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INFRAREALISMS, AGAIN: JOSÉ VICENTE ANAYA

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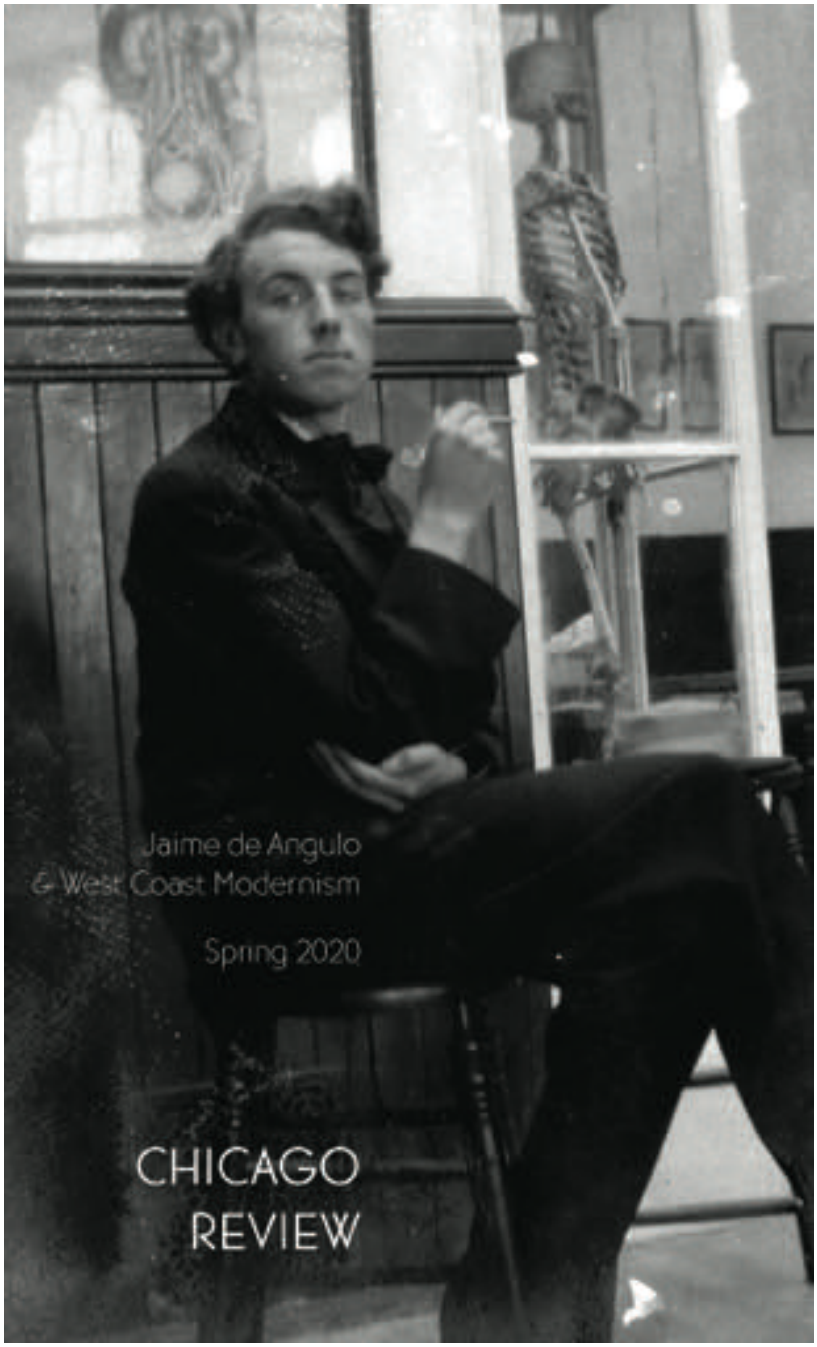
Jaime de Angulo
& West Coast Modernism
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REVIEW

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The Infrarealists, Casa del Lago, Chapultepec Park, Mexico City, 1976. Top row, left to right: Margarita Caballero, Mario Santiago Papasquiaro, José Rosas Ribeyro, Roberto Bolaño, and José Vicente Anaya. Bottom row, left to right: Rubén Medina, Dina García Cabrales, Ramón Méndez, María Guadalupe Ochoa Ávila, and José Peguero. Image courtesy of Rubén Medina.

JOSHUA POLLOCK

Introduction to José Vicente Anaya

José Vicente Anaya was born in 1947 in Villa Coronado, Chihuahua. In the 1970s, together with Roberto Bolaño and Mario Santiago Papasquiaro, Anaya helped found Infrarealism in Mexico City. Anaya's Infrarealist manifesto, "For a Vital and Unlimited Art," was written in 1975. In the decades following the dissolution of Infrarealism as a coherent milieu, Anaya has made a name for himself as a sort of wandering rebel poet—an outlier who still believes that poetry can and should be dangerous. He has translated works from English, founded the magazine *Alforja*, edited a collection of Chinese literature, and worked as a journalist. Perhaps because he has always been critical of the Mexican canon and despite his book-length poem *Híkuri* having become a sort of cult classic, he has been systematically excluded from anthologies and critical discourse. This is changing, though, as a collection of critical essays about *Híkuri* called *Caminatas nocturnas* was finally released in 2016, and my English translation of *Híkuri* is due to be published by The Operating System in 2020.

This small selection of Anaya's work consists of his Infrarealist manifesto—which should be read alongside the other two Infrarealist manifestos that were previously published in *Chicago Review* (60.3, 2017)—and three poems from his book *Morgue*, which was written between 1975–76 and published in 1981. These poems were chosen because they correspond to the time that Infrarealism was most active.

In an interview with Heriberto Yépez, Anaya recalled the disagreement he had with Bolaño when the Infrarealists discussed writing a manifesto. According to Anaya, Bolaño positioned himself as the leader with a clear vision for the movement, and he wanted to write the manifesto himself and just have everyone else sign it. Anaya wanted every Infra (over twenty people) to write their own manifestos and then have the group agree to each of them with a vote

of confidence. Anaya thought that this would allow for the expression of varied points of view and express the chaos of the movement; he also thought that it would be useful to incite confusion among their critics. In the end, only three of the Infras wrote manifestos—Anaya, Bolaño, and Santiago Papasquiaro. This anecdote is indicative of the political tension between Anaya and Bolaño. According to Anaya, his principles were more anarchistic, while Bolaño acted in a more authoritarian manner.† Anaya's critique of dogmatic politics and belief in decentralized communality are both apparent in his manifesto. In the same interview, Anaya recalled his last conversation with Bolaño before the latter moved to Spain, in which he accused Bolaño of thinking he was the Breton of the Infras—Bolaño retorted that Anaya thought he was the Artaud of the Infras, an assessment that proved to be fairly close to the mark.

Anaya's poems from *Morgue* display the aggressively punk ethos of Infrarealism while also introducing some of the overriding motifs that would continue to be developed in his major ongoing work, consisting of *Híkuri*, *Paria*, and *Peregrino*. Having grown out of Infrarealism, these themes contain similarities to the group's priorities: nomadism, linguistic motility, a view of the poet as an unassimilable, visionary outsider, the confluence of life and art, hostility to the commodification of art (and therefore of life), and a general antiestablishment attitude. Another of Anaya's major themes, which emerges more clearly in *Híkuri,* but is also present in *Morgue*, is a critique of industrial civilization as a destructive force that represses the individual and reduces indigenous autonomy to ruins. His writing is infused with an anarchistic, antiauthoritarian spirit that comes through in his identification with society's outcasts and his hostility to capitalist modernity. Anaya lets us know whom he envisions himself communicating with at the opening of *Morgue*, which—in a move he later echoes and expands in *Híkuri*—he dedicates, "To all human beings who have struggled to live: / pariahs, / heretics, / suicides, / madmen." May we all find our way to this work.

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†/ It merits stating here that Bolaño later clarified his position as a staunch critic of Stalinism and authoritarianism. This anecdote is not intended to smear Bolaño, whose work I admire.

Back cover of *Pájaro de calor, ocho poetas infrarrealistas*, 1976.

JOSÉ VICENTE ANAYA
Translated by Joshua Pollock

For a Vital and Unlimited Art

Beauty and Art

Beauty, as presently constructed with its senile righteousness, has been hopelessly stillborn, ending up in the midst of a bourgeois spectacle that has reduced it to nothing but a sumptuary object.

This beauty has suffocated under its copious ornaments: extensive dissertations about the purity of forms, theories of color or "good" and "bad" words that have nothing to do with human beings, countless panegyrics to inane artists, limited edition poetry books that include the author's autograph in each copy, baffling literary language full of data so pedantic that computers would turn green with envy.

All production of complicit pseudo-art has been affected by the death of that mistress. Never before have there been so many artists and critics clamoring in their cowardice for these decrepit times, hurling themselves desperately upon beauty's skull to dab it with bits of makeup whose supposed quality is certified in the gloomy cubicles of academia, or trying to decorate it with some artifacts from Morlock's jewelry shop…

Bearing in mind the above, we refuse to follow the institutional "CUL—isn't cul a prefix of French origin?—TURE" competition comprised by the theory and practice of little academic factions and reductionist sects struggling for editorial power and bragging in their schemata about having the definitive definition of what "beauty should be."

We don't say that "beauty should be," but rather BEAUTY IS, IT EXISTS IN THE PRESENT, it is unrestricted in life itself, without hasty schemata, with no limits, and because of this, INDEPENDENT from institutions and outside of geriatric boards of directors and anathematizing epigones.

The Present Situation

This is the grave condition of our century: PEOPLE ARE SICK WITH SENSE AND SANITY.

All conformists suffer from sense and sanity.

Sense and sanity destroy a human being's imagination and reduce it to an objectual plane where it stagnates, reproducing a miserable life day after day; the individual is too crushed by his own impotence and conformism to do anything at all:

—the hungry watch bread pass right under their noses;

—artists think that art ends when they publish or exhibit their works;

—lovers refuse to strike out in search of new responses to love;

—"thinkers" spend all their time in pursuit of new epithets with which to denigrate their detractors;

—political groups are considered demiurges with their immediatist theories, apraxic in the face of social reality;

—and another million-etceteras-per-second.

Our contemporaries currently treat each other like abstract objects. Individuals capitulate to a passive complacency in search of some sort of peace that will never exist, since human beings will always be the product of historical and internalized struggles that encompass the entirety of society…The majority of people take refuge in ideologization and surrender themselves to those who would take away what the individual cherishes most: HIS HUMANITY…Taking responsibility for oneself is the only way that individuals can effectively break out of the manipulative systems that try to regulate their lives. Every self-determined human being exists in resistance to all external control, whatever the source: religion, "science," political parties, the State, psychiatry, psychology, psychoanalysis, et cetera.

Individuals who reduce life to the dimensions of their own simplicity and pragmatism never get beyond the artificial walls they erect around themselves; this is one way that creative imagination is murdered, with no consideration that the imagination is another prerogative of a person's humanity. Accordingly, times as miserable as ours necessitate artists who know no limits.

WE SHOULD SHATTER ALL OUR NERVES because they're worn out, totally useless, numb, and they only serve to keep us in a degrading situation where everything we do is devoid of human meaning.

THE KINGDOM OF HAPPINESS IS HERE AND NOW in every individual that carries out a humane praxis recognizing subject/object, masculine/feminine, negative/positive, good/bad; a praxis of love and struggle, where self-actualization means creation and destruction within a vital essence…

We have to act on every possible—and impossible—front of human life. ALL ABSOLUTE AND HYPOSTATIC REDEMPTION IS FALSE.

Infrarealism and the Infrarealists

Infrarealism is the spontaneous and unexpected appearance of the key determinant that attacks and destroys every rule restraining and holding back the human being and her manifestations. In this way, Infrarealism is the contingency that combats meaning, the changes that rationalism can never anticipate, not even with the help of tons of technical equipment. Infrarealism is here, it permeates everything and it travels in the vehicle of the immediate.

To be an Infrarealist is to henceforth live in black hole galaxies, which means living a life that is conducted and expressed as those galaxies, where the extraordinary happens daily, the impossible is possible and each action arouses unexpected wonders. Those galaxies are seen through eyes that glimpse marvels, they are touched by hands that grasp delights and revel in meandering around the living textures of human bodies; they are livable because of movements that struggle for freedom, they are a dance among the stars; they are apparent when one has the courage to live each moment authentically, no matter the cost; they are found in every individual and social conflict that provokes a transformation of human life; they are heard in all of the voices, growls, songs, music, sounds that are composed on the roads of yearning souls; they are hallucinated in true minds that penetrate the impenetrable with art. Whoever looks for them, enters those galaxies; the immediate name used to characterize them is not important, because those names are just numerous ways to designate the HUMANIZATION that transforms the individual into a complete being.

—Infrarealism is the multitude of ropes that helped topple statues of oppressors like Peter the Great or Stalin.

—Infrarealism is Sergei Yesenin's pistol, which recited its poem for the United States in gunshots.

—Infrarealism is a mandarin that continues to relish as teeth peel off its rind.

—Gerard de Nerval is an Infrarealist walking through the streets of Paris pulling a lobster on a leash.

—Don Quijote de la Mancha's takedown of the fake Knight of the Mirrors is an Infrarealist act.

—Infrarealism sings and growls, it is scared and brave, loves and hates, is correct and foolish, wins and loses, comes together and falls apart, it freaks out and calms down, laughs and cries, approves and disapproves, but it is always overcome with contradictions, for better or for worse.

—Infrarealism doesn't stage actions in factories or banking institutions and, consequently, it feels fine when workers strike or banks get robbed.

—Infrarealism loves freely and doesn't believe in marriage. It likes to be adventurous in everything. It doesn't think that things are made, but that they are becoming (though it also thinks that many things are poorly made).

—Infrarealism ridicules capitalist alternatives, which are always "coke or pepsi?"

—Infrarealism sticks its tongue out at etiquette, it laughs its heads off at literary conferences, it breathes fresh air and it doesn't have a mom or a dad and it's androgynous.

—Infrarealism thinks that the so-called "professional writer" is an invention of the literati who want to live comfortably off art, which means an unseemly commercialization of life.

—Infrarealism is epicurean, sodomitic, heraclitian, hedonistic, narcissistic, kantian, hegelian, marxist, anarchist, metaphysical, pataphysical, utopian, existentialist; all of this and nothing at the same time; but it rejects the reproduction of sects of *il corpore fascista*.

—Infrarealism is not any sort of sect, it does not distribute memberships or tickets and it doesn't select its members through any mechanism of majority or minority because in order to be an Infrarealist it's enough to just be an Infrarealist.

—The group of Infrarealist poets doesn't have statutes or rules of conduct, for we constitute a nongroup group.

—For Infrarealism, better sorry than safe.

INFRAREALISM EXISTS AND DOES NOT EXIST.

CONVERSATION WITH ARMANDO PEREIRA

Make me a legend, amigo,
any way you want to.
After all, I don't train my body
for any sort of posterity.
You see, Virgil died of cancer
after 30 years
of going around tearing off
life's calluses, when I found out
my 28 had flown by
breaking the sound barrier:
upending pustules
on some of my organs.
Now I understand
that I'll be finished faster
denda liquor indis legendary bar,
faster than all the drugs
that handed their paranoia
(of amputation in the asylum)
over to Fernando,
whose poems—
        slipped through the windows
        of eternal solitude
—no one will ever read.

Tonight
my boozy neurons
jump
in place of my pain,
which, soothed,
bites me from behind a smile…

Make me a legend, whatever.
Life can't catch me
like it did James Dean,
even if I exist
for 100 years…

MORGUE #1

I fall asleep above the breath
left by my death / I can't dream.
I w a n d e r
through caverns
taken as streets. I escape
from the secret shrieking of other screams and
go back to being a lost vagabond,
my bones ground so fine
they're mistaken for morphine…What's holding me up?
I want to leave,
and into my body I drop
to traverse
tonight's mysterious languor. Who am I looking for?
Everyone is asleep. If it was summer
and the city's atmosphere less corrupt,
some crickets
would shift the pitch of my anguish. I have
jumped
limits,
but I'm fooling myself
because I land back where I started. Now
the distance
is expanding
backwards
from past obstacles; and
my only recourse is transgression,
or remain stuck. Where can I go?
They say that in other cities there are
cafés, theaters, bars, for the sleepless…

I have gone out to debase my voice. The ashes
of the incinerated ascend
with each step. My throat
can't with any rhythm
that might be remote from
the chords the floorboards play
at each footfall…The night
is deteriorating
with this song
that comes on
to poison my blood,
as if someone else, who is me,
has gotten into me
and usurped
my will to live…and
in this misery
I concoct a greater scandal
that I'll suffer
some other time.

But I keep walking,
pitting my luck
against panic.

I'm going flickering
in the darkness. Pressed

under the doubt that dawn
inflicts upon me. The big gray
birds
nesting on the roofs
don't even know to greet the morning…
there aren't any
robins, sparrows, canaries, larks or
cardinals, and the
pigeons pass by in their gloomy plumage…
Nevertheless day breaks, as
signaled by
that steam whistle screaming from a factory
that shadows houses
beneath its chimney. Smoke
rises
mocking with its black tones: inside
there are men
grinding down their lives…Outside
the sun paints the cupola with reds
seen
behind an opaque drapery…I keep walking
until
my feet stop obeying
my desires. I get tired. I reach
the place where buildings
were getting bigger, and
this phony
megacity
masquerades as a metropolis. I have to pass
through its center
throbbing
with beggars, clinging
to the doorways
of financial affluence, flies
driven mad
in the midden
for finding nothing…Lumpen
alcoholics

babbling
flashbacks, delusions
used to abandon
a brutal reality: a
skeletal woman
with black scabs across her skin
strolls by
majestically
in a long
black velvet cape
as if coming from the Court
of the Kingdom of Castile /

Another world within this world:

And you become aware
that leprosy wasn't some malady
left behind in Medieval times:
on the sidewalk
sits an old woman
displaying one wooden leg
and the other a bandaged foot, half-eaten away…

This world,
inside of this world.

MORGUE #2

For a long time now I'm not here…
I was overthrown by love (however you say it) and
my behavior protests my name.

Now I need my voice
but I waste it
ecstatic with liquid insanity
not knowing what to do
with the strange scores
from my forehead;
as I withstand famines
so not to become corrupted
or when I bum cigarettes
from strangers
in midnight streets
through the early hours…

I'm not here,
even though they offer me a drink and wave.
I'm far from the city
walking occupied streets
that I forget…

It's been a long time now that I'm not here,
although nobody understands it;
because I am screaming
growling with autobiographical fury
clawing at the feet of the 21st century and
surrounded by anthropoids
who were raised by inertia;
involving myself
in what life requires
the radical virtue of human actions
or else it's not life…
And it turns out that I live in a country
in the New World
but with men
who wed suicide
to birth,
cast
in complicit fear
who agree to decompose
in the laboratories
of the quotidian lie…
(some desperate souls run to Europe
but I don't understand exchanging
hell for hell)

I refuse and I can't be here.
Reality comes to me purring
pain from the cradle
where they hurl
the first cadavers

of my executed brothers;
and it so happens
that I can't sleep well
listening to the cries of the tortured
(and there are still those who say
that the liquid in the pipes
is water, and not blood)
…hallucinations
that compel me to converse
with the shadow of my overcoat…

I don't know, I'm simply not here
because I invert the world
as relentless reality
shatters me…

DAWN LUNDY MARTIN

My Father's Only Son

The house I grew up in, in Hartford, Connecticut, is itself like a ghost in my body. My father is a ghost in the house. Whenever I visit from Pittsburgh or New York—the two cities I live in now—I have to crouch down inside myself, a psychic form of protection. The physical distance isn't what creates the layered ghost effects. It's that the distance between the realities of then and now, and the life I lived and the one I dreamed up and pried my way into, sometimes collapses when I'm inside the house trying to be the good daughter. It's not simply that I have gone far from home. That's a very American story. I'm not sure what kind of story this is.

§

I awake first to the sound of my father's shoes moving back and forth from my parents' bedroom to the bathroom, and then his voice outside my room, my name pounding out of his mouth. I turn despondently in my bed and then feel his entry into the room, the tug of the blankets from my sleeping body, now cold and exposed to the day; in winter, the hiss of steam from the radiators and the promise of warmth. Sleepily I wake and shower, shove my books into my knapsack. My bus to school is at seven and my father works the first shift at his job so he too must arrive by seven. He drives me downtown to the bus stop where I am the first of my lot to arrive. I stand alone freezing in the dim light waiting for the other kids, watching the insurance workers hustle off to cubicles and offices in dark suits. This is the way of things every weekday until I turn sixteen.

I never think of those predawn hours without thinking of Robert Hayden's short poem "Those Winter Sundays." The last two stanzas in particular are reminders of what is difficult to know about anyone's heart.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.
What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

I imagine the father in Hayden's poem as being mostly unlike my father. Instead of driving the cold out, he yanked me into it. I was incidental to the morning's activities, not the focus of them. Yet, still, there was an intimacy in the proximity of our individual maneuverings and, somehow, a quiet, indirect care. What did I know of this man at all who said almost no meaningful words to me my whole life, who never said "I love you" out loud, and who managed his emotions primarily through rage and inflexibility?

On the day my father made my half brother Greg live in a storage shed, no one felt powerful enough to stop him. The storage shed had once been a handmade clubhouse built exclusively for me to do whatever children do with their friends in such structures. My father had noticed that I was always trying and failing to build one myself with scraps of wood I scavenged from neighbors' trash heaps.

Greg, a Vietnam veteran, had been kicked out of his apartment after spending all his money on cocaine. Dad was unrelenting, "No drug addicts in the house! I don't care!" Instead, Dad told him that he could live outside in my old clubhouse if he wanted, behind the garage. Dad and I had built that clubhouse in a single inspired afternoon with plywood, screws, and brackets that he'd purchased from the local Ace Hardware. It had little protection from severe elements, though we had taken the care to shingle the roof so it didn't rain or snow inside. In the summer heat or especially in the icy Connecticut winter, one might be better off in a homeless shelter. In this refusal of Greg's need for help was also a refusal of his existence, or a stabbing at it. This was, as I understand it now, one of those paradoxical violences that said, *you can stay but you can't stay*. From one angle it appears

as if a family member is getting some necessary assistance—at the very least, he's not sleeping in the gutter. Cock your head in another direction and see an aggressive disdain for perceived weakness, and the severe punishment of being left outside in the cold while the rest of the family toasts their toes at the mouth of the fireplace, gorging themselves on roasted chicken and sweet potato pie.

My father—his name was Andrew, but he was called Andy by everyone but my mother—was a man who engaged in earthly activities only. He didn't pray or read books or talk about horoscopes or love. He had rough hands and wore a wedding ring tight around his third finger until death. He seemed extra large like to me, but now I know he was no bigger than many other men—5'11" and 158 pounds at eighteen when he was drafted into the Army. One of 909,000 African American men to serve in the Army in World War II, fighting in the war was the thing that had happened to him in life, but he never talked about it. He didn't tell any stories about the past. This might be the strangest thing about him—that everything for him was present tense. But his body was a past body. My father's body, and bodies like his, were just regular bodies, yet forever bound up with the Mandingo fiction and being boiled into a stew for fucking the master's wife upon her calling. An invasion of my imagination when there was simply a presence: *He was huge! He was a monster!* As a grown man, my father was mostly body, mostly fat that looked like muscle, a body with a single, sometimes visible scar on his thigh. A scar I saw when he walked around in his white Fruit of the Loom underwear.

Before my mother, my father was married to another woman, whose name I can never remember. She gave birth to two sons—Greg and Andrew Jr., the oldest of my father's spawn. By the time I was born they were already adults with mysterious, devastating lives. Greg returned home from the Vietnam War addicted to painkillers, which transformed into heroin addiction that he tempered with cocaine and alcohol. When Greg came home from the war, he moved to Connecticut to be close to my father, who seemed not to care. Andrew Jr. lived with his wife and two sons in Jacksonville, Florida, near where our father had previously set up his life with his other wife after World War II. Andrew Jr. went on a walk one day when his boys were teens and never returned. Bruce, my brother closest to me in age, had been

adopted by my parents as a young boy before I was born. By blood, as they say, he's my first cousin, my mother's sister's son. But Helen had enough kids already, eight at the time, and lived in a cramped three-bedroom apartment in what was then the black projects in Daytona Beach, Florida. Likely overwhelmed by the sheer number of bodies, she let my childless parents have Bruce. What could be lovelier than the gift of a child, a son?

So many hours I'd spent lying on the living room rug with my legs resting on the sofa, listening to my *Let's Pretend Fairy Tale* records. In *The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs*, a baby born with a birthmark on its face is destined to marry the king's daughter. The king hates face marks so he sends the baby down the river in a box, probably hoping it will just die. The baby lives because a miller and his wife find it and raise him as their own. Because it's destiny, the boy ends up marrying the king's daughter anyway, but in another sadistic murder attempt, the king sends the boy into hell to retrieve three golden hairs from the devil's head. If he does this, he can live happily ever after. The fairy tale ends as fairy tales do, with a little retribution for the evil king who couldn't just let the boy be.

Maybe it was a warped blessing that Dad made Greg live outside. Bruce, on the other hand, was subject to our father's rage inside the house, which meant that, like the boy who married the king's daughter, it was difficult for him to position himself out of my father's long reach. When my father beat him, as he did sometimes, it was with a ferocity that would make an onlooker think that it wasn't about Bruce at all, but something inaccessible to our father, something out of his control. Toni Morrison writes that when violence is a response to chaos, it is "understood to be the most frequent response and the most rational when confronting the unknown, the catastrophic, the wild, wanton or incorrigible." The taciturn nature of my father meant that no one had access to whatever trajectory of chaos may have produced his targeted violence. Yet, I can imagine a connection between being born a black boy in the 1920s American south, fighting an American war decades before the US government recognized post-traumatic stress disorder, and returning to a country that disparaged black soldiers. Chaos was likely within and outside of his body. You've seen a beating, haven't you? You've witnessed a person lose the self inside of an attack

mode, grunting and escalating, as if to say "I can't stop"? I make no excuses for these brutalities. Everyone in my family was shaped by the contours of these actions, even if they were infrequent. I am trying to understand something about the protections afforded me, the shape of those protections, and what they allowed for in my own body and being, despite the inability to extend those protections to someone I love.

Obviously, no happily ever after happened for Bruce or any of the sons. Bruce, now in his late fifties, lives in his old bedroom at the house in which we were raised. He makes minimum wage as a janitor for a motel, most of his income skimmed off for child support. Greg lives and works at the VA Hospital, but often slips back into the addiction that overtook his whole life. We don't know where Andrew Jr. is. In an alternate fairy-tale ending, the daughter becomes the quasi hero of the story and replaces the son. I was the one in my father's eye. I was the one he took on Saturday strawberry-picking expeditions, hoisted onto the bar to feed pickled pigs' feet, beer nuts, pork rinds, and grape soda; the one he took to work at the dry cleaner's for the whole day and to whom he gave money to play miniature golf while he pressed clothes in the summer heat; the one on Sunday-afternoon drives to the country store where he could buy fresh clams ("cherrystones," he called them); the one he took to jai alai and taught how to bet and how to win and with whom he split the winnings when I picked the right numbers—our private experiences, always just the two of us, me a protégé in the ways of a man's world, or this man's world.

Technically speaking, or speaking on the evidence we had then, I was a girl and Bruce, Greg, and Andrew Jr. were boys. I don't know if my father knew this explicitly in his mind. It could be that my being technically speaking a girl made my father treat me differently from the boys. Or it could be that things melted down in his brain gender-wise because I, like him, liked to work, and none of the sons appeared to. I was only ten when I started my first moneymaking business, shoveling snow for the neighbors. Bruce was seventeen by this point and didn't have a job of any sort; he wasn't able to keep one until he was almost fifty years old, even though Dad, who worked two full-time jobs, had once gotten Bruce one of those pension jobs with the city. My father might have treated Bruce more brutally than anyone

because this son was not biologically his, and he resented having to be responsible for him especially because he was kind of a fuckup. Maybe my father wanted to do one thing right with one of his kids, and I was the last one. I'm just speculating, really. I have no idea.

§

The house held a fissure from which little spikes of violence could rise up, piercing any otherwise placid scene. It could have been something to do with the architecture of the house itself. The first floor of the structure was meant for communal living. It was comprised of a dining room, a living room, and a kitchen, positioned in adjacency in the shape of a square. The dining room was separated from the kitchen and the living room by two doors; and the kitchen was separated from the dining room and the living room by two doors. It was enclosed, its own separate place, where whoever was inside doing the kitchen work was usually alone. Instead of a gathering space, like in the images of black family sociality that permeate our desires and our narratives, this space and its appliances made the kitchen a work space only, filled with machines that enabled duty.

But all the doors in the house were nearly always open. This made any chase a good one. If you were running from someone who wanted to do you harm, you could run through the rooms in a circle, closing and opening doors in order to either block your pursuer or escape into the other rooms. Further, there were two sets of stairs: one leading to the basement and one leading to the three bedrooms and the bathroom upstairs. Stairs, obviously, motivate punishment in the form of a shove or a struggle to throw another person down. The location for the most pronounced violence, of course, is the basement, perhaps because it's underground and attackers, though we might think of them as insane, are not insane. They think about, however obliquely, the fact that screams are more difficult to hear by others outside of the house from down below in the cellar. Like some horror movie, this is where my father took Bruce in order to beat him.

My mother had chosen brown and pink as the colors for our kitchen. This had always struck me as an underwhelmingly garish choice. It gave the kitchen a mustardy feel. It was a color palette that

made the small, tableless room feel smaller. The kitchen is where my mother once had to wrestle Bruce's hands from his girlfriend's neck as he tried to strangle her. The girlfriend responded by squirming wildly to get out of his grasp and swinging her fists at his face, scratching and clawing. They had been fighting all morning and we had all heard it. But when the sounds of their voices became louder and tighter, hitting the air like bullets, my mother and I rushed in from wherever we were to see about the matter. My brother was a young man at this point—maybe twenty, and I seven years younger. I did not approach the scene, knowing that my brother would not hesitate to fling me into the wall, but I screamed for them to stop. My mother yelled, "Get your hands off of her!" and lunged, thrusting her body between theirs, daring them, it seemed, to accidentally put their hands on her. It worked. She broke up the fight, as no one in our family would dare—even accidentally—strike my mother. It was a risk too great as it was she who singularly held us together. It was she who paid all the bills, organized our summer vacations, made birthday cakes, purchased Christmas gifts, brought us to family reunions, tended to our curfews, bought the food and made all the meals, cleaned the house, etc. It was she who had taken my brother to the barber and braided my hair, she who read to us in the evenings and purchased puzzles and games that lit up our minds. She knew when the right time to purchase a new car was and if we could afford it. She knew when we were too sick for her care and needed a doctor. She is what one might call a "good woman," a suffering woman, a woman constrained by obligation. It was not a model that appealed to me.

§

I have always been a girl and a boy at the same time. Everyone saw me that way even when they didn't admit it out loud or to themselves. My mother told me a story of when she worked as a day-care teacher about a four-year-old who refused to recognize himself as a boy. He'd stand in the girls' line for recess and play with the other girls in the make-believe kitchen. When instructed by the adults to line up with the boys, he'd refuse and exclaim, "But I'm a girl!" to the dismay and

confusion of the adults around him. I don't know why my mother told me this story exactly but it had the effect of making me aware of the disjuncture between the way others named my gender and what I felt was true. Toni Morrison writes that another response to the perception of chaos is naming. I implicitly understood the need for the adult world to recognize and name me as a girl, but I resisted, insisting on wearing pants and T-shirts all the time, playing only boys' games with guns and race cars, and felt awful and ill at ease in the dresses I was forced to wear to church. These dresses were probably my first indication that there is no God. There were other indications, too, like how certain women in church would become possessed by the Holy Ghost and get into a fit right in front of everyone. I was embarrassed for them. I also thought they were faking. God, if there was one, I was sure, hated fakery. He'd be interested in expressions of the truest self.

One night, my father came home late and drunk and pissed on the kitchen floor. He couldn't find the toilet. Years later when I was a teenager, I returned home late from a high-school party and puked while sitting on the toilet peeing. We had one of those toilet-hugging mats that people had in the 1980s. The mat was soaked in my vomit. In my drunken teenaged stupor, I threw the mat out of the window. It landed on the bulkhead doors to the basement positioned directly under the bathroom window. I left it there and stumbled on to bed. My father and I breathed the same air. We walked along the same precarious rope. We were simultaneously very weak and very strong. We were gentle with each other. We built things together: the clubhouse, of course, which was the center of play and scheming for me and my neighborhood friends, and also go-carts with braking systems that sent me racing down the hill faster than any boy. He taught me how to make a kite out of newspaper and tree branches. When we flew the kite, I was awestruck by the heights it soared to and that we had made the thing at all. How could we make a thing like an airplane? The morning after the vomit incident, my father raged around the house. "What the hell?!" he bellowed, barrel-chested, until the moment when I said that it was me, and that I was sick and feverish and accidentally let go of the mat while trying to clean it. If my father was the type to hold my head, he would have. But instead he deflated and said "O," as if "O" was a kind of release.

The thing about my father is that I could often smell him. Like, I could smell the different persons inside of him. These aromas included after-work sweat, hair pomade, beer, green aftershave from the plastic bottle, cigarettes, dry-cleaning fluid, soap, stale cloth, and toward the end of his life, a smell I had never smelled before and have not since. To me, it was a death waft. In actuality, the rancidness was my father's body. The cancer was getting at his blood and bones from the inside, which made it so that he was almost too weak to walk. He could make it from bed, across the brief corridor, to the bathroom and back. Once as he was doing so in his thin robe, frail and hunched toward the floor, the robe fell open slightly and I glimpsed a mash of dark genitalia. The image has stayed with me as one of ghastly vulnerability. As a graduate student, I lived an hour away and returned home often to drive him to get blood transfusions to relieve him from extreme anemia. He walked slowly, one hand on my shoulder to stabilize his body, down the stairs, to the car, and into the hospital. The temporary relief offered by the transfusion was good motivation to take those painful, meticulous, and breathless steps.

He could no longer bathe himself. No one else in the family, including, or especially, my mother, was willing to do it. This is the stew that filled that house. Sometimes it didn't smell like a body at all, but a warning. We all smelled the odor. There was no avoiding it. But we never spoke of it, just as we all knew my father was dying and never mentioned that either. He himself refused to accept this fact of death surely coming. He did die, of course, and in the wake of it, my mother disposed of all the furniture in my old room where he had been bedridden. She disposed of everything that belonged to my father. In fact, on the evening of his funeral, the only thing that remained of him in the house was a drawer filled with spare change, a half-drank bottle of rum, and his wristwatch. Greg took the watch and Bruce and I split up the money.

The consequence of any new distance is another sight, noticing released from the bounds of a microcosm, the bounded vision of the close-up. What happened in my childhood home, I realize now, was a kind of trickle-down violence. And, though that violence escaped me directly, it had its hands around everyone's neck. Do you remember when regret was not present in the body? Do you remember the little

feelings of everything in your whole being welling up? Childhood is this wild experience of sensation and newness, the past so brief it's barely behind you. Adult persons' emotional expressions seemed to shoot out from nowhere and were terrifying in both their chaotic arrangement and their stark brightness. Those church ladies' perennial hysteria, for example, the way they leapt up off the pew benches as if possessed, weeping and hollering, in a seeming coming together of despair and ecstasy.

It's only in retrospect and years after my father's death that I can understand anything at all about being raised by one ostensibly good Christian woman and one mean atheist man. I couldn't see that goodness and badness were both ropes in a tangle that allowed for a wolf inside me to grow and that this was the real goodness. When my brothers were being beaten or locked out of the house, I would cry and wish my father dead. It's a weird thing to then be forced to hang out with him on Sunday afternoons, being free and eating all the burgers and candy at the bowling alley. There we were, the two of us, entering the building, him with his dad-sized bowling ball case and me with a slightly smaller one, grey like his. There we were, sidling up to the cashier in slow motion, like guys about to make a sweet deal with a guy who usually doesn't make deals. Our usual lane is reserved. There I am, all the darkness blocked from view, my interior feeling lit up like life is a cherry pie.

I am a wolf? Yes, I am a wolf. My father is a wolf mouth? The father is the whole structure of the house and we live inside of him. The wolf child scratches out of the father's mouth house. I hold my brothers in my own wolf mouth, but only temporarily.

§

One afternoon Dad told me that we had an outing, that I couldn't go swimming with my friends in the circular above-ground pool next door. He didn't say why, but I was pissed. I was thirteen by then, long past the time when I would go shirtless with dad in his station wagon to the gas station and stand freely pumping gas. I wore a shirt now. I wore a girl's bra maybe. But we had that other history. That history at the gas station when I was almost a boy. I sulked in the passenger

seat after being strong-armed away from the pool and my friends. When we turned a familiar corner into Keeney Park where the black golf course was situated, I recognized the shortcut to the liquor store, what we in Connecticut call the "package store," where my father got his beer. He pulled over on the side of the wooded road and said, "It's your turn." "What?" I asked. "Your turn to drive," he said. I switched places with him in the giant, brown Buick sedan, the back seat piled with plastic bags of beer cans he returned at the store for five cents a pop, and upon instruction pressed my foot solidly onto the brake pedal. Exhilarated, my hands tightened around the steering wheel and, ever so tentatively, I lifted one hand to shift the car into drive and pushed the gas pedal with a slight force. Some fathers would have taken their kid to a parking lot, but not mine. Instead we were inside of the park where cars would occasionally stream gently along, like on a Sunday drive. Some fathers would have taken their son on this journey, but mine took me. After this day, I was always my father's driver, which made me an excellent driver. He also taught me how to change a tire, how to check and change the oil, and replace spark plugs and worn belts.

Being treated like a boy by my dad saved me from the years I was recognized as a girl. There was another man, a charming one, who befriended my mother at the day-care center where she taught. I like charm to this day. But this guy was charming so that he could have access to little-girl bodies in ways that fractured their very selfhood. I was one of those girls. And the fractured selfhood happened to me, though no one at the time knew about it. Dad hated the charming man with a passion. Whenever he entered any room, my father would storm out. The charming man loved spending time with me too and would create opportunities for us to be alone; but this is a story for another time. For our purposes here, I needed rescue.

This gift of the ability to drive and the subsequent driver's license enabled my ability to get away. Suddenly, I was free. I made myself no longer available to the man who fractured souls. I realized escape was in my own hands, and escape I finally did. Eventually I escaped into the larger world, far from our small home in the small Connecticut city that no one would call "a destination." I drove to Manhattan with friends and purchased a long, black coat like I'd seen in teen movies.

We browsed the Fiorucci store and went dancing at Danceteria and Palladium. I drove to Watch Hill, Rhode Island, where I spent a glorious long weekend with friends at their rich grandmother's house—just us teenagers dancing around the kitchen to *The Big Chill* soundtrack. The car was more than transportation. It was more than symbolic, though it was that too, the way that the experience of driving was a window. And through it, I saw myself on the other side of that window. When I graduated from college, I boarded a Greyhound bus and moved as far away from Hartford as I could possibly imagine, to the West Coast, a place I'd never been to.

I write to you now from a quiet locale, a secret beach just on the southern coast of Spain where we can glimpse Africa through thin low-hanging clouds in the distance. I am positioned on a stone balcony where I've hung freshly washed underwear to dry in the late-afternoon sun. People pour in now from the beach, the shore, toward the parking lot or the inn, positioned, as it often is, up some bank or above what would be dunes. When evening approaches, it does so with very slowly fading light, encouraging leisure as a primary occupation. Heat lifts from your body, breeze insouciant, and there, pulling on the recesses of the throat-thought, the figure of the father emerges like a nagging dream. My body, however, is my own.

ADITI MACHADO

CONCERNING MATTERS CULINARY

1. So that
everything appears
in infinitest clarity
And that my taste
is subject

2. For this and all
the wild onions
the terrible excursions
simplify

3. The cold inn
the dressing warms
And the scallions that wither
in my arms

4. Portly grapes
This aside

5. Always the vinaigrettes mediate

6. The tuna seared
a bit uneven sits
cadmium in fine
sheets of guava

7. A leaf of curry
A scent of lime
evades detection

8. Derelict
nol kohl ribbons on a
shallow plate
Brief interludes
of tender coconut
round out the salad
Salted juniper
berries eye the mild
white peaks having
into a valley
dropped
from tremors

9. Tender scent of lime

10. Was this not
meditative

11. Such lips peeling
back the elements

And the scallions that
wither in my arms

12. So that
I measure this
adventure

13. So that
I ferment

14. Apples sicken

15. In one place the fig
rolls over
and I stem the tide

16. And because basil
does not yield to flesh
horses take to streets
The bright burns on this
lettuce recall
someone herbaceous
someone severed

17. So memory

18. So bated
the soliloquy
Burnt buccal clam

19. Two elements
The trifling beef set
upon a cauliflower purée
The ineffable curry leaf
infusing it refuses
this appropriation
terrific

20. And so
I thought
I was witness

to something within me
when the platter arrived
with its fish and
crab and tamarind
flowers dripping juices
oceanic

21. Arrived
set in curd
a candied gooseberry

22. Arrived
in a gel
the glossed eyes
of a fish

23. Arrived
the peculiar feeling
my thoughts were infusing
the food and not
the other way around

24. Was this
not meditative

25. That I churned
and put the cat away

26. That I savored
every bite and never
spat nothing out
though there were at times
items too crude
upon the palate and several
monotone or burnt

27. And scallions
wither in my arms

28. Were those not
my lips saccharine
left dumb to yours
o peach mouth
in which I
macerate

29. I'm full of vice
The erstwhile pig crackles

30. What sort of corridor
into the soul is
a knife to the belly

31. I go crazy for lack of
precise instruments

32. Interludes of lime

33. Bitter beet paint
Beat face of animal
Plums underwent this

34. There is death folded
into my mousse today

35. But do, yes,
induct the olive
into yourself
And keep plump
every berry, currant,
pickle slaw, and lush
your advances
I'll be my own still fruit

36. Left alone with my pudding impossible
sweetmeats prolong
the moment

37. Seasoned the wine
Mulled the paradox
Now perplexed solutions
trickle into my cup

38. Wuthering arms

39. Bread erupts
in this yeasty sun-
choked domesticity
I'm frittering in
Happens by sour design

40. So that I forget
to preserve the citrus
mushrooms grow
from the pear's welt

41. Life without scallions
A saga

42. A leaf of banana
How displaced
I consider its ridges

43. So that
confusion is primordial
Vinaigrettes

44. It is not I find I am
saying
that I don't love you
but these rabbit brains
are so delicately
floating, islands,
on this milk of goat
the terrible pastoral
garnish buckles under
I've lived for this
and you have not
Let's part

Adscriptio:

So that
I do not obsess

So that I do not
obsess over the fig

I place it on a rim
So that I do not

forget the fig

I move it
It bursts

The sap of figs is
cruel
The way they are

wrapped is cruel
They burst

So that I learn
kindness

the fig
the fig

VALERIA MEILLER
Translated by Whitney DeVos

CONEJOS

> "Llega, hasta sus oídos, sin estridencias, el rumor de febrero, el mes irreal, concentrado, como en un grumo, en la siesta."
>
> —Juan José Saer

En el futuro de la casa de campo hay pájaros y ellos parten olvidando una valija que no será indispensable. Aceptan el destino con voluntad, como aprendieron a ahogar crías en los bebederos: es necesario y la necesidad es la forma que conocen de la alegría. Actúan de acuerdo a sus rudimentos, desde la primera caza de conejos.

