

# *Death By Holograms*

*Chance Dibben*  
*poems*



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All typos intentional.

Made in Lawrence, Kansas

DEATH BY  
HOLOGRAMS  
chance dibben



death by holograms

## death by falling trampoline

could be sky  
wisped, worn  
and blotched with  
egoless droning—  
*guhguhguhguhguh*  
a hawk empties  
its beak and sprays  
cueballs downward—  
I don't know why  
I am still looking up.

## death by coca-cola

“hey, buddy”  
a man runs after me  
like an errant taxi cab  
and hands me a can of Coke  
as if this life was just a commercial  
for the aliens watching us afar—  
Galaxnoids, Praise Life! Drink Soda!  
Visit Earth!

I haven't been to Earth in a while.



## death by computer

typed in my name  
to receive a very exclusive  
special, limited, time-sensitive offer:  
a lottery that will give me 25% off  
all late-season clothes,  
    enroll me into an online  
MBA program,  
and locate my missing father.

dad's been dead since 2001.  
I'll accept whoever they find.

death by trash compactor

lost a glove  
in the trash bin.  
when they found my body  
it was bloody and crumpled,  
but serene,  
one unspeckled red-knit mitten  
poking through the garbage.

## death by misplaced parachute

in cartoons  
a presiding judge grants  
certain blends of reality  
for the sake of comic effect  
and to ensure noone is truly harmed,  
i.e. the anthropomorphic mouse sticks  
a firecracker in the anus  
of a 3-fingered white-gloved cat,  
who jumps all the way up the canyon wall  
and cools its burning ass  
in a horse trough outside a saloon.  
in practice, the toad explodes  
I have seen it, performed it  
it is my earliest memory  
of guilt and shame.  
thankfully, I learned to accept more  
guilt and shame into my life.  
instead of jamming frogs with M80s  
on Independence Day,  
it's now bad sex, failed jobs  
misused words, trespassing tickets,  
ugly debates about guns—  
can you *imagine* a civil debate about weapon  
proliferation  
in the world of Tex Avery  
or Chuck Jones?

not that I believe in the illusion  
of my painted walls or cartoon guns  
but I still paint my walls  
and I still shoot my guns.

anyway, I step out of the plane  
the parachute pack opens  
to a picnic place-setting.  
I should have known  
better than to trust that mouse.

death by falling telephone wire

in the Rube Goldberg

sense

of the word

*falling*

is

terrifyingly

beautiful

word

to mouth

to slap

o' the wrist

I fall,

fall in love

with my own

emptiness

death by sex

*you couldn't fuck your way out of  
a wet-paper bag*

they were right.

## death by kuleshov effect

in the sky appeared  
a bowl of soup,  
a casket,  
and a large-breasted woman.  
while we hemmed for feelings  
our country  
was invaded by  
North Korea.

## death by giant squid

damned if you wouldn't believe it  
but I saw it,  
tentacles like tramcars  
a head like bank headquarters  
eyes like polarized windows  
with cleaning people behind them—  
it erupted from somewhere  
and planted itself at the city's center  
soon enough it had friends  
and they swallowed millions of people.



## death by the death of journalism

news is spewed  
by holograms—  
the ads between segments  
the holograms of dead celebrities  
the mirrors are just  
holograms  
holograms leap out  
of billboards to vehicles  
driving by—  
ten car-pile ups  
every night  
at least we know  
the best place  
to get a bucket  
of fried chicken.

## death by mondays

millions and millions of workers  
are crouched on a toilet  
during their 10 o'clock break  
—not shitting  
but feeling the cool restroom air  
and fingering cheap holograms  
on their phones.

## death by the presidential election

for nearly two years  
we have waited to vote—  
which hologram  
can beat the other  
which hair will  
win  
which color of America  
will rejoice  
which candidate  
will be on commemorative  
porcelain—  
somewhere  
in my mother's house  
is a gold-rimmed plate  
honoring  
the heroes of 9/11  
with the towers  
painted in flames—  
my mother never told me  
I could be president.  
for that  
I thank her every day.

