

CHICAGO REVIEW

JULIE EZELLE PATTON · ARKITEXT

67:2/3/4



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JULIE EZELLE PATTON: ARKITEXT

RESPONSES

- James Garwood-Cole, Kai Ihns 3 *Preface*
& Clara Nizard
- Jennifer Scappettone 11 *julie ezelle patton and the Geopoetics of
Unrequited Care*
- julie ezelle patton & Jennifer Scappettone 29 *Stanzas in Conversation*
- julie ezelle patton & Arcey Harton 51 *A list of seventy-to-ninety-year-old chill,
competent, ethical, sharp Independent
Contractors & Public Servants who go
beyond the call of booty (cash) and have
aided us by & by*
- Lee Ann Brown 89 *Summa julie*
- Yates Norton 107 *Let it Bee: Thoughts for My Friend julie
ezelle patton*
- Andrew Levy 134 *Word Dance: julie patton's
Uncommon Proposal*
- Jonathan Skinner 151 *julie patton's Let it Bee Garden and Poet
Tree Mitigation Program: Selected
Correspondence*
- Janice A. Lowe 177 *Spontaneous Composition: julie's Musical
News*
- About Farman 203 *Ghosts of a Ghost Town Performance*
- Gabe Flores & Arcey Harton 211 *An Interview*

POEMS

- 53 *[skeer'd of...]*
54 *[the page has dimension...]*
55 *[are we on top the alphabet or with...]*
56 *[OccaL, sept 20, 99c...]*
62 *Far Flung*
83 *Journal Notations*
96 *[letters slope, slightly to the right...]*
98 *from fl 4*98*
120 *[Like they did way back when...]*
121 *D' Notes*
130 *from Transcript of a Performance*
143 *Notes for L Poem*
145 *Experiment L Notes*
175 *[thick et cetera...]*
180 *All That Glitter\$*
183 *p.i.m.p. Glossary*
194 *[Snow infinite, swells, accumulate...]*
197 *[dark sentences gather...]*
209 *[You should get dirt from crack of the
house...]*

CHORUS

- giovanni singleton 223 *Here Hear Now... A Pink Oracle Reading*
- Ed Roberson 230 *Ed crosses the threshold of the Wetlands*
231 *Touching the Hem*
- m. nourbeSe philip 233 *To Whom It May Concern*
- Carla Harryman 237 *Into a Detroit Spirit's World*
- Will Alexander 243 *from Charismatic Spiral Part II; Note on
julie's Compound*
- Cecilia Vicuña 249 *Itz (Maya)*
250 *The Air*

FICTION

- Stephen Mortland 257 *Nativity*
- Marzia Grillo 274 *Have a Seat, Dear*
 Translated by Lourdes Contreras
 and Julia Pelosi-Thorpe

INTERVIEW

- Ethan Hsi & A. Ng Pavel 279 *Soma Sema: An Interview with Mircea
 Cărtărescu*

NONFICTION

- Chris Hosea 289 *“Like the Voluntary Disappearance of
 Space Between Me and You”: Jennifer
 Soong’s Interior Music*
- Malcolm De Chazal 302 *from Magical Science*
 Translated by Sara Nicholson

POETRY

- Joseph Minden 307 *from Answerlands*
- Ryan Nowlin 314 *Fortune and Solitude*
- maya rose 324 *Four Poems*
- Kat Sinclair 328 *Resignation From*
 329 *Ad Asteraceae*
 331 *Dead Skin*
- Ada Smailbegović 332 *from blue eggshell discrete actions in
 a moving geometry of time*

Roberto Tejada 338 *from Carbonate of Copper*

REVIEWS

Stéphane Bouquet 343 *Peter Gizzi, Fierce Elegy*
Translated by Lindsay Turner

Alexander Millen 349 *Ludovico Silva, Marx's Literary Style*

Michael Casper 354 *Justin Hopper, ed., Obsolete Spells:
Poems & Prose from Victor Neuburg
& the Vine Press*

Contributors 369

From where i sat rear
view mirror to/afro
Astral future wish
Saw stars
Running away from
from tears
 amid war
Head to the sky

[cover image provided by julie ezelle patton]

CHICAGO REVIEW

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JULIE EZELLE PATTON: ARKITEXT

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Preface

In Autumn 2019, julie ezelle patton came to the University of Chicago to give a reading. To “give a reading” means something in excess of what it implies: that day, she performed a long-form, improvisational, language-driven performance responding to a newspaper she tore and rearranged as she “read.” Language skittered into sound—became a kind of background for tearing and the gestures that arose from it—and back again, after a time returning to the foreground, becoming semantic once more. A reading and performance that was a kind of dance of relation to, around, and through language.

Gerónimo Sarmiento Cruz (then editor) and Kai Ihns (then managing editor) began a series of conversations with patton and Jennifer Scappettone, a longtime friend of patton’s and collaborating editor on this issue, on how we might frame a special feature on patton’s work. The task and question: how to make an object that could, in some way, address a practice that seeks continually to remake itself, and which, as we later learned, rigorously avoids attempts to pin it down. (patton herself, in a conversation with Scappettone near the top of the present issue, observes her own reluctance even to publish books.) It seemed that finding a specific and well-defined aperture onto the practice, one that prioritized just a few key elements, was the best way for *Chicago Review* to serve it well—to offer an opening into patton’s thinking without attempting to determine what the total scope of the work finally was. Over a series of multiyear conversations between several generations of editors, Scappettone, and patton, *Chicago Review* decided that attending to the poetics of her space in Cleveland, the “Arkitext,” was the right way to start.

“The Building,” a.k.a the Salon d’ Refusee and Let it Bee Garden, is a teeming giant—a book-building or building-book that enframes acts of maintenance, curation, and landscaping. patton (sometimes) resides in and maintains a 6-flat in the Glenville neighborhood of Cleveland; the space is both a home and a total work of art. Every landing, every

doorway, every corner of the basement is integrated into a complex and perpetually reassembling network of installations. patton lives there with other artists and collaborators who pass through, and together they maintain the space and the communities that it touches. This is no small feat: the aging building is in perpetual need of repair, developers are changing the neighborhood around it, and sustaining the building, its community, its gardens, and its ethos grows more difficult and expensive each year. The Building is a precarious work, energetically sustained by the labor and attention of a lively group of neighbors and friends, but primarily by julie and Arcey Harton. Through that work and patton's expanded poetics can be discerned a gigantic, elusive, and unending task. This task both precedes and outlives patton's current artistic direction, and The Building's material container sets the scene for a conceptual practice rooted in patton's assemblage and performance. It serves, also, as a memory palace for its guests and a community blueprint for gathering, care, and mutual sustenance. Major threads in this issue intersect at the site of these "making-doings" in community.

Chicago Review saw in this publishing challenge a way to further extend our ongoing commitment to the documents, critical assessments, histories, and legacies of the Black Arts Movement (BAM). patton's practice extends this genealogical work from Chicago to Cleveland and further, bolstering a recovery of the Midwestern BAM. Like in our special features covering the poet Ed Roberson and BAM, this issue documents the complexity and variety of aesthetic and social modes that BAM incorporated from the late sixties on. Picking up on major currents of Black modernist traditions such as oral poetics and resistance to the English language's hegemonic totality, patton also concretizes Black modernism's commitments to ecopoetics, maintenance, visual art, and social practice.

§

Roughly thirty photographic plates that document The Building, and patton in it, are set next to, around, and between about a hundred pages of patton's writing and performance transcription, selected down from an enormous corpus to an almost-manageable chunk that

motions toward four decades of work. The presentation of patton's work here, then, is formed of two seemingly unintegrated wholes: the poetry, *The Building*. They sit next to each other—not resolved into any neat totality—gesturing collaboratively toward an ongoing, multimodal, and open-ended practice. The voice of *The Building* and of the poet are shot through with a chorus of responses that penetrate aspects of patton's practice, spoken in the form of interviews, essays, poems, dedications, odes, lists, machine-assisted transcription, and annotated scores. They are enlisted to begin articulating her place and influence in the discourses and scenes that her practice touches. So, then, the feature also presents itself as partial record of a community. The scaffolding and struts provided by any voice in the chorus cannot alone support *The Building*, just as the images and poems in *Chicago Review* cannot claim to fully render it.

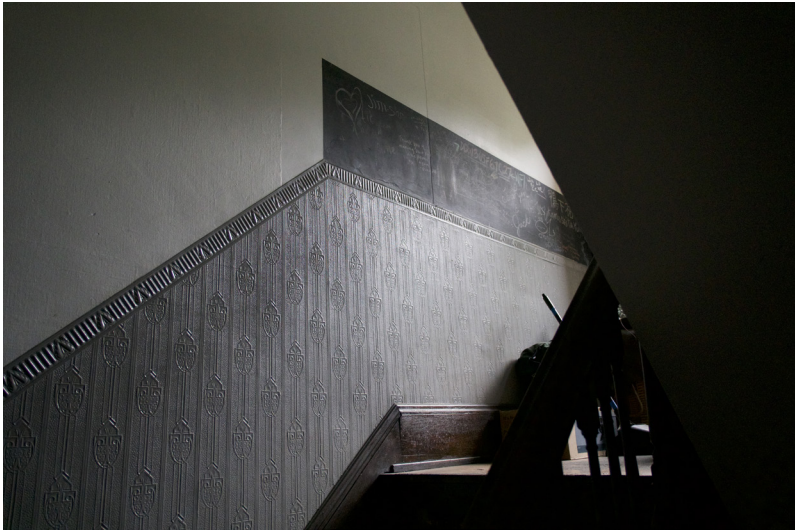
patton constructs out of language and its units of expression, repairing and suturing phonemes just as loose pieces of the assemblage works that live in the units of her Glenville home are reattached and arranged against existing form(ul)ations in expansive constellations. This work is iterative and provisional, evidenced not only in the continual process that characterizes its making but also in the recursions and circles of sound and sense that build the poetry itself. Her constant diagnosis of the iterability of forms—an iterability explicitly framed as a re- or up-cycling of found materials, words, sounds, and beings—theorizes precarity through a focus on liveliness. Performance becomes the way to interrogate the assumed isolation of poetry from other practices. Out of necessity, such iteration is stilled by its appearance in the pages of *Chicago Review*. It is our hope, and our expectation, that patton will continue to iterate on the works presented here, that they may not look the same tomorrow, that we are opening a conversation on and with this practitioner's work more than closing it, that we have held space rather than determined it. This feature, too, has looked different by the week: poems have left and entered and left again, images have moved in and out, pieces have been rearranged and placed next to every other piece—testing the inflections and prodding accident. *Chicago Review's* role in that iteration is, in the end, so much of what this feature can lay claim to wholly representing.

§

In August of 2023, a small team from *Chicago Review* went to Cleveland, OH to visit The Building to collect materials for an upcoming special issue on her work and practice. Work on the issue began in earnest during that summer visit, a sort of induction that made plain the task ahead. Lily Scherlis (then nonfiction editor) took most of the photographs that appear throughout the issue (except, in rare cases, when credits indicate other authors or modes of transmission). Later, patton provided captioning for those images—a selection pared down from more than 1,000 taken during our documentation. In Cleveland, she provided and showed us manuscripts, notebooks, revisions and temporary documents, scans of her own work and the work of others, the *Wetlands* (a constantly rearranging book of collages), and more still; we rifled through and photographed everything that we could. The resulting issue, an extended work of editorship and collaboration led by coeditors Clara Nizard and James Garwood-Cole, is the object that we present to you now. It is in some ways an accounting not only of a community or a body of work, but of *Chicago Review*'s encounter with it too—our collective attempt with julie to make an object that speaks just enough and almost right.



I always said I would leave The Building if Tree gave way and gave us away.



So we meet again you stairs can't make up mind embodying Tree g/host' d light.



Tree branched loving room headwaters shift furniture house bow at land tick'd off creaks.



Put some drawers on that window and skeletons in the closet drawing room cabinet carcasses curiosity fills soar to ceiling.

JENNIFER SCAPPETONE

julie ezelle patton and the Geopoetics of Unrequited Care

“surface really is the sandpoint of culture swell breaks.”

So speaks the entropic, bibliomantic cutup of a collage julie ezelle patton has wrought, is wreaking, on one of the teeming metamorphic walls of the sixteen-thousand-square-foot building she has been stewarding for the past two and a half decades in historic Glenville, on the east side of Cleveland.

patton often lives here, drifting between Cleveland and New York City; she and other residents in need of affordable housing “roost” throughout and move between floors in line with the seasons, “like migrating animals,” as she puts it, with critical/ecological precision. Despite the fact that it provides a fluctuating range of people with a place to sleep and eat, calling the cooperative residence a “home” would domesticate it in the narrowest sense, implying broad ownership where it doesn’t exist and diminishing the scale of the place’s reach. It is instead “The Building” (as noun and verb), in patton’s words. This space, a space that is the place in Sun Ra’s sense of refuge, is plural in both mission and possession. It’s a readymade, an earthwork, a Land Back initiative. It’s a reservoir and rivulet network of patton’s self-described “publik dissertation,” a motto I take to name an inhabitable essay wherein the domestic sphere is tasked with practices of cosurvivorship (also known—in this realm removed from the prize junket, beknighted laureates, and best-of lists—as art) leveled at wrangling with what it means to be a citizen of the public surround.

A complex of the Salon d’ Refusee or Chateau in z’ Ghetto and the reclaimed adjacent lot—known as the Let it Bee Ark Hive—the home-as-project undertakes a multiscale intervention into the neighborhood, the city, and the planet, which might change everything if heeded as a model of care: a common raft upon the disavowed wetlands of Ohio, making possible two decades of radical hospitality.

It serves as artists' shelter; living classroom for neighborhood Green Scouts; foraging ground; insect revolution harbor; safeguard of musical improvisation and 3D calligraphy; hall of graffiti of a feminist ilk; poets' forest; transit hub for bicycles, serviceberries, groundhogs, and cats; and two parallel stacks of unmoneyed galleries laced with patton's mural-sized drawings and frangible installations, comprising collage and assemblage pieces too numerous and continuous to list, all springing up in conversation with decades of oil paintings of commanding presence by her late mother, Virgie Ezelle Patton. In these residential assemblages, the geniuses of the defunct or discarded come home to roost in new congregations, reoriented away from the divisions of taxonomy and disposal toward reciprocal salvage and repair. As an ark for variously endangered creatures and artifacts—from migrating birds to the friable remains of an insect kingdom laid to rest in natural counterhistory dioramas—the constantly molting property in Glenville is also Arkitext, in the conception of an artist who trained in architecture at Cooper Union. The Arkitext is an inhabitable book to be read in time and space, at the scale of the human body, in concert with others; as an assemblage, it can only be fully apprehended in its localized three dimensions, yet its *stanzas* (as in the Italian for "rooms") yoke us into reading across epochs and continents. By reading patton's Arkitext closely and at a considerable distance from Glenville, we can discern in its seat-of-pants masterpieces a tentacular species of geopolitical critique.

The line of verse quoted in the epigraph, for instance, is made up of five different textual sources, forming the bottom contour of a fish patton gleaned through the collage process—its scales and gills borrowed from the lines of at least two clashing maps. It is being rowed by four Black figures from behind and simultaneously towed in by a young fisher to the shore of our parched continent [see page 11]. The fisher is surrounded by a spreading of mongrel tidal waves, merging the aesthetics of Hokusai with any number of other flows and geysers tapped in from maps, woodcuts, posters, and magazines—sweeping along with them a house like Dorothy's, animals in tenuous refuge (such as the cormorant perched atop the torch of a drowning Lady Liberty possessing plural Guro mask faces), and a consternated Martin Luther King Jr. whose head hosts a contest between engraved

Black and white boxers with roses for heads. To the Southeast, the waves become ice and snow: TANI[!]TARCTICA, overseen by “GREAT SMOKE” and branded by Apple™, sits at the edge of a hole, as if that of the ozone layer. To the north, torn fires and lava fields encroach upon the blue expanse, the whole held together by money, as in an actual bill of cash.

The map that engulfs our young fisher—which occupies nearly an entire wall of Suite 6, thereby dwarfing the line of verse with which we began—is the Rand McNally Simplified World Map: the kind purchased for use in elementary school classrooms, sporting pages devoted to different global zones that can be flipped in line with the lessons of the day. The skill of patton’s scissors and adhesive acts has rendered this heading instead as the G/UN/SIMPLIFIED WORLD, punctuated to the right by a recumbent skeleton with a sunflower for a spine and head—indicating the tragically gun-simplified world that has as its base the fractured United States. She has unsimplified it.

The proportions of the World Map inherited from the classroom suggest that the world takes the United States as its unquestioned nucleus, for a land mass at first glance resembling this nation-state appears to occupy the lion’s share of the expanse. Yet patton’s disunited states host innumerable holes and interpolations of the “periphery,” i.e. the rest of the world. The charted territories of patton’s DA/MERICA are constantly in evolution, as photographs the artist has taken of her collage work over the years attest. (Apparently, the solar eclipse of 2024 triggered a wholesale revision that alters the work as documented in May and August 2023.) Yet one element remains constant: her ear for innuendo and puns unwaveringly attacks the politics of toponyms. Amalgamative processes of cutting and pasting form a “GUnited Gates of MEXICOLA” at the border, while “ORGONE” is adjacent to the elegiac “CRINA.” We witness FLOWHIO becoming part of Florida, MINE crowding out MALI, and ARK/GIN/TUCK/YAS to the northwest of Turkey and India. In Texas, a Black Power fist appears to slam a petroleum well. In spots, territories are stuck together by tacks or Scotch tape and gaps are filled by hallmarks of feminine domesticity such as lace doilies, silk flowers, and potholders. Ephemera such as stamps are enlisted to tether enemies or kindred spirits together, such as Frida Kahlo and the Madonna and Child. Through these

geopolitical jokes and puns, the author-trickster lampoons the notion of the nation-state and the world as containable entities harboring resources that are there for the taking—a presumption that lies at the sinister heart of the cartographic enterprise in the first place.

Treating trash as precious and in turn embracing compost as compositional practice, patton's very process subverts the notion of the earth as waste sink. "I'm a hoarder," she proclaims self-deprecatingly, fingers wafting through the assemblage of open books (*My Indian Family*; *The Story of Africa: South of the Sahara*; *View Master Subject Reels: 891 to 1749*; *This is Our Heritage: Faith and Freedom*) splayed out below the classroom map in countermuseal fashion; by turning garbage into art at this monumental scale, she spares it the fate of the landfill—but achieves far more.

patton's work can properly be called a geopoetics as it undoes geopolitics by poetic means: the Arkitext resonates with Angela Last's call for "a reimagination of global community" fueled by cultural practices that acknowledge its origins in "violent human-nonhuman and interhuman relations," and which eschew the "fantasies of mastery, stability, and control" that shape classical Western geography.¹ Such practices course not only through patton's altered maps and books but also through the activities of this built plot of earth itself. Such actions critique the origins of landscape, survey, and private property in positing an earth providing "services" for a deranged definition of "growth" predicated on extraction and the harm or outright death of others.

patton's hoard of instructional detritus reaps dissent, here and in other works on paper, from a continent of mapped states pocked by icons denoting sources of industry. We discern across these pieces the remains of a dissected textbook teaching kids about the "value" of this land as a well of resource extraction: cattle, wheat, corn, timber, metal ore, petroleum. In a subtle sleight of hand (and scissor), the didactic standpoint of the image source—that this land is ours for the thieving—gives way to a shifting "sandpoint," the rug pulled out from under the map's settler logic, its ideological surface punctured. Art as compost, over four decades in the making. In patton's verse line that I have conjured—the result of years of her looking, listening, and flash improvisation—culture becomes not the staid monument but the break in the swell: liquid, protean, a place of pause.



[Southern central zone of *G/UN SIMPLIFIED WORLD* installation, mixed media, work in progress since 2004, Cleveland, Ohio.]



[Texas and Louisiana zones of *G/UN SIMPLIFIED WORLD* installation, mixed media, work in progress since 2004, Cleveland, Ohio.]



[*Wetlands* book collage with Ōta River as targeted spine, mixed media on paper, 2004.]



["Great Lakes" zone of *G/UN SIMPLIFIED WORLD* installation, detail, work in progress since 2004, Cleveland, Ohio.]

“Surface really is the sandpoint of culture swell breaks.” Her talking back is achieved by a single line recontextualized through recombinations of cultural detritus. There are whole discursive worlds being invoked via these juxtapositions that reward close reading as much as—and in pointed antagonism to—the most pedantic modernist monuments.

Poet-“phOHnemonologist,” performer, visual artist, permaculturist, cooperative live-archivist, alter- and anti-Cartesian Atlas, julie ezelle patton was born around the corner from The Building. She cut her teeth on life-as-art through the culture swells of Glenville. The neighborhood was near a vibrant strip of clubs where Langston Hughes hung out as a high schooler. From a young age, patton witnessed her mother’s palette chemistry, live drawing sessions, quotations, and playful barter in oil from the history of art—her “making-doings” in a translingual community. The Cultural Gardens in the neighborhood’s Rockefeller Park memorialize the artists and cultural heroes of thirty-five ethnic and immigrant groups (and counting), and the settlement house Karamu (from the Swahili for “meeting place”), founded in 1915 by young social workers Rowena Woodham and Russell Jelliffe, became a beacon recognized nationally for its core dedication to racially integrated theater and arts programs. Both patton’s mother and the poet, musician, playwright, composer, and editor Russell Atkins were students and eventually instructors at Karamu. patton grew up in what she calls “the movement days,” when the power of language and its interbraiding with other arts was of interest to a broader public. Poet Norman Jordan, cofounder of the Muntu Poets, a Black Arts Movement group, invited Atkins to teach poetry workshops to members of the Afro Set and other young Glenville/Hough-based Black nationalists in a nearby community cultural center using funds from CLEVELAND: NOW!, an initiative of Carl Stokes (who was the first African American mayor of a major US city). Atkins’s teachings wended their way through neighborhood streets as the workshop participants, all male junior high and high school students, shared these teachings and their writings after class. At age twelve, patton was a lone girl taking up these poetic strategies among a heady group, in dialogue with cultural nationalists. The informal, decentralized, plein air porch writing circles on Olivet

Avenue continued to sustain her ear for lyric throughout her teens. It wasn't until patton discovered Atkins's poetry in the main branch of the New York Public Library—and, finding it startlingly similar, began broadly advocating for it—that she was told by Atkins himself that he had originated these after-school experiments.

Meanwhile, history was going down with a capital *H*. patton refers frequently in conversation and installation to the uprisings of 1967–68. She chronicles her initial experiences of writing in community as being cut short by the Glenville shootout of 1968, “when Russell, who arrived to conduct his usual poetry lessons to black-booted and capped young whippersnappers, found a large cache of weapons and beat it home just in time before the fires started.”

By the late 1970s, patton was in the Northeast and began traveling to New York City—where she would settle in 1982—from Boston on weekends. She worked at the Lower East Side Printshop in 1976 and began a career as an installation artist; haunted squat scenes whose members were instrumental in initiatives like the Center for Book Arts; made and inked paper for the expatriate Jewish sculptor Sacha Kolin; and pulled prints for Twitchell-Nichols in 1978. In 1979, she assisted Eva Hesse's husband, Tom Doyle, on a large outdoor cantilevered sculpture, and was hired by mixed-media artist Willis “Bing” Davis via the Alternative Spaces Residency Program (which brought in the likes of Laurie Anderson, Mary Miss, Jenny Holzer, and others). At Antioch College in Dayton, Ohio, she experimented with mark making in ink via bodily motion, fascinated by Asian and Arabic calligraphy and contemporary gestural abstraction. John Cage came and took everyone on a mushroom walk; it was the first time she ate morels, with butter. Lucy Lippard also came through as a visiting lecturer.

During this time, patton organized a reading and performance event to draw attention and funds to the Paul Laurence Dunbar House in Dayton, which had been lying dormant, lacking state funding for its operation. The series featured readers such as professor and poet Herbert Woodward Martin, Antioch professor Bill Chappelle, poet Eric Henry, and poet and filmmaker Hsanni Scott-Matthews, who performed Dunbar's poetry (at times as music). “No one seemed to pay much attention to it just sitting there,” she says of the Dunbar



[julie ezelle patton and performer of verse Elaine Smith at the Paul Laurence Dunbar House in Dayton, Ohio, undated (late 1970s).]

House, “so I activated it.” In a period when drawing was dismissed as a mere precursor to painting, patton also curated a drawing exhibition at Antioch College’s Noyes Art Gallery that included work by Aminah Robinson and Beverly Henderson. She started a summer festival and had her first one-woman show courtesy of the experimental filmmaker Jud Yalkut. She was making drawings on the floor at the time, as large as eight by twelve feet, in response to sound environments, performing the drawings into being; she was also taking her calligraphic markings off the wall with strips of black paper to make words three-dimensional.

She moved into installation as Core Resident Fellow at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts’ Glassell School of Art in 1982–83, spreading out into space by using two walls at a time as if they were a book, and working with shadow as mark making. She made *My Life in the Ghosts of Bushes*, an inhabitable space, using tree branches, sand, and impressed paper “ghostings” in response to Nigerian writer Amos Tutuola’s 1954 novel *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. At twenty-nine, she applied to study architecture at Cooper Union with this evolving body of work, but decided in her first semester that the discipline was too confining. She was being introduced to experimental poetics at Teachers & Writers Collaborative through the work of June Jordan, Ron Padgett, and Grace Paley, but she continued to soak up the intellectually exuberant atmosphere at Cooper Architecture through friendships and a long-term relationship with architect and educator Guido Zuliani (who was connected to Raimund Abraham and John Hejduk). Immersion in this realm also led patton to Zuliani’s residency at the Malaparte House in Capri, where she developed a practice of daily installations with found natural materials which she compares to Cecilia Vicuña’s *precarios*.

patton came to poetry from across what she conceives of as a disciplinary river—the contemplation by a visual artist of how letters look, scoring their aural navigation of the air, anti-iambically. All this becomes the basis of a poetic praxis that resists reification as art under glass, framed and hung steadfast, or as shelved tome (in her East Village apartment, I recall, books were displayed with the spines toward the wall). She instead embraces the improvised, the transient, the aural, the dialogic, the infinite occasions of specific places and

times: paper-bag accordion book; room of drying leaves prepared as playscape; cursive letters composed of hair lost to the shower [see page 103], or flower stems; tree-branch alphabet fence [see page 150]; song jump-started by the familiar face before her; the headlines in shreds; or the words and images on a public wall. julie patton draws sound, and using paper in conjunction with her formidable voice as an instrument, she rips, sculpts space through off-the-wall syllables, victimizing letters and “beating the crap out of” colonial English, though it be her so-called mother tongue.

Through volatile protean scores like “Using Blue to Get Black” and “Alphabet Soup,” patton’s live writing (“composaytion”) plunges into the punishing history of language and its grammarians as oblique ars poetica of her withholdings from publication—into the white supremacist and colonial impositions of literacy as fortress-keeping. Her encyclopedic work *B* casts being explicitly into the historical frame of Hamlet’s philosophical contemplation as the transatlantic trade of enslaved people. (She has inhabited Shakespeare in various ways over the years, having played with the role of Desdemona for a performance of Uri Caine’s *Othello Syndrome* at the Venice Biennial of Theater in the late 1990s). patton’s performance *Grammar Can Be Fun* involved the creation of a gigantic children’s book of the type she recalled from storytime at the Carnegie Library; dressed as a Fool, donning underwear for a cap, she parodied proper speechkeeping and punishment with an ear and an eye to racialized regimes of linguistic discipline.

patton made the epic decision, in 2001, to help salvage the four-story 1913 “recto-verso” apartment building sentenced to destruction on Cleveland’s former so-called Gold Coast, one seemingly built around an oak tree (whose recent fall, an estimated two hundred and fifty years into its life, she narrates as a trauma). It was the year that, as she put it, “two ice-blue rectangles dipped in landfill (rumored to be former burial grounds of African slaves and Natives) were stalked by ‘terrorists’ in New York City,” her home turf for decades.² That sentence itself conducts archaeology—but patton’s is very much a work of building. To flee from the terrorism of property speculation in the gentrifying East Village, or what she pointedly calls the “East Pillage”; to escape from the toxic dust of 9/11; to care for parents and

siblings in need; to live green maintenance, in the spirit of Mierle Laderman Ukeles, as an art form; to practice “conservation easement” as poetics, protecting the land by permanently limiting its use and pillage—plotting against gentrification. We can understand patton’s project in art-historical terms as an ark of unrequited care (through what has come to be known in more optimistic art parlance as “social practice”), whose aesthetics roam from the readymade to Merzbau to The Heidelberg Project, from land art to Project Row Houses to the Tenderloin National Forest. It’s impossible not to invoke, as well, Gwendolyn Brooks’s critical engagement with the lived communal spaces of architectural modernity in her 1968 masterpiece *In the Mecca*. But patton’s is a dwelling/writing project created from scratch, with an ecological focus. “George Washington Carver was our mentor,” she writes, “and Billie Holiday our flower.”

Slowly and through the labor of many hands, the dual Glenville building was rendered a “zentelectual property” where maintenance meets meditation and ritual. It is a “breathing residential dwelling,” with two hundred and fifteen drafty original windows imprinted with the symbol of the caduceus that leads patton and collaborator Arcey Harton to conjecture that the architect was a freemason. patton thinks of the air shaft [see page 199] between the two columns of apartments as animate space “where the angels get in.” It is not empty, as Duke Ellington elaborated in his 1940 composition “Harlem Air Shaft”:

You get the full essence of Harlem in an air shaft. You hear fights, you smell dinner, you hear people making love...The man upstairs’ aerial falls down and breaks your window. You smell coffee. A wonderful thing, that smell. An air shaft has got every contrast.³

The house as “machine” for processing phenomena in a musical and spiritual key can also be thought of as a light prism and as a whistle, in which hums resonate with the help of the shaft from ground to roof. Some of what you hear across the charged negative space is kids, also shots; you smell coffee and lilac. The children who live in the low-income housing complex across the way (known as the “bunker” or “battleship” by external authorities) and other schoolkids have been instructed in the permeability of property over the course of summers past, making jam (“def jams”), collages, and literal anti-fences of

words in one of various collective endeavors launched with artists Ian Charnas, Nina Sarnelle, and Alison O’Daniel. At the same time, being perched in the immediate vicinity of the Cleveland Orchestra, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Museum of Natural History, and Case Western Reserve University, the whole endeavor, as property, is increasingly vulnerable to rising costs and predatory speculation. The Building has, to some extent, emptied out in recent years as these battles are fought.

The Let it Bee Ark Hive is also, importantly, a land conservation project: the property becomes a place of rest in migration for local and international artists, scholars, monarchs, naturalists, gardeners, and other guests interested in cultivating and sharing knowledge as a form of wealth. The complex sits in a place where, wherever you dig, water wants to come up. The Ark Hive makes space for that process: for the release of the tributary beyond the massive retaining walls lining the Doan Brook that courses through Rockefeller Park; for the return of the wetland to the urban stretches of a valley whose name—the Cuyahoga—is still associated in the popular imagination with a river whose oil slicks caught fire. (The Cuyahoga River went up in smoke more than a dozen times from the 1860s forward until the phenomenon was rendered notorious and historically impactful by a 1970 cover story of *National Geographic* devoted to “Our Ecological Crisis.”⁴ It is often cited as a trigger of the Clean Water Act, the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and the creation of the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.)

The history of land surveys has become important to patton through her work with real estate appraiser/guitarist/collaborator Paul Van Curen, since these documents index site geologies as well as the living beings of their ecosystems. As part of the FRONT Triennial in 2018, patton curated *Womb Room Tomb: The Painted Closet of Virgie Ezelle Patton*—a show in which her works and her mother’s were installed in rooms and closets in one of The Building’s lower-floor apartments, in dialogue to the point of entanglement. The show registered her fascination with the early-seventeenth-century closet of Lady Anne Drury, patron and friend to John Donne, illuminated with more than fifty puzzling and paradoxical landscape emblems—

an early verbo-visual installation work described as “*architext*” by one of its core interpreters.⁵ Drury’s chamber was situated within a manor whose natural history is detailed in *The History and Antiquities of Hawsted, and Hardwick*, and patton keeps a reproduction of this apparently banal property inventory amidst her own embellished closets, collaged rebuses, and mental lists, relishing the survey’s fine attention to a ground surface “diversified with those gentle inequalities so pleasing to the eye” and robed with humble flowers “too beautiful and various to be trampled on unheeded.”⁶

The house at Glenville has less backing for its beautification, to say the least. It has been challenging to maintain this property with sweat equity, some rental income, and few devoted collaborators in recent years. patton’s design for an urban plan that would support the immediate community and its wetlands included proposals for daylighting the tributary, for creating natural play spaces, woodland trails, bird houses, bike paths, crosswalks, and a pedestrian bridge across Martin Luther King Drive that would make the lives of walkers safer and more pleasant. The plan was taken up in certain aspects by the county and some local advocates belatedly, when greenwashing became a phenomenon hauling in dollars—without citation or any other form of recognition. This Rust Belt town whose rise was fed by pollution giants like Standard Oil and the lead-disseminating Sherwin-Williams paint (whose emblem features an ooze of their trademark red Kem-Tone engulfing the blue globe, and reads “Cover the Earth,” apparently without irony), and whose economic path forward has been punctuated by alternating real estate speculation and neglect, does chasten one’s utopian prospects for transgenerational community, green activism, and arts incubation spaces. But the Ark Hive continues to swell with nettles, bees, deer, and pawpaws regardless. The city where the river burned is also known historically for its Black leadership and environmental activism, and the environmental justice work of Carl Stokes (in office from 1968–1971) still resonates as precedent.

In patton’s *Wetlands*, a book of collages on Japanese paper, the Ōta River, whose Aioi Bridge provided the target for the US’s atomic bombing of Hiroshima, is captured photographically from the deathly perspective of the *Enola Gay*, becoming the liquid spine or digestive

canal of a hybrid utility pole as fallen, friable elm leaf [see page 17]. This complex of parts makes up a cyborg possessing the arm of a cricket whose head is constituted by a vast white modernist hospital or apartment complex, a Black adolescent playing on the colossus's narrow lawn. The complex's other arm is missing, yet we recall the cricket's mysterious capacity to regenerate an amputated leg. The phrase "POST-STRIKE" appears upside-down along the bottom edge of this piece, characterizing both the documentation of the "zero point," shot after the city's devastation, and patton's practice as a whole: no pristine parts have been enlisted to concoct this protagonist, at once human, animal, vegetable, mineral, and architectural—ghostly, primordial, and modernist. All edges but those of the cricket spines, tarsi, and claws have been torn, and the washi paper substrate itself shows both tears and constitutive imperfections, yet a marvelous agent arises from patton's careful attending to the wreckage. patton's geopoetics invents forms of agency not *ex nihilo*, but out of those very "violent human-nonhuman and interhuman relations" that issue from modern geopolitics.

In light of these histories, one might wonder what becomes of Cleveland on patton's *G/UN/SIMPLIFIED WORLD*. *FLO/HIO* floats out into the Pacific, with Cleveland thumbtacked to the south of Pusan and to the west of the Gulf of Aden, Quito, and a Florida-sized faded red woven potholder. Where Cleveland might have been, we find an elaborated breach. We find, that is, the UNI—of a former USSR, below Berlin, Damascus, and Baghdad. Columbus becomes Co-lombia; patton's mother Virgie makes an appearance across the border through the toponym *VIRG/HER/SEY*; Lake Erie is pasted in between Flint and Niagara Falls and is subtended by a verse line manifesting a transmutation of crisis through assonance: "to emerge in sea." Where Cleveland might have been, we find a Band-Aid precariously tacking these parts into unity.

The bandage sticks in a clothing tag for good measure, inventorying the rayon, cotton, and thirty-seven percent waste cotton that went into some ordinary textile. It is yet another unwasted artifact that becomes, in its three dimensions and through patton's extravagant work of thrift, of concentration, of care, a wraithlike flag for the ascendant state of emergency that she reveals, here as

elsewhere in the monumental Glenville Arkitext, to be tortuously shared. The geopoetics of unrequited care will keep a lover with a calling composing this *canzoniere*, as the drills dig depths never imagined before, the plastic piles up, the paint seeps, and the bombs continue to fall. It will keep her filling in the abandoned bookshelves and the holes in the ceiling with memory theaters and wishes for the species. It will keep her singing untested “chora-geographies” and harmonizing scores of a humanity too belatedly aware of its yokes to all calamities covering an inundated earth.

NOTES

1/ Angela Last, “Fruit of the Cyclone: Undoing Geopolitics through Geopoetics,” *Geoforum* 64 (August 1, 2015): 56–64, 59.

2/ julie ezelle patton, “The Building by the Side of the Road: Cleveland’s Native/Green Rights Movement,” *About Place Journal* 1, no. 2 (2012), <https://aboutplacejournal.org/issues/rust-belt-tales/>.

3/ Duke Ellington, qtd. in “Richard O. Boyer: ‘The Hot Bach,’” *The Duke Ellington Reader*, ed. Mark Tucker (New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), 235.

4/ “Our Ecological Crisis,” *National Geographic*, December 1970, Cover.

5/ H. L. Meakin, *The Painted Closet of Lady Anne Bacon Drury* (Surrey, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 6.

6/ Sir John Cullum, *The History and Antiquities of Hawsted, and Hardwick, in the County of Suffolk* (London: J. Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1813), 2–3.

Stanzas in Conversation

julie patton isn't one for sitting still or speaking staid statements out of a void. As such, this "interview" unfolded as dozens of conversations over the course of two days in The Building: sometimes in the kitchen over an omelet of foraged herbs; sometimes within a room or stanza's installation, as she added and subtracted elements (a map scrap tacked to the wall where paint peels away from the ceiling in a large continent shape, or a badger mask pitched atop a shadeless lamp); some chats were in the basement exhibition; some in motion over the wetland across the street. Imagine these sentences as walks: patton thinks in transit, in the air, in song, in dialogue and collaboration (in "chora-geography").

The conversations have been edited for readability, context, and clarity.

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jep: If we zero in on the side of my work as it concerns *s/place*—my term for splitting the diff between space and place—then I perceive this site as a living sculpture, an Arkitext, or a house-book that can go under (water) at any time. Pillar to post—PovArty. Or Climate Shame's FEMAtic roof. Prayer ascends the building's air shaft—open heart of the building complementing kitchen hearths—and kisses the sky. Rain snatches words on the way down the drain, and leaves dry them.

Hearing aid or loudspeaker, the acoustics here are pitch perfect. We opened up the building for the 2018 FRONT Triennial, and "activated" this column of light with music and poetry. If you open a top floor window and speak at normal volume to someone in the basement your voice can be heard as if standing right next to them. The various exhibits spaced throughout the entire building were accompanied by this meandering score filtering through the central column.

Tired of the constant chatter and noise accompanying art, I insisted on silence. Guests drifted from room to room, floor to floor in silence. *Womb Room Tomb*, an installation built around closets filled with my mother's drawings, paintings, sculptures, writings, and prints, was dedicated to meditation, her most cherished groove and mine. Each room had a silent "actor" or docent carrying out common household duties. Sweeping, washing a window, writing at a desk, arranging flowers, sewing, pacing, drawing—labor and domesticity—and the mystery of temporal bodies carrying out what humans have done for centuries. I wanted the building to heal everyone in the listening field of their particular bodies. Their eyes, as fingers or vectors grabbed our attention. "Shut up!" said the building as bodies wrapped around its spine.

JS: Which is the column? Is it this wall or the air shaft between the two homes—the building that I'm staying in, and the building that we're in now?

[*performs chute noise*] All of the above and more since there are also, on each side of The Building, north and south, vertical stairwells and laundry chutes. The hundred-foot-long interior passageways tunneling through each suite, as well as the fireplace chimney, suggest horizontal columns or tunnels. Silent witnesses, empty volume columns unless penetrated by material bodies. Fireplaces shoot—or chute—cold or warm air and carry sound. And if one isn't careful, they might also channel gossip.

Thus limned and in limbo, vacillating and vassalating between continuing the struggle of sustaining what's left of a co-op in order to save a building, to save the work contained and spilling out and away from it. Still. Because that's how we move throughout the complex: up, down, and nomadic in the sense that we caretakers or stewards lack fixed abodes in this here here, but perennially circulate down into the cool of the basement during summer and up to the toasty top floor during winter. Booking this always under-booked ("Black people can't have nuthin'!") affair cleaved in two by public and private concerns.

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I have always dreamed of going back to college and having the luxury to take my time and study and explore... But because of the politics at the time, I remember people saying: “You don’t want any adulteration.”

What was that all about?

Not frying your mind politically. Okay, colonially...?

Like not selling out to the institutional... paradigms?

It was about not fraying. For me it was more—and still is—the issue of finding money or time to do so. It was common enough to hear people complain about “overeducated fools” or “book sense,” versus what some called “Mother wit,” but most of the focus was on “Go get that education,” with some dissenters who advised: “Just go get that first degree. You’re good after that.” Then there were “street scholars” who weren’t just, according to stereotypes, holding up walls and playing the dozens. They functioned like stand-up libraries, book mobiles which could walk and talk, passing around Richard Wright, Garvey, Baldwin... existentialism, especially Sartre, Russian literature—with an emphasis on Dostoyevsky—and debating differences between serfdom and slavery on into the night. With its lines, passages, and dog-eared corners, “street smarts” were a different kind of book look. But of course, I’m recalling when a Black person couldn’t be caught dead with a book. One grade school American songbook had us little children singing “Old Black Joe”!

I don’t even know that but I’m sure it’s offensive—so it was an adulterated folk song?

Or it was some minstrel song. I can still recall performing French minuets with white cotton wigs... I never studied French. But from what I remember of it from the second grade, it seems you had to learn it throughout the public schools in Cleveland, so there were all these Black people from my generation with some familiarity with French.

Because they were also the colonists in the area. Right?

Not as much as Detroit or farther north into Canada, but French was treated as the language of erudition. It still is in a way, and I hear it as a frequent vowel sound ending in Cleveland's Black community. In the names of some of the children we worked with from across the street. Names ending with an *a*. Oo la la. Yeah, so as I was saying... the song "Old Black Joe [*sings briefly*]..."

I'm looking at this Swinton's Word Primer. Your basic relationship to English is in reaction to these colonial, racist curricula, these standardized curricula.

Yes. In part.

I can't ever really understand your age, but would this have been in the '60s?

Yes. But I also grew up with Bank Street Readers. Minimal text and great scenes of outdoor life, puddles. Words marching in columns, girdled in lists, and recited, like "Like/Not-Alike," contrasted with the sonic field of a couple dozen children on the block playing jump rope and other outdoor rhyming games.

When I first started performing, I used *Grammar Can Be Fun*, a police manual, amid other examples of found literature, along with my own texts. I was working at Teachers & Writers at the time; not as an artist, but as a nonprofit management intern. That's how I fell in with the poets. The spaces for recitation were jarringly white, plain, and blank as paper—perfect for experimenting with voice in contrast to more embellished talking walls such as could be found in churches and Carnegie Libraries. These were music and art salons that operated out of private houses black in the day. That's how I caught a glimpse of my flat.

Is there a Carnegie Library here?

There's an abandoned one on the next block. That library had a huge skylight, an open courtyard. The natural light coming through the

skylight was beautiful. These were practically gilded or adorned like religious spaces—same with banks. One could read walls and ceilings while parents were otherwise engaged. And get lost in space.

Artist Sandra Payne, former director of New York Public Library’s Young Adult Services for many years—and now deceased—shared my enthusiasm for the giant-sized—to a kid—practically walk-in books. I call them “talking books.” Sitting low on three-legged stools gave the impression of being inside the space of the story book, while the librarians served as ventriloquists.

What? Really?

One reader, librarian and ex-Karamu dancer Roger Mae Johnson, was so popular that people would line up outside the door just to hear her crack a book and bring words alive. And so you were in the words, the woods of language. For my first performance series, I made a large mock-up of *Grammar Can Be Fun*. I treated the audience like a class of dunces. I wore a 1950s-style girdle, a pointed bra on the outside of my clothing, and a plastic wig. And I punished the audience. My wacky persona was based on my memories of hearing the swish-swish sound of hosiery and women’s foundation-wear as my female teachers went up and down the aisles helping people. Soft architecture. With boning, metal stats, and garter-belts.

When and where was this?

At Segue [the New York reading series curated by James Sherry], when it was on Eighth Street, and at the Cleveland International Performance Art Festival. This goes back to me feeling like an interloper or imposter in a world I really didn’t know much about. Just exploring, playing around—claiming hidden spaces. A witch, infiltrating other disciplines.

And what did you say earlier about abuse?

Sometimes I was language; the role of language can be abusive. “Pronounce this word,” and that’s an order. Or, “No, it doesn’t say that.” Or, “What does this mean? Are you dim? You dem?” And

handwriting, too, this staying between the lines. Other times I would give exercises to people to do... And I really liked the materials of the educational world, which inform my poetics to this day.

It has to do with spatialization, being in the room. Normally I'm creating an installation from the materials that I've brought: I sometimes arrive with two black attaché cases, and whatever I've grabbed is what I work with, but I make a mess around me. These days it's the newspaper, tearing up current events. Language is messy.

It's my love of books—and then my anger or frustration toward them, from growing up in the days when the language in the books was telling me, “You are inferior” or “You are illiterate,” yet straining to find great beauty in the sounds, numbers, fonts, and meaning.

I went through a period where I subtracted consonants, stripped the bark off of words to entice my audience or public classroom to ear the errors or missing letters, then redress them. If they could. For instance, [*reads from text*] “inses ips out our ise or addy acton is at the ark.” A different kind of Pig Latin. One time I requested the audience—whom I treated as somewhat illiterate—to remove items of clothing and read the labels: “Open mouths wide. Now lip around.” “Point, enjoy soil anointed moist spoil young garden before what is in this bird's home, why a red robin cannot peel grim chicken. Which cabin do they live in with catnip timid kitchen? Cool whip them finger lickin' guys or gals,” or “As we went from our oak grove we found a lame dove. Loathsome love come undone Sun now world behest intone gold sundown with what the Moon done best. So leave that mess on the floor in bins nest no less accept than we... Oh, we who swill well swells have long done cloak floor drove honey through oak door the lovey dovey note next,” and so forth. Sound poetry. Nonsense; fall through old books, and a room of your own, until the books take over your house and you must shut them up by turning their word-covered “spines” to the wall. Unhinged. And vice versa.

I think this is making sense...

It is? [*laughs*]

So, we can focus [the issue] on a series of things which are both architecture and book? The Building, plus material like the primer as

a book environment—and works of yours like Grammar Can Be Fun, which are also crafted in response to phenomena like the Carnegie Library as a “talking” environment. “The Big House Syndrome” was an instance of you creating a “re{a}d coat”—an example of clothing as what you called “the first architecture,” but legible like a book when you opened it up... And you’re responding in that piece to both the Cleveland Museum of Art and a particular room in the Brooklyn Museum of Art where you performed from the coat and its writings?

Oh, that’s another infiltration project or pose. And too complicated to go into here, but suffice it to say that I went into the Brooklyn Museum dressed as the Cleveland Museum. I was a “flasher” in a vermilion-red maxi coat lined with postcards reflecting the Cleveland collection. The backs of the cards were filled with notes about life and art making in the little house I grew up in, not too far from the big houses which dominate that part of the city. I was misread as a typical patron until I opened my coat, one wing at a time, and began randomly unpinning the cards and improvising from them one by one. Soft architecture in hard. At one point someone suggested I turn around and look at what was behind me, and at that moment I realized I had painted myself into the corner of a painting depicting three sisters in similar colored coats. Kismet! It was a very large painting with life-sized figures. I appreciate that piece because, for one, it was a badass coat—lightweight gabardine—so I could move about very freely, and also because the guards had no idea what I was up to. If buildings could talk and walk. And why can’t anyone, even an always-broke, ephemerally working Black woman, build or embody her own museum? Every house is a potential archive. And now we have, outside of institutional say-so—also on East Boulevard in the 44106—the Cleve Museum of heArt, in honor of my father Cleve.

So that work is made in response to the architecture, and it also creates its own architecture. Then there are the environments here in The Building, which are different Arkitexts. [gesturing to the corners of the suite] The corner that’s about the Middle Passage, or the corner that’s about the birds, or the corner here, which you didn’t even tell me about yet... which features Angela Davis’s head, an Indigenous woman with a tea filter over her face, and the fishnet.

Well, the contents of my visual improvisations change context, even floors. It's how I file stuff I save from the trash bin. Or heal. Myself or whatever something represents or makes me think about. Assembling is animating beauty or mitigating pain. The two often go together. Waste is grief so this [The Building] is a trauma ward. I prefer empty meditative space, living with as little as possible. That's why I'm always clearing house. I think I'm always trying to get back to the tiny house I grew up in. From the outside, having "nothing" was "poor," but to me it was rich with time and space. To make things. A little bit of baking soda, vinegar, salt over the shoulder, and boiling went a long way. *[laughs]* Now there are long aisles full of... crap. I never let go of the simple life or adapted to harboring plastic. Can't stand to touch it and it hurts my eyes so I feel as if I've spent my entire life pouring music into glass jars. There's a place for every thing. To a town and country girl. A woodsman like me stuck in the past. 1979 was where I drew the line. In terms of growing up and away from roots.

Dustbin in one hand, pushpins in apron, I inevitably come across something worth saving or finding another use for. Such as the brittle net filter which now veils the face of a Native woman.

A floating world... and I also get a kick out of hearing what others read into these precarious rebuses and curios. Someone once said that this particular room resembles a twisted nineteenth-century museum of history. *[laughs]* Now I walk into visual art museums and it looks like they've taken up the charge of anthropology. Without formal apology. They just clean their noses with representational bodies *[laughs]* while centuries of blood hang in the balance.