Es el verano de los cartuchos suaves, agazapados para el tiro al salto, vestidos del color de la maleza. Corre un año en que todos los conejos del coto caen enfermos y eso los impresiona tanto que algunas noches sueñan con largas hileras de animales muertos y se despiertan para tocarse los brazos y saber que no llevan escopetas. Ella elige las armas y determina la cantidad de balas cuando recibe la noticia. Él llega en mitad de la mañana con la cara partida de sorpresa para decirle—las vacunas no funcionaron. El destino es un misterio ingobernable: la muerte benévola y mansa cediendo ante la muerte benévola y mansa.

En la víspera de la Navidad visitaron a las hermanas. El monasterio solo existió en el filo silencioso de la siesta y el ladrido de los perros cortó el aire. El misterio que corona las catedrales es el silencio y las familias lo aprenden al asomarse al círculo del oro. Todo es amplio porque alguien creyó que los seminaristas serían muchos. También los cerdos, las gallinas, y los conejos. Una monja le puso un conejo blanco entre los brazos, lo levantó de una jaula inmensa donde se agazapaba tras una pila de heno. Le costó tomarlo porque el animal temblaba y ella sabe que en el principio,

como en una mañana glacial, existe la idea de la muerte. Mientras lo sostenía, la mujer con el pelo cubierto había dicho que pronto iban a sacrificarlo y el animal temblaba.

Cuando se fueron, imaginaron que las hermanas ordenarían todo rápido. Barrerían, lavarían los cacharros y los pondrían en su sitio, de tal modo que pareciera que nunca habían recibido visitas. Que no fuera a pensar que las monjas y los conejos eran lo mismo, ellas no cedían ante el milagro de la vida y era difícil no pensar en eso.

—Lo que hacés primero es partirle el cuello. Le cortás la cabeza y después, lo pelás.

Quitarles el cuero a los animales se convierte en un acto de amor, el trabajo del cuchillo separando con ternura el abrigo de la carne. Viven los sacrificios con gratitud, se alegran en la temporada de caza. Y ahora que los conejos están todos enfermos, la pólvora se humedece como la mañana y los armeros se llenan de tierra.

RABBITS

> "It reaches their ears, without stridency, the murmur of February,
> the unreal month, concentrated, like a lump, during siesta."
>
> —Juan José Saer

In the future of the country house there are birds, and the family departs forgetting a suitcase that won't be essential. They accept fate willingly, the way they learned to drown litters in watering troughs; it is necessary and need is the only form of joy they know. They act according to their rudiments, since the first rabbit hunt.

It is the summer of soft-point cartridges, crouching to shoot at the jump, everyone dressed in the color of the undergrowth. That year all the hunting rabbits fall ill, and they are so astounded some nights they dream about long rows of dead animals and wake to feel their limbs and know they carry no shotguns. When they get the news, she chooses the weapons and the quantity of bullets. He arrives midmorning, his face split by surprise to tell her—the vaccines did not work. Destiny is a mystery impossible to govern: the benevolent and gentle death yielding to the benevolent and gentle death.

On Christmas Eve, they visited the sisters. The monastery existed only in the quiet edge of siesta and the barking of dogs cleaved the air. The mystery that crowns cathedrals is silence and families learn it when they lean into the gold circle. Everything is ample, as someone once believed the priests would be many; the pigs, the hens, and the rabbits also. A nun put a white rabbit in her arms; she lifted it from an enormous cage where it was hiding behind a pile of hay. It was hard to pick up because the animal was trembling, and she knows that at the beginning, as in a glacial morning, there exists the idea of death. As she held it, the woman with covered hair had said that it would soon be sacrificed and the animal trembled.

When they left, they imagined the sisters would soon tidy up. They would sweep, wash the pots and put them in their places, so that it would seem as though they never had visitors. Let it not be thought nuns and rabbits were the same, the nuns did not yield to the miracle of life and it was hard not to think of this.

—First thing to do is to break its neck, then you cut its head off and peel the body.

Skinning the hide of animals becomes an act of love, the work of the knife tenderly separating the fur from the flesh. They experience sacrifices with gratitude, they rejoice during hunting season. And now that all the rabbits are sick, the gunpowder moistens like morning and the gun racks fill with dust.

LANGOSTAS

El cielo lleva meses sin encapotarse. Ningún viento estremece los árboles y en la inmovilidad se doran las copas. Mejor hubiera sido elegir una forma más segura de subsistencia, donde las variables del clima no dijeran nada. Pero en cambio están ahí, luchando como corredores de fondo contra el terreno y sus dificultades.

—En el campo, no des nunca nada por sentado—se repite en la cabeza de él.

La sequía se transmite a su cuerpo por contagio y delira por la sed del pasto. Es una peste, la sequía como las langostas. Un silencio en que los pensamientos son amarillos y los bordes del paisaje lastiman. No imaginó nunca que febrero sería así. Alguna vez pensó en una plaga de langostas arrasando con todo a su paso, pero la imagen era distinta: un parpadeo, el zumbido, y en mitad del día un cielo negro. Alguien—ella o él—levantaba la cara y veía una inmensa nube oscura. De un momento a otro, se sacudían los sembrados y después todo estaba pelado igual que una rama en julio. La voz de las langostas, puede oírla—pero la sequía es una agonía sorda. Invierte el sentido de las puertas, que se cierran a los golpes, sin estremecer siquiera a quienes las empujan.

LOCUSTS

For months the sky has not turned overcast. No wind shakes the trees and in the stillness treetops turn yellow. Better to have chosen a more certain form of subsistence, where variables in climate would mean nothing. But instead they are there, struggling against the terrain and its difficulties, like long-distance runners.

—In the country, never take anything for granted—the phrase repeats in his head.

The drought is transmitted to the body by contagion and he raves for the thirst of grass. It is a plague, the drought like locusts. A silence in which thoughts are yellow and each edge of the landscape hurts. He never imagined February could be like this. Once he thought about a plague of locusts razing everything in their path, but the image was different: a blink, a whirr, and at midday a black sky. Someone—either of them—would look up and see an immense dark cloud. From one moment to the next, the fields were shaken and then peeled like a branch in winter. The sound of the locusts, he can hear it—but the drought is a deaf agony. It inverts the course of doors, slammed in anger, not even a shudder in those who push them.

LA CANELA

En tres palmos de jardín, él escribe.

Ella imagina llegar a la médula del sueño y las cartas que desea recibir empiezan sobre un fondo verde y llovido, donde todo lo demás es blanco como el arroz cortado.

En el jardín de la casa de campo se levanta un tallo, precursor del buen tiempo y dice:

—La rama que me crece del pie tiene unas flores.

Él piensa: Aquí las especias eclipsan a los árboles.

Ella dice:

—¿Qué hago ahora con el libro de las flores silvestres?

Cierra los ojos y ve a la rosa china en plena floración, en el ojo de sol de su balcón, peinándose.

—¡El siglo de la velocidad!—dice.

Pero ¿dónde? ¿Cómo es así? En realidad, nada ha cambiado.

Él dice:

—Voy a pasar de los árboles y la canela por un buen tiempo.

¿El cuerpo? Pura memoria.

La vida que comparten es torpe y ruedan por la superficie rozándose los codos.

Entonces, ¿por qué antes no habían estado tristes? ¿Los conmoverían las chispas del sol en el galpón? ¿Los brotes de su economía secándose? Tal vez, pero también podría ser esto: pasar de enero a la sequía sabiendo que en realidad lo que se eclipsa está por fuera del mundo. O mejor, tener un sueño con conejos atrapados en un coto de caza.

CINNAMON

In three garden-length spans, he writes.

She imagines arriving at the marrow of the dream. The letters she longs for begin on a background, green and rain-streaked, where everything is white like chopped rice.

In the garden of the country house a stem, precursor of good weather, rises and says:

—The branch growing from my foot has a few flowers.

He thinks: Here the herbs eclipse the trees.

She says:

—What am I to do now with the book of wildflowers?

She closes both eyes and sees the China rose in full bloom, combing itself in the sun's eye on her balcony.

Says:

—The century of speed!

But where? How is it like this? In reality, nothing has changed.

He says:

—I'm going to pass on the trees and cinnamon for a while.

The body? Pure memory.

The life they share is awkward and they roll over the surface rubbing elbows.

So, why had they not been sad before? The sparks of the sun in the shed, would those move them? The sprouts of their economy drying up? Perhaps, or it could be this: watching January turn to drought and knowing what is eclipsed is outside this world. Or better, dreaming of rabbits caught at the hunting ground.

EL ANIMAL

Bajo la luz de las linternas, el cuero se abre con la ferocidad de un brote.

Él le pide que no mire, y ella se queda quieta, con la linterna en una mano y un palo para ayudarse a caminar en la otra. Las huellas de las bicicletas van en dirección al pueblo. Deben ser dos hombres, tal vez con un niño. Abandonaron al animal casi entero, espantados por el ladrido de los perros.

Él dice que no era posible sacrificarlo entre los pajonales, por eso lo arrastraron hasta el bebedero donde el suelo está muerto por el pisoteo constante de las vacas y el agua cerca para lavarse las manos. Ella lo mira suponer, suspende el juicio. La escena que reconstruyen se remonta apenas a unas horas antes y sin embargo la distancia que los separa de ella les parece infinita.

Ahora que los partes del clima dicen, en una curva ascendente casi perfecta, que el próximo será el invierno más frío del que se tenga memoria ¿cómo harán para caminar en mitad de la noche como hoy? ¿De qué manera se arrimarán a esas muertes, o hacia el lugar donde los perros ladran?

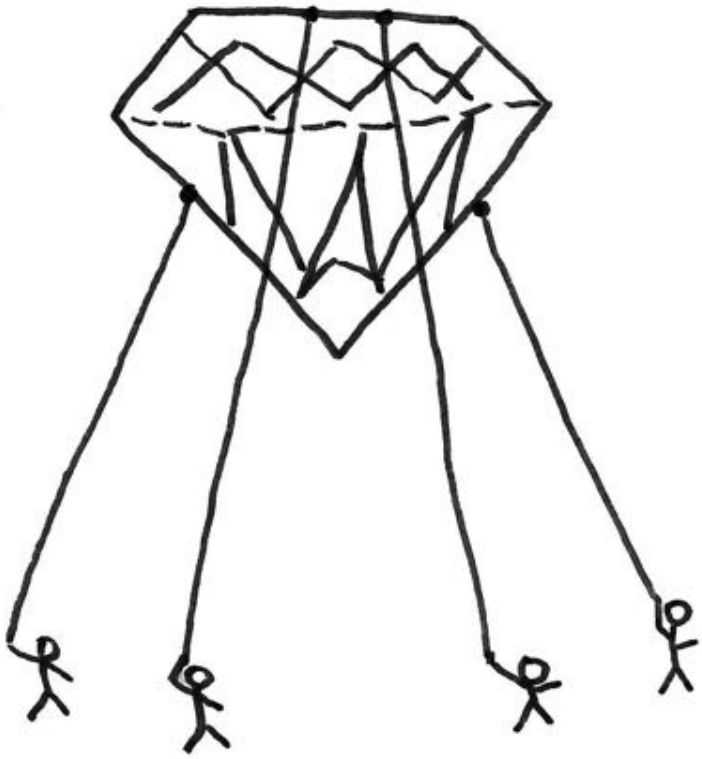
THE ANIMAL

Under the lantern light, the hide splits open ferociously, as a shoot ruptures seed.

He asks her not to watch, and she stays still, a lantern in one hand and a walking stick in the other. The tracks of the bicycles lead towards the town. There must have been two men, maybe with a boy. They left the animal almost whole, spooked by the barking of the dogs.

He says it wasn't possible to slaughter it on the grasslands, so they dragged it to the trough, where the ground is trampled dead by cows, and water close by, to wash their hands. She watches him conjecture, suspending judgement. The scene they reconstruct goes back only a few hours and yet that distance seems, to them, infinite.

Now that climate reports demonstrate, in an almost perfect upward curve, that next winter will be the coldest for which there is memory: How will they fare walking in the middle of the night? How will they arrive upon such deaths—or start towards the barking of the dogs?



Sommer Browning, “Parade.” Image courtesy of the artist.

KATE COLBY

The Bind

Gertrude Stein said, "And then there is using everything." I have long held to this aspirational strategy, taking completion as a basic measure of the world as I would have it, and wanting to depict it at total scale. I long to pull all that is, was, and might one day be into concentric shapes around me.

Recently, in the course of doing research on the poet Charles Olson, about whom I'm supposed to be writing per a fellowship proposal, I decided to write about Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, whose intra-referential proportions are meant to extend to everything—perfect man as basic measure of the universe. I thought I might also write about Vesuvian man—the heat-blasted, ash-buried bodies left at Pompeii—mostly for the wordplay. But I do have a knack for making things mean, and there's something concentric about a spread-eagled man representing the proportionality of the universe and the bodies curled up under a deadly blanket of ash, although I'm not sure which shape contains the other. Everything might already be here, in some form or another, but you can't have it all—per the uncertainty principle, say, you can know a moving object's speed or position but not both at once. I mean to toggle between.

Olson tried to include everything in his poems (with the exception of women). But on this livid March morning—raw cough, wet snow patches on ugly asphalt roofs—I am thinking about excision as another way toward completion. Not Wite-Out, but Vantablack, the blackest black material, which absorbs 99.965% of light. If you shine a flashlight on it, the beam disappears. It betrays no contours or third dimension of whatever it's applied to. If I wore a dress of it, for instance, my head and hands would appear to jut from a 2-D, dress-shaped void. I would find this garment more useful than an invisibility cloak, I think—to look down at my blacked-out torso and lap, and know a more palpable absence.

Lumped into my preoccupation with scale is equivalence: I just learned that the kilogram is a physical object stored under two bell jars and whose mass has been changing over time. Thus, since the late eighteenth century, a good deal of the human world's physical reality has rested on a basic unit of measurement that's unstable. A team of scientists has just created a stable version made of a silicon isotope and the new definition of a kilogram might soon be the number of atoms contained in its reflective, nearly perfect sphere.[1] If the softball-sized object were scaled up to the size of the earth, its greatest deviation from sea level would be five meters, making it the roundest man-made object. Sea level is a measure of roundness.

There's a sample of Vantablack at the Forbes Pigment Collection in the Harvard Art Museums. (Harvard is where I go to not write about Olson.) The small patch of it on a crinkled aluminum sheet looks like the space where a slice has been taken from the perceptible world. It looks like the sensation of there being nothing to see. Vantablack is made from vertical carbon nanotubes, like a fine velvet pile of filaments, each with the thickness of one atom. It even looks velvety, which is strange, since velvet looks the way it does because of its sheen. In spite of its inclusion in the Forbes collection, Vantablack is not a pigment and isn't even black—it's a nearly complete absence of color, which we perceive as black, like a black hole, which no one's ever seen and can't be seen, but which isn't black either. Either is the opposite of seeing, i.e., not seeing, but with eyes.

In thinking about Olson, I realized that one thing that drew me to his work in the first place was my sense that he too was trying to render infinity and abstraction in language, albeit by being exhaustive, while lately I've been going at it with a scalpel. Here's the niggling thing about pigment: it might be a basic unit of color, but color isn't in it—color doesn't belong to a thing, it's an effect of how light is reflected back into our eyes. So, the difference between viridian and Vantablack is complete, but only due to the fact and/or presence of a seeing body. Maybe humans are here to perceive.

Noun or verb, what's the fullest form of "being"?

Ludwig Wittgenstein: "Grounds for doubt are *lacking*." (Emphasis mine—his was on "doubt.")

In any case, I have no use for the void, only for its depiction.

The sculptor Anish Kapoor, best known for his reflective bean-shaped *Cloud Gate*, holds exclusive rights to Vantablack in artistic applications. This has inspired much ire in the art world, but I think it's a blessing. How many times can you apply a material evoking the void to an object and have it mean something? Certainly not many, so it's better to keep it unattainable, leaving everyone to slaver over all the things they'd love to apply it to. Thinking about it is much more interesting than seeing a field of Vantablack headstones. Or Vantablack stained glass windows. Or Vantablack eyeglasses or swimming pool or gazing ball or phone screen or skylight or rearview mirror or bunch of overripe bananas or whatnot. No matter what you applied it to, a Vantablack coating would suggest death, futility, and infinity, and while I'm interested in the infinite ways of saying those things, how often do I care to see them?

The eyes have no memory.

Charles Olson: "How, by form, to get the content instant?"

I can't know the void, and so this Vantablack mask / how I want my form torn from me.

At the Forbes there's a pigment made from ground-up Egyptian mummies. Learning of its origins, one pre-Raphaelite buried his tube of it in the yard.

I only learned recently that the bodies at Pompeii are actually plaster casts of the hollows the decomposed corpses left in the ash that buried them. I thought the bodies had been preserved under there, like famous prehistoric remains in ice, but no. They are their own shapes of their terror-stricken forms. And this is also how I think of Olson—he tried to draw everything there is in around him like mythopoetic ash that revealed his anticipatory death mask. He made

a space the negative shape of himself. You can now have diamonds made of your loved ones' ashes and I think that's where I'd like to spend eternity—a lapidary singularity.

Vantablack potholes, portholes,
a light bulb, a urinal, stars
on the ceiling of Grand Central,
a shroud, cash, subway rat, ash
diamond or therapy couch,

The White House

In response to Kapoor's hogging of Vantablack, the artist Stuart Semple created the fluorescent "Stuart Semple Pink," for which he is now best known, and which is forbidden to Anish Kapoor. To purchase the pigment on Semple's website, you must first agree to the following statement:

> By adding this product to your cart you confirm that you are not Anish Kapoor, you are in no way affiliated to Anish Kapoor, you are not purchasing this item on behalf of Anish Kapoor or an associate of Anish Kapoor. To the best of your knowledge, information and belief this paint will not make its way into the hands of Anish Kapoor. #ShareTheBlack

This game of proprietary color harkens back to International Klein Blue, patented in 1960 by Yves Klein, best known for his attempts to render the void in it. Klein's blue is a run-of-the-mill ultramarine, but the binding medium is a matte synthetic resin with a textured materiality, reportedly resulting in a vertiginous depthlessness when the paint is apprehended in person, something like a cloudless sky on a low-humidity day. It seems that the essence of a color can belong to either the pigment or the medium.

Is Klein's exclusive blue more form or content of his paintings?

One wants a pure thing mostly just to own it.

Synthetic diamonds are chemically identical to natural ones and both are the opposite of Vantablack. All are made of pure carbon, but a diamond gives the light back.

There are countless books and theories pertaining to color but I'm not interested in pure, as in exhaustive, knowledge (which might be an opposite of "truth"). I was planning to paint pigment as the smallest unit or measure of a painting—the most basic pictorial tool—but that is a conceit. The point and the line and other geometric considerations are just as basic, if not more so, in that they are imaginary, conceptual, or theoretical. Geometry is the shape and essence of the universe, and yet, perhaps, not in it. *Vitruvian Man* and Vesuvian man have exactly everything and nothing to do with one another: their most basic relation is either man's recapitulation of the universe or the precepts of Italian.

Color falls into the "explanatory gap" or the category of what are known in philosophy as "qualia"—subjective experiences that can't be explained by physics and physiology. Seeing the color red, for instance, comes down to the dynamics of light and the mechanics of the eye. But the sensation of seeing red cannot be induced in a computer or Platonic cave dweller. And I think this is where Olson was at odds with himself—the point of poetry, to a large degree, if not entirely, is to write into the gap, and he did that, but I get the sense that he thought he could bridge it by filling it in. His collective works read to me like shoveling dirt into his own grave—not to complete it but to eradicate it.

Using the city of Gloucester metonymically, Olson tried to hold in the whole world with the binding medium of his embodied mind: "…any of us / the center of a circle / our fingers / and our toes describe." At the same time, he wanted to make his mind manifest. Sometimes he called the manifestation "breath." *Vitruvian Man* is named for the Roman architect Vitruvius, whose ideas about the proportionality of the human body it illustrates with an ideal man in an ideal stance to all appearances ideally contained by both a circle and a square. Such seemingly perfect geometry seems to extend concentrically to the

universe's edges. But circles and squares have no inherent relationship, as the ancient and insoluble "squaring the circle" problem shows—you can't use a ruler and compass to create a square with the same area as a given circle. There's no equation. As with the fundamentals of the quantum and cosmic, these most basic units of reading the world are incompatible: Da Vinci's square and circle and the man pushing back at them are not proportionate—he fudged it.

"Phenomena" is a word for everything between us and the world, including the word.

By "word" I mean both language and the word "phenomena."

When the word for a problem is the word for the problem.

Saying is a way of seeing without eyes.

Since I read it in French my junior year of college, I've been carrying around a space containing something I didn't yet know how to say about Joris-Karl Huysmans's high-decadent classic *À rebours*. The protagonist Jean des Esseintes holes up and tries to boil his world down to the purely aesthetic. It's totally demented and now I get it, even if I can't condone it, even if I'm trying to do it. In chapter four he has the shell of a living tortoise gilded and set with gemstones in order to offset the colors of his carpet. There's a long passage explaining his choice of stones for each part of the design on the animal's shell, the choices determined by the stones' colors and effects, as well as their obscurity and relative unattainability. The amethyst, while beautiful, is ruled out because the stone "has been debased on the blood-red earlobes and tubulous fingers of butchers' wives who seek to adorn themselves, for a modest outlay, with genuine, weighty jewels." After opening a window and receiving a chill, followed by a graphic memory of a tooth extraction, he notices that the tortoise has died, unable to bear its burden of beauty.

If I could hole myself up thus, it would be with a bad photo of a dress that consumed the internet for a few weeks in 2015. Some saw it as white and gold, others as blue and black. It seems the discrepancy has

to do with the photo's lack of visual cues as to time of day and whether the dress is lit by natural or artificial light. Our brains color correct what we see in different lighting conditions in order to read the world as stable.[2] If you see the dress as naturally lit, then it appears to be in shadow and reads as white and gold. If you understand the light as artificial, then the photo seems washed out and the colors read blue and black. What bothers me isn't the variable appearance of the dress, nor the question of its actual color, but that the color I see either is or isn't actually in or on my computer screen. I don't know how color is digitally rendered, but it's in there somewhere, just as if I were to print the photo a printer would have to choose its pigments. Would it use blue and black or white and gold ink?

What is the difference between the apparent and the seen? (By "apparent" I mean "seeable" not "seeming," although I'm not sure of that difference either.) One concerns what a thing gives off, and the other how it's received, neither essential to the thing itself.

If there's a difference between wanting to know and wanting to own, what is it?

Which is as close as we can get to it.

Des Esseintes "had long been an expert at distinguishing between genuine and deceptive shades of color."[3] Given his consistent stated object of substituting simulacra for reality (his dining room contains a porthole looking in on fake fish, for instance), of the genuine and deceptive, I'm not sure which he considers the lesser. Further complicating either the matter or my understanding of it, he prefers colors that "increased in intensity by lamplight; little did he care if they appeared insipid or harsh by daylight." Studies found a correlation between how self-identified morning people and night owls viewed the shifty-colored dress, and it seems des Esseintes would fall into the blue-and-black camp. He trusts both his senses and his sensibilities, even though they are symbiotically suspect. He shuts himself into a self-made cave, free of context, where things only have the value he accords them, but which he believes is innate. Similarly and conversely, Olson tried to engage and appraise the entire inter-referential world

completely, but was effete. Both were would-be Vitruvian men, seeing themselves at the center of that which is universal, essential, and scalable to their self-experience.

Appearances are all that is real.

"Creation" is the act of creating as well as what's been created.

Vantablack compass rose,
tortoise shell,
painted inside

different kinds
of lids,

a periscope

I have a particular terror of being buried alive, particularly at the bottom of the sea. In 2000, after an explosion during a naval training exercise, twenty-three Russian sailors were stranded far beneath the ocean's surface in the Kursk submarine. In the days that followed there were reports that audio equipment had picked up tapping sounds from the vessel's interior. They were later discredited, but it's still not known how long the sailors lived before they likely suffocated. I remember my horror at this news of communication from the soon-to-be tomb of a metal tube. Is it worse to be locked out of or into the world and how can you tell when you're which? Perhaps it's a word problem: some science upholds that language developed as a tool of communication, and other science believes it developed to enable thought. This is a complete difference.

(Δ signifies difference.)

Brain stem damage from stroke or injury can result in a condition known as locked-in syndrome, where a person is completely paralyzed except, in some cases, for the eyes. This sounds like pure hell, being buried alive in a shallow grave of one's own body, but developments in communication with locked-in people have revealed that, by and large, they value their lives and are content, even. After being locked in by a

stroke in 1995, the French writer and editor Jean-Dominique Bauby laboriously dictated his memoir, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, by blinking his left eye. A diving bell is a pressurized metal chamber used to lower divers deep beneath the ocean, and Bauby likened his locked-in experience to being, and hearing oneself breathe, in a metal diving helmet at the bottom of the sea.

Ultramarine pigment, whose name means "beyond the sea," was once precious and used sparingly by medieval and Renaissance painters, usually for holy raiment. The lapis lazuli from which it was painstakingly ground is found only in Afghanistan and was thus costly and hard to come by in Europe. An inexpensive synthetic version was introduced in the nineteenth century, and while it was chemically identical to natural pure ultramarine, it was completely free of the trace minerals that make natural ultramarine slightly variable. How much and when does purity have to do with authenticity? We accord authenticity to what's "natural" (who wants a synthetic diamond, unless it's made of beloved ashes?) but everything's already here in some form or another—all that's left is combinatorial potential. And color doesn't even belong to a thing (the Pompeii body casts, though, do have bones in them).

If you stand with feet together and arms stretched up and away from your head, you constitute a triangle.

Is the picture in the painting in the mirror of the dress white and gold or blue and black?

Vantablack is backlight on the gap. (They should license it to poets just to look at.)

The Forbes collection was created to aid in determining artworks' authenticity: a Dutch Master wouldn't have used synthetic ultramarine, for instance. But some pigments have remained the same for centuries, and so, in many cases the tip-off to a painting's provenance and the measure of its genuineness are the age and contemporaneous availability of the binding medium, whether egg, oil, glue, or resin.[4] What the world is made of might already all be here, but not what

holds it together and asunder; space is still being made for it. All parallels are false, imaginary, conceptual, or theoretical, but if you consider everything on the largest scale, and infinity's your binding medium, then pigment's a place to begin with.

Which is more important to me: irreducibility or utter relativity?

Δ=save your breath

(*Utter* meaning "speak" and "complete.")

The earliest extant use of pigments is in prehistoric cave paintings rendered with earth, charcoal, and lime and a binding medium of spit, fat, or blood. Stone Age ochre mines have been linked to pre-homo-sapiens species of hominids, suggesting that aesthetic and symbolic behavior might date back nearly a million years. A common motif of cave paintings worldwide is the human hand, both positive and negative, i.e., printed or stenciled. Negative hands were created by dabbing ink or blowing it through hollow bones. In the Gargas Cave in the Pyrenees many of the negative hands are missing fingers. Potential reasons include frostbite, ritual mutilation, and disease, but the most widely accepted theory seems to be that the fingers are bent or hands contorted to mean something. Either the body is lost to the world or its meaning is, and content's an effect of the contemporary light.

If the earth were scaled down to the size of a softball, would we perceive the imperfections of Everest?

(An imperfection in a diamond is known as an "inclusion.")

I am a slight woman. My compressed remains might fit a missing digit.

Vantablack cave
painting
of a cave,

point-
illist painting
in empty
gold frame

Even if you could have it all—full-scale, complete content—you can't have it both ways. Speed or position, white and gold or blue and black. Invisibility or Vantablack. Gertrude Stein said, "Act so that there is no use in a centre," but sue me. I love a center, even a fake or synthetic one, and the unknown degree to which those things are opposites or isotopes or both, and especially when the unknown of the center *is* the center, which is the case herein, where I am only/just writing about Charles Olson.

Form is what we want the world with.

When I undertook writing about Olson, I proposed to examine the gendered underpinnings of his ideas about proprioception, which he used as a conceptual framework for the wide-angled, intricately counterbalanced writing he espoused. Neither a sense nor a faculty, proprioception is "one's own -ception," an innate sense of the body parts' relative location and motion—the body's perceptual binding medium. Olson outlined and enacted a tension-based poetics, positioning the body as scale model of the world as he would have it—dynamic and teetering, tipping and correcting like a dancer, pushing out against the circle. Olson scholar Eireene Nealand proposes pointillist painting as both analog and demonstration of proprioceptive gestalt, where tiny dots of pure color are blended by the eye to produce colors and effects that are not actually on the canvas, a phenomenon which is either not at all like or not unlike a badly lit photo of a dress.

You can't misperceive a color—the color of a thing is how you see it.

Proprioception is the body's certainty of its own speed and position.

There's something in a juxtapositional sensibility that's a wrench in the works of authenticity—a numinousness or quale or form that's torn from me.

Seurat began painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte* in 1884, the same year Huysmans published *À rebours*. How des Esseintes would have hated *La Grande Jatte*—its additive, nongenuine, irreducible colors representing the world as unknowable with and thanks to a cognitive smearing.[5] The noumenal and our senses in a feedback loop that to an unknown degree excludes actuality, including the degree of the world's stability.

To be buried at sea in a hyperbaric chamber of oneself—

Jean-Dominique Bauby: "Does the cosmos contain keys for opening up my diving bell?"

In many ways a mine is the opposite of a cave—and/or it's a synthetic cave, made by removing a seam that binds the earth together and asunder. It's an absence of use (I mean both a lack with, and of, utility). In 2010 a rockfall inside Chile's Copiapó copper mine buried thirty-three men alive. Rescuers weren't sure any had survived until they heard tapping on the drill that bore down to them. The miners taped notes to the bit. After many months they were rescued one by one in a metal chamber created for this purpose. These men are outliers in the history of mining disasters—others' bodies remain deep in the earth and will one day be a new seam, their bones turned to gems by heat and compression. Will those stones be natural or synthetic? What has the conscious intent of humans to do with authenticity?

Δ=negative capability

The eyes have no memory.

"Mine" denotes ownership and a hole in the ground where precious metals and minerals are found.

Lack is grounds for doubt.

Oliver Sacks: "[Proprioception is] that vital sixth sense without which a body must remain unreal, unpossessed."

There are only eyes in all Vantablack heads.

There is a recent tradition of referring to the work you're supposed to be writing—in and in lieu of the work at hand—when the two things turn out to be the same. Both my contribution to and failure to meet the requirements of the genre are both deliberate and accidental. I am, in fact, trying to use everything, even forever-former absences and imagined presences; my brain forever circling its square, on what by now is a sticky day in July.[6]

$\Delta T=1$ season[7]

There's a word for the fear of, but not for being, buried alive.

I have a sixth sense of not seeing with my eyes.

Susan Howe: "…indeterminacy involves all of life…"

Olson called for a verse in which the poet "manages to register both the acquisitions of his ear AND the pressures of his breath." He wanted not to record, but to be made/of the world: interior and prior to, outside and in anticipation of, each and every thing. What would the form of having gotten around and inside of, looking in and out from every angle look like? A perfect sphere, the roundest object, sea level to the core.

An isotope is either a complete or the slightest difference between things.

Are there different kinds of irreducibility?

At the Forbes there's a ball of yellow pigment made from urine of cows fed mango leaves.

It's not possible to create a color with optical mixing that can't be created physically. The pointillists were wrong about this. At the Forbes they also have a tube of the new YinMn Blue—an accidentally

discovered synthetic pigment. Is it possible there are colors not yet found or made that we might discover with our combinatory vision?

How, by form, to get the content instant when form is in the world we have to begin with?

("Have" meaning both "are required" and "possess.")

Rosmarie Waldrop on "Projective Verse": "Its mere influence makes it an important document."

Des Esseintes finally fine-tunes his senses to a degree where he becomes pure sensation. Opening a window (again) for some air, he's assaulted by a panoply of spring scents his brain can't contain. His seclusion has become not just a choice, but necessary, since every bit of sensory data induces a plexus of associations and memories whose insistence and relentlessness make him sweat and suffer. After trying to take the edge off his pain with a swig from a bottle of liqueur his mind is led into rampant and involuntary meditations on the aesthetics, history, and connotative data contained by the shape and color of the bottle, its label, the scent of the booze, the monks who produced it, until "he felt as though he was under a bell-jar in which the vacuum of every moment was becoming more powerful." At last, any little thing to which he's exposed induces a Borgesian cataract of information and suggestions, visions, phantom scents, and songs.

By "cataract" I mean "waterfall," not optical impediment.

The eyes have no memory.

(Funes the Memorious dies of lung congestion.)

Vantablack dark
matter binding
medium

prosthetic finger,

black lung

Consider proprioception as certainty principle bringing together body and world—at once intero- and extero-ceiving, neither locking out nor in, but opening the lid. Not bridge, but seam. One use or field/theory of everything.

There are different kinds of tombs and reasons for being in them. One is made of words.

Vantablack dancer
in Vanta-
black

box theater

I mean to use the limits of the brain—by which I mean both its prison and furthest reaches—as a writing constraint. The longest distance between as "being" (shut up).

Take this form to fill in/with.

There's an optical illusion called the Frasier Spiral—you've seen it—in which a black-and-white pattern laid under concentric circles makes them appear to coil in. It can be explained away, but the spiral remains and to that I will hitch my head.

Stein: "Let me recite what history teaches. History teaches."

History's a habit of thinking.

NOTES

1/ That a basic measure of weight can't be defined by another measure of weight is a no-brainer but I can't get my head around its definition as a number of something else.
2/ The vestibulo-ocular reflex is what causes our eyes to move when we turn our heads, stabilizing the world as imprinted on our retinas. My neuroscientist friend is researching the aural equivalent—since our ears are affixed to our heads, why doesn't the audible world seem to swirl around us when we move? He thinks he knows the answer. All I know is that the most you can see or hear is in a circle.
3/ This was supposed to be the epigraph of my third book, but it appears I misquoted it.
4/ …calling forth the previously called-back-to Klein International Blue, but what binds the qualities of a proprietary color to the authenticity of a painting is beyond me (by which I mean somewhere in an outer circle of everything I can't access).
5/ Huysmans did hate it, for different stated reasons. In 1887 he wrote in *La Revue indépendante*, "Strip [Seurat's] figures of the colored fleas with which they are covered, and underneath there is nothing, no soul, no thought, nothing. Nothingness in a body of which only the contour exists."
6/ As I write this, there are twelve children trapped in a flooded cave in Thailand.
7/ Markers of time are always contrived in a personal essay, but perhaps mirror the phenomenon (i.e., appearance and/or conceit) of time at large. {Just this morning [which is in May (at the time of the draft in which I'm writing this) (Later I will add the previous footnote.)] my husband played me a recording of a computerized voice saying the word "yanny," which, it seems, many people, including my husband, hear as "laurel." It's the aural equivalent of the dress (the white-and-gold one, not the Vantablack number) and I presume it will take over the internet. (August: It did.)} [In November more than sixty nations will (did) vote to base the kilogram on the Planck constant, which has something to do with quantum energy, rather than the silicone sphere. I should go back and edit out that nearly perfect sphere bit, but it's already been assimilated.]

RYŪNOSUKE AKUTAGAWA
Translated by Ryan Choi

Ten Thorns

I. People I

Such people exist: who seek to dissect every bit of the world, who rely on the logic of a botany text to feel the beauty of a rose. If only they knew, to dissect is to *destroy*.

Blessed are the intuitive among us, for the analytical lack sincerity, trapped in the terror of their endless game. They mutilate happiness and exalt anguish in the name of *analysis.*

"Had they never been born…" are the words I begrudge these men.

II. We

We are not who we think we are. Our ancestors, undying, live inside us, and ignoring them assures our misfortune.

Karma: figurative accounting of our literal covenant.

"Self-discovery," in its fullest, extends beyond the scope of the "one" and encompasses our ancestors and the gods themselves, who have ruled us for all time.

III. The Raven and the Peacock

The most terrifying truth for man is that he can never be more than man. Freed from the blinders of grandeur, one sees this incontrovertibly—that a raven, no matter how it tries, will never be a peacock; that one line of a poet's poetry is a summation of all his poems.

IV. Bouquets in the Firmament

Science explains everything. In the future, science will continue to explain everything, and despite this, we esteem it as we esteem art, as token bouquets to raise in our firmament of achievement. Even if we deny the sentiment *L'homme est rien*, what differentiates us from our fellow men? Visionary bands of Baudelaires populate the halls of our mental wards, but who among them has borne fruits like *Flowers of Evil* or *Small Prose Poems*?

V. 2+2=4

2+2=4 is inarguable fact, but the "+" sign, in actuality, contains an infinity of gradations, each subtler than the last. All problems, in this sense, are subsumed within the "+" sign.

VI. Heaven

Even if one could construct heaven, it would inevitably be a terrestrial place. Do we not imagine it as such—a heaven of roses flowering amid brambles; of men basking in despondence, while trotting alongside dogs?

Doubtless, there are far worse lots than ending up a dog.

VII. Penitence

The heart of man flourishes in penitential misery, the standard formulation of which is "I will not do again what I *did*," or "I will do from now as I *say*."

VIII. People II

Such people exist: whose greed knows no limits, for whom the prospect of having only one woman or one idea or one China pink or one slice

of bread is abhorrent, and who therefore live at the pinnacle of excess, which is also the pinnacle of despair. They are slaves to their cravings, denying to the very end the suffering at the root of their demise. Even if one served them enlightenment on a silver plate or guided them to the base of the heavenly stairs they would balk on the grounds that "enlightenment" and "heaven" cannot be theirs to keep. Not even a custom peacock-feather fan or a sumptuous roasted suckling pig can quell their appetites. No matter how much they acquire in life, or how much they achieve, they are faced with insoluble sorrows beyond the ordinary sorrows of man. A slim trench separates the piggish from the temperate, and the former are *exceptional* idiots. The only way to save them is to change them into new people. Hence, they cannot be saved.

IX. Voice

"It is assumed that one voice in a crowd of many will never be heard. This is wrong—*so long as the flame burns in the human spirit*."

As it happened, one merely had to wait for the dawn of the microphone.

X. Words

We cannot easily communicate our states of being. The act depends, crucially, on the state of our listener. The story of Gautama's silent transmission of the Flower Sermon to his pupil Mahākāśyapa is one of veritable wonder; even newspaper stories hundreds of lines long fail to impart any empathy for a stranger's feelings. The only one who understands a writer's words as he does is himself, that is, his "second self"; but man, by definition, grows like a plant, and in time, perhaps with the exception of this other self, no one remains to comprehend him. Man is doomed to become a stranger to his own being. Only with luck a "second self" persists convinced of its grasp of the "first."

July 1927

BEN ESTES & HANNAH BROOKS-MOTL

An Interview with Ben Estes

Ben Estes is a poet, visual artist, publisher, editor, and cofounder of The Song Cave, a press specializing in archival works, poetry, prose, translations, and limited edition art works. Aaron Kunin has said Estes's poems "speak in riddles, impossible questions, [and] vivid sensuous description." Estes's recent visual works, eight of which we feature here, are likewise concerned with erotics and ethics, with nonsense and romance, and with the ordinary mysteries of inhabiting one's body and place in the world. We chatted over email about poem-paintings and painting poems, casual symbology, pastoral, and the ontology of the artist.

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HBM: *You've been both a poet and a painter for decades. What precipitated this turn or development in your engagement with these two media?*

BE: I went to art school right out of high school, and a handful of years after that, I got an MFA in Painting and an MA in Art History. Writing, as an end-form, was the furthest thing from my mind. I'd always been a big reader, but I'd never really had a desire to write. In my mind, writers were intellectuals, and in school I never felt like an intellectual. I *barely* graduated from high school, and I had to go to summer school in order to graduate from college. I didn't think I was stupid, but I certainly didn't think I had the kind of brain to be a writer. While I was in grad school for painting though, I began writing about what I was doing in the studio in order to try to help me figure out what it was I wanted to do visually. After a little while, I realized the stuff I'd been writing down began to hold its own set of values that I found really interesting. After graduating, I was lucky enough to get into a great poetry program, so I could learn as much as I could about it all. It was my first semester there that I began The Song Cave

with Alan Felsenthal. While studying poetry, I completely put visual art on the back burner, knowing I'd always come back to it again later.