## death by unfinished screenplay

it's about the American west  
a love triangle—  
central to  
the founding of this great country  
or maybe the guy gets  
lost in the backwoods  
and has to crawl home  
to his loved one.

*gold rush*

no, it's about  
a sentient spaceship  
and its crew  
going back in time  
crashing into the pilgrims.  
maybe the love triangle  
is between  
the captain, the ship  
and the guide  
who receives them.  
are zombies too much?  
can we rent the Cary Grant hologram?  
what is the sequel potential?  
how much will they pay me for this?  
how much will they pay me for this?  
how much will they pay me for this?

## death by brain freeze

my brain is not a hologram  
yet here I am eating ice cream  
on my grandfather's porch  
he died before I was born  
so this must be a dream  
or a hologram.  
I can't see his face  
and he is off in the distance  
wearing a bomber jacket  
chasing down  
the ice cream truck  
he just missed.

## death by catchphrase

his catchphrase  
was a string of guttural noises,  
nasal-ly with a bassline  
and then a lilt,  
followed by the merged words of  
“youknowwhatImean.”

his life as a hologram  
worked out well.  
by the time he was 26,  
“youknowwhatImean,”  
he was in Time Magazine’s  
list of top 100 holograms.

he mated with other holograms—  
maybe you remember them?  
supermodels and real titans  
of industry.

he was unusually comfortable  
with his success—  
since age thirteen  
he had been pumped  
through our hologram reflectors  
and in his varied career,  
won awards  
for his hologramming

even becoming a  
political activist.

he married twice.  
his first marriage  
was a disaster  
and lasted two years.  
his second wife  
was the love of his life—  
who cares  
he cheated on the first  
with the second.  
the first wife died  
at age 29 causes unknown  
although many suspect  
death by public inattention  
or death by lonesome town.

he created an arts program  
for distressed youths interested  
in becoming holograms.  
although a formula one car race  
nearly ended his life  
at the age of 37,  
he lived until 83  
death by heart balloon.

he was the best hologram  
we had.

his epitaph:  
“youknowwhatImean.”



## death by sentient poems

these poems  
are aware and alive  
and know where you live.  
you've been doing bad things  
in your life and thinking lustily  
of holograms.  
take a moment  
to catch your breath  
and pull up your pants—  
you have a house to pay for  
and, we assume, a spouse  
that loves you  
about the same  
as you love them.

## death by beating the metaphor

I stood over a hologram horse  
dead under the pines.  
swung my stick,  
but before I made contact  
the horse leapt up  
and kicked my neck—  
not everything that looks  
like a hologram  
is a hologram,  
not everything that looks  
dead  
is dead.

## death by dream argument

Freddy Krueger scratches his nose  
and tells us he's been misunderstood.  
it was a great feeling  
this guy unloading on us  
in the church basement,  
like hearing an addict  
process the darkness of his heart.  
it's great when at the end of a sad  
self-effacing monologue  
the speaker has a tiny smile  
in his voice,  
it feels good  
because we, just by listening  
maybe saved this person  
from his demons.

sipping his coffee,  
Freddy Krueger says,  
"You don't even want to know  
what happens to me  
when I go to sleep."

death by my son  
wanting to be a hologram

I raised my boy  
through difficult times  
the economy,  
a couple of failed presidents,  
the deaths of our favorite  
hologram heroes  
the death by dish soap of his mother.

though I never had a taste for sports,  
I introduced baseball and basketball  
and my boy grew up  
to be a glorious athlete.  
I remember when  
he went on his first date,  
he was so awkward  
and angry at me,  
with all my snapping  
pictures, pats on the back,  
and twenties slipped into his jacket.  
“daaaaaad,” he cried under his breath  
pinching my potbelly  
slapping the top of my head  
—death by baldness  
and rushed out the door  
with the neighbor girl.

so you can imagine  
my surprise and fear  
when he said  
“I want to be a hologram.”  
that it was in his heart  
to be a hologram  
that he didn’t give two shits  
about this small town  
where his mother once lived  
and I raised him.