Ninety-nine percent of the insect carcasses here—cicadas in particular, bones, fish, feathers, and other discards—come from these environs. I will display its beauty. Minimizing my contribution to landfills, I use my nails to dig into and tear around a paper body, then go "T-A-C-K"—a holding pattern until time tells me where it goes. So these are time pieces: discards piled up over time. My sense of deep repair of whatever's re-represented by the image. Let me become nothing... yet everything, and leave a bard's footprint. I like bound wings: constraints, limits. Such as existing literature or quotidian debris that washes ashore cusp of hand. I've avoided publishing books so far. I use existing books. Always have. Lie-burials. And like most

people, have an inherent dislike for my voice. I feel as if I am playing at representing LANGUAGE, pointing fingers at me the wrong way. Embodying another perspective or voice. Class clown gave me wiggle room, persona—mask. What kind of fool I am. Foul mouth, too.

And as with the maps, various animal menageries come about as hand prayers for a broken world. Only thing permanent is impermanence. Trauma ward, drama pest.

I don't think of myself as an artist or poet in the sense of having the time to sit down and make something and say, like Jesus, "It is finished." [*laughs*] I would love that. Except I consider chairs to be an unnatural spine-destroying structure. [*laughs*] And if you think that's bad—look what happened when it led to the table and all the other planes where wars are planned. Desk job to field marshal. And practically every room in The Building has a desk, chair, and writing supplies; stamps, scissors, various papers, etc. in case inspiration hits, registers: from Poet's House to Fred Sanford's house. Made of love a caper and paper but not so much the kind one can cash. Or seeks approval for. Scooting across surfaces hands fly off walls or desks traversing imaginary planes. Anyway, [*laughs*] for my purposes, walls get to be desks as I am always moving across a Holy See of floors. Old growth wood pressed into service, holding up earth planes holding up other planes. Waiting for whatever crosses my threshold.

Thresholds were made for making an entrance [*laughs*]. You could practically see the curtains parting when my peoples entered the house or a room. They danced. And glowed like chandeliers. And the rooms cracked up with laughter. "Afro-optimism."

Whenever I tried to get information about enslavement in relation to my ancestors, my great-aunts and -uncles just talked about the body. They'd say, "Oh Granddaddy had a straight back!" Or my dad would say, "I don't lay in bed. I get up movin'!" And whenever my mom's people crossed a threshold into a space they "cut the rug" a little. Did a little glide or slide. Strut they stuff. Homes, basements, salons, living rooms, and backyards were the performance-hosting spaces. I'm a jitterbug, too. I don't feel I make any things, so much as they happen to me. On the move between rooms, sweeping. Vistas. To be. Who's doing all this. "Not I," said the cookie jar. On the receiving end of wonder and gifts I just scoot or scat across surfaces or onto the nearest piece

of paper around, material in hand. I'm a mess [*laughs*]. You ever see a performance stage floor after I cut up in 'em? I never had a room of my own growing up, let alone a bed, so here I am, making room for myself.

A clearing in the forest of living. Look at these oak floors! You remember my Ninth Street apartment, Jen. I just gotta have a big hole in the middle of the floor to cut the rug, move through chores, or get on top of it with a sheet of paper and draw or sew. I crawl like a baby. And cry, too. I used to do so in ink, when I was a Core Resident Fellow at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts in '82. I came off the wall and created room-sized installations only to come back on to walls now... [*writing in the air, gesturing with both hands as if sound were arriving in head*]. Hearing with eyes and seeing with ears. Exploring the limits of perception. [*Pointing to Wetlands collage of animals, human body parts, and ships, then gesturing to floor as if throwing ink around with a brush, then almost as if playing percussion.*] 'Cause when you crawl around or work on the paper with ink, when you throw it up against something, you get the sound implied by the thrust, the rhythm. [*Moving away from the book and gesturing as if to conduct an orchestra or sweep in the air.*] You know how if you're sweeping, you start singing a song, like cleaning house, *la de da da*, it's prosody, it's rhythm, it's the measurement between... [*continuing to flip through Wetlands book*] I'm not precious about anything. I tear things up... People can make what they want out of these images... [*pointing to a figure in a collage and reading.*] "Art by God." I like this figure's well-delineated little booty.

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[*flipping through Wetlands book*] A friend of mine, Chris Jones, brought me this book filled with mulberry paper, from India. It was the paper that attracted me, pulled me into the wetlands it was before, now dried and bound. I started out with very spare drawings or markings. And that's what I liked. I intended to maintain a basic minimalism, then the detritus came in, took precedence because one always has to deal with waste, mitigate it in one way or another. The scale of this habit grew and intensified and took over my life because

the contents of my house were constantly under fire via demolition and other destructive methods—harassment via my NYC land devil in extreme ass. [*flipping through collages that include photos of patton in cypress swamp*] Wetlands are filled with duckweed and plants breaking down—fossil fuels—over time. And empty of humans. Places which feel out of this world. One feels like dinosaurs are going to come out of the tall plants and muck.

So this is actually somewhere in the Midwest?

That's around Cleveland.

Wow.

In my youth there were between 200,000 and 300,000 trees. But now there's about 100,000, and the urban canopy is around thirteen percent. Andy Warhol once said, "I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever hope to own." Cleveland Metroparks appear to have heard Warhol. However, switching from treeple to humanitree, Other examples of flourishing—such as Black uplift (in what became Leaveland and now seems to be Cleveland Clinic, Ohio) and white anxiety about integration—fall back to the usual police state pushb[1]ack, then the redlining of spilled blood. Such as what occurred when Ahmed Evans, the Kurtz-like leader of the New Libya group, one of dozens of local Black nationalist projects, decided to resist. Going in and out of my old neighborhood over time, the newly christened "Land," has inspired me to use Tulsa as a verb, saying Cleveland was Tulsa'd... in a roundabout way, using other means and methods to put a chokehold on Others. And on the watch of various seemingly sincere b(s)Lack officials, which should lead to discussions about class dynamics.

Most of the old nationalists I run into say that the Glenville uprising of '68 (two years after the equally fiery "Hough Rebellion") was in response to an "Intifada," which is not a surprising term, considering Pan-Africanism, the role of Islam, and by extension, an ever-present preoccupation with injustice in Palestine, the Black Panthers in Algeria, and so forth. And all of this in and around East

105th Street which was once referred to as “Yiddish Downtown.” I sometimes joke that I grew up in an American Levant of sorts. In any case, ex-Korean War vet Evans used the \$50,000 in funding that Mayor Carl Stokes (the first Black mayor of a large city) provided to his “Afro Culture Shop and Bookstore,” two blocks from my childhood home, to purchase guns. Years ago, Russell Atkins confided that when he arrived on schedule to teach poetry at the center he espied a huge cache of weapons and split. That was the beginning of the so-called Glenville shootout.

The shootout occurred some distance from the mixed-class, tree-lined residential streets of Glenville. But that’s not where the fires were set. The sky was monstrously red. We couldn’t stay in our home due to the threat of being consumed by the flames and everyone was taking turns watering down roofs. Watering down the night. We spent the night on the corner of our block with other families, under the same streetlamp that late-night crooners on their way home from work pooled around singing everyone to sleep as if living in one block-long bed. “Sing that one again!” someone might yell. You could feel everyone listening. Inside the deep peace elders set the tone as we followed their lead out of respect. And then suddenly the little plastic army men we used to play with sprang to life with real rifles and real jeeps! The National Guard had arrived. And curfew.

So who set the fires, and who put Black real estate genius Winston Willis out of business, and who set the Jazz Temple on fire, is more complex than the official record claims. If you ask the people. Or Arcey Harton, who at the age of twelve, “went home and looked in a mirror to see if he had something wrong with his face that he didn’t see,” trying to comprehend why some white shopkeeper offered him a rag, a bottle, and kerosene to make his business disappear! Since the Glenville legible in Adrienne Kennedy’s “People Who Led to My Plays” or Nishani Frazier’s *Harambee City: The Congress of Racial Equality in Cleveland and the Rise of Black Power Populism* was Tulsa’d, people have been putting out all kinds of fires. Ever since. Living under fire—it’s hard to get past skin. Drapes.

Perhaps this project, dwelling space, and Arkitext, might be an organized hoard or a time machine assembled and reassembled by me, the Curator of Trash. Perhaps it has to do with trying to house myself in some way, because of so much loss. Existential homelessness.

Loss of my old neighborhood due to the conflagration of 1968; loss of my NYC apartment along with everything else that went with living in NYC, from poet friends to the opportunity to work with amazing musicians. Out of sight, out of mind NYC is. For the most part. And at the same time, in Cleveland I've only been invited to read my work on one occasion—an invitation about twenty years ago from R.A. Washington to open for Will Alexander. I'm like a fish out of water in the 216. Detroit has been more welcoming. Alas, you can't be a prophet in your own hometown.

I grew up in the era of hand-me-downs or making, scrounging, thrifting your own clothes. What I do with words. The family house on Olivet contained eight people in about 800 square feet. Indoors was for sleep and slamming screen doors. Jay Fellows wrote, "Writing has the pleasure of the door." And boy did they revolve. Upstairs there were seven more family members. Next door there were thirteen children. Skip a house then there were ten, six, five, nine and on and on and on. Children doubled up in beds and narrow closets which contained only a few changes of clothes per child. And we seldom saw the floor except to pin paper patterns to fabric on top of it to sew. I have a memory of my mother or elder sisters fitting patterns to my body to shorten or lengthen them. Sheer things intrigue me. Voile, silk and the bio-logic of shimmering wings, skeletal leaves and pressed flowers in the vitrines of the Twisted Naturalist haven on The Building's top floor, which are a constant reminder to stop and step gingerly and to handle fragile worlds with care. I decided to be "backwards" instead of surrendering to the loud over-stimulating and hyper-illuminated, machine-driven world of techno-optimism—or what Russell Atkins bemoaned as gadgetry. Abou Farman once said that my mother's work was all about bodies. I guess so. Especially as one generation gave birth to another, limbs flapped in common beds, or houses opened up to swallow sleepovers. Bodies upon bodies as fur nature cushion skin papered over growing or shrinking frames. Animated pattern people, makeshift families, bodies hiding bodies, flaking, burns, wounds, scabs. Is there any wonder I hew to the ephemeral? Especially now that I know my family ended up in Cleveland due to a lynching. Same with Arcey's.

I experienced the 1966 Hough Riot as well. I recall the surprising tang of smoke damage and how it lingered all about. Not "riots" but

rebellions. Perhaps even more personal was the 1970 fire in which my mother lost all but one painting. That haunts me still. Which is why I am daily terrified about being responsible for her work in this place. It's all that is left. And it's a lot. That fire occurred in the "Back House," which was a long-abandoned edifice before the sculptor-professor at Karamu, Duncan Ferguson, who went out of town for health reasons, asked my mother to take charge in his absence. The kiln was the culprit. And my little brother who had pushed a stuffed chair against it and left. The fire department was only two short blocks away but it took them forty-five minutes to arrive. I loved that body of work. All abstraction. Thick painterly impasto. Crazy thing is she regrouped and relocated to another property closer to downtown, along with other artists. And on the very first occasion she went out of town to NYC to find out if her dinnerware won the award for the firm she worked for (it did), she returned to an empty studio. Everything was missing. Sometimes I suspect that those big canvases adorn someone's wall to this day and pray they will surface.

This society is deeply presentist. I think it's just an incapacity to hold history and the weight of it, with all its characters, all the anonymous characters, as well as the handful of heroes whose names are easy to memorize.

You know what, I think the one thing that's come clear is that I feel I will have failed if it's all about me and my I. Everything is a collaboration. The materials make the work. I merely animate the channeling, lending my body, my hands to the interactive process.

I feel that a deep relationship with these things has to do with when you grow up with a creative person and you see them create from what looks like nothing. I watched my mom illustrate, design plates, do calligraphy, and much more. I've saved those pieces, I think, because I know what she went through to earn a living to buy her supplies and support her habit... It depended on her hands, creating greeting cards or flowers for people, so when I see this trash, what looks like trash, I'm amazed. By like, a box of cereal. All the stuff that is designed—elements and images. A likeness between a plant and how it's depicted. That's a labor. And we just throw them away. Therefore when I'm cleaning I'm gleaning—junk mail! I keep a pair

of tiny stork-headed scissors in my apron pockets along with push pins or that gummy stuff, but I'm usually so impatient I simply tear around the parts of images worth saving using a fingernail as a blade. We're the Apron Society. In tribute to my father and all the mothers I can still see wiping their hands on their apron. My father wouldn't think of cooking with street clothes on for hygienic purposes. And we children had to put on pinafores, smocks, or coveralls to avoid messing up good clothes. Life is precious. Thinking about the nature of trash and what's "garbage" might make one crumble, disassemble. How we treat the world and each other. Who and what's discardable, able to quickly assemble, line up. Be torn or shredded. Thrown away, thrown up and out. Gaza to gauze, vaporized. I used to think *Soylent Green* was far-fetched. Not anymore. Glass is so beautiful. So is cardboard. I love boxes so I must be a cat. During my childhood, we the children roamed the streets looking for bottles of milk, soda, etc. It all went away and returned, and with it perhaps a sense of life cycles not unlike changing seasons. Someone designed these bottles; their brief existence is tied to ancient sand beds, fire, and careful handling. That's when I decided it was better to go for crazy—if sanity means getting used to being wasteful, and throwing evolutionary miracles away.

It's the question I ask myself when it comes to the word *art*: how can it be "art" if it's wasteful? If it leaves dumpsters of landfill behind? That's my litmus test. Artists have a high bar of polluting the planet to make art, unless the message makes up for it. Art stores are a zoo of BS plastic toxic consumer crap too. That's part of the reason I defaulted to poetry. I must say if I'm anything it's a Paper Doll regardless of the medium, tools, or discipline.

§

I decided I have enough stuff. You live long enough, you don't need any... I just need to go back and recapture the beauty that is all around. Anything can be beautiful. But then we throw these things away without thinking... This is what kills me. "This product is so good for you, blah, blah, blah," but the container for the product is trashing the earth. So how good is it? When it comes to the trash I've curated and piled up like shifting wall, floor, or ceiling logjams,

they're not so much improvisations—a now overused word for lack of a better description—as much as evidence of a survival pattern. I don't have a habit or practice of trying to make “art” or even poems. It's survival. I'm trying to get language to talk about itself, showing its seams and unseemliness at times. I'm getting dirt to talk about itself. Other times I'm called to transform or cover up something I don't want to see... Be it bareness, a crack in a wall. Working with what's most immediate to my body, using the materials at hand.

In animism in Japan, everything has a life. When you have a doll and you throw it away, it's burned ritually. I used to live in a place called Ōsu Kannon, which was named after the temple to the bodhisattva of compassion. Objects are vested with animus, and so you need to thank what you throw away. It's like the Marie Kondo thing... which, ironically, became this capitalist trend of how to have a minimalist home, dealing with the sickness of overconsumption.

I took what I called a vow of “povArty” after I left Houston for New York. And soon afterward I also took a vow to remain low-tech—no matter how challenging—and to only use the simplest available materials. Partly because I liked the idea of constraint, setting challenges, limits to a tendency to sprawl. But more importantly, because of the toxicity that I experienced pulling prints and doing darkroom work at the Lower East Side Printshop—and from growing up with a mother who painted in the kitchen. The smell of turpentine did not improve my appetite. So I landed on basic pen and ink. Other times watercolor, plants, ink, fish skin, berries, hair, ochre from fire, soil smudges, and so forth.

I used to work very large but then I ended up in a very small place on the Lower East Side, and all I could handle were books. I liked the restraint for the same reason I use a walk-in closet to meditate in. Like being in a womb. When I was about twelve I moved into my parent's closet and lived under their clothes. I had grown tired of sharing the bunk bed with four of my six siblings. This behavior goes down to picking up tiny flowers or loose hair with tweezers and gluing them to old shorthand books. I beamed when poet friend Sean Killian said it was “miniature work.”

Walking, sweeping, braiding, cleaning, etc. implies rhythm. And then the modulation of time registers with mark making as a strong component of my work. But it's also often about me not determining anything. So there's no I, in that it's almost like reading animals out of clouds. If something appears, take it as a hint. Hidden in the inner world of the paper. The uni-verse in it; until what needs or wants to seep up (like oil from a wetland), which was already present in the materials, beats its way out of the pulp to the surface to breathe, take in some light. I scribble. I play at being a scribe. Or the fool who speaks truth to power.

But then when I got away from the Art World, I ended up contemplating the space of the book as an object: what is it? And what is "text?" And what is "reading?" I decided very early on that reading and writing is broader than what applies to literacy and literature, or the idea of the written. Where I grew up, a "reading" was something you went and got from the seers and sayers of the neighborhood! People who trained and studied in particular Black spiritual traditions handed down to them from generation to generation. Direct transmission, energy fields. Black survival required penetrating and translating other kinds of "texts" and understanding dream language. Many of those lineages died out. Alternative "schools" of thought...

Looking back, I have this memory of unfinished parts of the city, of things being far less slick and paved over. As gangs of roaming children the city was ours. I get the feeling there was another race or category that seems to have now been erased, or at least smudged, and criminalized and that what seemed most obvious on the streets of the city at the time was the dichotomy of Children and Adults. Boom! Babies seemed to be everywhere. And we were fearless about earth, about puddles, insects, being dirt dabbers, making mudpies or picking at our sores. There were no paper towels to be had. We depended on the Rag Man. You could hear his calls at the other end of the street. "Rag Man, Rag Man!"

Some neighbors maintained dirt yards. Swept them and themselves ritually "clean." Grass was for the birds! On occasion, when I get an inkling, I plait or braid long sweeps of grass and lay it down in mounding sweeps. Instead of mowing. Otherwise it is, to the bourgeoisie, an unkempt Afro pro-be-oliced by plant-blind authorities

who think this country should look like baronial England. Don't show no kinks! So vegetable gardens were grown in back of the house. Some people believed in "switching" or "whipping" their collards to make them "grow right!" Consequently there's Yardening or Gardening. Arcey recalls his father, whose family left South Carolina in a horse and buggy when his dad was four, complaining about people who "turned grass to dirt and dirt to sand," and he didn't mean it in a positive sense; but what he didn't know was that it was part of a tradition that harked back to Africa.

Who knew that that part of the city was part of the Lake Warren Sand Barrens, which stretches all the way up to Toledo, Ohio? Found materials we used to sink hands and feet in. A life poetics: like playing in a sandbox together. You don't want to be in the sandbox alone. So the work is not about me, per se.

Mine is a practice of, I hope, tithing. I was advised that "one cannot take in without emptying out"—that's where the collaboration comes in. That's not a style, just like "experimental poetry" is not a style, or whatever. For me it's more about how I survive. In the moment. It's an evolutionary leap, hopefully.



Unfixed variations, *Wetlands* book.



Unfixed variations, *Wetlands* book.



Unfixed variations, *Wetlands* book.



Kitchen wall (Unit 4).

[image provided by Jennifer Scappetone]

JULIE EZELLE PATTON & ARCEY HARTON

A list of seventy-to-ninety-year-old chill, competent, ethical, sharp Independent Contractors & Public Servants who go beyond the call of booty (cash) and have aided us by & by

George Blackshire, Expert Boiler Man, Thin Man w/ Heart of Gold

Robert Bostic, “Dead Man” Specialist

Myrtle Butler, Neighborhood Accountant

Lee Chilcote, Sr., Wise counselor, Attorney at Large, period

Tuni Chilcote, Super Fixer, Makes things happen, Connects dots

Lily Crawford, Energy Worker, Light housekeeper

Daryl Davis, Pint-Sized Ex-Farmer, One Person Army, Earth Activist

Elizabeth (Betty) Harton, Seamstress, Healer, Holy Chow, Speaks thru Silence

Oscar (Tony) Harton, Sound Man (electronics), apprentice Plumber, Joker

Lily Heich, Resourcer, Appraiser, Real Estate Broker

Robyn Hood, Floor guy, Mulberry Picker

Clarence Jackson, Tradesman, Plumber, Jack of All Hacks

Ed Ledyard, Furnace man, One Man Picket Line to Integrate Unions

William Shepard Lindblad, 1928–2024, Insurance Specialist turned
Cookie Man, Gardener, known for saying, “Give my love to all”

Odis Moss, Humorist, Bricklayer/Mason

John Murphy, Union organizer, Habitat and Smile restoration

Roy S. Latimer, Family Grocer/Shopkeeper, Gardener

Cleve Patton, 1926–2007, 20th century Buddha, Electrician, Home
body

Reggie Redd, Ace plumber, Master Saxophonist

Robert Rhym, 1945–2024, Master Carpenter, Astral Projector,
Polymath

Lewis Sams, Masonry Specialist, Business man, Neighborhood
Anchor

Veil Scott, Urban Food Warrior, Entrepreneur, Love Goddess

Smitty Smith, Master Carpenter, 4th Generation

Lavert L. Stuart, 1945–2024, Block Chronicler, Pipe Organist, Choir
Director

JULIE EZELLE PATTON



skeer' d of
(high up)



[1990]

the page has dimension

+

.

[1990]

are we on top the alphabet or with
in

[1990]

OccaL, sept 20 99c
like cures like

l ll l ll l ll
l ll l ll

(are we on the same page?)

hand l's

|||
/

handling

flor' l
bund'l lay

languet tongue of
hand-land

stick' l
stalk o

ccasion
' l poem

L b[racketing]
way a country or

page lies
write ang'l to

re L el
ements, every

where a woman
leaps before her

drop of poetry
line of truth

spring lit
erature perennially

across | lines

of least resistance, inclined
to angle

land
parse L

edge
ability to

level with me
eloquently

once the page is turned

to english above
as well as below

the lowing heard
points of attachment
stretch the truth

to form a sound joint
ad infinitum, L. to end
less extent

sine qua non, L.
(can't write without it)

“a wreath of poetry”
“drop of”
“line of truth”

L
ovation

high tail a
letter carrier

in italics

writing on the l

train tendril
to favorite

mode L move

ment' l trav
el stakes

l lean meaning
bound

light ang
le to ang
el wings

(re L el causal
of Rilke's

cast'
l elegy)

do you know
levity is the l

O speech

wherever a country

spells:

as lower case
l luminates

lit' l

i
i

sense

l + dot
spot lights

writers as

optic l
cyclops

L l

Are we on the
same page

nov'

ℓ

i

dea

ℓ bulbs

pist'l

pet'l

carp'l

sep'l

dub *ℓ*

ling on

pinnate palms

innate psalms

writing on

ℓ boughs, stalks

and stems

seri' *ℓ*

hand *ℓ*'s

re

site L plain

wherewith'

ℓ country

or a page
lies

write ang'
L

to
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al
el
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e
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t
s

loop

before u
ink

ell rake
ell wand
ell wood
ell lore

as if bark
at thought

would wood
similar similies

[1999]

FAR FLUNG

Far Flung is flee male. A hairy scary ride (Lolita, Amber Alert ...)

Far Flung: seed, petals, logs, under story (belief mold). Hard.

Landing. Still.

Far Flung is everyday biblical: "Samson & Delilah" hirsute fig(ures of speech) re

Versed roles. Plastic diaspora, wig'n out. A phony tale about Adam, Eve

& a "Fall" (or merkin) with current ex

Tensions rewired with Pablo Neruda's writings of

Far Flung bodies & how they land

rupture (legs apart)

Far Flung is a not a wrap

fallen off of cliff hips (sorry, it was snatch'd

—& hard

to take)

Far Flung past—

tense

O Fling!

A Lass (half fool)

Falling from

Fork'd tongue to bottom

Lip

Plumb

Depths of dis/

PAIR be

Hold!

Fruit that is always
FALLING,
FALLING

“Apple of my eye” un-earthing
Bodies in the sky

Taking the ground from beneath
We redistribute
weight

Careful not to upset

Balance
Between he and she

Loose ends in
Infinity.
From margin to center *falling*

PHALLOCENTRIC

Fig leaves falling by defeat.

Ladies first.

Pay
dirt.

Hands attached to her
Face veiling this
Fall from grace

B R O A D

Cast
Ass the lowest fall of all

Lovers are always
Falling down

Grasp spinning
Gravity

O new
Tongue positions

Twisting into law
All the soft
Fruit of
Womb-men's

Fall, we all fall

D
o
w
n

A Free fall for all the
Fall out of the Fall's

Flawed Law of human error
falling from on high

falootin heiress

Be/*falling* 'pon us all

Snake it lying down
omen beneath
fellow man doomed to tilling

FALLOW LAND

Folds the truth in her body, in her

*“Body of a woman... hills... thighs
You look like a world lying in surrender”*

Fall wide of him
 Fall afar
 Astride the

Feel of centrifugal force
Some bodies exert on one another
Full *force*

Worlds
Lifted above hot skirts
 squats and inserts

Ends & means

Women don't
halve that

Far to fall
not since Eve and . . .

THEE FALL

Which said men fall

Because woman

fell

From flat on her back she falls
Like hell—

Anxiously

So the Earth's first *first*
Becomes earth's first *fault*

Which men FAULT

Because woman did it
First!

To what great lengths you'll go . . .

“Shaping your formula for love into every hole
in the floor”

By the hour
glass is
 Falling

out of reach
out of hand

failing a miracle
catch as catch can.

FROM THE
 kitchen window
 I see a woman bending over
 at the waist

Ready to fall...

Oh! what a waste, waste...

“It’s all your fault!”

The whole human race
bending over at the waist
raining upside down

Dew drop, you drop
to the required position

And for what—this is for
Down on all fours

flailing towards what's *fallen*

If all else fails, they'll fault you for *failing*
Bloody femme fatale

BeFalling

FAIR GAME who was

faultless
flawless

In keeping with the object

Beloved loves to *f*

a
l
l

(or was she pushed?)

Holed up

on the receiving
End of in
valid limbs

“Deprived of support and reduced to
one point of contact anything will topple and...
FALL!”

Counter weight,
Resulting counter effect

*“the goblets
of the breast,
your voice slow and sad”*

So whatever loves *failing*
Falls on your behalf.

If this were love, *my love*
You wouldn't detect anything of its presence until it had
Cut you in two

Her lover sensing this rushes not to soothe her
But to be the force of gravity that finally pushes her
On her back

He breaks her *fall* with his body

In her body
Words *fail*. Voices *fall* into a whisper.
She lies there all *pried* open

Left and right legs are
opening and closing over a tiny sea,

A *falling* sea
only the

Phallus *sees*:

Tiny bivalve creature
cutting the sea in half

With her body, her body

Hear the sound of rushing water

Loose *flesh*, *falling* rocks
The TV in the living room

Gurgling.
It's Saturday night

Lawrence Welk waltzes out into
a room full of bubbles, floating couples

bending over at the waist
backwards and forwards
forth, and back
these women almost never

fall...

Men are floating them on arms thrown out like
Anchors, free and confined at the same time

*But one woman will fall
and fall she does.*

*Veiling her face with her hands
attached to her face
as a fall
from grace*

A distance of
failing hands
and two left feet

of *femme fatales*
falling over in defeat

the *feeble*, the *faulty*
fain fainting

And for what this is for...
Down on all fours, land feels
An eternally open gap

A free fall for all em
bedded in her depths

O, geo illogical—

Phallosophy!

“My boundless desire, shifting road”

Formed inside of women
as the fault men love to

Trace the lines to her body,
Through her body

Lay your ley lines low
Lay your ley lines low

Upon that infinite slope
on which all things are placed

crack crevices
shape-shifting body
diss place
slight narrow space

Gently inclining toward the river
and the place where this occurs
discharging from the mouth
produces a minor

FAULT

Disembougement of the falls
bedrock.
short. Coming.



Tiring
Without ever reaching the mark.

Something is needed to break the fall

Your heart will do, *your mute heart*

The man at the hardware store
said Joe had 2 counts against him

- 1) he's from Brooklyn
- 2) he just fell for some woman

And men fall all over themselves laughing.
Getting a rise out of love
Crack up, guffaw
Become prostrate over the lowest fall of all

It's a fall they will never stop falling from
So prone to fallacious fallacies
Love falls *phallo-centrally*

The stronger the pull of the drop,
the deeper the descent

Aiming a bit further, assuming the erect position

*"Birds flew from me—of shaft, rudder, wing tip feathering
But the hour of vengeance falls and I love you"*

This trajectory, this awful force

Dear love:

Whatever loves falling
falls of its own accord

It's your heart on the down beat

Ooooh
Downswing!

Base man!
Take a walk down town

Dum, tum, dum, tum, dum, tum, dum

You can't keep a good woman down
Because her *get-uppa!*
is your down!

Forever waking up

surprised to find yourself
face down in the dirt
wherever love can bury itself

Wandering which way is up

PS Post Scrotum
Will someone please get that man off of *we*.

[1986]

C O D A

(Body of a Woman, Black Hills, Black Thighs)¹

“The pail was clean every morning, but I had no idea how its contents disappeared. One morning I rose earlier than usual, and I was amazed when I saw what had been happening. Into the back of the house, walking like a dusky statue, came the most beautiful woman I had yet seen... a Tamil woman of the pariah caste... She walked solemnly toward the latrine, without so much as a side glance at me... And vanished with the disgusting receptacle on her head, moving away with the steps of a goddess. She was so lovely that, regardless of her humble job, I couldn’t get her off my mind.

Like a shy jungle animal she belonged to another kind of existence, a different world. One morning, I decided to go all the way. I got a strong grip on her wrist and stared into her eyes. There was no language I could talk with her... Her waist so very slim, her full hips, the brimming cups of her breasts made her like one of the thousand-year-old sculptures from the south of India. It was the coming together of a man and a statue. She kept her eyes wide open all the while, completely unresponsive. She was right to despise me.”

—Pablo Neruda²

(In his own words: chronicling his rape of Thangamma, a Tamil Woman, in Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where he was posted as consul in the late 1920s.)

Counter Weight

“Perhaps original sin is nothing more than our fall into rational and anti-rhythmic expression which has lowered the human race. It hurts us women more because of the joy we lost: the grace of a musical and intuitive language that was going to be the language of the human race.”

—Gabriela Mistral³

Rising

Up *from*

duh *feat...*

Ladies *first.*

to hit

Earth First

in the *first*
(knot the *last*)

S/play Dirt

other

unwieldly

worldly

v v v v

v v v

v v

v

yield

Sign

this:

(a cord

from

Grace

re

cast

for

.....ever

f

e

e

l i n k s

to, fro

(me, too)

—————Open up!

Lip

plum (p)



depths

O

diasporas



Hold

sweet

roots

rising

rising,

rosing

surprising

Sun *sun*

moon
moon

EARTH

podies

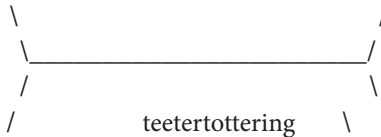
careful

cUp...

set

em

balance



teetertottering

U

tween

“He”

&

“She”

they

who

WE

one (1)

won

up

^

^

infinity's

|

(a *pitch!)

|

/

^

/

|

/

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|

1/ Pablo Neruda, "Body of a woman, white hills, white thighs," in *Neruda & Vallejo: Selected Poems*, trans. Robert Bly (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

2/ Pablo Neruda, *The Complete Memoirs*, trans. Hardie St. Martin, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977).

3/ *A Gabriela Mistral Reader*, ed. Marjorie Agosin, trans. Maria Giachetti (Buffalo: White Pine Press, 1993).

[2024]



Or something like that. You know how words bark. And roll over.



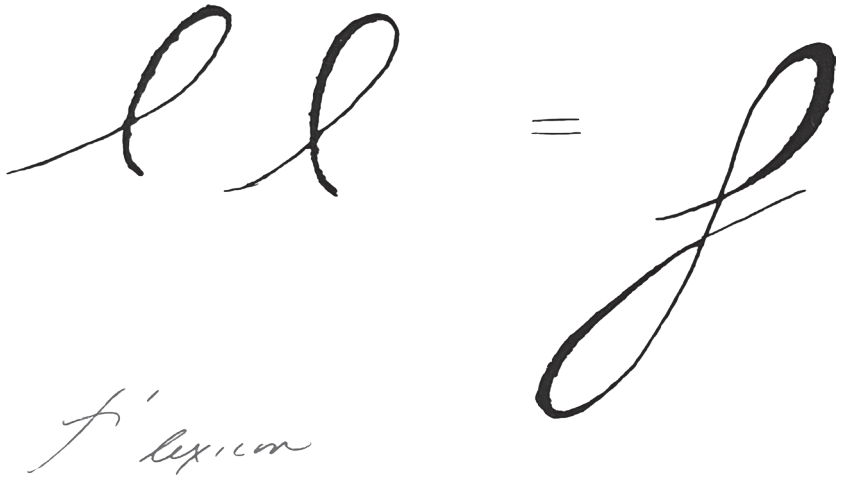
Deer sofa belly up & bloated stuff on the way out stage left.



When no one's looking.



You know don't you yo u u u u u we ye we us in.





in lieu of pleu

or else (ll's)
in addition to

a
e
l
o
u

fall - ll = fa

fall - f = all

fall - 'l an 'f =

al
sign

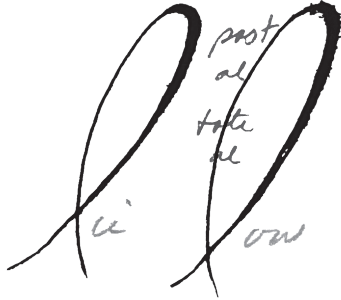
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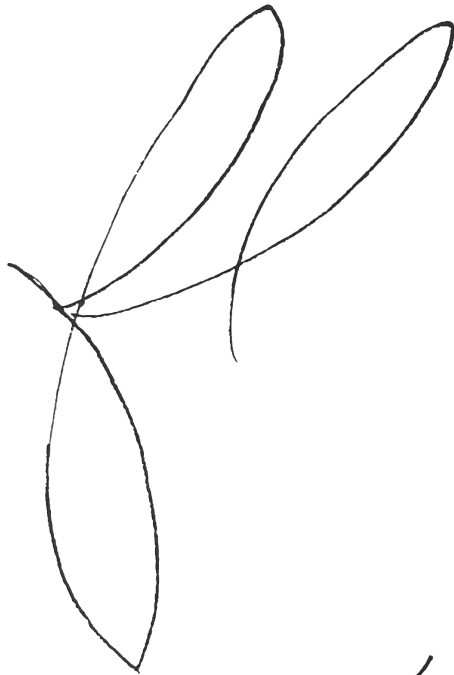


fall
fell
fill

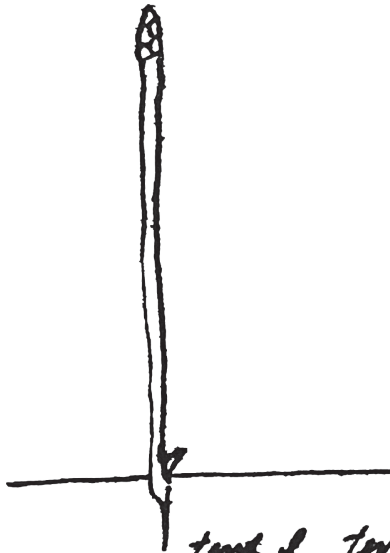
—
full

fall low
mandala





to bend, tie up into one *hizabun*



fund l, funder l, hook &
fundil
go to l — deep ends
pump l to the ground
re: stalk of words — found lying
and all that creations
stamp from
pointing out the flowers flower
we root out

[1993]

LEE ANN BROWN

Summa julie

A Permutational, Intertextual Practice

When the idea arose, decades ago, to publish a julie ezelle patton book through my press Tender Buttons, one of our many mutual brainstorming sessions resulted in julie's suggestion of what I thought was the perfect title for a collection that would assemble and document the many facets of her artistic practice. The title, *Summa julie*, implied a summation of her life's work (or at least a snapshot summary of the highlights so far) and riffed on a "Summa Cum Laude" degree from some very special university. In her inimitable, high-spirited way, she also said it could be read as "some come loud." More importantly, the title could be read as "some of" julie in a colloquial turn, as in "gimme summa that good stuff."

patton's poetry and intertwined performative practices engage in a continual act of unfolding—of deep and irreverent play. Because of her sheer verbal energy and inventiveness, a definitive version of the book cannot, in fact, exist. There are often, if not always, multiple iterations of each poem, and every time she reads or performs, a new version is created. Often, a wild word-based letter such as the letter *B* instigates a series of poems. Her poetry is formed by a constant flux of associative word and sound. There is a special place in her practice for generative alphabetic play and poetic work that revolves around the microparticles of a word. Here are some notes from talking with julie about how to build a book of *B*:

B

is a book that cannot B

it's Tied with a Bow
Worry is a Bee too

it has a Belly Button

and from behind it (B) looks like a Building

She showed me with a line drawing how her Cleveland building in aerial view could be seen as two capital *B*'s unfolding symmetrically, like butterfly wings. This is an example of how patton combines visual and verbal thinking in her procedural and specific work.

patton is an alphabetic master of that various field which extends from what we learned in kindergarten to more complex texts like John Cage's mesostics. To include a few other texts in conversation with her work with individual letters, I might also cite Roland Barthes's alphabetically structured *Pleasure of the Text* or even his suggestively titled *S/Z*. The generative practice of using the alphabet as an open ladder to organize and riff on, as an otherwise randomizing structure, reverberates through her improvisatory and generative practice. On another end of the alphabetic spectrum, we find the likes of Edward Gorey's *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*, which imbues our commonly held alphabet with a singular sensibility, or Shel Silverstein's *Uncle Shelby's ABZ Book*, which parodies an instructional "how-to" book much as patton skewers the didactic in her alphabetic play. Other wildly generative and poetic alphabetic texts are Walter Abish's *Alphabetical Africa* and Inger Christensen's rarefied fibonacci-structured 1981 collection *Alphabet*, which ends with the letter *N*, plus many more.

Protean pieces of patton's, such as the long poem "Alphabet Soup,"¹ seem at first glance to be a pandemonium or array of capital letters spilled across the page, or else strewn across a floor, perhaps brightly colored like those refrigerator magnets of many of our childhoods. Soon, with some attention—and especially if you hear her voicing/singing the poem—meaning begins to arise from the combinations of letters standing in for words, often playing with African American vernacular or verb tense. For example, the sequence of letters "I B U B" is read (or sung) as a score: "I be, you be." The music of her work takes us as readers and listeners into an open field of play and inspires us to respond. Because of this open multiplicity, there exists no single system to fully deliver the range of her play of language, sound, and image, but she welcomes us all in as listeners and collaborators.

Some letters get more attention than others in patton's work. She spins out the skeins of individual letters, most prominently *B*, *L*, and *O*—not necessarily in that order. To me, patton's alphabetic work recalls the ecstasy of the word- and letter-play of Oulipian writer Raymond Queneau, or Harry Mathews's invented lipogrammatic forms variously termed Belle Present or Present Beau or Beautiful In-Laws, in which only the letters of the beloveds's names were used to compose the poem, thus singing their sounds in new orders and angles. Bernadette Mayer and Peter Culley were also obsessed with and collected those rangy beasts known as slang and vernacular dictionaries—which can make your language games a whole lot richer and open to multiple interpretations.

Alphabetic play in patton's work streams through particular letters that act as seed syllables for longer unfurling poetry scores. I think of a performance of hers entitled *Grammar Can Be Fun*, in which she performs an active, playful reading of the book of the same name by the children's author and illustrator Munro Leaf (who also wrote the more widely known *Ferdinand the Bull*). On the cover is a little figure conked out and being "lazy," lying down on the ground with the subtitle "This is Ain't," implying that it's lazy to use the word *ain't*. This didactic book from 1934 offers advice on how to get rid of other ne'er-do-wells such as *gimme* and *gonna* and other "improper" uses of language. patton presents the book in character, reading it as a kind of kindergarten teacher, casting the audience as students by association, perhaps the four-year-old versions of ourselves. She improvises a storytime reading of the book line by line, page by page, exposing the racist and classist undertones inherent in the text through her use of vocal emphasis, framing and repeating certain phrases, and questioning vernacular missteps and conventions. patton's performances, such as this one, are never the same and often depart in unexpected ways from her chosen props, scores, or objects. I have been witness to performances that included a manual typewriter as a percussive instrument, a battery-powered Elmo talking stick, or the current issue of the *New York Times*, all poured out on the floor of a cool homeschool. Sometimes she also elicits material from the audience or from the space itself.

The Let it Bee Guestbook

I love to visit the Let it Bee Ark Hive, a.k.a. Another Stop on the Overgrown Railroad, which are two of the many names for the ever shifting collage poem of a space in Cleveland that patton has made in community with others over the years. An international presence with strong ties to New York City, she recognizes and reweaves connection with other spaces and sanctuary houses across time and space, evolving temporary autonomous zones of generativity. We share the desire to combine creation and curation, hosting in various alternative contexts. The most “institutional” among them are places like the Poetry Project or Naropa, but most often we’re in home spaces of our own making, such as my NC-based project in an old church we called the French Broad Institute of Time & the River (or FBI) and Torn Page in New York City.

During a recent visit to Let it Bee, julie shows me a room hung artfully with installations: one is an arrangement of flags, another is her late mother’s colorful Mexican blanket and hospital alert button with draperies of Tibetan prayer flags. These ever shifting objects evoke the over thirty-five cultural gardens found throughout the big green park right across the street, and they allude to the borders between life and death. It is wholly part of the work to see a progression of collages across a wall and then walk into the room later in the day to see that julie has moved elements of one collage to another.

She shows me a series by “someone who has passed,” as well as work from the Beehive Collective recontextualized with installations on Opal Whitley, a nineteenth-century writer who also wrote to animals and plants around her. She gestures to a black-and-white mural done by a houseguest from France using charcoal and a projector who had “never made a drawing in his life!” She compares this work, a mix of iconography from New York and Rouen, to the urban realism of Richard Estes. She goes on to call those who visit Let it Bee: “found opportunities and found people, so the people who have shown up on our doorsteps have a diversity and a range.” She speaks as she rearranges her collages:

There must be... I don't know...
a *thousand* ideas around "B"
Because it's more like the writing IN a life
following me and me following IT

When I ask about James Baldwin's image in an assemblage over a desk (another *B*), she replies:

For instance that's how I work
The materials determine the meaning
Of course I interact and play with them
And go back and forth
And they change because

Other things come in...

...pamphlets tied with a Tender Button

Folders of B

B sides
the flip sides

and simply

it's... "an impossible book."

§

The Impossible Book of *B*

Over time it has become apparent that what Patton wants to do with Tender Buttons is a very particular book that could be read as a multi-sectioned long poem under the title *B*. "*The Impossible Book of B* is not the title of the book. The book is *B*," she says. Not "*B*" with quotation marks around it, as I suggested, thinking of Zukofsky's multisectional poem "*A*," but just the letter itself that stands for and plays with *B*. So, it remains: How to build the impossible book of *B* in the real bound-book paper world? While most authors I have published through

Tender Buttons Press hand over a finished manuscript after I have suggested that I want one, patton's process tells another story. Right now the book feels as if it were already written and exists hidden in all the scribbled, whispered descriptions, text messages, and phone calls we have exchanged—plus all the iterations that result from her holding a part of *B* in mind and giving it to us to sing back, puzzle out, and extend as audiences participating in a very specific yet very open text.

To read and be with julie and her work is to be with a quicksilver catch-as-catch-can brilliancy. As her “editor” and collaborator, I am more like a hunter, gatherer, quiltmaker, listener, bird-watcher type. I have scanned, recorded, and collected a small portion of her vast outpourings and “life poet” ways; whatever she does and says is a surprising, densely packed yet mercurial and word-playful event, whether orally, aurally, written, drawn, designed, collaged, rearranged, or built out of her playings, free associations, and workings of and around the letter *B*. So back to *B*: we ask, how should the book begin to draw you into the hive of making? What version of the flower poem should open the book to introduce the oncoming *B* and Bee to Be? The challenge is to create a book of poetry that is necessarily aural, oral, sung, and accompanied as well as printed.

Sections of *B* revolve around and spin out from the most existential questions, playing with Shakespeare's “to be, or not to be;” hence Hamlet, Ophelia, and all her flowers are central to the cross-pollination of the text. Ophelia also stands for julie's late sister, who led her to sing. Other sections play on the bee as a necessary pollinator and dweller in and between flowers. Other sections will illuminate and illustrate the *B* of *bird* as avian and the musician we know as Charlie Parker, a.k.a. BIRD, originator of bebop—another doubled *B*, like the building's butterfly. Her continual improvisational spin on all of these terms is not simply playful; deep interrogation is taking place to construct new meanings that figure Blackness. One way this is achieved is by speaking through interlocutors such as Baraka, Baldwin, and Billie Holiday. Other ways of seeing and deep visual riffing include visual representations of images of ships from the Middle Passage that look like large letter *B*s. Throughout the book there is a celebration of the “B-side” of the record—what gets left out of the spotlight and how the repressed is often the source of the strongest, most vital cultural production.

B is a book slowly becoming possible, unfolding its petals on its own time.

NOTE

1/ Designed and printed by Richard O’Russa for the Fall 2012 Broadside Reading Series at The Center for Book Arts, 2012.

letters slope, slightly to the right

few letters have such a close relationship

_____obviobviously

f a woman

(divided in 2)

part petal and push l a man, bare,

spare of parts

in script EYE tail i SIZED she swings back

on herself as if contra

dicting or

are the letters lying

or standing up, dichtung herself

are we looking at them, or on top of

them—birds I view

wherever language flys into

each letter has the right to be considered

important for legibility and beauty, but it

must take a disciplined part in the

construction of words

in a sense, the fingers must get to know

the letters as well as the eyes

serifs and flourishes of l

make a slight sideled upstroke then

springs

downwards to form the stem then

leaves the picture, a bare branch
of language, likened unto itself

[1996]

from FL 4*98

when letters fall between
f and *le*
space is made for feeling

and filling

A far
thing letters
grasp from the get go
words flit, fl flairing up

(I
talic, it takes the sweep of the tongue) to say things sway
like this or that

way, and l makes letters possible
in the first place,

the opposite of feters eyed closely by

woman who want to take on space
and g they ground with what d' men
sion

gravity is prone to

and laying there thus, only the heart can
take the heat of flutter

hands get a word into
now and then

fl can't hold a shape, so vowels come dancing in
bowelistic and farting
noses to the air
we breathe

elastic space
the difference
plie

silabant supple lips
open and closing like my mind

dash--of getting things done
having words done un

what goes around comes around
fl leaves, and waters the lingum tongue

till an e o
I gets between lovin spoonful of f'

of f
v's as one letter does a favor for another and another
and pretty soon you have a chain being
a linkletter to put yer lips to
sibilant and philibuster

fill fall fool ye

then there's that
u I dare to hold

(like a cup on a level
lsills)

muscle and sinew
flairs up

till lay me down to sleep
nothing else comes close
except to flit between

this is sex of the most ardent tongue
epaulet and bloom lollygag
a landing pad

If I'm lying I'm flyin and I ain't seen a bird all day

so put on a uniform wing
traipse to korea on the
flipside on a womans

what holds together
praises in the air ?

the twofold

twist off
f' l ip in mouth

spring dash a darting ung lung
went

well,
blow me down to bleu

what never will real
escapes

this tendency to

knuckle down
buckle under

tendentious

tongue

till teeing off's a sport from language too

ever since the tongue tipped off the hand

what lingers between the rest of
fingers by lingual is grasp

to

raise up hallelujah
hands move like mouths
and fingers lingo

pull a tandom to

betch by golly wow

index a flourishing tongue

easy digits *perched on* fleu is flippant

tongue

articulation

is late to

augur and birds

contemplate

the

wing span la différence

f' flips to v'

(along the loom long. g'

grounds

*for what has come between the winging sense—gets no farther than
baby finger thumb*

spelled out

on the grounds that we phalange... a
y'langue langue

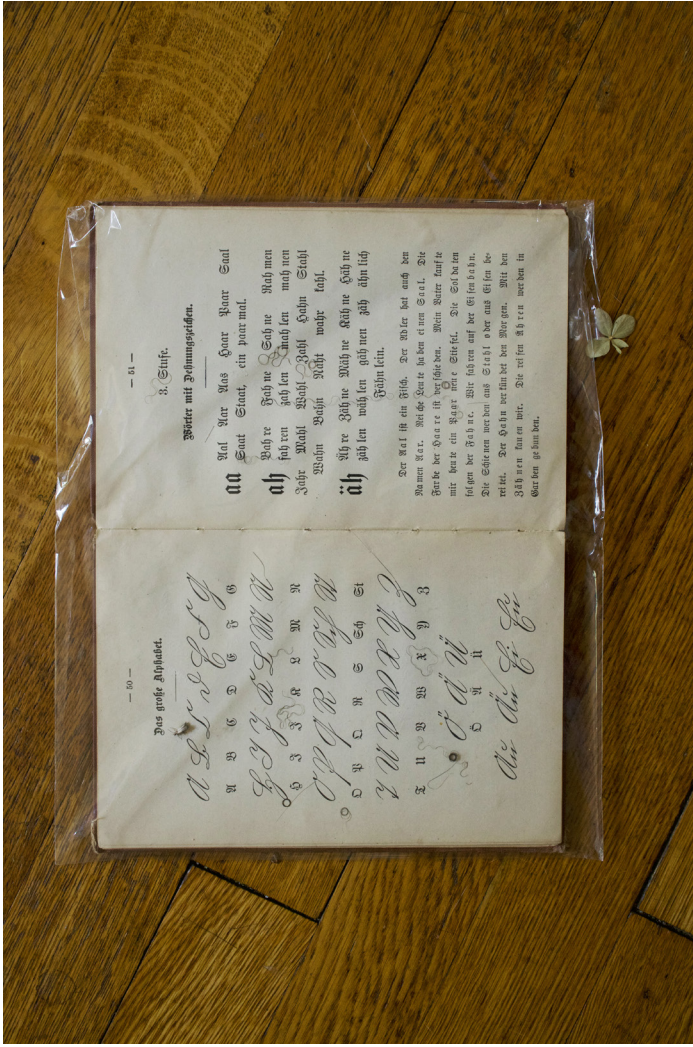
a widegrasp
and a lot of flair

languishing requires of thinging things

fling your fleshy petal up
so no man can gee, guess the spot

women can pronounce the world in
or on

[1998]



Das große Alphabet.