After poetry school ended, I began to slowly dip my toes back into painting, and it felt like a brand-new thing to me. Still familiar, but I found I had an entirely new set of questions about why I'd still even want to do it, and what I'd want from it.

I think text-based visual art is really hard to do, and I'd never had the impulse to write on any of my paintings before. I just didn't know how to do it. I couldn't figure out why I'd want to put words on paintings, and I told myself I never would.

So about two years ago I found myself with a chunk of free time that I did not expect to have, a few months set aside after a breakup, when I was able to go stay with a friend of mine in Vermont. I thought I'd use this downtime to work on a new poetry manuscript, but I ended up finding myself with a big roll of paper, and a nice work table—so I unrolled it. Mentally, I was kind of in a place where I felt I had nothing much to lose. Old ideas I'd had about who I was and what I was going to do had become tenuous, so I thought it might be the perfect time to revisit the kind of visual work I felt compelled to make, too. With no preconceived ideas. The thing I thought I'd never do? Let's try that. And I started making these paintings.

Can you talk about how you generate the language you're using here? Do the graphic and linguistic layers point in the same or different directions for you?

Well, the idea of the grid was that it was a very plain, almost neutral surface to use, or to begin with. It wasn't empty, but it was the closest thing I could think of to being empty while not being so. The symbol of the heart too felt kind of easy, or fair to use. It's just right there in the world. I ended up getting so attached to it as a symbol in so many of these paintings, I think, because it's such a casual symbol. A casual symbol for something very not-casual. But it is a beautiful shape I could use almost without having to think about it. It became a recipe.

Grid? Check. Hearts? Check. Ok, yeah, fine, now what am I going to do with them? On that level, these paintings can't be more formal.

They are arrangements of set elements of variant sizes, colors, and compositions. Super basic, almost ignoring the kind of interpretations that could be made up so that I can think more about things like touch and the quality of the paint on the paper, which often does have a casual or "quick" feel to it, but in places can slow way down and be pretty intimate. Maybe clumsily, but still intimate. Right now, I'm not interested in investigating small visual details. Not for these.

The language in these paintings comes from notebooks that are full of lines I've read in other people's stories and poems, lines I've written myself, things I've heard people say, lists, things from TV and music and movies and books; notes about going through the world and what I encounter—all mixed up together. So, I guess all the rest of it, the grids and the hearts and the color choices and the size of the paper and everything that goes into it visually, is setting itself up for it all to happen, when I can go in and start composing. It's like this grab bag of stuff. I reach in and pull out maybe ten or twelve random lines and put them together, and then just try to make sense out of it all. While this may be the sharpest or finest point in the process of making these paintings, it's also where I let myself open up the most and let myself be guided to find the messages I've pulled from these specific series of lines. Often only just a few words may end up being used, a short phrase, and I go back and gather more. Eventually I have something I'll be happy with, or can respect. I do invite and encourage spiritual guidance during this part of the process, the composing of the texts for these paintings. In any case, I feel like it's really good for a person to have a consistent practice of finding meaning. And making these paintings gives me the opportunity to do that.

Some (but not all?) of these you've said you think of as abstract paintings. Can you elaborate?

Well, because so much of my process in making these paintings relies on cycles of metaphoric thinking, things often flip back and forth for me in terms of representation. I think an abstraction always needs to be tied to its source? An abstracted tree, an abstracted face, etc. So yes, I sometimes think of some of these paintings in terms of their connection to their individual sources, when it still feels strong in

them after they are finished. Some of them just don't feel like an abstraction—they are not trying to represent an old idea in a new way. They are simply an idea, and those I do not think of as being abstract paintings. Also, the viewer literally reads the painting. It's just a really different kind of interpretation that happens when the painting tells you, however elliptically, what it is about.

Could you say a little more about "reading the painting"? Text-based art or visual poems often ask us to rethink our habitual reading practices (I'm thinking of concrete poets like Haroldo de Campos). This work seems less concerned with that project?

Yes, you're right, I'm not very interested in that aspect of it: to make the viewer rethink their own practice, or create something new for them to see in that way. I think of this almost like a craft that I can get better at the more I do it, rather than an opportunity to "express myself" or "create something new." It's to try to get better at being the person I'd like to live the rest of my days inside of, and to figure out how to live in the world without wanting to just leave it altogether.

Often, if someone is considered a virtuoso within a certain artistic medium, it is assumed then that the conceptual side must somehow be lacking. And vice versa, a painter that "does not know" how to paint, or a musician that "does not know" how to play their instrument, is able to sometimes balance that lack with a considered conceptual stance. Being someone who considers their writing and their visual art-making practices as equal pursuits, people often become suspicious of you. It's like it shouldn't be done, or that one has to be more serious than the other. Like you can't actually do two things. I've had some shows where the gallery representative, right in front of me, will introduce me as "a poet who makes paintings."

So to get back to your question about rethinking habitual reading practices, maybe for me, rethinking the definition of the type of artist that I should call myself, whether it be a writer or painter, or both, fills in that same curiosity for me. I find that to be a more interesting, and more fulfilling question—what am I?—than questioning what words and letters can do on a page—what is it? These paintings aren't questioning written language. It's not what they're for. They're paintings that are to be read. When you read them, you know what

the paintings are about—the subjects they are concerned with, their tones, rhythms, sounds, the non-semantic qualities of language we often associate with poetry, and seeing what those things also look like. They're trying to get a sense of themselves, to find specific terms that work for them as both paintings and poems—as two things. Art, by its nature, is self-explanatory. We call it art precisely because of that sufficiency, which isn't usually found in the rest of life. It makes art a great place to go to ask these huge questions like: What am I?

I know Robert Adams's writing is influential to you, and while reading his book Art Can Help *(2017) I thought about your paintings when I came across this line in his essay on Edward Hopper: "One did not need to be ashamed of having a heart." How does writing like Adams's aid or help you to continue as an artist?*

Oh, that's such a beautiful quote. Robert Adams is a national treasure. I'm going to try to see if I can answer your question by only using another quote of his, taken from his book *Why People Photograph* (1994):

> At our best and most fortunate we make pictures because of what stands in front of the camera, to honor what is greater and more interesting than we are. We never accomplish this perfectly, though in return we are given something perfect—a sense of inclusion. Our subject thus redefines us, and is part of the biography by which we want to be known.

Every time I read a book of his, or look at a photograph of his I think, "is there a way that this could have been done better?" The answer is always no.

Adams is *incredible—thanks for introducing me to his work! He often writes about art as processes or spaces in which harmony emerges* not *as stable or static but a kind of interim, momentary thing, like the sense of inclusion he talks about here. Or the intimate communion with spirits/others you describe earlier.*

You've made a lot of these paintings. Do you think of them as individual works or part of an ongoing practice of "finding meaning"? What would be your ideal way for viewers to encounter them?

That's a good question. I'm not sure! When I'm making them, I think of each painting as an individual thing, even if the exact underlying design and composition is one that I've used before in a different painting, which I've done lots of times, and I'm sure will continue to keep doing. I guess I think of them as you said, as "part of an ongoing practice of finding meaning." At the base of it all, that's just what they are for me. That might not make them very good paintings, or sound very smart, but they have been very good tools.

I really like when they go into people's homes. I think that is maybe when they are able to finally become "paintings." When they hang in someone's living room or bedroom or someplace, and become part of someone else's day-to-day fabric. That's pretty cool.

There's a painting that doesn't have any text. In its place we get a landscape floating in a bubble, or perhaps we're peeking through a window at it. It makes me wonder about the relationship of landscape to all this work. Is this a new direction you're pursuing or some kind of extension of the poem-heart paintings?

I think so, yes, to both. A new direction, and an extension, a side street, a distraction, whatever. They're still new. I've only done a few of them so far. As I'm getting older I think more and more about the importance a local landscape plays in who you are and how you live; I've felt more drawn to pastoral literature and its fringes. I grew up in Sonoma County, California, spending a lot of my time in Bodega Bay and the vicinity. To me, it's the most beautiful place on earth. So far, all of the landscapes I've used in the paintings have been that coastline. I feel very emotional about it.

Two years ago I moved to Kingston, New York. It's right at the base of the Catskill Mountains and on the Hudson river, right between the two. It's beautiful here. I'd only visited the town once before I moved, and I live here by myself. Would it be silly to quote Adams again in helping me try to answer?

> Finally, centrally, there is the joy to be found in a landscape experienced with family and friends. There are days that become, in the urgent and hushed sharing of a wonderful place with someone else, as much as I expect to know of the world for which I dream.

> To hear one's name, and the invitation, spoken with the assurance you will together see the same gift—"Look."

I love the idea that these works extend "landscape" to include the linguistic, private, and everyday experiences of living in a place. I know you've just curated a group show, Earthy Anecdote*, around the pastoral, at Situations Gallery in New York City. What resources do you think this ancient idea holds for us now?*

Right, the idealized country life is so complicated. I feel one can't have a *true* conversation around the pastoral these days without also including conversations about class, race, industry, weather politics, nationalism, and borders and immigration—it becomes very political very quickly. It's hard to know where to look. But to have the impulse to find a private experience with one's own land, whether it's a rural or urban landscape, and looking to *the landscape* to find a body's singular and personal fulfillment, to feel humbled, or to feel a part of something large, or to feel in communion with others, is one of the most beautiful human compulsions. We rely on the natural world. And these larger conversations are *all* about language. And they're *all* about finding meaning. And they should also be about dignity.

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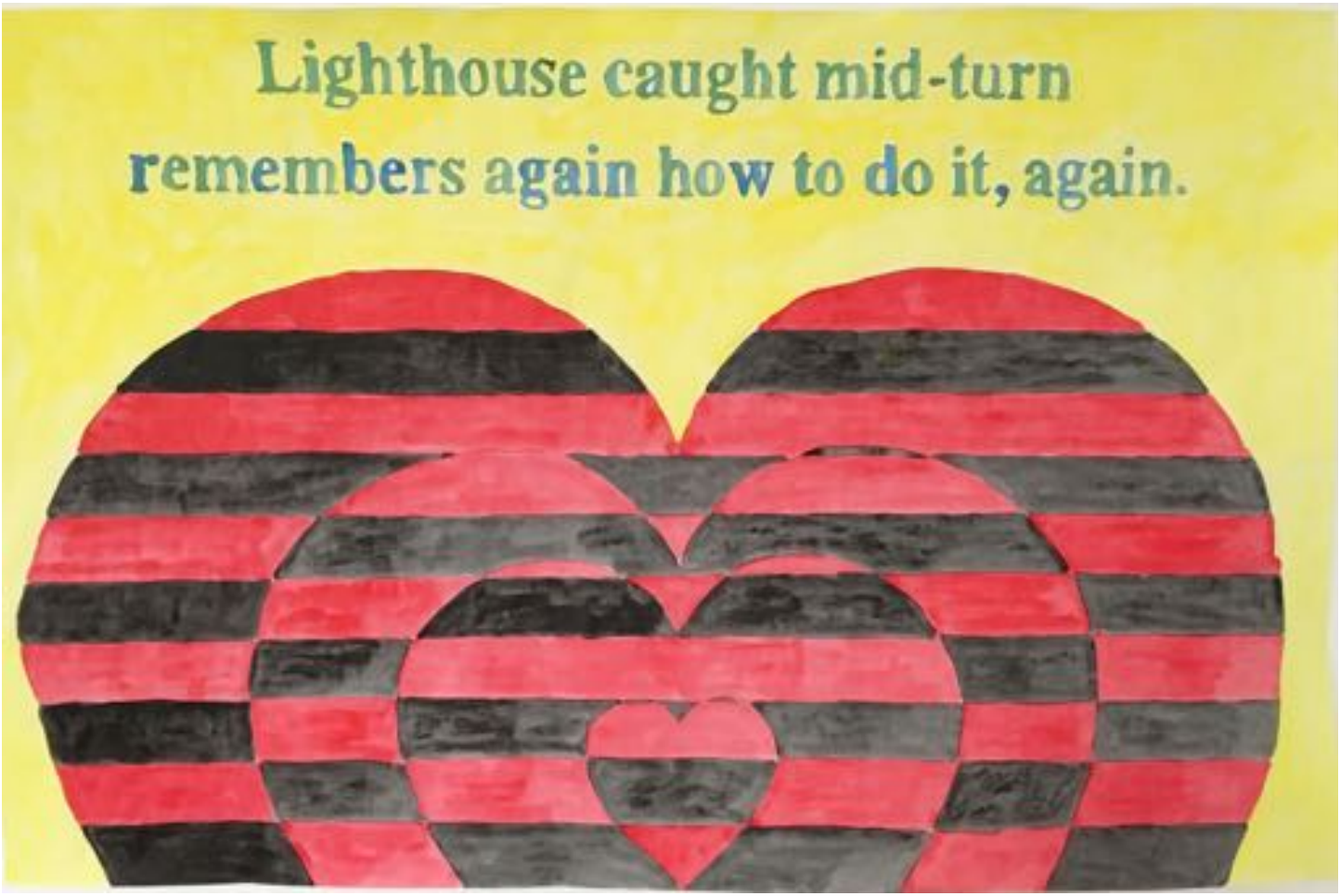
Titles and descriptions for Ben Estes's "painting poems" (in order):

Heart Poem (Lighthouse), 2018, acrylic and pencil on paper, 40 × 28 inches.
A Petaluma Purchase, 2019, acrylic and pencil on paper, 48 × 27 inches.
Heart Poem (Tell Them), 2018, acrylic and pencil on paper, 42 × 29 inches.
No title, 2019, Acrylic and pencil on paper, 48 x 26 inches.
Heart Poem (A Normal Kind of Wrong), 2018, acrylic and pencil on paper, 48 × 30 inches.
Earth Piano, 2019, acrylic, pencil, four-leaf clovers, foam core, and plexiglass on paper, 24 × 18 inches.
Heart Poem (Ice Plant in Moonlight), 2019, acrylic and pencil on paper, 48 × 30 inches.
Heart Poem (Ear of Blue Kernel), 2019, acrylic and pencil on paper, 48 × 30 inches.


ear of blue kernel
reddened with strawberries
liver lights and bowels
as if the earth uttered it


Lighthouse caught mid-turn
remembers again how to do it, again.

tell them the daffodils are slowly opening, say the American moon rises


A Petaluma Purchase:
HIS MOON-COLORED WAX
FOR
HIS WAX-COLORED MOOOOOOOOOOOOOON
'BOLT, PABBITS, BOLT!'
"BOLT, RABBITS, BOLT!"


A NORMAL KIND OF WRONG
THINK TRANSPARENT


iceplant in moonlight
climbing over the rocks
motorcycles to split the crowd


EARTH PIANO
PLASTER GUITAR

PETER GIZZI

INSIDE OUT LOUD

And then
the day
became fact.
Burned
beyond
description.
Though
why waste
a day
with de-
scription.
Better to
say why
waste
the poem
with trumpets.
Better to
say lilac,
to say war,
the room
I live in.
The collapse
of interiority
happened
in my time.
In my time
I was a
bewildered
subject,

a ghost
hungry for
selfhood.
I was walking
and talking.
I thought of you.
I think of you,
ghost.
It's im-
possible
to see
the flight
against
the void
I come from
inside
the extremes
where I
really lived.
The other me
hidden
and darker.
I kept
my language
closer.
These
redacted
documents
inside.
Writing
is one thing.
Pain is
the same thing.
I am
a stranger
in this.

I use
the words
haunted
and life
because
you can
see them.
But it's more
like spinning
light in
a dark room.
A catastrophic
light.
I have seen it
before but
if there is
a way
forward
I have yet
to find it.
I will sigh
at winter's
psychodrama
of wind.
There is
a greensward
inside.
A reclamation
in small things.
There is
a hill and
on this hill
I see
another hill.
The bridges
were a
natural iron.

Ferns bowed
in the gale.
Leaves
came to
ground.
What wind
brought me,
wanting
to see
the truth
in green.
Sequestered
here,
there is
a purpose.
There is
a density
to sight.
To see is
an organic
thing.
Sunday was
like this,
an un-
wavering
lively
occurring,
stupefied
and restless.

NOW IT'S DARK

Not the easiest day I am having, clouds banking
and I dropped my signal.
I was trying to find my shoes and thought
I am overpowered by the gigantism
    of commercial governing.
As I looked for my shoes this morning
the thought was where am I going?
There isn't a place I can walk out from
    under this chemical sky.
So I thought I would write a poem.
I thought I would try and make art.
But the chemicals seep into everything.
Reader if I could I would bring back for you
    a sun made in crayon.
A sun unformed in the paper sky.
I wonder the paper that made me.
Being human I know that paper makes my mind.
Strange pulp reminding me I am far away.
When my brother could no longer speak
    I said Tommy I got this
even if I don't want this, I'll sing for you.
When my brother had no voice there was only the couch
    and a wooden floor
the ceiling and the TV with nothing blaring.
When my brother lost his voice I lost my childhood
lost the sun over sand in some place I can't remember
    in Rhode Island summer.
So far from myself in a body I can't remember.
To no longer remember my body as a child.

To no longer remember today all that was.
Van Gogh was tormented by the sun and why not.
A constant blade-searing light that kills and cures.
I am not comforted by the cold stability
    of universal laws
though one day I will die and think, that's ok.
At least I'm writing and it makes a party in the dark.
A zombie feature that connects me to the undying.
I read every moment is an opportunity for grace
and think every moment is a possibility of art.
I tie my shoes and now I am standing alone
    in some inky light.
Yesterday I passed a Budget Motel next to
    the Peoples Bank.
If there's some connection it's lost on me.
My heart lost on me.
Weather like thought dissolves into static
a wiggy keepsake like nesting dolls of my
    spiritual blank.
Sky opening into blank.
I thought grief is a form of grace.
Then someone said the thing about money
    is that it's money.
I live on the edge of an expanding circumference
alone in some inky light.
Now rain turns the world to constant applause.
The day is uncoupled.
All there is is thunder as the house decays
    into a sound like me.
Freezing rain with silver seems to be speaking
and isn't asking me anything.
Just doing its thing in the gray morning.
I was down with materialism but
    wanted mystery.
I've asked myself a lot of questions like
    why the day's cascade
swiping left for life, right for lose.

All of it a dumb show.
All of me invested in poetry and the
    arrogance of this.
Wanting to transpose loneliness.
Why not take on the next life
    with its silence.
On my desk there are small plastic creatures.
The light on them is unrealistic.
It uncouples me.
Or the sight of serious windows opening out
    onto serious lawns.
This must be a government building.
This must be the anodyne room of
    a hospital beeping.
Every pronouncement on the feed, alien.
I'm in this corridor wandering a mind.
But the day is past caring.
The rhythmus is blooming at the beginning
    of the way back when.
I am sick with tradition and its weak signaling.
Sparkling eclogues drift and contribute
    little to the cause.
I am an incident trapped in thick description.
Just google it.
Dust jacket shows some rubbing,
    near fine in cloth.

MARY ELIZABETH DUBOIS

Aural Pariahs

For a long time I stayed away from the ship's hawsehole. I had a dithery feeling when I looked at it. And the hawser, all that white rope, the threads like shredded skin, wound around itself as though trying to keep organs in place. I would skirt the perimeter of the beached ship, the louche holes in the carbon fibre seeming to widen, iris-like, with every visit. Occasionally I would scale the slanted hull. At the bow of the ship, a pot-sized tiara made of kindling demanded the eye's full devotion, delicate and childlike in its handiwork. On the other end were the hawser and hawsehole, surrounded by a parade of routine beach debris: half a polyethylene foam noodle, five or so six-pack rings, a huge knot of tangled fishing wire. The debris comforted me. I avoided the hawsehole.

This of course was before Mariana left for the northern university. Despite the presence of the beached ship, we were more or less happy, eating figs, pointing out flyspecks on our hammock's torso, walking to the sea. We still had long conversations then. One summer evening, after Mariana returned from teaching her class at the university and I finished my translations for the day, we opened a bottle of cava and carried it with us to the beach. The in-between state of the sky, with its post-dusk, achromatic blankness, swallowed us into the belly of night. Mariana, on the path, walked a yard in front of me.

"I don't think moral complexity is as simple as a reversal," she was saying. Her instructor voice. The moonlight illuminated the back of her head. Something humanoid in a star field; a ripple of dark matter, snipped out of space. "It's about nuance, it's about the specific situation, it's about experience. To think we could ever outline a moral doctrine in some kind of symmetrical chiasmus is to return to structural thinking. It's an argument for growth, sure, but also an argument for preservation. We must believe in progress through

complexity, through specificity, else we fall through some hole. Some binary-thinking hole. The hole of nihilistic generality."

"Do I sense something regretful?"

"Regret for the hole? Maybe. That's a good point."

We were on the incline of a dune now. There were four rows of dunes before the path met the beach; we ascended the second-to-last one. At the top, Mariana stopped, her arms clinched around her stomach, the neck of cava swinging between her fingers. In the moonlight, I could see two brown dimes of nipple staining her white T-shirt.

She was watching me. She reached out and cupped one of my own breasts.

"I've never thought about some sort of nostalgia for binary thinking," she said. She let go and took a long sip of wine. She faced the beach. "But I suppose you're right, to a degree. To involve ourselves in any sort of moral or ethical quest, we'll probably steep some of our prior despair in a warm chamomile memory. We'll probably, in moments of exhaustion, wish we could think more simply again. Wish we weren't so bogged down in the details, in the complexity. Maybe that's what you mean."

"I think I mean both. Maybe all."

"Good," she said. "Keep going."

"I mean, I think there is a sort of nostalgia for any structure of thinking, once you're far enough away from it. Once you can idealize the state you were in, maybe because of idyllic external factors, maybe because of something unrelated to the actual thinking. As in maybe you remember the softness of the sheets in your childhood bed. And there was binary thinking in that bed, and so now, the binary thinking seems inseparable from the memory of the soft sheets, of comfort, of ease. In that case, there's nostalgia. Nostalgia for an external reality that doesn't have to do so much with the thinking itself."

"I like that."

We moved down the dune and up the last one, descending finally to the beach itself. Mariana sat close to the water. A mammoth oblong shape on our right confirmed the ship's doxa in my mind, about a mile away. Its dyad was the sky: grey and loose, hugging the hull.

To the left of us, fifty yards away, a gangly female profile was illuminated under the moon. I watched Mariana watch her.

"I think, too, there's an argument for the third term," Mariana said. "The anarchist hole. The probably transient but crucial hole that acts as a transport, bringing us somewhere new. Making change possible. Making love possible. Or if not physically possible, ideologically fun. Fun for a second."

She laughed.

I moved in a rising parabola away from her, the whirr of the generator, somewhere close, pacing my steps. It was as though a small fan was attached to my earlobe, the consistent hum. It affected my movements, my thoughts. The ship, far enough away for me to contemplate it peacefully, appeared to be rising out of the sea. An eyeless face. A moot bulk being born.

At the peak of my arc I turned back to face Mariana. The cava was nearly sideways in the sand; her head was in her hands, the cropped shards of hair pointing out multidirectionally. It was almost like she heard it too.

§

There was a day, the air poised at the cliff between summer and fall, when I realized the whirring noise was coming from the ship.

I had been sitting at my desk translating for most of the morning. The poem I was working on, "Aural Pariahs," was about a very different beach, one far away from here: black sand, an elbowed cove, three mysterious sounds that were found buried underneath engorged lichen. The first stanza was immediately strange and difficult for me:

> The sounds we have found: clook, pessisadie, debider
> O Earth, can you claim, tis mine?
> Tellurian noise, by definition unlunar:
> You have caught the cosmic sigh.

I spent most of the morning consulting texts to come up with appropriate translations for the discovered sounds. The first, "clook," was the simplest of the three; the "c" sound was important to complete the alliteration in lines two and four. The remaining two sounds were problematic. There were multiple possible pronunciations in English: was it peh-si-sah-dee? Or peh-si-sayde-ee? De-byde-er? De-bid-er?

At noon I made a pot of coffee. When I returned to my desk the whirring swelled into a massive crescendo. I observed the ship. Engraved into the sky, it was the focal point of a single window panel.

The beach was windy. Wrapped in my white bathrobe, I quickly climbed the dunes, their tenuous spines bending as my feet crawled along their backs. The ocean was smooth, a transparent splinter underneath the nail of sun. As I approached the ship, the acoustics of the wind funneling through the hull created a monotonous binary dialogue between "flu" and "flee." The whirring of the generator sat atop these organic words. Artificial. Regal.

I climbed the part of the skewed deck that intersected with the sand.

The twig-tiara was still at the bow, whitening in the sun, freckly and galvanized. I orbited this upright part of the ship, looking out at the sea. A single gull was moving in the opposite direction of its flock. The stretching of substance between connected objects. Glittering sangfroid.

When I finally did turn around, the hawsehole was there, staring seaward, an uncanny double whirring at me.

Back towards the house, behind the hole, a dark-haired woman disappeared and reemerged as she climbed the dunes.

§

That evening, Mariana and I went to the boardwalk café for tapas, about two miles north of the beach house. We walked along the dunes, our sandal straps looped through thumbs, Mariana's conversation soft and withdrawn. There was no moon.

At the restaurant, we sat on the patio, facing the strip of beach we'd walked along. Strings of cheap holiday lights. Polypropylene chairs and placemats boasting tricolored palm trees. The locals were wearing terry cloth. There was a group of tourists in matching fútbol jerseys; every ten minutes or so they'd break out into an elated, red-faced chant.

"Why isn't there a superior academic interest in acoustics?" Mariana asked.

"What?"

She tilted the beer bottle to read the label. The waiter brought the chips and olives.

"Where is the ivory tower of all this noise?"

Somewhere behind us, someone was stacking plates. Out on the beach, I watched a lone man in a fishing hat approach the water.

"I've been thinking about this too," I said. "Acoustics. My translation. It's about discovered sounds."

"And?"

"They're reasonable sounds to discover. But the narrator seems to think they're alien. That they weren't made here, that they signify some kind of divine conversation. That because of them, the narrator is now different. Or the Earth is now different. Some kind of hybrid auditory experience."

I pushed a toothpick through an olive.

"Alien sounds," Mariana said.

The chant ceased and the tourists ordered another round. On the beach, the fishing hat was standing ankle-deep, rubbernecking the sea.

"It's strange," I said. "I feel something paranoid. Something defensive. As though the narrator is pleading, maybe demanding, that the reader agree that the Earth has wronged humanity by hiding the sounds."

"The idea of the 'other,'" she said. "The defensive mechanism against strangeness. A betrayal of sight and sound."

"A sort of reliance on the binary. An obsessive commitment to the idea that there must be a bifurcation between old and new. Antiquity and progress. Earth and alien."

"A reaction to the cycles of life," Mariana said. "A wish that all of this could somehow have a logic to it, even an alien logic."

"That's the thing. It's like the alien logic is preferable. Preferable to any sort of rational explanation."

She was pensive, a toothpick lingering in her mouth.

"What other logic is there?" she said. "When something doesn't make sense?"

We picked at the chips, ate all of the olives. The moon appeared behind a swath of cloud, a faceless baby. The waiter dropped a tray of empty glasses; the tourists clapped and cheered at him. Down on the beach, the fishing hat was further away, a small, stationary dot. A pale grain of sand flanked by darker, organized sand.

We walked back, this time on the beach itself, my bare feet making copies of themselves at the tide line. When we reached the ship, I avoided looking at it directly. Mariana didn't seem to notice, her face to the sky, her hands underneath her shirt, one palm thumbing at a shuck of scar tissue.

"I bought fresh shrimp," she said, as we climbed the steps to the house.

She made paella. Planted on the top step of the deck, our cheeks raw with heat from the stove, we drank straight from the tumbler of ice water, ate straight from the pan.

I heard the generator whirring close by.

"The students, they're always sleepier in the summer," she said. Mariana's students: featureless ovals of flesh. Their nuances, their problems: they were so far removed from my everyday solitude on the beach. The Mariana I imagined engaged with them was less defined, more pastel, perhaps. A gray-scale form.

"Softer brains."

"Hotter brains, probably," she said. "The heat, cooking our brains for a few months, making us sleepy, dreamy, desirous. Preparing us for the coming refrigeration."

She was eating very quietly, her fork never scraping the bottom of the pan that rested between us. She sat cross-legged, facing the beach.

"I wonder about your students," I said. "I wonder if they make you have adulterous thoughts. I wonder if they have adulterous thoughts about you."

She laughed.

"Adulterous thoughts," she said. "Aren't all thoughts adulterous in some way? All thoughts outside of the shared brain of a relationship?" After we cleaned the pan and refilled the tumbler with white wine, Mariana changed into a silk nightgown. I put on my white bathrobe. We lay on the living room floor, the lights off, the ceiling shadowy. A mephitic smell traipsed through the open windows: vegetables and seawater. Miscreant air moving through a conduit. Air giving clearance to air.

I faced her, balanced on my side, my head nestled into an L'd arm. Through the sheer gauze of her nightgown, I could see her vermillion tattoo, stamped onto the left side of her stomach. I knew the shape was an oval, although the way the fabric was pressed lightly against

her skin, in tandem with the casual moonlight, I could only perceive a half-moon.

The generator, a low hum.

"I think it's happening again," I said.

"Where?"

"I don't know for sure."

"Where?"

"The ship."

"A noise?"

"A whirr."

"What?"

"Some sort of machine. A generator, maybe."

She was silent.

Some time passed. We drank from the tumbler of wine. My organs slowly electrified, the wine sliding down my body, pushing up my hair follicles. Eventually Mariana came to me, her breasts sinking into my thighs, her mouth warm and syrupy.

The night went on like this, slow and stirring, interrupted singularly by the soft cries of inevitable biology. We fell asleep on the floor, tasting iron, my thumb on her shuck of scar tissue, her hand maternally stroking my long hair, our mouths separated by the mechanical laugh of the generator.

§

A week later, I sat at my desk, translating the next two stanzas of "Aural Pariahs." There was an ontological shift in the third stanza, a first-person point of view asserting itself:

> Your sand was black, with dropsical lichen for a mouth
> and straightforwardly, we raped here.
> Our shovels to the ground, our hardhats facing south-
> ward, an elbowed cove appeared.
>
> I don't much care that we've discovered something novel.
> It's more that—you've lied to us.
> We put our trust in earthly logic, your brute aural:
> What now? Three new noisy lusts?

Discovery as rape. Discoverer becoming perpetrator. And then when the perpetrator dislikes what they've done, dislikes what they've found: anger. A human response to something unchangeable. Fear. Sadness. Resentment.

As I worked, I looked up every so often to assess the ship's position, confident that it hadn't shifted since last week. I hadn't heard the generator in a few days. I was hopeful.

§

At the restaurant that weekend, a group of university students joined us on the patio. Mariana knew three of them from previous classes; one young woman named Camila was currently in Mariana's class on the Catalan novel. They all called Mariana "Profe." The waiter brought out three pitchers of sangria.

It was still late afternoon; the air was humid. We shielded our eyes with upturned palms, fanned ourselves with the laminated place mats.

One of Mariana's prior students told a long, comical story about a translation mishap that happened on a trip to California. I watched Camila, gangly and wide-faced, her dark hair obscuring her cheeks. Her smile emerged at irregular moments in the story; her glance suggested a restrained sparkle. Sui generis.

As I watched her, the generator began to whirr.

"You're from there too," the story-telling student, Mateo, said to me. The sangria had engaged everyone in several distracted conversations. Mariana had an ear to Camila's mouth; the young girl was speaking seriously into it.

"Yes," I said.

"Where?"

"New York."

"Yes," he said excitedly. "The other pole."

Mariana was laughing, her mouth a rectangle, the creases of her lips sangria-stained.

"OK," Mateo said. "What is the light like in New York?"

"Well," I said.

"Do the buildings hide the sun?"

I took a long sip of my drink. I closed my eyes, tilting my face skyward.

"It's more that you don't think about the sun," I said. "The sun doesn't have the same metaphysical weight to it."

The student thought about this.

"I like that," he said. "I understand you now."

"Oh?"

"Well," he said. He was smiling. "I see why Profe likes you."

The sun began its descent into the water. The waiter kept refilling the pitchers, flirting with the young female students, asking their names and then pretending to forget them. One student felt sick and went home. When the sun was a half-star, perfectly bisected by the horizon, a group of them decided to take a walk on the beach, their young bodies graceful in their drunkenness, in their attempted gymnastics. A gull pecked at their leftover chips, shameless.

"You are also a profe?" Camila asked me, when they were gone.

Mariana and Mateo were engaged in a solemn conversation next to us, their bodies stretched toward each other over the table.

"Not exactly," I said. "Not anymore."

"But once?"

"Once," I said. "Maybe again someday. Something got in the way, but I always liked it."

Camila licked her lips and pressed them together. Then she smiled shyly.

"You do translations," she said. "Profe told me. But I thought I'd ask you anyway."

It was difficult for me to make eye contact with her.

The students on the beach were screaming with delight. One of the female students had stripped completely naked and was sprinting towards the water. Camila and I watched this in silence. A waiter aggressively flapped a rag and the gull took flight, rocking the table slightly.

"Mateo!" the female student called, her body meeting the water, her breasts sinking into the waves, out of view.

Mariana leaned back in her chair. Mateo grinned down at the beach. "Señora," he said ceremoniously to Mariana. He smiled at me. He jogged through the restaurant and out to the beach.

The three of us, Mariana, Camila, and I, sat watching Mateo's zigzagged jog, the kaleidoscope sunset. The students shrieked. The cheap, holiday lights made little blots on the sky, worlds of their own.

At some point the tourists left.

"Camila lives nearby," Mariana said eventually, her face pointed toward the sea. It wasn't entirely clear if she was speaking to me, or to Camila, or to herself.

§

That night, in the shower, Mariana's fingernails scrubbed shampoo into my scalp, her breath on my neck.

"When?" I said.

"What?"

"When did it start?"

Mariana retracted her hands. I turned to face her. She was rinsing her own head, her eyes closed, her face to the shower stream.

"The hole of moral complexity," I said.

"Nothing's going on."

"Nostalgia for binary thinking?" I said. "Is that really what you think?"

She stepped out of the shower. I watched her, the curtain pulled open, the water deflecting off my hip and spraying out onto the bathroom tile.

"Is that how you describe me to her?" I said, louder. "Binary? Adolescent? Crazy? Seeing and hearing things that aren't there?"

She was wrapping her short hair into a towel, her lithe body turned towards the door, away from me. I stood like this for a few moments, the shower water making awkward vectors on the tile, her toweled head rising toward the ceiling like a white, warped finger.

"I think you need a break from the poem," she said.

"The poem?" I said. My voice sounded shrill and juvenile. "Are you serious? Are you kidding me, Mariana?"

"It's strange. It's triggering. The auditory stuff. It's paranoid. It can't be good for you."

"You're fucking a twenty-year-old and we're talking about a *poem*?"

She left the bathroom. I turned off the shower. I wrapped myself in my bathrobe and followed her out to the kitchen.

"Do you really think I'm incapable of understanding the complexities of these things? Of love? Of lust?" I said.

Mariana stood at the sink, filling a mug with water.

"Jesus," she said.

"You think I'm stuck in some traditional view of relationships? You think because of the paranoia, I'm incapable of understanding love outside of a single lover? That I can't handle it?"

"I would never say that."

"What, I'm suddenly some pathetic, love-drunk child, sitting at home, waiting for you to get back? Waiting for you to come home and protect me from my hallucinations?"

Mariana slammed the mug on the countertop. "Stop."

"I'm the refrigeration," I said. "And Camila is the hot, sexy, sleepy brain."

"Listen," Mariana said. "Listen." She approached me slowly. She pressed a single finger into the crook of her closed eye. A signal. "Can we sit down and talk about this?"

We sat on the sofa in the living room, the lights off, our hair dripping onto the cheap upholstery. She sat cross-legged, facing me. I sat facing forward.

"This isn't because of your hallucinations," she said.

"Oh, please," I said, childishly. "It's a burden. It's a thing you have to deal with."

"It's not a burden."

"It's the parasite inside of our relationship."

"Look," Mariana said. "It's not. You know that."

"I'm a child to you," I said. "Something delicate. Breakable. A thing to take care of. A burden."

Mariana exhaled forcefully.

"OK," I said. I untied my robe. "It's not about me at all, it's about the hot, sleepy sex."

"Well, yes, in one way."

"One way?"

"I mean initially I thought it was about the sex," Mariana said.

Her forehead was in her hands.

We sat there for a long time. Outside the window, the porch light cloaked the black backdrop of sky, synthetic fuzz. The generator was loud and anxious. I tried not to cry.

"It wasn't about the sex," Mariana said again, eventually.

Our breathing seemed to match, quick and lopsided.

"I'm realizing it's not that simple," she said, her voice muffled. "It's not about you, or Camila. It's just me."

She was crying.

The generator, truncated, yet very much alive.

"I want something else," she said finally.

We stayed like that for a long time, crying separately, then eventually crying together, our grief and love conspiring to produce a wave of ardent, terrible desire. Our tongues, scared and ceremonious, atrophied our limbs. The sex took on a life of its own: unstable, selfish.

That would be the last time.

I slept outside that night in the hammock, my face pressed against the flyspecks we'd once examined so ridiculously, so lovingly. When I woke up the next morning, a glass of fig juice was waiting for me on the deck, sweaty and alone.

The whirring was gone.

§

A month later, weeks after Mariana had decided to accept the professorship at the northern university for the fall, I walked out to the ship. I hadn't been back since those days before the argument. The intrigue of the whirring, the generator, the hawsehole: it no longer existed.

Before I walked to the beach, I reread the poem, letting it pace my steps as I climbed the dunes:

> Aural Pariahs
>
> The sounds we have found: clook, pessisadie, debider
> O Earth, can you claim, tis mine?
> Tellurian noise, by definition unlunar:
> You have caught the cosmic sigh.
>
> Your sand was black, with dropsical lichen for a mouth
> and straightforwardly, we raped here.
> Our shovels to the ground, our hardhats facing south-
> ward, an elbowed cove appeared.

I don't much care that we've discovered something novel.
It's more that—you've lied to us.
We put our trust in earthly logic, your brute aural:
What now? Three new noisy lusts?

It's true. We will never be the same as we once were.
New mores call for uproars.
But I have found that something draws me towards "debider":
Love? Thirst? A sound to care for?

The familiar camelbacks of the dunes; the mouth of the ocean, wide and greedy. The beached ship, as I approached, seemed smaller than it had before. I spent a while circumnavigating; I stared up at the hawsehole from the ground. The hawser flowed down through the hole, pooling on the beach below in a casual spiral.

Scaling the side of the ship, I heard unusual noises. A woman's laughter, followed by another woman's chiding. At the top, I observed Camila, accompanied by the female student who had bathed naked in the ocean that afternoon.

We didn't speak at first. They were sprawled out at the bow of the ship, sunbathing. The friend was wearing the twig-tiara; their swimsuit tops were crumpled underneath their heads. I walked to the center of the ship, then to the hawsehole, putting my face close to it, looking through it down to the ground below. I kicked the polyurethane noodle, making it dance a little in the wind.

"What's up?" Camila said, her head upside down, her dark hair piled below, her entire face revealed to me.

I put a hand on the hawser, right where it was wedged through the hawsehole. I let go and moved towards them.

"Did you make that?" I asked Camila's friend.

She was laughing. She sat up, her breasts bobbing. She took off the tiara.

"Do you like it?" she said.

"Yes."

"Then yes, I made it."

They were both laughing. Camila's friend held out the tiara; I took it from her. I put it on.

"Very good," Camila complimented.

I smiled. The friend laughed again.

I went and stood at the front of the ship, looking out to sea. Some time passed. The sun went behind a cloud, then reemerged. Eventually the friend left, and Camila joined me at the bow.

We watched the whitecaps, snags in a smooth blue rug. The wind passing through the hull sounded like TV static. The smell of saltwater. Camila's sweat. A fishing boat hovered at the foot of the horizon, UFO-like, motionless.

D. S. MARRIOTT

SISYPHUS REDUX

A word with something missing, as if stranded
in deep ice, a boat
caught in phantasmagoria
as a syllable leaps
back n forth.
Me na see it, star,
chained for all time
to a history that will never change.
Heaved, hewn, sowed:
waiting for the night to gather
the black familiar crags
and the storm
to reach
each day stamped by hand, the cold familiar use,
irrevocable,
a foretaste of

something fixed, too,
moving in the same spot forever—
fixed but forever erased
like an *o* missing an *n*,
a mouth seemingly filled by snow.

How easily
his shadow runs away

from him,
like a sentence that ends and always begins,
or a future wide open
(out of reach)

steering

the course of a falling stone.

A WHITE RABBIT AT ZERO GRAVITY

The sky is so white it haunts the scene
and, like the equator, it staggers
under the cold accusation of the sun.

We shall be known by our rewards, forever
clutching our disappointments like small
fragments of glass; the shards made
absolute by fear and curiosity, as the
waves rush in across desert sands.

In my den I receive him, the all-seeing star.
Forgiveness is a vision
where all cruelty fades.
Faith and death and the ever-lengthening years…
  a symbol for the end
        of all that is familiar,
                the farther distances
and no sign of woodsmoke
            to make the eyes weep…
for I have become estranged from my own nature.

I have known hedgerows, woods, and trees and
have seen the owl swoop so shadow-like
it caused me to doubt my own agilities
in the snow, for the known is no longer
apparent, and there is no exquisite
proof to counter disbelief or rejection.

Still, I have waited
        for the earth to speak,

the morning's imprecision
wishful, half-uttered,
                the storm
        not yet bourne by snow.
        The body, undone,
        by meaning. As the horizon
        recedes
                by the roadside,
        and flesh, maimed,
        crawls back to where it came from:
        a red smear in black mud.

I enter these
  absences
     the way
a storm
 passes over a pond—
by seeing
  heaven pebbled
at my feet,
        the beaches
   haunted,
waiting for
    the world
        to hurl me
upwards
        downwards
    to where
        every secret
is headed.