*no way*

“I’m going to be a hologram  
I’m going to be somebody,  
not like you  
you bald, fat fuck  
you can’t make me stay here.”

he was right  
what was I supposed to do?  
I let him leave  
never telling him  
that when I was his age  
I wanted to be a hologram  
and that now  
I still do.

## death by the new world

on October 11, 1492  
Christopher Columbus  
reported  
what today  
we might call  
a UFO  
as he approached  
the new world—

“a small  
wax candle  
that rose  
and lifted up”

it did not  
deter his fleet  
back across  
the Atlantic—  
the rest is,  
as they say,  
history.

## death by feral cat

our cat ran away years ago  
then last week  
we see him at the edge  
of the yard.  
we try bringing him inside  
but he recedes back to the woods  
before we can snag him.

we go outside and see his  
wild hologram eyes  
and spooked fur  
unsure if he will ever come back  
into the house  
this has happened ever night  
so far,  
us coolly looking  
at the cat  
at the edge of the yard  
placing his favorite wet food  
by the backdoor  
which he doesn't eat.

Mr. Bubbles—what happened?  
Where did you go?  
Why did you return?

## death by falling limb

my mother tells me  
not to go outside  
it is too icy  
and you can get hit  
by falling branches  
overloaded  
with snow and ice.

I ignore  
her warning  
I am bored  
with cabin fever  
and need a Coke.  
I get halfway  
to the store  
and find  
myself facedown  
in the gutter  
suffocating on slush  
held in struggle  
by half a cottonwood.  
two minutes pass  
and I almost  
death by seeing the light.



a car drives by,  
the driver  
gets out and lifts  
the tree  
off my head  
I am woozy, cold  
incoherent  
thanking the woman  
for saving my life.

I decline her offer  
for a ride  
I make it to the store  
and back,  
with enough  
Coca-Cola  
for the whole family.

## death by unfinished birdhouses

I used to believe scenes  
in which someone  
built a birdhouse  
were metaphors  
for something larger;  
divorce, lingering anger  
childhood trauma  
unrequited love,  
dreams infected by Coca-Cola  
worms in the bodyheart hologram  
feelings of human inadequacy—  
*oh we can put a man on the moon*  
we put men on the moon  
like coaxing birds  
into Sunday projects  
father-son activities  
commercial bright teeth  
and hologram level homes

I used to believe this  
until I failed at my first birdhouse.  
although I uttered many  
of this language's great  
swearwords,  
I saw the metaphor  
(fuck)  
for what it is  
broken wood

nails

glue

blood

## death by road rage

a man cut me off in traffic  
to which I replied  
with a beautiful,  
resplendent, defiant  
American bird.

we stopped by the side of the road  
and approached each other  
on the hot asphalt,  
sun spewing god-ugly heat at us.

we got a few feet from each other  
he raised his arms  
I couldn't understand anything  
he screamed at me,  
but then it  
became silly,  
we knew it was worthless  
he would go his way  
and I would go my way.

getting into his car  
he turned to me  
and uttered a defeated  
"asshole"  
and then drove off

the whole ride home,  
jazzed with nerves  
and drama,  
I thought about  
those killer burns  
that would have just  
fucking destroyed him.

death by guantanamo bay

today

I learned that

the only McDonald's in Cuba

is trapped inside

Guantanamo Bay

## death by coca-cola pt. 2

today  
I had three cans  
of Coca-Cola

tomorrow  
I will have  
three or four cans  
of Coca-Cola

yesterday  
I threw up because  
of Coca-Cola

I cannot remember  
my first can  
of Coca-Cola

## death by floods in the Carolinas

the news hologram  
is out there on a fucking rowboat  
thousands of \$\$ in TV gear  
to show us huge rivers  
choked with cars that look like  
silent stalking hippos  
and people wading, supplies  
carried on their head—

“It’s Biblical,” says  
the news hologram.  
so far ten people have died  
because of this heavy rain.

online, people  
express sympathy for this  
pocket of America  
but also argue  
about the hologram’s use of  
“Biblical”

“the Bible isn’t real”  
“this is climate change, not God”  
“this is what we get for  
living in a country of sin”



oh, how I wish  
everybody knew  
they were right.  
oh how I wish everybody  
would  
shut the hell up.