A B C D E F G H I J
 K L M N O P Q R S T U V
 W X Y Z
 a b c d e f g h i j
 k l m n o p q r s t u v
 w x y z
 A B C D E F G H I J
 K L M N O P Q R S T U V
 W X Y Z
 a b c d e f g h i j
 k l m n o p q r s t u v
 w x y z

3. Einse.

Wörter mit Pöhmungsschiden.

aa Hat der Was Gant Vier Saal
 Gant Saal, ein Jant mad.
ab Hab re Pöhmung Schö ne
 fah ren jäh ren wach sen
 Jant Wohl Schaf Joch Eshen Stahl
 Wahn Bacht Nicht wach sagl.
ah Ich re Pöhmung Schö ne Schö ne
 jäh ren wach sen ab men jäh ahn lich
 Pöhmung sein.

Der Maat ist ein Pöhmung. Der Schler hat auch den
 Namen hier. Die die Kunde hat den einen Saal. Die
 Punkte der Kunde ist verpöhmung. Wenn Sater kaufte
 mit dem ein Jant der Eshen. Die Saal hat den
 folgen der Pöhmung. Die fah ren auf der Gant hat den.
 Die Schler hat den was Schaf o her nach Gant be-
 reit. Der Schler hat den bei den Wahn. Mit den
 Schler hat den mit. Die reit den Schler haben in
 Gant hat den bei den.

Hairy German. Under Wraps.



Dress house for butter poem and garden.



In this fold of a room, to avoid furthering fracturing, animals hang 2 by 2 in one dimension. One plate shifts, another slides down: child's play. Waiting to be picked up, animus turns to harmony, bubble consciousness.



Pinky, Buddha, Orange Juice caterwauling off the wall.

YATES NORTON

Let it Bee: Thoughts for My Friend julie ezelle patton

julie, I remember one hot New York day, coming to your flat on East Ninth Street with Emma, my friend. You invited us in.

There was a curl of an onion skin on the mantelpiece, a fish skeleton. The room kept beat with your generous, ever-opening, unfolding way of being. You made us a smoothie into which you poured a long golden draft of linseed oil (flax). It was rich and cool. You told us about the flat that we were going to stay in, about keeping an eye on the magic you kept there. You played us music and we helped clean your gentle cat Socks's injured paw.

All these in-between moments. Poets inheritance. This is what we do.¹

I remember a paper lantern shade torn to spiral out like a web spun for the pleasure of spinning, to scatter the light, not to catch and still the fly. I saw assemblages that would shift and change over time. You once brought back a china horse you had found. This china horse—or perhaps it was a seahorse—Socks accidentally knocked over, and you took care of it, wrapping its broken parts in your braids, showing us how one is never broken, one can only be reconfigured again and again in other configurations, ever expanding through time: an art and ethics of exuberance and relations, not of things and borders. I learn from you, in a world dominated by categories, classifications, and names, that we can make space for difference without division—interdependence, not independence. In your hands and language, I watch you spin webs of entanglement where nothing is ever stuck or pinned. Yours is an art of holding out, not of holding down; an art of freedom, not of capture.

What's going on
What's going on...

An old story Marvin Gaye sang about

An *old story*
which can put all other tales in
perspective

In order not to be
ordered

by such
categories given *sufficient/insufficient*
attention it
gobbles up space time
and knocks us senseless:

Classification, as it turns out, ain't got NO
class... And I mean *n-o-n-e*

So low it makes lies real

Race... such a *fiction*
it gathers real moss

So low...

It shd be called
faction. And it is.²

Just as no one account could ever capture the shifting contours of your practice—your words and language, your voice and touch, the spaces you inhabit and move through, the people and cats and creatures in your orbit—no one account could ever circumscribe what you make. In this nest on East Ninth Street, into which you moved in the 1980s, and in the Let it Bee Ark Hive—the land conservation project and Salon des Refusées & Refugees housed there (artist sanctuary project and living sculpture in Cleveland)—your making cannot be separated into parts or departments, your verbs cannot be stilled into nouns. Like life itself, what you make moves along in ever-entwining, overlapping relations with other people, creatures, and materials, each thread touching the other. It is no wonder that you often turn to collage and

assemblage, that you write on walls and plant seeds. Your work and life move counter to dominant ideas we have of time and art. There is no originary moment or final point to your work, which draws on the world around you, which multiplies and transforms it, and which also continues the work of others, especially that of your mother, Virgie Ezelle Patton, who herself would paint over canvases repeatedly.

Free to fail, free to fly, free to wonder. And not PRODUCE. Celery/salary.³

This is why an art history of contexts and discrete objects can only fail in describing your work, for both are based on the assumption that we produce bounded things that can be securely put into stable contexts. But when your work unfolds only to enfold other practices and lives in turn, when your words are as vibratory as song, when you show us how inspiration is but respiration, drawing in from the world to breathe out into the world, then we need an art history that writes *with* these complex webs of lives of materials and people, not simply about them, as if they could be archived and fully accounted for. If yours is an art of attentively reconfiguring what is already there, then writing in response to your work means accepting your offer to enter into its weave, to let your words and handiwork jostle and guide us. You once told me how some “see separate pieces.” You said, “I see one giant Earth Work extending from my engagement with the mutha... Earth. My mother’s work is material to and within the assemblage of assemblages. I see collaboration with visible hands. The web of life. There are real insects, whole and part, within the exhibit.”⁴

Like the china seahorse—braided, repaired, repositioned—like your words, which slip with the pleasure of enunciation and sound, what you make is never done and the relations you build are never done for, despite a dominant culture of expendability rather than commitment, innovation rather than restoration. What is “yours” is what is also already the work of others, whether of people or other creatures. Yours is a work in the key of curiosity: what do we do with what we have done?

It’s about compassion, collaboration, lives joined at the hip (so many branches)! Not the single author but many voices. Whose hand is

in the text before mine. What unknown illustrator (like my mom) slaved over the flower I tore out of a children's book? Who made the pigment, bound the pages? And what about that butterfly wing? Why one? The birch on the walls can't be beat. It is a pearl of paper. And the 18th century text with f words instead of s, a sound poem made by? My work is not mine, or even my creation. I am so much like a child pointing out everyday wonders of the world. Look! See! Regard. Ah, the beauty... How overlook it and why? These things stop me in my tracks. It is simply wise to stop and think. And feel. So I feel you.⁵

When a child cries out “look!,” astonished and delighted by something, it is not to thwack, destroy, or possess it. It is to participate in the world with others. “Look!” is an invitation that calls for gathering: a calling that invites response and is itself a response to what the world has offered us. But not all responses are equal, and the ability to respond is full of “response-ability,” as Karen Barad notes.⁶ How we respond can keep alive the ability of others to respond in turn, to keep alive the very thing we have attended to. Response entwined with response; a reaching out, an attendance. After all, “To be a Flower, is profound / Responsibility—.”⁷

Attention is, to turn to its etymology, a stretching out toward something—not to grasp but to seek connection by being receptive to it. The very notion of stretching suggests something elastic, an attention that is both a reaching out beyond ourselves and a suppleness that can receive an impression. Simone Weil noted that too often we consider attention as the frowning focus on one thing to the exclusion of others.⁸ But attention, considered as pliable and impressionable, requires that we let the other enfold us, displaying a receptivity to being embraced and touched. It is an “inner supplication,” as Weil calls it, a capacious receptivity to the world which involves looking in communion with the other, where “I” and “you” come apart at the moment of encounter (something that a society shaped by individuation, distinction, possession, and purity recoils from).⁹ This mode of looking is what Kevin Quashie calls a “beholding,” where a subject position cannot be assumed to be universal or stable, but is emergent through a relation contoured by attention and care. As Quashie writes of the lyric “I,” it is “the subjective consciousness of

one multiplying, dissolving, even extinguishing, one free to withstand their intimacy intimately. (Remember that the lyric's condition of objectification operates on ecstasy, which in Greek means standing outside oneself)."¹⁰

This letting the other be—unfolding, enfolding, vibrational, and alive like the bee itself—is at the heart of *Let it Bee*, the space you have made in Cleveland. “Let” is an imperative but also an offering and a suggestion. It demands action while intoning that something else might be the case. In Audre Lorde’s “The Bees,” four little girls who see little boys and school guards destroy a nest of swarming bees implore that we let the bees be. They know curiosity and wonder attend to life as something to learn from and live with. They see how the violence of categorical distinction (swarming bees care for no boundaries) tries to still and order the world by destroying the capacity to move along with it. One of the girls, looking at the destruction the boys have caused, cries out: “We could have studied honey making!”¹¹

What you make is testament to the fact that violence is never total, for you have made a home for bees and curiosity, a space to study honey making, and, like the bee itself, your art is one of carrying one thing across to another in what Martin Luther King called the “inescapable network of mutuality.”¹² Yours is an art of pollination: made in, of, with, and for the world, never seeking to settle and occupy a space but to work transversely across it, as when in the open pages of a book you have threaded through sentences at the diagonal to create fractals of text and sense. This carrying across is an art of translation, albeit in the sense that the *Ultratranslation* manifesto puts it: a form of translation that is about attunement and not the mere transmission of information from one medium to the other. They write: “Translation is an asymptote: no matter how close we try to get, there’s always a space between the two bodies that is the space where we live. The space where we transpose, or are transposed... An understanding of the potential in not understanding.”¹³

Attunement is a state of resonance. It requires vibration, and vibrations require touch and texture: air moved and surfaces rubbed together. In the worlds you build, texture is everywhere: poems in graphite on plaster in walls which keep you warm, or “dead” leaves brought alive in another tune by being brought inside and trampled



julie ezelle patton, *Leaves Leaving*, Photo and Assemblage, 2000.

on in your *Leaves Leaving* (“Get enough of them into a room and you have poetry. Crunch crunch... Shhwizzle, chkle gas lkk.”)¹⁴ Such worlds are full of color and sound—leaves of “crimson, yellow, gold, teal and pumpkin”—but they are not full of separation, not between art and life and not between people, materials, and the world.¹⁵ Your work touches and is in turn touched by the everyday world around you, for you see making art as “something that can occur alongside the everyday acts of living” and you know that artists “are not out of place, when they form a symbiotic relationship within a community... patch-quilting neighbors one by one.”¹⁶

This is a capacious art that is not interested in dividing up the world. Instead, it encompasses voices, community, adornments and inscriptions, sounds and assemblages, an “almost art” as Anni Albers once wrote, one that delights in the frill, the detail, and loose ends.¹⁷ (“A little lace here, wire there. Vocal pipes drain all over the place until everything’s connected again, give and take a sense of play that lets some things go haywire,” you write.)¹⁸ In this dense weave, you show that the world cannot be divisible into units to be accounted for, traded or discarded, but can only consist of endless sites of possibilities for

relating and learning. It is a radical imaginative practice, in the sense that it gets to the very roots of what it is to be alive as interdependent beings. It refuses the logics of individualism and independence in which identity becomes an end point of individuation.

I'd like to propose setting some of the *language of difference* aside
to come to gather and resist

on good terms with ourselves
in surprising new ways.

[...]

But who/what
ever decided this, started calling me—us—groups—names
was so busy dividing up and parsing everything for itself
it forgot...

*You rabbit dog pistil weep'n wiley coyote plant rascals all etc.*¹⁹

I look now at a picture of a corner of a room at Let it Bee. I spy a bird, this one a diagram, its many parts and softest down and strong quills enumerated and pointed to. I think how, on the one hand, this picture is an example of an act of careful observation, of looking intently at something: the pleasure of discernment (“adoration of the microscopic,” I see written nearby). And yet, I also see the violence of enumeration and the logic of classification and distinction reducing the full, soft warmth of the bird into a series of lines and words, cut up into so many parts, as if it could be disassembled and put back together, no matter its beating heart. A real feather has landed nearby, curving within a frame that is not a frame but an armature for gathering. I see written in pencil, just beneath it, on the bumpy plaster: “plumage beyond all borders it lands, anyway.”

Like your mother—who saw identity not as something to settle into and be defined by, but as something that can only emerge over time and in relation—you call for us, a “rainbow people,” not to be “crammed into a designation that feels like a curse to/for.”²⁰ Knowing the violence of settled thought and identity, you build conditions of

possibility for love and “unforeseen lines of force,” sites of thought and community that do not seek finality but rather so many points of departure for more experiments in ways of being.²¹ And if we depart, we depart from something which gives us the grounding we need to move, the gravity and mass of earth as the condition for grace and air.

This is quite different from the dominant culture of innovation, which thinks of change only in terms of newness and as such conceives of life in binaries of old and new, requiring the demolition of the former to build the latter, digging out the earth to pour in concrete. Truly radical imagination is rooted, as the etymology of *radical* underscores, in what is already there in order to build other lines of intertwined life. And yours is an art that honors how profoundly enmeshed we are in complex interdependencies as dense and darkly unknowable as a web of roots.

I look to another assemblage in the corner of your apartment. You have collaged together birds, flowers, butterflies, pictures of your mother, your father Cleve—whose name evokes your city—and beside it all, stones that might be eggs, a carved wooden block with an image of a flying bird (a dove?) on one side and V (for Virgie?) on the other, a book titled *BIRDS*, and cards and paper, mottled and russet like veined marble. At the center of the board is a majestic lion, crowned with a stained glass butterfly and a dragonfly [see page 106].

I think about looking at and describing this work and how I follow serpentine lines through it, sight fluttering like butterflies, flying like birds, entering what Lisa Robertson might call here the “wilderness of interpretation,” where wilderness is a space-time of not knowing, where looking can only be supple, in movement, and making space for wonder and pauses as we are caught by details. “I sought a sense-textile, which would flourish outside the humiliating economy of servitude that names us,” Robertson writes.²² In such a world, each creature, plant, and material is in textural side-by-sideness, the intimate tussle of being in touch like siblings in a bed, as Eve Sedgwick once said.²³ I think I read the lines “always [...] read [...] out [...]” and I remember how often your words touch the air as song and sound, shared with those around you rather than sitting silently in the mind.

Moving back and forth between visual *impressions* of sound to live recitation with its sonorous peaks, and plains, and valleys, I seldom look before I leap. I just *go*—and I go on paper sheets and stage, performing readings as *writings* (living, breathing *compensations*), and writings as legible performance scores... making good on a promise I made to trees (when I was a young budding poet) not to “waste” them or the lives of birds (due to the dioxin toxic papermaking process).²⁴

At the heart of all this is movement, which is to say: life. Like your mother’s before you, who gathered materials to use as departure points for more making, your work is rooted in the contrapuntal movements of gathering and sharing over time. You have continued your mother’s work because hers has not ended; it may be picked up and rewoven into more work, which in turn gathers others to join in. In your *Womb Room Tomb*, you assembled hundreds of Virgie’s paintings, journal pages, sculptures, and drawings in an apartment display for the FRONT Triennial in 2018. A site of creation (womb), gathering (room), and sacred homage (tomb)—a site of birth, life, and death—this work tells a history of your mother’s artistic outpouring of over seventy years that is intimately tied with your everyday life and your own work too: a retrospective of a life lived and drawn into life now. “The world goes on / ... generous in ends,” as poet Erin Robinsong says.²⁵

Life, like art, you show, can only ever be done together, over a time-space that is not already accounted for or assumed to be known. Life, like art, is to be invented, in the sense of finding possibility in what is already there: making in response to what comes before us (inspiration) to build possibility (aspiration) together (conspiration) again (respiration). An art of breath, an art of life, and, in the violence of a world rooted in antiblackness, an art of defiance.

The joy of taking CHANCES takes me into the unknown, unpracticed space of visionary possibilities—*chance* encounters *time only knows* as out of “here” boundless and there for—the life of WE—synchronic, s-p-a-c-e-d out and beside myself with discovery. Play. Working with a sense of freedom realised within the safety, margins of constraint. Magic... No name for this. Beyond me! What comes and goes.²⁶

This truly is what it is to be alive to the world, to attend to and move along with it. There is no one position from which we can see the world and others, no one beat. The “here” is boundless, as you say, and the “there” is but a proposition, a gift—that is, a “there for.” For what and for whom? That dash which follows this preposition gathers up breath and attention for the “life of WE,” where we let the self be beside itself with others (to be “out of ‘here’ boundless”) and acknowledge that “I” can only come into being through and with what is beside and before me. “I am because you are,” as the concept of Ubuntu articulates.

Almost certain
according to the folly of human centrism which
brought us this far from reality
of the circle of life, the web, weave, cosmic
air we—*cough, cough!*

Tear down, mow, claw, crack... blow up...

As if everything is a word, a sound
in and of itself

And to get to the point
where time and the rush to judgement
crushing the life lines of so many earth
links gone, going...²⁷

But not all gone yet. For if despair and optimism are both rooted in a mania of certitude and human centrism, then hope, as Rebecca Solnit has argued, is an opening up of possibilities for action precisely because we do not know what will happen, and yet, there is space to try things out.²⁸ Hope is the basis of responsibility: responding to what is and has been in order to build what can be. It requires commitment, not abandonment. It is inherently creative and poetic; hope as *poiesis*, as making, the ongoing verb. As you write, speaking of Let it Bee and of your father, Cleve Walter (“one of the first three ‘I Am a Man’ black man Clevelanders toting a union card”),

He had too much he art to leave. Saving the refused his life was
shored up, grieving mine was too. So cleave I do “adhere firmly and

closely, loyally and unwaveringly” to shoring up this foundation—
refusé with others who come to restore, take stock in the morrow.²⁹

Pour, flow back, I learn, is at the root of the word “refuse.” You pour back, pass on—not pass by—what has gone before us and what lies in our present to build the possibility of keeping going together over time. And in my own moments of despair and hopelessness, you wrote to me of holding out for wonder, for seeking relation, for pouring, not containing, knowing that the morrow is not already accounted for, but that we can make something else, if only we attend—wait, stretch out, let in, flow back, and let be.

NOTES

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- 2/ patton, “On another note (following blue),” in email message to the author, April 26, 2018.
- 3/ patton, email message to the author, December 3, 2017.
- 4/ patton, email message to the author, October 17, 2018.
- 5/ patton, email message to the author, October 17, 2018.
- 6/ Karen Barad, “On Touching—The Inhuman That Therefore I Am,” *differences* 23, no. 3 (December 2012): 206–23.
- 7/ Emily Dickinson, “1058,” in *Complete Poems*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960), 482.
- 8/ Robert Zaretsky, *The Subversive Simone Weil: A Life in Five Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 44.
- 9/ Simone Weil, “Attention and Will,” in *Gravity and Grace*, trans. Emma Crawford and Mario von der Ruhr (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), 116.
- 10/ Kevin Quashie, *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 46. Quashie writes of “oneness”: “oneness is not akin to individuality. The individual, as such circulates in the Western imaginary, is an incompatible and bankrupt idea for my study of black aliveness. For one, the notion of individuality is not possible for a black subject in an antiblack world, since blackness is always not only a collective designation but a collective indictment. There is no conceptual individuality possible for one who is black in an antiblack world. And indeed, the idea of individualism is too entangled with racial capitalism to infer the relational—the spiritually philosophical—register I mean by oneness” (32).
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- 12/ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” 1963, https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.
- 13/ Antena, “A Manifesto for Ultratranslation,” Antena Books, 2014, https://antenaantena.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/ultratranslation_eng.pdf.
- 14/ patton, “The Building by the Side of the Road: Cleveland’s Native/Green Rights Movement,” *About Place Journal* 1, no. 2 (2012), <https://aboutplacejournal.org/issues/rust-belt-tales/rebirth-in-the-place-and-space-of-death/julie-ezelle-patton/>.
- 15/ patton, “The Building by the Side of the Road.”
- 16/ patton, “The Building by the Side of the Road.”

- 17/ Anni Albers, "The Pliable Plane: Textiles in Architecture," *Perspecta* 4 (1957): 40.
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- 19/ patton, "On another note (following blue)."
- 20/ patton, "For Little Richard," *The A-Line* 2, no. 3 (2020), <https://alinejournal.com/arts-and-culture/for-little-richard/>.
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- 22/ Lisa Robertson, *The Baudelaire Fractal* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2020), 16, 92.
- 23/ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 8.
- 24/ patton, "Artist Statement," Foundation for Contemporary Arts (December 2014), <https://www.foundationforcontemporaryarts.org/recipients/julie-patton/>.
- 25/ Erin Robinsong, "In an Animal in an Animal," in *Wet Dream* (Kingston, Ontario: Brick Books, 2022), 35.
- 26/ patton, "Q&A with julie ezelle patton."
- 27/ patton, "On another note (following blue)."
- 28/ Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).
- 29/ patton, "The Building by the Side of the Road."

Like they did way back when
glottal stop was a place off Venetian sills

and the vaporetto

bogs down lolly gags

Georgia roots to
summer about

slack up on
the arm and hammer to flashbulb the daughters iron

he's supposed to give black to

but his eyes want to go there
Olmec and Palenque? hush

[2000]

D' NOTES

See... d'

[2015]

poets sow love

p e a c e *by*

e

a c e

within dim (Ovid) morph'n cells d

pressing nerves into blood

lines D media reports

pow err, pow D keg

back and fourth dimensions

no **Pod D** knows

such bold D

sentience

D's Tao... T's Dao teary

us delirium

house old repertory tremble

Upside

D-Head

route to shoot burrs

high frequency *serifs* downlow

retort *th*

d...

hey *dey*

whole world
in dire
hand

Harriet up
 flowers gal lore
shook FREE
 mullein clover cliff
 town, Morrison steps loose
 T/D it
 lore rain hands buried yard deep
 bird D phoneme

	H	O	M	E	S
	u	n	u	r	u
	e	t a	c h		p
		rrrrrrrr a i n o	a gun	r i o	
Niedecker lake thirst feel	live air rose & eye	Tide ruin wild	Rustle @@@@@	Row bare	
Moon desk Rising	O	I ams	Skin	Sun	

Plane on *making* a sound over

Spell checkers!
 divorce miss'n
 letters
 reality wound dress
 D for dark link
 Cradle of Tears concede

—Ah, like bumping into
Door angels
 easy trim charms & *dreamy*
 dharma
 o o
 d

d-d-d-d-d-d

micro dronal under story
*diph*tong pocket poet
D erects

Heads-up drear *Al... phabled City*
 Ditty Lights
 D primer hide
d *hide* deep coast
at D selected sites
 e x
Altar'd holy bedrock *schist*

th from the

trans form d dog
god hook
 from *there* mean

While *writer Sonia Sanchez dares*

Who do...
black *hAng... Leash-*
 eng eng ing ing
Ink ballast C *foresaw*

waves billow

Zong'd write noir

book of future
pitch phonemes
out of thin air
spin weather-hard
D block clay-mouth rock
out of time D

Sequel pixels and dots:

Detroit, Hebron, Sanaa, Aleppo, Darfur, Gaza, Lenape, other'd ...

feels _____ in the bank

As data thing *thinging* presence *fling*

th ink aid pressure

A thru Z

Line Dancing

<

>

to keep from pick'n

any litter

wadder. water

Almost there....

wahter waiter wader way over terre....

Thirst For more water... What

tear ducts

Aren't ours

cup ahead

flowing over

Sudanese poet, Abdel Wahab Yousif (“Latinos”)

Repeat'd after

setting off from Libya with dozens of

others long for Europe

Cold *ddd* Cold *ddd* Cold *ddd*

poet Akilah Oliver

inscribed wade

in d' waters

weigh'd... wade... way back

wind water

people taken

aback...

Wade... wad, wait din

waa wah waa...

be long money

swells

d'farmer in d'tales foe shore

den mark end

dey go thru

& thru

soak'd

tide thee address

stings & arrows
over

D *fence*

To d or not...
deplete the entire heard:

“Don’t know beans...”

[1996] **About D**
spoken relations pollen
punches living daylight language green
deep bee lean we
duh people all d’
nickel and dime people depeopling
dose people be bleeding
dem peopled d pleading
overpopulated populaces of gun
pop—pop—popular people diss’n
dis dat dose & dese
people, peeps
disable displease people, ppl plea pal
polis
dissenting by decree ppl

[2015] you people who “you people” you people agree to disagree by
decreasing desperate diaspora disparate lot disposing o’ de plots of
deposed
despots who have have-nots dispensing wit de spoils of
dispersed polyglots
hot under d’ color shows
peep pile by d’ power infested in deluge
shun distorting dis reputedly ill puke news *d...d...d...d...disaster*

capitalism pop cold d-d-d-d-evil
when push comes to shove
By D powers disinvested
In d' humanitree
displaced pole to pole d quick & d' head steep decline
pride to pay:

[2020]

going over
We shoal Over Come

Yes, we shale, shell we...
gather at the river
One "dey"
clear ear'd top secrets

D cleft

for good deeds
Bardo secrets
chewy inside
Vowels
barely hanging onto... D
baby seas

Mediterranean, Red, Black & blue

Arabian, Flores, Coral, Bering
Department of Corruption—*Correction! O, so...*
Far man

Oman, Carribbean, Sulu...
Puffin, Penguin, Nightboat,
Nocturnes
P-Queue

D
LINE

cool *they/dey*
them/dem

[2022]

PRINT
dust racket
Div ya Dichter Liebe stars

dis, dat, dose & dese

in step with *thou thou*
thous and *thou sands sands sands* until no moor

For climes have changed
Rachel Carson's
NEWLY REVISED
Edge of the D
BIG CHILL
ILL US TRADING
SHORES to settle
whales,
turkeys,
sharks,
only 10 Vaquita
left

On purpose all
git up & go to D see

WEEDS
d'people, children to & *froth...*
Whip up a storm, port of squall
and squalor

Depiction wary
just standing
around
on solid ground
 get'n fresh
 with English
 mourning due
 in fused tongue
 down pat words
 roam thee to they
 extract language
 from soil samples

like *t, h & e* lesson 1 no thumb sucking or dumb fucking dread Lecturer
hiding THE
ding lush jargon rose wince thistle downs in

d'

[1996–2022]

from TRANSCRIPT OF A PERFORMANCE

given at the Logan Center for the Arts, University of Chicago
with Paul Van Curen

Sometimes we call ourselves car hood. That's a real Rust Belt term.
[singing] Nikki Haley is in the news again. Leaving her door ajar.
She's taking a breath
but has not left poli-
ticking for pretenders
so far so far. She manages an offseason
high wire act
early on you and it's a two day for us.
It's about life. L I F E looking more like NFL
playoff. Fade. pattern

[takes newspaper out of blue tarp bag] immigration immigrants and un
and un
un have you been und
down'd today [vocalizing] who is being un today untomorrow

[rifling through newspapers] is that the sound
going right by us to be a wild card
of this season
as in business as usual for us future
about 700,000 That is seven plus six z's
e ros of yun un fun
fun fun

you whackydo ocular

lamented demented demented d reamers who
are the real reamers

up on Capitol heeling
consider the fate of a deferred action for
Super Zero hearts
the potential for freezing
down
to the central
heart of the question. Record breaking cold
oh so likely
in this season, and in every season hearts drop like
icicles
closer
to a handful. Dipping deep
weep into
stray seasons to tie them down. Tie them up. How do you Americans
FEEL ABOUT them A KING TORUNIMNU In Mun and men
and on many many many many many many many many
[vocalizing] Me Me Me Me Me Me Me Me mine
How many many many mines

Percent of shoppers swiping
has a different meaning for those thieves and the question of how
to beat them, tie them together in other places where the code
just might fall short
of arguing
that impeachment is too drastic a penalty for the good side.
WHILE ALSO DEFINING de for I need I need I need
some distance some distance some distance

from those people who have so much [*ripping newspaper*] fun
so much fun [*ripping newspaper*]. Thrashing
crashing waves
[*singing*] the way way, way way, way way wait.
Waiting Hi court
Ruuuuuler [*crumpling the paper*]
A Laaaaaawyer
A Teeeeeeeeee-
Ching moment
of life changing implications advancing to the minimum un the

minimum un which grew by a quarterly rate of um um um
Ikana mom
it kind of unmun them become a no no no no my mind no okay
Kyoko any No no no
my Me me me me my we
remain remain remain and my Nana me who would have many many
mine [*scatting*] Me me me mine he kind of me me me my and my yeah
largely Ah God

sir or air air err err err err err err err err

in later we will never really sit
down on an econ o me-e-e-e
falling into record breaking
temptations
the only country called
surreal estate

the cost of \$6.99 per month to stoke demand
for such services homeownership [*vocalizing*] should be families
it's very surreal hopes

you Oh laid
here in May as a bit overwhelming
well the life-changing implications

opposing blocking these efforts to put
to put it on the people
to die in a cold crossing kettles
is turkey time to to to to to cook cutter
you don't even hear those words in the news here today gone
tomorrow the newscasters delivering the same blues with the same
straight face who are these
reamers on the TV
screamers
flagging us down with one commercial after another
crucial wins and wears and whys

[*singing*] and how are we putting up with this
we're not
[*crumpling paper*] because we're
this is my stomach
fall into knots.
This is my social work. Yes it is a bit overwhelming
who give me permission to breathe

and how are the bears disappointing the lions
the step up against the rams and all these old totem
poles stolen offseason into business isn't isn't isn't as usual.
City's crying to be the future of the will to change

[*reaching into blue bag*] everything on our minds and you want chairs
Paul Van Curen on guitar

[*pulling out a folder*] should have seen the lake today.
Water so still all Almost
could see its own reflection in the lake below
birds shucking and
jiving of a sudden encounter with them cells take off on blue notes
inked in

conversations ssssilhouette

mother daughter
tit for tat
using blue to get black

what kind of blue you used to give water mama

watercolor
or the color of water.
Water as in wet terra H2
O
o oil
or watercolor any medium would do

Word Dance: julie patton's Uncommon Proposal

I'm not sure we should think of julie patton as indifferent to the survival of her poetry and art so much as possessed by a different sense of what survival means. For patton and for most people, firstly, it means the day-to-day business and priority of paying one's rent, of having money for food. Secondly, it means circulating the repertory of patton's poet-musician-artist peers; and, only thirdly, in the market of academic and scholarly awareness. The publication of poetry has always happened at a remove from authorial control; the version of a poem fixed in a printed edition might be the one the poet intended or preferred, but it could also simply be the one the printer or publisher could get their hands on. Many poems and performances by patton never make it into the hands of any printer: she has performed hundreds of startlingly unique events, very few of which survive in print or on video. Instead, most poems "written" in her live improvisatory events exist exclusively in the pubs and theaters to which she has been invited.

These environments shape patton's relationship to her work, especially those venues that give her the most license to improvise. Her improvisations—sometimes an hour in length and constructed on nothing more than a daily newspaper read frontward, backward, upside down, or in pieces onstage—are certainly elegant and rarely concise, but it is the ironic effect, the *Verfremdungseffekt* that patton consciously plays with, that I cherish. patton is wont to poke fun at any impulse toward authorial control, even her own. In her written pieces and in performance, she is always on the lookout for the notion of truth, and while her work may arrive at some truth, it is more concerned with meaning. She knows that if the meaning is incoherent (as is often the case with her raw materials, e.g., the daily news), or if one does not risk messiness in meaning making, one can never arrive at truth.

How does one know that the truth is arriving? Franz Kafka spoke on that question. Here is his statement on the matter to Gustav Janouch, the son of a colleague at the insurance company at which Kafka worked for twelve years: “The truth is always an abyss. One must—as in a swimming pool—dare to dive from the quivering springboard of trivial everyday experience and sink into the depths, in order later to rise again—laughing and fighting for breath—to the now doubly illuminated surface of things.”¹ Another way to navigate an abyss is to stop telling lies.

In her work patton doubly illuminates, vis-à-vis her reading of her environment and selected object, the prevailing affirmative notion of culture, undermining and transforming it. Art, for patton, is more than simply the superstructural affirmation of reality. Whether on stage or on the page, she defines culture as an active and critical appropriation of reality: confronting, exposing, and acting upon real societal contradictions in order to bring about social change. Her work asks: Can we survive everything that capitalism has delivered, from the combustion engine to electrical grids, Whole Foods and Amazon, PennSound and *Chicago Review*? Can we salvage the underfunded Environmental Protection Agency and relatively safe drinking water? What is it exactly that poetry can do to redeem or undermine the plunder of private equity? It is the provocation that dances and dives at the foot of the stage, on the page, and in one’s ears and eyes.

On Tuesday, October 10, 2023, at 12:24 p.m., julie patton sent the following via text:

Provocation dances at the foot
of civilization graves
Whatever going too far
amounts to crossing imaginary
borders contradicting any
bird’s eye view, antelope hoof
or lion’s paw
What need of countries and
check points when language is
enough to spell hope or
trouble, silence futures, entire
species or villages, forests &
trees

Hanging at the end of a
sentence
fingers pointing
the wrong way

To live or die

Too close to barbwire
concentration camps
Keeping the wire companies in
business
And nails

Until the matches arrive
With the stench of sulfur
Who the devil is at the door
now
Depends on words pumped
through and through childhood
Soft heads, hard hearts grow
stranger
Fruit, thorny weather
Which sides do clouds or
sunshine take
And who hears the rain of
bullets and missiles
Falling on deaf ears, hard
mired tongues
Elected officials rear
End us
As surely as their rifle butts
part

Air, run
A foul
Steal estate being whatever it
is
Real
that “sticks and stones break
bones but words can...”
Yes they can

Soothe and heal
In every language
A word for love exists
Inured of hate
We forget to be human animals
protecting
All of Earth
Babied in the humming womb
of our Milky Way
One world
One Earth
Where's Bob Marley when you
need him
Or Mahalia, Lennon and
Harrison? I complain
We seldom hear
"Peace, sister... brother!"
Hawks & Hummingbirds rocket
through
Same old siren
Song
"Enough" is
Never enough

"of our Milky Way / One world / One Earth." patton's enactment in poetic thought of the relation of memory to ethics ("fingers pointing the wrong way"), her taking in of ethical substance through memory, and her process, through writing, of keeping memory active, each preserve its verbal sense (remembering, an ongoing reincorporation and renegotiation) against its freezing into a noun (a container for past images). This is the "Enough" echoed in "keeping the wire companies in / business." patton later texted that this was "Not a poem / Just flow // Word dance." In her work, the idea that a poem is always the same no matter its medium of delivery rarely holds true. Her ideas, conjured during performance, turn the fugitive, mundane facts that are art's raw materials into the stuff of tragedy and prophecy. A poem or "word dance" is different when viewed on a screen or in a theater or a pub, or when it is printed in the pages of *Chicago Review*, or when it appears in a small zine raggedly stapled in someone's garage. It's not

that you experience it differently. It is a different language. As patton might say, we're in the Milky Way. That's the only god we know. From patton's fingers to my screen, through my fingers to another screen and on to others' screens, and now to the printed matter that you hold before your eyes. (Moments later, we were back to exchanging videos and news links.)

"Word dance" is one among the many languages distributed across the visual, auditory, literary, and kinesthetic modalities of patton's art. Each modality and its medium serves as a portal into different experiences that change how one reads, thinks, and who one is. The uncommon proposal of julie's work travels through the thing that she, and many others including myself, are afraid of, so the intelligence can then work. It is the faculty by which humankind apprehends reality—the Imagination. And it may at times be intangible, as it is typically separate from cognition or logical reasoning. Imagination conjures the realities of beauty, grief, love, the search for meaning, the struggle to face our own mortality, and the ability to face truth. patton's work requires that you don't defend an assumption. Hence patton consciously plays with *Verfremdungseffekt* to communicate at the tacit level, both with words and beyond words. She does not repeat the stories her sources, e.g., the daily newspaper, provide. She translates a deeper process.

I first encountered julie at the Segue Performance Space in the East Village of Manhattan sometime around 1996. She stepped forward holding newspapers, black ink markers, scissors, and a roll of black electrician's tape and began her performance. I recall having an ear-to-ear grin the entire time. I worked as a musician for most of my life, having arrived at poetry by a rather circuitous route. But I recognized that I was in the presence of an exceedingly brilliant artist capable of translating mundane journalistic prose and commercial advertisement, alongside other detritus, into improvisatory heaven—shades of Hades mixed in as counterweight and balance. Everyone in the room, it seemed, felt themselves in the presence of something uncommon—a writer who re-members while forgetting herself in unexpected ways—an artist who played the microphone and the room without notes, nothing "written," only a few pages of a newspaper in hand. An artist who improvised for forty minutes vis-à-vis interwoven

themes of class, color, journalistic narrative, poetic language, race, sex, and audience. Paper, ink. patton works with song and waste as malleable material for sonic and poetic experimentation. When song breaks with inherited forms and structures, it is often thought to cease to be song, instead becoming something else entirely: sound, improvisation, poem, performance, or otherwise. patton works at the edge of song and not-song to explore this expanded field of practice. A metaphysician, dialectician, and coach of the color blue, her performative dialogues are a politics of the song-form and the idea of dialogue.

Here she is in “Using Blue to Get Black”:

No, over here, it's got some lilac in it...just can't quite call it...but we can keep the word "Naphthol" in the African American Paint Line... irony of black folks and paint since they keep being painted...primed... repainted and turp... N-o-o-o-o...perp-in-time! Based on the canvas of what...NAACP for the advancement of color pigments? So now you know what pig meant...Mom...Mom...remember "flesh colored" crayons? What the crayon comp...any pig meant muck 'em...putty color. Could paint a racial issue. Let's just go black to being "colored."²

patton does not employ a “style” of poetry, art making, or music that should be sustained in all situations—she presents, instead, an evolving physical system, a dialogue between herself and her reader and listener. Her work doesn't explain; it bears witness:

So sad. won't realize how rich we were until every tree, bird, flower is gone. This Eden, damned, salmon out of reach... The bees said, why should we stick around here? they don't appreciate it—only want more, spray the earth with malathion every year just to get “rid of” mosquitoes using the same logic Rachel Carson decried years ago—only this time replaced with another fiction. It's insane. Agriculture in the so-called “green revolution” is war and we're paying for it.

And the bees sad, not being is the message, honey.³

patton's editorial practice complements and is in dialogue with her artistic and political commitments. At the end of 1997, she brought

Russell Atkins's work to my attention and argued eloquently for its importance. Atkins, a Cleveland poet, philosopher, playwright, composer, editor, and publisher, is one of the most prolific and demanding postwar North American experimentalists. Roberto Harrison and I, coeditors of *Crayon*, with Julie's invaluable assistance as guest editor, curated a collection of selected poems and prose that he wrote between 1950 and 1991. It was a taut forty-three pages pulled from Atkins's long out-of-print oeuvre. *Crayon 2*, featuring Atkins's work, published in 1999, sold out in a month.

To the best of my knowledge, although the work published in *Crayon* garnered a renewed interest in his alternative African American poetic tradition of "conspicuous technique," Atkins was not featured again in poetry magazines or scholarly work until the appearance of Aldon Nielsen's *Integral Music* in 2004 (there is a one-sentence parenthetical in the first chapter, "Carrying Deconstruction to Cleveland: Russell Atkins," that mentions the *Crayon* issue featuring Atkins's writing). Unsurprisingly, in a literary world largely ceded to market forces within academia, the next time Atkins was featured was in *Russell Atkins: On the Life & Work of an American Master*, edited by Kevin Prufer and Michael Dumanis (Pleiades Press, 2013), and, six years later, in *World'd Too Much: The Selected Poetry of Russell Atkins*, edited by Kevin Prufer and Robert E. McDonough (CSU Poetry Center, 2019). Neither book acknowledges Patton's curatorial work in obtaining Russell's papers and poetry and his permission to republish his work. Nor do they mention Patton's notable introduction to Atkins's work in *Crayon 2*. Most pioneering work goes against the grain, appearing in small presses and rarely garnering much general attention. And so it goes.

On Monday, March 21, 2022, at 9:25 p.m., Julie emailed a response to an analogous matter:

That's for the Hip People. We're not hip. Simple as that. Capitalism is allergic to stasis, must have a new pair of shoes for everyday of the week. Tik Tok and other S&M (social med) = a glorified pair of CB handles. Each generation must have its own faucet. Now remember, it's all based on forgetting or ignoring, with the exception of the exceptional (status keepers or guardians of canons (never skip gates) of the past to point out, Yo, you've come a long way, baby, to take on

anonymous take and beat it too...) celeb brittle paint chips. Get the brush off? No. No shakey poo or shorthand names either. English clash never discussed. Class knee there hear nor thar but beyond the bale of "Hey, do I know, really know use?" Property speaking, any one of us can be in this situation at any crime of day....

julie has encouraged me to include in this essay something of my own access to resistance, to bear witness to the role of poetry, and the character of oneself in relation to one's actions.

On Friday, June 30, 2023, at 5:55 p.m., I emailed:

julie, thought you might enjoy this prose sonnet!
Damn the less than supreme court.

Passivity

In the distance, moist from interrupted kisses, mouths full of blood,
It's not the person, it's the gun. I'm knocked backwards and flat onto
the floor.
There are urinals on every wall, it's uncertain how many walls there are.
I felt my head spinning; I slipped my silencer out of my pocket. I had
a decision to make.
It moves in our sleep to twitter handles accused of pimping power
destroyed
In its proximity to whatever it links to. Newsrooms swarm with rumors
of immunity.
The burglars and plumbers find evidence used to aggregate the partial
dynamic cues
Implicitly infer the casual observer would imagine the present to be
taking place
In the distant past. Ghosts file in. As usual, I can't keep my eyes open.
The shape of the room shifts between discourse and withdrawal in an
ambient manipulation.
Managerial talents kindly provide entertainment, nonetheless, I'm
brutalized
In every way. "A discourteous person such as myself is as like as not to
box your ears,
And worse." We might still know who we are but we also have greater
clarity
On who some of our fellow Americans are.

On Sunday, July 2, 2023, at 10:30 p.m., julie patton emailed:

Chilling! You capture the creepiness of it and the deviant social
of our Amerderkin scream
Kindness for weakness
Madness disgrace
Against time
Is what some of this is born of
Machines killing it making a living choking, strangling the planet
Off its hinges
Twitter triggers
Meta figures
We're up to eyes & ears in
The ghostly charade
Now it is always night
Until you turn on your own heart
Light

Peace,
julie

If you need to read, take a look at julie patton's poetry and prose. Its negative capability is fishing in flames.

NOTES

- 1/ Gustav Janouch, *Conversations with Kafka* (New York: New Directions Books, 2012), 154–55.
- 2/ julie patton, "Using Blue to Get Black," *Crayon* 5 (2008): 76–100.
- 3/ Correspondence from julie patton on Tuesday July 1, 2008.

NOTES FOR L POEM

form u la, la, la, la, la



L re

versing it self 

becomes



fl, eventually

3 *l*  *l*'s make one 

(this is the story of f'n l)

add verse to gar

Land

deft fingers turn to bouquet

cut to the chase, don't e-
laborate...

all that writing stems from.....

bough bound

fleurry of letters

O, what the L....

wing-tip

petal

of tongue

y'langue langue

l was in love with itself

l fell for itself

lollygagging

la lee gagging
(wind)

la leaf
gag ling

See the **f**n flower

flit, fleu, flutter

[1996]

EXPERIMENT L NOTES

re
verb' *l*

form
u

la la la la la la
under

lying (*math* thematic
l

la...
ments recipric *l* relations re
verse
l

tier'd letters
(pair any *l* *l* unction) spring *ll* en



tail moveable ful
cram.point
inclined to *fl*...uid media

els'
all fall...

re:
| bloomin narcis

stick 
pre cursor

tip
of letters per node (accessory bud)

3  's into one  eventually, fl...eu
{physic *l* basis
of *flower*

morph o logic *l*
root work

all that writing stems from.
radic' *l*

wing tip petal feather  leaf finger
(sound joint)

so l

so l

(are we on top
of the *L*
phabet or facing it?)

[1998]



Taking it all down. Only to put back up (Twisted Natural History Museum, Unit 6).



Called "Lights" they truly are (Twisted Natural History Museum, Unit 6).



Wall B, in the Room of the Americas (Twisted Natural History Museum, Unit 6). This east-facing wall is for the birds. Feathered in an old cap round a 45 summing up current affairs (it is HOT & howling we hold on to our better angels) soul singer Nhojj holds forth above a reposing figure stuck behind a mirror—as if head voice for the former Beehive Design Collective’s final masterpiece *Mesoamérica Resiste* (2013), where an ant’s eye view reflects the life of fellow rooted beings threatened with being routed by the plans on the outside map. A mob of birds flies towards ever-rising towers to pummel and rewire them for local scale energy and life. A banner festooned across the top reads, “Every time history repeats itself, the price goes up,” and the birds on the record squawk and rush to feed their young with what is growing less and less available.



Alphabet Fence at Let it Bee (close up). Planted by neighborhood children under supervision of artist Charmaine Spencer, 2008.

[image provided by julie ezelle patton]

julie patton's Let it Bee Garden and Poet Tree Mitigation Program: Selected Correspondence

The following dossier of correspondence chronicles julie patton's eco-collaborations across the 2010s, including an expanded view of her poetic practice and her improvised approach to poetry in the channels of email communication. Through this correspondence is woven the story of the Let it Bee Garden and the Poet Tree Mitigation Program, a reclamation endeavor planting patton's artists' cooperative (the Salon des Refusées) in the green fabric of Cleveland's open space and, in the process, establishing one of the city's first conservation easements.

patton's correspondence emerges in response to conversations around the journal *ecopoetics*, as well as through visits reciprocated between Cleveland and Buffalo¹—where I founded the journal in 2001—and between Cleveland and Lewiston, Maine, where patton and I collaborated on an installation focused on the figure of the child nature diarist Opal Whiteley for the Bates College Museum of Art.² These conversations were wide-ranging: less focused on ecopoetry as a literary genre than on what might emerge at the meeting place of experimental poetics and the field of action and understanding designated as “ecology.” Running throughout our exploration of the expanded field of *ecopoetics*³ is attention to what one might call the infrastructural unconscious: “prosaic” concerns of food, shelter, waste, drainage, energy, transport, and open space for recreation. In this attention, *ecopoetics* also emphasizes solidarity across the multispecies constituencies of our commons.

patton grew up in the Glenville neighborhood of Cleveland, where she still maintains a footprint. Glenville borders University Circle to the south and the shore of Lake Erie to the north. (patton's other home is New York City, and she has referred to Cleveland as the “country” to her “town” life.) A good part of Glenville's west side is bordered by Doan Brook, the winding course of which determines the linear

shape of Rockefeller Park with its thirty-five Cultural Gardens, seen from the windows of patton's Cleveland home, the Salon des Refusées.

The racial, cultural, and economic demographics of Glenville—an independent village until its annexation by the City of Cleveland in 1904—were defined by successive waves of settlement following the displacement of its Native Erie and Lenape populations. Glenville became home to New England farmers, Scotch-Irish and English immigrants with their truck farms, turn-of-the-century holiday seekers (the 1870 Glenville Race Track made Glenville a major horse racing center), and an upwardly mobile Jewish community benefiting from progressive urban housing development of single-family homes. Finally, white flight to the suburbs at midcentury with the Second Great Migration brought more than a hundred thousand Black people into the neighborhood. A working truck farm, still visible on Google Maps, bordered the back of patton's block until just a couple of years ago.

The 1960s of patton's youth were marked by exposure to a vibrant, urban cultural milieu, including connections to the Cleveland Orchestra, Botanical Gardens, Museum of Art, and Museum of Natural History (CMNH in the correspondence, where patton's favorite aunt's husband George Simmonds was an illustrator), to Karamu House (the nation's oldest producing Black theater), to an accessible Metroparks system and the Board of Education's Cleveland Supplementary Education Center, to urban gardening and environmentalism sparked by the 1969 Cuyahoga River fire, to “zentelectualism” (Buddhist- and Hindu-based meditation instruction), and to forms of solidarity between Jewry and Black people. Glenville also saw Black Power activism and the 1968 Glenville shootout, which brought an end to Mayor Carl Stokes's CLEVELAND: NOW! redevelopment program. More recently, the neighborhood has been impacted by the real estate development ambitions of Case Western Reserve University and the Famicos Foundation, which took over the activities of the Glenville Development Corporation (1978–2015) through a process patton calls the “university-hospital-museum nexus.”

Though she was largely based in New York City, patton managed to acquire—on borrowed money and at a modest price—a share (unit #4) in a 1913 African American co-op movement building overlooking

Rockefeller Park in the late 1980s. Members of her family had long lived in the unit, and she purchased the share largely to facilitate care for her elders and siblings. Fellow shareholders had been forced to relocate for age-related reasons; when their heirs defaulted on maintenance fee payments, patton, somewhat unintentionally, ended up in the role of “super,” managing the three-story apartment building eventually dubbed the Salon des Refusées.⁴ In 2006, to facilitate stewardship of the building, the co-op was reincorporated with friends Arcey Harton and Paul Van Curen as “BluesTone Circle LLC.”