This, then is named a fall…
how my body fell
beneath a low sky—suspended,
without equivalence or equation.
Its weight neither increased nor diminished.
            The fire liquid, luminous,
crowning wave after wave
splashing black against the unknown.

LIKE A THOUGHT THAT PLAYS NO PART

the day is full of her,
but the ecstasy still feels like an execution.
It is so simple:
watch the bent over body gasp
as the pain tightens,
the body cut, like rose petals,
blooming but not yet replete, retarded.

Forgive me! I am not yet your only son,
even though blackness is my only wrong.

The shopping bag, though heavy, is incredibly light.
I have spent days
drowning my body in anger
only to see it emerge from the depths
ever more furious—
every sin listed, rising by weight.
Like a mother who, at the end,
can no longer kneel down or refuse.

The black wafer is bitter, you see,
and can only be swallowed, or tasted,
when the tongue is a truthful bruise.
On the tongue,
an indecent feeling of exaltation & desuetude
as if slavery were infinite—or a flower
pressed to extinction,
rendered by a newborn.

MARGARET ROSS

RELATIONS

What I know of love I think
I learned there. At the center
of the room, a roofless playhouse
formed a cubicle around
my mattress on the carpet.
Day or night the window stayed
dark gray (it faced the alley) but you
could tell what time it was by who
was there. Most waking hours
a woman. I remember wrapping myself
around her back, the stiff fuzz
where her hair stopped, where her
neck began. How when I stepped right
where the floor became the wall, it pricked my feet
like sparks of under-fire. I'd press my heels to it
to have my height marked on the wall in pencil.
It must have been the carpet staples.
When I started learning what
money was, that she was being paid, I felt afraid
to grow to where she'd stop coming. What it was
and that it lived there in the same time
as my loving her. Scent of her
I'd inhale through the blue tongues
of her paisley blouse. A flame of her blood
in pale green toilet water. I asked *what*
cut you. If it had been the natural world outside, the lesson
might have been change cycles, balances.
But it was city, one building disappeared
another. I know I don't know what

it cost her, working there. Incisions
in the ceiling fixture forced the light to make a sun shape
on the plaster. And what my parents were
accruing those hours as the neighborhood grew
expensive, as she called home on prepaid card
then on a cell phone, as I saved coins in a ceramic heart,
as she left for the daycare for the benefits as the century turned,
would eventually tear down the house and up the carpet
for the novelty of prewar flooring: oak and in some corners
concrete where (the contractor explained) the family
living back then cut costs thinking they could keep
those spots under the furniture.

SONGS OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

A classroom in a basement
and the students people
I am at most five years older than,
each sitting with the same few pages marked
in different shades of highlighter
and bullets, stars in the margin.

I'm paid to teach something called Writing
as an Ethical Act.

I wear dark colors to appear more credible.

Everybody in the basement knows
the Ethical Act is writing
I assign to read. Student writing is
"constructing arguments" from excerpts
of a story or a poem we call "supporting
evidence," "proof."

You read something then make
a case about it. That's how
you get graded.

On Sundays, volunteering
at a Home for Girls girls aren't allowed
to leave, distributing pens and paper, asking
"anybody want to share?"

One girl says "this is one
I wrote last night" and reads "The Tyger."

One reads a poem remembering her sister.

Poems in the shape of hearts, of suns, each ray a line
extending to the edges of the page.

One girl writing daily before sleeping.

"Don't teach anything you love too much"
is advice I was given.

Every act supporting evidence.

The history of describing
history, everybody in the basement.

The class read *Songs of Innocence*
and Experience, In the Mecca,
The Book of the Dead.

Driving back, I pulled off, walked out
into dry leaves, leaves
up to my calves. You felt
rich wading through them.

I lay down underneath the empty
branches spanning the intricate angles
of attempt, of wind, of competition, hunger,
weather, hunger, hunger, compromise.

When I said what I did
to a doctor studying my naked body
for any threatening mark left by the sun,
he told me he took poetry in college.

His office was a white box on an asphalt circle
poured over the prairie. Magazines
in the waiting room not touched enough
to be soft yet. You could see the flat land

stretching from the window, green and still,
divided by the one road going straight
for miles. I'd just turned twenty-five.

I got hired for the summer term.
Summer students were younger, still illiterate.

They could dictate captions for their drawings.

The jagged dinosaurs and flowers,
damp sky colored-in entirely

with blue marker. Coloring and coloring
one spot on the paper made the paper tear. It rained

so violently that summer,
streets rushed with temporary rivers.
While it rained, the students ate lunch
in the library, inventing

games with food or paper clips or drumming fists
against each other's backs
in time with a singsong list of commands
that started *concentrate—concentrate—*
people are dying—

SERGE PEY
Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith

The Bench

This bench is a bench. This bench is the very epitome of a bench: a long narrow wooden seat allowing several people to sit together. This bench is a Platonic idea of a bench: all alone, gliding through the heaven of the pure ideas of all benches. A worm-eaten bench, polished and worn by generations of schoolchildren in gray smocks. A bench on either end of which you should not sit for fear of toppling off, feet in the air, to roars of laughter from infinity. A true bench, therefore. Horizontal, wobbly, lopsided—stopping place for all wayfarers, even those who have lost their way. This bench, on the concrete floor of the guardhouse, with a soldier sitting on it, is the matrix of all the benches in existence. But here beside the railroad line, amidst ghosts of the travel-weary and thirsty, it has become the centerpiece of a bench museum, saved long ago by some collector from the programmed elimination of all the world's benches.

The soldier has chosen his spot well. He asks me to sit, like him, at one end of the bench, so that he can watch me. When I entered the guardhouse, I had seen from his reddened eyes that he was exhausted and had obviously not slept in a long while.

At his signal we both sit down at the same time, one at each end of the bench.

The nearby church bell tolls one in the morning. A police dog barks very close to the guardhouse. Despite the trains that pass regularly, the soldier has nodded off.

I have been in the guardhouse for at least two hours now, my legs hurt, and my wrists are raw from the handcuffs.

By shifting my backside, I try to find the exact point that would allow me to get to my feet without making the bench tip and, above all, without making the soldier slide off. The slightest false move or haste on my part might cause the soldier's weight to raise the bench and thus alert him to the fact that I have stood up. I resolve to alter

my position by imperceptible increments. At each of these movements my guard instinctively corrects for the slight challenge I have made to our seat's stability.

The soldier is dreaming. He is in a huge house where an old woman walks on crutches. He opens a door. The door of an armoire. But he closes it again. He knows that behind it is the mouth of a fathomless well. Now the door opens by itself. Someone is pushing it from within. Someone is waiting for him at the bottom of the well. The soldier leaves the house. Then he realizes that he has failed to rescue the old woman on crutches. He goes back inside but the old woman has vanished. He thinks that she must already have gone out through another door. He looks for her outside but does not see her. The soldier tries to walk but his legs are numb and won't let him. He knows that someone imprisoned in the well is after him, but he cannot go more quickly. Just as he is about to be caught he wakes up. He doesn't know where he is, but then realizes he is in the guardhouse. The bench has moved. The guard restores the bench's balance and shifts his position because his legs hurt.

It occurs to the guard that his prisoner too must have legs that hurt. The guard goes back to sleep.

A fly is circling in the guardhouse. I know that I have to turn into a fly. I have to brave the storm. I have to land on dung. I have to escape through the skylight of the guardhouse. Another fly has come in. It looks at me, then changes direction. Turning my head for a split second, I see that it has landed on the soldier. I must become a fly too. Flies have a freedom that we lack.

I must acquire the fly's ability to be present in two different places almost simultaneously. I must be swift and silent. I must absolutely choose to be a fly.

I see myself now soaring above the soldiers and the trains. The fly is delivering a message. The fly is a maquisard within the temporary jail where I find myself.

Outside, a noncommissioned officer is shouting orders under the rain. The same orders over and over. Then comes barking: it seems to me that the soldier marching along the railroad line has a dog on a leash. I can hear the dog panting. I can hear my guard sleeping behind me; he is snoring softly. He seems calm now. The handcuffs hurt my wrists. I wiggle my toes in my shoes. I have pins and needles. That is

what we used to say as kids: pins and needles. In point of fact it is the blocking of the circulation in my thighs, the backs of which are on the edge of the bench, that is numbing my two legs. My feet are blocks of wood. I am in pain. I simply have to get up. My blood absolutely must start flowing again. Thousands of needles are pricking my feet. I raise first one and then the other shoe and tap a foot gently on the floor to get the blood moving. I have to get up at all costs and get the circulation going again, but the bench must not move.

I have no illusions about the fate that awaits me. A suspect I assuredly am. The policemen who arrested me on the train handed me over to this army unit while my papers were checked. It will not take them long to discover my real identity—before the night is out, or possibly tomorrow.

I hear the church bell tolling: the night is half over. Then another bell responds like an echo. I have heard two bells tolling almost at the same time, but there is a lag between them. Twice, three times I note this lag. Then I realize that I am myself this interval in time, this "almost" that separates the two peals. I must become an echo.

Should I kill this soldier in order to escape? I could, but I don't think I will. I don't want to kill the sleeping soldier. A third bell resounds as if from underground. My concern right now is to stop my feet going numb by letting the blood flow through my thighs. I lift each leg in turn and rotate my ankles. My first goal is to shift from my closed-knee sitting position at the end of the bench to a spread-legged one from which I can better control the bench's balance.

I have lucked upon a tired soldier, for, despite the directives of his superior officer, he has sensed my change of position but failed to forbid it. In fact his posture is just like mine.

It is a posture, however, which does not alter the fact that, should either of us stand up, the bench will inevitably tip up and clatter back onto the concrete floor.

I move my backside slowly on the end of the bench, centimeter by centimeter, raising myself up from time to time so that the bench tips down slightly at the soldier's end, unbalancing him. Regularly, still half asleep, he corrects the balance that I have thus disturbed by almost indiscernibly moving his own rear end.

My movements toward the front of the bench are as slight and natural as those any man sitting down all night long might make to

avoid cramps. The soldier is in the same situation as me. His position is likewise unstable. Since I am handcuffed, he cannot possibly imagine that I might escape. So he himself shifts his backside, quite naturally, to avoid tipping up the bench.

The bench thus represents the invisible plane on which we are ensconced and which constrains us. That the soldier's own legs might fall asleep is one external disturbing factor, for example, for which I am not exclusively responsible. Quite as easily as an escape attempt on my part, the soldier's painful legs could also precipitate a fall.

The equilibrium of the bench might be considered not as a static situation but rather as a cycle, a succession of situations involving my feet, the guard's feet, and even noises and motion outside the guardhouse. The notion of equilibrium inside the guardhouse depends on a specific point of view that at once unites and separates the two of us. That point of view combines those of the bench, the guard, and myself.

The soldier has a back just like mine and fatigue just like mine. He has no wish to disturb the peace of his fragile slumber.

By now I am at the very end of the bench. I know that the soldier has moved his rump a tiny bit further along and is supporting himself on legs spread even wider. He is leaning on the barrel of his rifle: I see that in response to my barely perceptible shifts, he has thus assumed the position of a tripod and the bench has become perfectly stable.

I know that the time has come to put the bench's confident balance to the test.

I decide to get to my feet, breathing from my stomach and letting the blood flow down through my legs. The tingling in my right foot makes me stumble, but I rise successfully and the bench does not tip. When I hoist myself up onto the windowsill I can see a soldier patrolling the station platform.

I decide to sit back down on the bench and wait for the next train to come through. The station is suddenly silent. I realize that this next train will be my last chance. But will it ever arrive? In the rhythm of the cars gliding along the rails you can hear whole symphonies. The ties, bolts, and track ballast, along with the cadence of the wheels, suggest so many musicians playing under the direction of an invisible conductor. Trains cannot be against me, nor can their music.

Every would-be fugitive ought to master the circus arts: aerial perch, tightrope, chair balancing, stilts, and walking globes. On this bench I am juggling horizontally with equilibrium so as not to fall. Or, perhaps better, balance is seeking its own balance so as to go on existing.

In fact the bench, the soldier, and I constitute a set of interactions that may be deemed stable just so long as no agency has an interest in changing its strategy. But should the bench no longer be at risk of tipping up even though I am standing, my strategy will have created a new equilibrium. A pendulum self-stabilized in the wake of its oscillation is said to be "in stable equilibrium." As I get to my feet, I make doubly sure that the bench does not wobble.

The soldier is still sleeping, believing that I am still on the other end of the bench. But I am on my feet, behind him, contemplating his crossed hands grasping his rifle.

The bench, balanced, is not budging. I have become its extremity, detached now, and leaving through the window.

The bench was really a stilled pendulum. A motionless horizontal clock. The guard sitting on one end restored stability at each of my subtle movements. This meant that his strategy, which counted on his being woken up when he was tipped off the bench, did not work. I had calculated most carefully that the bench would not rise and clang back onto the floor when I got to my feet. Once, twice, three times I stood up, and each time the bench remained perfectly stable. Without realizing it, the guard had definitively corrected the imbalance and was now still asleep, leaning on his gun.

Outside, the rails began to quiver. A rumble caused the guardhouse floor to shake. The train I was awaiting was pulling in. The last one of the night. It was now or never. Later would be too late.

I got up slowly, and just as I had trained him to do over the last few hours, my guard, grunting, adjusted his position. I had become double. One me was still sitting at the back of the room on the bench but another me was standing before the window and heaving myself up.

I had trained the bench not to tip up and to wait for me. I had almost reached the window. The confidence filling me now was founded on the fact that I could not imagine that this was me escaping, only that I was still sitting on the bench to make sure it would not tip up.

Perhaps the one escaping was just a figment of the imagination of the one still seated? Perhaps I was just an illusion? All the same, I was on my feet and past my guard.

He was still sleeping as I pulled myself up to the window. Outside I could see the train, stopped. A compartment window was open, and opposite me was an officer, perhaps a commanding officer.

He looked at me. I did not believe that this was an officer across from me, just a man. For his part he could not believe that I was a prisoner escaping.

The officer was not there: it was someone else at the train window watching me tumble noiselessly onto the platform with my hands manacled. And it was not he who watched me cross the railroad line and go down the little path behind the station. Not he who said nothing and failed to raise the alarm. It was he, however, who, too late, fired at me. I crawled under the stationary train. Then I ran off on the far side toward the trees.

Behind me nobody moved.

I am thinking that we are not in a state of war. That the enemy has not bombarded the entire region. That thousands of children are not wandering the roads. I fancy that I am playing a game in winter, by the fire, drinking a glass of brandy and stuffing an old pipe.

I watch the dice rolling on the table and move my men. A game is a formal arrangement in which two or more players each decide on a strategy in the full awareness that its success depends on the choices of all. Two players, the soldier and I, chose a bench as our scales. The player who stood up first without causing the bench to tip would undoubtedly have a chance to win and leave through the window. The victor would maintain equilibrium but lose the bench. Those were the stakes. The loser would win the bench and carry it on his back his whole life long as testimony to a theory of equilibrium.

I tell myself that it is not me running through the trees but that other me sitting on the bench in the guardhouse by the station platform. But one rider on a seesaw has escaped today. I am a plaything in thrall to a mathematical law that I do not understand.

At the end of the walkway leading into the woods, which is cluttered with the trunks of felled trees, a dog barks when it sees me but then goes silent as though grasping the implications of this signal.

The guardhouse in which I was being held captive is locked with a key, and the soldier is still sitting on the bench. I know he must be awake by now. He is afraid, and raises the alarm through the window. But it is already too late. A siren blares on the platform. The other soldiers begin firing toward the forest. I am running alongside a stream. I think I recognize the trees in the forest.

ELÉNA RIVERA

MOVEMENT IN THE LOWER REGION

Homeless we are in this age
"If only…" if I could manage,
wield each "infinite nuance of

the unsaid" in the autumn rain
A skylight illuminates the dark
full of products—packaged

moons, astroids and flowers
Objects dropped into the lap of
the homesick who must move

up the peaks of an untold future—
constructions, and names, labels,
empty of any meaning howling

Towers of one city—semaphores
that linger, images emptied now
in the hurry—almost a shadow

The stairs, *the* hurdle—that walk
up the stairs, up the hill, pale blue
moment at a desk—outstretched

En route, primed to stretch, sketch
words, write them, fingers scorched
scored layers of sharp, brisk winds

From a distance, abasement
The physical motion of bodies
and internal upheavals of emotion

How not to be paralyzed by it
snow crusted coated existence—
Our relations in the distance now

Sights, memories, stuck with
Crazy-glue—"me" hunched,
a "being" pictured in open-air—

nude, posed, painted, arms
upward aching to be released,
returned to the place in the corner

Hurdles are crossed with drops
of hushed sound, pins in an envelope—
"to suffer" "the things of the world"

After a battle, contrition, then stripped
Paper caught language couldn't
come close to oracular structures

Blue and voiceless the movement
downward battled rage inwardly causing
in turn resistance and wandering

City closed around the family
as it fights its way down the street,
decade after decade—few pin oaks

"I will prove to you" and "you
will not make me" and the hasty—
"Hasty retreat" hurrying where?

"I will show you" where the curb
meets resistance at the entrance
Meanwhile, "how I long for you"

also sung in the prison chamber…
Threads come together to form
a rope, where mercy sleeps

•

Twin stations bring on a century
condemned to gaol. "History"
the place of absence, names

empty of presence or omitted—
watch a "passerby" the poet wrote
still wielding words—her path

of sun, sparkling—knew "Eternity"
on the other side—at night dreams
align to fight the submissive condition

of the Other forced to self-abasement
Who will color blooms in the window,
geraniums ever flowering in the cold

In the middle of "hey, I'm stuck"
the simplest distraction exposes
puddles, grows in the voice garden

The subway shaking whole bodies,
physically cinctured and pressed
against—avalanche of electric currents

Who sees what we've put into tin-
foil fished with our ductile joints
Our condition crystallized in fall

The culture part of what was given,
on billboards "All determined by"
"most complex interdependencies"

Between minutes awake, minutes
asleep, the vast sorrow in between
what is reported and what one sees

•

A man drags six empty shopping carts
down the street—the frozen bundle
wrapped in a blanket holds out a cup

How many city maps do we need?
The soldier experiences vertigo,
within customary silence, nausea

Beneath surface tension breaks,
and so "dying, our whole lives long"
between bouts of extraordinary laughter

In a few frightened moments, see
our mistakes on display, evening-wear
and jewels recede—hurrying again

We lose reality, our homestead,
the store-bought goes back to
the forefront—the mind's poverty

Nothing to the "slough of despond"
In the mirror, a mire of lines cross,
recross, define the borders—shared

evidence gets messy then as now
Plastic-wrapped, bound, obsessed over
Or, let me entertain you for your dime

No past, future, just noise whirling
Wait, I caulk, paint, circle around
the block, scrape and wipe layers—

All is dust and debris, moments of
reflection by a window untraceable,
a single-minded mounting panic

•

How can one describe the "experience
of the Gulag" "pleasantly" to a little
boy in the back seat of a car?

At the center of the arcade I remain
hidden under violent explosions, rock
and child—no one is spared rain

Divisions created in a tag—priced
air shared, what is in between home-
lessness and the tongue that declares

Look out of that window—where
are you…? Must lean out to catch
a whiff of air—posing at the window

A member of the family of this our
dislodged earth, pending—in categories—
exhale—heavy weightlessness

All rituals have different ways,
subtle ways, of mixing alloys,
to anneal and toughen the whole

In this morning's meeting, dialogue
in wet feet at the threshold—
take leave—from silence will I

Of silence? Take. Of darkness?
"O Beauty ever ancient" squeeze
softness, slowness—Of heat? Bend,

soften the blurting of tired anger
Reality, the passerby and the face of others
being real rise crisp and clear before us

TREY SAGER

Throwing Shadows

My mother grew up near the sound. She lived with her parents and two brothers in a small white colonial surrounded by evergreens, tall trees that blurred into afternoons and harbored the fox that one day killed her cat. Her mother grew tomatoes in a small square plot of dirt on the back lawn. Her father kept the grass short and neat all around like a Marine Corps haircut.

Inside, in the dining room, a dark round table with baroque curlicues along the side took up most of the space. There was a display cabinet in the corner, its shelves stacked with unusual glasses, and a brass skeleton key stuck out from the lock like a switch. Many years later, my mother took the table and display case for her own house, along with two red leather chairs, and one day I'd do the same, I'd make the same mistakes she did.

Her room was on the second floor. At bedtime she and her father raced up the stairs, desperate not to be the rotten egg. After she brushed her teeth and washed her face, they threw shadows at the edge of her bed, where the light from the hallway projected shapes they made with their hands onto the wall. They made butterflies and dragons like the ghost deer of Lascaux, signs the daylight didn't allow.

On Saturdays they went fishing together. My grandfather borrowed a skiff from a neighbor, a man too old to use it himself, and bought a can of minnows at a roadside shack. He rowed them past the docks and crab traps and away from the pageant of sailboats on the sound, looking for where the water was thick and quiet.

My mother slivered minnows onto hooks while my grandfather smoked his cigar. They used crude drop lines, two crossed pieces of wood wrapped with twine, attaching split shot next to the hooks. They fished for fluke and flounder, and they ate whatever they caught, except when her father caught a puffer fish, spiky, brown, and ugly,

even uglier than flounder. Instead of tossing it back, my grandfather stuffed his cigar into the fish's mouth and it swelled up like the cheeks of a trumpet player, with smoke crinkling out of its gills and its eyes wide and black, and then he dropped it onto the floor of the skiff, where it shuddered violently until it died.

§

There are days when the sky is like another sky, when the day is like the day before, when someone you love is like any other person, vulnerable and cruel, their name the only difference.

§

When I was ten my mother took me on vacation to Boothbay Harbor, Maine, and we went deep-sea fishing aboard a trawler. The captain shook my hand as we climbed aboard. He had a blunt face and his black polo smelled like sweat dried by the sun. His grip was warm and meaty. My mother shook his hand too, but when she spoke, he stiffened. He turned to me, but she yanked his hand back.

"I'm deaf," she explained. "I can read your lips."

"She's deaf," I repeated softly.

The captain nodded, but it was the kind of nod people make when they're trying to disentangle. His eyebrows lifted in fake acknowledgment, a civilized attempt to signal a strong desire to leave. He didn't understand what she'd said. He didn't want to understand.

A teenage boy, probably his son, unleashed us from the dock, and soon we were away from the harbor.

The other passengers, mostly women in their sixties, crammed onto benches built into the sides of the boat. They wore blue windbreakers and boxy black sunglasses. My mother and I sat on seats near the bow, away from the others, where the boy strung up the poles, tall black lines whickering in the air. It was a bright day, blue sky, and no clouds.

An hour passed, and the captain slowed down the boat and the boy passed out the rods. He motioned with his hands for us to jigger them up and down.

"Mackerel eat shiners," announced the captain. "When you lift your rod up and down, the silver hooks catch the light and the mackerel will bite. We're sitting on a whole school of them."

My mother inspected her rod. She looked confused and raised her hand to ask a question.

"What do we use for bait?" she interrupted.

A deaf voice is an unexpected note in the song, a young girl getting married in a graveyard.

The hearing are the dead, aghast.

The other passengers turned toward us like astonished doctors. It was not unusual to meet a chorus of distrust.

§

Many years later, when I was in my early twenties, I moved to a lapsed commune in Western Massachusetts. There were four families still living in the tall white house at the end of the dirt road, and they let me stay in an uninsulated shack a few hundred feet away, which had electricity and a space heater but no running water. The shack belonged to a woman named Margaret, who'd first started the commune. The people in the house, the second generation, hated Margaret. Once, they filled her shampoo bottle with maple syrup. Eventually, Margaret abandoned the commune. She moved to a small town in Colorado. That's why the shack was empty. I came to the commune to learn how to farm, but no one used the land there anymore except Hayden, a soft-spoken, bearded man who raised turkeys. He kept them inside a moveable pen, which he repositioned every few days so the turkeys could stipple another part of the field. The pen sat inside a much larger area that was surrounded by an electric fence. In November I got a job at a café in town, and one day I came back to the shack during a storm. When I arrived, a few of the turkeys were scuttering along the yard. The wind had been so strong that it flipped over their pen, which had crashed into the electric fence and created an opening. Most of the turkeys were standing around the fence. One had gotten caught in the wires. Its head and neck were tangled. It struggled to free itself. Several of the other turkeys gathered around it, and I was surprised that they were snapping at the turkey's head, stabbing it with their beaks. I couldn't decide if they were trying to kill it so it wouldn't suffer or because it was vulnerable. I freed the turkey from the wire, but a few days later they were all gone, they'd all been slaughtered for Thanksgiving.

§

The captain's mouth tore into a smile. I squeezed my mother's wrist and she turned toward me. It was always my role.

"There's no bait," I said to her. "The hook shines in the sun and the fish bite."

Most of the passengers turned away when they saw me intervene, but the captain and his son continued to stare. My mother pinched the hook and laid it onto her palm like a dead butterfly.

"It's deceitful," she noted.

Everyone cast their lines. We stood with the others along the edge of the boat, calmly jouncing our poles up and down, watching and waiting, but the surface of the water looked as blank and blue as before. I heard the passengers to my right snigger but I didn't catch their words.

And then suddenly I felt violence. My line jerked. I pulled on the rod and cranked the reel. I struggled out a narrow fish with silver skin like fine mesh. It thrashed in the air, gleaming metallic in the sunlight, and everyone marveled as the captain cut the line. When the fish flopped on the floor, the boy pounced on it and beat it with a club.

"We don't want it to suffer," the captain explained.

They tossed the fish in a cooler of ice and the captain clapped me on the back.

No one caught another.

My mother was proud; I could see it in her eyes, hazel like a pond in a fantasy novel. She smiled and shook my shoulders. As the trawler pitched over the water, the wind blew fingers through her hair. She wore it short and feathered like David Cassidy, if David Cassidy were a forty-five-year-old deaf woman.

We stayed at a cottage that belonged to my grandmother's friend. Her name, Mrs. Birdsong, had an unacknowledged sting. Once, for Christmas, Mrs. Birdsong gave us small taxidermy birds for our Christmas tree and they were lifelike with their soft feathers and how their talons gripped the branches. In the cottage kitchen, my mother slid a knife into the mackerel and cut it lengthwise. She fingered out the guts and ran the fish under cold water. Its eyes were like blank television screens.

I suppose from outside the window we looked like any other family, and in many ways we were, in that way every family is exactly different, every family is their own imperceptible story. We're both inside the cottage and outside looking in, and if we rapped on the glass, we'd look up at ourselves staring and there'd be a moment of clarity for everyone, except my mother, who would not hear the rapping. She would continue to stand at the sink holding the fish under the water.

MARJORIE WELISH

EVERYTHING I LOOK ON

Go
Life
and All. Where do signs of life first appear? Let us avail ourselves of "By the road to the contagious hospital" wherein readers almost always miss the stop
Color

Green green green green, the four-color problem

The office is open during business hours; the showroom by appointment only
verdure
not visible from the street behind the showroom the office is open. Go there. The office and showroom are always open; just ring the bell. Access to the basement through the showroom requires that from the office comes someone to the door to let you in.
May I post a notice on the door to this effect?
No "yes, buts"
verdure
leafage pasture sod turf for the office not visible
but ramified shade open but off
wide of the mark
wild glass flashing
the lyric extremity signs of

Trespass welcome crossing the sustainable threshold stop the public green open to the air and accessible to the senses hours of operation during daylight favor red but toward dusk green appears brilliant and note that 2% dark blue the primaries as far as the eye

can see limits for either an indeterminate gate with a biological necessity
or the little office
        gru
staring back knowingly
blue darker under the same light as red it has been written iris by whose authority
to open literally but closed now or closing no or closing down apparatus accessible always open but by appointment for a field operation or opera off-limits what if quite visible
from the street
        closing down
rough moss

and sustaining a flesh wound. Pigment subtractive to black upon mixture of red green yellow blue orange purple go stop bruise under construction provoked both/and. ax to grind hospitality throughout green oxide let us wield a tincture of red ramifying the indeterminate field of dye quite literally waiting for a green light
  have you received a facsimile
of celadon it
        stains

Ferric to ferrous pause drop temperature aperture of celadon singularly a pause as eyes replay go but off limits and initial it clement remedy usually edible herbage youthful vigorous green not ripe or matured field factory office showroom fresh tender factory showroom by appointment freshly sawed not aged unseasoned eventfulness in vitrines and/or downstairs screening with discussion for any profusion you have
        waste greenish
overripe and plenty of death
received dyed green seasoned then or greenish mess beyond celadon jade leave this
stop open closed welcome eventful craquelure fresh faced of the reduced atmosphere.
Tender kiln, initial it.

In slate sea klangfarben may occupy the same similar congruent iteration oxidating
  mucous light arterial dark bright contagion of which we are
    Verdure virulent overripe odor
gunmetal to go
    apple off limits
or inaccessibly tempting within the vitrine of display are daring instruments the vitality of which flashing glass OPEN BUT OFF-LIMITS VACANCY NO GO concerning it slate shades of open I am mindful with discussion for any profusion aged mold moldering and eventful pastures lavishly indeterminate Go
    verdigris shards of
olive bread versus a priori green
    and notating photons
flashing green modem ON for sure and snap Go To launch daylight hours of logic the same square and union whose vertices verdure electric as brightness: The office is open during business hours; the showroom by appointment only

Old English *gan* "to advance, walk; depart, go away; happen, take place; conquer; observe, practice, exercise," from West Germanic **gaian* (cognates: Old Saxon, Old Frisian *gan*, Middle Dutch *gaen*, Dutch *gaan*, Old High German *gan*, German *gehen*), from PIE **ghe-* "to release, let go" (cognates: Sanskrit *jihite* "goes away," Greek *kikhano* "I reach, meet with"), but there does not seem to be general agreement on a list of cognates.

    shards of appled
gates

May I post a notice on the door to this effect? Hours of operation are inaccessible or speculative a mind open without authorization to open the message to get "the green light"; unless one can view the why and the wherefore practicality remains indeterminate or wild Evergreen bacterial pause to scrub from Go
  in verdure teeming
with green life always open; just ring the bell.

A MODERN GLACIER

Point, Line, Plane step into a conjectural city nothing but
writing sideways sometimes the inverse of yellow
deletions. Undertaking anticipations, why do you not
cut, copy, paste the sought-for person
evading the simple past change of concordance.
It may be dateless. John said. John said that
events are said to formula similarly heuristic
to see her smile; or to see her smile you took up the pencil's
calculus. At the crosswalk: yellow and resend. A sequence
opened that door. Without a mate during breeding time?
Whereby the achrony? Mary in analogue is played by entities
and oughts. Expedite the heart? Alms deprived of momentum
once begun; once begun in momentum nothing gets in the way of
abatement or as-is, for instance. *In medias res* and so much comic
vestibule as per this and that: No, I do not need a rusted saw just yet,
thank you.

Of black or city nothing but traipsing across the simple past
Point, Line, Plane: topos or city writing the inverse of
cut, copy, paste the sought-for concordance
during breeding time. Why don't you
undo the digital yellow and resend the momentum
in the way of what not ought?
As-is, for instance. Very much and so much comic
abatement as per this and that No.

And resend the momentum
in the way of what not ought.
As is, for instance. And so much comic

monochrome as per this new wave
which overtook Point, Line, Plane
topos or city writing the inverse of
cut, copy, paste.

And resend the momentum
in the way of Point, Line, Plane topos
or city writing the inverse of
as is, for instance.

Point, Line, Plane topos. Or city?

SKYWATCHING

1

The activity of attending films at the cinema …of going to see motion pictures …of going to see motion pictures incessant habit of moviegoing

to serve wait upon to put in play severe stringent futurity apart arguably icy

tomorrow. In preterition
auld lang syne ages ago old long since times past yesterday

Today to serve wait upon to put in play
auld lang syne's habitual moviegoing

Yesterday today tomorrow icy moviegoing

2

The activity of attending films at the cinema
Severe
Auld lang syne

The act of going regularly to watch films at the cinema
Many severally
this in the manner of our ancestors

…of going to see motion pictures
to serve wait upon
preterition

frequenting the movies
a pilot
in times past

The activity of attending films at the cinema
Severe aura in the well-wrought
Auld lang syne

The act of going regularly to watch films at the cinema
Severally morning noon and binoculars
this in the manner of our ancestors

Glacial moons through staring
to serve wait upon
…of going to see motion pictures

At noon today preterition
frequenting the movies
apart arguably icy

fatigue
as when past is prologue
yesterday today tomorrow

aircraft aspirational but
with astringent
time.

The activity of attending films at the cinema
Yesterday's long exposure
turns its back on

tomorrow. Apart arguably icy
auld lang syne's incessant
habitual moviegoing

how the spot
segmental yesterday today
tomorrow's glacial kiss has sped up

the very polemic. Filmic
long ago since
severs severally into movement

although not so equidistant:
yesterday today tomorrow icy moviegoing
Yesterday Today Tomorrow, icy moviegoing

3

The door is opening.
The doors open at noon.

THOMAS HEISE

Ghost Money

Sometimes when I hadn't emerged for hours from my office at Therapeutic Solutions, even after all of my sessions were over and my anxious and sleepless patients had returned once more to the lives awaiting them at home, when I had become no more than a shadow under the door or a voice emanating through a wall, Camille would knock to check if I were okay. As I stood at the window I heard her tap and told her to come in.

These past weeks you've been lost in your head, she remarked while backlit in the doorway. It's not good for you to stay cooped up in this cage for so long. Come, Michael, waving her hand, let's go have a drink and a bite to eat.

Thirty minutes later we were sitting down to a dinner at Compagnie des Vins Surnaturels on the border of Nolita and Chinatown, in whose dim ambience we had to lean over the small votive allotted to us to even see each other. The other diners, of which there may have been five or fifteen, it was impossible to tell, were merely sounds flowing in and out of the penumbra around us and led me to think, as the waiters passed by our tables, we must have looked like attendees at a séance. After a glass of scotch, I felt myself beginning to thaw. In the middle of the second glass, I started sharing with Camille an argument that was on my mind of late made by a young but dour Swedish philosopher named Nick Bostrom at Oxford. For the past month, I had been reading his work right before trying to fall asleep, but the effect was to keep me up thinking about his ideas and what they might mean for the relationships we have with others, from strangers on the street to the people we loved most dearly. Bostrom argued that human consciousness, the entire mental history of mankind, is a computer simulation by what he termed posthumans, who exist in a future of technological maturity and who are running billions of simulations of their ancestral pasts in which the rest of us, for lack of a better word, live, though we are not, strictly speaking, alive. Why they would run these simulations is

of course entirely speculative, though the consensus among Bostrom and his disciples is they likely would do so either as a game they are playing or as a way of understanding the countless scenarios by which their deep history branched through the infinite forking paths of time until it reached their present.

I could see Camille smile in disbelief as I spoke, but I begged her to hear me out, if only to humor me. If this idea is true—and Bostrom calculates the odds are about one in three that it is—then it likely follows that those who have constructed the simulation in turn themselves could be, without knowing it, simulations for other simulated posthumans in what would amount to a series of realities stacked up in virtual machines managed in essence by a hierarchy of gods standing on each other's shoulders. Imagine you created people in *The Sims* and those people built a replica of the game and ran their own simulations within it, I said, and their simulations built a replica of the game and ran their own simulations within it and so on and so forth. The computer processing power required for a fully imagined universe would be unthinkable, so Bostrom's hunch is that our world is simulated in scope and granularity only to a level that produces a realistic representation of a credible human experience, but no further. The rest is left to the imagination. So without him naming it as such, Bostrom is positing a certain theory of verisimilitude, or I suppose you could say a theory about the relationship between seeing and knowing, a theory that bears on how one might paint or write as much as it does on how one might relate to another person. The simulation, however, would have to evolve alongside the evolution of what it means to be human, which has changed slowly, if fundamentally, over the short course of recorded history. In other words, the computer simulation of life would thus adjust, recalibrate, and remake the world so our human condition and our place in the cosmos are reflected seamlessly back to us in a way that seems timeless but is always in a state of minutely undetectable transformation, I said as I tried to explain this somewhat absurd idea to my colleague. I finished the scotch, its ice rattling in the glass. Hear me out, I said, pleading a little. So, distant astronomical objects, such as the yellow moons around a far-off, unreachable planet or remote quasars that through a telescope look like flowers floating in space, are unconstructed frameworks whose finer details are added, if they are ever added, as needed at a later date when humans develop the technology to see them more clearly.

The sommelier, a giant of a man whose enormous upper body was immersed in darkness like a sequoia beyond the reach of our candlelight, silently appeared at the edge of our table. He was dressed in a black waistcoat with lapels and when he leaned over I could see his impressively cultivated mustache that, in the style of a nineteenth-century gentleman, drooped slightly past the corners of his mouth. He cradled a bottle of Château Malescot Saint Exupéry with both hands, as if presenting a newborn to us. We gazed mutely with reverence at the cost of the wine we ordered for no reason. We weren't celebrating anything. The label was a red banner of a palm with the first two fingers raised and the third and fourth closed. When I asked Camille the next day what it meant, she said it was a Byzantine image of Christ's benediction drawn from the Book of Luke:

> And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came about that while He was blessing them, He parted from them. And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising God.

On that evening, however, the hand gesture was unintelligible to me, I remember thinking, as I continued to speak about Bostrom. Camille leaned closer and looked at me with a raised eyebrow that implied I was spoiling the wine. What is true of the material reality around us—buildings that exist in the backdrop, but which we have never stepped foot in, or highways we never travel on and only know by their place on a map, or as exits we never take, or verdant fields we glimpse in the distance when looking out a train window—Bostrom argues is also likely the case even with humans. In other words, many of those around us are only partially simulated, like minor characters in a novel, people to whom the writer hasn't given much thought, just the broadest outlines, maybe just a name, maybe not even.

Bostrom speculates that most of humanity may be comprised of what he labels shadow-people moving along the periphery of our lives, people who have been simulated just to a degree and depth sufficient to not awaken our doubts that they aren't real. Those people streaming, like in the background in films, streaming through the streets, the masses, the crowds, you know what I mean, I said, nodding to Camille, whose eyeglasses glinted in the candlelight.

A cutting board with sliced meats and cheeses from France appeared in front of us so we began, as if preprogrammed, to eat on cue. Think of the random encounters on any given day—friends of friends you serendipitously bump into on the M train that you hardly ever take, but will not hear about again for upwards of a year when one of them has hanged himself to death at thirty; the Caribbean woman in line at the supermarket purchasing soy milk with a toddler asleep in her cart who you remember days later because she was wearing a blue *Aladdin* T-shirt your daughter once wore and you think about where she is as you take your seat among the rows of strangers around you on an Airbus A380, each group nestled into its separate, private conversation; or the almost robotic male voice on the other end of the phone squeezed in a cubicle, you imagine, located in a call center in Mumbai when you're trying to learn how to install a driver for your printer and you look out at the inky river of cars passing your window at dusk. These lives we are ignorant of, that I'm ignorant of, are unknowable, but since we think we are kind people, we want to believe their lives are as vividly complex as our own, that those we touch no matter how briefly are panged and dented by love and wonder, and that they dream at night, and that they are woven with hundreds of other narratives of their own families, friends, lovers, a sprawling, shapeless story that if we can discover some pattern in our meager swatch of it we assign it a meaning.

I felt the urge to reach across the table to hold Camille's hand, but when I did, her hand wasn't there. Last week on Instagram I stumbled upon an image of a dark crowd pouring out of the Staten Island Ferry on a fogged-in evening hovering between the buildings of the Financial District. So many people I thought, and there I was in the background of someone else's selfie—a heartbreakingly beautiful family of four—watching the boat with my hair blowing back, and dangling from my hand was a netted tote bag of bright clementines lighting up the edge of the frame on Saturday 9:12 PM. I have no memory whatsoever of that moment. It's a total black hole.

How much of this I said aloud and how much I said to myself in my own mind at our dinner, I can't remember. I paused and placed my wine glass back down. At this point I was inebriated, but I pushed on through even though I felt I was losing my train of thought as I kept trying to explain what I was thinking as men sometimes do to

great annoyance when in the presence of a woman that they secretly are trying to impress. Bostrom says, I said, these peripheral figures are for all intents and purposes not people but virtual zombies, his term, encrypted voids without an interior life or any semblance of consciousness we might recognize. They are conjured up as extras in the film of your own life, like someone you might approach at a bar to go home with, or a stranger you meet along the street and ask where the closest subway station is, and the fact we imagine they possess an inner world like our own, different but like ours, which we know isn't true, speaks more to a need to see ourselves as moral and capable of empathy than it does about the reality of the simulated situation. I think this is how it must be for novelists too when they try to dream up their readers, who are nothing more than ghosts out on the edges of their imagination, I said. I could see Camille's silver necklace, a glowing band of light, but her face was invisible.

At this point, I don't think I really believed anything I was saying, but I said it anyway. I said, Bostrom goes on to say there remains the likelihood our own internal lives have been radically abridged for the sake of efficiency. He suggests our pasts, which of course don't actually exist, might be comprised of false memories simulated for periods omitted from the program. I can recall little of my childhood, I admitted, and while there are a few inscrutable moments burned into my memory, most of what I do remember is from photographs I've been shown as an adult, the picture but not the event. I frequently wonder if I've made it up or dreamt it, which if I am to speak honestly, makes me, as I lie in my bed at night and think, feel magnificently alone and free, totally free. I sat farther back in my chair. I could walk out into the oncoming traffic of the West Side Highway and it wouldn't matter. The cars might even pass right through me. If what Bostrom claims is true, it is not unreasonable to conclude there exists no suffering in the world and all memories of suffering are illusions.

Such an idea, however, can be seriously entertained, he says, only in those intervals when we are not currently in a state of suffering, which in my experience, I said softly, appear to be fewer and fewer of late.

At that point I stopped speaking, for it occurred to me I was talking to hear my own voice and that we were no longer attuned to each other, each of us had become immersed in separate moods.