## death by fake breasts

the hologram  
with the fake breasts  
appears nude  
on a magazine cover  
twenty years  
after her first spread.

in the meantime  
she's supported  
great charitable causes  
I'm told she's amazing  
and better than most  
give her credit  
by a man  
excitedly  
holding the magazine.

## death by wrong bus transfer

I was trying  
to get to a bar  
on south broadway in Denver  
missed my stop  
and ended up in Littleton.  
phone was dead and  
the return bus  
wouldn't arrive  
for another 45 mins.  
stuck out in the cold  
alone  
I had a panicked time,  
though now I can say  
I've been to Littleton, Colorado.

## death by haunted songs

did her songs  
presage her young death  
—from pneumonia no less?  
or can I not hear  
her hologram voice  
without a cluster  
of bittersweet emotions  
those  
dolorous sparks  
rubbing against  
sharp electronic noises  
inverted orchestras  
and processed drumming?

\*

we don't listen to Elvis  
and often think  
what might have been,  
since his decline was so long  
and dramatic.  
we don't really  
theorize on the sadness  
of "Hound Dog" or "Jailhouse Rock"  
his hip shaking was not  
a pieta

some people think  
Elvis still lives.  
Really he died  
oh, 'round 1967.

## death by questions

I think a lot about how choice  
is the only currency that matters,  
how when used properly  
it disintegrates  
forked road bullshit sure,  
but how am I supposed to figure  
out if I should get the turkey  
or chicken club?  
maybe I shouldn't get a club  
today bacon is bad  
I can't keep eating tomorrow can I?  
could get the soup  
or the cup half sammie combo  
or I could fuck it up with a salad.  
    because I have other choices to make,  
    fuck up,  
I make a choice  
and pretend indecision is cute  
that misanthropy  
is a valuable choice  
even though I never had a choice.  
nature versus nurture has turned me  
into a real prick  
only now wife can love  
(half the time)

what to watch  
what to do  
what to eat  
not to be that guy  
that puts his cat in *another* poem—  
but why does he snout out  
the perfect folds of blankets  
when there is plenty  
of dirty clothes on the floor—  
why does he get so intensely focused,  
hunting a place to ooze out?  
the obvious answer  
is that he has nothing but time  
has no concept  
of **choice as loss**.  
where did I come from?  
analyzing small choices  
and raw deals  
has been my autobiography.  
my jokes fall flat  
and I often ruin opportunities for sex.  
good old Coca-Cola though  
got me through hard times  
wild times, desk times,  
dead times.

I remember getting  
Cokes with my mother  
after a funeral  
but why do I remember this?  
what is the value?  
is this so I will buy  
more Coca-Cola?  
    or so I can recall  
    one of the few times  
I saw my mother cry?



### death by coca-cola pt. 3

I've seen those experiments  
where Coca-Cola  
dissolves teeth  
and eats through  
a cow's heart  
pulls blood  
from concrete  
and erodes  
acid buildup  
on batteries—  
these demonstrations  
I suppose  
are to scare us  
after all  
what are we  
except  
teeth, beef  
and blood  
held together  
by batteries  
constantly  
falling apart.

## acknowledgements

“death by kuleshov effect”

appeared in *Reality Hands*

"death by coca-cola", "death by dream  
argument" appeared in *Hobart Online*

## about

Chance Dibben is a writer, photographer,  
and performer based in Lawrence, KS.

Chance Dibben is @chancedibben some  
places.

Chance Dibben drank two cans of Coke  
before writing this sentence.

## *death by brain freeze*

my brain is not a hologram  
yet here I am eating ice cream  
on my grandfather's porch  
he died before I was born  
so this must be a dream  
or a hologram.

I can't see his face  
and he is off in the distance  
wearing a bomber jacket  
chasing down  
the ice cream truck  
he just missed.