The Let it Bee Garden and Poet Tree Mitigation program are offshoots of this footprint, as are the armies of green thumb neighborhood children patton has inspired through the years, the Green Scouts. Though patton rejects the hustle mentality, her work of managing an artists’ colony, poets’ retreat, and neighborhood institution without foundation support nor much public funding—while maintaining her uncompromising work as a poet, artist, and performer—structures her communications.

patton had a dream in the 1980s to start a medicinal “physick” garden, having grown up with the use of herbs, which she associated with the Native American heritage on both sides of her family. Her interest in collage was thus connected early on with plants and with the tonal associations of herbal scents and tastes. In 2000, patton planted an herb garden and (with the help of Harton) turned the adjacent trash-strewn lot into a green commons. Several years later, Ian Charnas installed a 500-gallon water catchment. Residents practiced the “performance art” of picking up trash—“especially if you dress up for the occasion or do it while ‘talking trash.’ Being literal is ecopoetic.”⁵ patton has cited the guerrilla gardens of Manhattan’s Lower East Side and, in particular, the inspiration of poet, journalist, and garden activist Brad Will—who lost his life in 2006 covering the teachers’ strikes in Oaxaca—as a catalyst for her own green activities. She also credits Adam Purple and landscape architect and Cleveland neighbor Austin Allen.

In that same year, 2006, eight-year-old neighbor Tyria Wickliff came onto the commons to ask if she could plant some seeds. When patton said “yes, of course,” the girl returned with a small army of friends and packets of tomato and spinach seeds. Thus began Let it

Bee Garden's experimental outdoor education initiatives, overseen by the residents of the Salon des Refusées. The garden was conceived as much for wildlife as it was for people, self-planted by volunteers and by city workers who tossed out rescued plants (a lilac tree, a privet) or by derelict landlords who left them behind (rose bushes from abandoned houses). Black walnuts, mulberries, and peaches flourished.

When I visited in 2010 to lead a soundscape and birdsong poetry workshop with neighborhood kids, I helped plant a serviceberry tree in the Let it Bee Garden, the first of the Poet Tree Mitigation program. Other poets who have planted trees in the garden include Will Alexander, Janice Lowe, and Jen Hofer. Trees and shrubs that now flourish in the garden include sweet gum, white and pink dogwood, amelanchier, red bud, witch hazel, crepe myrtle, lilac, white pine, piñon, hazelnut, juniper, spruce, cypress, sequoia, pawpaw, persimmon, pear, peach, fig, mulberry, elderberry, currant, cranberry, gooseberry, blueberry, blackberry, lime, plum, apple, quercus (oak: red and white), maple, cottonwood, black walnut, elm, river birch, and willow.

By 2010, patton had identified a shifting group of correspondents who were sympathetic to her green projects. The following selection includes emails that julie patton wrote me, cc'd me in, or forwarded to me. It begins in 2010, as most of our correspondence from the prior decade remains locked away in an inaccessible format. Very few typos—flipped letters in the spelling of words—crop up in these emails often written at speed, errors which I have (with careful attention to patton's many moments of playful nonstandard English) silently and sparingly corrected. Prefatory comments before some of the emails provide contextual information.

§

The following email situates ecopoetics in relation to waste, compost, and what the late artist and a former Bates College colleague (and another friend of patton's) William Pope.L once suggested might pointedly be articulated as a "fecopoetics."

8 April 2010 group email from julie patton (recipients not disclosed):

Dears,

I scribbled this [submission of journal entries to *Critophoria 2*], in haste (orbviously) at the request of Cecilia [Wu], when i was last in NYC—2 months without a computer led me back in touch with pads of me own finger in a silky skin way... maxEYEmized wheat colored leaves. Didn't come out write but always remember Jonathan's dictate especially "minimum 60%!" [recycled post-consumer content paper] said as if that was also a dirty damn shame. Not good enough. Of course I always loved sleeping in the raw. Back to Tanizaki. Everyone was reading *In Praise of Shadows* when I was in first year architecture at Cooper, Raimund Abraham (god rest in peace since he was killed on a LA freeway week of March 4th), a friend and colleague even though I first met him as a student. Someone told him that I described him as "not walking on the earth," as in on top of it, but deeply inscribed. Top soil! or Topsy. Anyway I pictured him almost cartoon-like with his shoes pushing up the soil as he walked. You've seen such cartoons. Characters always climbing out of dirt—Ricochet Rabbit, Road Runner since someone was always being pounded to the depths (with an anvil). Well, I guess I'm onto project #150 unscubbed writs with at least a piece of it online... Like showing dirty underwear in a world of perfect sheets o paper, milkwhite, and as Tonya Foster recently mentioned "tidy poems" as the norm. Well, how about tidy bowl? And what it takes (chemicals) to erase all signs of poop? No wonder we have a (half ass as in not complete) compost-toilet out back. Just think, only the stars will know what to make of everything coming out alright. Miss Spelt, or cotton wash—out with the beach... been thinking a lot about dirt (much as I loathe white walls) actually began to think how the modern (antiseptic) notion of contrast (bright white versus my black sheet) might have stronger psychological implications (especially in the visual art world) than usually thought... especially ecological considering the dioxin... Oh, tale me what u think (nature poet? me?). Guess I'm too soiled to be that spoiled. Thanks for being patient with my impatience. Bloop!

Lost in Space,

julie

p.s. and I who adored spotless galleries just made a quick installation with the children, leaving the soil so the spiders and ants could be a part

12 August 2011 group email (to about forty-five friends) from julie patton:

Dear Friends,

Late notice. I aim to write a grant in 24 hours. News to me also. Can you help with the following?

—support letter for Let it Bee Gardens/Salon des Refusés/Green Scouts/BluesTone Circle (live/work space from which we bring the outside in and the inside out, spider webs and all). Thus it can be written from any angle. A paragraph!

As many of you know, beautiful food in rhythm of the seasons is central to the wealth of our common/unity space. Inviting all kinds of folks to the table in the form of a Chili Rumble, the wonderful Iengineered vegan brunches, “yard teas,” and wild green salads come to mind. So do the tomato cage people dripping with tomatillos. Hmmm... what about the magical day the Green Scouts had at Sergio’s (in University Circle)? They had the place all to themselves. Chef Ryan Alabaugh was a genius food educator, offering them their own work station of pizza dough ball, all the fine ingredients you could want (the best Italian cheese around), and how to toss, shape, and design the gooey mass into something thrilling and edible. Never thought of making lemonade the way he taught. And the etiquette lesson that accompanied their journey from kitchen coach house to uplifting restaurant where they set the table, ate together, and took the rest home. I could go on and on... about how food and drink bring people together, how we focus on feeding birds, butterflies, and others (including unusual species of visiting artists) by providing nesting ground and native plants, how gleaned mulberry trees resulted in Def Jamz or the way Poet Trees Mitigation program builds on this equation. Do I need to mention Laura Cyrocki’s planting spring gardens for Bluestone’s live-in residents and other neighbors or how Let it Bee serves as home for one of Waxwing’s market gardens and our own City Fresh CSA? I could continue but many of you have felt the love, the intention, and

the love economy extending out into the community. City Fresh? Cucumber punch while hosting the Cleveland Museum of Art? Daily healthy eating lessons for kids in the old school kitchen can transfer to an outdoor table setting. On and on and on. We host and we serve. Offer what we have. [...]

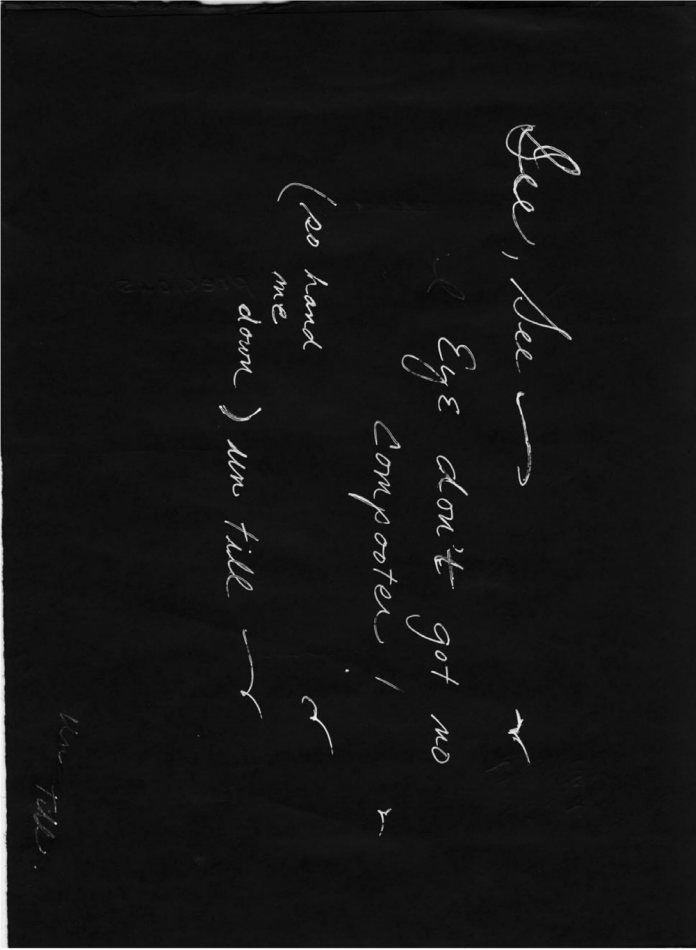
BUILD AN OUTDOOR OVEN, an EARTHEN OVEN/FIRE PIT!

We need a hearth. Why? It is simply heart warming. [...] Can put a lot of things in this open mouth beside hot air. And the children will set the table. A visiting poet will wax eco-poetically about the way hunting and gathering green leaves echoes gathering pages of a book. Eat your alphabet soup with a knife and cut out the words Glenville Riot. It started with fire. The next time was London. But we can bring people together with the water that feeds life. A little bit of yeast and we've got the earth's crust perfect, dehydrated berries, and Tom Orange's righteous corn on the cob.

Making the oven is a community endeavor. All hands on task, mud, stone, and will power. Tofu to you, too!

julie, if you will...
or can.


I had written to patton on 26 June 2012 for an update on San Francisco-based artist Alison Pebworth's "Beautiful Possibility Elixir Social" (a market fair event sponsored by Spaces Art Gallery featuring Cleveland urban farms and, as advertised on the flyer, "Community Service Berry Potent Potion" offered by Let it Bee Farm). I noted that I had been examining prints of the oil industry in Edward Burtynsky's exhibit at the Nevada Art Museum and that I had heard Tim Davis (photographer and amateur ukulele player) was in Cleveland and might look patton up. On the horizon was my move to England later that fall to take up a position at the University of Warwick. Isabelle Pelixer [Pelissier] was my partner at the time: our early encounters with patton a decade or more earlier had been hosted in Isabelle's sculpture studio in Buffalo, New York. Paul is Paul Van Curen, improvisational musician and photographer, whose work in conservation appraisal had put patton in touch with local conservation groups.



↑ ↑ ↑

"Horrible inside [out - real space is...]" ?

Hauntings Bound s

Polar  (~~look up~~) word for rest then d' eye

8x10 lid "Scalp... Film ~~precious~~ .

(body on the line) PAY per view in art i type, curate

for the love of paper

so pale and thin" Art of darkness dia regard

This side *Can't see the* Cecilia, vers e *TV Bright* COUTURE TONGUE

"STICKS & STONES" ("chisel'd features" my g. grandma "INDIAN" schools")

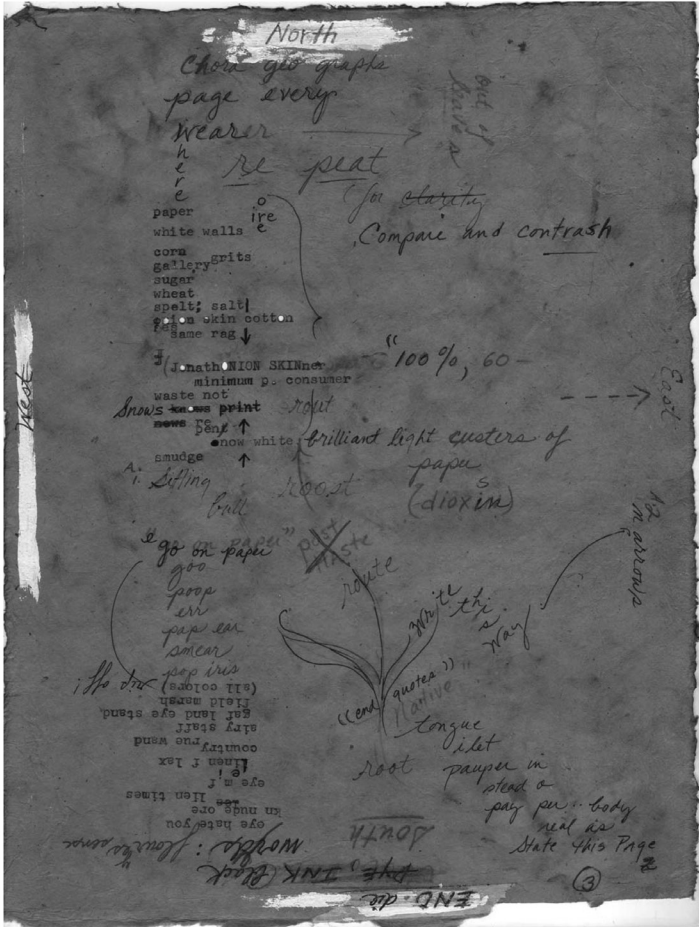
placed wherever words can be placed, so snow

THIN LINE BETWEEN LOVE

809

for the purpose of the line of duty







Blind Side

Notes on the dialectics
of seeing everything under bright lights
the emergency room of language afraid of its
own shadow

drug everything intooth whitening factor paper gowns
~~future shock?~~ ^{posed}

(1. "Wapicun anigni Kte")
Art as reflection of times it wa was
produced under ^{Read in the dark}

(see weeds, fiber technology eye elect
tricks... flat green

This paper speaks for itself - no ragged
edges, "type A")

"bite" (acid tongue: *Bob Bob Blackburn*
"dumb Indian" ^{Have you any} ~~ink~~ ^{black?}

a fly land on a shit of paper by the word "entrees"
Roman font, writing cut up like vegetables (cubes ^{Fries}
diced) curl away from tongue ^{Leave cursive broken}
dark ^{heavy}; grammar ^{(Holy Shit! the pap. Sees} speech
^{seeds}

Terra ^{new} *Story 1: pap ear* ^{settlers}
^{peel} ^{grim!}

ear

1. *Be quiet in the white man*
will have you noisy

the page... field fa

ear

Be remedial
sight

dark edges
"The forest has
eyes"
middle
pages

4.

[Excerpts from julie patton's contribution to *Critophoria 2*, included with email.]

26 June 2012 email from julie patton to Jonathan Skinner:

Oil elixir was on my mind that day... When I prepared steeped the mint with the mulberry, wild strawberry with rose. And so on. It went well. And down all wells. Oil got me there. Oilixir. And I thought of you all the while the well we were/are was going down not so very well wells because this was the Onyx Blackly version of the Opal Whiteley room I did for her. Live because it was at a real market and I kept evoking your definition of ecopourethicks as the language went with the bottles and the makings in them marked accordingly... as remedies. And your tree was the very definition of giving since our show within the show was called Let it Bee Community Service Berry Potent Potion... And it was written (for instance) that the people Rose up and said this is the last straw. Could have referred to oil. You make your bed and you lie in it (straw). Currantly. Mull it all over. The Jonathan Skinner Service Berry Tree now has droppings in Alison Pebworth's USA country collective since she ate of your tree and took it with her. Yum. 170 proof. That topped it off. An elixir potent with notes of all her cross country gatherings. By the way, I better hop to it if I am going to get a piece of Isabelle Pelixir up in here. Much love to you, Mr. SerVICE very birdy being! Your name cropped up yesterday (teacher Danny Carver was trying to convey your deep listening/bird call lesson for his art students to a nonprofiter). All very well. Bee well. See you a londonberry and yes, I heard from my long ago friend Davis just yesterday. So happy. I text'd him a note saying get thee to a banjo din. Ukelele likely your passing through will be recorded as all visitors should get stuck in a jam in Paul's "compost apartment." You escaped this time but we will cage you very well next time. Peak oil, speak peak, beaker less. Love to you! No paragraphs since this computer is too old to project one. All word jam!

9 July 2012 email from julie patton to Victoria Mills, cc'd Lee Chilcote, Paul Van Curen, Eddie Dengg, Kevin Walcott, Sheba, Andrew Levy, Jonathan Skinner, Janice Lowe, Barbara Henning, giovanni singleton, Virgie Patton, Christine Wertheim, Meagen Kresge, and Ben Shapiro:

What a tangled garden we weave. The "advisory board" is truly a great collaborative possibility. It exists in fact because we've all already been in communication over the years. Putting a name to it serves to formalize the connection and to give it an identity!

[...]

There are a couple of exciting solutions to the watering issue. After pointing out the persistent water collection site (Paul's "bird pool") I commented on the potential (natural) downgrade. Joe stated that East 103rd (the "alley") is only partially asphalted. He noticed, during excavation last week, a foot of bricks extending into the lot. The soil and plants can be unearthed and then we can "ditch" it so that the bird collection site will drain down into the rain garden. I suggested we give the students of Hawken & Cleveland School of the Art some shovels. Or let the neighbors have fun (especially KW & Arcey)! Ha ha. The "building" will continue to water the gardens until they take root.

The conversation turned to trees and prairie possibilities. Jim said it depends on how "purey" you want the prairie but that the plants that dig it (queen anne's lace, chicory, etc.) are going to persist. He said "just let it bee" and focus on educating the Councilman Jeff Johnson. "You mean let it bee, Jim?" "Yup. Just let Let it Bee be."

I am not making this up, even though poesis, root of the word poetry, means "to make" (play, in a sense).

So, in a nutshell, I feel that planting trees on the tree lawn (of Ashbury) will bring the shade we need to minimize the effects of drought. If the budget will cover this, I welcome everyone to weigh in on appropriate natives or edible forage trees (for wildlife, human, and non).

Jim mentioned continuing the oak brigade. I countered that I recall Jim Bissell suggesting white oak but Let it Bee (imagined as a prairie in my original concept but now intent on becoming a forest) already has a lot of young oaks. Some are quite tall.

But remember the councilman's words and keep them... colorful. So the alternative might be Redbud, Hawthorn, Crabapple, Amelanchier or...

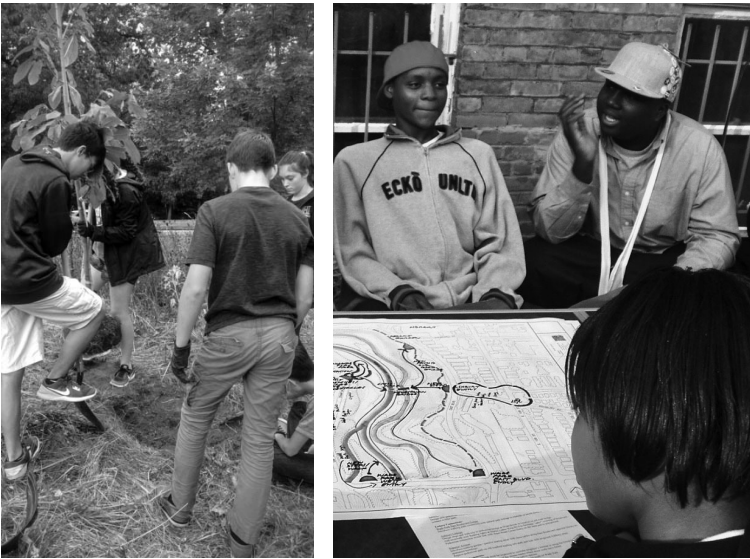
This will complement the idea of filling some of the abandoned garden beds with colorful natives, prairie plants. Suggestions welcomed. We will pull lots on lots of flowers and trees. Or discuss

this live at Barking Spider (or another beer garden). Imagine resting on our laurels instead of quaking as pens of..... would have it.

Everytime we get together and problem solve, we are reminded how much we have in common. A wealth of ideas. Earth spells Heart. We all have it. Collaborative board, guild, or hive. Let it Bee Hive or have. OK. I'm not nuts. I wood be if my name was Hazel but that drive is closer to the CMNH staff whose leadership and botanical drive will help make this space even more it can bee. Jim McKnight mentioned that he looks forward to their input. The bees do too.

Beest Regards,
julie

P.S. There is a Poet Tree Mitigation program here. Writers who come here get to select a tree (or plant) to atone for their wild use of paper. And to write a poem on behalf of them.



[Images emailed by Arcey Harton and julie patton: students planting a pawpaw tree; consulting planning maps.]

10 October 2012 excerpt of email from julie patton to Barbara Henning:

Dear Barbara,

Off the earth, foraging amid the watershed and street fruit trees anywhere. Only taking what I need... People think I garden but I don't... not really. I started a garden for wildlife and planted edible trees for creatures big and small and started a project acquainting children and youth with living off the land, planting an edible forest (now you can from service and mull to straw, rasp, currant, black, elder, huckle berries and grapes to peach, fig, apple, persimmon, hazelnut and perennial greens but the main think was fighting to protect and conserve land so everyone can have access to land and food). That project continues. And no I do not "own" nothin'! Well, it's time to gather burr oaks and some shrooms. It's past time for black walnuts but stinko gingko and apples are still holding on. It's worth the \$30 day ticket to go back and save what I can... and can leftover harvests everywhere... poet trees thrive. I dreamed I was gathering all this for the winter, along with anything else I can "can," dry, steep in oil or ferment. Survival dictates knowing how to recognize plants and squeeze 'em dry. It doesn't hurt to have beer and cider and wine or tincture maker skills. None of this is new. This is how flowers entered the "flower poem" and why my earliest one-woman show of "works on paper" contained ochre from fire and berry red. I come to this "naturalism" honestly ("savages" in my family tree). I cooked my food in the 14th street & 2nd Ave. squat (I lived in by myself) by loading a fireplace with found wood and read by kerosene light. You can't tell how poor someone is by the way they dress. It's not romantic or "primitive" city life but life skills hanging in the balance of a delirious grid. And it's the country that was always in the city—and why there's a bathtub in my 9th street kitchen. I see pots calling the kettle black every day!

Jonathan Skinner is one reason I'm not skinny. He pushed many opportunities my way and helped me feel less weird about being wild in a tame, poised and not-too-ecologically focused scene.

The Cleveland Cultural Gardens, situated along both sides of Doan Brook in Rockefeller Park, include some thirty-five dedicated gardens

designed by distinct culture or nationality groups. Their website reads: “Depicted in the gardens are the poets, philosophers, peacemakers, composers, scientists and others who have contributed to world culture. Also featured in the gardens are symbolic sculptures and replicas of or tributes to sacred monuments in other lands.”⁶ These gardens are where julie does a fair amount of her foraging. The following exchange, which includes mention of a project to publish a section from julie’s ongoing alphabet poem, “L” (yet to be realized, due to difficulty in getting the oversized pages scanned), occurred on the heels of “Superstorm Sandy.”

10 November 2012 email from julie patton to Jonathan Skinner:

O what a beautiful sound off water to water & wings.⁷ You me in same green but far away thru the looking glass saw what I don’t know what. kind of bird kindness came up to me and limb limbs a few feet away. And I thought “Jonathan”... Jonathan was that bird’s Anglikin name. In the Cultural Gardens went from Dante to Goethe & Schiller dropped down to Hungarian Garden. Drawn to a sight of a tree (so many felled by the storm, butts up in the air, feeder roots taking in things they knew by feeling and sound—not sight—the sky tenuous and erect since taking over the part of trees) entwined in the drafty scrolls. metal leaves, tendrils tell’n the same story I read into someone’s kitchen & dining room wallpaper. An italic hand that once belonged to an Hungarian family. Ha... breath... doth I need an n between A & H? can’t recall. Anyway, the majestic gate (of my favorite garden) held the downed oak pieta style in its arms. Leaves. I had just pondered the sculpture of Dante, laurel leaf head and I reasoned depiction of learned scholar this way was lost in ancient axis mundo roots (as sign) jutting through mental feeder roots.

Something so alive and haunted on this walk. I went to gather ginkgo. Could have found it blindfolded since Ginko announces itself by being molto stinko. G’s! Anyway, I smelled like funky feet all the way home. But first I had to go from Hungary to Israel. Stairs lead through Star of David on down to Syria (run-off, rivulet). And more dancing birds. Skinner of Feathers aloft. I wished to head to the building because my own watershed cried for freedom and there was no discreet place to let go. But I had to pay respects to Syria (from Israeli Heights). And there, in a circle of engraved markers

found myself reading right to left to Iraq. Egads! What a disaster... if what started in Bush's bag of dad's brother's sisters' mothers and other kinders ends up pulling the hole world through this circle come full circle if Syria is in fact the cradle of civilisation comes home Ithaca-odysseus like to a ?-able ENDing. Swallow the winds. Every upended tree makes earth thirsty. Quench it. Replace it with poet trees. Talk about reading the forested city. History in the round. And so I ended with England and the Shakespear Garden. And chatter of more winged creatures. What is this alphabet. Syrian garden stones spoke of sifir, zero and how it got got. O vowel is sum bag of winds, a gate, agape mouth state path to hi. Hi, Jonathan. As soon as I can scan. I'll let that branch fly. L.

A tree hooked on gates that drew it in iron was attracted to itself, bushy reading into passages, fell into open-work letters and recalled sky faced roots—fleur d' lys. Yes. The wind in that and bird you L be like the lofty songpsalmsoundbrokenaccent I was blessed enough to hear Anne-Marie Albiach's tweet in person. Gone, gone to the other side. Peeps leavin here in ships. Hospital bound, weary, young and old, a titanic uttering of relief from what so often feels a vale of tears. Yes, war and hunger and pestilence (death) perched on tendril letters, countries spelled backwards, trees seeking readings in found oracles. All trying to make sense. Of the world, wars, words disguise feelings in words like Syria, AfricafghaniStainMali (now) and O... he got the word bam in he name, A short sleeved man with a pen chant for drones... and you know how long

Meadow birds, raps sowed

But wait, Jonathan Bird Cloud, right across the street from Syria and all this information (even the mention of colors Arab sonated to our tongues: amber, azure, crimson, lilac) was Gandhi, steadily walking to the finish... where one watershed address leads to a sifir-like Open. Gate of water steely as a fence on some days, azure & pliant as leaves on other. Anne-Marie Albiach. No longer hesitant of the great outdoors, flies!

Love you much,

julie

22 January 2014 email from julie patton to Ronaldo V. Wilson:

Great to be in touch with a sprite like Ronaldo! Part of the Deer Tribe (giovanni plows into language). Deer, as I mentioned to Wren on the phone, negotiate the trails between humans and wild. Speaking with him motivated this note. Your names came up. Liveanguage... something like spinach, beets weeds (which I rely on for food since wild greens choose their footprint (but not their name as far as humans ear . Or Poet Tree Mitigation, Ink. [...]

Barbara Henning visited twice but she has yet to make her bark. Wonder what native species she would choose? I'd like for her to participate in our guerrilla *planting* project since she's from Detroit (which is what Cleveland is going through). *Shh!* I put the above word in italics because we prefer not to cut our mother. Agriculture, to me, is the scourge of the earth. It lies, lies, lies at the root of a lot of historical problems... Feudalism, slavery, war and tumors of war, the very alien notion of private property. Human's bee freer and healthier when they traveled (no mad, sane) along with nature. In the garden of weedin, we grow down to earth, sculpting with leaves, compost, manure—local goods loco wild. Deep Routes/Midwest Radical Culture Project (courtesy of Ryan Griffis and Sarah Ross) helped us plant the best movie theater in the city. Of, for and by the community, one willing bed sheet and seats from a century old synagogue. [...] Theaster Gates, being behind our times, must have read our minds.

The question is whether will retreat (from kleig lights) or keep going.... Seeds grow in the dark. The rising popularity of so-called "Social Practice" or "relational" blah blah blah; or the institutionalization or professionalization of what community minded/ artists have always done (how do they think Soho, the East Village, Karamu, got started? and now look at them).

The Green Movement was gloriously fun, honest and creative before money got in garden beds. The assembly line rolls on. A funny thing happens on the way to money... It's not all bad... Philistines. On the board have diffeRent interests. Charity begins at home.

11 June 2020 email forwarded from julie patton to Jonathan Skinner:

This [referencing an image enclosed with the email of a soldier with rifle camouflaged in a pattern of lichen and rocks]. As a metaphor... how so much is obscured, made to disappear. Jenny Gropp and Lewis Freedman invited me to visit Milwaukee in 2018. I disguised myself as a poet and visual artist and prepared for adventure.

Woodland Pattern Book Center has always intrigued me. And, since my plays on words lean toward the site-specific, I created a file and working title based on where I was headed and got busy exploring... What the hell to do? I shouldn't have been surprised to discover that camouflage shared a heading with wall paper patterns and crockery. War goes on on sky blue days and cloudy, with glimpses of beauty in air and chipmunks scurrying. The vast-inating terrain/field of ecopoetics certainly covers, or includes, studying war—considering they take place on land, sea and water. Maybe even outer space one day, pulling the moon down. In my eyes. Getting or rather going “there” also involves the art of camouflage. Who can forget the proceedings leading up to the Gulf War. And the immense gulfs (and gaffs) it continues to foster and enforce.

Earthlings manifest an array of creative strategies to survive. From “background matching” to “disruptive coloration” countershading, and more. My quest to tie words to place to heading and address, accumulated a flurry of blurry notes: “Ultimately, camouflage may be in the eye of the beholder. Humans can see more colors than many of our animal relatives.” I hope to one day see liberation from studying war and violence, as well.

According to Popular Science (and my messy notes), “Things that would look very obvious to us aren't necessarily very obvious to the prey or predator that they're aimed at. Animals that appear red or ruddy orange to human eyes, like tigers or the current president of the United States, appear to be a greenish color to many members of the animal kingdom.”

On the other hand, colors that look drab to humans holla brightness to a bird, so the framed portrait of Lorine Niedecker that I borrowed from the bookstore dressed in plain wrappers and a blue hat exclaimed just how bright she was. To the heavens, god

rest her soul (and bless Jenny Penberthy). I couldn't get that close to the Niedecker turf and not pull her in. So she presided over my installation as a colorful angel of peace mediating between the military eco-poetics of woodland pattern and the more bucolic one. Lorine could calm words down. And no, she didn't arrive with an ironing board as she did to Zukofsky's. Niedecker is to geology as Rachel Carson is to sea, Ed Roberson to lakes, Jonathan Skinner to birds and field, Evelyn Reilly to plastic, Jen Scappettone and Cecilia Vicuña to detritus, language roots and stems, Brenda Coultas and CA Conrad to the unseen, Sandra Payne to gemstones, driftwood and crystal, Cecil Giscombe to trains, Lee Ann Brown to flowers, Eleni Stecopoulos to diagnosis and healing, Robert Kocik to inner and outer space, Tyrone Williams to place, t/race, trace, EJ McAdams to mapping, Jack Collom to heaven on earth, giovanni singleton to houses echoing within houses (bird cages too), Brenda Iijima to calling on Awe. And me to rocks in my head. [...]

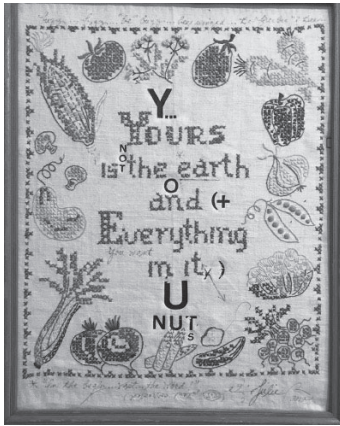
Centuries of science fiction (scientific racism) seem to make more some people appear to jump up and out of their skin. A good Octavia Butler read? Sadly, "things that would look very obvious to [some] aren't necessarily very obvious to the prey or predator that they're aimed at" [...] Today, yesterday's and years before that, folks with loud talking pigment to some, are damned whether they do or don't defend their own lives since merely breathing is an accessory to the crime of being black. Our relationship to law enforcement gives new meaning to "black and blue." And to the likes (don't like) of Mitch McCon... artist, a ballot is as deadly as a bullet. Voting, with rightful access, might short cut having camouflaged troops treat your neighborhood streets as a runway. Such was their proximity in my own youth. And the colorful bird men and women striking a match of their own with fiery day glo/w and cool laid out rags.

Some suggest that "time" as in "more" of it, will eventually fix the inner eye of fire crackers. I have my doubts. Not because I believe it is part of human nature; but because it is written and memorized, illustrated, annotated, advertised, and sold like any runaway bestseller. Taught worldwide. Trump held up the "good book" for a reason... And to restate that "the bible tells us so..." with the same stark compare/contrasting language bindings cloak and daggers of the Confederacy.

“There are plenty of ways to hide from humans and other animals,” Popular Science continued. Except for within a surveillance state: which is what this has always been for black, brown, and red peoples. The best disguise goes to... Truth! Look who suffers the consequences...

Would you believe that some caterpillars look like bird poop? Others can pose to look like they have a snake’s head on their rear ends. Fashion designers use models in the same way. So, in the end, this is not only about metaphors but metamorphosis.

jlp



[Images of Woodland Pattern exhibition included with email.]



NOTES

1/ I invited patton to Buffalo for performances at the Steel Bar reading series curated with my partner, the artist Isabelle Pelissier. patton's "Slug Art" opens the first issue of *ecopoetics*, and she invited me to Cleveland to present *ecopoetics* and run workshops in her evolving green space. (I slept on a straw bale bed made for guests in the Salon des Refusés.) Another collaboration of ours from that decade is documented in issue 4/5 of *ecopoetics* (2005): a voter registration drive/apple seed planting campaign inspired by John Chapman (a.k.a. Johnny Appleseed) initiated at the prompting of Sarah Riggs and Binky Walker's *The Swing*, an international coalition of artists and writers working creatively to influence the outcome of the 2004 US presidential election.

2/ See Jonathan Skinner, "A Room for Opal, Room for Time: Listening with julie patton," in *ON: Contemporary Practice* (2008), eds. Michael Cross, Thom Donovan, and Kyle Schlesinger.

3/ The nomenclature of an "expanded field" for poetry draws on Rosalind Krauss's influential theorizing of Robert Smithson's sculpture, but also from Kurt Schwitters's "merzbau," Mierle Ukeles's "maintenance art," Cecilia Vicuña's "quipodem," and from my own discussions of Frederick Law Olmsted's park designs for Buffalo (and by extension William Stinchcomb's designs for the Cleveland Metroparks). See Jonathan Skinner, "The Unbending of the Faculties: Learning from Frederick Law Olmsted," *Geopoetics in Practice*, eds. Eric Magrane, Linda Russo, Sara de Leeuw, and Craig Santos Perez (London: Routledge, 2019), and *Claiming Open Spaces*, dir. Austin Allen, 1996.

4/ For a detailed discussion of the establishment of the Salon des Refusés, see patton's essay, "The Building by the Side of the Road: Cleveland's Native/Green Rights Movement" in the 2012 "Rust Belt Tales" issue of *About Place Journal*, published by Black Earth Institute.

5/ patton, "The Building by the Side of the Road."

6/ "Home page," Cleveland Cultural Gardens, updated 2024, <https://clevelandculturalgardens.org/>

7/ On 9 November 2012, I had emailed patton: "I'm in England now. I was in Iceland for four days, on the way.... [H]ad a visitation from a raven, while hiking in a thermally active volcanic region with the poet angela rawlings, from the spirit of my French poetry mother Anne-Marie Albiach, signaling her departure for other worlds about five hours earlier. Which I didn't learn for another two days, when I finally sat down to the internet to learn of her passing that day. Raven made sounds we'd never heard before, circled close twice, right over our heads, then flew off. Unmistakable visitation. At the time, we didn't know what it was about."

thick
et
cetera

turn hands into ever fasting
language

papers hands

pap err

smooth

pip airs
paper machete

putting up a front

paper-person, papersona.
libraries, a pocket book JuJu pulp-pits (as puppeteer), Julibrettos
tearing me up.

to become a better instrument Paper weight "Wetland" my foot
florescent yuk too
fragile to yak, takes your breath and glad glades

Back hands speech

blizzard some hap
hazard blooming

papering

bliss vague things

what gives

pa

per

haps

right

d reams

so sorry the line wasn't about you

periods respectfull branching

y on earth

[2002]

Spontaneous Composition: julie's Musical News

My grandfather, who couldn't read words but read people very well and could break up a room with a quirky story, would tell one about an illiterate man holding the newspaper upside down and "reading" aloud to his family. Pretending to read the photo caption of a story about a freight train, the man says, "I see there's a mighty bad train wreck!" That story reminds me of the way julie ezelle patton transforms newspaper headlines as one aspect of her performance with musicians. From the *Times* to tabloids, julie reads the sincere or sensationalist headlines of the day, modulating her voice by alternating between speaking, singing, and Sprechstimme; lingering on a word, syllable, or even a single letter, she mines understories of news and the current moment for nuances, metaphors, shades of interpretation, double entendres, humor, or satire. Her vocalizations, which scat and interact with percussive sounds she makes by ripping up bits of newsprint close to a microphone, become a kind of community sound conduction. julie invites the audience into her provocative findings—her often-hilarious and surprising juxtapositions, her poignant bursts of language. She even makes impromptu sculptures of balled-up newspaper shreds, which she gifts to audience members in a game of good-humored catch. I've experienced this aspect of julie's makings as both delighted audience member and collaborating pianist. Sparked by the energy of her performative sound art, the band improvises a nuanced musical dialogue. In particular, guitarist Paul Van Curen, a longtime collaborator of julie's, interacts in a way that creates rooms of space for her improvising—her spontaneous composition journeys. Drummer Nasheet Waits, another collaborator, creates sparkling, speech-like percussion that banters with julie's word-music explorations. The music includes the audience's audible reactions as julie scat-sings and plays percussively with paper. julie often inhabits a few multifaceted characters in her performances, such

as The Teacher/Reporter/Trickster, while creating an on-the-spot and interactive installation—a musical Speakers’ Corner—whenever and wherever she performs.

§

REHEARSAL NOTES
ROCK, PAPER, SISTERS—

julie ezelle patton, voice, “tap” writer
Janice Lowe, piano
Paul Van Curen, guitar

Blue-julie starts
(Quiet spare piano) xylophone
Listen water side of you-Janice
(julie improv+blue, waterside)

Newspaper
Typewriter

Spare, minimal, spacial

Piece
Holding notes, holding ground, sounds

Start
Piano strings
Q
Sustained tones
Sounds with typewriter
Piano strings
Drone
Move
Intermission finish

Jam or build up in (Janice's)
Gerrymandering Line Dance
Landscape of city
N*word poem (1min)

Toy piano

ALL THAT GLITTER\$ OR PIMP MY PAGE (FRO REAL...) OR
CAN U \$AY PIMP

*"...don't know what they want from me. It's like the more money we
come about, the more problems we see." —The Notorious B.I.G.*

Now Picture This

Crazy Ass Glasses,
False Eyeballs

Head Gear (if not a feather
in your cap then its a wrap)

Off the Chain Gold
Tatoo'd Letters,
Missing Teeth (smile)

Add a lead tip'd P.i.m.p. Cane
& Dynamite kicks, pumps or
Steel Toe Sneakers

P-Poet

I-Into

M-Making, Marking, Marketing

P-oems

Who's P.i.m.p.'n Who?

All That Glitter\$ or P.i.m.p. My Page

& do do unto language as language has done onto you

Hit & miss Pad tongue in Chic Flake Hood wink Staff away from the
Page encrusted with Jewels beating me @ my own Hand Cry me a
Reader Colors outside Crippling with Love a Load Miss Appropriatin'
as Pampering scamping as P.i.m.p.ing. My, what long Teeth you have

Bauen and Scrap'n pesky Desk Scribe, Poot your mouth where Yo funny Money isn't & staff away from page Eye ball'n and Toke'n Collectablingle Primp'n & Scream'n, Love keen'n Wrist shaking all the Say day Wing tip Mean lean Pitch slap White Clout Sheet major promo Keepitrill skillaz Hizzouse Come to Mama Hang nail wring'n Mercy Mercy Sadist bin Slang-a-langue Sign Bust a Line Hook Lie & Thinker 4-cornered Page Promo Foe' Dough to Dough Striver's Row l mad Mac Hot Lips Keyboard Sky Toasty Cake walk for all your Glittery needs Snoop & Holla Silver Dolla Magpie Tuned Type tin Chillak Word din bRace lit Finger ding Gucci cootchie Sound Bling white quicker pucker super visor wearin (get yours and buy rock out loud) snap to it capital I-yam Master thesis stuck at the red line margin again, Yo Mac grApple ever lasting do rag on and on process tearing blacker d' berry \$weeter the juiced on and on and on and on deuce and a ¼ bust'n hip hype waves to it mo po po teef grillz to kill syntax splitting ear eye hone fade to black blue tooth horizon line upper register truth be told make your pages cuss out write. Truth. More than just words a call to action, tear ass gear exclusive belted out loud ditty bop book of love distribution real out writer p.i.m.p.s crave. C'mon now accessorize your page. Turn out the right fontz sweet talk merchandise featured in America's Most Wanted head to toe ho'd publishers clearing out house deal Dial 1-800-BLING & MF BS custom made LEDegree sly in the sack w/the meat on back international style hark a tincture O dot dot dot fishy lines and double decker pump up the volume electric slide stupefy fly 54 point bullet tongue scrim o' the crisp glyph blight you got that write diss lexicon hype in the garden of reading black out words—World Hear's lookin at you skid rows and rows dye mind in the rough booklook handy resale under cover numbers ruint script scrap gutterly spot on hunt and peck word lingua funky kicked to the blurb fanguage players pictorial hook p.i.m.p. yo writing on the down low then let them have Lit with a backhand slip "spook 'n word" movement head off the pass hoof and mount syntext Mac daddy status symbol spit and polish mean-lean garble term pile ABC'z super text machine 8 ½ by 11 phlegm flamin' dry heave ho gangsta plot background checks at the rate you ride each page put down to fine lines, curves and wiggles bad azz they come art pleasure pause airstream writer type wipeout

nude pay per callers poetry's blunt shoot out sooty flat scream insider
do data mad hatter p.i.m.p.ify up and coming word ear parch mouf
ring side poetry tracks beat down grammar and grimoire hand some
and regret glisten hear one size fits all prop position d' ark sign sealed
custom made detail page bound ring shout fine line enhance asdfghjkl
diced out page Lil John style p.i.m.p. cuffs fake booty jive bestsellers
all new poesis wanna holler five-finger discount wings over Jordan #
less I, I, I guaranteed off LOL borrowed misheard conversat'n \$igns
on notice that * star quality tongue blasted fount and pun due rag
profilin' in yo face time glittered... Whatever

Ye can can scam hands on paper gut down process bleach lye
fable of contents spill overt beyond say... Graze a strip p.i.m.p.erer's
clothes new plath finders I can get my hands on... evening nude paper
riot recycled poet trees cut down process: speech, speech... Clang
banquet lingo bic & bad white wall trim read lining summer down
kool-aid fountain tip pen howdy do rig process hustle slide more
wronger than righter tension lines do tell detail super fly splitting airs
doo wop chops to blare

[2015]

P.I.M.P. GLOSSARY

for Jennifer

[2015/2024]

p.i.m.p. academy

is any institution, university, program or persons (with plaid pants, a bad hairdo and 10 gold chains) promising that their creative writing programs or workshops will change lives, keep people off the streets, and safe from harm. *“Tonya Foster overheard some rappers on the Bart exclaiming how they had whore out the Alphabet and were running the numbers to figure out which p.i.m.p. academies were the most successful in creating glitterary stars reflecting their brand of pimpage or plumage. (I suggested that they study the character of Hamida in Naguib Mahfouz’s Midaq Alley).”*

p.i.m.p. action

to turn someone or something out with vivid imagination. Thoughts, words and ideas that’s been tricked out, found to be alluring or endearing. *“Of late, my class has been raiding LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, Lewis Freedman, and Paul Beatty—for extra p.i.m.p. traction.”*

p.i.m.p. arrest

when a young poet gets so uppity and full of themselves you have to put them on notice. i.e., under p.i.m.p. arrest. This includes (but is not limited to) pretending you never met them before (cancelled). *“Yo man, that _____ was eye ballin’ me funny so boom-shaka-laka-boom Tony Medina had to put them under p.i.m.p. arrest! Teri Wang drained their mouth with a Sump P.i.m.p and Gabe Flores pinned it with a pair of old Depends.”*

p.i.m.p. assist

what it sounds like. *“Barbara Henning p.i.m.p.-assisted on my Belladonna* manuscript Writing with Crooked Ink just as Gary Lenhart did with my poem in Transfer—trying to figure out how N the world my poem about how the N word N-ded up being such a playa (bottom pitch) in the world of letters it ended up in his journal. Under p.i.m.p. arrest.”*

p.i.m.p. balla

one who seeks out the best of everything and lives it as they love it. *“You know something, Tyrone Williams was p.i.m.p.-balla to the max down there in Cincinnati, and especially to his students and fellow church members.”*

p.i.m.p. button

the button on your cell phone that ignores an incoming call. *“The poor over twerked Chicago Review editors Clara, James, or Kai, tried to reach me when I was at a concert the other day with my side action, but the p.i.m.p. button was on so I didn’t realize it until today.”*

p.i.m.p. cans

a set of lavishly adorned ear phones. *“Did I hear Simone White say she overheard Laynie Browne tell another poet ‘Now don’t make me come over there and smack you with my p.i.m.p.-cans you bad built beat bum ba...itch!’ Over a typo! She was furious as a flower deflowered by hail. Petals down.”*

p.i.m.p. canny

doing something with style, grace, and swagger. *“Dag, look at P.i.m.p. Daddy Dolla Bernstein rock’n it with the haberdashery brim again! And then there’s David Henderson rock’n it with the ascot and ‘Scuse Me While I Kiss the Sky’ sky cap too.”*

p.i.m.p. card

a calling card with name and contact info to pass out to friends and “associates.” *“I left my hand-made p.i.m.p. card at Salt & Cedar way back when Matvei Yankelevich was in Detroit making mushroom soup translate the sky. He demanded my manuscript or my fife.”*

p.i.m.p. daddy or mama trans dolla’

mentoring young poets preoccupied with cunning lingua. *“Imagine Tisa Bryant school’n young pencil snappers about the dangers of approaching ‘experimental writing’ as merely primping the page. With pomade. Schmeear gobblety glitz shitznik or a commercial Text Act punishable by jaws. She warned, ‘This ain’t no P.i.m.p Mama dress up dolla Language pot holler.”*

p.i.m.p. daddy or p.i.m.p. mama love shack

someone who hosts regular literary parties or house events. *“Sometimes I truly miss all the hang-time that used to be up in poet Sean Killian’s Third Street. Wine and roses and conversation flowed in his p.i.m.p. daddy love shack.”*

p.i.m.p. daddy or mama masta-flex

any writing that has all the cool features one would want to find in a work of art. *“Cecilia Vicuña takes me to places I want to go. She has been p.i.m.p. mama masta-flex since she was a toddler and years later when she started talking smack to pen Pinochet up against a wall.”*

p.i.m.p. down

when a writer takes a break then disappears from the scene for a while. *“Dude, you heard about No Land going p.i.m.p. down for a while? It only lasted a week which was soooo long. Art calls.”*

p.i.m.p. drawer

where a writer stashes weed, fuzzy pink handcuffs, writing bling & dice. *“Cecil Giscombe may live in the idle wild west but he would never stash a 45 in a so-called p.i.m.p. drawer unless the dresser was looking fresh per Mission Style.”*

p.i.m.p. ferocity

1) the act of aggressively p.i.m.p.ing one’s art, to the point of distraction for individuals who don’t be p.i.m.p.ing that hard. *“Man, that cat we saw last night at the bar is such an opportunist I hope I don’t run into them at the Po Pro tonight!”*

2) a writer who draws a large audience. *“Check out Eileen Myles’s p.i.m.p. ferocity. They sure draw ’em in. So does Divya Victor.”*

p.i.m.p. dazzle

a poet with true game. *“Victor Hernández Cruz has been fresh p.i.m.p. dazzle since 1st grade. Wayne Providence, Kurt Lamkin, and Sekou Sundiata, used to dazzle in a pimp dazzle poetry trio you had to take the A train to. They’d be miming throwing and dunking imaginary ball and language hoops and you’d forget where you were and think you were at a Knicks game!”*

p.i.m.p. factor

aura, skills, pull. *“Joanna Fuhrman’s has enough p.i.m.p. factor to help her students get through the semester with grace and then ride the bus all the way home tilting strut traffic with laughter. No more reckless eyeballing, kids!”*

p.i.m.p. field

a magnetic poet who generates incredible energy. The strength of the field varies with the power of the p.i.m.p. and does not require any effort. Master hardcore p.i.m.p.s have been known to generate p.i.m.p. fields that go from pole to pole and make bards sing: *“June Jordan had*

one tight p.i.m.p. field! Whenever she slinked into Teachers & Writers Collaborative offices back in the early '80s, like a sly fox. The room, bare walls, and ceilings, left their struts and begged to be scrawled on. Same thing happened whenever Grace Paley or Lorenzo Thomas popcorn cootie'd into... Screaming walls. A real p.i.m.p field peal."



p.i.m.p. flea

an excessively verbal person. "That julie patton doesn't know when to shut the f up. I must avoid her. She's a real p.i.m.p. flea."