Where red wine had run down the inside of Camille's glass was a wash of color that the candlelight projected without her awareness onto her face. Like an amoeba, it edged down her cheek, morphing shape as it slipped over her jaw and into her blouse. I remember thinking how I wanted to believe her silence was a repudiation of everything I had thought, but I couldn't tell, and I thought as she sat there she couldn't even see me. The bottle was removed from the table by a disembodied hand reaching through the penumbra.

We walked out onto Centre Street with the space of another person between us, though no one else was on the sidewalk. In this way we crossed Worth Street, and though we had no destination in mind, we detoured into Chinatown where we happened upon a street festival in the process of being dismantled, a couple lingering in front of a food cart sharing dumplings from a paper tray shaped like a boat while a young Chinese man was carrying a pole from stall to stall to unhook a string of lanterns that held together all of the vendors. By a storefront temple that I must have walked past a thousand times without stopping, a woman was huddled over an earthenware pot burning colorful bundles of ghost money in denominations of a hundred million with a portrait in the center of Yu Huang wearing a flat hat dangling with beads and the words Bank of Hell printed on a banner on the back. She was incinerating one bundle at a time, waving away the ashes flying up from the fire that had turned green. Having burned all of her bribes, she reached into a straw basket and pulled out an elaborate paper replica of a house, followed by replicas of passports, a paper laptop, airline tickets, a paper station wagon, and a small paper shar-pei lined up in a semicircle around her feet. One by one she lifted them into the flames where they disappeared into smoke we could still smell as we rounded the corner. I was in a state of total calm that frequently follows a feeling of loneliness in the presence of another, especially when walking through the city. The office buildings were lit up, and high above them the wind moved through a sky I couldn't see but I assumed was there. My cellphone vibrated and across its electronic wallpaper of Mount Vesuvius golden at sunset was a number marked *Unknown*, and I thought of the time when I was traveling with my parents across the country, how standing in a carpeted motel room while my father went to get ice I called back home to listen to the messages on the answering machine, and how I

was nervous that by the third or fourth ring someone would lift the receiver and I would hear my own voice on the other end say Hello. We walked for a little more when Camille suggested we turn onto Doyers.

There is something I want to show you, she said, pointing up the block.

We arrived at an apothecary shop window whose glow spilled onto the pavement. Among a display of medicinal herbs and acupuncture charts locating the meridian pinpoints of the body stood a tall glass cage like a tower. It held three morpho butterflies. They were electric blue, but on the ventral side they were brown with large circles that resembled human eyes with dilated pupils. Fluttering up and down in a continuous turning motion, the butterflies were spiraling in the tiny cyclone of wind generated in the column by the flapping of each other's wings. Resting on the descent with their legs extended in the air and working doubly hard on the climb up. And each time they fluttered, they cast a flash of blue light from an eye that appeared to blink. Blink. Blink. Blink. We stood there without talking, just observing for a few minutes, the unspoken tension between us having dissipated with the walk. At least I thought so. As she took her leave at the subway, descending down into the darkness, she spun around, raised her hand with two fingers up and the third and fourth closed, and laughed a little.

In my apartment that night, I sat by the window overlooking the Hudson. With *The Moths and Butterflies of the Americas* in my lap, I read how the striking metallic color of the morpho has nothing to do with pigmentation inherent to the insect, but is instead an instance of iridescence, essentially an optical illusion of surfaces in which light waves are diffracted and interfered with, changing with each new angle that the wings are viewed. One might assume their remarkable color, more intense in the males of the species as is usual with winged creatures, is a tool to attract a mate, but this would be wrong. It is an act not of beauty, but of visual aggression. And at night when they sleep perched on a leaf with their wings folded up, the underside reveals their huge false eyes looking out wide awake and unseeing into the dark for any predator that might approach through the hours.

They live on average 137 days.

ROBERT FERNANDEZ

FERRARI

Mike's dad
in his 1985
Ferrari 308
GTB has great
calves, and
everything
in their house
is so put together.
The samurai
sword in
the foyer
is sheathed
in black lacquer
and has tiny
orange tassels
around the hilt.
I spill a bucket
of red seeds
all over
the Florida
asphalt.
The blade
falls; a million
silver threads
evacuate
the theater.

I stand
like one dead.
These pink
clouds charging
in some Deco
fascism lay
a blade over
my heart.
Later,
the little
woofers smiling
at my temples
play *Carmina*
Burana and
the band of
sapphire coast
folds itself
into a ring.
I dream
of passing
through
that hole
where rainbows
in Pumas
play hearts.
A zombie,
I stood
captive,
the bubble
of "accident"
swelling
my throat.
The world
stopped.
It takes some
feeling
to become
a criminal.

It takes
a ward
to become
a word. Never
again. Now
whom do you
serve? Who
moves you?
Whose will
is yours?

POM-POM

We were
making
pancakes
in the parking lot
and you started
singing
morning stars
back to me
and I started
laughing
and said stop
I don't have
the energy
I can't
take it.
The sky
was blue
and it was cold.
I said do you
remember me
talking to Isaiah
about how
saturated
means seen,
like the sun, blond
and blackening?
You said
ocean, as
if dragging

a bar of steel
across the beach
to smooth
the sand.
I said
horseshoe crabs
with their
masks upturned
and thousand
legs shivering.
There were
smokestacks
in the distance,
we were
a family,
I played with
the other kids
across the street.
I could say
a world
was here,
but today
the pit bulls
trot like souls
down the sidewalk,
keeping us
reverent.
I begin
again, I
break,
the cold
magma comes
in flaky handfuls.
I sit and think
I was thought.
I started
walking then

with another
vigorously
down the path.
Death of the self
is a long,
tearless night,
and the grills are
bright, the day
cold. You were
a song, you had
a father, you have
a name. But
the ocean,
what could
it be, sun-
mingled,
eternity
like a razor
blade in a
glass? Pass
forward and gather
your eyes. Who
could marvel
that such sympathy
has come to you?
Who could we
name to name us,
what merciless
flowering could fall
forth to clear
the day of its
letters? O
Child of
the Sun,
listen,
the word
begins again

with you for
the last time,
so give it all
you have because
there is only
this chance,
wrapped
in infinity
like a strip
of bacon.
I mean
everything
you ever
suspected
and all
you can't
imagine
is real.

MICHAEL HEINRICH
Translated by Simon Hajdini

Marx: Biography as Politics

Round birthdays of notable figures are readily taken as occasions for biographies. The 200th birthday of Karl Marx in 2018 was no exception. Gareth Stedman Jones's *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* had already appeared in 2016, followed in the spring of 2018 by the expanded edition of Sven-Eric Liedman's *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx*, originally published in Swedish in 2015. In April 2018, shortly before Marx's birthday on May 5, I was able to join the festivities by publishing the first volume of the German edition of *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society*, which appeared in English translation in July 2019.[1]

Biography as a genre is often situated somewhere between historiography and literature, involving an artistic or creative element that sets it apart from other historical studies. Many biographies tend to concern themselves with the flow of the narrative rather than striving for historical accuracy. Rather than focusing on a precise inventory of what is known for certain about the person depicted, and what for more or less good reasons can only be assumed about them, these biographies "emotionally attune" themselves to the situation, and, more often than not, to their subjects' imagined inner conflicts. Every year a slew of biographies of diverse individuals appear, which amount to nothing more than a mixture of already well-known facts, often circulated but unattested anecdotes, vulgar psychology, and the biographers' own particular views of the world. Even more notable biographies frequently fail to distinguish between what can be reasonably concluded from the sources, what is a more or less well-founded assumption, and what is simply vague speculation. Where several biographies of a person are available, the more recent ones repeat much of what was said already in the older ones, so that few biographers concern themselves with whether these older claims they draw upon are also sufficiently ascertained—an ideal path toward the creation of legends.

Among the fairly recent biographies of Marx, the group of questionable works includes, in particular, the one published by Francis Wheen in 1999. Many reviews praised how in Wheen's account the private Marx, "Karl Marx the man," took center stage. That is true. Except that many of the private anecdotes are fictitious, or else rely on an extensive embellishment of the few facts that have been established. Wheen's procedure should be sufficiently elucidated by the following brief example. When on May 10, 1838, Marx's father, Heinrich Marx, died in Trier, his son Karl was in Berlin. He did not attend the funeral. Wheen notes: "Karl did not attend the funeral. The journey from Berlin would be too long, he explained, and he had more important things to do."[2] On the basis of the formulation "he explained," an impartial reader will assume that this is an original statement by Marx. But Wheen does not specify a source—and there isn't one. Wheen's justification for Marx's absence at the funeral, a justification that makes the young Marx appear an indifferent son, is fictitious. A quick look at the traffic conditions of the time shows that it would have been impossible for Marx to attend the funeral. There was no rail connection between Trier and Berlin. The stagecoach, carrying both people and mail, took from five to seven days but did not run daily. Between the sending of a letter with news of the death and the son's arrival, twelve to fourteen days would have passed. In the early summer in Trier, however, it was impossible to preserve the body for that long. Accordingly, the burial had to take place a few days after death. Unfortunately this is not the only invention in Wheen's biography, rendering the book useless as a serious source for studying Marx's life.

I.

In Germany in particular, even serious biographies of politically important figures continue to have a hard time of it with many leftists. They are suspected of favoring an individualizing conception of history as advocated in the nineteenth century by, among others, the German historian Heinrich von Treitschke, who devised the famous phrase that history is made by great men. Biographies of leftist theorists are considered entirely suspect: What could possibly be gained from a preoccupation with a biographical account, if what is ultimately at stake is an engagement with the theory?

Until the end of the Cold War the political appreciation that many biographies offered of Marx as a person depended on whether his theory was highly valued or considered worthless. Those critically opposed to Marx's theory were often already highly suspicious of Marx the person. He was said to have been domineering, taking advantage of his family and friends. Conversely, many Marxists presented him as noble and good, and whenever there was a conflict, he was of course always right.

The situation these days is not quite as awkward. Hero worship and hagiography are out, and personal debasements have become subtler. But Marx's life is still used to support judgments about his theory. This is particularly evident in Jonathan Sperber's and Stedman Jones's biographies. In both cases, the titles themselves already indicate how things are going to unfold: *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (2013) and *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (2016).

In the introduction to his book, Sperber leaves no doubt that Marx has nothing more to tell us today. Sperber opposes the contemporary relevance of Marx's theories, a relevance recognized to some extent even by conservatives—for example, Margaret Thatcher's biographer Charles Moore—since the financial crisis of 2008–9. Sperber poses the ironic question of "how a mortal human being, and not a wizard—Karl Marx, and not Gandalf the Grey—could successfully look 150 or 160 years into the future."[3] Some reviewers commented that it is quite strange to publish an extensive biography of a person whose work the author considers irrelevant. However, the very formulation of the question is more than questionable: whether Marx's analyses are relevant today is not a question of clairvoyance, but of whether Marx has analyzed and provided insight into the fundamental capitalist structures that continue to dominate the current economy and are therefore still important today.

Stedman Jones's verdict, on the other hand, is not as radically unfavorable as Sperber's: Marx is granted a certain "greatness," but mostly "illusion." For both authors, the basic argument is that Marx's theories were so strongly tied to the discourse and experiences of his time that there's not much left to be learned from him about the problems of the present. For Sperber, Marx's economic theory is reducible to capitalism of the early nineteenth century, while for Stedman Jones, Marx's political ideas are rooted in the "pre-March" era

before the European revolutions of 1848 and therefore are completely outdated.

Both authors give the impression that the message they strive to communicate was already clear from the outset and that their biographies are merely intended to give this message greater plausibility. Given the extent of their criticism of Marx's analyses in *Capital*, however, it is astounding how little they delve deeply into this unfinished work. Both authors rely on the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe* (*MEGA*)—in publication since 1975, and comprising collected works, letters, manuscripts, excerpts in their original form (which was not the case with previous editions) and in their different versions (which was also uncommon)—yet the enormous potential of this edition is used only to a very limited extent, both as far as Marx's additional texts on *Capital* are concerned, edited here for the first time, and in terms of the information provided in the editorial apparatus. Even the debates on Marx's *Capital* over the last forty years have been assimilated only to a very small extent. One can argue about how deeply a biography should engage with the most important work of the depicted person. But if the biographers don't recoil from making such negative judgments about the work, then it seems necessary to ask on what basis these judgments are actually made. Liedman, who sees *Capital* more positively than Sperber and Stedman Jones, bases his assessments not only on a much more detailed treatment of Marx's critique of political economy, but also takes note of at least some of the more recent debates.

II.

The genre of biography is neither self-evident nor simply given. Especially in the last thirty or forty years we have witnessed important discussions about the actual possibilities and limitations of biographical writing (which are discussed extensively in the appendix to the first volume of my book). The more recent Marx biographies, however, pay no regard to these debates. Sperber subdivides his account into three large parts—"Shaping," "Struggle," and "Legacy"—which he also understands chronologically: "Shaping" is supposed to portray Marx's youth and maturation (1818–1847), "Struggle" deals with the conflicts of the mature Marx (1848–1871), while "Legacy" depicts Marx's old age (1871–1883) and raises the question of what remains.

Based on the bildungsroman, the idea that a person is first influenced, then has their character formed and, once this process is concluded, they begin to influence their environment, was the basis of many nineteenth-century biographies, and was generalized by Wilhelm Dilthey at the beginning of the twentieth century. Marx's life clearly doesn't align with these simple ideas. The period of his "shaping" did not end in 1848; he continued learning until well into his old age. The influence of Eurocentric and historically deterministic theories, which can be traced back to the 1840s and 1850s, lessened in the 1860s, and was completely surpassed by the 1870s. On the other hand, Marx's "struggle" did not begin in 1848, but at the latest in 1842 when he began writing for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, nor did it end in 1871. Far more plausible than Sperber's construction, it seems to me, is to consider the "person" as an effect of a continuing process of constitution that avoids the schematic division into a first phase, in which external influences on the person predominate, and a second phase, in which the person actively shapes the external world. Therefore, I make no attempt in my biography to construct periods of Marx's life. This also applies to the division of the biography into several volumes, which results from purely practical aspects but explicitly does not claim to portray periods of Marx's life.

Stedman Jones emphasizes how strongly the present distorted image of Marx has been shaped by the Marxist production of an embellished icon—a process that began with German social democracy at the end of the nineteenth century. In opposition to this, Stedman Jones purports to return to the original Marx of the nineteenth century—which he also makes clear terminologically by consistently referring to "Karl" instead of "Marx." It's a matter of course that a biography must take note of how strongly the image of the person depicted was influenced by reception history (which, in Marx's case, is comprised not only of "Marxism"). However, Stedman Jones's notion that the reception history—and with it the horizon, which has become historical, of our own questioning—could easily be abandoned is highly questionable. Hans-Georg Gadamer convincingly criticized such views sixty years ago.

At any rate, the formation of the cipher "Marx" is not the only result of reception history that's relevant to a biography of Marx. The same is true of "Hegelian Philosophy," "Romanticism," "Materialism,"

and so on, concepts that also cannot simply be assumed as given and deployed unreflectively. What this means can be seen in the widespread characterization of Hegel as a representative of "German Idealism." In Hegel's lifetime, such an understanding of the philosophies of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel himself was far from common. It was put forward only in the second half of the nineteenth century in German writing on the history of philosophy, and then adopted in other countries.[4] As late as the 1840s, contemporary encyclopedias would customarily emphasize that, unlike Kant and Fichte, Hegel and Schelling are not actually "Idealists." Although Marx already speaks of "German Idealism" in *The Holy Family*, as well as in the posthumously published *The German Ideology*, this term is not used as a category of the history of philosophy, but rather as a polemical description. Hegel's "Idealism" shouldn't be used lightly as something self-evident.

When composing a biography, we have to consider not only various diachronic lines, which extend to the present time, but also synchronic ones. That one should place the depicted figure in their own time is nothing new; many biographies include the phrase "His/her life and his/her times" already in their title. More often than not, however, the times and people important to the person portrayed are only considered from the perspective of the depicted individual. When it comes to Bruno Bauer, for instance, many Marx biographies take more or less the position formulated by Marx and Engels in *The Holy Family* or *The German Ideology*. However, it then remains completely incomprehensible how Bauer could have been Marx's closest personal friend and political companion for five years. In order to understand this, Bauer must be regarded as a theoretically as well as politically radicalized Hegelian theologian, and thus considered completely independently of Marx and his later critique of him. The situation is quite similar with a number of others, such as Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Ferdinand Lassalle, or Mikhail Bakunin. Their political ideas deserve to be taken more seriously than has been customary, at least among many Marxists. Conversely, Marx's critique of them deserves closer scrutiny, for it was not always adequate, either on a personal or a factual level.

Another synchronic line aims less at people than at the respective field of discourses. If biographies focus solely on the person and their

work, then it remains unclear what in their work was actually new at the time and what was not. We then judge the work solely from our contemporary perspective. Yet in order to be able to judge whether the depicted figure has merely produced a new result within the already existing discursive field or whether they also shifted its boundaries, one must first reconstruct the field of what was "sayable" at the time.

III.

Completely contrary to the views of prevailing economic doctrines, the financial crisis of 2008–09 showed that the capitalist economy is highly unstable and prone to crises. The fact that during the subsequent economic recovery social inequality in many countries increased rather than diminished made it clear that even under the most favorable conditions capitalism is a social machine for further enrichment of the wealthy, while the rest of the population must content itself with slight improvements to their situation. And only those who ignore all the facts can disregard signs of the accelerating climate change that threatens humanity, and that ultimately results from capitalist-driven economic growth. It is therefore far from surprising that in such a situation interest in Marx's critical analysis of capitalism has increased significantly worldwide. This is not an abstract interest in the history of ideas, but a concrete political interest. However, it has also been clear for some time now that many Marxisms have too often transformed Marx's project of a critique of political economy into a shallow worldview. A politically productive appropriation of Marx's theory must therefore also partly put to the test the Marxist certainty about what this theory allegedly states, and must not stop at the contradictions and ambivalences that one finds in Marx himself.

In taking this critical demand seriously, such an examination must begin with the structure of Marx's texts themselves. While many earlier editions—above all the manuscripts not published by Marx himself—reveal extensive interventions by their respective publishers, with *MEGA* we received for the very first time a faithful and complete edition of all the texts of Marx and Engels. The additional question of quality in translations arises. While *Capital* has been translated into many languages, most of these translations have been found to

contain significant inaccuracies and errors. In this respect, it is a good sign for the current discussion of Marxian theory that in the last six or seven years we saw several new translations of *Capital* partly consulting the additional material from *MEGA*: in Brazil new translations of all three volumes of *Capital* appeared; in Italy the first volume of *Capital* with additional texts from *MEGA* was published in two volumes; Slovenia and Greece saw new translations of the first volume; and new translations have also been published in Persian and in Arabic. For now, two different translations of all three volumes of *Capital* are available in English. The publication of Marx's original 1864–65 manuscript of the third volume, translated by Ben Fowkes and published by Fred Moseley, presents a significant contribution to this debate. However, the two English translations of the first volume of *Capital* (referring to different German texts) exhibit a series of inaccuracies and errors. It's therefore very important to the English-language discussion that Princeton University Press will publish a new English edition of the first volume, translated by Paul Reitter.

What significance for the new discussion of Marxian theory can be attributed to a biography of Marx then? That one can attempt through the detour of a biography to demonstrate the limitations of Marxian theory by emphasizing the extent to which Marxian thinking is confined to nineteenth-century conceptions has already been shown by Sperber and Stedman Jones in their respective books. However, it's a banality to note that the thinking of a man who was born in 1818 and died in 1883 was rooted in the nineteenth century. Where else should it have been rooted? The much more exciting question is how close we are today to the social, economic, and political upheavals that occurred in the nineteenth century: the onset of industrial capitalism and the emergence of the class of wage laborers; the replacement of cabinet politics with a more rigorous parliamentarianism, as well as the concomitant expansion of voting rights and public debate on politics; the increasing importance of mass media, which began long before radio and television, when the first nineteenth-century mass-circulated newspapers became dailies. The basic structures of modern societies emerged, or at least began to make their way, in the nineteenth century, first in Europe and then in many other parts of the world. These are the developments that concern Marxian analyses.

The problems Marx dealt with can hardly be charged with irrelevance. However, their relevance alone cannot lead one to conclude that the Marxian analyses are all true: they have to be discussed rigorously. Marxian investigations are still too strongly situated on a purely theoretical level; Marx comes into view only as a theoretician, and his texts are read more or less as timeless treatises without considering their historical context. His investigations, however, consistently display a dual character: they are not merely analyses of fundamental economic or political relations, sometimes of a very high level of abstraction; they are always also direct interventions in political conflicts and debates, with which today's readers are no longer familiar. Here a biography can significantly contribute to understanding the context of these works by elucidating these conflicts and Marx's involvement in them.

In addition, a proper reception of Marx's work requires an examination of the very different kinds of texts that Marx left behind. This requires not abstract claims to completeness but rather relating the different kinds of texts to one another with respect to their content. If one wants to learn something about the economic analyses of the "mature" Marx, consulting the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* manuscripts is not enough. One has to include the newspaper articles on economic issues that were written at the same time, as well as the numerous notebooks in which Marx deals with theoretical economic literature and with empirical crises, such as the crisis of 1857–58 or that of 1866. And finally, the letters are also of great importance, in which economic and political developments were repeatedly discussed. Proper assessment of all these documents requires biographical information.

IV.

Contrary to all Marxist attempts at systematization and the constructions of "dialectical" and "historical materialism"—terms that Marx never once used—Marx's work is by no means a theory coherent in itself or even complete. This work has not remained merely a torso, but a series of torsos. Looking at the development of Marx's work as a whole, one sees beginnings, breaks, new beginnings accompanied by smaller or larger conceptual shifts, and new breaks. Even Marx's dissertation of 1841 was supposed to be the prelude to a series of studies on post-Aristotelian Greek philosophy (with fully informed references to post-Hegelian

philosophy). Further studies, however, were never written. The early critique of the economy contained in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, first published in the 1930s and primarily known for their discussion of alienation, was intended to open a series of critiques (of politics, law, and morality) which were never written. The 1845–46 manuscripts of *The German Ideology* also weren't published until the 1930s, but then quickly received the nimbus of a purported founding document of "historical materialism." However, Marx and Engels never undertook the planned revision of these manuscripts, and their status as founding documents can now be doubted with good reason. In 1859, Marx wanted to expound his critique of political economy in six books (on capital, landed property, wage labor, the state, international trade, and the world market), but only the first part of the first book, titled *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and dealing with the commodity and money, was published in 1859. In the preface to the first volume of *Capital*, published in 1867, Marx announced three more volumes of *Capital*, which he was unable to complete in the sixteen years until his death—not least because, in the 1870s, he considerably expanded the scope of his investigation, which also implied a new conception of *Capital*.[5]

If one wants to understand how these many torsos came about, what the causes of the many breaks and the new considerations and aspects were, which later made immediate continuation impossible, then one cannot bypass Marx's biography: one has to take note of the political developments of the time, consider the conflicts in which Marx was involved, as well as his scientific and political education, which can often only be reconstructed from excerpts and letters.

In the course of tracing these concerns, it quickly becomes clear that the prevailing image of Marx, which focuses on him as a critical scientist, requires a considerable expansion. Marx wasn't merely a scientist, he was also a journalist who intervened in politics and a revolutionary activist who formed alliances, took part in building various organizations, and had to fight out political conflicts not only with his opponents but sometimes with his comrades. And last but not least, Marx was also a private scholar who devoted himself to diverse scientific studies in various fields of knowledge. These different sides of Marx's life were by no means separate. Marx's scientific insights were not an end in themselves; they were geared toward praxis that

would change society and influenced both his journalistic work and his political engagement. On the other hand, the journalistic and political activities not only disrupted his scholarly work but also confronted Marx with new topics and problems, thus leading to the postponement of his research and, sometimes, to fundamentally new concepts. Marx's texts are the result of continuous learning processes that proceeded on different and by no means linear levels. He did not always make better sense of everything over time; he would sometimes reach a deadlock.

The development of Marx's work was marked by a multitude of contingencies. By no means was everything necessarily reducible to the main work of *Capital*. Had Marx not been forced to leave Paris in 1849, and had he not gone to London, he could not have written *Capital. Capital* as we know it today could only have been written in London—the center of British capitalism that dominated the world market at the time, where economic issues were continuously discussed in newspapers and in parliament, where reports on economic crises, the policy of the Bank of England, the situation in the factories, etc., were debated, and where the world's largest library of economic literature was accessible to Marx at the British Museum. However, the economic research that he began in the 1850s did not dominate his scientific activities to the extent usually and repeatedly assumed. To be sure, Marx never wrote the planned book on the state. But the engagement with a critique of politics and the state is found not only in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* (1852) and in *The Civil War in France* (1871), but also in a large number of Marx's newspaper articles, which, granted, focused on current political topics, but always went beyond them in dealing with more fundamental questions. In addition to these two main strands—politics and political economy—the letters and excerpts also tackle, with various degrees of intensity, other topics, such as different problems of history, ethnology, linguistics, mathematics, the natural sciences, and—avant la lettre—ecological questions.[6]

This multidimensional character of Marx's work is accompanied by a complex developmental history. For decades we witnessed two opposing conceptions of the development of his work. On the one hand, there is the "continuity hypothesis," which posits an essentially continuous development of Marx's work since the 1844 Parisian manuscripts, or even, as is sometimes claimed, since the 1843 *Critique*

of Hegel's Philosophy of Right—a development in which the central theoretical concepts supposedly undergo no fundamental change but are merely extended and specified. On the other hand, there is the "break hypothesis," positing a fundamental cut, which is usually dated to the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the *German Ideology* of 1845–46. Neither of these theses seems to me to reflect the complexity of Marx's development. Marx's educational processes led to a multitude of breaks and fundamental conceptual changes, so that the idea of a continuous development and improvement of an original conception (developed already by the rather young Marx) is completely untenable. However, at different times, these breaks took place in very different areas of Marx's research. These remarkably diverse conceptual changes cannot be summarized in one or two major breaks, such that one could reduce the development of Marx's work to two or three major phases. The actual development is much more complicated. What Marx once stated as his own life motto is also well suited as a motto for the exploration of Marx's biography and the development of his works: *De omnibus dubitandum* ("everything must be doubted").

NOTES

1/ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion* (London: Allen Lane, 2016); Sven-Eric Liedman, *A World to Win: The Life and Works of Karl Marx*, trans. Jeffrey N. Skinner (London: Verso, 2018); Michael Heinrich, *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society: The Life of Marx and the Development of His Work*, vol. 1, trans. Alexander Locascio (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2019).

2/ Francis Wheen, *Karl Marx* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), 29–30.

3/ Jonathan Sperber, *Karl Marx: A Nineteenth-Century Life* (London and New York: Liveright, 2013), xiii.

4/ Walter Jaeschke, "Genealogie des Deutschen Idealismus," in *Materialismus und Spiritualismus: Philosophie und Wissenschaften nach 1848*, ed. Andreas Arndt and Walter Jaeschke, (Hamburg: Meiner, 2000), 219–234.

5/ See Michael Heinrich, "*Capital* after *MEGA*: Discontinuities, Interruptions, and New Beginnings," in *Crisis and Critique* 3, no. 3 (2016): 92–138.

6/ See Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2017).

Ange Mlinko, *Distant Mandate*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

The murk of the overdetermined licenses the luculence of art but does not explain it.

Translation, or gloss: "luculence," derived from the Latin "lux," for light, lucid of speech, of brilliant clarity, adjectival form "luculent," as in "To my love (my luculent one!)," the ecstatic dedication that launches Ange Mlinko's most recent collection of poetry, *Distant Mandate*. For better or worse, depending on your tolerance for a principled ecstasis, luculence sets the tenor for the poems that follow. A list of contested poetic virtues composed in an atmosphere of anxiety about the staying power of the truthful and the factual might well place luculence (for what it wants) and ecstasy (for what it is) in close relation. What does poetry look like after the fact and what is it, however its merits are counted, that we crave when we aspire to read it or write it or call its name expecting something to materialize? A necessary proviso: when we say we want poetry, we only sometimes mean that we want poems.

Reviews of Mlinko's work have often concentrated on its fine, ludic finish, its tincture of Renaissance discipline, modernist precision, and New York School blitheness. Mlinko imagines poetry as a vector of joy, wonder, and legerdemain (both in the new sense, as accomplished trickery, and in the old one—*leger de main* or lightness of hand). In a literary landscape where poetry often proceeds (and often rightly) from positions of everydayness or trauma or a mixture of the two, this lightness of hand is distinctive. But Mlinko's legerdemain can often, quite cannily, deflect attention from the difficult demand for luculence, for accuracy, which is also, on occasion, a definitive poetic ambition.

I think of Roland Barthes, to whom I've turned before in order to understand Mlinko, in one of my favorite passages of *The Neutral*: "In the end," writes Barthes, and his mourning for his mother practically flares from subtext into text, "[the Neutral's] essential form is a protestation; it consists of saying: it matters little to me to know if God exists or not; but what I know and will know to the end is that He shouldn't have simultaneously created love and death." How confront the discontinuous nature of lived experience and the splendid sweep of its attachments, which comprehend mortality and affection, self-destruction and designer mirrors, bread and roses? How account for the tragicomic lengths to which we'll go to adjust our being to a world in which none of these things are entirely mutually exclusive?

One such means of adjustment might be to dwell in forms of poetry that traffic in this unruly polysemy, euphonious constraints that, like certain conventions of Gothic architecture, make heavy things appear light while not diminishing their mass by a single atom. Such a strategy might look less like coping and more like thriving, less like crawling and more like an arabesque. This is, perhaps, a roundabout way of hypothesizing about why Mlinko's passion for accuracy—exactitude of diction, fidelity to a world that unforgivably loads its inhabitants with the burdens of love and death—results so often not in a realism of despair, but one of wit, irony, agility.

Consider "Cooked in Their Own Ink," which invokes "Byblos—unreclaimed by the sea," a Phoenician site in modern Lebanon, where one of the oldest alphabetic inscriptions known to archaeology has been uncovered. The poem does not ignore the successive waves of conflict that have left their mark on Byblos and environs (Mlinko lived, for a time, in Lebanon). Nor does it exile the possibility of flourishing in ongoing destruction: "orchards of pomegranate / and lemon flourish amid ruins" and "like the melting down of coins, / bells, the material persists." The gift of the material lies in its transformative potential, the recuperation of fruit trees from spent soil, of metal from obsolete currency or clarions of celebration or alarm, though the poem is clear-eyed enough to know that transformation is not always an optimism. Those who have been "cooked in their own ink"—a poetic, if unkosher, way to be served up for a seaside dinner—are, as much as squids, the long succession of scholars, scribes, archivists, illuminators, book collectors, and poets—ink-users—who have added their own alphabetic traces to the palimpsest at Byblos. The result is a poem about the conditions for art-making as a necessary luxury in a world that often tries to enforce an impossible, generic rigidity on experience, to demand we live everything as tragedy or horror or, on the other end of the spectrum, as comedy or cozy mystery. One mode of lucidity—of accuracy—and one of the least comfortable—might be to represent, as carefully as possible, scenes of the irreducible, those places in a life that refuse to conform neatly to a received concept or an image, a narrative or an architecture of feeling. This strategy is an operation of realism in that it assumes a world in which some things tend to wicked ends—but not all things—in which some things tend to good ends—but not all things—in which some ends are definitive and others sing, without necessary ethical valence, of bodies changed to various forms.

Refrain: the murk of the overdetermined licenses the luculence of art but does not explain it.

Translation, or gloss (cont.): "overdetermined," a word that anglicizes the Freudian German of *Überdeterminierung* and signifies, roughly, a single phenomenon whose causes are multiple and each, in itself, adequate to produce the observed effect so that it is impossible to point to any one cause and say that this and this alone has caused it. *The Interpretation of Dreams* puts it this

way: "Every element of the dream content turns out to be over-determined—that is, it enjoys a manifold representation in the dream thoughts." That dark wood, seeded in silver proxies: bless thee, Bottom, bless thee. Thou art translated. Dreams are a not insignificant test case for this particular term of art.

That luculence may not be reduced to its causes (which are multiple and, in any case, singly sufficient), to its potential paraphrases (which are not the experience of the poem, though they may make transparent something of its meanings and its readers), or to its attributes (of which even a mostly comprehensive set bears the same relation to the whole as a list of ingredients to a lemon tart), becomes grist for dreaming in *Distant Mandate*. Some of the questions in play might be roughly rendered so:

What can art—or love, which art sometimes figures—mean after we come to terms with the practical vanity of the question of determinate causes, first or proximate? Where does love—or art, which love sometimes figures—go to die? What is living in love and poetry? How do attachments among people—and particularly lovers—find their forms? Eurydice to Orpheus, Psyche to Cupid, Beatrice to Benedick, in what shapes can attachments among people stay—or fail to stay—sustainable? In a reality constituted by its overdeterminations, how do we tell how we are historical and how it might matter? Under the faint, echoic thrum of that distant mandate, source unknown (even if we can't resist a guessing game), does some kind of new vitality become possible, some trill of humor, lightness, grace, the rococo of our substrate, bare life? For Mlinko, these concerns are not precisely new but when she returns to the quarry—or the query, as the case may be—it's with avidity. And this may be part of the point: to retrace air already troubled by her passage, not as repetition-compulsion, but, at the very least, as an irreverent acknowledgment of how a familiar landscape melts into its palimpsests and, at most, as a growth into new answers to old questions.

Mlinko has long been interested in poetry as a vehicle for grappling with how different histories—whether of violence, wonder, or formal inheritance—inscribe themselves in the present and so often in ways that may be intensely, unconsciously persuasive and invisible. This difficulty, which amounts to a faculty for understanding the terms of your reality as conventional and constructed—historical, in short—entails both the pain of the counterfactual (the knowledge that the catastrophe of things might have been otherwise) and the tenuous quickening of hope (because knowing that things might have been otherwise means they might still be other than catastrophic). For the theorist György Lukács, a useful term for this naturalized field of conventions we don't even know to question was "second nature." His version of this concept marks "a world that does not offer itself either as meaning to the aim-seeking subject or as matter, in sensuous immediacy, to the active subject…determinable only

as the embodiment of recognised but senseless necessities and therefore… incomprehensible, unknowable in its real substance." Lukács's great, wild hope for a somewhat creakily conceived lyric poetry was that it might, in brief, sublime sunbursts, give us access to that substance from which custom alienates us: "only in lyric poetry do these direct, sudden flashes of the substance become like lost original manuscripts suddenly made legible; only in lyric poetry is the subject, the vehicle of such experiences, transformed into the sole carrier of meaning, the only true reality." Mlinko's poetics, which is committed to a methodical exposure of the cruel absurdities of convention, is more modest in its claims about what kinds of substance we can recover. The project of raking up the past is one way of challenging the numbing bewitchment of second nature. But where another kind of critical sensibility might marshal against second nature an explicit campaign of demystification, Mlinko's response depends on another form of enchantment: a poetics that insists on the possibility of some kind of touch at a distance between language and its luculence. Her method for rendering this touch-at-a-distance is often a rejuvenation of received forms, devices, and tropes (rhyme, sonnet, aubade, villanelle, terza rima).

Refrain: the murk of the overdetermined licenses the luculence of art but does not explain it.

In "Captivity," Mlinko juxtaposes Christmas's associations with birth and prophecy and a seasonal display at a barbershop, interleaving dives into the historical with the scene of a child having his hair cut:

> Festive lights are strung up, arranged
> around amusing headlines on the wall:
> ROSENBERGS DIE (scissors flashing);
> BIN LADEN KILLED (clippers gnashing).
> And that's not all (no, that's not all…):
> MAN IN TX JAIL CELL FOUND HANGED.

The fairy lights of Christmas uneasily frame signs of aggression; jumbled headlines mark the death of the Rosenbergs (leftist Americans convicted of spying for the Soviet Union and subsequently executed by electric chair in 1953), the killing of Bin Laden (carried out in Pakistan on a CIA-led raid code-named Operation Neptune Spear), and an unnamed man found hanged in a Texas jail cell (the headline refuses to attribute agency for the act, which might or might not be suicide). Part of the horror here—that ironized "amusement" underscored by the barber's tools with their martial motions, "scissors flashing," "clippers gnashing"—lies in the logic of state-sanctioned violence that groups together these differently motivated examples of direct and indirect execution, as if they were consequences of natural inclination, as if they had happened entirely by free will ("ROSENBERGS DIE"), divine

justice ("BIN LADEN KILLED," but by whom?), or passive serendipity ("FOUND HANGED"). Balking this version of events, which erases a clear account of political agency and gestures too at the conspiracy theorist's overdeveloped faculty for pattern recognition, "Captivity" plays out in alternating octets and sestets, sonnets that rhyme almost sub rosa. The rhythmic momentum conjures up the self-soothing inevitability of a prosody our ears expect to resolve according to pattern—the old metrical contract.

All this makes a frame for the rather older versions of American captivity narratives that Mlinko raises from the dead in the rest of the poem: the stories of Mary Rowlandson, an American colonial of English extraction who recounted her period of detainment by Nashaway/Nipmuc Indians in a sensationally popular memoir published in 1682, and Rachel Plummer, whom the Comanche Indians captured and held for just under two years at various sites in what is now the state of Texas (she too wrote an account of her experiences, which was published in 1838 and would also go on to be widely read). "Captivity" is a poem preoccupied with firsthand accounts of earlier editions of American predicament; it contends with the viciousness of the colonial project, to which formalized damage is not collateral but agential and primary: "It's a bad omen;" runs one of the refrains of the villanelle "Frontier," "it portends some kind of agon." And to this anxiety about a dialectic in which only agon—conflict—repeats itself, Mlinko adds a consideration of what marriage and motherhood can mean in a culture that so frequently conditions human interaction as captive to the forms of aggression: a shotgun wedding for the ages.

Marriage, in guises angelic and decidedly more realist, is of more than notional significance to *Distant Mandate*. Mlinko's general explanatory note (a genre I love for its siren song of authorial intent) specifies the collection's subtending myths as Cupid and Psyche and Orpheus and Eurydice. The wryly titled "Epic," which follows a contemporary Psyche during a sojourn in Brooklyn, tracks a separation and ends with the return of the beloved, whose imminent arrival enables a more generous connection to the social past:

> A letter awaits Psyche. Dearest, j'arrive!
> And for a moment history is a vine
> like a motif of grape that comes alive—

I have deceived the birds, but Parrhasius has deceived Zeuxis—a joke so old its satisfactions have fermented. But this vivifying power is only one possibility for poetry and romantic love: the collection's opening terza-rima piece, "Cottonmouth," revives and kills again the shade of Eurydice, a scene reimagined in the genre of Southern Gothic, complete with festoons of Spanish moss and other climbers of the air. "Marriage as Baroque Music" negotiates these questions less euphemistically; its setting is a performance of Buxtehude's

"Liebster, meine Seele saget," which takes its text from an Ernst Christoph Homburg poem that draws, in turn, on the Song of Solomon's bridal hymn. The poem limns a picture of a marriage whose "hiatus is on hiatus," whose ongoing progress takes its colors from lines of music in which "the sopranos and the violins part ways." "Uncertainty of what they'll sing" is, the rhyming culmination tells us, "[what] makes the composition interesting." The poem suggests that the marriage plot after the marriage knot is nothing if not a series of active accommodations: "The marriage-scale./It starts with do." Even in—especially in—a contemporary moment that demands, more than ever, innovative ideals of love, partnership, intimacy, and poetry, the problem of how to negotiate inherited social and poetic forms, whether sonnets or marriages, persists and these are the particular constraints with which *Distant Mandate* concerns itself most attentively.

Refrain: the murk of the overdetermined licenses the luculence of art but does not explain it.

Distant Mandate depends on the difference between what art does and where art began, work that speaks directly to the collection's title. Drawn from a chapter of the Hungarian writer László Krasznahorkai's episodic novel *Seiobo There Below*, the phrase "distant mandate" refers, in Mlinko's reading, to a "speculat[ion] on the obscure origins of the Alhambra and, by extension, art itself." The Alhambra, the fortress or palace that dates to ninth-century Muslim Iberia, is often associated with visions of Al-Andalus as a golden age of art and cross-cultural tolerance. Its etiology is unknown and irretrievable as the name of the first song. If the making of art takes place in the twinned shadows of the nomothetic—the law-giving impulse and the utopian ideal—then the impish proposition is that the content of that stern law, that perfect point of origin, is irrecoverable and—perhaps—better lost to time. For only in the knowledge of the mandate's remoteness do the improvisatory, situational gestures that art requires become possible: a little room for play, for making adequate to a fallen world that could, nonetheless, be other and better than it is.

And we should laugh more. Against all, this, what the nonce demands from us, the detailed, heuristic-resistant business of actually living or reading or making in the time we know, what use some grand pronouncement, risible as a popinjay in a pigpen, about the nature of art or poetry, some mandarin declamation like "the murk of the overdetermined licenses the luculence of art but does not explain it"? Do all such propositions start to sound specious the moment they begin to insulate themselves against humor? Do they know they're playing the straight man? Can they be chivvied out of oracular pomposity and into a brighter accuracy, something made for wearing lightly?

In *Distant Mandate* are all the feints and fidgets, the baroque verbs and the usual characters from her antique bestiary: the centauresses and

Shakespearean heroines, wonders out of myth and landscapes out of hell, alphabets living and dead, cries and whispers, words now rarities or hapax legomenon, the world that's too much with us and the one that's not yet with us enough, traced on the rigorous vector from obscure Alhambra to unknowable omega, which, nonetheless, may be walked—in fact, always in fact—as a tightrope is—the nimble ethic.

Rebecca Ariel Porte

§

Dennis Tedlock, *The Olson Codex*. University of New Mexico Press, 2017.

