



# Recalculating

*Charles Bernstein*

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Charles Bernstein

## Recalculating Charles Bernstein

Long anticipated, *Recalculating* is Charles Bernstein's first full-length collection of new poems in seven years. As a result of this lengthy time under construction, the scope, scale, and stylistic variation of the poems far surpasses Bernstein's previous work. Together, the poems of *Recalculating* take readers on a journey through the history and poetics of the decades since the end of the Cold War as seen through the lens of social and personal turbulence and tragedy.

The collection's title, the now-familiar GPS expression, suggests a change in direction due to a mistaken or unexpected turn. For Bernstein, formal invention is a necessary swerve in the midst of difficulty. As in all his work since the 1970s, he makes palpable the idea that radically new structures, appropriated forms, an aversion to received ideas and conventions, political engagement, and syntactic novelty will open the doors of perception to exuberance and resonance, from giddiness to pleasure to grief. But at the same time he cautions, with typical deflationary ardor, "The pen is tinier than the sword." In these poems, Bernstein makes good on his claim that "the poetry is not in speaking to the dead but listening to the dead." In doing so, *Recalculating* incorporates translations and adaptations of Baudelaire, Cole Porter, Mandelstam, and Paul Celan, as well as several tributes to writers crucial to Bernstein's work and a set of epigrammatic verse essays that combine poetics with wry observation, caustic satire, and aesthetic slapstick.

Formally stunning and emotionally charged, *Recalculating* makes the familiar strange—and in a startling way, makes the strange familiar. Into these poems, brimming with sonic and rhythmic intensity, philosophical wit, and multiple personae, life events intrude, breaking down any easy distinction between artifice and the real. With works that range from elegy to comedy, conceptual to metrical, expressionist to ambient, uproarious to procedural, aphoristic to lyric, Bernstein has created a journey through the dark striated by bolts of imaginative invention and pure delight.

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