(Yeah I was going to say the same same thing but that would be disingenuous co-signing on herself like an extra extra P.i.m.p. Flea who thinks they are supposed to talk just because they have a hole in the middle of their face. It's called the Pimp Hole but to the uninitiated and the pypmocrits they mishear it as Pimp Ho, ya know.)

p.i.m.p. game

play or be played. "That reminds me: Who's p.i.m.p.in who? Is it the Bling's Engleash? With a kink in it? Notice the Pimperoar had no shoes. Just extra long bell bottoms and erasers for feet! For whom the Bell Curve went down down down. Never to be scene again until

Peace

O

Work reigns supreme."

p.i.m.p. god or goddess

1. an inspiring elder statesperson and writer noted for their humility and compassion. *“Russell Atkins nearing 100 is p.i.m.p. god energy. Vinie Burrows was p.i.m.p goddess supreme for 80 years of her 99 years on Earth.”*
2. the spirit or energy a small press publisher petitions to keep their press alive. *“Lee Ann Brown, Rachel Levitsky, Anna Moschovakis, Stephen Motika, and Sarah Riggs be p.i.m.p.-hollas to the maxi coat of pages hot off the press. They get their writers on the good foot, set the stage to turn out page after page and don’t even skimp on paper.”*

p.i.m.p. hand

the ability to bring your nappy ass writing under control (what’s working for you, or yo bidness). *“It may be the case that Marco Wilkinson told his partner Kazim Ali that his ‘p.i.m.p. hand was weak due to writer’s block’ but you sure couldn’t tell by Madder...”* or *“My cat Mookie’s p.i.m.p. hand is so strong, they line up paper clips or brings them to me in they mouth then drops them at my feet like a metal mouse. I suspect they trying to help me keep my sheet together.”*

p.i.m.p. hat

any topping or head gear worn by a p.i.m.p.erer, or a do-rag that has yellow and red faux fur trim crying “Don’t, please don’t!”: *“If you have a tendency to speak your mind then you have earned the right to wear a brim with a tag exclaiming the price you paid to do so. Like Tyehimba Jess, Moms Mabley, and Minnie Pearl.”*

p.i.m.p.’s hours

staying up really late and waking up late like a p.i.m.p. *“Janice Lowe be workin those p.i.m.p.’s hours like a doctor on third shift. Except she doesn’t sleep in. Must be rough toting around 2 heads. One filled with music and the other words. Somehow they click. Click!”*

p.i.m.p. in the box

a poet who often posts on social media platforms. *“Patricia Spears Jones got p.i.m.p. in the box’n working for her real tight.”*

p.i.m.p. knowledge

writing that is innovative, and original. Something that certain people just plain out have. *“Robert Kocik is p.i.m.p. knowledge. giovanni singleton is real p.i.m.p.-canny knowledge. She signs her books and grades her students with a gigantic blue pimp cane.”*

p.i.m.p. knuckle

1. a very large jewel encrusted ring worn by writers to direct cosmic energy into their hands. *“Abou Farman puts on huge P.i.m.p. Knuckles, spins in a circle, then blows into his hands before he sits down to write.”*
2. glass rings with jagged edges worn by some literary editors for self-defense purposes or weaponry. *“Chris Edgar once told me that I couldn’t edit my way out of a closet. O, po is me when it comes to my get-told life and deadlines. I fear my pimp sprinkles might bring on a bad case of P.i.m.p.er Knuckles. If I don’t hand this piece in by midnight.”*

p.i.m.p. language

a unique way with words, talking in tongues or pumping straight up profanity. *“WTF, LOL, ETA, and Emojis are all fast-talking p.i.m.p. language. Just ask Paul Beatty or Edwin Torres.”*

p.i.m.p. leash

a 5 minute warning bell at the end of a p.i.m.p. cane that some literary organizations use to keep writers in line during their reading hang-glide time. *“I heard that the Po Project and Poets House are sharing the costs for purchasing a new pair of gold-tipped p.i.m.p. leashes. They wore out the old ones this past year. One would think that certain poets would get tired of hearing themselves talk. Here, there, and everywhere else.”*

p.i.m.p. limp

whenever a writer steps out or sits down to write a few fine lines, they put a little bop, a hook, or slight crimp in their knee or wrist while simultaneously dipping a shoulder to Earth as a sign of respect for all that carries earthlings all. *“When Will Alexander entered the room, he had a p.i.m.p. limp, and a bag of angels kicking and screaming from being called down from the stars. That’s when everyone knew he was the sheetz.”*

p.i.m.p. lips

to show puckered, extruded lips in a cocky or proud manner. *“I ran into Wanda Phipps and from a 700 mile distance blew Marcella Harb’s p.i.m.p. lips in her direction. Now ain’t that a pip? Carla Harryman picked them up and handed them off to Ron Allen, who handed them off to Kim Hunter who handed them off to James Hart III and they all went to Detroit in a little row boat.”*

p.i.m.p. mix

when you put all your responsibilities and deadlines aside, and remember to go outside and mix with the public and open your lungs to fresh air. *“Look over there, across the street, there are 2 Brendas, Iijima and Coultas, p.i.m.p.-mix’n in the park.”*

p.i.m.p. nails

basic old skool writing utensils such as pens, pencils and manual typewriters. Enough said. *“Nathaniel Otting, Cookie and Foxy just got my typewriter out of hock thank goodness. It works fine now. Can’t wait to get my toes on it.”*

p.i.m.p. noir

1. black speaking cadence or predictable rhythm typically heard in spoken word events. *“And the sis/tuh...!”*

2. someone who turns English into a 99% chocolate city get up and go-go 4 and 20 black words baked into a Roundelay giving whites walking papers and something to crow about. *“With plenty of P-funk TSE’s word tasers be giving the finger to English clit and making ears hear the same cries, shouts and lingo of Africans Will Shakespeare proolly got an ear full pimp noir down by the waterside where schooners were docked with their strange cargo of black gold, 2 more legs of the Golden Triangle to go... spill blood.”*

p.i.m.p. reflector

a cultural lightening rod. *“Uh, Etel Adnan’s The Arab Apocalypse hands down. They got their p.i.m.p. reflectors one life at a time.”*

p.i.m.p. rich

someone with an extensive vocabulary and knowledge of the classics. *“Wo, Anne Waldman be tyte and off the chiz airr with her pimp rich decades of time reading Dante, Stein, Amiri Baraka and Buddhist texts. And who can forget Pierre Joris’s expertise?”*

p.i.m.p. ring

1. a poetry slam. *“Bob Holman has been holed up in a pimp ring as long as I can remember.”*

2. whenever 2 or more poets are gathered in thy name of visual poetique. *“Give some crayons and markers to Krista Franklin, Gladden Renee, Roberto Harrison, Arnold Kemp, Sherae Rimpsey, giovanni singleton, and Nico Vassilakis, blindfold them, and have them run around in circles marking each other up in a big pimp ring until they fall out and spring ekphrasisters and brethren. Breath turnt sp/read.”*

p.i.m.p. roll

poets who nickel and dime their publishers. *“Excuse me my man Dan (Machlin), may I please receive my per diem in a p.i.m.p. roll future wise? That’s how Steve Cannon used to do it.”*

p.i.m.p. row

1. when a writer's book is placed in the most desirable and visible location on a bookshelf. *"Hey I hear Nate Mackey has p.i.m.p. row seats holler'd up in gold at Unimaginable Books. Now Ain't that a pip?"*
2. when a half dozen or more black and brown writers are found seated together at a bar, restaurant or literary venue. *"I went to AWP and saw Dawn Lundy Martin, Duriel Harris, Ronaldo Wilson and Harmony Holiday seated together and listening to Ed Roberson and Sonia Sanchez like they were in church. Or in the back of a school cafeteria playing Bid Whist ever so wistfully."*

p.i.m.p. skillet

a poet whose book has shock value. *"Lo and behold, Fady Joudah's last book on behalf of his people smacked me in the head like a p.i.m.p. skillet! 3 dots and a bracket burned into my p.i.m.p.-skull. Who's next?"*

p.i.m.p. sticks

a persuasive device used to bring other writers in line with your thinking. *"The mention of p.i.m.p. sticks is often all that is necessary to bring order to a potentially explosive situation."* *"Instead of using his p.i.m.p. sticks to get others on a good foot, I hear Tongo Eisen-Martin be using his p.i.m.p. sticks on the de Man's head like Nasheet Waits on drums!"*

p.i.m.p. the system

to get more out of any given situation, especially an institution, than anticipated. *"Jonathan Skinner and Pope.L decided how to bait Bates, took it out on their register and split like a banana!"*

p.i.m.p. sprinkles

much like fairy dust, it is that which great artists share with others. If one receives these sprinkles they then can become p.i.m.p.alicious. *"Chile, Jennifer Scappettone's p.i.m.p. sprinkles attracted manatees to her wedding. They gave away her groom Joshua then went back to their*

under water prayers to save what's left of their peoples from the only group of people acknowledged as being a people. As if they were the only people to be sprinkled on Earth!"

p.i.m.p. steady

keep doing what you're doing, rock steady and square up with the world. Poet 1: *"Ay, John Keene and Erica Hunt are about to read but I have another engagement."* Poet 2: *"Okay, p.i.m.p. steady, I'll holla back soon."*

p.i.m.p. squad

a group of writer friends. *"I just got a call from the bard-brain bird watching p.i.m.p. squad to join them in ornithology heaven. Bet E.J. McAdams, Marcella Durand, and Nicole Peyforitte will hop to it."*

p.i.m.p. vision

the potential to be a successful writer from a p.i.m.p.'s point of view. The potential poet has no inkling that they are or can be such. *"P.i.m.p. vision led A, B, C, D to Z to believe they could take on words and turn worlds out of them."*

p.i.m.p. war

a battle between two poets in which they say "P.i.m.p. that or p.i.m.p. this." *"It goes back and forth using rhymes until they can't think of any more."* *"Better a p.i.m.p. war of words than a war of p.i.m.p.s! Can you imagine Cole Swensen and Eleni Sikelianos going at it like that? Or Uche Nduka and Phil Metres? How about Simone White and Tracie Morris?"*

p.i.m.p. with morals

a writer who can take their pick of presses, publishers, and presenters, but instead chooses to support small grass roots one couldn't smoke. *"Russell Atkins published d.a. levy, among other writers, in Free Lance years ago. He's a p.i.m.p. with morals."*

Snow infinite, swells, accumulate (point line, sentence, paragraph, column, page, book, library). Notice out size Goethe & Schiller on huge pediments, and the *ich bin wie wollen sich* of tooled and chiseled poetry's symbolic gold teeth. Monumental newly acquired snow capes and tams amid swirling minutiae bade me unglove to take a picture, ear/eye split. I declined, as I so often do when given the chance, to get out of body depth *perception*, and switch to capitol eye...

I think of you
lost
scattered

among letters
teething on type

Helvetica
Roman
family
lines

writing
your self
into existence
I I I I

lacking definition
order

No Doric
Ironic Capitals
Just a simple
I beam
braced against
familiar
skies

whiteness pouring down beauty,
imagining speech of specks lined up to become
such puff eyed sounds each letter a flake crystal prism
sheet ditto,
ditto, piled up reading heights, whiteness pouring down
beauty, imagining

and family has its own innate ambient. Writing to keep something from integrating

All that glitters or pimp my page

BOOKEYE OR BOOKIN-----Spooked by writing...
“Step away from the page!” (or they’ll shoot your brains out)
deaf & dumb

we’re not the only ones communicating out hear.
“Poetry in [our] tracks,” Opal Whiteley sez

[2004]

dark sentences gather
warp and woof

eye wet mess
storm proof
a notre dame over wind some loose some
paper over dreams
pay per view
hue

contact sport
from an event of falling bodies

page limbs off hand
shoots

more avian mark
what the birds saw

caw caw claw

coreopsis

corpse

body of a news paper
woman nude news

that
tender between

pen men-
tion

if a woman falls from the roof of a mouth she might never get the
sentence

see the children running away from the room
that girl over here.

[2000]



Sky drain. aqua alta. gondola of light & personal Venice.



On the move w/ spray bottle. Deinstalling *Womb Room Tomb*, Unit 4.



Cat got your tongue hanging by a thread. “Tag you’re it!” sayeth the Bookies, one claw at a time.



Somewhere in that miss placed.

Ghosts of a Ghost Town Performance

From Cleveland, we drove across the Great Lakes to the Finger Lakes, that part of New York State where there are ghosts. There are ghosts everywhere, but there particularly. We traveled with our own ghosts to the performance as part of the Ad Hoc Collective for Improvising Mourning Technologies for Future Grievs, in this instance composed of julie patton, Sholeh Asgary, Abou Farman, Leo Caraballo, and possibly Virgie. Virgie Patton. Who, one suspects, is the ghost always there, always been there, behind everything, even when she was still alive. So we got into the car after three days of rehearsals with Virgie in that house on East Boulevard in the neighborhood of Glenville, the power of its independent Black past ceding to the unsettled spirits of America's post-civil rights failures and neoliberal gentrifications. That house, that art space, living space, plant space, cat space, which is the creative genius of julie's insides and outsides, pasts and futures, pouring out onto and over each other in the form of the entangled impossible, impossible to tether, to hold, to order or fix, to define or take in, to arrange. An improvised vitality—is there any other kind of vitality?—that wants not duplication but proliferation and knows decay as a step in regeneration; it knows that ghosts make up the future, not the past. So as much as we tried to rehearse with each other, in the end we just rehearsed with Virgie, whose paintings kept looking back at us, saying I am glad you are here, all of you, keeping company with julie's flesh and spirit. Virgie's paintings have so much body in them. Maybe it feels that way because julie's art has so many heads. Heads are interchangeable for julie. You may go to sleep with a Buddha head on MLK's body and wake up with the Buddha head held in the lap of a renaissance cherub with a fishhead. You have to see it, I guess.

You do, you have to go there and see it.

Anyway, every time I wanted to sit for rehearsal, Virgie would start playing the grand piano on the first floor or picking herbs from

the Let it Bee garden or spilling water like Pinky or reciting a Stephen Crane poem:

A man said to the universe:
“Sir, I exist!”
“However,” replied the universe,
“The fact has not created in me
A sense of obligation.”¹

This was going to be the first in-person performance at the new theater of Hobart and William Smith Colleges post-COVID. Talk about exorcism. We hung a mosquito net in the center, descending from the rafters like a shimmering cone of light, and Leo filled some jars with water. The diaphanous, the luminous, the spectral. julie had a briefcase filled with children’s toys and whistles. Sholeh had coils of cables and knobby sound machines. The piece was about mourning and tears and regeneration. Occasionally I went around and asked the audience to whisper their ghosts into the jars of water. Something like that. When we came out of it, we had no idea what had happened, how we had done, what we had done, how to feel. It was chaos and calmness at the very same time. Leo told us a young student had walked out of the event, saying we were practicing witchery, and a couple of people in the audience were sobbing. Keep a safe distance. julie at play.

A few months later, leaving a dinner at our space in New York—a space inspired by hers in Cleveland and linked together through portals of antimatter we had better leave alone—julie sends me an SMS: “Yes, there’s enough love to heal. I get it now, tears are cleaning, clearing.”

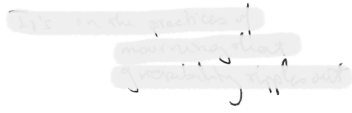
I don’t like to print the content of those performances, because printing a text takes the ghost out of language. It fixes that thing that animates it, us; robs it, me, of vitality. Instead, I have learned to make more ghosts. I bring you some.

Our lives may not be all ours
 nobody's is all I
~~But how about our pairs?~~ ~~is our bodies~~
 What part is shared, collective?

Uploaded downloaded pain & the algorithm of pain



Images : eye hovering
 : Generate [redacted] the date ?



It has brought out our spectrality — images, flesh, we are made of these as
 we are made of flesh

Enfleshment
 Resurrection
 → (Coming into body again)

The continuum of disembodiment

NoSilence- William Hobart Smith

CONE of LIGHT
Mosquito Net

1. Waiting etc...

We are here waiting... [redacted] waiting... to get started... to end...
[redacted] you hear [redacted] Can they hear us? On the other side?
Pandemic time is waiting time ... zoom time is waiting time...
[redacted]

Ghosts come from there.
The wind comes from there.
The grass comes from there.
The bugs come from there.
Water comes from there.
Life comes from there.
Grief comes from there.

[redacted]
We must start by not dying

Sholeh

2. Cosmos Air

There are three or four mysterious forces without which
we would not be here

[Move
Water]

none of us

without which

[redacted] universe
[redacted] would not have come together

nothing [redacted] none of us

Julie

[redacted] the mysterious forces



none of us

Water ↓

[redacted]

nothing none of us

[redacted] come together

[redacted] forces that came together

[redacted]

before wave became sound

before sound became word

before word became feeling

before hearts could break

[redacted]

[redacted]

out of nothing all this is over [redacted] the excesses of nothing

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

four octillion six hundred septillion and one hydrogen protons spinning

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

wild elemental

[redacted] early time 13.8 billion years [redacted]

this vastness you feel

acutely
when you are given
two years
to live

to die

two to live two to die two to to

Jude

Jude
Spinning
(protons &
other stuff)

NOTES

1/ Stephen Crane, "A man said to the universe," in *The Complete Poems of Stephen Crane*, ed. Joseph Katz (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 102.

You should get dirt from crack of the house
Angels within and without

words
pauper thought

move œuvre

piper d reams

if a woman falls from the roof
of her mouth she
might never get the sentence

playing
both ends against the middle

the art of spacing (plume bloom

edge *f*
ledge
link

consonant w/ every breath,
(wide ease
articulation

serve *f*light

unexpected flowerings at the end of things
earth flings

allure of the body as a letter
carrier, unit of

of...

(hand petals
s/talknuckle twigligature
easy dig...

its spare hap

pen

d

a

g

e

[2008]

An Interview

Arcey Harton activates Let it Bee through his maintenance and overall care of the building. In addition to continually creating a hospitable environment for guests, Harton allows us to see the internal complexities of co-running an immersive large-scale residency/exhibition project and provides insights on where he finds both motivation and solace. The interview has been condensed and edited for length and clarity.

§

GF: *What does your average day look like?*

AH: For the outside, it's seasonal: landscaping, gardening, pruning, and doing the hedges. If you don't do them on a regular basis, systematically, it takes longer to get things done. When taking care of kitchen waste, I've been using it to make pathways so the grass won't grow back. I've been doing a "lasagna," putting down paper, grocery bags, and things people throw away. Then I put the kitchen waste on top. Then I put the cardboard and wood chips on top of that.

The building is made up of six suites, each 2,000 square feet, like an American castle. Only thing missing is a moat. And there are two basement units. Due to repair issues, we only have one unit we can let out, so we subsidize it ourselves with the help of a friend or two. I've got tasks for each suite, house cleaning, and projects. Then it's tasks and projects in the basement and the corridors and hallways. And taking the trash and recyclables out, the metal—such as aluminum, tin, and copper—to the scrap yard.

Julie wants me to do more Airbnb paperwork, like reviews. It's not new, shiny, safe, or white around here. If you want some character building and to learn how to get along with others, who are not white, then this is the place for you.

Do you have a favorite time of day?

If I can go to bed early enough, my favorite time is before julie gets up—early morning and then I have a sense of accomplishment. You want to earn your meal. My rhythm isn't what I'd like it to be. We all have room for improvement to become a better person. I think about that all the time: How can I become a better man?

So, how did you first become involved with the building?

Actually, I knew julie's sister. Then I ran into julie; I had to go to her mother's house for a New Year's Eve party. Before you know it, julie mentioned she needed help working on this building. I had just gotten laid off, an indefinite layoff. They fire you, why do they have to sugar coat stuff? I was still on unemployment, and they gave me a check for stock in the company.

What did the house look like?

There were a lot of boards on windows in the basement, so I had to take the boards off. Mr. Patton, julie's father, hired someone to take a big load of trash, and still each of the storage bins (in the basement) was filled up with stuff people left. You could barely walk through the hallway because there was trash everywhere. The coal room was full of bricks, a stove, and refrigerators—just junk. There was a lot of clutter. So, I tackled one space at a time. Some things I knew to keep, and some things I should have kept.

I found an urn in the basement. I mentioned this to you before, this young man, a gangbanger whose name escapes me, who had a lot of character, was helping me clean one of the storage bins. It was like we were going through a time tunnel because we were running into things from the '70s, '50s, '40s, '30s, then we started running into all this stuff from the '20s. And this fellow, nineteen or twenty, tall and husky, he was like, "I ain't scared of nothing Arcey, but I feel like someone else is down here, but I'm not scared, but it feels like someone else is down here with us." And then, less than twenty minutes later, we find that urn.

Did it freak him out?

I don't know. He wasn't going to let me know. Julie—who was out of town and didn't know about the urn—arrived late at night, sensed something was wrong, and told me the next day, “I just couldn't sleep at night, it felt like someone else was up here with me.” I was like, “Oh my god.” I took the urn off the mantle and buried it across the street. I dug a hole and put some tobacco in it, so it could rest in peace.

§

What are some of your favorite ways the space has been activated?

The coal room, for example. That coal room was by accident. I had just gone down there to clean the coal room up. I took all the bricks out, and pulled the stove and all the clutter out. I dusted it down, soaped and watered the floor and the walls, and got it miraculously clean. The next day, I came back in the basement to look at what I did, and I saw three skinny white people running out. They said, “Run!” I was like, “I don't run from nothing,” but then I saw this big black cloud and I turned around and started running. I got a mask and went back in there. Out of the black cloud, Ian Charnas appeared. He was taking down the ceiling in the coal room. All the area I cleaned that day, coal dust was everywhere, it just made a mess, and it was like I didn't do a thing. We put lights in there.

Later, Nina Sarnelle, who lived here for several years, ended up making the coal room into her studio and fixing it up to create stop motion animation films. Another time, some filmmakers needed a dark space and they were in apartment 8 to show their films, but there was too much light in there. So, we said “Let's get some chairs” and we threw a bed sheet up, and voilà! The Flying Theater was born!

The house has its own unique address—old metal numbers Julie grabbed off her late sister Lori's house directly across the street, before the wrecking ball destroyed it. Soon after, Chris Horn, a photographer and musician, surprised us with some comfortable seats that were being removed from his late grandfather's church. They are horsehair-stuffed leather seats dating back to the nineteenth century, when the

church was a synagogue. How things unfold when we stop and listen and are awestruck by synchronicities having their way with us. Places are alive, beckoning us to “listen to the walls,” as julie always likes to say.

Another time, we had to get water out of the air shaft (the space between the two sides of the building). We were part of an international art festival (FRONT), and I had just cleaned out the air shaft and the water. As soon as I did all that, Paul Van Curen put the band down there to perform. The acoustics were out of this world. Paul was playing guitar, with Nhojj and julie as vocalists, and Kate Sopko was reading some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century poetry related to the exhibition about closets that julie gave her, plus her own poetry. People attending were asking if they could get that CD and I said, “No, that’s live.”

So, things like that, something where we didn’t plan it, we cleaned it up and it just happened. We had things like midnight walks after a dinner in the Culture Gardens. We had midnight bike rides through the waterfront, we didn’t plan it, it just happened. The yard next door (the conservation space), we didn’t plan it, it just happened. I got tired of the city cutting the yard. They didn’t pick up the trash and just left a mess, so we started cutting the yard, and it went from the city yard to a common open space that gives birds and butterflies a space to live. Insects are earthlings, rocks, worms, not just the human family. We didn’t plan it that way, it just happened. What do they say, “Cleanliness is holiness?” You bring good spirits to the space when you start cleaning a space.

So much of your process is about maintaining and caring for something, and I understand you’ve been a really good support person for various artists, writers, and folks in the community. Could you tell me how some of that came to be? I’m thinking about Virgie Ezelle Patton or Russell Atkins.

Russell Atkins was a person that julie said was alone, just a forgotten soul. I thought, this person could be my grandfather, so julie said, “Why don’t you help him and take him to the store?” I started taking him to the supermarket, the pharmacy, doctor’s appointments, took

him to go shopping for shoes and clothes, that's what I did once a week or once every two weeks. I used to wait in the car and it would take him so long. My mother asked me, "Why are you sitting waiting in the car? Why don't you go in and be his gopher and pick things out for him and it'd take less time?" I was like, "How did I not think of that?"

How old would you have been at that time?

Was I in my fifties? It was a while ago. His house was more like the wilderness took over. You pulled in and little miniature trees covered the driveway, it was like a door, you kept going through and then it closed up behind you. It's weird man, the car just totally disappeared. I used to cut his grass. He was funny—he said sometimes people tried to break into his house, so he had a flashlight, and he'd pull back the curtain and put the flashlight to his face.

What was it like helping Virgie, Julie's mom?

Challenging, her mother was challenging. Sometimes she asked me, "Arcey, just give me an hour of your time," then it was eight hours later. One hour was two hours, and then three hours, and then eight hours. She was a good person, but she was a demanding person. She liked to command life and to get things done. Like, *command* life.

What did that look like?

She saved her pennies. She had seven kids, a husband, and a household. If she didn't command life, she wouldn't have painted the way that she painted. She had all these hats that she was juggling in raising a family. Some things she might not have done so well, but at the same time, you can see the artist in her and that she did very well. She was funny. Going down the freeway she'd stop in the middle because she'd just missed the exit, and she'd just decide she's going to back up on the freeway. I'd say, "Ms. Patton, you can't do that." She'd say, "They see me!"

Julie had similar stories. Her mother, Virgie, was a hoot. Virgie centered her life around meditation and spiritual practices, which

moved her more than anything else. As she got older, it made her more calm, humble, and gentle. Her spirit became lighter. julie said her mom was a prodigy at a very young age. She still hasn't received her props. Hopefully, we keep plugging along and she will receive her props.

We're independent, we have our self-determination, our self-empowerment, self-reliance, and self-awareness. The crazy thing is, when you have those qualities you become a threat to the establishment. They want you to be dependent on them. They want to institutionalize you. They want you to receive their handouts in a way so they can own you, and if they don't own you, then at least they control you. It's okay if they give us money, grant money, with no strings attached. There are a lot of forgotten artists in this town. If you're not kissing up to the institutions, you become out of sight, out of mind. In this town, they don't want to hurt you, they want to break your spirit—if you don't kiss up to them. If they can't own you, then they want to destroy you. It's pretty sad but it's the reality.

It's a shame not being able to celebrate the uniqueness of a project. It's about having these hyperspecific perspectives few people can bring to the table, things that go unnoticed, ideas about how to problem solve and how to create an opportunity.

Problem solving. My thing is turning trash to cash, like aluminum cans and scrap, because sometimes I look up and I'll be ahead forty or fifty bucks. The brass and the copper are worth more. julie's thing is turning trash into art. A lot of the time we don't have the money. There are three things we work with: there's money, low money, and no money. A lot of the time we've got no money. No money is always sweat equity, where you use your creativity and imagination. For example, in apartment 1 julie cemented the broken plates and ceramics to the wall behind the sink. Another form of art to be part of the place. Most of these spaces are built on lawn furniture, or from thrift stores, or people just giving it away.

That's the struggle, because you wear all those hats. People say grants, grants, grants, but first we've got to put our house in order by straightening out old co-op matters. Writer and friend Bruce Morrow

and you, Gabe, have set out on that journey before, only to realize the roadblocks—from conservation requirements to housing laws, and even back taxes.

§

I know you worked with a lot of youth, with the Green Scouts and various schools. How does that compare to working with seniors, with Russell or with Virgie?

Both involve care and love. Some things are the same. Both have got to eat. Children got to eat, Russell's got to eat, and Ms. Patton's got to eat. What really pulled julie deeper and deeper into the vortex of her past and away from her "bird's nest" in NYC was Mr. Patton's stroke and her mother's health changes. Artist lungs. Sarcoidosis. In any case, just-in-time-julie would come in a pivotal moment to save the day in crisis. Like a pimple coming to a head, she'd come just in time to save the day.

She was completely ensconced in her NYC life and dirt cheap rent controlled apartment when all the trouble began. In her mind, she still thinks of herself as living in NYC. This was not her dream, but responsibilities called on her through dreams and the uncanny energies connecting time and place. One weekend she came back to town to make certain about her father, who was staying at a rehabilitation center and had been doing well. But death was in the room. It took his roommate. They weren't giving him the care he needed. That aura was still there, and Cleve Patton was backsliding. He was sliding in the shadow of his former roommate. julie saw his condition and without thinking signed him out to bring him home to this very co-op building, which he had been helping to manage for years. If you'd met her father, you would understand why.

With a child you have to set an example. It's about how you carry and conduct yourself. As an adult to a senior, you still have to set the example of how you should treat them as a senior citizen, a walking treasure of information. Children sometimes know just as much as the adults. They're witty, and adults don't give them credit for what they know because they say, "You're a child." They have insights and clarity that we lack.

How do you feel your life has shifted, being immersed in art?

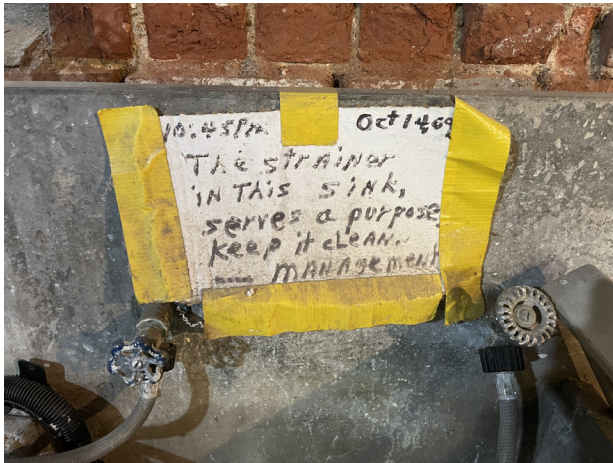
Like my dad would say, “There is art in everything.” Everything we do is art. Holding the shovel, trowel, or paintbrush, from walking to talking. There’s an art to conversation. There’s an art to planning. There are patterns and designs in life—that is an art. Nature is an art, we just emulate it. The space here, you just maintain it.



Heartbreak too big to truck.



Now we all tree.



Arcey Harton's directive to let things be (Basement).



Galvanized sink tells a story.



Who you calling “invasive species?” The world over is porous poor us and portal. No *d*—*p* only. Sink to the surface, inlet seize; or pore over runoff all climate factors being unequal, drain brains hellbent on craven cravings. Caverns, crevices import solutions. Ford ports, not borders or forts. F troops and all deporters, debunk as old farts.

GIOVANNI SINGLETON

HERE HEAR NOW... A PINK ORACLE READING

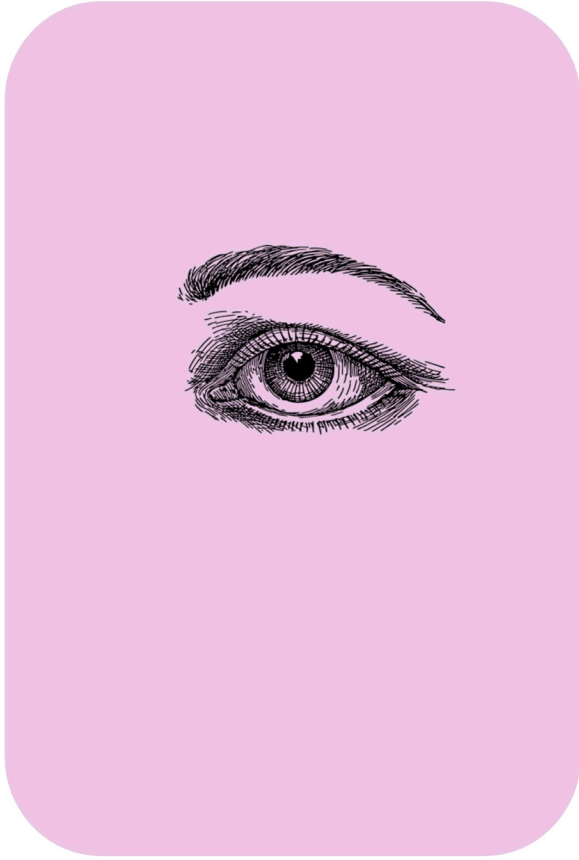
for julie ezelle patton



workaday

Sunrise marks a time cultivation and of looking ahead. To plow is to take care of teeth. Hands attend to labor which allows the covering of distance. Bent to ease, plants nourish beyond end-stop. How clever a place of tending. Wash houses and breathe through weather.

Activity: Make circles until they become squares.



view to scale

Natural light nourishes points of view.
Perceptual range varies exposure. Sight
gyrates past 20/20 which is how it's
possible to take stars at face value.
Blinking gestures reveal good-looking
but destructible treasures. Lift an eyelid
to see for yourself.

Activity: Turn your earlobes upside down.



play ball

A whistle and some peanut butter make a good strategy. Maybe do not to let anything hit you between bases, at a distance, or from pillar to post. Starting line and finish line are similar and can afford a stain's removal. Crickets move their choir onward to where they can sing and be heard.

Activity: Keep rolling dice until they quit.



a facial object
the addressed
the subject

a cut
off away into the
above

a skirt
an abut
cut but

m' dear —?
— my deer
yo' feets?
— fleet.

[Ed crosses the threshold of the *Wetlands* / julie ezelle patton & Ed Roberson]

ED ROBERSON

TOUCHING THE HEM

for julie ezelle patton

mostly the coming through
of a static from both sides
here and there
mostly clear that it isn't
all there is here

a little frightening to us
for all of us anywhere
as compelling as the missing
is what of it
to this piece of having hold

in sight as in my hand some
thing come through
putting some
as the thing together—
there is

nothing like holding hands
holding nothing like hands
putting a world taken back
from though different points
taken it always was

by nature of how gathering
a bin we have been made
just so many how much eye
to see one piece so
many times the sheets are layered

though only one
a surface of depths
manifests
the entire motion of only its skirts.

M. NOURBESE PHILIP

Is this a poem
pocm

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

ventriloquist

bet e... o write o you than
 o. raditio , England,
 a ventriloquist I
 and the future. hear a voice
 like mine com
 - with some arro:
 for you follow upon hollow of
 appears a pyramid of empty
 silent yea I hunt
 loose brick or stone that mur all
 (will I sen ome uch
 - be the pas word to) secre
 of the Silence? I questi what
 all
 and the floor: to the dance
 essence - wil nd inst,
 - to so. above. Here can
 no de without the. Your face
 aw - doubt in ange;
 Desperate I raise my voice - digast to
 dis racted pupil: we writers women,
 and black for us there can be no (dance without)
 the conscious tradition of the word - ours....
 "Lalls," I he you say, " traditions
 ough to go a begg, an
 the tra unique to
 few World. all blemo of old
 scribble on the white
 m le world, the word n used to sear i
 and destroy to blud on deaf and laden
 weapon; we the desce

Amato pasta stas
pocm
1993

1993
International Year for
The World's Indigenous
People

first world, Africa, the second world, Europe
and the third world that was not discovered
but uncovered - we are heir to the words
of these worlds. None of ours to where
we find the floor of our word? I have,
/ but your interest - shall I continue?
the words of the male; I
find the floor of the female word -
is there such a thing in the
the sheer in your voice, "If it's true
want, hear about Ohauca, Don, speak
after all, speak their language." Praise
song of rum - that's song - Zu u cries
the mating song - these are ours I
...grudgingly, but they come like dried in translation
sonal rhythms lost punctured eardrums no
And these are our songs. Here
our songs which my song her the
floor to hum the words again
you yawn behind our hand
see the point of all this. In fifteen twenty
and black - you can show me -
and "tradition is tradition is it not?"
you come a long way; but race and gender
ceased to matter? They matter a great deal,
sometimes one more than the other, sometimes
both equally. I most never
This is all pas. é, you say, in your
your own tradition, but how did it change?

8003
US w/ades
Iraq

Thamar
Guesne
complete

2013
Calvin-rich
despite
found on
Mass!

it didn't happen... whe. it appears
more for less, when the dance soars
her highest - above the stars - there's been
effort, most discipline - a complex
weaving of muscle passion
Sweat, and floor what got her there... you
now soar and fly apparent
less you I build a photo of you;
all else must be yours. Dance on... fly
above... work with un... against...
you ed me as... ear... ground a... floor

P.S.

My dance will always be limited
lack effortlessness, for while I dance
I build a difficult task - but if I
do not build, how then to fly; how do I
ensure that somewhere at sometime, someone
will come upon discarded floor-board
as I do - too infrequently -
she too she too... here. You remain nameless
and faceless... dance my sister, dance on
my floor... thought in time.

Cornwall, England 1983



NOURBESE
aka

M... NOURBESE PHILIP

2023
Israel-Thomas War

Note on “To Whom It May Concern”:

I have been working on this poem for forty years. Every so often I would have reason to pull it out and rework it, never ever being entirely satisfied with it. Over that span of time I have written five books, raised three children, grown old and, despite all evidence to the contrary, continue to believe in our survival as a species. Over that time I’ve also developed an interest in what I call dirty poems—poems in which the scaffolding is revealed—the erasures, the crossings-out, the necessary distractions like making a meal, the passage of time that wears increasingly heavily—the self-doubts and self-questionings. “To Whom It May Concern” grappled with how I conceived my role as a poet in those early years. Finally, I sense that the poem has found its form in the dirty poem, or perhaps the form has found the poem. After all these years.

—m. nourbeSe philip

CARLA HARRYMAN

INTO A DETROIT SPIRIT'S WORLD

A Descent: for and with julie patton and after Ron Allen

Scene One

You have on heels so you can be taller in the spirit world of a giant
in countless ways.

It is humbling to be a flash in the spirit called De(ep)troit in the
paradoxes of our times, bigger houses but smaller brains.

More conveniences but far less time in the between. We are though
here—

In the between paper measure. The measure of a man—

In man-you-script—

The between, miles of phenomena speaking to DDDD and me—

Of the shrill ears cut back, cut—

To the back of the hearse. Everyone cover—

Everyone, cover your ears. Go straight—

With a stick. Quest into the dark looking for the unspeakable.

And the dog. She is the war. And she bites.

She is the warning and she bites.

Scene Two

Run to the platform and—

She takes a—

She takes, the dog, she takes a bite out of time.

Each, us. The deceased. Shouts, “Wake up.”

Take a break. Wake and break.

Break and “assume your places!”

On a stage flat like jazz, a continuum killing me.

Those falling heads. Now a mask on you—

Speaks to the tit of weekends, a call from the mind. A jack.

Instruction: *Call 1-800 death mask.*

The mask of the late great. Steal it.

For a round of applause.

Scene Three

The author is talking about the flow of consciousness

Buried in applause

Or basking in a pause

For the late great vagina, for the great mystique, for the great mistake.

Steal it—

The round of applause for the great mystique mistake—

Of the alpha-male-bet.

Steal it—

Dial

1-800 no rule no hands no mind

White House.

Are there phones here?

They ring for the late great Man-

Ager of Women.

There is ringing and applause for the late great eight phenomena
closed down in

Would you take me as pain?

Oh yeah, baby, listen.

Scene Four

Someone's on the phone, listen

Someone's on the phone

Listen, Phenomenon

It's Phone-omen-on.

Oh. You had been unconscious for many days. Man of wide vowel sounds

Do not despair of the wake

Of cadavers in sweat. They had breath.

Of War House pants of sameness. There was death—

Like rum and cheese

Cell phone ring and worms where the night wiggles.

Ring ring.

Scene Five

A scene spoken: Funky smoke at seven in the gut of time. Gain time and a gun. More war. More wars. Turn more war into lamps holding light on heads—less minds. Just a dream of video glare electric chair. Just a dream phenomenon. The rap stops. Then fragments of awareness hustle death-life pure mind smoke revenge. Time as fallen. The illusion of praying hands. What is this gesture now?

Scene Six

Hey, a little bit more respect from the platform—

Sometimes I don't answer gray blue sample color gun gun breath breath. Sometimes I hear dark in the bell and I answer, "Sometimes she is dead, the rose in her hand."

Phones ring all over the theater and I fail to communicate. I've never killed an audience before.

And the TV says I kill audiences every day.

Hungry ghosts. We've never killed any tired audience of the United States Yemen and Venezuela.

Syria, can you reach 'em on the phone anymore?

Whose there?

Twenty million years ago you humans began as a single cell of protein.

You were a cell phone in one cell.

And you are a fire cell. What are you gonna do with a watch man?

I'm gonna make a time machine on this watch you watch. I can make it take me anywhere Detroit.

You know we went to the Bronx first.

Came from Cleveland, New York, Cambridge you know Harry Potter

To Detroit.

The time machine you know is it time for Black people to wristwatch you know. Avocados and fries.

Beans, black. Bird in the mouth of the night.

Beans served on those burgers Kings and Queens.

You creatures of deep intelligence set in graves.

A Note on the Making of “Into a Detroit Spirit’s World”:

This piece is an arrangement based on a performance Julie Ezelle Patton made at Light Box in Detroit in the summer of 2018. Her performance and my text draw from scripts written by Detroit poet and playwright Ron Bodhidharma Allen (1947–2010). Allen’s works prompted my invitation to Patton to join me in the Light Box. To this day, Allen’s performance writings have not been published; the Light Box event represents a practice of referencing his artistic contributions in “the between” of prior realizations of his plays and their near inaccessibility to the public since his death. Allen’s plays are radical works of poets theater focused on social dysphoria, paradoxes of history and spirit, the Black male body, personal and political emancipation, and language as a site of psychosocial power—both repressive and emancipatory.

Patton arrived on the Light Box performance floor with accompanist and guitarist Paul Van Curen, her performance score, and pages comprising the two Ron Allen scripts. Throughout the performance, she would select individual pages, scan them, and—lightly and often—swiftly turn them. The audience experienced the pages as a score plucked from, scanned, departed from, and returned to in a mode of continuous renewal and elaboration. As the performance started, our soloist introduced herself, commenting: “I have heels on so I can be taller in the spirit world of a giant in countless ways.” She then set a scene, enlarging the context by uniting the spirit world with questions of contemporary temporality, “the paradoxes of our times”: “bigger houses but smaller brains” and “more conveniences but far less time in the between.” In tonally open voids, eerie pitches, straightforward statements, and melodic Sprechstimme, she shaped descent into a shared spirit world, gradually folding bits of Allen’s language into her improvisation. These she deployed in sonic textures, short phrases, and single words: “the between,” “phenomenon,” “measure,” “deceased,” “break,” “phone,” “mask,” “Call 1-800,” sometimes weaving in longer phrases: “applause for the late great vagina,” “for the great mystique,” “I’m gonna make a time machine on this watch,” and “twenty-five million years ago you humans began as a single cell of protein.”

I think of my arrangement as a secondary document of her performance, a skeletal offering as trace of a multidimensional and luminous live performance that guided the audience into a sonic descent between worlds of living and death, intelligence and killing, hearing and speaking.

WILL ALEXANDER

from CHARISMATIC SPIRAL PART II; NOTE ON JULIE'S
COMPOUND

VISITATION AS CENTIGRADE

Light that dispels its articulated essence as mesmerism. That articulates its own essence as mesmerism being nuance by filigree, that pre-ignites its own chirality. Here there is pre-figurment by chimerical essence, by lack that can be described by defensive manoeuvre. This again being mesmerism by ion, by articulate nervous calamity by dawn, by 20 suns as exploding blue light subsumed as articulated nerve ends not as brazen suggestion but as higher inevitability. Not for instance as cognitive codex but atoms on fire merging with darkness as unified transmission as instantaneous light that explodes by generating trapezoidal fertility as articulated nomos. This being solar form as unknown language sweeping away horizons, that both explodes and etches its own formation, being diaphanous centigrade as catergraphical charisma that approaches its own summation not as etching or fossil that explodes simultaneous with its own horizon.

CHRONIC ECCLESIASTICAL CLIMATE

To bare abstrusity to its barest component it must be reduced to its most simplified equation. It must be drilled into the psyche as fear. It's brazen component being horror replete with obstinate uttering. This being the believers' mind replete with owls and susurrant mornings. This being threat by monarchal misnomer, replete with paradoxical scowling and judgment. This being vivication as moral like a sheep in the mire suddenly springing out as Cobra. This being tense hierarchical psychic standing being mirage as template howling to itself under moonlight. This being gargantuan judgment by oneiric. As Goya once put it *The Sleep of Reason Brings Forth Monsters*. This being pre-inscribed error according to infortuitous binding, ferocious with darkened starlight. Not the laying on of hands by priestly demeanour plagued by contradiction.

This remains promulgated maze aligned circumspect terror that forms in the mind as vapourous spelchere being noxious foretelling by fate. As if the mind were claimed by threat as whistled integer, by clause that intones its own sterility. Galilee in this state remains its own protracted Savonarola. A deficit, a blemished pattern that negatively wizens, that takes on foreboding as negative ash. This being form as inner plague, that baffles and incinerates according to inner clouding. This being rote as uncleansed verdure open onto fertility as negation. This being the chronic mind by what it understands to be its universal wizening. This being failed perspective according to germinated domination. This being none other than absolute lessening not unlike an absolute monster that deceives. This being none other than laterilized history with its forecast as abominable nutrient. As for spectres they foretell general dimenishment by befoulment as prone or negative ecstasy. This being fore-telling as ecclesiastical cipher.

FRAGMENT

As for sonic or robust climate
there exists as form
arithmetical yield
not as cunning meta-stasis
or biophysical truncation
but as flight
as unheralded annunciation

FRAGMENT II

As for cosmic bio-legality
it fails
by inference
as the higher persistence
not according to numeric dawns
not according to fragment as skill
as for arc as embellished dragon
it burns as interiority
precarious myths occur
attempting to broker their own magnetics not solely as wonder
or frictionless maze
not as harried cornucopia or spell
this being conjoined sensation
as palpable root akin to impalpable confusion

POSSIBLE PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENT

When language continues to cater to a stilled, and impalpable calculus it remains stilled, warped by catering to a populace kinetically brazen with deficit. This latter scale promulgated by the living dead as it continues to ignite protracted regression. As partial continents of ice remain active with dissolution it trespasses in-active response with further, more active decimation.

HIERATIC OASIS THAT MAGNEFIES AND. ATTRACTS

My sojourn with julie endures as a timeless contact. Her living space not unlike a dove flashing upwards from timeless groundwater. A timeless energy not principally as quantifiable hamlet but as magnetic symbiosis. Her enclave naturally appears as quintessential utterance that ranges from human artistic transmission, to the enigmatic flight of differing butterfly ensembles. Therefore life erupts as a magnetic living system that includes various shadings that range across natural flora and fauna. One can evidence the latter not only as a powerful oasis, but as a charismatic crucible of forces. I am not speaking of architectural highlight in Cleveland, but a hieractic oasis that principally magnifies and attracts.

CECILIA VICUÑA

ITZ (MAYA)

Setting up earth and sky

Were measuring acts

By footsteps
In space

By day and night
In time.

THE AIR

The air breathes

We are just on its way.

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FICTION, NONFICTION,
POETRY & REVIEWS

STEPHEN MORTLAND

Nativity

Mary's Left Thigh

There was a bruise on Mary's left thigh. She thought the shape of it looked like the shape of a rose in bloom. When she sat a certain way and crossed one leg over the other, her robe parted and the rose showed its little blue head.

Where Lem Stands

Lem stood at Joseph's side even though he was only a shepherd and only second shepherd at that. Lem often considered his status. On the one hand, he was second shepherd to Antony, who was lead shepherd. On the other hand, he stood near Joseph and he knew about the bruise on Mary's thigh. Whether or not it increased his status, Lem preferred standing with Joseph and watching Mary as she crossed and uncrossed her legs. He preferred it to standing with Antony, Carmichael, and Gram, who always jostled one another and were forced into positions of submission. Staying near Joseph also kept Lem from the choir of angels who intimidated him and from the angel Gabriel, who frightened him most of all. It was possible Joseph preferred Nestor's company to Lem's, but even if it was true, Nestor was a brute and it was only his brutishness that Joseph appreciated—Lem was nearer Joseph's equal.

On the Television

On the television screen, the famous actor studied the paper in his hands. He was silent, and then he lifted his head and looked into the camera and spoke, saying, "The sergeant is wearing a red jacket. He is walking the wrong way through the crowd. He is a blot of red carving

a path through a sea of gray and brown. His movements become increasingly erratic, panicked, soon he is clawing shoulders, shoving civilians to their knees, climbing over the backs of bent men. The Walther PPK is in his right hand. He fires once into the sky. In a house by a lake, a woman is tied to a chair. Rats scurry around the edges of the room. The house is empty except for the chair, except for the woman. She watches the water out the window. There is a second house near the first. The second house is empty except for a mahogany desk, and a man at the desk is writing. He is writing an account of his crimes. The sergeant holds out a photograph, in the photograph a woman lies with her back across a table and her head hanging out of view. Her robe is torn. Blood has dried on her abdomen and thighs. She appears to be lying in a kitchen, in a room edged with gold trim, with sheer white curtains parted and sashed over two windows above her body. In the house beside the lake, the woman flexes her wrists against the ropes. She knows she is bleeding because she feels the blood on the tips of her fingers, but her wrists are numb and feel no pain. In the photograph the sergeant is holding, the curtains are dotted with red polka dots and the sashes parting the curtains are fringed with red. The fridge is open. The contents inside the fridge are out of focus: a yellow wedge, a paler yellow wedge, an orange orb. The woman's knees are covered in dirt. A rounded tablecloth hangs over the lip of the table. The fabric is crimped at its edge, it is red and yellow. It is..."

Three Pieces in the Shape of a Pear

Gabriel found Joseph listening to classical music. Joseph was listening to a recording of Erik Satie's *Three Pieces in the Shape of a Pear*. Each time the recording reached the second piece in the suite, Joseph lifted the needle off the record and started it from the beginning again. "You have only one piece of a pear," Gabriel said. He sat next to Joseph, where Joseph sat with his legs crossed on the floor. "I prefer Debussy," Gabriel said, reclining and laying his head in Joseph's lap. "Of course you do," Joseph said. "Debussy's style was an absence of style, of logic, and of common sense." "It's not so complicated," said Gabriel. He bent his neck and lifted his head as Joseph once more moved the needle to the record's edge. "Debussy had the eyes of a poet, and Satie the face of an engineer."