Q'anil. I begin to write this with a hard thunderstorm of late May fulminating above me. Bursts of light make the hail as bright as mercury in the dark afternoon. There is a tornado warning in effect. Dennis would have liked this—the sound of thunder is *Toj* in the language of the Mayan K'iche' who are also called *Tohohil*, "thunderers" or the people of the pulsation of thunder, whose character is as that of clouds massing together and the deep coughs of a radiant jaguar. I return to Dennis's stunning immersion in the Mayan mythworld, *Breath on the Mirror*, and learn again that thunder is a hungry god. He presses his wooden foot of fire only on those nations that adopt, embrace, and feed him. Dennis supposes that the price was blood and hearts—that, like the ceremony of new fire in Mexico, every so often the ancient people of the Guatemalan highlands would extinguish every fire in the land, open a man's chest with a chert knife, and in a feast for the god rekindle the spark of fire down in that empty cavity of socket and ribs. I wonder if maybe words would also break open the chest, rekindle the fires of the thunder god, and fill our empty cavities with life and pulsation. As I finish this paragraph the clouds have moved through, the golden sky is splitting open again, and a feast of birdsong has returned to the green boughs.

A day passes, the day now is *Toj*—a day of paying debts and making good on contracts. In the afternoon, I teach the poetry of Cecilia Vicuña's khipu and watch my students wrap a classroom in thread. The room is decorated with one of those fake trees you find in just about any office building. I quote anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena—"things (mountains, soil, water, and rocks) are not only things; they are earth-beings, and their names speak what they are"—to teach the idea of the sign whose representability is intimately entwined with the materiality of the sign, a natural sign whose nature is its own, rather than that natural sign given to us by the ecclesiastical philosophers of the seventeenth century, whose nature is always only a system of signals

from a Christian God through his works. That natural sign whose iterability is infinite but whose reference is singular, that is, as Foucault put it, "everywhere the same: coeval with the institution of God." In Vicuña's threads, the sign is asked to stand for itself, to bear authority in the living materials of its signaling. I wonder which is more alive, though—the thread or the never anything but abstract tree in the room, the thread which carries the memories of every touch and unwinding, or that tree in permanently suspended symbolic virtuality, caught in a kind of perpetual imagining. Tedlock often writes about feeding the signs, making sure that those hungry for memory get what they need, and that those hungry for imagination also get what they need. Thunder again that evening; heavy rain; lightning bursting across the eastern sky.

My debts to Dennis. The first bit of critical writing I published was a review of Tedlock's *2000 Years of Mayan Literature* for *Jacket2*. The day after it was posted online he wrote me in alacrity because someone had considered his book so seriously. As a child of Central America working out how the racial idioms of my being related to an antiquity in the Americas, I took it very seriously. It was a beam of light to guide me into a course of study, a kind of critical and situated philology that embraced its object of inquiry. It was a real gift to the world, whose fractures and contradictions took on a new shape in the light of Mayan poetry and art. This dissatisfaction of paying debts to the dead lingers.

Tz'i'. The dog who guides the night sun through the underworld. In Tedlock's last book, *The Olson Codex: Projective Verse and the Problem of Mayan Glyphs*, he uses the dog glyph to explain how Mayan writers constantly manipulate the elision of sign, figure, and object in Mayan logographs. Signs can become images with the same fluidity in which objects in the world become signs. In one glyph a dog turns its head so you see only its ear, an "apparent abstraction [that] is the result of a scribe's decision to use a detail from a larger life form." It is a life form in semiotic silhouette, at once object, image, and sign. The larger life form in silhouette in this book is Charles Olson. It is concerned with Olson's relationship to the Mayan worlds of Yucatán in which he researched glyphs and where he wrote his epistolary ethnography with Robert Creeley, *Mayan Letters*. Tedlock's question is: What did Olson understand of these worlds? And, most pressingly, did Olson read the glyphs?

Tedlock's book emerged from the kerfuffle around the published translation of Heriberto Yépez's *Empire of Neomemory* in 2013. People were angry about this book. Surprisingly, I got tangled in these fights because I had published a celebratory review of Yépez's writings for the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. I got nasty emails about this—emails with the rant and rancor of a missive from Ezra Pound but with none of the intellectual content. Dennis and I talked about Yépez's book and he thought Yépez had got it wrong. As you

might remember, that book is a theorization of the imperial mnemotechnics at play in Olson's engagement with Mexican antiquity. Some people took it as an attack on Olson and the legacies of projectivism in which many poets identify themselves. They felt called out. And they called out Yépez. And there was a lot of signing of statements of denunciation. (The Obama years!) I wasn't as bothered by Yépez's book. I think the story he tells is an important one, but it is only part of the story, the part in which Olson is a metonym for imperial subsumptions. The other part, the part that Dennis felt needed telling, was the story of how the Mesoamerican worlds of Mexican antiquity also subsume and absorb, how they metonymize themselves in contemporary poetry through Olson. That is the story of *The Olson Codex*.

In the early drafts that I saw of this book Dennis was experimenting with its format. He wanted it to work like a Mesoamerican codex—an accordion screenfold, which readers could spread as one long sheet on the floor or fold into itself as they read, creating that textual layering that gives Mesoamerican codices their sense of temporal implication. The idea behind such Mayan time is that history is not an accumulation of foregone events; rather, it is a constant interaction between present and past, involving human times in the times of gods and animals also. These layers are like the intersecting threads in a weaving, whereon activity on a human plane of being affects the intersecting plane of myth and animals, while the actions in the myth and animal worlds also affect the stability of human existence. In the introduction to his translation of the Popol Vuh—the K'iche' Mayan story of creation, literally "the Book of the Mat" (i.e., seat of intersecting threads)—Tedlock called this sense of temporal implication "mythistory." Stealing the word from Thucydides's lopsided critique of Herodotus, he explains that in Mayan philosophy "instead of being in logical opposition to one another, the realms of divine and human actions are joined by a mutual attraction"; they are "interpenetrating rather than mutually exclusive." He goes on: "At one end of the Popol Vuh the gods are preoccupied with the difficult task of making humans, and at the other end humans are preoccupied with the equally difficult task of finding traces of divine movement in their own deeds." In folding Olson into such an accordion of time, Tedlock wished to express how Olson was already implicated in a more layered sense of time than standard rectilinear conceptions of history allow. In Yucatán Olson was moving through layers of Mayan mythistory that pressed on him and pulled him along.

But the question remains: Did Olson understand these worlds? And did he read the glyphs? As Tedlock explains it, the answer is complicated. Structured as a kind of almanac—situating the day-to-day chronology of Olson's *Mayan Letters* in Mayan ritual calendars, astronomical calculations, glyph decipherment, landscape morphology, dream interpretation, divinatory

readings, and indigenous history—Tedlock's copiously illustrated book reveals how much of the strangeness of Olson's little book emerges from raw ethnographic information. Olson's idea was that, as a poet who had begun to exploit the visual field of the page in his writing, he would be able to understand the Mayan writing system that combines image and sign to make its meanings. This led to some wacky speculations. But, as Tedlock shows, it also gave Olson a certain grasp of how glyphs worked, allowed him to work at the translation of some, and indeed let him see the Mayan visual and poetic aesthetics of parallelism. This is Tedlock's basic evidentiary claim. But his philosophical claim is perhaps more interesting.

That is, in the panoramic view of the Mayan mythworld that he gives in *The Olson Codex*—in which he "reconstructed the corresponding stars, planetary positions, lunations, birds, beasts, deities, and divinatory readings" that surrounded Olson in the year that he spent in Yucatán—Tedlock suggests that perhaps it doesn't matter what Olson understood of his object of inquiry. Perhaps, if we recognize the pulsing and encompassing life of this object, we can see how it implicates Olson without much troubling over Olson. Dennis and his wife, the anthropologist Barbara Tedlock, apprenticed in the art of K'iche' Mayan daykeeping (*ajk'in* or *ajq'ij*), which is a kind of readership of mythistory: "daykeepers measure the rhythms of time, watch the skies, pay attention to dreams, and listen to the stories people tell about themselves, seeking clues to events that are hidden in the past or have yet to happen." He brings this reading strategy to bear on Olson's writing, finding in Olson's descriptions of dreams and animals mirrors that reflect the Mayan gods ambling in the background, hearing in Olson's words the echoes of divine movements. To bring this world to the fore, at one point Dennis considered not naming Olson at all in the text. I think he realized quickly the indexical monstrosity that such an effort would make. But in several instances his figure is still referred to only as "the poet from Gloucester."

In like manner, I learned more about Dennis's background after his disappearance from the stormy world of the living. He grew up in Albuquerque and Taos, surrounded by that famous community of modernist artists and writers that had gathered around Mabel Dodge Luhan and Tony Luhan. As a teenager, he studied with the Cochiti artist Joe Herrera and did some archaeological work in the New Mexico Pueblos and in Mexico. He majored in art history and anthropology at the University of New Mexico, where his father was a scholar of D. H. Lawrence and, it turns out, MA advisor to Robert Creeley. His doctoral work at Tulane was on the verbal artistry of Zuni storytelling, which he published in an experimental "projectivist" form to convey the vocalization of the stories. With his wife, Barbara, he immersed himself in the Mayan worlds of Central America. In four decades of research and engagement there, especially in the communities of the Momostenango

municipality of the Guatemalan highlands (where they were initiated as daykeepers), he published many books and articles. For most of his career he was associated with the important poetics program at SUNY Buffalo. And I think that he was at his best when his sensibility as poet and artist could animate his analytical objects, when the work of verbal artistry could inflect an understanding and experience of worlds past, present, and future.

Further consideration of days—skies clear, crisp air, expecting night rain—tomorrow there will be more thunderstorms. Tomorrow is *B'atz'* in K'iche' Mayan, which means monkey; and it is *Chuen* in Yucatec Mayan, which means artisan. Tedlock explains in *The Olson Codex*: "together, these are divine names, belonging to twin monkeys who spend all their time writing books and carving masks." Patrons of the arts, these monkeys are also a warning to artists. Tedlock gives the warning in his Popol Vuh: "in theory, if we who presently claim to be human were to forget our efforts to find the traces of divine movements in our own actions, our fate should be something like that of the wooden people in the Popol Vuh. For them, the forgotten force of divinity reasserted itself by inhabiting their own tools and utensils, which rose up against them and drove them from their homes. Today they are swinging through the trees." In this Olson implicates himself again, as he writes in his *Mayan Letters*:

> The trouble is,
> it is very difficult,
> to be both a poet
> and an historian.

Edgar Garcia

§

The Collected Letters of Charles Olson and J. H. Prynne, edited by Ryan Dobran. University of New Mexico Press, 2017.

Since 2013, the University of New Mexico Press's Recencies Series has made available several key texts related to Black Mountain-era poetry and poetics, most notably Amiri Baraka and Edward Dorn's *Collected Letters* (2013), Edward Dorn's *The Shoshoneans: The People of the Basin Plateau* (2013), Dennis Tedlock's *The Olson Codex* (2017), and James Maynard's *Robert Duncan and the Pragmatist Sublime* (2018). My own 2017 contributions to the series, along with Robert Bertholf, include *Imagining Persons: Robert Duncan's Lectures on Charles Olson* and *An Open Map: The Correspondence*

of Robert Duncan and Charles Olson. The recent addition to the series of *The Collected Letters of Charles Olson and J. H. Prynne* (2017), edited with a substantial introduction by Ryan Dobran, brings into public circulation a strikingly rich expansion of Olson's intellectual interests and shares insight to Prynne's encounters with American poetry. Through these encounters, Prynne began to forcefully distinguish his writing from British contemporary poets like Donald Davie and Charles Tomlinson, directing his attention to the interiority of poetic composition where style, statement, and self converge. The constellations of inquiry and in-group performance in the letters between Olson and Prynne, Olson and Duncan, and Baraka and Dorn, make publicly available for the first time a record of correspondence between writers who often asserted their views at the extreme of literary margins in the 1950s and 60s. Many of the letters have been available to scholars working with library holdings, most notably the Charles Olson Research Collection at the University of Connecticut. But the public dissemination of the correspondences will extend the historical context of those poets who attempted new forms of open-verse poetry motivated by many non-literary areas of interest, such as geography, cultural history, and anthropology. The publications of Olson's letters to Duncan and Prynne join those already available in Olson's *Selected Letters* (2000) and in published correspondences with Cid Corman, Frances Boldereff, and, most notably, Robert Creeley, forming an invaluable record of poetic friendship, literary ambition, and formal innovation.

The new epistolary collections reveal aspects of Charles Olson, both the man and the poet, across various lines of communication, and it is this, in part, I would like to foreground: the force and contradiction of Olson's thought is revealed by circumstances and relationships, each drawing on the diverse energies of his larger poetic enterprise, most notably his epic of Gloucester, MA, *The Maximus Poems* (1983). While a comparative look at the range of his letters with multiple correspondents certainly yields many unique insights into the man and his project, I want to draw attention here to the rhetorical and grammatical aspects of Black Mountain poetics as they appear in the letters he shares with Duncan and Prynne. Grammar is particularly evident among the concerns of the Olson and Prynne correspondence; the grammars of attention to diverse texts and phenomena reveal both poets' commitments to the terms and conditions of their independent and shared studies. Summarizing a vast body of research in the fields of rhetoric and grammar risks certain generalizations, but the distinctions help make sense of Olson's capacities as a poet and as a figure active in poetic communities at mid-century. Modern scholarship emphasizes rhetoric as the study and teaching of persuasion, a heightening of awareness toward the ways communication is fostered by modes of reasoning and feeling through a range of media, including literature. But rhetoric is more than manipulative or instrumental

uses of language. Discussions between Duncan and Olson often center on the attitudinal relationship of writers to their audience. See, for example, the letters in *An Open Map* leading up to Olson's controversial essay "Against Wisdom as Such" (1954), wherein he takes Duncan to task for asserting the possibility of a wizened outlook prefiguring the written utterance. Duncan and Olson also challenge one another in terms of expanding their capacities for formal innovation in poetry, increasing their confidence and capabilities as writers while attempting to work in a modernist context that expanded the Pound-Williams tradition to acknowledge the location of the author in the written work. The physicality of attention and the performance of self at the limits of what one knows at a given moment of composition inherently located the author bodily in the temporal and spatial moment of poetic making. The rhetorical commitment stresses the persuasive possibilities connected to poetic form, and it places the writer's responsibility solidly in the process of composition.

Grammar, on the other hand, may be thought of as close heuristic analysis not only of texts, but of material information. The persuasive force of directed speech is less important to the grammatical outlook than to detecting relationships of syntax, cultural histories, material objects and the records of their uses. The grammarian searches etymologies and archives to acquire the fundamental information on the basis of which persuasive positions are exchanged. In the ancient tradition, grammar combined the study of something like anthropology, cultural history, and linguistics/philology. Through hermeneutic practices, the uses and meanings of words and acts were analyzed, deciphered for greater understanding. The ancient *Grammatike*, as Jeffrey Walker explains it in *The Genuine Teachers of this Art: Rhetorical Education in Antiquity* (2011), is in a sense the foundation of a larger paideia, and also represents processes of specialization, from linguistics to forms of literary exegesis. Certainly, *The Maximus Poems* as well as much of Prynne's work are built on this kind of attention to information, and the poet's attitude toward language and cultural material is what I would like to call here a grammatical outlook, if not an outright grammar of attention. Most of what follows, then, will take on this grammatical grounding of thought as shown in Olson's letters to the younger British author. Additionally, I want to stress how his correspondence with Prynne differs notably from his letters to Duncan, because to do so reveals intersecting concepts of language and its uses for larger poetic enterprises based in a variety of social and literary contexts.

Olson and Duncan approached each other as peers. Ezra Pound introduced them in 1947, and Olson visited Duncan in Berkeley that year when he traveled west to study documents related to the tragic Donner Party passage to California. Much of their correspondence focuses on details of publication, travel, and advocacy of Black Mountain poetics, as well as reinforcing their

mutual respect and devotion to one another as friends and literary peers. They approach form as a rhetorical project too, one devised from the energy and dynamic processes of planned design in specific contexts (see for instance their discussion while Duncan traveled in Spain in 1955–56 regarding dynamic cultural instantiations of form in individual artists). Rhetoric, if we think of it not as an application of figures and tropes in some stylistic process, but as a range of discursive features in ever-shifting poetic and institutional contexts, helps us see how Duncan and Olson interacted to achieve goals in their writing and in the larger communities of poets and publishers they inhabited. Their correspondence is concerned with the persuasive terms of coterie dynamics; the advocacy of literary projects; an expansion of the scales of publishing, from little presses to larger sites of cultural production at Grove and New Directions; and valuable disagreements and displays of mutual affection in efforts to articulate the meaning of "fuerza," the energy of new form that Duncan and Olson persuasively realized in the 1950s.

By contrast, Olson's exchanges with Prynne are less companionable, if more rigorous in terms of specific investigations. It is important here to note, for instance, that throughout much of the correspondence Prynne acts in many ways as Olson's amanuensis, tracking down and locating shipping records, mailing books to Olson, xeroxing articles, and even typing a transcript of *Maximus* for publication. The Weymouth Port books are records Prynne shares with Olson in a letter dated May 2, 1963, which provide details for some of the English merchant vessels involved in the colonization of Cape Ann, Olson's main precinct of study. These men are not peers, then, separated by age, geographic location, poetic methodologies, and social position. Olson had entered the final decade of his life when the correspondence commenced in 1961. His reputation already had been established in part through the publications of *Call Me Ishmael* (1947), "Projective Verse" (1950), Donald Allen's *New American Poetry* (1960), *The Distances* (1960), and publications of *The Maximus Poems* in several volumes (1953, 1956, and 1968). Much of his research and thinking about the American West, poetic form, and literary challenges to the literature and poetics associated with New Criticism had been worked out decades prior.

Prynne was a young Cambridge fellow and librarian, precocious, intellectually rigorous, and committed to literary history. When he met Olson he was about to publish his first book of poems, a publication he later disavowed (Prynne's books published during the period of his correspondence with Olson, notably *Force of Circumference and other Poems* [1962], *Kitchen Poems* [1968], and *The White Stones* [1969], reflect his encounter with the New American Poetry). Their reputations are incongruent insofar as Olson is older, more widely known, and more in command of the relationship in terms of his intellectual requirements; he is a figure of admiration for Prynne

when he initiates the correspondence in November 1961, writing to ask Olson for poems he might publish in the Cambridge literary magazine *Prospect*. Olson quickly becomes interested in the British poet's exhaustive attention to primary material, effortlessly (at least as it appears in the letters) tracking down shipping records and other sources for his and Olson's research. Prynne's letters are tightly focused, his deliberate and explanatory prose is informed by a different epistolary tradition than what we see often in Olson's performative shorthand. They explore some of the crucial primary sources of *Maximus* and help us understand the young scholar-poet's role as Olson's intellectual confidant early in their correspondence.

If the Duncan and Olson letters can be characterized as a complex social and, by extension, rhetorico-cultural project, then we have in the letters to Prynne a contrasting focus on the integrative material of poetry, its language and sources. This side of Olson is committed to the terms of his grammar. And the grammatical orientation found in the correspondence led them to observe the basic role of words, their histories and functions, and what Prynne refers to as "tones of being," explaining in a letter dated March 18, 1966:

> The language with which we specify the tones of being will affix only to processive nouns, as in "with pleasure," "for pleasure." Otherwise we can only relate the matter elsewhere: "I did it for good reason, in spite of objection, out of very personal motives." What we should know is that "doing for its own sake" is specifically a form of being, and not part of the fiscal linkage of transfer. To do it "for love" or "for pleasure" is the partial & localized recognition of real continuance, the ground of feeling.... And if the tones ever could diversify and blend into a complete arc, the reason-and-motive dialect(ic) would simply melt into the ground.

This close attention to the relationship of words and their tonal patterns compels the interests of both men, though Olson directs the conversation toward the material grammar of written records. Writing on April 24, 1966, more than a month later, he asks: "any way there...to check vessels built before 1630: in particular the *Royal Merchant*, 600 tons by William Stevens (Stephens—+ I'm pretty sure for Stepney? date of building—? + if discernable any info on shipyard capable of such bldg?" In one sense, Olson shifts the conversation to his interests, leaning on the young scholar to locate information related to the project of *Maximus*. Here I'm trying to identify impulses toward a careful discovery on the parts of Olson and Prynne in their correspondence by suggesting that grammar, an area of study with overlaps into linguistics, material histories, anthropology, and geography established meaning for them as poets and as committed coworkers in fields

that are not typically connected to poetry. For instance, Olson and Prynne connect lexicography to everyday things, and so the back-and-forth of their correspondence remains focused on this line of understanding: shared cultural resources, both of language and the material culture through which it moves and leaves traces in documents and habits of usage, are seen as the main objective of the letters. Even when there are incongruent exchanges between them (Prynne is the more active correspondent), they are frequently united by joint concerns over the interpretations of records and texts, sharing in the transmission of information and a growing body of knowledge derived from the complex intersection of disciplines once understood as grammar.

Certainly, however, the younger Prynne provided much of the labor of friendship through gifts, documents, typescripts, and contributions from his own scholarly and poetic training. Such kindness was not always reciprocated. There are often long gaps on Olson's side of the correspondence, and in 1966–67, while visiting the UK, he does not even go to Cambridge to see Prynne, though they do meet briefly elsewhere. Dobran relates in his introduction that the two poets did not really get along in person, which is perhaps one reason why the correspondence drifts off after Olson's visit. Things thereafter cool down between them, Olson's final letter posted in 1968, and in less than two years Olson would die. Prynne nonetheless made efforts to maintain close contact with the older poet until his death in January 1970, though they were not always reciprocated. A gift to Olson, Ernest de Selincourt's edition of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, drew vehement rebuke. Writing to Prynne on January 18, 1967, he says:

> Dear Jeremy: I abhor...of course (+ all the sticky feeling of + bet. DW [Dorothy Wordsworth] (shit) etc + STC [Samuel Taylor Coleridge] (germ)

Olson's dismissal of British Romanticism wasn't a surprise to those who knew him, and many understood his rejection of the expressivity and subjectivity associated with Wordsworth especially, a poet who was, nonetheless, close to Prynne's thinking. The notational shorthand of Olson's rejection is in keeping with much of his side of the correspondence, where short bursts of passion function as affective signposts for the receiver. Still, there is evidence of great affection on both sides of the correspondence, and Prynne's patience and generosity are apparent. This collection of letters reveals a view of both men as complex in feeling and temperament, both giving to each other what was possible within the limitations of their particular domains of study and creative practice. Prynne's energy and determination of scholarly research helped give the correspondence rigorous definition, bringing to life a new grammar of mid-century poetics that remains instructive for anyone committed to the ways intricate forms of information can enhance poetic practice now.

This book is distinguished from the other published Olson correspondences by focusing less on poetic communities—he and Prynne are too separated geographically for that—but on an array of topics like the crucial questions of shipping across the Atlantic, new developments in linguistics, then-current scholarship in ancient European myth and society, and newly encountered research among geologists of the period. Prynne rejected a postwar tradition that had formed in the UK through the efforts of W. H. Auden, with poets like Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes turning to a formal poetic structure through which they pronounced strong attitudes toward modern society. The young Cambridge poet was much more embedded in the transmission of language, how its formal usages revealed unexamined attitudes or cultural positions. He looked through shared cultural usages of language to achieve a poetic stance from within the poem, rather than attempting, like many of his better-known contemporaries, to impose social positions on the poems themselves. This could be seen as yet another distinction between rhetoric and grammar, where the former is understood as a conscious approach to the shaping of language for advantageous purposes while the latter investigates the ways attitudinal relationships are socially embedded in the terms of language and its history of shared usages.

Dobran announces in the introduction that obscure terms and figures are easily available through internet searches, but this is easier said than done, and brief editorial notes would enhance and ease the reading experience. This collection is really prepared for those readers and scholars familiar with Olson and Prynne, though I hold out hope for the possibility of new readers who might find much to value in the terms and innovations of Black Mountain poetics. As a record in its own right, Dobran has made an admirable contribution to helping us see the relationship not only of Olson and Prynne, but of the larger connections between US and UK poets in the 1960s, where Black Mountain authors Edward Dorn and Robert Creeley, *Paris Review* poetry editor Tom Clark, and the British/Canadian scholar Ralph Maud all sojourned at various times, meeting Prynne and others in the UK literary scenes. But these figures are mostly sidenotes to a more substantial discussion held over nearly a decade regarding poetry's ability to express cultural patterns and linguistic modes of relationality rather than insisting on the formal play of the art as it is shaped into a literary object. As in other Black Mountain correspondences, conversation is informed by much more than literary traditions. The editorial commitment to excavating a grammatical enthusiasm shared by Olson and Prynne provides great insight to mid-century writing, showing how Olson and Prynne's grammar prepares new possibilities for us now.

Dale Martin Smith

§

Stephanie Strickland, *How the Universe is Made: Poems New & Selected, 1985–2019*. Ahsahta, 2019.

Some years ago I sat down with a poet friend and commenced to complain about the then-current categories into which critics herded poets. The terms varied, but (or so I claimed, grousing over my espresso) they always seemed to stress the same division, as if the line drawn between Donald Allen's *The New American Poetry: 1945–1960* and the Hall/Pack/Simpson anthology *New Poets of England and America* had exhausted the possibilities for poetic distinctions and affinities. "So," said my sensible friend, "let's come up with some others." One of our ideas was to divide poets into astrologers and astronomers—not in any literal sense, although a little effort would probably bring examples of poet-astrologers and poet-astronomers to mind. We sought, rather, a distinction between temperaments. Robert Bly? Surely an astrologer, just as Robert Duncan would be. Marianne Moore? An astronomer, just like Rae Armantrout. I hadn't thought about this little parlor game for years, but when I began reading *How the Universe is Made*, Stephanie Strickland's new and selected poems, I was overwhelmed by a powerful sentiment: here, I knew, was an astronomer, as pure as they come.

The first distances we encounter in *How the Universe is Made* aren't interstellar, though. The poems Strickland has selected from her early collection *Give the Body Back* (1991) begin with an account of the distance between a shipboard speaker and a medusa, a briefly glimpsed jellyfish as elusive as it is splendid in its alterity. It's no coincidence that Strickland chooses to write about the jellyfish in its mythologically resonant medusa phase of development: many of the poems from *Give the Body Back* depict a feminine presence as unnerving, in her way, as the snake-headed woman from Greek mythology: the poet's mother. We get the gist of the relationship in a childhood memory from "Mother: Dressed Up" where, mid-embrace, the speaker (most likely a child) tells us:

> I am stunned
> by your body, trying
> to hide
>
> its eagerness
> to pull away
> from mine.

Later, in "My Mother's Body," the emotional distance comes from the daughter's inability to open up to the mother. "Tell me about writing," the frail and aged mother asks from her hospital bed, spreading her tube-and-wire entangled

arms. "But," replies the daughter, "I could not tell her." The daughter has been as paralyzed by the mother as any Greek hero caught in Medusa's gaze. We see the origins of this poet's sensibility: reserved, rational, and analytic, rather than emotionally warm; systematic rather than spontaneous; Apollonian, not Dionysian. An astronomer.

Perhaps it is not surprising that Strickland turns to Simone Weil as the subject of her next book, *The Red Virgin*: Weil, after all, is another woman haunted by distances, what will to connect she has constantly foiled by a world that refuses to embrace her. Strickland's poem "Comic Progression, 1939–" gives a kind of précis of Weil's attempts to connect to, and even die for, community. Weil constantly seeks to be sent to the front in France's war with Germany, and is consistently rejected. Later, she is sentenced to jail, and looks forward to finding community there, but her conviction is overturned and the opportunity for fellowship in chains disappears. She tries to join the Catholic Church, but her reasons for becoming Catholic do not fit with the priest's sense of theological norms. Later, having fled to England, she asks repeatedly to be sent back to France as a saboteur, but is rejected and sent to a solitary desk job. In several poems Strickland implies a parallel between Weil's situation and Weil's thought: Weil's is, after all, a theology of a God who withdraws so that we may pursue him, and one of her great notions is that of the *metaxu*, a point of division that is also a point of connection. The *metaxu* is like a prison wall that divides the inhabitants of different cells, but in so doing creates the conditions for them to communicate by knocking on the wall. Weil's eventual death—starving herself in English exile out of sympathy for the French living under occupation—is just such a *metaxu*. She exits this world alone, but does so to sacrifice the isolated self on behalf of the community: she departs in order to draw close. This kind of distant closeness fascinates Strickland, and when she contemplates Weil's death she thinks of her own mother. In a strange way, the figure of Weil becomes a *metaxu* itself, allowing Strickland to return to a contemplation of the death of her emotionally distant mother at a safe remove.

True North, Strickland's next book of poems, examines codes, broadly conceived, and the makers of codes, seeking the significance of both. She begins with a poem on the paleographer David Diringer's *The Alphabet: A Key to the History of Mankind*, but soon focuses on two other figures, one well-known to readers of poetry (Emily Dickinson) and one not—the nineteenth-century American mathematician, physicist, and chemist Josiah Willard Gibbs. Both Dickinson and Gibbs were introverts, and the products of a particular strain in New England Protestantism that fostered inner passion and outward restraint. Both Dickinson and Gibbs quietly fabricated universes out of their observations, and in their different ways made private codes of symbols that have grown to greater public significance. Gibbs's work

on important forms of scientific notation eludes my understanding, but I am reassured by Wikipedia that it made possible both statistical mechanics and modern vector calculus. Strickland, who understands these things, notes that Gibbs's social isolation and reserve could be overcome by his fascination with systems of notation, which brought him into contact with others and eventually made possible major innovations in the world. This, perhaps, was his *metaxu*. In "Young Willard Gibbs is a Physicist" she writes of Gibbs as:

> at home […]
> with ideas; not, with people—yet, if it were
> important, he would praise: eulogizing
> Clausius; if it were very important,
>
> he would fight: over vectors, with Tait.
> "… but I believe that there is a deeper
> question of notions underlying
>
> that of notations. Indeed, if my offence
> had been solely in the matter
> of notation…."

Gibbs, in Strickland's rendering, needs solitude to create the language for certain mathematical ideas, but at the same time he insists on the social being of those ideas, their validity as a way of participating in the world. We get a good sense of this in "0 Shortcut to What?" which presents us with the only recorded moment of Gibbs speaking in a Harvard faculty meeting over a long academic career:

> Gibbs, hidden at home, creating the loneliness
> he needed to assume just one responsibility—for which no thanks,
> much complaining of it, some wonder.
> […]
> The reward for
> getting past the failings of language? To be found
> un-readable. Gibbs rose. He said: Mathematics
> is a language. And sat down.

Gibbs highlights the social character of the ideas of mathematics—asserting that math is a language makes a claim for its ability to connect people, to produce the conditions of sociality, circulation, and communication.

Later, in "Heaven and Earth, 1666," Strickland shows us a submerged human connection between isolated scientists working on the same problems

over centuries, with Copernicus's observations augmented by Tycho Brahe, then formalized by Kepler, and incorporated in Newton's thought. Astronomy separates these men, alone in their studies or staring at the night sky, but also connects them—it is a kind of *metaxu*. The isolated figure finding a strange, oblique connection with others fascinates Strickland, and she returns to her icons of connected isolation—Weil, Dickinson, and Gibbs—again and again throughout her poetry.

Indeed, Strickland dedicates her next book, *WaveSon.nets/Losing L'Una* to Simone Weil as just such a figure, noting her need to reach beyond isolation in "her Life & Thought;/her need to touch;" In the poems of this book we see Weil dedicating herself to humble labors—pitching hay, working beetroot fields, picking grapes—in an attempt to identify more fully with the common people. We also find Strickland's instructions on how to approach her poems, which are often constructed in series and, even when presented as discrete, connect to other poems in the oeuvre via recurrent characters, themes, and motifs (count the number of witches, of references to Adam naming the creatures of Eden, or of mentions to cuneiform script as you read *How the Universe was Made* and you'll see what I mean). "Gentle reader," Strickland writes in "Errand Upon Which We Came," "begin anywhere. Skip anything. This text/is framed/fully for the purpose of skipping." Strickland gives us the stars: she lets the reader draw the connecting lines that make constellations.

Some will be frustrated by this invitation for readers to make their own provisional wholes out of the parts on display: the obliquity and fragmentation of the "WaveSon.nets," for example, can seem more like a collection of notes for poetry than like fully realized poems, and "slippinglimpse," from the next collection *Zone: Zero*, consists of a collection of snippets from various articles and interviews about technology and the arts, awaiting strong intervention by the reader if she is to find points of connection and areas of signification. But this elusiveness is a common enough feature of the period style of experimental poetry during the years covered by the collection, and it provides its own pleasures. I'm never quite going to understand a line like "Gnova, Gnomon, Goose, Ouzel, Orca, Longdark" from "WaveSon.net 14," but that's not going to stop me from enjoying it as it rolls off the tongue, or as I attempt to wedge it into some elusive pattern of meaning.

Given her love of scientific codes, it should come as no surprise that Strickland—who sits on the board of the Electronic Literature Organization—adores information technology. We see this in *Zone: Zero*'s "Ballad of Sand and Harry Soot," a kind of elliptical drama or dialogue between Sand, a figure for silicon-based computer technology, and Soot, an embodiment of human life, destined to end as ashes. We see it, too, in her increasing turn to ekphrastic writing in her more recent books, where the art she engages is invariably electronic: "Rara Avis," for example, from *Dragon Logic*, addresses

a telepresence installation by Eduardo Kac in which remote participants are invited to inhabit the subjectivity of a robotic macaw in an aviary. Here we see the idea of the *metaxu* yet again, as people separated by technological mediation are also connected by participation in the shared subject position of the bird. Another poem from the *Dragon Logic*, "Algorithm," includes a list of instructions that reveal Strickland's quiet sense of delight in the construction of codes and systems:

map a metaphor or more
to computational processes (not
to compositional
capiche?)

twiddle (de dee) tweak (de dum)
execute / run repeat
till well (enough)

The twiddle de dee and twiddle de dum are entirely ludic, and show the spirit of joy that must have animated Strickland in the construction of her many electronic poems, descriptions of which appear, along with illustrations, in the final section of *How the Universe is Made*, "Poems Procedural, Generative, Kinetic & Hypertextual." Several of these are, alas, no longer functional with current information technology.

Ahsahta is to be commended for many things about this book: the handling of difficult typography, the presentation of numerous images, and the selection of the cover image, a Micronesian stick chart of wave patterns and ocean currents in the form of an irregular grid of rods and pebbles—the perfect representation of Strickland's sensibility. Only a nitpicking wretch would bother to complain about a table of contents that lists only the titles of books rather than of individual poems, or of endnotes that tell you who Walt Disney was but do little to explain what Bell's theorem is all about, other than refer the befuddled reader to John Stewart Bell's 1964 *Physics*.

Strickland's name has never figured prominently among the experimental poets of her generation, which includes such figures as Lyn Hejinian, Bob Perelman, and Charles Bernstein. Perhaps this is because Strickland has had only a marginal connection to academe, or perhaps it is because the delight that animates these poems is—like Josiah Gibbs's quiet passion—only detectable when one listens carefully. No matter. *How the Universe is Made* gives those who have missed out on Strickland's remarkable journey a chance to catch up.

Robert Archambeau

§

Lou Sullivan, *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan*, edited by Ellis Martin and Zach Ozma. Nightboat, 2019.
Zach Ozma, *Black Dog Drinking from an Outdoor Pool*. Sibling Rivalry Press, 2019.
Oliver Baez Bendorf, *Advantages of Being Evergreen*. Cleveland State University Press, 2019.

The marble ass that covers the new publication of the diaries of Lou Sullivan, the gay and trans activist and writer who passed away from AIDS complications in 1991, is a useful hint at the person we are about to meet within the book's pages. Sullivan is the definition of boy crazy. From his beginnings as a young Christian child ravenously obsessed with the Beatles ("Paul-Ringo-Paul-Ringo they keep bouncing around my head. They're so perfect. […] This is a love so strong and real. Oh, love me, too, anyone") to the adult cruising San Francisco's leather bars, Sullivan writes with awe about men and the love men might share. "The beauty of a man loving a man just takes away my breath," he writes in a late entry.

As hinted by its title, *We Both Laughed in Pleasure: The Selected Diaries of Lou Sullivan* is a deeply erotic book. Sullivan's diaries record in great detail his sexual exploits, romantic infatuations, and complex personal relationships. These reminiscences are written in a style somewhere between childlike giddiness and deft description, where you can sense that Sullivan is turning himself on with every entry he writes. His life and diary are committed to gay sex, seeing in it the embodiment of the challenge and passion of life at the margins. "What has it been about male / male love that has made me desire it so?" Sullivan asks himself in a late entry, "The fact that it didn't *happen*—that the two people involved really *wanted* to be with each other, and that the other person chose to love him […] despite all forces against them, they clung to each other with desire."

But the sex Sullivan records in these pages is not always so affirming and so brave as he idealizes gay sex to be. Though Sullivan often describes sex as a useful tool toward learning truths about his own manhood, the reader is made painfully aware (more aware, it seems, than Sullivan was at times) of the way sex becomes an obstacle to Sullivan's becoming. His lovers, especially the "T" who is the last major relationship of his life, often use sex as an arena to debate Sullivan's transition and to propose certain ideas about how he should embody his gender. It is often saddening and frustrating to read the ways Sullivan's lovers leverage their own sexual identities against his still-blossoming gender identity, or to read his lovers using sexual pleasure against his plans for transition, as when he writes "[T] said I shouldn't get the cock operation because I *am* enjoying my pussy. I agreed and told him what a special person he is."

This selection of journal entries, which Sullivan always imagined being published, makes for an essential record of the daily frustrations and pleasures of coming into a sense of self. Importantly, it is a useful record of a scene (specifically, 70s and 80s queer San Francisco, both its activist networks and its sexual ones) and a record of how an individual came to understand themselves as an individual within a scene. But at the moment when Sullivan finally holds the most crystal-clear sense of himself, he is diagnosed with HIV. Sullivan has said both in the diaries and in public interviews that his greatest sadness upon diagnosis was fear that his bottom surgery (begun, but not healed properly, in 1986 before diagnosis) would never be fully finished and corrected, as he feared doctors would be unwilling to do surgery on him.

In a book textured by humor, pleasure, ecstasy, giddiness, and sadness, this "final chapter" is obviously dominated by pain. Though his always charming and funny style remains surprisingly present, there is a clear loss of energy and life excitement in this last section, as Sullivan details some of his medical routines, new difficulties, and friends' deaths. But, at the very least, Sullivan dies having definitively answered major questions about himself that have been puzzled over for the hundreds of pages that make up this selection. He dies, to use his own terms, "finally a MAN!" having fought long and hard for a place in the gay community he has admired since he was a child. It is perhaps this knowledge that lets him write, with characteristic goofiness:

> I heard this remark on television tonight and thought it so appropriate, I wish I'd have thought of it myself back in the olden days, when Dad used to ask me, "What's it all about?" The answer:
>
> *You do the hokey-pokey*
> *And you turn yourself around*
> *That's what it's all about…*

Susan Stryker, in her heartfelt introduction to the selection, is exactly right when she says, "get ready to meet a great soul." That's what this book feels like, an opportunity to meet someone great. The sleek editing work by Ellis Martin and Zach Ozma, the campy but handsome design by Joel Gregory, and the joint publishing work of Nightboat Books and the now-departed Timeless, Infinite Light, together make that meeting both possible and deeply pleasurable.

We Both Laughed in Pleasure is only half the reason why its coeditor Zach Ozma is having a good year. 2019 has also brought the release of his debut poetry book, *Black Dog Drinking from an Outdoor Pool*, a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age narrative told in verse through a small group

of characters named simply by their roles: "mother," "father," "dog," "boy," and "i." Its language is plain and quietly sad, with moments of evocative tension. For these reasons and others, the book's most obvious ancestor is *The Book of Frank* (2009) by CA Conrad. Readers familiar with *The Book of Frank* will recognize its precise mix of melancholy, desire, repulsion, and wonder in Ozma's poems such as "Garbage Man":

> father accuses mother of an affair with the garbage man
>
> but it's dog that licks the slime from between
>
> the trash collector's wicked fingers

Ozma shares with Conrad an ability to make every ingredient of a scene feel confoundingly meaningful, communicative in ways that unsettle rather than answer questions. It's an ability that makes the formal simplicity of the lines in this queer biography feel resplendent, as Conrad's sparse free verse did in *The Book of Frank*.

The narrative seems to tell us how an "i" comes into selfhood in an upbringing with a difficult, distant, and hard-to-read father, and in the aftermath of that father's suicide. The "dog" overlaps with several of the character's embodiments, working as a particularly mobile image and emotional site. We get scenes where father becomes dog ("father licks himself clean / father curls up by fire / father crawls under house to die"), or scenes where the "i" becomes dog ("it leaves soft impressions in my fur"). The "dog" might be the comforting companion during grief, or the lived, furry embodiment of grief's complexity.

In a series of puns on the phrase "good boy," the "i" and the dog are in some form of allegiance, the phrase marking a category they would both like to belong to, sometimes even do. Becoming "dog" is mapped onto becoming "man/boy," so that the struggle over the image of the dog that organizes this book is based in the fact that "father" represents a "garbage man" and a "bad dog" ("we lied and said father doesn't bite"), while the "i" is struggling to fit into being a "good boy." But even as I say that, I am aware that there is a kind of stretchiness to the images struggled over in this book, and that such a reading fails to account for all of the textures "dog," "father," "boy," and "i" take up.

Through all this stretchiness, it is clear that *Black Dog Drinking from an Outdoor Pool* is a book about death as an instance of becoming, where becoming might mean something like animalization. Its pages are peppered with transformations:

father's dog died when i was born
house too small for many pups
dog curled up in mud
became a redwood

i curled up in low pile carpet
became a boy

Without making any guesses as to the timeline of the editing of *We Both Laughed in Pleasure* and the writing of *Black Dog Drinking from an Outdoor Pool*, it seems to me that Ozma either learned from or appreciates Sullivan's critical attention to the way events, especially sex and death, catalyze or frustrate the process of personal becoming. While Sullivan's book is a record of the ordinary, a record of his becoming over time, Ozma's is a bestiary of the ordinary, somewhere between fairy tale and memoir.