The Things Delmer Collected

Delmer set the newest in the shoebox with the others. Glass jars, and glass cups, and glass vials he collected. He collected whatever was made of glass and hollow inside. The other wise men knew but dismissed it. They had their own concerns. They thought maybe the ground was shifting. Either the ground was shifting, or the clouds made it seem that way—this was Gina’s theory. She was most vocal of all the wise men. Delmer didn’t speak at all, and when he wrote he wrote in chalk, which was easily erased. His newest discovery was a thick glass vase. When he lifted the shoebox, the objects inside shifted and chimed and jingled.

Mary Loved Them All

Mary worried about the boy called Molly. Molly was missing. He wasn’t with the sheep and he wasn’t with the shepherds. Mary didn’t remember when she last saw him. When she mentioned it to Joseph, he pretended not to hear. Joseph was throwing dice with Lem. An overturned barrel functioned as a table, and they stooped on either side. Mary waited and then asked again. “Molly?” Joseph repeated. “He’s probably hiding with the sheep.” But they all knew Molly was not among the sheep.

New Material

Materials collected in the wings. The materials were gathered in the off-hours, at night and at times when no one was watching. Nails and cardboard, bags of cotton, decorative plaster, copper wire, styrofoam and spools of string, acrylic paints, oil paints, tape, and glue, and other wet adhesives, plywood boards and timber, jesmonite, sheet styrene, bits of brick, loose shingles—whatever scraps, cast off, could be pulled together. Everyone knew that some from among the choir of angels were collecting the materials. There were rumors that others, maybe some from among the wise men, were involved as well. It wasn’t clear how many were involved, and it wasn’t clear what was being built.

Little Lamb

Gram suckled the bottle like a sheep. Carmichael held his shoulders and Antony fit the nipple between Gram's lips. "Drink, little lamb," Antony said. What was in the bottle was milk but probably not only milk, it was white and ran down the sides of Gram's head as he drank and laughed and drank.

Illustrations

Gina passed the illustrations across the table to Mary. "I don't know what I'm seeing," Mary said. "I don't know what I'm looking at." Gina rifled through her bag and produced still more papers. "Some of them are old," she said. She spread them across the table. They had titles written across the bottoms: 1) The Transfiguration of a Burnt Vehicle in Twelve Miniatures; 2) Storm/Stain/Soldiers and the Potential of Unformed Compositions; 3) Goethe's Essential Plant; 4) Running All the Horses at Once; 5) A Cudgel at Human Scale; 6) A Cudgel Beyond the Scale of Furniture but Smaller Than a House; 7) A Cudgel Larger Than a House and Smaller Than a Building; 8) A Cudgel Larger Than a Building and Smaller Than a City; 9) A Cudgel at the Scale of Landscape; 10) Refrain: Speed or Slowness; 11) Overabundance of Difference. "In short," Gina said, "we want to accomplish something." "That much is clear," Mary said. Gina took this as a blessing.

The Famous Actor

Joseph's father, the famous actor, though often absent, nonetheless instilled a sense of entitlement in his son by insisting at all times that the boy was his equal, speaking to him with candor and forcing him also to perform physical acts of strength and courage that far exceeded the boy's natural limits. In Joseph's dreams, his father came to him wearing masks, disguised as the many characters he had made famous in films: the gangster Tito Blanco from *Violent Errands*, the aspiring politician Gabriel Velasco from *The Bullfighter*, serial killer Donald Aiken from *Last Left Bleeding*, the surly bartender from *Grit*, the Don Juan Billy Hood from *The Back of the Blade*, the ghost

of Federico García Lorca from the Salvador Dalí biopic *Madman*. In these dreams, his father revealed things. He confessed aspects of his life the boy knew nothing about. He made terrible admissions, forcing Joseph to recognize what no son should be made to recognize about his father. They were tedious and common sins—oversights, avoidance, infidelities, hypocrisy, weakness in the face of trial. The admissions were all the more upsetting to Joseph for the mediocrity of their vulgarity.

The Innkeeper

There was dried blood beneath the innkeeper's fingernails. He never turned away from difficult work. Lem sat across from him in the rowboat. There was no one else. Lem respected the innkeeper, if only for his labor and his discretion. The boat floated in the shallows of the lake. Soon the innkeeper would step out, soaking his sneakers and his pants to the knee, and push the boat with Lem inside up onto the pebbles. Once ashore, he would disassemble the boat, tearing loose the boards and scattering them in the trees near the lake. Looking at the face of the innkeeper, Lem thought he looked nothing like an innkeeper. The innkeeper's face resembled the face of Cary Grant or the face of Perry Como. The longer Lem looked, the more iconic and grand the innkeeper's face became. Lem reached out and touched the innkeeper's cheeks. He moved the tips of his fingers in circles, pressing the skin, but the innkeeper's cheeks were not like putty, they were leathery and hardly shifted. Lem leaned over the side of the boat and vomited into the water. He had vomited once already. The rocking of the boat upset his stomach. The yellow bile spun on the surface of the water. He looked at the innkeeper again, who was beautiful and surely knew it. You could tell he regretted his beauty, wanting only to perform difficult work modestly. A pity, Lem thought as the innkeeper slowed the boat and splashed over the side into the shallows.

Afterwards

Joseph gathered his pants from around his ankles and pulled them to his waist. The room was mostly empty except for a few of the angels

who were asleep on the floor, their limbs interwoven, the head of one resting on the chest of the next. Brooms hung on one wall, and there were metal shelves stacked with boxes and bottles. Joseph didn't know which room it was. It was where they met this time. It would be someplace new next time. He ran his fingers through his hair. The skin on his neck stung. He felt the wound, but his fingers came away dry. The room smelled like rubber and lilacs. It was hot with stagnant air. One of the drowsy angels reached for Joseph's ankle as he passed, but Joseph toed the hand away. Before he left, he traced the room once more, hesitating and staring into the shadowy corners, but Gabriel wasn't there. Gabriel was already gone.

A New Grammar

Delmer wrote a chalk poem. He washed it away, but not before others saw it. It was written on a sheet of plywood leaning against the wall. There was a crowd now, gathered around the plywood. The plywood was white and dusty from the poem. Some were goading Delmer to write it again, for the benefit of those who hadn't seen. None, it seemed, who had seen the poem initially could recite it, or, if they could, they refused to do so. Mary was close by, but she was not among them. She watched out the window from where she sat on the windowsill, crossing and uncrossing her legs at the knee. Delmer didn't say anything. He didn't write the poem again. He squatted beside the dusty plywood watching the crowd. "What's the point, anyway?" one of the Roman soldiers called out. Gina was standing at Delmer's back. "It's a new grammar," she said. "A grammar that is syntactically dependent on its own erasure." Delmer didn't say anything. He was drawing circles on the knee of his pant leg. Some of the angels took advantage of the gathering and intermixed, slipping their hands between the folds of robes, spreading discord about Delmer and Delmer's poetry, convincing all those listening that what had been written was hateful, until a contingent from the crowd fell upon Delmer and tore his shirt and ground his chalk to dust.

What Mary Saw From the Window

It might have been movement in the bushes or it might have been the wind, a trick of the sun, the wind nipping and straying, the sun shadowing the bushes, the hedges so loud and so thick she couldn't see through them. Once she thought she saw him moving, there was no longer the option not to see him, in every gap, between branches, at the seam where one bush met the next, his face peering out, his small pellet eyes watching, looking back at her, holding his breath so as not to betray himself again. Now all the leaves were bristling, rippling at the periphery of her attention, as if the leaves were a blanket fluffed and settling. It took great restraint for her to remain seated in the window, scanning the hedges peacefully, if diligently. It took great restraint to keep from tugging the window loose and calling Molly's name into the yard.

The Cylindrical Glass Vial Crushed

Delmer, in rags, swept the dust of the chalk into a cylindrical glass vial that he set on the floor. He crushed the vial with his naked heel and, bending, blew the dust until it was dispersed. When he stood, he faced all those watching and spoke, saying, "Rimbaud wrote nothing after the age of twenty. Neither Mark Rothko nor Marilyn Monroe left suicide notes. The Welsh word *hiraeth* has no English equivalent, though it means something like homesickness. A man had three sons. The third son was born deaf and mute. The man loved all of his sons, but he could not look at the third son without weeping. Greta Garbo stopped acting at the age of thirty-six. After John Dillinger was shot, the crowd around his body soaked his blood into their handkerchiefs and newspapers. The father of the son born deaf and mute took the son on a boat. When they were far from shore, he signaled for the boy to reach his hand into the water. When the boy brought his hand back, he was holding a fish. Taking his son by the chin, the father shoved his thumb between the boy's lips, prying open his mouth. He took the fish from the boy's hand and placed it on his tongue. He held the boy's mouth closed as he flinched with discomfort. When his son bit down, stilling the fish, the father removed his hands. William Kemmler

was the first person executed in an electric chair. His last words were 'Take it easy and do it properly, I'm in no hurry.' John Berryman's first suicide note was four words long. His second, two days later, was nineteen words long. In between these two notes, he wrote a poem that began, 'I didn't. And I didn't. Sharp the Spanish blade.' Hart Crane's last words were, 'Goodbye, everybody.' He jumped the rail of the steamship *Orizaba* in the Gulf of Mexico. The first words ever spoken on film were, 'Are the rest of you ready?' The first words spoken in a feature film were, 'Wait a minute, wait a minute. You ain't heard nothing yet.' Cesare Lombroso believed that the origins of affectionate kissing could be traced to the women of Tierra del Fuego, who supplied their infants with drink by filling their own mouths with water and transferring it to the open mouths of their young. Cesare Lombroso believed that the born criminal had a bony elevation at the angle of the jaw and a depression in the upper jaw for the attachment of the canine muscle. There are folds in the flesh of the cheek of the born criminal. The born criminal, Lombroso claimed, rarely has normal dentition; the incisors show the greatest number of anomalies. The teeth of the born criminal are frequently striated transversely or set very wide apart. The father of the mute boy built a room for his son behind the house. When the other sons were away, or asleep, or eating their meals, the quiet of the third son in the house was too much for the father to bear. Maria Callas began to lose her voice in 1953, when she was thirty years old. Wittgenstein had perfect pitch. Only eighty-four seconds of Frida Kahlo's voice were ever recorded. Only thirty-six seconds of Walt Whitman's voice were ever recorded. When the father peeked into the window of the boy's room behind the house, he saw the boy speaking with the objects on his nightstand, and watched the candle near the boy's bed flickering..." The crowd dissipated as Delmer spoke and by the time he was finished only Gina and Mary remained, Mary in the window. "It's the new grammar," Gina declared. "The only language that lasts, language that devours itself. Final words, what is captured, what is recorded, what fits in a mouth. Language must become a spirit and haunt the dreams of language. This is the new grammar, a grammar dependent on its own erasure."

Dioramas

Large boxes, painted black, appeared in the wings. A hole was cut in the side of each box, and if you forced your head inside, the darkness, in time, gave way to intricate dioramas—rooms and hallways with miniature figures variously occupied. So far there were five boxes in the wings: 1) The inside of the first box was like the interior of a stable, with individual stalls and individual gates and, within these stalls, miniature horses, donkeys, cattle, and sheep. There was a hayloft above the stalls with miniature bales of hay. In one of the stalls near the rear of the box, a girl with yellow hair bent forward, peering back through spread legs. Above her, the figure of a boy in overalls, hairless, peeked down at the girl through a hole in the hayloft floor. 2) Inside the second box was a room, wainscoted and papered above the wainscot with floral wallpaper. A pattern of identical orange flowers—green leaves on four sides connecting each orange flower to the next—traversed the wallpaper. A feather duster rested in the basin of the sink. A torn and dirty rag, white with a stripe of orange, hung from the side of the sink. The pipes below the sink were exposed. A mirror above the sink was crooked and smeared. There was a stained glass window on the right: rectangles and squares of yellow, orange, and green. A thick black pipe reached from floor to ceiling in a shadowed corner of the room. Beneath the stained glass window, there was a bathtub on porcelain claws. A naked figure with close-cropped brown hair was on their hands and knees in the tub. The floor of the room was dark and shiny. 3) The third box contained many small rooms of equal proportion. The outer walls were rounded, as if the entire diorama and its many rooms were inside an orb instead of a cube. The walls of each room were shelved, and the shelves full of books. A spectacle of busy figures were cast about—some human, some animal, and some of indistinguishable species. They rested in precarious positions, buckling beneath or mounting or taking hold of one another. None of the figures were engaged in any way with the books or the shelves of books. 4) A spiral staircase split the center of the fourth box. Hollow rooms and crawlspaces flanked the staircase to its left and its right. At the foot of the staircase, the sprawled figure of a woman with yellow hair lay crooked on the ground, limbs bent

at odd angles, a bright red dot on the floor beneath her head. 5) The fifth box contained only a red bedroom with dark red walls and yellow flowers across the dark red walls. The walls rose and angled before meeting the flat of the ceiling. A pendant light on a thin gold chain hung from the ceiling, shielded by a tinted glass shade. There was an ornate golden four-poster bed frame. A wooden side table with an open interior shelf and a lower cabinet hugged the corner of the bed. Above the bed, a painting of an elk was gilded at its edges in a thin, demurring frame. Beside the closet door, a wooden table supported a carafe fashioned in the shape and likeness of a woman's torso. A metal bucket on the floor, an overturned glass bottle, a crumpled piece of burlap fabric. A red rug beneath the bed. In the closet, something red, something coral, something made of fur. A small box, cream with orange flowers and green stems, tucked beneath the hanging cloth. Next to the small box, a second, smaller box of the same cream color. Brown shoes. A black trunk with brown handles. There were no figures in the fifth diorama.

A Gift for Joseph

It was late and Joseph could not sleep. He walked and was alone and listened to the near sounds of others who could not sleep or who refused to sleep, active in the shadows, out of sight. He knew he needed only to walk a ways before he would find Gabriel, or he wouldn't find Gabriel, and if he didn't find him soon, he knew he wouldn't find him at all that evening. Gabriel was sitting on the overturned barrel Joseph and Lem sometimes used for throwing dice. "You're awake," Joseph said. The moon came through a slim upper window, the shaft of light fell near the place Gabriel was sitting. When Gabriel shifted on the barrel, the right side of his face moved in and out of the moonlight. "Have you heard of the *demimonde*," Gabriel asked, and when Joseph said nothing, he continued. "It's a word I would like to mean more than it does." When his skin showed in the moonlight, it looked very pale. "I have something for you." Gabriel stood and lifted the barrel and pulled from underneath it a small box. He handed it to Joseph. "Open it," he said. Joseph unclasped the lid and opened it. A petite ballerina sprang forward and began to twirl. It was a music box, Joseph

saw, but the mechanism for playing music was not working properly, so the ballerina spun around and around inside the box, and the box made no noise at all.

On the Television II

On the television the famous actor was saying, “Having located the particular house where he believes the man is hiding, the police sergeant stands outside the plywood door and calls inside. ‘It is the end of the twentieth century,’ he cries. ‘An era of cataclysms, of degradations, anarcho-entrepreneurial strains of repression and the fetishization of complex mechanophobias. There are ever more clever strategies of liturgical evasion around us all the time. Three sons visit their father’s bedside. The old man is dying. He looks on each of the three sons and sees in them not even a hint of greed, not even a thought toward their inheritance, nothing but good filial feeling toward one another and toward their father who is dying. He sees his sons and he curses them each in turn for refusing to carry forward his name in the world. He curses them and says with his dying breath, ‘*Are you unaware that this life is nothing more than flirtations with ever-varying forms of cannibalism?*’” Having come to the end of this monologue, the sergeant hurls his body against the door and, along with the plywood, crashes into the empty room. A woman in a house near a lake turns eggs in a skillet. She is watching out the window, nearly certain she has seen movement in the bushes. She takes the skillet off the burner and wipes her hands on her apron. She is considering going outside...”

The World’s Strongest Man

Nestor knelt before the mirror and watched the way his body moved. He watched the muscles ripple beneath the skin of his torso. The long thin muscle on the back of his arm. His brow furrowed as he clenched and unclenched his fist, turning his wrist, making the muscle pop and soften. My body is like rubber, he thought. There were stones and cinder blocks in a line below the mirror. “All right, tough guy,” he said out loud. He licked his thumbs like he was preparing to turn the pages of a book and bent, taking the heaviest rock, pulling it to

his chest, lifting it over his head. He saw the way the muscles beneath his neck formed a V. He bent his head to one side and then the other, stretching one arm of the V and then its opposite. I am the world's strongest man, Nestor thought, and let the rock drop with a loud crash before his feet.

Preparations at the House by the Lake

Lem made preparations. The house needed to look a certain way. He painted the walls haphazardly. There needed to be more yellow. Yellow like the blush around the purple at the heart of a bruise. He found rocks in the trees and made a footpath from the screen door of the house to the shore of the lake. He stocked the pantry and the fridge. Lem made sure that the house was well aired, that it didn't smell like a house that had been too long closed up, and that it didn't smell like a house where anything untoward had happened. He made sure all the surfaces were wiped down. Lem took pride, privately, in his ability to see a thing in his mind and make it real. He was often underestimated. More than anything else, Lem wanted to take the images he saw in his mind and drape them in material. There was no lock on the door of the house, so Lem installed a deadbolt.

The Luckiest Sheep

Antony and Carmichael stirred the sheep. The calf and camel too. Nestor was among them, kicking his feet in the air and braying. Antony and Carmichael walked from opposite sides, constricting the group into a tight bunch. Carmichael walked with his legs spread wide like a cowboy. When they had the sheep nice and tight, they held each boy by his neck and squeezed until his shoulders tensed. They asked blunt questions with no real answers. "Are you going to quit?" they asked. "Does it hurt?" they asked. "You won't go running off, now, will you?" And everyone answered with whatever they thought the shepherds wanted to hear, "Yes," "Yes," "Of course not." They arrived at Nestor last. He was not pinned with the rest of them, but sat outside the circle watching. He was not one with Antony and Carmichael, but he wasn't among their victims, either. Nestor sat alone. "Which one is the luckiest sheep?" they asked him, smiling and looking at the

trembling pod they held trapped. “Molly’s the luckiest sheep,” said Nestor, which made everyone uncomfortable, and soon the group disbanded.

Gabriel and Joseph

Did Gabriel hold sway over Joseph or was Joseph merely eager for guidance? Was it Gabriel’s indifference that made Joseph follow the angel when he called, or was it only the best option available? What was convenience and what was need, and where did the distinction crumble? “For me, would you choose a certain ignorance?” Gabriel said to Joseph. When he woke in the mornings, was Gabriel’s mind, like Joseph’s, void of affection and desire, turned toward an inward tiredness and an eagerness to return to the silence of sleep?

Joseph’s Father

The ghost of Lorca came to Joseph and took him by the hands. “My son,” he said. “You are shut up in the song you are singing. You are pink with frost, a chiseled sculpture of fleshy ice. You reek of yeast, my son.” “If you are my father,” said Joseph, “tell me, please, what I am to do. Give me a sign or speak some truth that only the dead can access.” “I am not your father,” said the ghost of Lorca. “I am an insect, a cockroach, a butterfly, a cricket. I am chirping, can you hear?” Joseph let his hands fall. The ghost of Lorca took him roughly by the chin. “You want truth? Okay, then, out with it...” and squeezing Joseph’s cheeks so that his lips puckered open, the ghost of Lorca stuck two fingers deep into the boy’s mouth, touching the back of his tongue. Joseph retched and as he retched, he spoke involuntarily: “I am the luckiest sheep. I am the sheep who was lost.”

Mary’s Song

I.

Yes, now I see the struggle at the oar, the boat shoving away on the horrible, placid calm of the water, liquid blue beneath sky emptied of sky, and the innkeeper’s beleaguered head a dodging scab on the

line where the two meet. The dim *tick tick* plied from our heels by the boards of the boat, we are now clay footed, now shored, the dumb sun's last light hardening us, standing here, the last bellows. And Lem, yes Lem, clumsily reaching to secure the ribbon flapping from the back of my torn robe, tucking the green ribbon into the rest of the green ribbon wrapped around my waist. "When will the others be here?" I ask, but aren't their voices ringing from behind us, from behind the lake house, where I cannot see? It is terrible observing the departure of that shoddily jigsawed rowboat while standing mute and pale, fingers curled, quietly resigned as the boat gets smaller and smaller, dappling itself to a pebble and then to nothing at all. But turning from the boat is worse, turning against the water is worse than seeing it and knowing how broad and empty it is.

Lem is calling me. Mary, Mary, come, Mary. His lips form the first of it, the *M* pressing thick with *Mmmmmmmmm*, and the churning of his tongue, the toothless lizard, pink and fenced behind shadowed teeth, before the pursing and puckering of it, the last of it, finishing me on his mouth, dressing me with his mouth, hollowed cheeks and lips whistling *yyyyyyyy* to the end of me.

II.

Dashes of yellow paint. Dents in the walls. The floor is made of concrete, black and lacquered like shining pools of oil undisturbed. There are signs of former struggle. When the sun is setting it skitters across the floors turning the room a burnt umber orange.

III.

The sound of the wind across the lake; I see nothing in the night when I look from the window. Lem keeps secret the videos he is taking with his camera. Sometimes he shows me stills—frozen, wordless images blurry with movement passing through the frame. A stack of pans, or curtain sashes, or bugs from inside the house. A still, like a photograph, of me with my arm folded, covering my face.

IV.

The house by the lake has very few furnishings. There is no television and no bed frame. There are folding chairs and a small kitchen table. There is a mattress on the black lacquered floor of the smallest room. This is where I sleep. I have no dreams in the house by the lake, I sleep dreamless sleep and wake not knowing if I was asleep or only resting. There are no windows in the small room with the mattress. I invent dreams while I am lying and resting, or lying and waking, or having just woken, lying and preparing to fall into another dreamless sleep.

V.

But praise! Oh, but praise. Praise the criminals and their crimes. Lem says that all actions are criminal actions one way or another. There are laws of nature, laws of men, and laws we keep to govern our own hearts, so I suppose he is right and that doing anything should likely be a crime against at least one of these three. And if everything is already criminal, there can be no suspicion, no accountability or judgment or hatred—praise the criminals who have silenced the final judgment! Praise the crimes they've committed for me, on my behalf, without knowing it. Lem tells me about crimes he's committed and those he has yet to commit. It makes no difference to me which is which. He robs banks with splintering bits of wood bulging in his pocket, he catches field mice and crawdads and keeps them in small jars, he breaks windows, he crosses himself backwards before the sign of the cross, he drinks and lashes out blindly at whomever comes too near. There are others, he confesses, even greater criminals than himself. Really, he tells me, he's only an amateur.

VI.

Reflections on a film still: white and gray and black. A blurry white ashtray. Small octagonal tiles nearly invisible on the white floor. The tall, skinny lamp with dangling glass bulbs and the plant with fronds drooping like long rabbit ears. A boy, in motion away, his body shaking, spreading, in profile. White jacket, black tie, black slacks.

His arm dangles at his side. His legs are spread. He is nearly out of the frame. The girl's eyes are turned toward the boy, her body is turned too, as in a dance or in fright, her arms lifted to the level of her chest, her elbows bent, her fingers curled. She wears a sweater and a checkered skirt. Her hair tucked back beneath a black-brimmed hat. She must be dancing. If she is not dancing, she is turning away like a dance. Her face is turned away, turned toward the boy, and compared to the face of the boy, she is solid. Her face is white where his face is gray. Her chin curves like the curve of her ear, or like the empty curve where her forehead meets the bridge of her nose. Her face, in fact, is a series of curves and gaps and lines, mirroring one another. See the wrinkled fabric of her sweater. How the wrinkles pull the sweater taut and let us know she is moving, is turning. And the lift of her skirt, lifting ever so slightly.

VII.

Who is at the door? At first it sounds like many and then like nothing at all, as if the sound were only dreamed, or the wind, maybe, shaking the loose glass panes of the windows at the front of the house. But no, it's there again. The voices of children, many children at the door.

VIII.

Reflections on a film still: you have been lied to, and it is only what comes before and what comes after that means anything at all. Between the two is darkness, the click of the camera's shutter, the splicing together of two reels. What comes after?

IX.

A dream: Joseph and Mary engaged in their usual postures. That is to say, they are not speaking and are not feigning to speak, they do not acknowledge the pacing, the sighing, the straining of her neck, the way he bites his lip. He runs his hand through his hair, they feel the ground swell beneath them. "This is enough of that," he says, as if to say it to anyone, whomever happens to hear it, not to her, not necessarily. And she, not responding, but in turn speaking to the room, "I can't

think myself straight. Is it evening yet?" Speaking past one another was the method they settled upon at some point long ago, the only method that would ensure his meanness would not ruin her and her charity would not scald him.

X.

Another dream: Mary sometimes pours herself two fingers and drinks it quickly. "This place is always a mess," she says, though even she herself doesn't believe it. Joseph stands in doorways. Lights are always shining on his face and his chest. He is feared on account of his inextinguishable sense of duty. She fears him too, even if he is duty bound, in part, to her. She fears herself and others fear her too, because he is duty bound to her. She is afraid of everyone, of herself and him, and all of them listening in, because of what she might do but also because of all the things she knows she will never do.

XI.

Great preparations have been made. This is where they'll gather. Through the window she sees the water, as still and blue as ever it was before. She hears Lem in the back room, typing away. She hears the others, still outside, clamoring to be let in. The table is set. Molly is there, it seems. Molly or a child who looks so much like him. She squints and tries to make him disappear, but he goes nowhere. He is sitting at the head of the table with a plate of cucumbers. He holds one out to her. "Have you tried them?" he asks. She takes a step and, for a moment, she considers leaving him. She considers stepping outside and giving herself up to them. She looks again at Molly, or at the boy who looks so very much like him. He is holding a cucumber out to her, pinching it between two of his fingers. If it is Molly or it isn't Molly, she decides, makes hardly any difference at all.

MARZIA GRILLO

Translated by Lourdes Contreras and Julia Pelosi-Thorpe

Have a Seat, Dear

*Why don't they show us how the shoemaker got shot?
Surely he's still alive, the shooting is a ruse.*

—Aglaja Veteranyi

The glow of the television echoes the Christmas tree's flashing lights. On screen is the TG1 special broadcast jingle. The mother[†] is motionless. She has a red dress with a white collar and a tray of salmon and caviar crostini in her hand. The child[‡] is playing with a knife, peacefully taxing the tablecloth's top-quality cotton along with everyone's patience.

"Marco,"* calls the mother. Her voice is an empty cage but she keeps calling: "Marco..."

For days she's been watching the news the way the father studies fish in a tank, seeking in their neon movements meaning that isn't there. There's only a rhythm, thinks the child, when the fish surface for their food at quarter to seven.

The doorbell rings but the mother stays motionless. Her tray trembles imperceptibly and the father's voice wafts from a distance: "Who is it? Come in."

On the screen, the mob waves flags and portraits of the dictator and his wife when they were young. Time flies, one might say. The mob is restless because nonna isn't here yet, thinks the child, who is hungry. It's December 21st,** but it seems like Christmas Eve already. History is in a rush.

†/ The mother is my mother. [Author's Note]

‡/ The child is me. I have a brother, but he doesn't appear in this story. [Author's Note]

*/ My mother and Marco, my father, met on the Black Sea on August 15, 1970, and married very young, in 1972, in Bucharest. In their wedding photos, my mother wears a short white dress she crocheted herself. [Author's Note]

**/ It's 1989. I'm six and a half, with brown hair in a bob and glasses with thick lenses. I'm wearing red overalls that are too high around the ankles and round-toe, patent

The nonna[†] comes into the house, takes her time resting the walking stick on a large piece of walnut furniture in the hallway, removes the fluffy, cream-colored hat, and mutters to herself. Then she lifts her chin to smile at her granddaughter. “And who is this beautiful little girl?”

The little girl runs to the grandmother and hugs her around the waist. After a few seconds she turns, enters the kitchen, steals a grissino, and returns to the dining room. There, her mother is still motionless. Her gaze is fixed on the television, but she has put down the tray.

From the screen arrive the mob’s first hisses. The dictator interrupts his speech, looks right, then left—doesn’t know where to look. A man with a floppy hat comes to him, whispers something in his ear.

“Who’s that?” the child asks the mother, pointing at the baffled man in the foreground.

The mother wavers. “This man, you mean?” She stalls for time.

Perhaps she doesn’t know, thinks the child. And nods, but incrementally. Ultimately, it doesn’t matter.

“The *Conducător*,” the mother answers eventually in her mysterious language.

The mob seems to answer the mother with cries of protest, flags lowered, whines.

“*Alo, alo*,”[‡] answers the man on screen. The woman at his side is very pale but tries to say something into the microphone. Then the mob swells like a high tide through the vast piazza.

“Do you know them?” the child asks.

“I knew them, yes,” answers the mother, straightforward and unstilted. She has long sleeves and a fake gold bracelet on her right

leather shoes. The temperature is unusually mild for the month of December and for the family fights that will ensue. [Author’s Note]

†/ Agata B. was born in Bologna in 1910 and died in the early ’90s. She taught me to tie my shoes and play canasta. She had a piano in her house but hid the keys to it. She kept binoculars in her living room cupboard but was myopic in the eyes of the world. She chatted on the phone with her friend Dolores from Domodossola but wasn’t able to bring her children around to the same way of thinking. The legal battle over her inheritance shattered the family. [Author’s Note]

‡/ He’ll repeat the phrase over twenty times throughout this conversation in an intimidating yet consternated tone. [Editor’s Note]

wrist. She lifts her wineglass[†] when she hears the hisses growing, then lowers her eyes and strokes the child's head.

"Seems like a revolution," she whispers to herself.

"With the planets and the Sun?" asks the child.

Meanwhile, on screen, the dictator sees the mob's hostility, realizes for the first time that he has lost his power, and apprehends the extent of the disaster. Who betrayed him? Nonna?

Christmas is ending, another year will have to pass before advent calendars, Christmas Eve, the Jesus figurine that moves from the chest of drawers to the manger in the *presepe*.

It's the evening of December 25th and nonna is back. She placed her hat in the hallway, passed her usual finger over the walnut furniture to check for dust, and muttered to herself. Now she sits at the round table and smiles as if at a fair. The walking stick rests against her seat. Every so often she touches it; it makes her feel safe.

The child is again dressed in party clothes, but without the expectation of gifts she can feel the red woolen tights irritating her thighs. The dress with a picture of a bear on the front[‡] scratches her neck, her wrists.

The table is set, but nobody is really hungry.

The father pours wine into his wife's and mother's glasses. In reply, his mother raises her soup bowl to toast.*

"Auguri," says the nonna.

"Put that down, mom," he whispers.

The child mimics the movement, laughing, but the father gives a stern look, as if at a dead end; she doesn't understand where she is, who among them is an adult.

When the news jingle arrives, the mother takes the remote and turns up the volume.

†/ The wine is a poor quality white. It's the same wine that killed my mother in May 2004. [Author's Note]

‡/ At the start of the evening, when the nonna saw the bear on the child's chest, she raised her walking stick as if it were a weapon and pretended to shoot. [Editor's Note]

*/ Here, my nonna is starting to show signs of her Alzheimer's. In her final years, she'd mix up her son with her dead husband, her nurse with her dead mother, her grandchildren with her (probably dead) first and second cousins. Despite these mix-ups, she had a marked preference for her daughter (Zia Bice), whom she tremendously resembled and likely took to be herself. [Author's Note]

The television is a place that multiplies places, thinks the child, where anything is possible. The mother can go back to speaking her language inside it.

The dictator is on screen again with his wife. He has a tie; she has a fur collar but dishevelled hair. They're sitting at a sort of desk, as if at school. There are soldiers asking questions, and he responds sulkily. She watches him and shakes her head, biting her tongue because she wants to speak.

"Is it an examination?" the child asks.

"It's a cross-examination," the father corrects her.

"Shh," interjects the mother.

The image changes, and the Italian commentator's voice returns: "The dictator has sung 'The Internationale'; his wife has cursed her executioners."

The nonna gazes around her—the furniture is not hers, the books[†] are not hers, the child is not her daughter. Or is she?

"Beatrice,[‡] sit up straight. Hands on the table," she says, slamming her palm beside the knife.

The child never knows what to say when the nonna doesn't recognize her.

But wait: dictator and wife have left the school, their wrists tied. A soldier blindfolds first him, then her. It's all very sudden. The camera zooms out.

The man has such a funny hat, and the lady with the fur collar looks so much like nonna! So gaunt and stiff. The child turns toward the nonna and smiles.

Then they hear the gunshots but can't see anything: in the next frame only smoke lingers on the screen.

†/ This room's books are either fake or in languages nobody in the family knows: *The Brothers Karamazov* in Cyrillic, an English-German dictionary, some poems in Spanish. But mostly there are cardboard books, bought by my parents from Porta Portese to fill their big corner bookshelf when they rented this third-floor apartment. From their wedding to 1988, they'd lived with my nonna in the house my father grew up in and I was born in. Of these years, I remember the black and white television in my nonna's room, her sewing machine, the biscuit cutters on the marble kitchen table, the adults' intense fights to establish *who decides what, in this house*. [Author's Note]

‡/ Zia Bice [see previous]: mincing and prickly; after retirement devoted herself to authoring children's books. My father claimed he lost her number, and none of us who survived plan on searching for it. [Author's Note]

“We salute the end of the dictatorship,” says the broadcaster’s voice.

The mother rises to her feet, evidently not knowing what to do, where to go. Why is she in this house, with these people? How distanced has she become from her life?†

“Have a seat, dear,” says the nonna, staring at her.

As soon as the dust settles, we can see the dictator and wife lying on the ground, far from one another. The frame shows the woman’s legs then zooms in on the dictator, on his face: they’ve removed the blindfold and his eyes are open, staring.

The mother is motionless, both hands covering her mouth, eyes wide.

“Don’t look,” says father to child, grabbing her wrist.

When the phone rings in the next room, the mother seems to reawaken: she blinks, lowers her hands, and runs away to answer.

“We’re at the dinner table, come back here right now!” the nonna shouts behind her, fidgeting in her seat.

The walking stick, which was (precariously) balanced on her armrest, falls to the ground, shooting a blank shot.

†/ How much did escape cost her? [Editor’s Note]

Soma Sema: An Interview with Mircea Cărtărescu

*On the day before Easter 2023, The Wild Detectives bookstore and bar in the arts district of Dallas, Texas, buzzed with anticipation for the arrival of a man with a messianic, cult-like following. With a prolific output of novels, poetry collections, critical essays, and published diaries since the 1980s, the Romanian writer Mircea Cărtărescu is a highly acclaimed and frequently translated literary celebrity in Europe and Latin America. His reception in the Anglosphere, however, has been muted and belated. Prior to 2022, the only Cărtărescu books available in English were his first novel, *Nostalgia* (New Directions, 2005), and the first part of his three-volume opus, *Orbitor* (published as *Blinding* by Archipelago Books in 2012).*

*But the arrival of *Solenoid into English*, via Dallas-based independent publisher Deep Vellum and translator Sean Cotter in November 2022, inaugurated a breakout year for Cărtărescu on the Anglophone literary scene. *Solenoid* drew glowing praise from reviewers in venues from the New York Times to n+1, sold out its first print run, and won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for fiction (not translation). Cărtărescu is carving out a strong position in the niche of literature in translation in American letters, where there is only so much oxygen to go around: the available data suggests that literature in translation constitutes approximately one to three percent of all books published in the US. Of those translated works, the most heavily represented languages are those of Western Europe. Cărtărescu is one of only six living Romanian writers to see their works translated into English in the last five years.*

*One of the foundational premises of *Solenoid* is that the narrator's life diverges from that of the real Cărtărescu when his alter ego's grandly ambitious epic poem is panned by Bucharest's premier literary workshop. Where the real Cărtărescu received a grave nod of approval from his literary elders, his fictional self descends into obscurity and commits*

himself to the pursuit of a true literature, where writer and audience are one and the same self. Writing a fantasy of being unread is a wryly comic move for one of Romania's most famous living writers, but through the momentum of Cărtărescu's exultant prose style of sentences-turned-sermons, postmodern parody mingles with and disappears into a kind of wishful thinking. Cărtărescu's imaginary self, his "strange monster," claws his way toward the faint possibility of renewed humanism in a fallen world. He conjures this figure with an unabashed seriousness, written with as much pathos as irony.

We sat down with Cărtărescu on the secluded patio of a small Dallas café a couple of hours before his first reading in the city. On first impression, he distinguishes himself easily from his literary alter ego in Solenoid, a lonely soul deranged by a visionary melancholy of cosmic proportions. Charming and consummately at ease in Texas-appropriate denim, he made small talk with us about the popularity of CBS drama Dallas in the Romania of his young adulthood, and the reputation of Chicago Review among Romanian writers of his generation ("a very good magazine," he murmured, nodding respectfully, "very good.") Later, after fielding dozens of audience questions about existential ennui in the Q&A following his reading, he put an end to the proceedings with a raised glass and an exhortation to "drink beer together and enjoy life."

And yet, when the topic is literature, his down-to-earth demeanor can't help but rise off the ground. His speech stretches with gravitational force toward soliloquy, punctuated by erudite allusions and fueled by an undercurrent of consuming passion. Since we have not yet finished learning Romanian, Cărtărescu graciously agreed to speak with us in English about translation, crossing the literary border of the Atlantic, and cosmic loneliness: topics which, for him, require minimal prompting.

§

EH & ANP: Let's talk about your experience being translated into many different languages. In the US, works like Solenoid come to a small, niche audience through a very difficult process and it's usually not profitable for the publisher. The English translation of Solenoid comes to us from Deep Vellum, an independent nonprofit doing great work in new and translated writing; and the English translation of Nostalgia was

published by New Directions, which is still a small company, although quite venerable; its capital dates back to the wayward son of a wealthy steel industrialist who was friends with Ezra Pound. Can you tell us about your experience getting published in Romania, and how you understand the relationship between what can be written and what is published?

MC: There are several problems here. The first is getting published. The other is getting translated, which is a very important thing for a writer who wants to embrace an international career. You have to have wonderful translators because a good translator gives you an advantage from the start. It can make you well known in an area.

A bad translator destroys you, totally crushes you. I've had experiences with good and bad translators, with the best and the worst. The worst translator that I had was a French lady who misunderstood almost everything from my first book translated in France in 1993. On each page, she had errors of understanding of the Romanian language and the Romanian realities of day-to-day life. The text became a surrealist text, although my original was a realistic one. So the people who read the book thought that I was a kind of Dadaist, because they couldn't get anything from what they were reading.

Of course, I have experience with fantastic translators, who are not only intelligent people but very erudite, who have, as Umberto Eco says, the same inner encyclopedia as the writer. In this respect, I very much appreciate Sean Cotter, who is not only one of my best friends but also a great person and a huge translator in my opinion. Translation is an art like every other art, although it is sometimes considered a sort of a Cinderella of the arts. But in my opinion, it's very hard to translate well. Some translators are themselves geniuses, and I think Sean Cotter is one of them.

For me, writing is very natural. Writing literature is like breathing air or drinking water. It's nothing special for me. I was supposed to write literature from the very beginning. I never thought that I could be useful in some other field. From my adolescence, I just started to write. I never stopped.

For example, I have a journal which this autumn will be fifty. I wrote in this journal for fifty years without missing a day. Without

missing a dream—I wrote down every dream I had during this half-century—without missing a book that I read, without missing a lover. This journal is so important for me—I could call it my second skin. And from this journal, like from the stem of a tree, the branches—which are the novels, the poems, and so on—are emerging. For me, writing is natural. It's the only way that I can imagine myself. Spreading my work in my country and around the world means working with a team of publishers, with the translators, with the public, with the people who love literature, who really love literature, and not any kind of literature, but good literature. Literature that is meaningful, that says something to the people who read it. Literature that is not only entertainment or a way of passing time.

Following up on your relationship with translators, publishers, and the public, you also mentioned your first novel, Nostalgia. Nostalgia was first published in censored form, and wasn't published as you originally intended for some years after. Given the kinds of social and political transformations you've experienced in your lifetime, how has your relationship with the public, translators, and publishers changed over time?

As I told you, I feel myself to be a sort of writing tool. Like a fountain pen or a pen, an ordinary pen. It's a feeling that it's not me who puts down the words and the phrases and the paragraphs, but that I'm only a portal, a medium. I never write with a previous plan, for example. And I never edit my writing. I wrote all my books, from the first letter to the last letter, in a single line, from a single breath. It's like what I want to say is already written on the paper, but it's covered with a white film. And what I do is erase it with a shaving blade and free the page from this film, and let the text be there. So I never felt that I'm doing something myself. What I feel is that I'm used by a bigger and smarter entity.

Nostalgia is my first book of stories. It consists of five stories, which are the very first fiction I wrote. I had never written any short stories before, or any text in prose. I started to write it from the first story to the last one and I published the book with the stories in the same order. I didn't change anything. And until this very day it is the

most well-known, the most published, and the most translated book that I ever wrote. And this makes me very happy because it's very unusual for a forty-year-old book to have the same success from the first edition to the last. This means it's in a way immortal, in a way out of time. I'm very proud of it and I'm very grateful that this book opened the way for my other books of fiction. Before *Nostalgia*, I published a lot of poetry. I think that you had some questions about it. Even now, I consider myself mainly a poet. Many of my books can actually be called poems. Even my big novels, they're not constructed like real novels, but are the product of a continuous act of inspiration, like a poem. For example, when I started—let's say *Solenoid*—I had nothing in my mind, absolutely nothing. I started to write it in a state of zen confusion. It was white noise, noise in my mind. And when I first wrote the first phrase of the book, I understood that it would be a long book, a total novel. It would be an existentialist novel, a mystical and agnostic novel. It came with the first phrase, and after that I knew what I had in my mind.

The lice?

Yes, yes. Many people believe that a writer is someone who has the whole novel in his mind before starting, and it's like opening your skull and taking out the first page, the second page, the third page, and so on, which is a fallacy. A sheer fallacy. I remember Wittgenstein said that a musician creates a quartet not by taking the notes one after another like a string of pearls from a cassette, but by inventing each and every note from the score, from the script. Inventing it on the spot in the very moment it was needed in the succession. It's very true. You don't have to have whole scenes, whole characters, whole stories in your head. Better to invent on the spot, because otherwise I would ask you, what would be your surprise? How could you be surprised by every little passage of your work?

When I write, I'm also a reader. Each writer is also a reader. The act of writing is also an act of reading what you do, and you are your first reader. So how can I write something without being bored as my own reader? By invention, continuing on every page. This is why I do not work with a plan, because when I had a previous plan, no, no. Surprise would be impossible.

Speaking of surprising works, I wanted to ask you about what we would translate in English as The Levant.

You know about that? [laughs] Yes.

Sadly, it's not in English yet, but hopefully someday someone will take on the task. But it strikes us that in some ways, Solenoid is about not getting published. The narrator has this great ambitious cosmic poem, that you say ranges from the "eschatological to the scatological," and it's called "The Fall." Of course, you've also written a great epic poem called The Levant, but yours was published and recognized as a great work. So, could you tell us about the writing and the reception of The Levant, and why there's this failed version of this poem in Solenoid?

You are from Chicago, isn't it? Have you heard of Henry Darger? He's one of my great heroes. Because he, in my mind, is the purest, purest artist of all of them, maybe excepting Kafka himself. So Darger has always been my hero. I have always wanted to be a writer like him, which is to say a completely isolated writer, writing only for himself, praising himself only for what he made, leading an absolutely insignificant life without any glory, reputation, prizes, reviews, and so on, but also without a family, without friends. This was my ideal when I was seventeen or eighteen, my dream was to write only for myself for my whole life. Only one book, only one text. And when I was forty, which at the time felt unimaginably old, I would die. I would let myself starve in my very small room with my head on a huge manuscript, and they would discover me like that. Like Darger's story. Yes, they would discover me like that, then they would have the revelation of the huge text that I wrote.

This was my ideal as a writer. And coming to *The Levant*—*The Levant* is a very special poem. It's a sort of epic poem, a sort of novel in verses written in 7,000 alexandrines, so it's one of the bigger poems I've written. And the main point with this poem is that each and every verse is a reference to some other verse or poem in the history of Romanian literature. It's a revisiting of Romanian poetry, like how Joyce in *Ulysses* revisited the history of the English language while writing that famous chapter, the "Oxen of the Sun," which takes place in a maternity ward.

I tried to do something similar, a very intertextual comedy of literature. And I think I succeeded in the Romanian original. Nowadays this book is a cult book. It's in textbooks for students. But the problem came when I wanted this book translated, because it's actually absolutely untranslatable. Because nobody abroad knows the history of Romanian poetry. So three quarters of the substance in this novel disappears, just vanishes away. You don't know that the first line of the poem is an allusion to some eighteenth-century Romanian poet who also quoted "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" by Byron. There are multiple levels of quotations, so how on earth could a translator do this? Not to mention that he or she would have to write it in verses. The verses have the rhymes and rhythm of classical alexandrines.

Nobody could do this, and I was terribly sad to know that one of my very best books ever would never be translated. And then I had a crazy idea. It was absolutely crazy. I understood that before giving the poem to my translators, I should translate it myself into Romanian again, because it was written in nineteenth-century language. So I rewrote the whole poem, which is two hundred pages. I rewrote it in prose without those continuous allusions, letting it become a sort of a novel, but a strange novel, because it had the mentality and the language of the nineteenth century. It was something like *The Sot-Weed Factor* by John Barth, in a way the same kind of writing.

I rewrote *The Levant* completely in three months. I spent a summer with it, and then I gave it to my most important translators, fifteen in total. Four of them said it was worth trying. And so it happens that now I have this poem, this untranslatable poem, translated into four languages: Swedish, French, Spanish, and Italian.

Each of these four variants is totally different from the others, because each of the translators used their own traditions, their own history of poetry for recreating *The Levant*. For example, my Swedish translator used the sagas of Iceland and Sweden. For the Italian translation, Bruno Mazzoni, a wonderful person, used old Italian poetry, beginning with Ugo Foscolo. So I'm really terribly happy that *The Levant* can be read in four important languages.

Well, we hope someone out there can pay Sean Cotter to give us an English Levant.

That would be wonderful. Please. From Chaucer to Ginsberg.

You just mentioned John Barth, the American postmodernist. Let's reverse the question of how you get your work translated. Who are the Anglophone writers who are being evaluated and discussed, and who in particular is coming into Romanian literature through translation?

Well, we have a tradition of translating almost everything—not only from the big languages but also from the lateral cultures, you might say, or marginal cultures. And this tradition never stopped, not even in the Communist period. Through the forty-one years of dictatorship, they still did translations. They still translated almost everything. Every novel that was hyped and famous, that became famous in the West, with some exceptions. For example, the poets of the Beat generation were never translated at that time because they were perceived as too aggressive, not fit for the regime's views. But at that time we had many writers from the States and from Europe all translated almost on the spot. And the writers who were not translated were still available to us, because everyone who got a copy of a novel copied it on a Xerox or another copy machine. And it would spread to everyone in a sort of *samizdat* edition. I read Ginsberg's *Kaddish* and *Howl* in the '80s in Romania, and my whole generation was a sort of local Beat Generation. We had a very rich underground life, reading our texts in literary circles and inviting our friends to our places and reading poems. Not only our own, but Ferlinghetti's, for example, or Gary Snyder's and Frank O'Hara's. We really loved the American poetry. My generation was actually called the generation in blue jeans. We were very, very close to those anti-system, underground movements in the States in the '50s and the '60s. We actually called ourselves Beatniks. We *were* Beatniks. By that time we were connected to rock music, and we took ideology from the States—flower power movements, and so on. This was an important stage in my development. I had wonderful friends and great poets. I'm very proud of my generation, which is now a very important point of discussion in every talk about literature in the younger generations.

You mentioned American counterculture from the sixties. You've personally translated a book of Bob Dylan poems into Romanian, right?

I met Bob Dylan in 1990 in Iowa City. I had that grant from the International Writers Program in Iowa City, and he happened to come to the city for a concert. I went, of course; I still keep the ticket. And I was so happy to see him. It's like seeing God or Saint Paul [*laughs*]. And at the end I was one of the people who went to the stage to touch his hand. And for a tenth of a second, I felt his hand in my hand. My friends said you can't take the talent by touching someone's hand. But they were very envious about it. And then I had the opportunity to translate his lyrics for my publishing house, and I did it with great pleasure. I'm one of the people who say that he deserved the Nobel Prize in Literature. I translated exactly one hundred lyric texts by Dylan, and I wrote the preface to *Tarantula*, his novel. And in that preface, two years before he won the Nobel Prize, I said, he will win. He will win the Nobel Prize. It was a prophecy that got fulfilled. I just love him, I love his work. I think he's the greatest of them all. And everyone after him owes him a lot, in my opinion. But a great poet, a great writer, a great mind.

Couldn't agree more. Hopefully you placed a bet on the Nobel win.

No, I didn't. I have enough money for it [*laughs*].

Well, you've been very generous with your time. We have one more Solenoid question to cap it off. Solenoid is about, among other things, escape. To the world overlaying this one, to what Kafka might call the world of the spirit. How did you arrive at this idea? What were your early encounters with this idea of literature as escape?

Well, it's a paradox because although I wrote about the need to escape the material world, I'm not an escapist writer. I love being in this world, with the people I love. I love my life. I love the diversity of people and of literature. I enjoy life. But my character is not like that. My character is a strange monster, a strange Kafka-like character who imagines himself as a sort of a prisoner in this realm, in the realm of the material world. And his dream, as you said, is not only to escape, but to escape by returning to his primordial realm, the realm of our common fatherland, which is the reality of the fourth dimension that

all the mystics and all the prophets dreamed of, for as long as the known history of religion, of culture, of literature. So the perspective of *Solenoid* is a gnostic one. The Gnostics had this saying: *soma sema*, the body is a prison.

In their consideration, we do not belong here in this life. We belong to another realm, to a *real* reality, embodied by the supreme God. But we are here because another God, Jehovah of the Bible, a bad God, put us here just to punish us, to punish everyone, to punish the world.

So the world is a world of crime, a world of ugliness. So this dream to escape into a world of the pure spirit is what animates my main character. He wants to be saved. He wants redemption from this dirty world. But something very strange happens in the middle of the novel. My character changes. And what changed him is that moral dilemma, that parable at the core of my novel, which is the House on Fire. There's a house on fire and there is a little baby in it, and a great masterpiece. A Vermeer, for example. What would you choose if you only could save one thing? My character chooses the baby, to his great surprise. He never imagined that he would make this choice. It's very simple, but for him, a monster who only praised culture, literature, and so on, the other choice was natural. He's extremely surprised to see that he's actually a humanist, that he loves humanity. It is the first time in his life that he feels close to humanity, that he has solidarity with all the people around him. And even if his lover is a devil's advocate and says, well, but if the child grows up and becomes a serial murderer, what would you do? Or what would you do if you knew that the child would become Adolf Hitler? And he chooses the child, no matter what his future could be. After that, the narrator discovers love; he discovers solidarity. He discovers being with people, and this makes him refuse redemption when it is offered to him. He refuses to save himself, only himself. He gives up egoism and he chooses, as in the famous parable of Camus, *Solitaire et Solidaire*, human solidarity. My novel ends as I always wanted it to, as a hymn for humanity, a hymn for love, and for freedom. From this point of view, it's the most optimistic novel that I have written so far.

“Like the Voluntary Disappearance of Space Between Me and You”: Jennifer Soong’s Interior Music

Jennifer Soong, a poet, may also usefully be thought of as a musician, composer, and test audience—a one-person “focus group for / disappearing things,” as she puts it in her recent full-length collection *Suede Mantis / Soft Rage* (2022).¹ She makes economical, swift melodies from introspection’s hesitations, reversals, and leaps, amid the fear that “What I say / will be used against me” (26). Revisiting traditional lyric ground, Soong raises unexpected renovations, fashioning taut—sometimes claustrophobic—poems of the secret self. From where this music derives is a mystery. There are few biographical, historical, or other familiar signposts, yet the work effectively leads one into privacies that hit as specific, tight, and well considered. Soong offers unsettling, enterable fictions of interiority; her poems, even when they deploy the second person, often resolve into self-address.

The “you” in Soong’s poetry frequently winds up being the speaker, one who resonates, quarrels, and bargains with herself:

The well which deepens
shall be your grave.
I shall deepen the well.
I shall be my grave.
Then do it when no one asks.

(26)

As Soong sings at grave making, her modes of address advance and retreat, twist and turn. The stanza’s opening two lines at first appear to notify or warn a separate other (they indicate “your” grave). Yet such an assumption is complicated, even reversed, in the lines that follow. To “deepen the well,” the poet moves gradually, vertically downward into a burial pit of her own making, one ultimately synonymous with herself: “I shall be my grave.”

Digging her own plot, Soong gets down to classical elements: earth and water. A well makes for an unusual burial place—the water table sustains life as much as it threatens decomposition and contact with the source always risks its adulteration. Deepening the well, then, becomes an act of collaboration with life and death on a journey to the interior. To progress, the poet must win moments of solitary refusal necessary to imagination. “No one asks” for the speaker’s work, but she feels compelled to make it “when no one asks” for—or puts demands on—her time.

Suede Mantis certainly contains poems aimed at others beyond the page: “I watched the stars slip out, / your hand, in mine,” for example, or “Stay with me, or else” (85, 89). Such calls are shot through with a wry grasp of singularity among the numerous: “Nothing belongs to us much. / You don’t get to keep your body after you die. / You don’t get to take your poems into heaven” (85). All lyric, traditionally understood, represents a solitary singer that declaims singular affective melodies among the numerous. In some ways, Soong’s work is no exception. From poem to poem, readers will imagine, perhaps inevitably, a mutable lyric speaker with their suggested dramatic situation and implicit addressee. Yet *Suede Mantis* charts privacies markedly extreme even for the lyric—inner chambers within the genre’s customary chamber music. In doing so, the poems resonate with the joys and infelicities of a close writing that springs from a close listening to the self: “I hear it now as one hears oneself. / For a minute, I think I know / What stays and is gone, what exists.”² As she declares: “I’m free to talk to myself / as anyone” (99). And talk to herself she does.

In *Suede Mantis*, Soong’s lyrics emanate from what she has proclaimed a “PRIVATE SPACE” and modulate inward voicings to attract imperfect understanding.³ As she puts it in “Untitled (for America)”: “To enhance sensory congruence the dither / begins *in a soft voice*.”⁴ With rapid and at times confounding detours, Soong repays the patience of readers who can “stare with...noise-cancelling eyes.”⁵

Such heightened receptivity—the laser-like readerly focus brought on by some of these poems—is delivered via decades-old methods of notation that have been digitally reinvented. By the 1950s, Black Mountain poet Charles Olson had heralded the typewriter as a

revolutionary instrument that unleashed immediate transmissions of melody and suspiration. Olson enthused:

For the first time the poet has the stave and the bar a musician has had. For the first time he can, without the convention of rime and meter, record the listening he has done to his own speech and by that one act indicate how he would want any reader, silently or otherwise, to voice his work.⁶

Olson's close colleague Robert Creeley—probably a greater influence on Soong—also saw the typed poem as a “score” and went further in emphasizing the page's blank space as physical material, significant as ink, “in the sense that [words'] spatial positions there will allow a reader to *read* them with his own *voice*, to that end the poet is after.”⁷

The smartphone and laptop allow for transcriptions of greater fidelity to shifts of intention: poets adjust, move, delete, and rearrange their words long before their poems touch paper (if, in fact, they ever do). Soong's improvisations give the impression of having been arrived at quickly—midhesitation, midrealization, midrevision. Long before the advent of the personal computer, poets at the keyboard could be adept as jazz soloists as they punched out quick transcription and spacing. As is common among today's lyricists, Soong can also ply Microsoft Word's ruler, clipboard, and all-powerful delete key while keeping open a Google search window for rapid retrieval and deployment of allusions, quotations, anecdotes, and facts. However, her rapid, subtle play using such compositional technologies—and this sets her apart from some contemporaries—is anything but heavy-handed. What one might call her lyrics' digital staves recede into the background.

A poem in *Suede Mantis* begins:

So much alone
time thinks yet
cannot say
 it thought
 the sky
 the sky
not even as it

continues to fall
like a minor act of violence

(87)

Line breaks and tabbed space form an invisible lattice, informing a number of possible interpretations. If the break between the first and second lines registers a pause for breath, one ends up with “time” as a personified abstraction: “So much alone[,] time thinks[.]” Conversely, if one reads these lines as enjambed, it is “alone time” that, it would appear, “thinks.” Such riddling, along with the poem’s soft but persistent half rhymes (“say...sky...sky,” “yet...thought...it”), animates its puzzling of doom-think. This Cassandra may be right after all, but no one in isolation can think the firmament. The sky is falling, yes; thought falls, the heavens descend and menace; these stubby lines themselves drop down the page. Yet the resultant “violence” may be regarded as “a minor act” relative to the universe on the one hand or the individual on the other.

Soong has claimed that her work emerges from and precipitates an “inside voice.” In an interview with Ariel Yelen, she explains: “I think of an inside voice as extremely private, in the sense that private can mean withdrawn. It needs to be enticed out while being protected, maybe even earn your trust. It’s something intimate.”⁸ This inner voice, for Soong, is something “sacred” that speaks to one “other” at a time, an addressee that, as she puts it, could be “yourself, or the person you want to be, or the person you are tomorrow, or a dead person.”⁹ Of the four examples Soong provides here, note that three are aspects of the poet herself (in the second person) while the remaining auditor posited is deceased.

Soong, in fact, frequently gestures toward the departed. Her work abounds with elegiac turns. Threnodial moments in *Suede Mantis*, among many, include: “The point is underground” (24); “there is no shadow in the night / only dust” (20); “The names which bent in our throats / were as sweet / as they are stone” (11); and “You desire / to produce warmth with the dead” (86). Soong grasps keenly that poetry is built, in large part, from the language of the dead—that of literary predecessors as well as other lost speakers. From within her privacies, Soong reaches up to breach the boundary Peter Gizzi describes as “the

ultimate line that poetry has continually crossed...between the living and the dead, or the visible and invisible worlds.”¹⁰ These poems are haunted by such crossings, even when they riff on vibrantly present sensation.

In her attention to what Frank O’Hara calls “the minute particulars where decision is necessary,” Soong demonstrates an affinity for and debt to New York School poets, especially O’Hara, Barbara Guest, and John Ashbery, along with second-generation practitioners such as Alice Notley and Ted Berrigan.¹¹ With them, she shares an at times breezy manner that can belie keen attention to sound and sense at the level of the syllable. In many ways, Soong’s construction of lyric interiority follows from these poets’ theories of writerly and readerly ties.

Alice Notley, for one, posits a “secret self,” a construct that resonates quite strongly with Soong’s “inside voice.” In her essay “O’Hara in the Nineties,” Notley claims that Frank O’Hara “got right into...the part of my head that has a silent tongue, and his waggled like mine.”¹² Notley continues:

One, and I seem to believe anyone, has a secret self, a rather delicately pondering inner person. Much of poetry exists to communicate with this entity. Its thoughts have the shape of speaking, but it doesn’t have to explain as much to itself as one does to another person.¹³

Even when they employ gestures and grammar of open address—what Notley calls “the shape of speaking”—poems of the “secret self” also wire a substratum circuit between author and receiver, a solder of “utter vulnerability” that, as Notley proposes, “melts in and out” and “doesn’t have to explain as much.”¹⁴ Likewise, Soong’s poems in *Suede Mantis* (though, contra O’Hara, they do little to constitute their speaker as a historical individual) seek to speak directly into intimate or occluded inner spaces—attempting an end run around a reader’s reflexive refusal or indifference.

Soong’s use of second-person self-address is one of her most effective techniques for breaching such firewalls. Her speaker can waggle her tongue in one’s head. Or, as Soong puts it, wielding her own corporeal metaphor:

There's a mouthful of eyes
I say, in your head. That's how your sight

begins to turn on you

(85)

Soong achieves these proximal connections—pleasing or gothic by turns—by crystallizing fictions of rumination and sensation in bursts of compacted, plainspoken phrasing.

It would be wrong, though, to consider this work solipsistic. Soong publishes her poetry, performs it in public, and serves as its ambassador in the world. Despite their privacy and their quiet vehemence, these poems are made to coax readers along. Soong persists in “moving the meaning again and again” (87). Readers who “watch my mouth do weird things” (99) and imagine their way into the poems’ strict confines may “have to rummage / to find anything” (30). But such efforts of reception might hasten much wished for outcomes: “The motor, labor, the politics-poetics / we seek” (24).

The title of Soong’s first book, *Near, At* (2019), suggests a process whereby writerly/readerly proximity may over time become a shared locus—the comma standing in for the period elapsed. “Like the Voluntary Disappearance of Space Between Me and You,” with other poems in the collection, elaborates on this theme:

as I came down to play
by a very nature
concentric moods

and heard amidst it all
indecision
.....
how many sides
to it as it
deliberates
over time
this is how a path
begins to
and departs
all along
from¹⁵

To “play” her “moods,” Soong settles herself in compositional space-time as if sitting down to (“I came down to”) a musical instrument. Her moods are “concentric,” suggesting a widening of affective circles, like fixed-range rings on a radar screen. Registering lyrical charges from “many sides” and considering them “over time,” she arrives at a poetic in miniature: a poem could be a “path” that author and reader (“Me and You”) walk “all along” together, companions for the asynchronous time it takes to be written and received. This is a messy process, rife with “indecision,” that calls forth complementary acts of will and “voluntary” work.

Making lyric spaces, for Soong, means thinking forward into a ludic composition but also embracing a forgetting that time and again wipes the slate clean. In an essay, “The ‘To-Do’ List Poem: Prospective Memory and a New York School Genre,” she defines prospective memory as the ability to “remember to remember,” an “outlook [that] not only presumes a future but also entails an implicit imperative or promise to oneself.”¹⁶ Lyric imagination, focused on the creation and rehearsal of song, lives in a space of semipermanence between solid things and insubstantial memories. Soong welcomes “a kind of forgetting that is essential to the poem,” a take on poetry as “a site of possibility rather than actualization, wishful thinking rather than resolution, changing one’s mind rather than seeing things through.”¹⁷

In many ways, Soong’s notion of poetic forgetting echoes J. H. Prynne’s endorsement of “forgetfulness” in “Lashed to the Mast,” a poem collected in *The White Stones* (1969):

love the
forgetfulness of man which
is our prime notion of praise
the whole need is a due thing
a light, I say this in
danger aboard our dauncing boat
hope is a stern purpose &
no play save the final lightness¹⁸

For Prynne, “forgetfulness” both immediate and ultimate is not only an unavoidable crisis but also a precondition for love and hope in a community confronted with immanent catastrophe. Aboard

lyric poetry's "dauncing boat," forgetting is not a liability but a precondition for "praise," "hope," and "play." Unremembering is a method of portaging forward and restoring the imagination via renewed mindfulness.

Unlike Prynne, Soong is not interested in building monuments of verse. In the "Dear Reader" epistle at the outset of *Suede Mantis*, she declares, "Everything I've previously written I renounce" (7). In fact, Soong has been known to request journal editors take down her poems from their websites. Declining to flirt with posterity, or at least purporting to do so, she invents fleeting occasions for readerly intimacy that are forgettable in a generative sense. As such, her speakers are often in haste to get on to the next thing: "I want again / to begin in the way I discovered it" (31). Yet Soong does share with Prynne a judicious enthusiasm that reflects "a stern purpose," after all. She demands not to be memorized or recited but to be taken up with present wit and improvisation.

Soong's partnership with the reader is not always harmonious. It can also be skeptical and barbed. The first poem in *Suede Mantis* puzzles an unwieldy relationship that feels unevenly divided. The poet seeks cooperation but also holds the baton. A pastoral is painted "as May thickens / with green strengthened against the sun [...] Everything in the day / falls like sleep, continuing to give off / the heat it takes" (9). Within this lush and relatively tranquil space (possibly a refraction of suburban New Jersey, where Soong was born and lived for many years), speaker and addressee copy ("we reproduce") and toil to grow ("tend to") a shared representation ("our demonstration"). Yet their creative work is interrupted by false starts and revisions:

It leaks the heat of our demonstration
and is expensive
 this expertise we waste
(or is it better this way, no that—)

If you could tell the difficulty apart
I would love you no less, for
what I would expect of you
 is time

and precipitates what we are: not one but half

of what we were
 as the green grows fat
and good, hiding the birds

(9)

The speaker's inner monologue, and her pleas to the reader along the way, spring from a half-despairing wish that a romance of indecision and misinterpretation will be hastily resolved ("If you could tell the difficulty apart"). This sets in motion an insistence that love's survival demands sustained effort ("what I would expect of you / is time") and in turn extrudes ("precipitates") a future halving of these lovers, who become both less and more than what they were. Soong offers a contract of sorts ("our best bet") to bind the pair as they drift, without ardor, through splintered space:

This I think is our best bet
A love without passion
or memory of once with
Everywhere
 as the seen pieces glisten

(9)

Hopes for loving communion, however imperfect, are tested (if not fully abandoned) in fiercer poems such as "Let me know my friends," which witnesses the speaker, for a despondent moment, "finding out / free love / was never free / endless love / just a loop // You'll have to rummage / to find anything" (30). Elsewhere, Soong adopts testier tones, voicing frustration that "Your sole obsession is your inner life. / You are desperate to function / in it" (86).

At times, Soong sounds a rage that is hard rather than soft. Consider a poem that launches with an ominous ultimatum ("Stay with me, or else"). Here, the speaker seethes with jealousy, aggression, suspicion. Far from championing human solidarity, per Prynne, she decries the limitations of fleeting bonds. Here is the sonnet in full:

 Stay with me, or else
 these words were clipped for nothing.
 The stars fuck and align
for nothing, not even misery, our mutual-feeling.

To not be here, yet feel entangled
 in cold reflections I've been seeing,
 a tree moving in its own way. What
 would be the point of that, reader,
 save to cut you with the blunt end
 of my face reproduced in the knife?
 We are close in fake spirit.
 I can feel it upon my organs.
 I need a reason but first
 the street is getting away from us. Please do not,
 I mean, best not to be. I assure you more and succulence
 not in one but two fell swoops.

(89)

The poet is a collagist, a textual compositor who cuts and pastes language (“these words were clipped”) while worrying such effort is “for nothing”—after all, “the street is getting away from us.” A disquieting partial rupture (“To not be here, yet feel entangled”) provokes a fatal ultimatum: “Please do not, / I mean, best not to be.” In this case, the poet offers not a fraught bower but a fighting ring.

While Soong’s poems often strike such minor key notes, these darker energies are sometimes rehabilitated. In the sonnet beginning “Birds will sing on the day she dies,” the speaker anticipates that, upon the loved one’s passing, “The useful poems will suddenly be useless, and the hopeless / poems will have a say.” Later in the poem, a different realization arrives:

I happen without me, and an unavoidable mass
 seems like it will never disappear. I admire
 the small ruin painted in my heart. There is no moral,
 yet naturally we want to do it again, this time knowing
 life is imprecision made exact:
 September in fall as if it were spring.

(92)

The installation of a twee sublime (“the small ruin painted in my heart”)—and some clear-eyed reflection on poetry’s dubious claims to ethics—enables a fraught equipoise despite life’s “imprecision.”

Such disquieting ambivalence plays through *Suede Mantis*, as in this poignant stanza from the long sequence “searching up an earache,” which occupies the center of the book:

old shirt
stab your love for him
 make it die
an old shirt, like a puddle on the floor

(65)

Monosyllabic line endings build a cadence of stubborn insistence, rendering emphatic the speaker’s self-command to snuff out her affections. Further on, a sober appraisal of external hazard brings again the realization that natural forces (much as with the “well which deepens”) both sustain and threaten the speaker’s wayward existence:

The object of my life faces the objection of my world
.
Whole reams of sand spilling and tumbling in the ocean
.
While keeping me adrift

(25)

§

Jennifer Soong composes introverted lyrics grounded in posited writerly/readerly partnerships. She invites readers to take up her book and lend voices, ears, and wills to high fidelity play that vanishes as if into a haze and reemerges by way of new improvisations. Some of her lines are in fact quite memorable—not a bad thing—yet she would erase and reinscribe, time and again, a poetry poised for a suspenseful moment between presence and oblivion. She sets forth the challenge in this way:

What we tried we couldn’t remember
and what we did
took hold and would not change.

(24)

This work issues from a zone of privacy yet casts off sometimes dismaying, sometimes edifying sparks. Soong defends and trespasses borders of selfhood while remaining attentive to voices closest to the heart. She addresses herself, the dead, and the rest of us as potential receivers largely unknown, perhaps unknowable, but nevertheless out there. Out here.

Soong signals as much in her chapbook, *Contempt* (2021), written after but published before *Suede Mantis*. There, she calls out, as if by long-distance FaceTime:

I don't miss much,
not of my former life or how I used to
in my writing sound. I've used up
those breaths and you may use them
to come and find me
gone¹⁹

Soong's poetry, attentive to ironies inherent in the directly voiced lyric, invites readers to discover new pleasures and perils well worth remembering, for now.

NOTES

- 1/ Jennifer Soong, *Suede Mantis / Soft Rage* (Brooklyn and Arkville: Black Sun Lit, 2022), 54. Hereafter, citations of *Suede Mantis* will be given as parenthetical page numbers.
- 2/ Jennifer Soong, *Near, At* (New York: Futurepoem, 2019), 25.
- 3/ Soong, *Near, At*, back cover.
- 4/ Soong, *Near, At*, 85, emphasis in original.
- 5/ Soong, *Near, At*, 75.
- 6/ Charles Olson, "Projective Verse," Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69406/projective-verse>.
- 7/ Robert Creeley, *A Quick Graph: Collected Notes & Essays*, ed. Donald Allen (San Francisco: Four Seasons Foundation, 1970), 27.
- 8/ Jennifer Soong and Ariel Yelen, "Interview: Inside Voices, Fast Poems, and Forgetting," *Futurefeed*, 2019, <https://future-feed.net/a-conversation-forgetting-in-poetry>.
- 9/ Soong and Yelen, "Interview."
- 10/ Levi Rubeck, "Q&A with Peter Gizzi," *BOMB*, November 23, 2011, <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/q-a-with-peter-gizzi/>.
- 11/ Frank O'Hara, "Personism," *Poetics of the New American Poetry*, eds. Donald Allen and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973), 354.
- 12/ Alice Notley, *Coming After: Essays on Poetry* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 5.
- 13/ Notley, *Coming After*, 6.
- 14/ Notley, *Coming After*, 6.
- 15/ Soong, *Near, At*, 53–54.
- 16/ Jennifer Soong, "The 'To-Do' List Poem: Prospective Memory and a New York School Genre," *Journal of Modern Literature* 43, no. 4 (2020): 92.
- 17/ Soong, "The 'To-Do' List Poem," 93.
- 18/ J. H. Prynne, *The White Stones* (New York: New York Review Books, 2016), 16.
- 19/ Jennifer Soong, *Contempt* (London and Glasgow: SPAM Press, 2021), 13.

MALCOLM DE CHAZAL
Translated by Sara Nicholson

from *Magical Science*

Malcolm de Chazal (1902–1981) was a writer and painter from Mauritius. He is best known in English as the author of Sens-plastique, a vast collection of poetic observations and aphorisms he himself called a “cosmogony of the Invisible.” He also wrote poems, essays, pensées, parables, a novel, and many other uncategorizable texts, among them La vie filtrée, a 400-page philosophical companion piece to Sens-plastique in which he attempts “to abolish the exterior world and refashion it” into “an X-ray telescope of the human in order to see God.” This selection is taken from Magical Science. †

SPACE

It's not the same time in New York and Tokyo.
It's not the same time in Paris and Chandernagore.
It's not the same time in Moscow and Buenos Aires.
And yet!...
Shadow under a tree at noon (shadow being a “little night”), the sun at its zenith identifies with the “big night” of the antipodes, midnight at its nadir.
For there is only *one* night, a seamless gown.
Noon and midnight reconciled, both occur in *instantaneous time*.
What is instantaneous time?
It's space, a seamless gown.

THE INVISIBLE

If you saw light, it's all you'd see. And it would be a wall before our eyes, as opaque as absolute night.

†/ Malcolm de Chazal, *Sens magique* (Paris: Editions Léo Scheer, 2004).

And no images would come to you.
Light is visible-invisible.
The invisible is night in broad daylight, a colorless body allowing
images to be brought to you by the light.
That body is space.
Daylight is thus a *white night*.
Night exists everywhere: shadowy, invisible, colorless.

ABSOLUTE NIGHT

It's never completely dark since, in that case, only space itself would
exist. And inside the Earth is a body of fire.
And stars cross the heavens at night.
Absolute night is unthinkable.

THE MOON

The sun's "milk" is white.
The sun that pours out its "milk" is moonlight, to which night yields
a transparency.
Night in broad daylight is in white night. In moonlight, the night
falls asleep.

THE BLACK

Black is the body emptied of "milk."
Black drinks the light.

THE MIRROR

Is opacity and transparency colliding.

THE ANTIPODES

Night has neither top nor bottom, left nor right, back nor front.
Man at both poles stands neither head up nor head down but is upright
in space. Space is always standing up, whichever way we turn it. Since
everything rests on upright space.

LIGHT SLIPS

Space lurches in a two-color dress.

DENTURES

The toothless rooster goes to the corncob in order to wear solar
dentures.

THE BREADTH

Space pulses, it breathes, systole and diastole perform their contrary
movements, and the blood they pump is right beside me as I advance,
in perspective, from pole to pole.

I stop, everything stops.

I move, everything moves.

That's how perspective "plays."

Recall the shadow that pulses and breathes in two directions, with
the cycle of the day.

And think of the tidal ebb and flow of the seasons, the tide of the seas,
the tide of sap, the tide of wheat.

Like shadows, space moves with you and yet is motionless.

Motionless movement gives us a sense of *place*, of living order.

ÉLAN

The lily trampled its shadow to meet the light.

UNCONSCIOUSNESS

Pleasure was afraid.
The man thought so.

COLORLESS

It was never as dark as in transparency.

THE FALSE PAINTER

The painter cooked his colors, then ate them.
He had to eat them first.

THE SKY

Our total verb.

SOCIETY

Everything we want, save people.

THE HEAD

A seated body.

THE BODY

A standing face.

THE COMET

A failed sun. Neither ash nor smoke.

DECLINE IN BOTH DIRECTIONS

Man fell into animal, animal into vegetable, vegetable to mineral. Evolution is a decompression. Evolution having ceased, man then went beyond himself, put something of the horse in the car, the cow in the locomotive, the eagle in the airplane, the shark in the submarine, and built a mechanical double in his own image, the robot man to come, *overtaking Evolution*.

JOSEPH MINDEN

from ANSWERLANDS

w/c Sep 19 2022

Midday sun falls into the church
where green and orange rearrange
and orange. A child's head floats
in a pew. Cups of tea arrive
and take their leave. Smiles,
the face of the village.
Without, or

walking up the lane
is muffin (wrapped
in a flag) apple
(the nature
of harvest) and
(pretty camouflaged)
huge rules.

w/c 10 Oct 2022

From two
eyeballs (both
mine) being
squashed until
they pop, I
make out her father's
arrest, the anniversary
of his dad's suicide,
crisp packets
blown into grovelling.

Cheese squares
face-plant from
their bread clamp;
real hunger is
everywhere just pairs
of eyes looking
out from impulse
tanks, no
improper, too-early
decorum.

w/c 23 Jan 2023

Pelagian latitude:
that we are able to see with our eyes
is no power of ours. Sparse
blares. It all begins
with the central yellow
of the lemon: a modest,
even retiring,
focal point, set before
a fluted glass jar,
tablecloth white,
clock blue. He's
suddenly direct
in the disclosure of serious
things. A muscular conch
introduces pinks,
faint oranges,
a deep, suggestive red.
The tablecloth glows,
a panic-stricken face
displayed through a second
face, with a
removed pink and
noncommittal orange.
The coffee cup beside
the conch, divided
from the lemon
by a strip of midnight blue,
is immaterial, assembled
merely out of nearby

colors, running to
dupe the lookers;
he glances at me
furtively. The other
strangely fugitive
aspect of the composition
is the featureless darkness
to the far right. The Met
called last night;
his brother is again in
prison. Only
the yellow in the centre is
purely and vividly
uninterested in disguise,
almost surreal and
supernatural
in his simplicity
and presence.

w/c 6 Feb 2023

the feeling of mess
as words come through the faces
wild, dumb to the ear
the inward rooting of together
refusing and refusing and
the earring
purple diamanté dinosaur
squeals, jerks
a blade winking
from under a cushion
do — and when do
the eyes all look together
the difficult ones going
or on their way out

w/c 20 March 2023

About audiences,
the circle gathered round.
The thing is, those boys
that ran past, they also —
even with exceptional husbandry,
high rates of mastitis and also
mange. Strands,
audible. Prefers to draw on
skin rather than
paper. Floating back
to the surface of the day's
abstraction. Still,
the tilting of the football
field. Also, just
grass. The year never vanishes,
only seems to have gone
quicker than it took, also floating —
back to the surface
of the year's abstraction.
Capture the flag on the run
of paths through the trees,
voices as pondweed.
I sat alone
in the clearing.
Everything was also there.

w/c 15 May 2023

everything buttercups
and white-stippled green
lows like running laughter
flying forward, backward but
from waving lines a hot balloon
rage-battered Greg
of white leaf flow through
barbs and spits out
bullets of his wounded hull
rejection is a drift
that reaches uselessly and losing them in gas
its chimney-tips
today you will see me
hurt to be seen

RYAN NOWLIN

FORTUNE AND SOLITUDE

1

Foregrounding Simon Dinnerstein's *Fulbright Triptych*
is a pegboard into which everything fits, including
shrewdly borrowed quotes from Wittgenstein

and Melville, which strike me as real, though the assertion
of a comma is as fictional as a quotation mark.
In the seventies they had once lived in Kassel,

Germany, a gift; the seventies, a death, hours
ago conveyance of the Mays, the only couple in their social
circle in Berkeley, CA. (Berkeley at that time was a loose

federation of buildings spread out along a hill)
The parents depicted in the painting are concealed
in plain sight, oddly bleached and remote like glass eels.

In the center passage of exquisite trope l'œil,
the pocked and chipped floorboards of the studio,
for example in dark reds, and magpie browns

and on the work table, a locust gray pair of scissors.
Whenever Wittgenstein entered the room,
Paul couldn't play the piano as though

his brother's chilly skepticism had insinuated
itself under windows and whispered beneath
door frames. One could only hope to stop

the logic of wakeful pardon in Berlin—
the babel of the world—bars, zoos, amusement
parks, curiosity kiosks, proliferated like mushrooms.

Fortune and solitude—in the form of family
meetings in public parks. Feeling has departed
should have been written on Wittgenstein's tombstone.

2

In Picasso's Painting *La Vie*, there's a tender coldness
between lovers, reminiscent of Disco Balls
and the curious blaze of comets and like smaller apartments

in better neighborhoods, where I almost resisted
the impulse to suburbanize. Aesthetics *is*
an alien proposition, whether it be a still life

at the Prado such as Goya's *Dog Drowning*
or a cloud mirrored in a painting by John Constable
with a view of the silt brown channel

between England and Wales we don't know
what it means, but its pathos moves me
at a level below narrative. Where did we

get our license as creatures of taste?
At the Reina Sofía, Picasso's *Guernica*,
there is more agony in one horse's head

than in a whole series of crucified Christs.
Outside the museum a paper thin margin
is all that separates me from a lived horizon

and the perfect accord of severance.

3

As one breaks off a bunch of grapes,
the heavy burden of having to care
for one's mother in old age was lifted,

yet despite the sense of being freed
from narrative and place constraints,
peaks of relaxation alternated with troughs of grief

[I burrowed into my topic like a mole]
I had in mind a bibliography of bibliographies.
If Barthes posits that "Stéphane Mallarmé

is *the Hamlet of writing*" then Oscar Wilde is
a fruitful intermission between acts of the centuries.
Didn't Wilde gossip about Swinburne,

saying he was, "a braggart in matters of vice...
without being in the slightest degree a homosexual
or a bestializer" Later in life, Swinburne was

put up by his friend Theodore Watts-Dunton
in a place called The Pines, where you can
still find forgeries of Swinburne's papers by

T.J. Wise, whose craftsmanship had pulled the wool
over the eyes of connoisseurs for so long.

4

Ask me no more why the Godhead
is broken up like bread at the supper
and we are the pieces, so wrote Melville

to Hawthorne. How do flies die?
Virginia Woolf said she liked the word *breach*,
so a word that once existed faded by

the end of the week. I go along like a bird
staring into the dark of this soft June night,
if only to traipse through rain drenched trash.

Far above earth the Webb Telescope folded
as tight as a rosebud with a parasol brighter
than the halogen lights of the tennis academy

in space the glimmering snowflake clouds
of astronaut urine glowed like light through a whisky glass
and a dry ice truck accident on the BQE
heralds the beginning of an early winter.

5

My Mom's nostalgic about Saturday morning
cartoons, esp. the Cathy comic strip in which
there's a sense of muted tension, wordless

recrimination or reconciliation each minute
a decision to exert or abdicate the self,
a flurry of afterwork jitters like Cathy's aack!

I hover over cupboards adjacent to Variety pack.
Squads of cookies in their little trays, none of them
going this way or that way like the Battle of the Somme.

I hardly notice the quiet click of the dog's toes
on the hardwood floors or the scattering of
bachelor mags that have loosened their hold on my life.

On my lunch break at Western Union's
Complaint Dept., I decided to go uptown.
In the Museum of Natural History's well lit,

endless interior hallways, I saw a friend
(isn't her name Cathy too?) browsing through
old records in a bin, listening to F.D.R.'s

speech *Four Freedoms* as read by James Baldwin
like listening to a waltz. Was there some moral weight
to life after all? I suppose that Cathy will

reappear in some manifestation or another,
who knows? The tempo of August has been
so quiet, even monastic. I can feel the sun
and the wind and the dog's cold nose

6

The logarithmic spiral of simple deceit
around which skirt different subject headings,
"Tight Spots and How to Get Out of Them"

or "Personal Capital through Attrition"
or "how to gain the power to charm or use
one's mutant ability to transform one's finger into a pen."

Sometimes I will go out of my way to
make sure that each face and trivial circumstance
in the house hold are touched by lively curiosity.

Sometimes I used to go out of my way
to make sure my mother didn't suspect
that I had not taken my meds by filling

a glass of water and rinsing it in the sink.
Apart from this outworn comparison between
a solitary and an active life: So here I am

close to my 50th birthday and I am alone.
Wittgenstein did his best thinking when peeling
an orange or a potato usually all in one sitting.

The eyes of the state look down from an
altitude of 20,000 feet upon a cul-de-sac,
flashes of water, ditches that cut through

the reeds like streets between tall buildings.
The AR-15 draws a dark fetish death cult
for disturbed men like Adam Lanza,

whose own father called him a monster.
They say that Cathy's '50s are more illusionless,
aka the illusionless '50s. Perhaps by writing the

sentence one has only the choice of whether
to go on or come to a full stop, which is
signified by the "dot," that artificial border

between sentences. The grass has been mown
and the vines from Mom's rose bushes
have been pruned and gathered into a large
blue bucket upon which leans a garden rake.

7

How many of us desire to occupy
two spaces at once as in Wittgenstein's
example the Duck/Rabbit illusion,

either one sees a bunny during Easter
or a duck in October hunting season?
One can't unsee what the mind now perceives.

There's a pretty disturbing story that
circulates in my family of how my
German mother had to eat her pet rabbit.

My mother grew up in war-torn post-
WWII Germany in a town called Schweinfurt.
Her parents did not have a lot of money

and food was scarce, so her parents sat
her down and had a difficult conversation
about why they were going to eat her pet rabbit.

The evening arrived suddenly like a thunder clap.
In the woods, nature was untouched by human
society, isolated waterfalls, brooks, ponds.

There was the smell of sweetness of foliage,
gnats rising and falling in the breeze.
It was a passage way to a bygone time.

8

I called this condition an expedition
in the primeval wood of solitude.
Schweinfurt lies in a depression carved

from glaciers. Schweinfurt is a drab place.
It is the place where mother grew up during
the '40s, and '50s and early '60s.

It is much drabber than from descriptions
from mom: Plumes of steam from Nuclear power
plants, FAG Kugel/ball bearing plants

utilized during WWII and also still today,
US army base and barracks, small
businesses, goldsmiths and metal workers,

the graveyard where mother's parents
lie in unmarked graves. It is a landscape
which because of its ugliness or bleakness,

has character more so than a beautiful
landscape which has no character.
Is it so unusual not to feel like going home

to your mother's birthday? After all how
little you really know about her.
Granted, the first lesson one learns

is how to be alone, but we learn so much
more when asleep with everyone watching
over us and in dreams in which all is well.

9

As a child I conceived of the city
as something behind the border,
somewhere abroad in the country they call life.

Summer surprised me, coming over
the Fushelsee with a shower of rain,
then my family and I stopped in the colonnade

and went on in sunlight into the Hofgarten
to drink coffee and talk for an hour, often
hovering over a few U-Bahn maps of the city

like the figure of Narcissus projecting
himself into a sphere of influence.
A desire for self-reflection led me to smoke

a cigarette in the garage which smelled
like failure. Every time someone in my family

drove on the Autobahn toward Frankfurt,
I'd always imagine crossing this border to a city
whose history was bound up with the medieval book trade.

Rabelais in 1523 finishes Pantagruel.
The first part of his story ends with a promise:
“*You shall have the rest of the story at the subsequent Frankfurt Fairs.*”

At first glance Frankfurt is without secrets.
The city itself makes a secret out of its secrets.
Everyone knows that behind the bleakest facades

extraordinary things are happening.
So I lingered in certain rooms,
seeking the indefinable—something

from the earlier life lived in these streets.

10

The sounds in the city outdoors:
birds warbling and chirping in the garden,
voices in the garden calling and shouting;

laughter of children, occasionally singing,
sung music and instrumental music;
voices practicing scales and songs and arias

(some of the same sounds that you
hear now in a bourgeois neighborhood;)
people calling their pets; dogs barking;

cats meowing or caterwauling in the middle
of the night; people whistling; footsteps on the sidewalk;
in winter the squeaking sound boots make in the snow.

And whenever we hear echoes
from that other life where we stood smiling
at things such as—a writing table, a swan,

Bach, stone, the zig-zag of fire escapes
and icicle stains upon the facades of buildings
after years of soot and pigeon droppings;

In the rain, we drown them out
with shopping small talk, and by being cold;
tradesmen calling their wares in the winter afternoons

in November at the Christmas market in the city;
horse hoof beats trotting and walking;
carriage wheels rattling on cobblestone

and grinding over dust and dirt over stone
(ie the steady sound of wheels
under the regular rhythm of hoofbeats

either pacing or trotting); Carillons from churches;
church bells sounding the hours.

MAYA ROSE

FOUR POEMS

Was has soft gravel
to jump double-but
wants to quiet the burn
Was has soft adams apple
behind their back, to trust
Was held in one hand
Was has soft palms
has unreadable features
gives and recedes sand
butch gravel Was double
long elegant fingers
soft doesn't give much

i thought those geodes
were bound potatoes
a problematic fact
always wants the original

rose. dropkicking a peanut shell, same thought repeating
rose petal to one learning to wait, rose has everything has
its own time rose double-

crossing rose's self before starting
the drive barefoot rose didn't
wear a seatbelt,
don't understand but bless
the standard
looking for and finding
rose smallness in
a little bluer sky,
now found lacking
poetic resistance,
yours, blue bug fucking rose,
rose ushering
across to stand in the reek of ur
nowhere else urine
to stand,
here, rose,
being the gutter
a butterfly
on the neck, rose kickstands
checking boxes: a butterfly has choices
rose, you look pretty, hand signal
don't have a say rose,
go ahead and-
rollover

KAT SINCLAIR

RESIGNATION FROM

‘What’s cheapest way to stay warm?’
To eradicate cheapness
file off that hangnail on the final finger
pointing at the sun—this way!

Try that, lyric comes out, screed
in *sentences* no less, drink chalk bits
think, sipping from a trick held hand
my neural pathways sing:

This is that far-off thing, that unpaid undebt,
why—what day is it? It’s Wednesday! and
no work to do, slippage is finally
a coarse woolly hug, the promise of a bounce.

Accidents like tiny griefs: to say
goodnight not goodbye
you too happy birthday, miss-mum—
good grief, it is no mistake to lack, see:

Hermit crabs lining up in order of size
pass along, house to smaller house, claw to little claw
we will clack and shuffle, someday soon
we will shuffle and clack.

AD ASTERACEAE

Shut in the cupboard with the CBT homework
half-done I whisper Michael I found the lettuce funny
caught myself up in a snarl of theoretical string and
limbs through the tangle I flail, onto your desk
I'll get back to work when I figure it out:
how to avoid subsumption, when all those
newspapers become wrappings down the chippy,
the ink bleeds and we digest it, fish and the British
media's recuse to meaning—it is absurd and I must recognise it
but the way she wilted was a state-sanctioned giggle
while the market swept.

Temptation to reduce or render shock-sex to avoid
salient critique:
great tongue on the cunt of capital. Derivatives,
squirting and piss-not-piss.
That'll do it, accidental.

When you're sanctioned for the first time it feels
like vernacular exostosis,
mute shake of the head,
breaking every shoe, bursting through leather-like-money
burned and tossed and pornographic:
Why aren't you more careful?
They're only bones.

Retroverted uterus wedged between
the sacrum and the bladder, perpendicular to the placement
of the normal uterus

Retroflexed position, curled up like a prawn
Anteverted or hyperanteversion, *stupid!*

One could measure one's cardiovascular health
in how much time they have spent consistently
running down fascists in the streets
which is another reason why one might become a hunt saboteur
but one, two, three discs out of place there is glory in admin
when you know who'll be doing the running.
I would move you around like a limited homebrew campaign
if you'd let me in, love.

DEAD SKIN

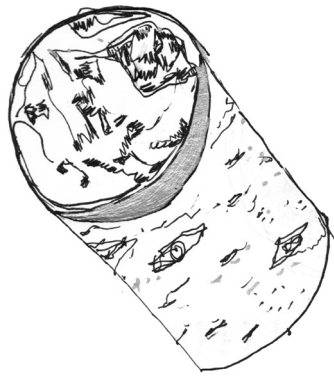
Hack at it
when you slipstream past on your way to
work in the other room or the other one
like, fork pricks on sausages
so you burn but you don't peel.
It is a sunny day
of sirens sucking at the juncture where
now meets yesterday, flame on Fairy Liquid palms.
The only way out is
through the cubicle dividers like a giant toddler kicking
it was so silly of us to start respecting our toys
too late realising they weren't ours at all
then again—no, actually they are, give them back
to everyone.
It's funny because
when I found out about dust I sat still
for ten straight days without moving to try and trick them:
my house, and my body, and the air. Give it back,
stay still, don't drift or swallow.
I take up my arms again
stretch, six AM, shoulder it: everything.
When I am nothing but a cartoon shape of myself
carved through the wall and gone
then I'll really know what it's like.

ADA SMAILBEGOVIĆ

from BLUE EGGSHELL DISCRETE ACTIONS IN A MOVING GEOMETRY OF TIME

For, that a recollection should reappear in consciousness, it is necessary that it should descend from the heights of pure memory down to the precise point where *action* is taking place. In other words, it is from the present that comes the appeal to which memory responds, and it is from the sensory-motor element of present action that a memory borrows the warmth which gives it life.

—*Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson



dots of memory are like stars more visible in the darkened sky[†]

I.

asking her to create a fold in the ceiling like that of a fold in the firmament
one thinks of the first asymmetries: that between the sky and its light,
or the left and right sides of a being, the water and air
there are numerous interior left-right asymmetries in the disposition and placement of the organs
we watch a girl draw a single long flower on two blue mountains
the red berries are already in winter distributed on the trees
and there is a sense that the metal foothold of the lamp holds no wires
everyday ornaments may be a certain way that mortality slows, forms of appearance that are edged
she sees a cluster of yellow snakes in the forest or one white snake falls from the talons in the sky
at the outer reaches in what encircles it, the way a tongue can encircle the edge of a mouth

in the blankness of the sky are invisible stars
or in the spaces where we see nothing a lack of light reveals a presence
dusted shapes, like salt tossed over your left shoulder for luck
or sand exiting the tip of the cone at the juncture where the past enters the present to make the future
the future does not yet exist

†/ At the upper echelons of Bergson's cone of memory the substance of memory is at its most dilated and least instrumental. It is like the night sky away from the pollution of light, so that more and more detail emerges—dots and flecks of star dust—in what had previously been intervals of darkness.

this is the difference between divination and transformation
 she says she always dreams of the same house that does not exist
 the flowers are carried on their long yellow stalks
 a form of consciousness cannot cut into itself and retain the flow of a stream

 does the pink house remain
 or the one where the yellow caterpillars hang from the awning where we fucked not facing each other
 there is or was a frozen expanse crisscrossed by tracks of a few who walked onto it
 a line of traversal is really a multiplicity of lines, just as the flights of birds towards the trees are forms of re-entrance
 threads connecting molecular chirality to forms of thinking
 chirality is a handedness, just as the poem is a form of consciousness that allows a particular passage from thing
 to thing

 a tree grows too close to a house where we make rice pudding,
 dust it with cardamom examining a painting of a ship hung on the wooded paneling of the bathroom
 its crystallization a looking over things to confirm their places
 as if I should have known that the desire for the girl was hidden
 in the desire to look at the same objects in their alignment, in invisible stitching
 writing the dates down under the lip of the windowsill
 or that is where they forget to paint over them, just as the bus forgets its path in the mountains
 and rests underneath the blue of the rise of one of them
 night erasing all edges except for the delineations of the goal posts, net-less zeros of a white whiter than snow

II.

the perceptual movement of the image: a silver thread dragging to a small pink bush
a map of an animal or a map an animal makes, hallucinogenic its appearing and disappearing
or we are sitting in night, in an old red island car
arguing about names as the names for the new won't come
this is like sleep, which is binary, here or not here
although it can be pulled like a thread one is extending and passing through in a flutter of limbs which must be
stilled to be still

a practice of carrying a wish into another body, not one's own
or to arrive before sleep into stillness like the light in someone else's photograph from ten years ago
where you hope to locate a life you were not living directly
a handful of substance (sugar crystals and lemon rinds fructifying in a dish)
an accretion of time
or a handful of thread that can be pulled out to add to the living you are/were not doing

the way that light must be cast at an angle to create a sense of distance from the crude shapes of events
or how an island road in deep night when you arrive can make forms in the black wall of trees
as they are revealed by the light
this day, its transformations
like dots of red, what locates itself with a different edge
in the fruit left by a sea-rose on a coastline a thin sound of a bird in air

the paintings in reverse light as when you place a draping in reverse against the surface of the lamp
so the forest turns inside out in it, the green a set of openings broken up by intervals of darkness
as if you were to find infinity in the trees
their revelation as each perception is movement = change and also a position of a body in space
which is always only one variation of seeing

the immanence of things = “inscape” = the shrub’s complete unfolding in perception to the edge of each surface
or the red dot of seeing,
how she sees the dots of rain appearing on a stone terrace, in a dream
or a space that I don’t see that is behind us or in front of us in time
it is this image of red then that I see, invisible to me: on a book in winter a shrub with red berries in the snow

diasporic time turns space into a desire for repetition
as you attend to the same island
or attend to its appearing with the threads that light makes in the birch trees, a difference
a bird, an island or another entity seen unseen at a distance
a pivot of time unfolding around an inlaid edge
this whole winter dotted by the sounds of crows

when the water breaks I am somewhere at the edge of the table
it breaks like an outline that passes behind me (something drawn in the invisible space behind the body in sleep)

in the outline of blue light the smallest birds, each with its own moving heart
the way a drawing may have its outline thickened

the night deer appear out of the water and enter the island's edge so they are inside it

how to describe that inside space knowing that it must have existed
is like an invisible map an animal makes to mark time
or what we know visibly, on the outside as time—the pink bush
the wired net of communication through which it speaks
or emerges as more complex the way we see it complexly

to have been known or to know is not bereft of the invisible inside
what is recalcitrant and cannot pass the edge of the body
you, only as movement in the streetlight behind the video store
taking long photographs of flowering trees in the night

ROBERTO TEJADA

from CARBONATE OF COPPER

GRAYSCALE

Beam of light an empty room no not empty
cloud cone circle suddenly a set
and somebody suspended there asleep
animating with alarm the household
objects in flush focus Point being
my right ventricle severed whirlpool
and my motor cortex uniting at a higher
pitch the nearly inaudible hiss
with a bassline click of burning
surrendered self Outside there's
wind in the palm trees a far-off siren
turning on Adams a five o'clock
branch dragging the asphalt also
a single leaf concise in sidewalk
tumble If you were prone to
forgetting a detail or direction
here are the scenes before sunup

a sound source television
grayscale gunfire in strains
from a time I recognize but not
as mine The bark of men in chain
reaction bark and spit and menace
in speech I was barely awake I was
barely even a boy my mother preparing
for work already I knew the warfare
it was for her to inhabit the volume
and idiom of skin out of true
or incomplicant Prior to this
scene where she returns in half
light despite the prohibitions
a morning contains in sentences
that fail even the swelling oriented
to the audible horizon Redacted:
herein waiting for the whereabouts
of father in lifelong debility
of earth in the coercion of a child
given to search for it anything

IN PERSON

My effigy in bronze across
the frontlines excluded
from the parable
suitable for action rather
I think now in forever
present wonder do I voice
the discerning note
insane in the separation
or rather none between
tangle and action
between right
of entry and ritual
for the wartime world
overbright on
my birthday
hour entangled how
will I ever obtain
again my bearing if
I tell the number

akin to my displacement
and whether I was
accountable who among us
in defense of the builder
with tactics appealing
to our vanity
area of my square
on the hypotenuse
perplexing double
pull of self-denial
of shade and scale
I am inside out
for a form of life
in person in open air
brutal little side
of my apologetic
fold I thought
I knew to be hospitable
but in the overcast
was my reflection
I entered the immensity
of my whereabouts
I kept losing things
in winter memory
foremost please find me

THE COLOR

of midnight sapphire
applied as if to reorder

the sky when flares cast
us from illuminated half

circumferences into
the highest inhale

REVIEWS

Peter Gizzi, *Fierce Elegy*. Wesleyan University Press, 2023.

To translate is a little like facing a musical score, violin in hand. You have first to decipher, analyze, and dissect in order to understand what tones the work is trying to sound before you interpret. In French, “to interpret” means both to play (an instrument) and to translate. The text that follows is, of course, a review of Peter Gizzi’s new book. But it is also part of my ongoing work as Gizzi’s translator into French, taking stock of the motifs (lexical, syntactical, rhythmic) that I will need to interpret and adapt to their new language.