Animalization, becoming, and death as a set of questions for trans life is a problem set encountered in another 2019 poetry collection. Oliver Baez Bendorf's *Advantages of Being Evergreen* is a brief collection of woodsy lyrics published by the Cleveland State University Poetry Center. The book's central concern seems to be the difficult task of imagining sanctuary for a body heavy with memory, catalyzed into change, and charged with desire:

Earth not even buried

in the earth. So many gay
bodies on fire, offerings to
gods who don't deserve us,
gods of punishment, gods of plight.

The land in the holler weeps.
Still we dream of sanctuary,
follow a hand-drawn map
up the mountain.

On the quest to "put on a self," the speaker in *Advantages of Being Evergreen* takes a deep dive into the ecosystem, looking to nature for a model of self both wild and preservable. Its style is primarily in-line with the contemporary lyric styles that CSUPC has published in recent years, though the book is also populated by some experiments in form. In its sound and its images, the book strives for consonance over dissonance, though always upholding "wildness" as a form for life. Baez Bendorf writes: "I inject, grow a beard, bleed a while… I become my wildest self / through make-believe—to the river with this thunderous me[…]."

Rainwater, the river, foxes, and bears all repeatedly appear in these poems in the context of grief, transition, queerness, their presence received with something akin to awe or desirous curiosity. The river is the star of one of the collection's most impressive poems "River I Dream About." The poem is a repetitive structure of fragments using the word "river" ("River that curve down a backbone./River through which I particle heat."), sharing an interest with a few other poems in the collection in a more procedural, patterned, and mechanical language. But the poem, as it continues, breaks its form with the I's transition to the sentence's subject, moving away from phrases like "River I dream about" to something like the poem's final lines: "I will be there, printing textures of rock / on the skin of me, belly down, face down. / My god it is good to be home." What starts as a kind of scenic and recurrent exploration of a variety of rivers is slowly made into a home by the appearance and the movement of the I within the network of rivers. What the poem slowly builds with this grammatical shift is a sense of belonging, the feeling of one's body belonging in an environment, and the feeling that one's body belongs to oneself, wild or otherwise: "river where/my fur belongs to me."

I recall Lou Sullivan's journals when reading the closing lines from Baez Bendorf in another standout poem "Who Spit into the Pumpkin, Who They Waiting For": "What I want from the river is what I always want: / to be held by a stronger thing that, in the end, chooses mercy." It is the sensitive portrayal of gay desire's risky tenderness that seems shared between Baez Bendorf and Sullivan. I mean by that both the feeling of the love existing "despite all forces," to use Sullivan's words of worship, and the danger always associated with the act of loving men. The erotics in *Advantages of Being Evergreen* are relatively subtle and smartly written, even when they seem to be the innocent and clumsy desires of summer camp and the wilderness. Gay writing has always been obsessed with how to precisely catch and describe our desires, especially the love and sex that moves through the summer heat. In this ongoing debate, Baez Bendorf has landed somewhere productive. "Something happens under the bridge. I come up singing," he writes in "Who Spit into the Pumpkin, Who They Waiting For." "Something" might be a personal transformation, an interpersonal act of desire, an interpersonal act of violence, or something more mundane, the ambiguity capturing some of the subtle but uncensored description of gay desire. The line's placement in the middle of a nearly prosaic stanza makes its central transformation, its "something" that "happens," feel ordinary, as much a part of the landscape as the eggs, hens, peppers, marjoram, and pumpkin that surround it.

In the connection between desire, the animal, the natural, and trans life, *Advantages of Being Evergreen*—along with recent books like Ozma's collection, Chely Lima's 2017 *What the Werewolf Told Them*, CA Conrad's 2014 *ECODEVIANCE*, and *The Criminal: Invisibility of Parallel Forces* by Max

Wolf Valerio—is not exactly unprecedented. But in Baez Bendorf's version, this thematic connection is staged, perhaps deceptively, as the connection of all things. He writes of a kind of congregation of "everything under the moon" in a form of relation that is pleasurable, mysterious, and productive. The book's finish occurs in the great ecstasy of this congregation: "the earth is my home and there is / much to cry about. It always helps / to look up, look all the way up // look up, look up, look up, we look / up, up, up." The repeated words, along with the mapping of earth/heavens along issues of sanctuary, make this conclusion the most explicit revelation of the book's aesthetics of the spiritual.

Baez Bendorf's book is aesthetically and thematically working over the issue of belonging, a theme Sullivan mapped constantly in journal entries throughout his life. Sullivan felt, by turns, an unprecedented sense of belonging and a confounding sense of exclusion amongst his scene of San Francisco queers. He worshipped gay men's love, of which he endlessly desired to become a part, but was often reminded (by lovers, by friends) of his difference from the cis gay men that he gave so much care to. The writings of Sullivan, an ancestor for all of contemporary queer community, but especially for trans gay men, clearly offer a set of tools, anxieties, dreams, and desires to the many trans gay talents writing now: Ozma, Baez Bendorf, Stephen Ira, Ely Shipley, Jay Besemer, Ari Banias, to name only a limited few in poetry. In these publication's coinciding in 2019, this lineage is made resplendently clear.

Gabriel Ojeda-Sagué

§

Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Graphic Novella*. Xexoxial Editions, 2015.
Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Days and Works*. Ahsahta Press, 2017.
Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Around the Day in 80 Worlds*. BlazeVOX, 2018.

What are we engaging with when we first pick up these three recent volumes by Rachel Blau DuPlessis, each with its punning title reflecting the literary world back to itself? A few paratextual notes can aid us: *Around the Day in 80 Worlds* is described as a "companion book" to *Days and Works*, and both are part of a new "post-*Draft*s meta-poem called *Traces*." *Graphic Novella* belongs to a group of interstitial books that dwell "between words and visuals." As I have discussed elsewhere, *Drafts*, described as a "small epic," was "a self-confessed challenge to Ezra Pound's *Cantos* (a "counter-Cantos"), as well as a simultaneous, spectacular refusal of the slim volume

and the monumental volume at the same time."† The serial poem extends to 114 parts published over five main volumes in which individual poems talk back and forth to each other along numerical lines calculated in groups of nineteen (e.g., 1/20/39/58/77/96). The complexity of its folds drew on the Jewish tradition of Midrash involving interpretation, reinterpretation, and speaking back to ancestors.

Encountering this new "meta-poem," *Traces*, we then wonder where DuPlessis will lead us this time, on what entangled journey between and across the covers of books? The three books considered here demonstrate considerable diversity across and within each volume and, as we might expect, speak to each other, so this review will look at the whole impression as well as the individual volumes. *Around the Day in 80 Worlds* is a sequence of poems infiltrated with found text as a writer's notebook might be, *Days and Works* is peppered with newspaper clippings pasted on to the pages, and *Graphic Novella* consists of large-format collaged pages of text and image. DuPlessis has grown increasingly interested in collage in the last ten years, and *Graphic Novella* is one of her most sustained pieces of work in that form.

How, then, do we read these volumes together? As tributes to early twentieth-century modernist experimentation? As an act of faith akin to Walter Benjamin's belief in the "revolutionary energies that appear in the 'outmoded'"? Or as the last gasp of the book in the teeth of the World Wide Web? Why, like all DuPlessis's oeuvre, they are all of this and more, always more—self-questioning and self-defining hybrids, always moving beyond literary genre. "Is this a scrapbook?" *80 Worlds* asks of itself. *Graphic Novella* wonders whether it is a "dialogical notebook." In fact, each question could be equally posed about the other text. DuPlessis unpicks strategically and subversively as she sews, writing in acute awareness of "a thing filled with the guilt of its genre." Indeed, these works are aware of the compromised status, not only of genre, but of all forms of literary classification and periodization—even of the early twentieth century avant-garde, a period which DuPlessis has specialized in throughout her academic career: "A certain kind of modernism has a lot to answer for," *Graphic Novella* declares dryly.

Rather than being confined to any one of the inheritances or categorizations mentioned above, all three of these books proliferate and engage with multiple forms of cultural production. These books hope to elude (and of course allude to) the sins of each genre while remaining true to the kind of political and artistic integrity that DuPlessis has admired and brought to critical attention in her work on Objectivism. Most active between the 1930s and 1950s, Objectivist poets attempted to look clearly, often with Jewish and/or Marxist perspectives,

†/ Harriet Tarlo, "'The page is slowly turning black': Rachel Blau DuPlessis's 'Torques: Drafts 58–76,'" *Jacket2*, (December 2011). There are several valuable essays in Patrick Pritchett's special issue of *Jacket2* on DuPlessis.

at the world of matter, including "historical and contemporary particulars" (Louis Zukofsky), and to find a form to respond to these. DuPlessis writes about George Oppen, a mentor of hers: "Oppen's art is political in this way: commitment has migrated into form. Oppen exposes and explores the riven and fraught nature of subjectivity in a state of political and existential arousal that cannot (yet) be satisfied." Though her poetry is not particularly like Oppen's, DuPlessis's work is also "uncannily in the open" (the title of her essay on Oppen) and her ambitions are similar. Through her excesses and hybridizations of form, she hopes to say more, always more about how we live now, but also how we feel about our lives in our current political climate. The witty refrain, "WE ARE LIVING IN LATE CATAPULTISM," which appears as the epigraph to *Days and Works*, acknowledges that we are overturned, overwhelmed, overloaded, disorientated, catapulted, and catapulted at. This phrase, which also appears twice in *Graphic Novella*, is addressed with an answer of sorts:

> NOTHING ANSWERS TO THAT
> UNCANNINESS EXCEPT
> MORE UNCANNI-
> NESS

In *Days and Works*, the art of uncanny answering is further glossed by a citation from Christine Froula: "MOVEMENT, ACTION, GESTURE / AND SOLIDIFIED EPHEMERA." We can read this quote as a declaration of DuPlessis's art now, as the rest of this review demonstrates.

The angry and witty resistance of DuPlessis's earlier poetry has become increasingly infused in *Days and Works* with this sense of uncanniness, as well as by the recurring terms *frantumaglia* and *smarrito*. These words are awkward manifestations, terms that need breaking down. Not just uncanny, for instance, but "uncanni- / ness" as it splits over the line break to further defamiliarize the term's sense. Similarly, *frantumaglia*, a word requiring translation, was inherited at two stages of removal from the novelist Elena Ferrante via her mother:

> She said that inside her she had a *frantumaglia*…It was the word for a disquiet not otherwise definable…The *frantumaglia* is the storehouse of time without the orderliness of a history, a story.

Smarrito carries similar connotations, but with greater potential for joy. DuPlessis describes it as "the Dante-word that means dazed, dazzled, confused, vertiginous, undone, stunned and awe-struck." This definition is fitting for *Days and Works*, which like its parent text, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, is a

book that engages with universals, the mythic, dreams, and visions, as well as the quotidian. Like Hesiod, DuPlessis opens with speculations on the creation of the universe. Unlike Hesiod, she considers the extraordinary nature of neutrinos. While some dreams and retellings of Hesiodic fables are full of wonder as well as violence, *Days and Works* retains a feeling of anxiety and paranoia within its uncanny catapultism featuring dreams of lost papers, stolen cameras, and hair being chopped off. Our own disorientation as readers is compounded by an uncertainty as to when the text is entering dream narratives.

In keeping with her emphasis on activity, DuPlessis favors Hesiod's alternative reading of Eris—strife—as driving one on to positive work, and translates it to the work of defamiliarized poetry:

> As for me, I've made no secret of
> it: want deformed words, want bits of alphabet formed into statements
> facing a sudden encounter, want to know what is really there, want
> chakra phonemes hanging over the page as from a void…
>
> if you want these things then work with work upon work.

The final line is a direct quote from Hesiod. But is there any significance in her reversal of his title for her own book as in *Days and Works* as opposed to *Works and Days*? For the poet perhaps, days spent in the world come first, and require urgent response in works. Thus, the observation that "Every act is an act in the politics of yearning" seemed a fitting epigraph for this review—"yearning" plays tribute to just how long and how passionately DuPlessis has been at this action, these poet-/polit-ical acts.

Days return in another witty *détournement* of a renowned title, *Around the Day in 80 Worlds*, a text that is slightly more restful in its attention to individual days. Here's a book to be relished by fellow travelers on the road of the difficult, "examined" life of writing, for whom lines such as "So—cope" might bring a wry comfort or necessary stoicism. *Days and Works* has a much longer reach, a sense of years, millennia even, behind each day:

> How much is enough, how much is too much. When does one's anger rise to agency? There is no formula for disclosure. If one hesitates over adequacy, years go by.… It appears this is the 21st century now. About thirty years have passed since X.'s trip.† And it's exactly one hundred years since the first World War. The Unnecessary One. But there were always murders, infiltrations, betrayals, conflicts, loud claims of multiple

†/ This is a reference to Tiananmen Square.

vanguards, gurus, dictators, disinformation, bribes, "this war will pay for itself," losses of nerve, ginning up to fight, declaring an enemy, ultimate opposites, final battles, conflicted conviction, silent or proud dissent, suicides, and normal life—years go by. How quickly useless misery can occur; how woven into the daily; how transforming.

And so *Days and Works* pushes each new page on remorselessly, often over the page, trying to answer its unanswerable questions. *Around the Day in 80 Worlds* sits more lightly, "poetically," on the page, trying to slow all this down, to look at it all a day at a time.

Day:

Is it possible
To know what happened?

[…]

Wait—. That all occurred too fast.
It got said
Too fast.
Don't erase the terms
Before they are examined.
Don't erase fear, aversion, rage, and grief.

As befits texts belonging to the new *Traces* project, all three of these recent books are engaged with loss. The trace "flirts, / just avoids / (skirts?) its own / disappearances" yet is "…continuous in the metamorphoses / of endless emergences of itself […] ruptures and recoveries / of one long missing." The "interstitial" here reminds us of the "gap" poems along the line of five (5/24/43, etc.) in the *Drafts* project, poems that reference past and present wars and the legacy of the Holocaust. In DuPlessis's poem-world the dead and the living have always cohabited and still do:

Investigate, invigilate,

and look into what's buried in the page.

Which is the underside where
the dead and the living can cross into each other's
best intentions.

These new books remain true to the sense of loss that haunted DuPlessis's generation and still haunts us—lost people or "the disappeared" and, increasingly, the lost species climate change brings. These lost worlds all coalesce around the evocative, universally familiar dream of a lost object (a scarf) in *80 Worlds*. In the face of this, *Graphic Novella*'s act of witness to past and present is one of "sey," a repeated neologism combining saying with sighing, a light breath "still palpable after all these years." In physical form, the book embraces "SOLIDIFIED EPHEMERA," yet retains a ghostliness. Its final page incorporates fragments of black-and-white photographs of people, allowing for the gathering up and preservation of debris, of what would otherwise be lost. Throughout *Graphic Novella* the spatial dramatizes the temporal in big "GESTURES" presented on capacious, collaged pages—a partial fulfillment of DuPlessis's long-held desire to *materialize* language. Here she allows the physical body to subvert the mechanical means of production through marks on the page showing the indent of hands "pressured onto the paper."

The recto pages of this collection present monochrome collages of xeroxed and cut-up text (printed and handwritten, often fringed with black) and images of machines associated with surveillance, war, and contamination past and present—cameras, timepieces, planes, protective gear—juxtaposed with hands and legs and/or fragments of newspaper articles and handwritten language, including references to PTSD. The scattered-debris effect materializes the sense of loss, the pages referencing material and physical remnants of lost and threatened worlds from body parts to butterflies to text fragments referencing fracking and caring for animals in contaminated zones. Craft elements such as thread, buttons, and fabric appear to reinforce the materiality of the collaging process. Taking a clear step away from lyric beauty, this material is cut out and overlapped, achieving a somewhat surrealist, sometimes cyborgian, and often quite ugly, painfully handmade effect—that "uncanni- / ness" again. "Can I help sort?" asks DuPlessis humbly, humorously, or disingenuously; or more likely all three. Yes, she sorts, but most of the time we are left with many possible ways to read or see this work. Sometimes we can read it relatively simply—the clocks, for instance, suggest time, and by metonymic extension, contribute to our sense of "slo-mo apocalypse" or climate catastrophe. Sometimes we find a pleasurable satisfaction in seeing this stuff all cut up, fantasizing perhaps that power can be cropped, cut down to size. Sometimes we read through juxtaposition for more complex, ambivalent effects. The dynamic relations between facing pages encourage this way of reading, the verso providing a sometimes humorous commentary or meta-discourse on the recto pages. We might see this as a development of the Midrashic aspect of DuPlessis's *Drafts*. Of course, any rule to read by, even this last, is always subverted by this tricksy poet:

I want not to know
which is margin, which is text,
which is writing, which is gloss.
And I won't.

This informs us how to "read" DuPlessis's use of the collage form itself, a question she engages with throughout the text. The literal and symbolic hunt that runs through *Graphic Novella* for the correct glue with which to stick the materials provides a clue. There is advice from various named friends, one of whom resists glue entirely:

> Liliane said—basically—this an obsolete problem. With Photoshop™ or another program like that, you can move the poems onto the collages without needing to glue them directly, that is, without needing to make paper pages.

In contrast, DuPlessis writes, "we all have to learn adhesion anyway and/or know when to stop." On the recto facing the page in which glue is discussed in this fashion, DuPlessis presents a dream of a new genre, "of making, of pure poesis," and beneath it the following quotation: "Twentieth century modernists identified paper scraps as their preferred material." In doing this, she acknowledges origins, but also affirms "cutting and sticking" as a valid Benjaminian impulse to engage with outmoded forms in order, perversely, to find new creative forms. On a more symbolic political level, all this talk of glue can be read as the need for "social glue." Intriguingly, this term, which I thought referred to people and social networks, now appears to be used to explore how communication technology can bring people together. The co-option of this term touches on one of our contemporary fears that "communication technology" might replace "real" interaction just as Photoshop or similar software replaces the cutting and sticking, the *making* element of collage. The draw to recover some form of collective voice in order to "call out the damaging / predations of 'capital' " and related environmental degradation is explored in *Around the Day in 80 Worlds*. Interestingly, young writers and artists are discovering both outmoded forms, embracing artist's books and zine culture and recognizing the importance of coming together on the streets as well as online to protest in movements such as Extinction Rebellion. In DuPlessis's world, we can call all such artistic and sociopolitical behaviors forms of "ACTION." As her bio for *Days and Works* attests:

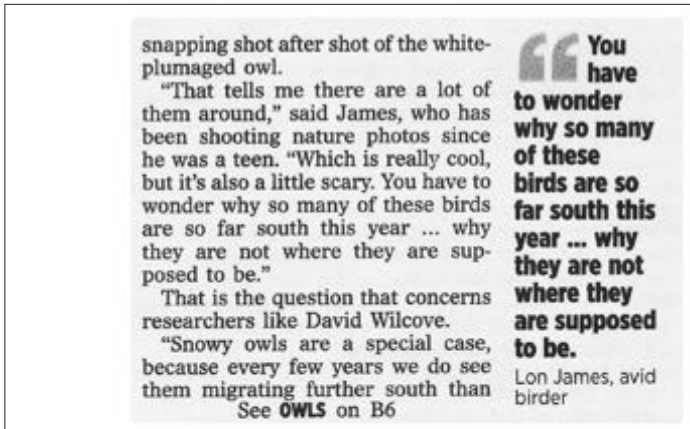
> The operable terms for the long poem are activity (praxis or poesis—the practice or the making) and desire…a passionate activity…entering into a continuing situation of responsiveness… plethora, hyper-stimulation, an overwhelmedness to which one responds.

Just as "retro" as collage is DuPlessis's persistent use of newspapers in all three of these books, often her local *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Some might now see the newspaper as a precursor to endless rolling news, but DuPlessis insists on the incontrovertible dailiness of the newspaper, the specificity of those works and days. DuPlessis sticks by and on the newspaper, though often in satiric, bitter quotation. Even in reproduction, its very paperiness acts in juxtaposition to the "poetic" text—the violence of snipped out edges and unfinished sentences is a direct embodiment of the violence of the half-told stories we glimpse here, tiny acts of witness to violence, resistance, despair, and hope.

In her referencing Oppen's "the real that we confront," is DuPlessis then veering away from poetry/lyric towards prose/story? The title of *Graphic Novella* implies a hybrid text, a micro (or feminine?) novel with images, but in fact it problematizes storytelling and narrative throughout. This is dramatized by the juxtaposition of a paragraph (about a family returning home after the war to find themselves never invited to neighbors' houses, and the neighbors having stolen their belongings for themselves) with an image of a cassette tape: a recognizable but, again, outmoded means of recording a story. A scrap of paper lies across the tape, partly eliding it and bearing the following tiny script:

> "I don't write fiction."
> "You should."
> "Why?"

Who is DuPlessis talking to/about? Herself? So, while there are many stories, a plethora, in all these books, every one is cut up, cut across or just not told quite right. They are fragments of tales, leaving the reader with many questions, such as: Is this family Jewish? A name might have helped confirm this and helped situate and solidify the story, whether as fact or fiction. Leaving the story partial leaves us looking for more before we have a chance to switch off, a common response to stories we do not want to hear and yet need to keep hearing. Yet, there is a powerful Reznikoffian desire to document with feeling (to "sey"). This desire drives the travels in space and time in both *Graphic Novella* and *Days and Works*, from apartheid South Africa in 1976 (*Graphic Novella*) to much more local instances of oppression and racist taunts (*Days and Works*). In the latter, the innumerable half-stories (usually in newspaper cut-ups) of environmental degradation and apocalypse come from myriad places and once again embody loss within the text.



snapping shot after shot of the white-plumaged owl.

"That tells me there are a lot of them around," said James, who has been shooting nature photos since he was a teen. "Which is really cool, but it's also a little scary. You have to wonder why so many of these birds are so far south this year ... why they are not where they are supposed to be."

That is the question that concerns researchers like David Wilcove.

"Snowy owls are a special case, because every few years we do see them migrating further south than

See OWLS on B6

"You have to wonder why so many of these birds are so far south this year ... why they are not where they are supposed to be.

Lon James, avid birder

All poems I write are shadow poems. As in an eclipse, the engulfing reddish pigment of earth's sunsets shadows the orb, displaying it more clearly as a solid, hanging sphere. It is the shock of proof, like mountains on the moon, or the moons of Jupiter. Who traveled from Mt. Olympus to Mt. Oulipos? It wasn't me. Or was it? I was flirty on this question. Did these words come here from the grave vase tube? Or did I write this? Is this female "thing" important? and when? This picking, gleaning, arranging, these tales about the birds and of the snake—what now? For

It's a sad irony that the agricultural advice of the georgic that characterizes Hesiod is replaced in *Days and Works* by cuttings about pollution and decay: cuttings about artificial sweeteners in rivers or about soil pollution and endangered species in the Southern San Joaquin Valley. No wonder farming seems impossibly compromised, even doomed, in this context. At first glance, this might seem to be the meaning of the dream of a burning hayrick in *Days and Works*. Yet, at the same time, as with the word *smarrito*, the image is glossed and transformed into one in which power has also the potential to be nourishing: "someone setting fire to a hayrick. Life as grain and its straw—nourishing, flammable, explosive. Touch where you are, even unto singeing, and make words into talismans, sparks to flame and go to ash within the cool zones of darkness." As always when reading DuPlessis, we should look for "both and and."

This leads me to one last pronominal question to pose here—who is the poetic voice in this new work? In her early work, DuPlessis had an urgent need to recover the "voy-elle," the "she" pronoun for herself and others. This need is still apparent; for instance, in *Graphic Novella* she references

the artistic practice of a little-known painter who influenced Pollock, and interjects: "(This person is real. Her name is Janet Sobel)." Here DuPlessis wants us to know the name and gender, though again the storytelling is fragmentary and cut through with inelegant parentheses. It is introduced by a dry, rather witty fragment: "'Here I will gesture to the female subject.' / (He waves his hand)." Thus, DuPlessis makes clear that she is interested in telling stories that recover the female figure from object to subject status, an aim we can also observe in her treatment of Hesiod's fables. She retells the Pandora story in the first person as the poet's dream; she then uses the story of the Hawk and the Nightingale to demonstrate an endlessly violent world, particularly against the feminized nightingale, who tries to sing out despite the hawk's talons on her neck. In the extract above, she wonders about the efficacy and importance of this in the face of all that is going on.

So it is that, in these new books, she tries out the gender-neutral pronouns "it" and "we" and that these are the pronouns that are especially noticeable and vehement in usage. In *Graphic Novella*, opposite an ungainly cyborgian camera on legs with one giant shoe, appear the words

> It needs to become "it."
> Implacable. Unbending. But resilient.
> It needs to see that quirk, that turn. It needs
> to watch.
> It needs to try
> walking with legs like wings,
> flying out and
> holding a camera in her gut.
> (Stubbornness.)
>
> That's the need to know, to catalogue, to find.

It seems to me that this "thing" that needs to become the "it," the object, is both poem and poet united (hence still "her" gut), a strange figure who wants to address "you," whoever you are, directly: "The poem 'wants' to be created as more of itself with you as the medium." Here then is a desire to be "it" not "I"—to perceive the self/poet and the poem as objects among objects as Olson urged in 1950 and as the object-oriented ontologists and new materialists urge now. Yet there is still always the problem of "I" as articulated concisely in *80 Worlds*:

> I made these
>
> from the "it" self

These words and spaces enact a battle for the "'it' self" to escape the "Today I" self that engages in its activities in time and space that "I cannot control" and "I really can't talk about." When "I" appears, it does in odd, unexpected—even uncanny—ways: "Accept the desire to puncture the page, maybe with the penetrating awl created by a Capital 'I,' with its specific pinhole or pin-hold of light." The plosives here are both painfully phallic and illuminating, the ambivalence clear. Yet the epic struggle with her own lyric I continues, though playfully:

> My "I" had already fallen off that keyboard, but when I press it hard, it clicks back on. Of off. Of on. On-Off.
>
> When I press it very hard, sometimes it will write iiiiiii until I erase what "I's" I do not need.

"We" could help of course, dear readers. We might well ask, "who are the we?" To which DuPlessis answers, "Who cares—WE are here, WE / have declared ourselves." Why is "we" important? Because pronouns, those little shifters that change according to who speaks, as Jakobson discovered, are indicators of identity, including gender. They can help us acknowledge responsibility and expand to whom we are speaking though they can also pose the problem of human subjectivity and power: "'I' and 'we' have made a memorable—if often damaging—mark." Nonetheless it's this elusive "we," the commons of language, that is yearned for in the politics of DuPlessis's books. For after all:

> We live together—different people, a passel of friends. A generation or two, modulation. Time passes. It's normal. You remember to look around.
> It is a landscape of slowly changing shapes. A hill erodes. Or there is an avalanche. Some fracking; that's different. People are slightly altered. Some "disappear" and we know (we say we know) what this means.

It is "we" who bring about and endure these times. The most recent of these three books, *Around the Day in 80 Worlds*, takes up the story in words that assert poetic and extra-poetic actions necessary to push against the darkness of the centuries and the now:

> …how then did we
> find these contradictions as
> arousing, our rage giving power,

and thereby discover
the fact that a WE
does exist.

I have focused on the politically engaged and materially embodied nature of DuPlessis's recent works here, and how they speak to our "catapulted" contemporary state. I have looked back at how they move on from and connect with her previous serial poems and her deep classical, Jewish, and modernist roots, and considered her restless search for new-old forms that can mirror the complexity of our "Human Universe." Perhaps most remarkable, however, is that somewhere, somehow, in the interstices between the cosmological threads of "scudding sliding planets" and the fragmentary tales of kidney donors and marches, DuPlessis still half-uncovers, half-creates wonder and weirdness in the world and in books.

Harriet Tarlo

§

Nomi Stone, *Kill Class*. Tupelo Press, 2019.

"Pineland has room for whatever the world does to itself," writes Nomi Stone of the setting of her second collection of poetry, *Kill Class*. "In the beginning, Pineland was somewhat like the Soviet Union. Now, Pineland is somewhat like the Middle East." Pineland is an amalgam of the fake Middle Eastern villages erected at military bases across the United States, which soldiers inhabit as training before their deployment to any of the number of countries the United States has covertly or overtly invaded, or been in open armed conflict with for several decades.

In Pineland, soldiers enter rooms and rehearse invasions, stopping and restarting their interactions with foreign nationals hired as actors to play locals: "Iraqi role-players whispering / in collapsible houses / made for daily wreckage." These false cities stage complexity to make it seem as if it can be comprehended: what might be an otherwise impenetrable encounter becomes a "situation" or a "scenario" to be navigated, a language to be learned, a code to be processed, a game to be won. Villages and cities in targeted geopolitical zones are appropriated and rebuilt around war's logic into the relevant parts: "POLICE STATION/JAIL ROOM" and "MOSQUE/SCHOOL ROOM." Walls are erected in order to train soldiers to suspect someone behind them, to learn to enter a room with calculated ease. Actors plastered with fake wounds create an opportunity to practice care, or to interrogate a suspect screaming in pain.

Stone's poems make use of the war-game lexicon she encounters, but she makes clear their embodied stakes, borrowing language from the contents of Simulaids Deluxe Casualty Simulation Kit: "Foreign body protrusion (901), Eviscerated intestines (902), Large laceration, 5 cm (903)." The alienation between this catalogue of prosthetic wounds for purchase and the real wounds these bits of plastic gore are meant to simulate underscores how the choices available in these scenarios are deliberately divorced from the decisions already made: the wounds seem inevitable, like game pieces, their placement on these particular bodies a necessary part of the scene. The actors—hired because of their lived closeness to the characters the military is training its soldiers to interact with: brown, non-English-speaking, and familiar with life in a war-traumatized country—are employed to set the stage with a crude and recognizable symbolism.

> Omar tells me the soldiers don't know it yet, but all
> the Iraqis in this village are in cahoots with the militia. The game says
> figure out which bodies have turned the bright chill of gold.
> In the classroom behind the imam's chair, a blackboard with drawings—
> planes sizzling into the buildings.
> Omar shows me the knife, scimitar-curved, that hangs
> on the wall at the police station. He takes down that knife, cradles it
> like a guitar, plays a song.

The purpose of these rehearsals is to train suspicion: American soldiers learn that apparent civilians can be combatants in disguise, mothers are manipulable, and children can be "compromised" by the enemy. Though the actor might not wield a scimitar, the Omar in the "game" that is the war does. The soldiers learn to read the symbol as threatening regardless of whether the fingers stroking the curve of the knife are miming plucking strings. This lexicon enables the mechanical gesture of the "plug-and-play": where a game is designed to work perfectly regardless of who is slotted into the positions of "soldier," "civilian," and "enemy combatant." In "The Soldier Takes the Anthropologist to the Shooting Range," as the anthropologist follows the soldier's—Billy's—instructions, the act of shooting is overlaid with the various places a bullet might be directed to pierce: paper target, beating heart.

> The targets, once birds: changed into silhouettes with red kill-spots, heart-
> shots. Billy knows what it (he) does and did / the hole in the throat /
> the eyes
> so surprised.

Whether from a keystroke or a bullet, the comb of a perforating machine or a probing question, Stone's book queries perforations: these openings, tunnels or shafts passing into something else, rows of holes automatically torn for the sake of separation between objects. These war games between nations can be repeated until the soldiers pick the lock of the scene with the right tactics: insistence and threats, but also pleasantries and kindness. A bland liberal reformism might champion such tactics as humane; but as Stone observes, the empathy taught here is always at base about enabling a more efficient kill. Places like Pineland work to maintain an illusion of artifice. Pineland brings people whose bodies are always already racialized and marked as state-enemies into a space where they can be shot at and manipulated seemingly without stakes, where the coffins are fake, where the ambient violence that structures the everyday seems like a game—justified as strategy.

As Eyal Weizman observes of the vocabulary and digital warfare scenarios that Stone's poetry addresses, these tactics are often employed by policy-makers to hide the stakes of increasingly deadly military interventions: "Highly euphoric military theoretical and technological 'talk' seeks to describe war as remote, sterile, easy, quick, intellectual, exciting and almost cost-free (to the military that is). Violence can thus be projected as tolerable, and the public more inclined to support it." Stone discerns how the operative simplicity of the game naturalizes varieties of violence into tactics. The questions are simple: are the people good, bad, or useful? Do the soldiers let them live, kill them, or use them to kill others?

> …The people speak
>
> the language of a country we are trying
> to make into a kinder country. Some
> of the people over there are good /
> others evil / others circumstantially
>
> bad / some only want
> cash / some just want
> their family to not die.
> The game says figure
>
> out which
> are which.

In her critical writing on her ethnographic fieldwork, Stone astutely parses the institutionalization of empathy and mimicry as a military tactic, arguing

that "imperial mimesis," as she terms it, has been used as a way of lubricating interactions with locals and civilians in war zones to turn those individuals into informants. In *Kill Class* she dwells in the particular violence of that act of translation and transformation, as in the opening poem "Human Technology":

> Choose a person
> who knows who is bad. Make them
> slice open the skin of their country…

The book witnesses Stone teasing the edges of things, tracing holes in the narrative, tonguing a sore that will not close, wondering what to say into a silence that opened up, examining scraps of memories shot through with holes. The bodies inhabiting positions in this game are subjects of the binary logic of the war machine (open/closed, empty/full, hit/miss, kill/let live, dead/alive) haunting each gap. The audience gazes through appointed peepholes. Cameras catch certain things through their circular lenses. In "Soldiers Parachuting into the War Game" Stone plays with the pixelated texture of these sometimes literally digital and programmatic scenarios. The scenes progress like a choose-your-own-adventure story or a ghostly sort of video game: a list of endlessly repeatable, erasable, but limited options.

> In one room:
> a tiny fake coffin no
> isn't here a body no, nowhere
> here my body. Input: say
> a kind word to the villager / output
> villager soaked clean of prior forms
> of place. It is (subtract
> this footprint) snowing. Now
> fade.

The grammatical ligatures and punctuation scaffold a repeatable, almost mathematical scene. Given a room with an empty child-sized coffin, the user-soldier-player might speak kindly to those who might be grieving, an interaction summarized brusquely with "Input: say." These lines read like a Mad Libs word game, where players connect given objects into a narrative by providing verbs, adjectives, and nouns when prompted. There are holes in this script to ad-lib, but the usual signals that what follows is an answer or additional information—such as colons and indexicals—open onto spaces not wholly empty: photo negatives and haunted shapes. The body in the

poem is denied existence, it is nowhere and also still here, enjambed onto the next line. The corpse of a child flickers in and out of the closed void of the coffin like Schrödinger's cat or a digital glitch, the soldier has stepped into the gameplay of a fictional desert, built in a forest in which it is snowing, and left a mark that can be subtracted, deleted. Stone extends her use of the colon and other punctuation throughout the document into rows that break the poems into sections, flashing like the dots on a binary card: ":: :: ::"

In addition to functioning as a technique of warfare, these perforations are appropriated as a critical and communal tactic for creation: a piece of fabric perforated enough forms a net, a hole in the body can provide occasion for adornment, the space where the body is supposed to be does not have to define the body or its relation to it:

> Her purple earrings sparkle, Nafeesa's do,
> in the sun, there is sun,
> I touch her arm. That is all,
> but / and / still, it is spring: light
>
> catches in my chest. Whatever bad did
> happen, she is dancing too. We are
> none of us made of holes.

In "Living the Role" Stone asks: "Does anyone have a translation for any of this? If your face is a mirror / (depending on whom you face), behind you is a splinter. This is one proverb." Stone's attentiveness to the ambivalence of symbolism reveals the ambivalence of the employee within this empire, who inhabits and willingly sells the racialized commodity of their experience as victim, whose employer—the US government—is also the soldiers' employer. Just as soldiers are killing machines for the state, the actors are made into citizens of a deterritorialized, impossible, amalgamated fiction of the enemy state, "somewhat like the Middle East," but which is, in fact, nothing like it, never actual. Stone herself experiences the dizziness and frail certainty of being a character "in the game":

> Sense is an edge, see
> if you dare look
> over into the white
> falling We are in
> a role-play
> but if you feel it in there, you feel it. What is it
> you think I am lying
> about, Commander?

In a now familiar, postmodern anthropological move—which also reads like a responsible research tactic—Stone is attentive to her position as observer. In fact, it seems thrust upon her in the more prosaic moments where she is directly addressed as anthropologist: "So, what do you study? Is this part of a class for you?" Stone's discomfort with her participation in these war games manifests as one of the strongest repeated themes of the collection. In struggling to parse the scene, the frontlines between nations in an ongoing war, and the sheer fascinating fact of her access to these spaces as a scholar, Stone often passes through:

> But the camera burned
> the hole. We fell through.
>
> Anthropologist, why are you in this story?

Her positionality both enables her participation and interpolates her as outside of it, someone who should only watch and cannot be a part: an observer, a white, American academic, a "civilian," not a soldier. But how is she merely observer when she writes and sets scenes, when her whiteness and watching is that against which these scenes unfold, when it is nominally in her name qua civilian that these wars are fought against these bodies in these places? The attempt to fill the circumscribed positions with answers—who are you, why are you here—forefronts her attempts to take responsibility for her involvement. The effect is somewhat like watching someone stand behind a comic panel at a fair and stick their head through the hole cut out above a painted scene: uncanny.

Stone's self-conscious interrogation of her complicity and her modes and materials of observation are well-handled and in keeping with other works of political poetry produced in the past decades. This archive includes works like Solmaz Sharif's *Look* (2016), which puns with and explores the lexicon of euphemisms in the *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Philip Metres *Sand Opera* (2015), which erases and reinhabits the Standard Operating Procedures for the US Department of Defense, and Travis Macdonald's erasure of the *9/11 Commission Repor*t, titled *The O Mission Repo* (2008). Like many of these works, a lot of the momentum of the collection relies on the circumstances of its creation, laid out clearly in the titles alone, such as "Former Iraq War Interpreters Role-Play Executioners."

Stone's work stands out for its insistent attention to the aftermath of that complicity and how it corrupts. Having perforated, she peers through, witnessing what ghosts and light might emerge from these wounds, from

these cropped perspectives of a decades-long "War on Terror" largely eclipsed in the news by the sheer fact of its everydayness. As Stone helps a friend practicing for the US naturalization exam, she marks how the words on the form that defines and translates citizenship carry this perforating violence with them:

> Renounce now, on oath, all prior loyalties. It is natural, friend,
> to want to live. How neutral you wished to be, hired to bring
> your country to life. No preparing for how the bomb packed
> with ball bearings & nails denatured the body. The acronym,
> neutered, turns blank into a lot, but how
>
> we counted them,
> row by row.

Stone's poems hold up these holes and find them haunted by those who have to keep making them, those who live in the honeycombed aftermath. She traces how we might make those openings sacred with strange rituals and visions of "wounds circled by bees." But even as she attempts to probe and sanctify individual openings she finds that these shapes are not singular and discrete: holes create new holes, create networks and tunnels of complicity. There is no end. In fact, there are jobs available to those who are willing to continue variously perforating a variety of bodies and spaces:

> From the darkness come the lightdrunk hole
> out of the whitehot nerve; came keepers

People from the Middle East are paid to play, soldiers are paid to perforate those bodies, the anthropologist is effectively paid to observe. The readership buys the book to read about the various holes bored into those bodies, rotten through. The "I" is uncompromising but already compromised: the uncomfortable squirming of the anthropologist is also the guilty evasion of the citizen turning away from the ugliness of their complicity, "the white worm of pain / inside your skin, the almost-lit / match in your chest, / in that moment you did not speak."

K. Bellamy Mitchell

How *Chicago Review* Positively Deconstructed My Life and Added 200 Libra to My Dead Lift

I first became aware of *Chicago Review* in North Dakota, around 1960, through the agency of *Big Table*, the first issue of which was essentially comprised of the suppressed 1958/1959 Winter issue of *CR* on the Beat writers. There are several accounts of this notorious event in literary journalism—including my own in *TriQuarterly* 43 (1978)—but suffice it to say here that, by challenging the University of Chicago for suppressing what is now recognized as some of the liveliest and most insightful writing of the time, it signifies one of the most conspicuous proclamations of the postmodern reformation of academic modernism. It took me a few years to understand that that was the implication of the suppressed issue; this is what I learned while editing *CR* from 1961–64. I had come to the University of Chicago to study Aristotelian literary criticism, which I did assiduously with Elder Olson. As it turned out, even as I was attempting to master the categories of that rigorous discipline I had to unlearn them to function as an editor. It was a complex, not to say precarious, posture, but it provided an incredibly instructive dialectic as I gradually got a grip on it.

When I joined the *CR* staff Hyung Woong Pak was the Editor. I subsequently found out that he had been the only member of the editorial board who had not resigned when the University censored the Beat issue. That had cost him and *CR* the loss of some trust among writers and editors, as I discovered in a latrine when I went to the second meeting of the Association of Literary Magazines of America (ALMA) in 1964. I was confronted there by an irate editor, who growled abruptly, "You from *Chicago Review*?" He had just delivered a peroration in support of Karl Shapiro, whose *Prairie Schooner* had recently been censored by the University of Nebraska. His tone implied rough road ahead, so I replied warily in the affirmative. By this point I was tending to business, and in my defensive agitation nearly turned on him in full arc. I should have. Trailing clouds of righteous glory, he began arguing that editors countrywide, obviously including me, should boycott the University of Chicago and go on strike; what kind of reptilian quisling was I, he continued, had I no pride, no morals, blah blah blah…. By this point I was drained, adangle and defenseless, when luckily John Logan, then editing *Choice*, entered. He outranked my antagonist, dismissed his tirade, and in fact complimented *CR*'s new literary character.

The anecdote illustrates the not infrequent problems and tensions, internal and external, little magazines and their editors face, as I discovered in future editing projects, including the ill-fated *Purple Sage* in Wyoming (1968–69) and the rather successful *Rolling Stock*, which I edited with Ed and Jenny Dorn in Colorado for a decade (1981–93). The external problems tend to be financial, while the internal ones are counterpointed by the pleasures of working creatively and productively with colleagues. That was certainly the case during my time at *CR*. I had persuaded several of my fellow graduate students to join me at the magazine: John McManmon, then a priest from Notre Dame, Beverly Gross, John Dwyer, and Eugene Wildman. As an editorial team we worked well together and learned especially about that modernism/postmodernism dynamic I mentioned above. We had largely been trained in the prevailing modernist assumptions about literature, a kind of New Critical formalism. At that point our vocabulary did not include the term postmodernism, notwithstanding the fact that it was happening all around us. Obscenity, for example, was a preoccupation that signified a more profound shift in aesthetics than was understood then. That was the principle cause in the suppression of the 1958/1959 Beat issue of *CR*. I was consequently obliged, though it was never clear by whom, to take each issue of *CR* to the US Post Office, presumably for approval. Whether anybody there ever read it, I never knew, but we never received disapproval.

Moreover, I do not recall our editorial discussions ever focusing on obscenity. When we published William Burroughs's "The Boys Magazine," at a time when his work was still being censored for obscenity, this work was far more debatable for its form and style than its obscenity. It was a similar case with the sections we published from Ronald Tavel's novel *Street of Stairs*, which featured a fair amount of homosexual content; but its quirky style and vitality validated its publication. On the other hand, we did botch the call when we rejected Kenneth H. Brown's play *The Brig*, which was more theatrical than literary, which we subsequently recognized was its strength. This was our most humbling mistake, not to have understood that and thereby to have misjudged its quality. Luckily it was published by *Tulane Drama Review* and, within a year of our rejection, it became a celebrated item in The Living Theater repertory, which illustrates how the vitality of little magazines in general transcends their individual mistakes.

The irony was that we were especially interested in publishing plays, which is why Brown had sent it to us. We had published Tavel's verse play *Christina's World*, and we published full-length plays in the next three issues, a bold practice at the time considering the page space required for plays. I still think that we were right, notwithstanding our misguided rejection, to encourage drama. As literary magazines do, *CR* encourages writers to keep at it, whether or not they become stars. They signal creative vitality to those

who need that signal. In that regard I am pleased with, even proud of, what we did.

Tavel, for example, is someone whose career we helped start by publishing his verse and prose in several issues. He went on to become the principal playwright for what became known as the Theater of the Ridiculous in New York and he subsequently wrote screenplays for Andy Warhol's Factory among other highly respected works. Similarly, when we published "A Zen Anthology" (*CR* 16.3, 1963), compiled and translated by Lucien Stryk and Takashi Ikemoto, Stryk had not yet been recognized as a serious scholar of Zen or as a poet. After the anthology became a successful book, Stryk's career received a much-deserved boost. Helping to secure an audience for new or scarcely known writers and artists is clearly one of the biggest satisfactions in little magazine publishing. We had that satisfaction as well with a number of other poets, including Miller Williams, John William Corrington, Barry Spacks, Earle Birney, and a few others. Some, like A. R. Ammons or Sandra Hochman, did not need a boost from us but did get increased distribution and exposure. Burroughs was another writer who didn't need us, but we provided space for experimental work. In a sense Burroughs's reputation exceeded his prerogatives. While *Playboy* or *Esquire* would pay him for his journalism, they were not so receptive to the kind of experiments that earned him his literary reputation. We, on the other hand, were receptive to this work, which not only encouraged Burroughs, but other writers as well. For Tavel, being in the same issue as Burroughs was, he wrote, "like a swig of pure oxygen."

We had a taste for translation and contemporary international writing as well. Peter Zekeli's translations of four Swedish poets—Artur Lundkvist, Harry Martinson, Erik Lindegren, and Gunnar Ekelöf—and a special feature we called "Latin American Supplement" (*CR* 17.1)—which presented work by Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda, Juana de Ibarbourou, Alfonsina Storni, and others—were published at a time when neither Swedes nor Latin American poets, especially women poets, were familiar to American readers. We also got Kenneth Rexroth's piece on modern Chinese literature long before expatriate Chinese writers became American Kewpie dolls. Likewise, we published Galway Kinnell's translations of Yves Bonnefoy's poetry when Bonnefoy was still news in this country.

And so it went. For me, Reinhold Niebuhr's essay "The Nuclear Dilemma" and our last issue on Chicago writers and artists (*CR* 17.2/3) were perhaps the most satisfying. At the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion, shortly before we were eyeball to eyeball with the Russians over some missiles in Cuba, I thought it a good idea to put together a symposium on morality and power politics. I wrote a dozen or more people asking them to contribute, including Adlai Stevenson, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr. We got replies

ranging from "Good Luck" to "How Much?" To the latter I figured we could raise fifty bucks and offered that. "No thanks," was the reply. A month or so later he had a piece in *Harper's* on the same topic. Niebuhr, partially paralyzed and nearing the end of his life, sent the incisively humane essay "The Nuclear Dilemma," along with a touching note apologizing for the condition of his manuscript because he could only type with one hand and had no secretary. The symposium didn't materialize, but I felt rewarded to have Niebuhr's work and my encounter with his profound humility and grace.

Editing *Chicago Review* was a definitive turning point in my life, where I chose literature rather than scholarship as such. It determined the kind of writer and teacher I became and, for better or worse, the kind of career I've had. I suppose all the nearly seventy-five years' worth of *CR* editors would derive something similar from the experience. I certainly hope so. It was a unique part of my University of Chicago education, and I salute the University for its continuing commitment. That damned dialectic I mentioned at the start has agitated me ever since. Whatever else it may have done, it has kept my energies vital in the relentless quest for aesthetic understanding.

Peter Michelson

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Concretism: After the Afterword

When the material for the *Chicago Review* "Anthology of Concretism" issue (19.4, 1967) began arriving at the magazine, I was overwhelmed. What to make of it? How did one judge this very strange stuff? To say nothing of how much of it there was! It seemed that half the world was writing these peculiar-looking texts and offering them up for my consideration.

I began to avoid the office and instead would walk across campus in hope that an insight would somehow come to me. On these peregrinations I followed a fairly standard route past Ida Noyes and Mandel Hall. As it happened, that was also where Court Theatre, the University's drama company, was in rehearsal for their upcoming production of Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. In time I would notice small changes in the staging and I began to feel almost part of the production myself.

And then one day on my walkabout it simply came to me, in a flash, the whole arrangement I would be using: the blank pages, the blackout pages, the poems I would end up choosing. The turning of a page would be a genuine aesthetic event. The anthology would be a concrete book. That was what I

needed to do. This would not be a conventional anthology organized in some standard sequence, say alphabetically, or by type or date of composition.

Thanks to Aristotle we tend to think of the artist's subject matter as being nature rather than material. And that being the case, if art is mimetic, plot will follow the ups and downs of the hero or heroine. But what if action were keyed to a movement of presentation? Verisimilitude, degree of fidelity to physics, to psychology, to sociology, to history was the artist's goal. Only this was different. In this work, text existed in an ideogrammic state.

Poetry, no matter the type or genre, offers us insight. It takes us deeper inside itself. German artist Timm Ulrichs takes the word "rose," transforms it into "eros," then back again to "rose," and once more "eros," and so on in continuous rows. It's truly the *Romance of the Rose*. But keep going and a few pages on, there is eros once again in Belgian painter/writer Paul de Vree's poem of that name. Here the reader is presented with a textual arrangement depicting the interlocking narratives centered on the labyrinth at Knossos. Elsewhere, Seiichi Niikuni, a Japanese poet/artist, gives us the Chinese character for rain, and just like that it becomes the rain falling, falling, falling over the blank space of the page.

So there we have it, a last look back. Would I like to have a do-over? Sure. I'm a hard-core reviser. Published or not, I almost never stop rewriting. There's little doubt that I would do some things differently: adding here, cutting there, rephrasing, clarifying. But actual regrets? Well, finish the novel that still sits unfinished. The death of the novel turns out to have been exaggerated. A lot of time has passed since then. No doubt I'd like to find a way to write about my present reality. But looking back I'm proud of the *Review* and at peace with what we did. The Concretism issue was a moment in time and I think that that came through.

Eugene Wildman

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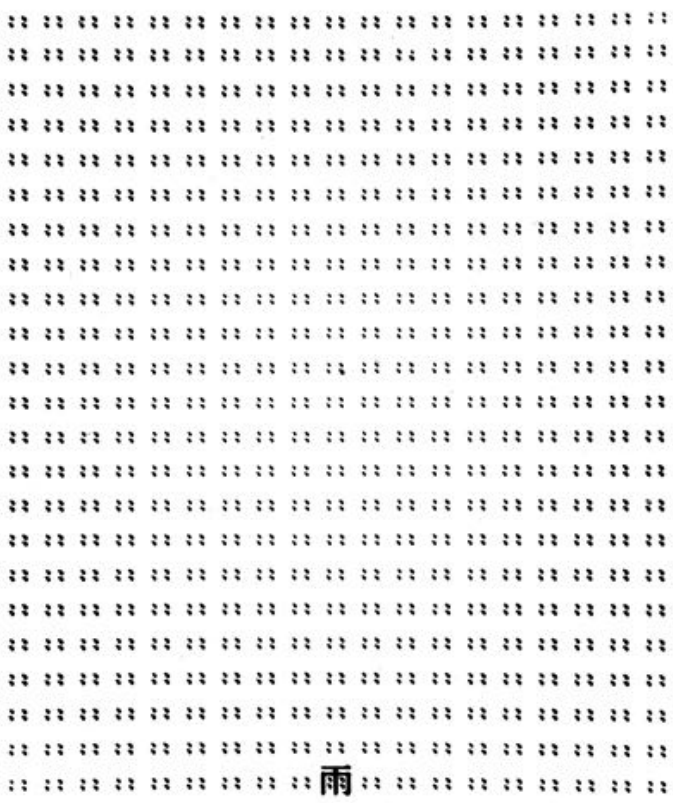
As *Chicago Review* approaches its 75th Anniversary in 2021, we will be soliciting and publishing memoirs from former editors and staff members. We'd love to hear from anyone who wishes to contribute to this process of collective memorialization; write us at editors@chicagoreview.org.

The Editors


CHICAGO REVIEW
anthology of concretism

rain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Thinking About Kevin: In Memoriam Kevin Killian (1952–2019)

It was hard to know where to start to say something in the wake of Kevin Killian's passing. I spent the last weeks of his life broken up knowing he was in the ICU and then failing and then eventually passing on out of our immediate surround. I was sleepless and sad and silent and spent days looking at wonderful photos and taking in the hundreds of truly loving and heartfelt tributes posted on Facebook and elsewhere. All of it cutting deep. And the photos of him and Dodie giving me the most pause, to see their total love and happiness in all of their photos together. What a singular, stunning story of devotion and art and love they shared. Something wasn't entirely real for Kevin until he could share it with Dodie. I watched, with gut laughter and intermittent sobbing, videos of him reading and talking. I reread his interviews with complete astonishment at the casual way he summoned such wide knowledge and combined it with his instinctual intelligence.

The photo I share here (see p. 230) is from a brighter moment. It's from the week in 2004 when we first went through the five Spicer archive boxes that Robin Blaser had sent to the Bancroft. We were so filled with mind-blowing joy at the many treasures that were to be found and were almost breathless as one of us would hold up a sheet and say, "Oh my god! The unfinished letter to Lorca about sounds," or, "Holy Shit! There is an entirely new and longer text to the 'Oliver Charming' notebooks," and it went on like this, moment after moment, for a full week. We have both said to each other, more than once, that it was one of the best weeks of our lives. How fortunate to share a deep love and regard for a writer. How lucky, in the moment of discovery, to share this affinity with someone I loved. This is fun: Kevin being Kevin, he invited many people to come by to witness the gold we were unearthing. At one point there were six or seven younger people standing around in awe. He transformed the stodgy hush hush of the Bancroft into a happy hour! He made magic and fun out of his life. A major part of what it was for me all these years working in this queer archive compiling *My Vocabulary Did This to Me*, and helping out with other documents to come, was always to be sharing it with Kevin; it will always be this way. And all the myriad emails and squibs over the years about this or that piece of gossip, lore, or discovery in the ongoing Spicer archive. Kevin's search never ceased, he was always

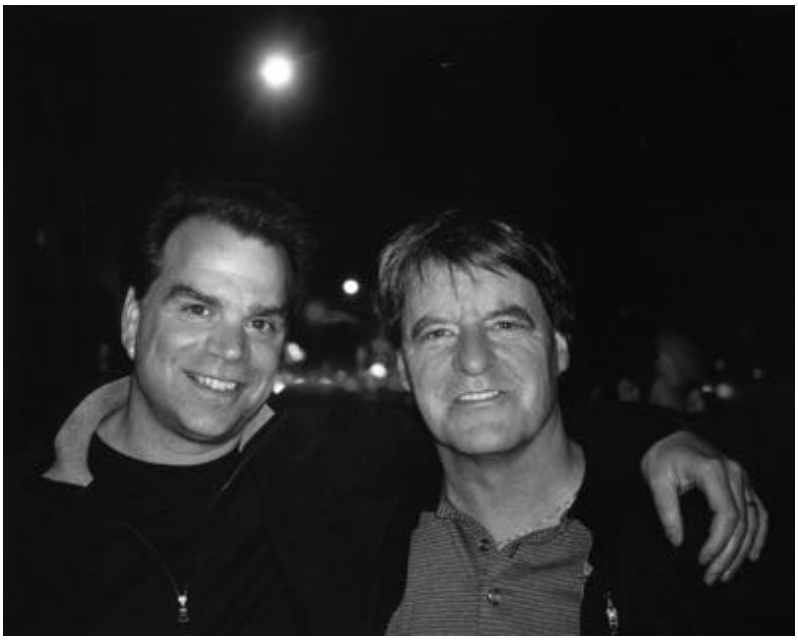
discovering new things and sharing them. He was willing to share the fruits of his rigorous research and scholarship with anyone, i.e., everyone. He was the most unselfish and least proprietorial person I knew. His generosity and thoughtfulness in every aspect of his life were legion. And his hunger and curiosity were a constant source of wonderment. He was voracious and giving. With his passing we lose an incalculable knowledge of the San Francisco scene and its histories.

What we do have is his writing, and that will now be his great legacy. There wasn't a genre that he didn't engage—and engage with sheer, uncanny, off-handed originality. For me his harrowing *Argento Series*, published by Krupskaya in 2001, took its rightful place among the great queer works of SF poetries, along with John Wieners's *Hotel Wentley Poems* and Spicer's *Language*. But it has been my feeling for some time that not until his Amazon reviews (he wrote close to 2,700) are selected and edited and placed in a proper volume will we be able to take the full measure of this epochal masterwork. The best of his "imaginary reviews" make a sly and informal but absolutely scathing intervention into the complacent nature of our role in consumer culture in this age of commercialized governing. There is nothing like them: hilarious, caustic, culturally illuminating, informed, disarming, class awake, off-putting, fictive, documentary, and seemingly cast-off. Every time I heard him read one the room was crying with uncomfortable, self-aware laughter at the broken system in which we engage every day. Beckett said that "the task of the artist is to find a form to accommodate the mess." Kevin certainly found it in this project, and all of it unpretentious and breezy, and written in a language Marianne Moore called "plain American which cats and dogs can read." I can imagine Kevin Killian, this superlative and brilliant human, one of our important and intrepid interlocutors of literature and culture, writing these documents, creating this new exploratory form to look the monster in the eye, not at a writers' colony or on sabbatical leave, but at his desk at a nine-to-five job at Able Cleaning Services where he worked as an executive secretary for the majority of his life. There is so much more to say and we will have to say it over the coming years as his work is gathered into new editions.

I remember when we first met in 1991 at Jessica Grimm's apartment for a house reading by Lisa Robertson. He was lovely and introduced me to everyone there. He proposed we have lunch the next day to talk Spicer. I was looking for unpublished work for my little magazine *o·blēk*. Besides Spicer, we mostly talked about classic cinema, trying to best each other with names of starlets and B-movie cast lists. At some point he looked at me and said: "Are you sure you aren't gay?" I wasn't sure if he was hitting on me or putting me on. I'm still not sure. He was the best and always fun to

be around. He wasn't simply the true keeper of the flame of SF poetries, he was the flame. He welcomed countless youth into this story year after year after year his whole life. It will never be the same without him. He was my brother in Spicer and I am blessed to have loved him, to have learned from him (and I will continue to learn from him), and to have had him in my life all these years.

Peter Gizzi



Kevin Killian (right) and Peter Gizzi, 2004. Image courtesy of Peter Gizzi.


CHICAGO REVIEW 2021
75TH ANNIVERSARY

LETTERBOX

To the Editors:

I submit this response to Joshua Pollock's letter published in the previous issue of *Chicago Review* (62.4/63.1-2), where he accused me of excluding José Vicente Anaya from the dossier John Burns and I edited on Infrarealism in *CR* 60.3. While I welcome the publication of Anaya's manifesto and poems in *CR*, I should make some observations and clarifications regarding Pollock's claims in his letter and his lack of knowledge about the Infrarealist movement.

Pollock's argumentation on my exclusion of Anaya is a deceptive and convenient rhetorical gesture. He first takes issue with my anthology of Infrarealism, *Perros habitados por las voces del desierto/Dogs Inhabitated by the Voices of the Desert*, which was published in 2014 in Mexico City. Currently in its second edition in Mexico, this anthology has been published in Peru and recently in Chile as well; it includes two manifestos (penned by Bolaño and Santiago), and poems by twenty poets—Anaya indeed was not included in the book. Given the work I did with this anthology, Pollock argues that I have positioned myself "as the gatekeeper of Infrarealism." But instead of citing my explanations as to why I excluded Anaya from the anthology, he conveniently only refers to the sentence I wrote in the *CR* dossier. Pollock writes: "Medina attempts to justify the exclusion from *Chicago Review* with a short sentence buried at the bottom of footnote one: 'Anaya left the group in 1976.' The slightest bit of research exposes the emptiness of such a justification, leaving it unclear exactly why Medina and Burns have chosen to retrospectively purge him." Since I did not want to repeat the same long explanation in the *CR* dossier, which Pollock ignored, here is what I wrote in the anthology:

> *Dogs Inhabited by the Voices of the Desert* is not a strictly historical anthology, neither is it inclusive. For example, Darío Galicia is not included, whom the group admires as a poet and for claiming an openly queer identity in his poetry and daily life, which breaks with the conservative and prudish tradition of Mexican poetry at the beginning of the seventies, and that Bolaño and Santiago published as an Infrarealist poet at every opportunity they had. Santiago, for instance, included Darío Galicia in "Six young Mexican Infrarealists" (Plural 61, December 1976), and Bolaño published several of his poems in *Rimbaud, vuelve a casa* (Barcelona, 1977).

> Such publications brought Darío various feuds and to be declared persona non grata in the literary milieu of Mexico City upon being associated with Infrarealism. Nor does it include José Vicente Anaya who participated in the movement's foundations and appeared published in *Pájaro de calor* (1976), yet he distanced himself from the group at the end of 1976. Likewise, Vera Larrosa, Lisa Johnson, and Kyra Galván detached themselves from the group at the end of the summer of 1975, after the conferences that Bolaño and Santiago organized at Casa de Lago and several months before the public emergence of Infrarealism. Also not included is Lorena de la Rocha, who disappeared after the first irruptions of the group. Infrarealism, as is well known, alters the lives of various individuals and such encounters affect their personal and professional lives; however, this anthology is not the adequate medium for their presence. I am referring to the poets Max Rojas, Jorge Mancera, Bárbara Delano; to the sculptor and painter, Margarita Caballero and Carla Rippey, respectively, and especially to Geles Lebrija ("life in extasis" whose smile—the freest of our emotions—has stayed engraved in all the cities, towns, and coasts of the national territory). The same is the case of the Peruvian poet Tulio Mora, who joins the group between 1979–1983 when he resided in Mexico City, capturing his experience in several poems, testimonies, and in his recent and excellent book *Hora Zero: los broches mayores del silencio* (Lima, 2009).

In the introduction to *Dogs Inhabited*, I also set forth my criteria for the focus of the anthology as well as the selection of participants:

> *Dogs Inhabited* is a personal anthology: is not every anthology personal? Nevertheless, it was open to the opinions and commentaries of several members of the group and their voices inhabited me during the process of putting it together. It includes those that, in my own judgement, provided consistency and participated daily in Infrarealism during the Mexican years and maintained the aesthetic and ethical positions of the group, according to its principles, attitudes, and manifestos, both in Mexico City and later on in the diaspora. None of the poets gathered here has tried to join the literary establishment or sought personal benefit to carry out their writing or denied their affiliation with the Infrarealists. All of them have refused to be part of the functional opportunism promoted by the cultural institutions of the

> country and even the custom of cultivating friendships within the establishment that would bring a benefit to their literary "career."

As noted in the previous citation, my introduction took this aesthetic and ethical position as the central focus of the analysis in order to explain the emergence of the group's activity during the eighties and nineties, as well as the relevance of Infrarealism as one of the Latin American neo-avant gardes of the last decades of the twentieth century.

My particular exclusion of Anaya from the anthology lies in the fact that after he left the group at the end of 1976, he gradually began accepting positions in the Mexican literary establishment. Beginning in 1982 he became the chief editor at the Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México press, published poetry books, and became entangled in other literary enterprises within the establishment during the following decades.

In my introduction to *Dogs Inhabited* I also engaged in a critical dialogue with Heriberto Yépez's essay on Infrarealism. I did so because Yépez's analysis was truly enlightening and the first to offer an overall and critical vision of Infrarealism. Yet I respectfully disagreed with his major and most appealing tenet on the existence of multiple Infrarealisms. Here I am quoting my text again:

> [Regarding Anaya's separation from the Infra group,] Yépez wrote: "When the group dismembered following the departure [from Mexico] of Bolaño and Santiago, and several others had distanced themselves due to conflicts with the Chilean (who undoubtedly had control over other members of the group), another Infra phase emerged. Anaya distanced himself from this nucleus and, to some degree, abandoned the current, taking his own path (he would travel to the North, from where emerged his long poem *Híkuri*), and minimizing those who later on would identify as 'Infras,' starting in 1977–1978." Yépez's observation is true: Anaya appeared in the first Infrarealist publication, *Pájaro de calor* (August 1976), but he is not included in "Six young Mexican Infrarealists" (*Plural*, December 1976), nor in *Correspondencia Infra* (October–November 1977). Yépez added: "The books of poems that belong to the fully Infra phase are *Morgue*, *Aludel trizado* and *Punto negro*." See Yépez's essay, "Historia de algunos infrarrealismos," published in *Alforja* 30 in the fall of 2006, in which Yépez reconsiders and centers the figure of Anaya in order to put forth his thesis about the existence of various Infrarealisms and to reduce the movement to another "poetic current" thus placing the analysis of the group within a

> traditional literary framework, without acknowledging the *ethical dimension* that unites the group from its beginning to the various decades after. In spite of this, Yépez's essay is one of the most intelligent efforts to understand Infrarealism.

My dialogue with Yépez, happily, is endless. If I entertain his notion of various Infrarealisms, then I suppose that the first Infrarealism would cover the years of 1975–1977, ending with *Correspondencia infra* in November 1977, published by José Peguero and myself. *Correspondencia* included Bolaño's first manifesto, Mario Santiago's long poem "Advice from 1 Disciple of Marx to 1 Heidegger Fanatic," and poems by several members. A second Infrarealism is activated by Mario Santiago upon his return to Mexico City from Europe and Israel, which spans two decades, and includes new members particularly after 1978 and the early 1980s. Yépez called this group Neo-Infras. This second period ends with the death of Santiago in January of 1998. A third Infrarealism emerged after the death of Roberto Bolaño in 2003 and goes on until 2013 approximately, a period that brought unusual attention to Bolaño's years in Mexico and his participation in the Infra movement. Various original members of the group took advantage of this new attention on Infrarealism in Mexico City and started giving poetry readings in various places in Mexico which attracted many new young poets. This third Infra group created a website and enthusiastically responded to the public's curiosity to know in person some of the Infras fictionalized in Bolaño's novel *The Savage Detectives*. And finally, the last Infrarealism is associated with my anthology and my persona, which offered an expanded view of Infrarealism by focusing on ethics and aesthetics as a way of stressing the Infra's principles of unifying life and poetry, and of creating a social sphere for poetry outside the literary establishment. In other words, a position that stressed the exercise of a strategic marginality in order to avoid whatever opportunism could emerge from the group's recent public attention. But my problem with this perspective on various Infrarealisms is that no one can have a leading role in the Infra movement. In that regard, José Peguero wrote a short text titled "Tiros por la culata," where he began with the question: "Is there anyone who tries to lead Infrarealism?" And he responded, "When you tried it, flying kicks, low blows, shots from the butt come out." What unites the group, to be clear, is not a single member or this anarchic attitude, but the ethical principles, and particularly the will to remain outside the literary mafias.

In his review of *Dogs Inhabited*, Yépez still insisted on the existence of various Infrarealisms. Highlighting my exclusion of Anaya from the anthology, he acknowledged that my view of the group is evidently different from Bolaño's and Anaya's, which thereby underscored the existence of

multiple perspectives or accounts. But at the same time, he moved away from this polemic ("I do not want to concentrate on this discrepancy that I have with Medina's book") in order to celebrate my long prologue and the anthology.

I have one last clarification. Pollock claims that Anaya wrote one of the "group's three manifestos" and, while he is partially correct, there were not three, but four manifestos written during the period of 1975–1977, which I clearly indicated in my introductory essay to the *CR* dossier, "Infrarealism: A Latin American Neo-Avant-Garde, or The Lost Boys of Guy Debord." In addition to Anaya's "For a Vital and Unlimited Art" and Mario Santiago's "Infrarealist Manifesto," Roberto Bolaño wrote two manifestos ("Leave it All, Once More" and "Infrarealist Manifesto: Fractures of Reality"). The latter, to be precise, was written in the fall of 1977 while Bolaño was already living in Barcelona. Bolaño's second manifesto, I feel it's necessary to add, centered on and underscored the group's connection of life, poetry, and ethics, which the text displays from its beginning: "We are not dying to be published. The goal of our poetry is not seeing our names printed." Bolaño then cited various examples of how the literary establishment in Mexico City as a whole was pursuing the total elimination of the Infras' poetry by denying them access to every single magazine and journal.

I hope the comments expressed here further clarify my reasons to exclude not only Anaya from the Infra dossier in *CR* and *Dogs Inhabited*, but also other poets. I do not have any qualms with Pollock for pitching a translation for publication in *CR* (the literary market allows it after all), but Pollock's arguments are suspicious and opportunist.

Thank you,

Rubén Medina

The Bro-mides of American Poetry

Poet Bob Hicok recently elicited a collective groan from social media with an indulgent, inane, and poorly written essay titled "The Promise of American Poetry." Justified reactions on social media quickly emerged to dismiss Hicok (some highlights from Twitter: "Has Bob Hicok heard of a diary? YIKES, prime example of when you should not press send"; "The Bob Hicok essay can be summed up as: We straight white poets should roll over and accept our irrelevance, and then once we've rolled over then we should expect a tummy rub"; "Bob Hicok has a poem titled Building a Joke, funny because that should've been the title for his essay"). But this essay perhaps merits a more reflective response, on both the author and the literary and political landscape he unveils.

Hicok is clearly going for down-home authenticity and Honest-Abe, aw-shucks charm in trying to express the cognitive dissonance he senses over the fact that he's "dying as a poet" because he's a "straight white guy and the face of poetry is finally changing." Although he supports the change he perceives—and quotes Martin Luther King Jr. to prove it—he's sad nobody reads or reviews his books anymore. But Hicok misses the mark, and not just because this kind of authenticity and truth-telling, in our Trumpian age, is corrupted and fetishized beyond recovery. Aside from how tone-deaf and out of touch the piece is—and Hicok admits that the "zeitgeist" escaped him a long time ago—a close look at its politics reveals liberalism's inadequacy to the moment.

Hicok's argument, to be generous for a moment and assume there is one, seems to be that the poetry world is a kind of laboratory for experiments in the future of democracy—and that this laboratory is out front in promoting equality for historically underrepresented voices. This is a good thing, but it means that he's a victim right now, a victim both of the recoil to this historical tendency and of an overreaction of, one would assume, the more radical drives behind these changes. Here is the most telling moment (let me apologize in advance for quoting so much trash):

> Though emotionally I'm crushed that I'm disappearing as a poet, ethically I find it necessary and don't know how to put the two together. It's weird to stand near what I believe is the end of the kind of control men like me have held, hoping it is the end,

> trusting there's nothing about any kind of human that gives them value greater than any other kind. Odd to feel this way while also knowing that, because force has been exerted for centuries against women and minorities, when that branch, so to speak, is let go, it has to snap back hard and far the other way, that for every action, there's an equal and opposite reaction. Contradictory to believe and even enjoy that this kind of accounting has to take place, otherwise human nature isn't what I think it is, otherwise I've been deeply wrong about our moral being, and strange to want this accounting while also wanting my life to continue as it has, for it's been a very good life and a very good career. And not so weird, really, to not want to die, metaphorically and then actually, and of course forever weird to know that I have to do both, have to be cleared out to make room for the young, and that I and people like me deserve to be cleared out to make room for those unfairly denied. Weird to both love and hate this state of affairs. And maybe not so weird to love this: that American democracy asks to be a force pulling against the tendency to use our differences for advantage, by offering a civic space in which it is assumed we are the same.

One can perceive some of the traits of the classic bourgeois reactionary in Hicok's understanding of the moment, where a threat (that branch isn't going to stop swinging) is veiled in the form of sage advice. It is the same victim-blaming that would tell #MeToo to dial it down because it's going to cause a backlash, or place the onus of responsibility for Charlottesville on antirascist protesters (Trump's "both sides"). It's the "pragmatic" wisdom of liberal pundits who tell us that we'll lose the general election if we support a candidate pushing for the hardly revolutionary proposition of Medicare for All. Hicok's notion of democracy is the vacuous public sphere that relegates politics to voting and shopping, where differences shouldn't matter so long as we all have a say at the polls and a credit card in hand. His essay reeks of the fear and angst that liberals exude any time real politics occur—politics that would force an actual confrontation and the recognition that if there is an "equal and opposite reaction" to #MeToo or Black Lives Matter or Medicare for All, it would be revelatory of who the enemy really is. Precisely to the degree that this is revealed, it advances the cause of revolutionary change.

Hicok's view of poetry as democratic laboratory is no less misguided.

> And unlike any other group I can think of, poets have turned a corner in approaching a more egalitarian way of being, and are successfully pushing at the structural barriers and traditions of

> bias that have limited success in our little world mostly to people who look like me. In that sense, I wish all Americans were poets.

If only all Americans were poets! Just think of the potential audience for Bob Hicok's books then! Of course, Hicok ignores the entire machinery of the publishing business, dominated by multinational corporations, the MFA factory system, a creative writing industry reliant largely on contingent labor, the racket of philanthropic money (great for tax write-offs), supporting "creative" writers. The Poetry Foundation, flush with that pharma cash, sure is diverse in their programming and their magazine these days, but we know what those holding the purse strings and the editorial reins look like. If token diversity signals the future of American democracy, the advertising wings of the corporations were way out front—everyone is free and equal to buy their brands. Just don't look behind the curtain.

The essay is an off-key swan song, and far more than Bob Hicok realized. May the rest of the tenured poetry professors die with more dignity, and more quietly.

XOXO,

Geoffrey Treacle

CONTRIBUTORS

Ryūnosuke Akutagawa (1892–1927), born in Tokyo, Japan, was the author of more than 350 works of fiction and nonfiction. Japan's premier literary award for emerging writers, the Akutagawa Prize, is named after him. ◆ **José Vicente Anaya** is a Mexican poet, essayist, translator, editor, and journalist. He was a founding member of Infrarealism. He has published more than thirty books, including *Híkuri*, *Peregrino*, and *Paria*, and has translated the work of Allen Ginsberg, Marge Piercy, and Antonin Artaud, among many others. His poetry has been translated into English, French, Italian, and Portuguese. ◆ **Robert Archambeau**'s books include the critical studies *Inventions of a Barbarous Age: Poetry from Conceptualism to Rhyme*, *The Poet Resigns: Poetry in a Difficult World*, *Laureates and Heretics: Six Careers in American Poetry*, and *Poetry and Uselessness from Coleridge to Ashbery*, as well as the poetry collections *Home and Variations* and *The Kafka Sutra* and a multigenre collaboration with John Matthias and Jean Dibble, *Revolutions*. He teaches at Lake Forest College. ◆ **Ryan Choi**'s other translations include the works of Jun Tsuji, Shinkichi Takahashi, and Sanki Saitō. He lives in Honolulu, Hawai'i, where he was born and raised. ◆ **Kate Colby** is author of seven books of poetry, including *I Mean* and *The Arrangements*, and a book of lyric essays, *Dream of the Trenches*. She lives in Providence, Rhode Island, and teaches at Brown University. ◆ **Whitney DeVos** is a writer, translator, and scholar. She is currently completing a doctoral dissertation on documentary poetics in the Americas after 1945. Her translations of Norah Lange's poems have appeared in *The Acentos Review*, and a translation of prose by Sergio Chejfec is forthcoming from Ugly Duckling Presse. ◆ **Mary Elizabeth Dubois** is a professor of English at Rutgers University. Her work is the recipient of the Axinn Foundation/E. L. Doctorow Fellowship and the James F. Parker Prize for Fiction and Literary Criticism. ◆ **Ben Estes** is the founder of the literary press The Song Cave. His writing includes *Illustrated Games of Patience* (2015), *The Strings of Walnetto Arrangements* (2011), and *Announcement for a Poem*, a collaboration with Kim Gordon and Rick Myers (2012). He most recently exhibited his paintings at Paula Cooper Gallery in a two-person show with Alan Shields. ◆ **Robert Fernandez** is the author, most recently, of *Scarecrow* (Wesleyan). He lives in Lincoln, Nebraska. ◆ **Edgar Garcia**'s writing has appeared (or is forthcoming) in *Antioch Review, Berkeley Poetry Review, Big Bridge, Damn the Caesars, Jacket2, Los Angeles Review of Books, Mandorla, Make: A Literary Magazine, PMLA, Sous les Pavés,*

Those That This: Arts Journal, and *Tzak: A Journal of Poetry and Poetics*. He teaches at the University of Chicago. ◆ **Peter Gizzi** is the author of seven collections of poetry, most recently, *Archeophonics*, *In Defense of Nothing*, and *Threshold Songs*. In February of 2020 Carcanet will publish *Sky Burial: New & Selected Poems*. ◆ Born in Germany, **Barbara Goldowsky** attended Wilbur Wright Junior College and the University of Chicago, earning a BA in Political Science in 1958. Her published work includes short stories, poems, and numerous newspaper articles. She is at work on *Immigrant Dreams*, a memoir. ◆ **Simon Hajdini** is a Research Fellow in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Ljubljana, and currently a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Chicago. He works at the intersection of philosophy, psychoanalysis, and the critique of political economy. ◆ **Michael Heinrich** is a mathematician and political scientist. Until 2016, he was professor of economics at the University of Applied Sciences, Berlin. He published *An Introduction to the Three Volumes of Marx's Capital* (2012), and the first volume of a Marx-biography *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society* (2019). In 2020, his *Science of Value* will appear in English. ◆ **Thomas Heise** is the author of *Moth; or How I Came to Be With You Again* (Sarabande, 2013), *Urban Underworlds: A Geography of Twentieth-Century American Literature and Culture* (Rutgers, 2011), and *Horror Vacui: Poems* (Sarabande, 2006). He is an Assistant Professor at Pennsylvania State University (Abington) and lives in New York City. ◆ **Aditi Machado** is the author of *Some Beheadings* (2017) and *Emporium* (2020), both from Nightboat Books. Her writing appears in journals such as *Lana Turner*, *The Rumpus*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *Jacket2*. She works as the Visiting Poet-in-Residence at Washington University in St. Louis. ◆ **D. S. Marriott** teaches at Penn State University. He is the author of *Duppies* (Commune Editions, 2019), *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being* (Stanford 2018), *The Bloods* (Shearsman, 2011), and *Haunted Life* (Rutgers 2007). He has written several defining essays in the areas of Afro-Pessimism and is a member of the Cambridge School of Poetry. ◆ **Dawn Lundy Martin** is a poet and essayist. She is the author of four books of poems including *Good Stock Strange Blood* (Coffee House Press). Her nonfiction can be found in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *n+1*, *The Believer*, and *Best American Essays 2019*. Martin is a Professor of English in the writing program at the University of Pittsburgh and Director of the Center for African American Poetry and Poetics. ◆ **Valeria Meiller** is an Argentine poet, translator, and PhD candidate in Spanish and Portuguese at Georgetown University. She is author of the Spanish poetry books *El Recreo*, *Prueba de Soledad en el Paisaje* (coauthor), *El Mes Raro*, and the forthcoming *El Libro de los Caballitos*. ◆

K. Bellamy Mitchell is a graduate student at the University of Chicago, pursuing a PhD in the Committee on Social Thought and the Department of English Language and Literature, where she researches the poetics of apologies and apologetic forms. Her poetry and essays appear in *Gulf Coast* and *Prodigal*. ◆ **Peter Michelson** retired from the English and Creative Writing faculty of the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he lives and works. His *Mixed Frequencies, New and Selected Poems* will be published this winter by the Mad Hat Press. He has published verse and prose in a variety of journals, ranging from *TriQuarterly* to *The Nation* and *The Notre Dame Review*. His volumes of poetry include *Pacific Plainsong*, of prose include *Speaking the Unspeakable*. ◆ Born in Manchester, England, **Donald Nicholson-Smith** is a longtime resident of New York City. He has translated several novels by Jean-Patrick Manchette, including *Three to Kill* (City Lights, 2002), *Fatale* (NYRB, 2011), *The Mad and the Bad* (NYRB, 2014), *Ivory Pearl* (NYRB, 2018), and *Nada* (NYRB, 2019). He also translated *In Praise of Defeat*, a collection of poems self-selected by the celebrated Moroccan author Abdellatif Laâbi (Archipelago Books). ◆ **Gabriel Ojeda-Sagué** is a gay, Latino Leo living in Chicago. He is the author of *Losing Miami* (Civil Coping Mechanisms, 2019), *Jazzercise is a Language* (The Operating System, 2018), and *Oil and Candle* (Timeless, Infinite Light, 2016). He is also the author of chapbooks on gay sex, Cher, the Legend of Zelda, and anxious bilingualism. He is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Chicago. ◆ **Serge Pey**'s parents were among the wave of Spanish Republicans who fled to France as refugees and were interned in camps by the French after their defeat in the Civil War. This background haunts the "tales of childhood and war" collected in *The Treasure of the Spanish Civil War*. Pey was born in Toulouse in 1950 and teaches modern poetry at Toulouse University. He is a prolific writer and performance artist who travels widely with his "action poetry." ◆ **Joshua Pollock** is a poet, translator, and video artist. His writing has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Vestiges* and *jubilat*. His translation of José Vicente Anaya's *Híkuri* (Peyote) will be published by The Operating System in early 2020. His video *Spectopia* began screening in festivals in late 2019. ◆ **Rebecca Ariel Porte** is Core Faculty at the Brooklyn Institute for Social Research. She is at work on a book called *On Earthly Delights: Paradise, Arcadia, and the Golden Age*. ◆ **Eléna Rivera** was born in Mexico City and raised in France. Her third book of poetry, *Scaffolding,* is available from Princeton (2017). She is the author of *The Perforated Map* from Shearsman Books and *Unknowne Land* from Kelsey Street Press. ◆ **Margaret Ross** is the author of *A Timeshare*. She teaches at Stanford, where she is a Jones Lecturer. ◆ **Trey Sager** is the author of *Fires of Siberia*, *Dear Failures*, and *O New York*. The excerpt

published herein is from an unfinished memoir. He edits fiction at *Fence* magazine. ◆ **Dale Martin Smith** lives in Toronto, Ontario. With Robert Bertholf, he edited *An Open Map: The Correspondence of Robert Duncan and Charles Olson* (a new paper edition was published in 2020) and *Imagining Persons: Robert Duncan's Lectures on Charles Olson*. He is on the faculty of English at Ryerson University. ◆ **Harriet Tarlo** is a poet and academic at Sheffield Hallam University. Her poetry appears with Shearsman Books and her artists' books with Judith Tucker with Wild Pansy Press. Critical work is published in books and journals such as *Jacket2*, *Critical Survey*, *Classical Review*, and *Journal of Ecocriticism*. ◆ **Marjorie Welish**'s most recent books of poems are *So What So That* (Coffee House Press) and her chapbook *Periphery Collective* (Equipage). Her recent visual art features *Between Sincerity and Irony*, a gateway accordion construction done in collaboration with Dan Walsh, on view at the Paula Cooper Gallery early in 2020. ◆ **Eugene Wildman** taught at the University of Illinois at Chicago where he was for several years was Director of the Program for Writers. He has won four Illinois Arts Council awards for fiction and has published two experimental novels. His most recent book, a novel-in-stories titled *The World of Glass*, was published by Notre Dame.

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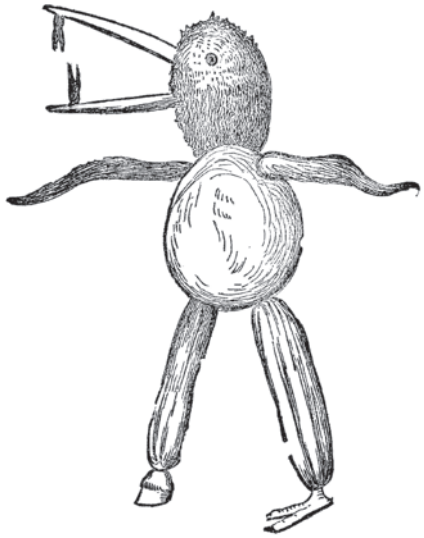

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