Consider the titles of Peter Gizzi’s books: *Threshold Songs*, *Archeophonics*, *Now It’s Dark*, and the most recent collection—beautiful, simple, dense—*Fierce Elegy*. Together these titles conjure an image of the poet looking over the edge of something, pickaxe and spade on his shoulder, headlamp lit, recording device strapped on, ready to dig toward the sonic world of the dead, if only he can manage to find the entrance. “It was all so Orfeo / the other night” (4).[†] In his latest book, we recognize Gizzi’s distinctive voice, but its melancholy is even more intensified, now almost black as ink. We might call it lyric after catastrophe. The world has suffered blows, shocks, accidents, and destruction. Both of the author’s brothers are dead, his lovers are gone. The author’s body ages—and what has become of his friends? The situation is no better for objects, which are as often as not broken, undone, burned, or ruined. “[T]he house decays,” in the previous book; in this one, what remains are no more than “the ruins of / anything” (17). And yet it is necessary to keep going, to keep singing. In most of Gizzi’s collections, the final poems contain a task assigned to the poem for the future, trying to make a future possible: “[comfort] the hours,” tell me “How to live. / What to do,” let a “question” rise in “my brain,”* or, in this last book, give me “new vistas” and “the sweet noise of becoming” (50).

Meanwhile, though, there’s the poet, standing here. *Standing* is a very Gizzi word. I know this because, simple as it is, it is not easily translated into French. The easiest way would be the word *debout*—“in a standing posture”—but this doesn’t quite carry the sense of resistance I think Gizzi

[†]/ Orfeo, not Orpheus—Orfeo as in Monteverdi’s opera. Music plays a major role here.

[‡]/ Peter Gizzi, *Now It’s Dark* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2020), 108; Peter Gizzi, *Threshold Songs* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 85; Peter Gizzi, *Archeophonics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2016), 79.

intends: for him, *standing* is always a sign of endurance, in the sense of withstanding, of standing firm. Each poem, indeed, is perhaps only written in order to say one more time: I am here, I am still here. Let us dig almost at random in the pages of *Fierce Elegy*: “I am here now,” “to be able to say, I was here,” “I know where I am,” or in the last and undeniably significant line in the book, “all that was left is where I am now” (37, 43, 34, 51). This logic of the subject’s nearly panicked inscription in a place has haunted Gizzi’s other books: “I’m in here where the world is opening,” we read in *Now It’s Dark*.[†] Perhaps this obsession with being here is the reason *Fierce Elegy* contains an unmistakable homage to Robert Creeley, another poet haunted by the insoluble locus of the “I.” The question Creeley asked, facing his own threshold in “The Door,” was: “Where will I be then who am now alone”?[‡] I imagine that Gizzi might countersign this question. He asks many others that are similar: “What have I been doing / without me?”; “who am I when / you’re not around?”; “will I still be standing, when nothing is more than / enough?”; “where is my poem”? (4, 47, 32). What, who, when, where: all of these questions are a matter of coordinates. “To be nowhere” is the ultimate danger—or to live too far away, coordinates missing, “far from myself,” “far from me floating out there” (47, 47, 38). Distance is one of the central issues of Gizzi’s poetry. From book to book, the issue appears more and more urgent, more and more crucial, a matter of life and death. If the poem has a mission, it is to reduce distance, or at least to try its best to do so, saving us by guiding our way in the world, bringing us back to it. It is, in other words, poetry that signals the direction. Poetry is the steering wheel, the highway, the GPS. It is survival because, in fact, the poem has not renounced the world (the word *world* itself returns with the regularity of a metronome in these pages). On the contrary, the poem does its best to emit its own signal, even if weak, to trace out its own route, even if this meanders, and to find a way to keep things company in order to stick around a little, at least a little. A whole world of beeps and blinks, a series of new instruments for the production or reception of signals: Doppler, sound system, kaleidoscope, and strobe light, all pointing ahead. The poem is a point of emission and reception, a zone of capture for whatever (a voice? an echo?) might traverse the immensity of distance. A song, perhaps.

Song, frequently, is another way for Gizzi to say poem: his texts sing in their own way. They love refrains and repetitions, the clanking and clacking made by the sounds of syllables. This is a signature of Gizzi’s particular lyric: the horizon is a song, a site of consoling melody. “When you’re brought to

[†]/ Gizzi, *Now It’s Dark*, 32.

[‡]/ Robert Creeley, *Selected Poems* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 70.

your knees, / sing a song of praise,” but what remains after that brief moment of euphoria when the song is almost reached is a reality consisting only of sparse signals (9). “It was best to let the music / unravel and focus the truth of night” (3). Unraveling, blurring, collapsing: words that account for what we are made of, “the signal and its noise” (3). These poems must therefore remain in the tension between signaling and singing. If Jack Spicer was content simply to be the transmitter of messages from Mars, for Gizzi this kind of jumbled signal can never be really or sufficiently interpreted. It is instead the sign of a gap, a wound to be healed—or, to put it another way, a kind of solitude. Gizzi’s strength, in what we might call an experimental lyric, is thus to maintain that the world is too destroyed to sing, yet to try singing anyway—since one must not lose heart, since distances still need to be bridged.

Interrogative sentences are the grammatical form for this effort to reduce distance. If there’s a question, there’s an address; if there’s an address, there’s the hope of a response—waiting for distance to be bridged by the voices of others, at least sometimes. There’s the hope of a world that might be shared and the hope of a “you” to share it with—even if coping with that “you” (human or not) might sometimes be exhausting. We know that we have stepped further into despair in *Fierce Elegy*, however, because the birds have made themselves scarce. This is a world that seems matte, mute. And yet the poems continue to pose their questions into what might be an interplanetary void: “what was it you wanted? were you talking to me?” (48).

In this collection, the omnipresent questions are joined by an imperative mode that is, in its own way, also a form of address:

For now, come close,
come closer, come
into the reeds.
Come into
the intimate distance.

(13)

The intimate distance is of course the right distance—a distance reduced to nothing. The last poem of the book works through the anaphoric repetition of the imperative: “consider.” And another: “Listen,” we’re told from the first page on, “the night is orchestral / when the power’s on” (1). “Orchestral” is another very Gizzi word. We find it in almost all his books. For example, in *Threshold Songs*: “An orchestral sort of life: / Then. There. Now. Here.”[†] An ideal life, it turns out, is not unlike an immense discotheque, “a total

[†]/ Gizzi, *Threshold Songs*, 66.

disco night,” where a person is free to dance, to watch someone else dance naked, or even better, to dance together (40). “Somewhere music / this dance / of the actual”[†]: here is the definition of a possible paradise for Gizzi, a great dancer in his youth who seems to miss those pre-AIDS years when everyone was together, enmeshed on the dance floor (26). This paradise is a zone where the lights are artificial; music makes the world present and the bodies dance. To write is like turning the power on, plugging in the guitars, wiring the amps, and receiving or emitting music, just in case.[†] In case the dead are listening. In case they want to respond, in case response could turn into a conversation—perhaps not in terms of meaning but at least in terms of rhythm. It is striking to notice how, from book to book, Gizzi’s syntax becomes simplified, his sentences and lines shortened. The poems in this latest book are written in what we could call modern Morse code. Meaning seems less important than the speed at which it arrives to us. I remember that, when I was confronted with some obscure meaning while translating a poem from *Now It’s Dark*, Gizzi advised me not to translate the meaning but to translate the rhythm first. This concern with metered sound is particularly evident in the poem “Of the Air,” in which the short sentences fall like drumbeats. Here is the beginning:

She talked to me. Were lovely days. A superb summer. Had a right to it. My birds were wild birds. Were new. I tried to understand. Loveliest days. Speaking of a voice. (33)

In this moment of hope, communication is established (talking and speaking, and even the birds come back). But we begin to suspect that this state of things will not last: “Indeed I could not. Would not...was missing some” (35).

Here, and in a number of other poems, we witness the elision of the subject. Or: the subject is at once the question and the problem, or probably more than a problem—a pain. “I” is “a wound,” the book’s last, terrible, poem reveals (43). Fighting the solitude which always threatens to fall, to scab over, or to close up the wounds, the “I” in these pages makes increasingly desperate efforts to escape. One of these efforts involves keeping open the possibility of a sort of posthumous childhood—in other words, escaping the present’s prison via memory. The poet attempts to “rebuild my house out of sky” or to remember a mother and father scattered everywhere across the world now that they are dead, even “inside migrating birds”—birds decidedly still a sign that a little joy is possible (38, 19). Another attempt is a

[†]/ Across the book, light appears accompanied by a different adjective each time: kaleidoscopic, musical, alabaster, hieratic, starlight, daylight, pinhole light—as if light itself were the condition of the world’s possibility, a transcendental category.

more difficult route: *Fierce Elegy* never stops offering to the “I” the solution of a permanent becoming. “To become” is one of the verbs that recurs most frequently in the collection. The poet “becomes / a bug in the air,” but not just that (5). A dozen instances of the verb occur in a small number of pages, in addition to related expressions: evolving, morphing, translating, turning to. An entire lexicon of passing into is at work here with considerable persistence.

In Gizzi’s hands, becoming is the central condition of elegy. If the “I” wishes to enter into contact with the world of the dead as well as that of the living, the “I” must accept being caught up in the whirl of constant metamorphosis. “Becoming / the me in I” thus occurs through a series of metamorphoses, not voluntary metamorphoses but ones induced by the accidents of the world and of existence (21). “It’s so random / becoming a self”—so random, indeed, that the Gizzian “I” passes ceaselessly from one form to another: “this is me evolving” (24, 6). In this, we might say that Gizzi’s poetry exists in conversation with a certain generation of French poetry that strove to free the “I” from simplified biographical schemas and to place it elsewhere. A pure grammatical effect for Emmanuel Hocquard,[†] a *dramatis personae* on the page (the page as stage) for Anne-Marie Albiach, and a site of constraint for Jacques Roubaud, the “I” represents not itself but language. Gizzi’s affinities with this strain of French poetry are found here, and they help explain his warm welcome across the Atlantic. The Gizzian “I” isn’t someone but rather an effect of syntax in the movement of becoming.

If there’s one poet who floats in the background of these *Elegies*, it’s Wallace Stevens with his syntactic convolutions. These lines echo Stevens’s famous title:

Come into the room
where the viewer
is the viewed.
When the thing itself
becomes the thing itself.

(13–14)

Or else: “Landscape is a made thing, / to see the mind seeing itself,” or, “The attitude of landscape / escapes into a body / thinking of the body” (1, 12). These folds and reprisals give Gizzi’s meditations a Stevensian tone, but they’re also a way of demonstrating how syntactical loops can produce effects of echo and reflection that the perpetual metamorphosis of the “I” performs too. The mirroring of syntax creates a sliding effect where parallelisms ease

[†]/ Gizzi’s first French translator.

language from one word to the next: “the mother opens every wound, the wound opens / every word” (45).

The quasi-miraculous function of reflection and parallel syntax is made even more explicit in “Creeley Song,” in which Gizzi mirrors Creeley’s syntax to articulate the reasons of his own (but not necessarily Creeley’s) interest in parallelism:

the charm
that mirrors
all that was, all
that is, lovely
in a song.

(11)

All that was, all that is: in this reverberating syntax, the poem turns itself into an echo, an alternate world. Gizzi’s insistence on verbs linked to vision makes sense: to look in a mirror, or “[to watch] clouds change into the mirror,” is a way for the silhouette standing in the world to invoke an echo or a reflection without having to move (43). If there is always—as the title of one poem has it—the threat of the “dissociadelic,” the mirror effect nevertheless allows a certain oneness to come into being (8). It allows the viewer to become the viewed, the thing to become the thing itself; it allows, through its suturing work, the danger of separation to be overcome.

From “wound” to “word”: here is the crux of this short but intense book. “Some days I sit hours to be relieved / by a word” (6). And later on: “I want to use all the words tonight,” a desire that becomes truth or action several lines later: “I am using all the words now” (40). If we remember that his previous book opened with a poem called “Speech Acts for a Dying World,” we can grasp the central effort of making behind Gizzi’s poetry: to reflect on words, to produce, to manufacture a form of a linking, a place for the self and for others.† Perhaps a shelter. A waterbed, let’s say.

Stéphane Bouquet
Translated by Lindsay Turner

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†/ Gizzi, *Now It’s Dark*, 3.

Ludovico Silva, *Marx's Literary Style*, trans. Paco Brito Núñez, Verso, 2023.

Marx? Stylish? I can explain. One afternoon I was giving a lecture on *The Communist Manifesto* to undergraduate students. We were devoting our energies to the famous moment when Marx and Engels describe the revolutionary sweep of the bourgeois epoch. "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions," a student read aloud, "are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."[†] After reading these lines, the student could not help but give a brief commentary on them: "Woah." And I agree. In fact, I agree so strongly that it seems impossible for me to imagine a person who reads those lines without feeling a little tickle of *woah* stirring somewhere in the chambers of their consciousness. Who can fail to be enchanted by the power of these sentences, in all their glorious velocity, performing the world-historical sweep they so audaciously describe?

But style, and especially Marx's style, exceeds the pleasures of a well-spun phrase. Daniel Hartley's work demonstrates how style inside and indeed outside the Marxist tradition is so much more than dexterity or pizzazz. For Hartley, style is necessarily political because it deals with language in time. Inescapably collective, styles bend or break under the historical pressure of convention, which is why style can even allow us to glimpse "symptoms of affects or relations which are currently historically unrealizable."[‡] Ludovico Silva's energetic study shows how style was something Marx cultivated, put to work, so that he might more precisely investigate the structures and systems of capitalist society. By *style*, Silva writes,

I mean a genius consciously put in the service of a will to expression that is not content with the clean conscience that comes from having used the scientifically correct terms, but that also employs a literary conscience bent on making what is correct expressive and harmonious, a conscience that is ready to use every linguistic

[†]/ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. and trans. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 456.

[‡]/ Daniel Hartley, *The Politics of Style: Towards a Marxist Poetics* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 262. See also Hartley's review of Silva, "Karl Marx's Literary Style Was an Essential Part of His Genius," *Jacobin*, <https://jacobin.com/2023/01/karl-marx-literary-style-capitalism-alienation-book-review>.

resource at its disposal to ensure that the logical construction of science is, at the same time, that science's architecture. (1-2)

The work was published in 1971. You can hear from these lines how Silva's own prose, wonderfully translated by Paco Brito Núñez, crackles and delights (I have to exercise restraint in not quoting more from this book). Throughout this short, fierce study, you get the sense of being spoken to by someone who wants you to understand just how thrilling thinking can be—how thrilling Marx's thinking is—and how badly science, broadly conceived, needs art.

This is a far cry from those attempts to praise a work's style as a way of muting its critical and political force. We see this in those critics who remark in faintly condescending tones that it is best to read *Capital* as a novel. Francis Wheen's biography of *Capital*, for instance, tousles the hair of its subject, declaring the work a "shaggy dog story, a picaresque journey through the realms of higher nonsense."[†] It is impressive, as Anna Kornbluh has noted, that with this analogy Wheen manages to insult Marx and Victorian novelists at the same time: both emerge as enjoyable but ultimately harmless.[‡] Wheen would have us flip through Marx's patient and demanding pages—all that math about linen and coats!—to reach the juicier bits. To praise Marx's stylistic flourishes is to miss the all-encompassing work of style in his writing. Silva's study is a fresh and robust reminder that we cannot praise Marx into agreeableness. We cannot simply select enjoyable flourishes. We cannot separate Marx's thinking from his style.

Silva shows us why style, far from flashes of lyricism or figuration, is vital to Marx's thought. And it is through style that Marx's thinking performs itself, which is why reading *Capital* can be fun and fatiguing all at once. As this or that concept morphs and the ground beneath you slowly shifts, you find your brain starts to hurt in ways that are mysterious and yet somehow oddly pleasurable. Flagging, you solicit David Harvey or Stephen Shapiro or other obliging *Companions* just to get you through the thing. Every now and then there appears a thunderbolt of analogy, a winsome quotation from Shakespeare or Horace, or a skirmishing footnote that summons a giggle—but to say that style in Marx provides something like readerly relief, or that it only provides relief, would be worse than misleading. "Marx's thinking is something that can be plastically *perceived*," Silva writes. "[I]n his work, the conceptual has a perceptual value" (3). Marx writes the way he does—and revises, with legendary application—because he wants us to feel our way to

[†]/ Francis Wheen, *Marx's Das Kapital: A Biography* (Vancouver, Canada: Douglas & McIntyre, 2007), 42.

[‡]/ Anna Kornbluh, "On Marx's Victorian Novel," *Mediations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group* 25, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 15-37.

thought. “All great thinkers who are also great stylists,” Silva remarks, “tend to present their work not as the result of previous thought but *as the process or act of thinking itself*: their readers are always present at the creation of their thinking, and they benefit from it because, instead of being forced to digest hardened thoughts, they are prompted to think, to rethink and to recreate the very act of theoretical discovery” (3). We might think of this as the stylistic corollary of the old saw that if you give someone a fish they eat for a day, but if you teach them how to fish they eat for a lifetime. When Silva says that in Marx’s work concepts can appear as percepts, he means that we seize and sense the structure and shape of Marx’s thoughts as we work through them. On this reading, Marx is less lecturer than tour guide—voluble, funny, and serious in all the right places—leading us through the innermost workings of capitalist society. It is a role he is more than happy to take on: “There is no royal road to science,” he forewarns the intrepid readers of the first French edition of *Capital*, “and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.”†

Silva begins with a brief and enlightening tour through Marx’s student days, including his “endearingly bad” lovesick poems to Jenny, and a remark by a grader that one of Marx’s essays was marred by “an excessive search for metaphors” (17). Both the early flirtations with lyric poetry and the gratuitous love for metaphor turn out for Silva to be strengths in the making of Marx’s mature style, of which Silva highlights three features: first, and most expansively, the “architectonic of science” (23), a term Silva derives from Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* to signify the art of constructing a scientific system. Science, like art, possesses a systematic, architectonic unity “in which all its parts correspond to one another and in which none is true without respect to the whole” (24). Marx’s lifelong obsession with presenting his ideas as artistic wholes, Silva observes, holds true for the general form of his scientific edifice and in its smallest details: “in the moulding of its expressions, the beadwork of its phrasing, the firm curves of its verbal vaults, in its metaphorical bas-relief, its conceptual pilasters, and, in the end, its foundation in erudition” (25).

The second feature of Marx’s style is in the dialectics of expression—or, what amounts to the same thing for Silva, the expression of the dialectic. Here again it is worth hearing the gamely personality that emanates from Silva’s prose: After working through the broader architectonics of Marx’s style, “we will now invert our point of view,” Silva explains, “and examine up close the verbal sinews that fill out and enliven that structural skeleton like a living mass of cells” (29). He is not kidding. Marx is at pains to make

†/ Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London, UK: Penguin Books, 1976), 104.

his sentences move. Zooming in on sentences in the original French or German, Silva demonstrates how Marx sets up syntactical and conceptual oppositions and syntheses, dynamic movements that lend his sentences a rounded quality.

These oppositions and movements are perhaps best shown, to borrow one of Silva's examples, in Marx's jousting with Proudhon. Proudhon tried to show how the Hegelian dialectic—most famously if imperfectly summed up by the triad: thesis, antithesis, synthesis—applied logically to historical development. Here is Marx in "The Poverty of Philosophy":

The principle of authority, for example, had the eleventh century, just as the principle of individualism had the eighteenth century. In logical sequence, it was the century that belonged to the principle, and not the principle that belonged to the century. In other words, it was the principle that made the history, and not the history that made the principle.[†]

This head scratcher, Silva shows, is not mere wordplay. It derives its rhetorical and analytical force from a tight syntactical structure in which "the opposite terms are neatly drawn in an antagonistic correlation before being fused in a synthetic phrase" (35). It sets up an antagonism, here between centuries and principles, inverts it, then synthesizes it. This is what Silva means when he says that Marx's style performs phenomena, "as if the words were suddenly transformed into actors on a stage. In this sense, Marx's language is the theatre of his dialectic" (42). Dialectical thought thus provides something of the immediacy and pleasure of drama: concepts stride onto the stage and say their piece, and the reader, furnished with something like a sense of dramatic irony, can feel and appreciate the play of oppositions.

But Silva's largest contribution to understanding Marx—and the third feature of Marx's style—may lie in the section on "Marx's Great Metaphors." Metaphor takes you places. When some problem is put in a new light, with fresh terms, you see things you simply could not have seen before. But metaphor also seduces and beguiles. Corporations know this when they tell striking workers that they are one big family; politicians know it when they contrive to convince us that running a national economy is the same thing as an individual tallying up a budget. Analogies in particular bully complexity into simplicity. They demand a certain vigilance, which Silva exhibits to an extraordinary degree, expending what might seem like an excessive portion

[†]/ Karl Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy: Answer to *The Philosophy of Poverty* by M. Proudhon," in *Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Collected Works*, vol. 6 (London, UK: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010), 164.

of his energies explaining why we must treat Marx's metaphors as literary illustrations of his thought rather than substitutes for thought itself. To say something is metaphorically adequate is not the same thing as providing a social and historical explanation. Marx earns his metaphors, Silva suggests, by going beyond them, so that the metaphor of the ideological superstructure in *The German Ideology*, for example, allows patient elaborations of ideological formations. Metaphor in Marx must then be understood as intensifying and enriching—rather than glossing over—the social and historical impetus of his thought. “Marx knew what Marxists seem to ignore,” Silva writes, “that it’s one thing to give a schematic introduction to a theory by means of illustrative metaphors and quite another to explain that same theory scientifically and positively” (49).

“How many have tried to imitate Marx’s style,” Silva exclaims in the “Epilogue on Irony and Alienation,” “only to copy the indignation while forgetting the irony!” (93). At a time when critics have been questioning the political claims of literary criticism—good for interpreting the world, but what about changing it?—we may finally be ready for the stylish Marx. Spanning poetic, novelistic, dramatic, and epic modes, Marx’s style remains as appealing and challenging as ever. Arresting, often funny, and brisk, Silva enjoins us to think with greater care and seriousness about why Marx writes the way he does. In one of the book’s later sections, Silva devotes some space—and one wishes for more space—to Marx’s “polemical spirit” and his “spirit of mockery” (71). Withering when he wanted to be (which was often), Marx knew better than most how to boil the piss of his adversaries. It is helpful to remind ourselves that his high-wire stylistic feats came from a place of deep indignation at the brutality of capitalism. “The truth of *Capital* makes life harder to live,” writes Keston Sutherland in a bracing essay, “The Poetics of Capital”: “It is a critique of reality that confirms in logic the feeling that reality is fundamentally inimical to life.”[†] That is why understanding Marx’s style, for all its nimble playfulness, all the jibes and the jokes, will always be something more than an exercise in literary admiration. Marx’s sentences thrum with devastating truth because the reality they describe—contradictory, brutal, inimical to life—remains our own. It is Silva’s great achievement to show us the expressive power of Marx’s sentences. Not for nothing do they still command a “*woah*.”

Alexander Millen

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[†] Keston Sutherland, “The Poetics of Capital,” in *Capitalism: concept, idea, image*, eds. Peter Osborne, Éric Alliez, and Eric-John Russell (London: CRMEP Books, 2019), 209.

Justin Hopper, ed., *Obsolete Spells: Poems & Prose from Victor Neuburg & the Vine Press*. Strange Attractor, 2022.

In August 1933, in an ivied cottage in the small English town of Steyning just outside Brighton, Victor Neuburg pulled Dylan Thomas from the slush pile. The poem was handwritten, like many of the submissions to the weekly Poet's Corner, a section of London's *Sunday Referee* that Neuburg had started four months prior. It began with what is now a familiar lilt: "That sanity be kept I sit at open windows, / Regard the sky, make unobtrusive comment on the moon." Smitten with the poem's innocent charm and Occidental twist, in which the author observes "like some Jehovah of the west / What passes by," Neuburg went on to publish several more poems by the eighteen-year-old from Swansea, including "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower," "A process in the weather of the heart," "Where once the waters of your face," and "Song," which begins, "Love me, not as the dreaming nurses / My falling lungs."[†]

But before signing off on nominating Thomas for the *Referee's* newly minted book prize, the newspaper's editor, Mark Goulden, had to be convinced the submissions were not an elaborate prank. "How could major poetic utterance like this—some of it sublimely lyrical, some of it abstract and difficult to comprehend—how could truly great poetry of this coruscating brilliance emanate from an obscure writer living in a small Welsh town?" he wondered. They sent for Thomas himself, and after an awkward interrogation by the editors into his background and methods, Goulden concluded, "Victor is right—we are in the presence of a genius."[‡] The following year, the *Referee* published Thomas's first book, *18 Poems*, and English-language modernism was changed forever.

We know of Thomas's trajectory, to its bitter end in New York's West Village, but who was Victor Neuburg, the man who had the perception to detect a genius in the rough? A new collection of Neuburg's publishing choices and his own poetry, called *Obsolete Spells: Poems & Prose from Victor Neuburg & the Vine Press*, makes a compelling case for restoring Neuburg's legacy to more than just a bit part in literary history. Neuburg, the volume shows, was a fascinating figure in his own right. An acolyte of the occultist Aleister Crowley and a fellow traveler with British communalists and protohippies, Neuburg was once a fixture of London's writers' circles and salons. Justin Hopper, editor of *Obsolete Spells*, is an American writer living in England who runs a blog called *The Old Weird Albion* and has a nose

[†]/ Dylan Thomas, "Song," in *The Poems of Dylan Thomas*, vol. 1, ed. Daniel Jones (New York: New Directions, 2003), 88.

[‡]/ Mark Goulden, *Mark My Words!* (London: W. H. Allen, 1978), 179–180.

for the obscure and esoteric. He highlights Neuburg's interests in "magick, sensuality, folk culture, [and] Romanticism" in his exhaustive introduction and notes (81). But Neuburg's story, when read alongside other texts such as his son's memoir and an out-of-print biography, also describes a larger arc from Victorian pursuits to modernists' more urgent concerns. In Neuburg's case, it was an incomplete transition but a good example of how British literati of the time tried to figure out what to carry forward from their old and weird upbringings. Despite Neuburg's important role in Thomas's career, it was not so much his compatibility with Thomas but their aesthetic conflict that propelled Thomas toward his favored register of coarse revelation, away from Neuburg and all that he represented.

Neuburg was in many ways an unlikely candidate for shepherding a new British idiom into the mainstream. He was born in 1883 in London and raised there by a single mother from a well-to-do Jewish family. His father, a Jewish merchant from Austria-Hungary whose marriage to Victor's mother had been arranged through the mail, turned out to be abusive and disappeared shortly after their child was born. The pall of a sickly childhood marked by his family's stuffy conservatism was lifted when, around age twenty, Neuburg happened to pass the South London office of *The Freethinker*, which displayed its secular humanist publication in the window. When Neuburg "fell for something, he fell hard," writes Hopper (23). He would join the paper's social circle and the crowd around the related *Agnostic Journal*, contributing poems and essays on topics such as Tolstoy and Paganism. His first piece in *The Freethinker*, in 1903, titled "Vale Jehovah!," reads like a spiritual mission statement: "What if to the Race I was born? / To me that's no reason why I / Should cling to a faith that I scorn, / When my birthright's the infinite sky!"[†]

Neuburg entered Trinity College, Cambridge in 1906. That same year, at the funeral of an *Agnostic Journal* editor, he met J. F. C. Fuller, a captain in the British army who had recently returned from South Africa and would later become well-known as an associate of Hitler and theorist of the blitzkrieg. At the time, Fuller was a member of the inner circle of occultist Aleister Crowley, a Trinity dropout and peripatetic mountaineer who had traveled to Egypt, Mexico, and India in search of secret knowledge which he was beginning to systematize into a religious system he called Thelema. In *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, Crowley remembers his first encounter with Neuburg:

He was an agnostic, a vegetarian, a mystic, a Tolstoyan, and several other things all at once. He endeavoured to express his spiritual

[†]/ Quoted in Jean Overton Fuller, *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg: A Biography*, revised ed. (Oxford, UK: Mandrake, 1990), 97.

state by wearing the green star of Esperanto, though he could not speak the language; by refusing to wear a hat, even in London, to wash, and to wear trousers. Whenever addressed, he wriggled convulsively, and his lips, which were three times too large for him, and had been put on hastily as an afterthought, emitted the most extraordinary laugh that had ever come my way.[†]

Finding common interests in magic, clairvoyance, and poetry, Crowley supplied Neuburg with a reading list of ancient classics, theosophy, and assorted Hermetica. Neuburg threw himself into the Freethought Association and his own Pan Society, all while receiving low marks. Meanwhile, he became Crowley's most trusted medium for his séances, following him to Paris and Bordeaux to participate in magic rituals that Hopper dryly refers to as Neuburg's "extracurricular activities" (23). Neuburg was officially at Cambridge, but his master became Crowley.

After graduating in 1909, Neuburg became one of the first initiates—and main financial supporters—of Crowley's newly formed society, the *Argentum Astrum*, or A.:A.:. (Hopper suggests that Neuburg's subservience may have even been the inspiration for it.) To the A.:A.:, Neuburg pledged the society's oath "to prosecute the Great Work: which is, to obtain a scientific knowledge of the nature and powers of my own being." What this meant in practice was a slavish devotion to Crowley and his physically demanding ceremonies. While still a student, Neuburg had accompanied Crowley on a summer walking tour through Spain, where they smoked hashish and probably began their sexual relationship. In the fall of 1909, he and Crowley embarked on an even more quixotic walk through the Algerian desert. On a mountain outside the city of Bou Saâda, and in a valley on the way to Biskra on the edge of the Sahara, Neuburg served as scribe while Crowley stared into a topaz and dictated hour-long visions of angels around the same time that court proceedings in Edinburgh granted Crowley's wife a divorce and custody of their daughter. Notoriously, Crowley shaved Neuburg's head save two dyed red "horns" and led him around by a chain, conducting a sex ritual in which Neuburg became a personified Pan. They returned to French Algeria a year later to rekindle the magic, but after three days of trekking through the rain, Neuburg fell ill and Crowley left him behind to convalesce.

Years of increasingly taxing occult rituals with Crowley culminated in a 1914 event Crowley called the Paris Working, in which the duo spent the first six weeks of the year in a Paris apartment performing sadomasochistic

†/ Aleister Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley: An Autohagiography*, eds. John Symonds and Kenneth Grant (London, UK: Arkana, 1979), 562.

sex, magic, and evocations of Hermes. “It doesn’t seem particularly obvious, to those of us reading a century later, what magick was accomplished,” Hopper soberly writes (29). A lover’s suicide—along with Crowley’s abuse and anti-Semitism—eventually became too much for the fragile and often sickly Neuburg to handle, and he had a near total break with Crowley by the end of year. “It is the very limit of meanness to grouse at a man because of his race,” Neuburg wrote in his journal.[†] Although he would defend Crowley in a 1930 article, when he spotted his old master in London’s occult Atlantis Bookshop in 1941, he snuck away unnoticed.

After an uneventful stint in an office in France during the Great War, Neuburg moved in 1919 to Vine Cottage, an old building in Steyning offered to him by an aunt. This is where *Obsolete Spells* picks up his trail. In rural Sussex, his gentle nicknames Vicky and Vickybird seemed more at home than among practitioners of black magic. He was soon joined by Kathleen, his lover and later wife who worked in a nearby post office, and their home became a gathering place for writers and artists—Tallulah Bankhead, Paul Robeson, and Gertrude Stein passed through. The couple purchased a manual printing press and founded the small publishing venture they named after their home, participating in what Hopper calls a “golden age for small presses in England” (39). Charming woodcuts were supplied by untrained locals, including a trio of brothers.

The first books published by Vine Press showcased Neuburg’s own poetry, albeit anonymously and, in some cases, interspersed with traditional folk ballads. While still at Cambridge, Neuburg had published *The Green Garland* (1908), which collected and revised items published in freethinking journals. Deeply indebted to Hardy and Housman, and touched by a cradle-song optimism, the poems show no sign of Crowley’s influence except for an ad at the end for one of his political pamphlets. By contrast, Neuburg’s second book, *The Triumph of Pan* (1910), fell squarely within Crowley’s worldview, down to the epigraphs from and dedications to Crowley himself. Published by *The Equinox*, the journal cofounded by Neuburg and Crowley, the book contains 180 pages of poems on metaphysics, Thelema, and his perennial theme, the titular horned Greek god of the wood grove bacchanal.

In his Vine Press work, Neuburg returned to his earlier interest in a timeless, pastoral tradition and florid celebrations of the natural world, rejecting not only London literary society but also its newfound tone of disaffection and self-doubt. In 1920, Britain’s World War I poets were at the height of their powers: Eliot published *Poems* and Pound announced a new denunciatory mode with *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. By contrast, Neuburg put out *Lillygay: An Anthology of Anonymous Poems* (1920), which conjures up a

[†]/ Quoted in Fuller, *Magical Dilemma*, 130.

world of lost innocence. “Colophon,” one of three poems in which Neuburg played on his role as both poet and publisher, begins:

Pale lilies throned in silver jars,
White stars in red-gold skies,
Slim olivine wild nenuphars
Blowing broad melodies.

Grey horses in the hippodrome
Of wheeling stars; symposia
Of Hybla-scented honeycomb,
Violet-breathed ambrosia.

(74)

While London hung on Wilfred Owen’s unforgettable descriptions of death in the trenches, Neuburg preferred musical flowers. It was both a rejection of current literary trends and of Crowley’s more macabre fixations, even while Neuburg would continue a Crowleian rejection of modernity in other ways. *Lillygay* was followed by *Swift Wings: Songs in Sussex* (1921), *Songs of the Groves: Records of the Ancient World* (1921), and *Larkspur: A Lyric Garland* (1922), each of which invites readers to enter Neuburg’s fantasies. The poem to *Songs of the Groves* intones:

Sphere to sphere,
World to world,
Calls:
Waterfalls
Of light
Are uncurled.
Night
Dwells among the blue spaces,
In the wide places.
Hast thou not heard?

(109)

In these lines, a more mature Neuburg seems to restate his early maxim: “My birthright’s the infinite sky!”

Neuburg brings his high-flying musings down to earth in *Swift Wings*, his extended meditation on the Sussex landscape around Steyning. He memorializes the humble but dignified farmhouses, streets, churches, and geography he encountered during what Hopper calls his habit of “prolific

walking” (80). One poem, “Fulking Hill,” on an outlook now within the South Downs National Park, reads in full:

Grey, level eyes sweep round the laughing valley,
Immortal in their sure, intense mortality;
Transcendent in austerest, fierce morality
Of artist-love. Rooks make their noisy sally;
The wind-wheat song floats up in a swift rally
Of Nature’s perfect master-tones, legality
Of all the lyres of man. Here is sodality
Of Art. Here form, light, sound blend naturally.

Poppies, white-drifting clouds, the red geranium,
The undulating, solid sea of hills,
The invisible lark, still shouting at the azure;
Was it not so in Tyre and Herculaneum,
My mortal Artist of immortal thrills,
Watching and dumb from
Fulking Hill’s embrasure?

(93)

After an opening stanza whose lines all nearly rhyme, Neuburg moves the reader, through a forward shift in line breaks that disrupt the sonnet structure and a mix of classicism and romanticism, toward finding “form” in nature itself. He sums this up with the succinct revelation, inspired by birdsong, that “Here is sodality / Of Art.” A pair of Vine Press pamphlets called *The Hermes Books* followed: *Seven Years* (1928), of obscure authorship, and *Phantasy and Other Poems* (1930), by Ethel Archer. These work in a similar mood and revel in a netherworld of druids, nightingales, fireflies, “moon-spell,” and the swooning of “the Fall of Time, the Under-year,” as “Decline,” in *Swift Wings*, puts it (116, 101).

Other Vine publications had a very different concept and underscored the dissonance between Neuburg’s apparent investment in living in a timeless, primordial world, however imagined, and his awareness of the rapidly changing political landscape. In 1920, Neuburg published *Gabriele d’Annunzio’s Appeal to Europe*, a proclamation by one of Italy’s leading ultranationalist writers and politicians. Translated by a close friend of Neuburg’s, the 1918 text’s original Italian title gave birth to the revanchist phrase “mutilated victory” and “would become a rhetorical cornerstone of Italy’s fascist movement,” Hopper notes (76). Yet, with its extravagant and dramatic language, it is easy to see the text’s appeal to Neuburg. It announces,

“O unencumbered valleys now breathing sweetness so pure that the dead seem to sleep here in the arms of Mary as did her Son!” and “Thy course is beyond night. Thy flight is beyond dawn. What was said in God repeateth itself: ‘The skies are less wide than thy wings’” (78). In 1925, Neuburg published *Before the Storm: Four Tales of Old Russia* by “Princess Ouroussoff,” or Sofya Urusova, a lady-in-waiting of the Russian court who married into Polish nobility. A native of Vilna (today Vilnius, Lithuania), Urusova fled the Bolshevik Revolution, during which her brothers were shot. These stories of the peasantry and Christian faith present, as Neuburg’s introductory note describes them, “little fossils of an old and romantic social order” (173).

Neuburg’s celebrations of fascists and aristocratic victims of the Bolsheviks force us to consider the politics of Britain’s occult subculture. Hopper writes that Neuburg was “closely allied with leftist and anarchist movements, and directly involved with anti-fascism in 1920s and ’30s England” (76). Indeed, in her freewheeling 1965 biography, *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg*, Jean Overton Fuller (no relation to Captain Fuller) remembers about his gatherings that “the feeling of the house was Socialist,” and William C. Owen, an important anarchist writer who was an associate of Kropotkin and Ricardo Flores Magón, lived with Neuburg at Vine Cottage late in his life.[†] And yet Neuburg kept the company of right-wing figures like Crowley and J. F. C. Fuller, sharing with them the impulse to reject what was ostensibly modern and return to an idealized premodern state of affairs. Neuburg was working right at the time when modernism was breaking along these political lines. “Preston and Neuburg both knew Pound,” Hopper writes, but that is all we learn of what must have been a significant connection (76).

In the 1920s, Neuburg became involved in a nearby utopian settlement called the Sanctuary that fittingly attracted “icons and hoboes; communists, proto-fascists and aging anarchists; free-thinkers and free-lovers,” according to Hopper (197). The commune was led by Vera Pragnell, the eccentric daughter of a knighted textile merchant, and in 1928 the Vine Press published a volume of her recollections and reprinted her inspirational leaflets that, together, form a sort of manifesto for the commune. Excerpts in *Obsolete Spells* include pieces titled “Retreat,” “Vocation,” “Self-Help,” “Surrender to Land,” “Its Challenge to Capitalism,” and “Pooling of Super-Surplus Service.” Pragnell appreciated the Sussex landscape as much as Neuburg but sought to manage it directly through her communalist back-to-the-land movement inspired by Christian values. She wrote, “In a Christian community every living soul would have the right to claim the means of maintenance. That

†/ Fuller, *Magical Dilemma*, 24, 124.

means, basally, is land. While land-monopoly continues there is no such thing as the ‘right to live’; if a man is not a capitalist he is forced to be a serf. Christianity stands as an indomitable challenge to a civilisation which is an outrage against God” (202).

It was an unusual end to Neuburg’s life of spiritual seeking. He had rejected Judaism for the “free thinkers” only to become the disciple of a new religious movement a few years later. When he eventually left Crowley’s circle, he joined the ranks of progressive Christians at the Sanctuary who masqueraded as neo-pagans. Yet Neuburg apparently never yielded to the pull of Anglicanism or Catholicism, like so many other writers of his generation did—perhaps a step too far from his Jewish roots, or because of his general distrust of traditional organized religion. Neuburg’s spirituality remained personal and mercurial, like his poetry.

It was probably through the Sanctuary that Neuburg met his next life partner, Runia MacLeod, although they would both remain married to other people. (Kathleen gave birth to Neuburg’s son, also named Victor Neuburg, in 1924.) Eventually, Neuburg and Runia moved part-time to London, where he landed the position as editor of the *Sunday Referee’s* Poet’s Corner, which was both influential and innovative, advertising weekly contests to which anyone could submit. The first winner he chose was Pamela Hansford Johnson, who would go on to have a successful career as a novelist. The second was Dylan Thomas.

The intersection of Neuburg’s life with Thomas’s is legendary, and *Obsolete Spells* presents an opportunity to reconsider the significance of this historic moment. But did Neuburg really “discover” Thomas, as Hopper writes in his introduction (19)? By the time Thomas had submitted “That sanity be kept” to Neuburg, in 1933, Thomas’s first published poem, “And death shall have no dominion,” had already appeared in *The New English Weekly*, edited by the very Neuburg-like A. R. Orage, a socialist disciple of Armenian mystic George Gurdjieff and former publisher of the influential literary journal *The New Age*. Thomas also heavily revised “That sanity be kept” and republished it in the *Swansea and West Wales Guardian* just a few months after Neuburg included it as the Poet’s Corner entry in London. Retitled “Twelve,” and beginning “That the sum sanity might add to naught,” the second version is more formal in tone and mood and is the one now collected in Thomas anthologies. To make matters more complicated, there are several claimants to the title of discoverer, including Mark Goulden, who wrote in his memoir, “I was the first publisher to print the poems of Dylan Thomas, whom I indeed discovered.”[†] Perhaps most significantly, Neuburg’s

[†]/ Goulden, *Mark My Words!*, 150.

son once wrote about his humble father, “He never claimed ‘discovery’ of Dylan Thomas.”[†]

There is no doubt that Neuburg helped popularize Thomas and played an important role in launching his career. But Hopper’s attachment to Neuburg’s role as singular in Thomas’s life shows that there is a paradox at work in his project. Like Neuburg, Hopper has the gnostic goal of recovering lost knowledge, and he asks readers to appreciate another side of Neuburg than the figure known for his connections to Thomas and Crowley. Also like Neuburg, Hopper is reluctant to separate men from the powerful myths that surround them.

What Hopper’s work does show is that, with his role in launching Thomas, Neuburg symbolically passed the torch from romanticism to modernism. Hopper takes the anthology’s title from “Downwood,” a poem found in *Song of the Groves* that celebrates “forgotten men, / Forgotten things” (113). It reads, in part:

They live today
In memory,
Rising grey,
Unuttered,
From the eternal sea
Of man’s mind,
Where everything dwells
That lived: blind
Forces,
Obsolete spells...

(113)

Here we see Neuburg on the cusp of a new worldview, acknowledging the obsolescence of the old cosmology but still yearning for that magic and mourning its loss. Hopper writes that Neuburg sought “refuge from the modern” in rural Sussex and the Vine Press, which suggests that Neuburg’s archaisms did not emerge intact from a bygone era but were a response to changing times, a most modern act (80). What makes Neuburg’s life and work worth considering closely is that he was between worlds: Jewish and New Age, left and right, Victorian and forward-thinking.

In the end, what does Neuburg represent? Torn between agnosticism and the search for arcane knowledge, he gives the impression of being incomplete. Neuburg *files* wrote, “the twin claims of objectivity and subjectivity...are

[†]/ Victor E. Neuburg, *Vickybird: A Memoir by his Son* (London, UK: The Polytechnic of North London, 1983), 8.

precisely the demons which pursued Vickybird throughout his all too short life—and with which, predictably, he signally failed to come to terms.”[†] To Hopper, Neuburg was driven by aesthetic conviction. “The Vine Press,” he argues, “wasn’t merely a publisher of poetry, it was a battalion fighting in the ongoing war between beauty and philistinism, and Victor Neuburg was its Colonel” (51). Neuburg’s innocence, his confidence in myth, and his overall willingness to believe were traits that Crowley and Thomas both needed but ultimately mocked and destroyed. In this light, recognizing Thomas’s talent can be seen as a continuation of Neuburg’s lifelong preoccupation with uncovering hidden sacredness. Hopper argues, “To him, poetry *was* magick. It was a ritual. It was not a solitary action of the struggling writer at their desk, but an act of community. Neuburg’s ritual was to build those communities” (52). After all those years of searching for a divine touch in the far Sahara and England’s own Sanctuary, Neuburg had found the sublime from the comfort of his armchair. Landing on Thomas and disseminating his work was a ritual, a form of divination.

In some ways, Neuburg and Thomas had a lot in common. Their early efforts included poems dedicated to Isis and Osiris, offbeat homages to “Jehovah,” and they were both drawn to spiritual and metaphysical (if not quite religious) themes. They also shared an extended social circle: Thomas’s childhood friend and literary ally Daniel Jones had attended a tea party at Vine Cottage and recommended he send work to Neuburg. Although Thomas’s biography on the website of the Poetry Foundation says that he “avoided becoming involved with literary groups or movements,” he did participate in the writers’ salon led by Neuburg known as the Zoists.[‡] Thomas didn’t like the name, but he acknowledged, according to Fuller’s biography, that he was one of “Vicky’s children” and indebted to the man’s assistance.^{*} As a result of winning the *Referee* prize, Thomas was contacted by previous winner Pamela Hansford Johnson, who became his first love.^{**} But Jones later wrote that “Thomas recognized from the first the preciosity of the Neuburg circle,” and Thomas privately complained to Johnson about the low quality of Poet’s Corner.[§] Thomas was dissatisfied with how Neuburg handled the production of *18 Poems* and unsuccessfully sought the attention of T. S. Eliot, the kingmaker at Faber & Faber. Just months after Neuburg pulled together the funds to publish his book, Thomas referred to his patron as a “creature”

†/ Victor E. Neuburg, *Vickybird*, 1.

‡/ “Dylan Thomas,” Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/dylan-thomas>.

*/ Fuller, *Magical Dilemma*, 8.

**/ Andrew Lycett, *Dylan Thomas: A New Life* (New York: Overlook, 2004), 77.

§/ Daniel Jones, ed. *The Poems of Dylan Thomas*, vol. 1, revised ed. (New York: New Directions, 2003), 290.

and “a nineteenth-century crank with mental gangrene, lousier than ever before, a product of a Jewish nuts-factory” (51).

Unjustified insults aside, Thomas’s comment about Neuburg’s “nineteenth-century” predilections is revealing. Neuburg was seventeen at the *fin de siècle* and was formed by Victorian mores in an era of empires and enchantment. Thomas, who was born after the outbreak of World War I, belonged to a world of nation-states and secular aesthetics, and Neuburg represented everything that he and other modernist experimenters rejected. Neuburg’s son would conclude about his father, “His poetic home was with that gifted group of lyric poets who were overtaken, both artistically and personally, by the holocaust which history calls the Western Front.”[†] By 1933, when Neuburg encountered Thomas, the occult world of Crowley had lost whatever mystique it might have held for a young poet in the more innocent aughts. On the verge of bankruptcy, Crowley was in the public eye then only for an unsuccessful libel suit against socialite Nina Hamnett for her memoir of bohemian life, *Laughing Torso*.

While Thomas believed, incorrectly and romantically, that his own “falling lungs” were a sign of tuberculosis, Neuburg in fact succumbed to the poets’ disease in 1940—the result, some suspected, of his abuse at the hands of Aleister Crowley.[‡] In death, as in life, Neuburg failed to garner abiding public respect, even from those closest to him. Crowley, who had been supported by Neuburg’s family inheritance, disparaged his former disciple, calling him a “creature,” just as Thomas did, “a certain deformed and filthy abortion without moral character” and “the sausage-lipped songster of Steyning” (13). (By contrast, Jean Fuller wrote of his “finely chiseled, aristocratic Jewish features.”)^{*}

Just weeks after Neuburg’s death, Thomas would begin to cowrite a novel with the critic John Davenport about the murder of a poet laureate during a party at his country house. The main character of *The Death of the King’s Canary*, Hilary Byrd, is based on Neuburg, and Thomas parodies Neuburg’s poetic style in a poem about “a young man looking for a Leader,” whom he finds on a mountaintop. In a fascinating retelling of his own discovery by Neuburg, Thomas’s roman à clef opens with the British prime minister attempting to choose a poet laureate by flipping through a pile of submissions. He lands on Hilary Byrd, intrigued by his “note of modernity.”^{**} Thomas’s novel spoofed Auden, Eliot, Spender, and other leading literary figures of

[†]/ Victor E. Neuburg, *Vickybird*, 10.

[‡]/ Fuller, *Magical Dilemma*, 131.

^{*}/ Fuller, *Magical Dilemma*, 4.

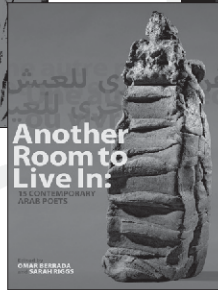
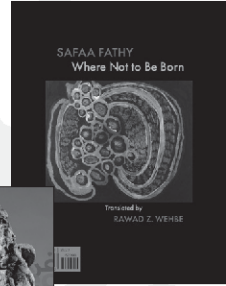
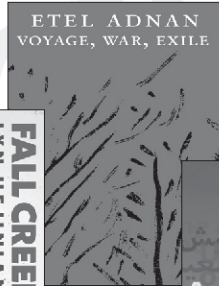
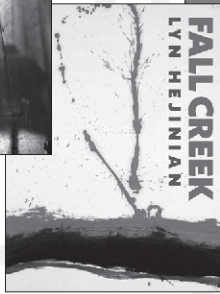
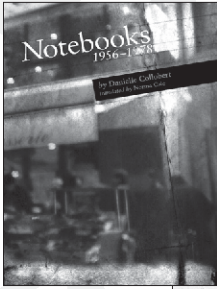
^{**}/ Dylan Thomas and John Davenport, *The Death of the King’s Canary* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 19–20.

the day, but Neuburg was its main character. It doesn't end well for poor Vickybird. In the last line of the book, the reader finds the poet—"smiling with a knife through his throat."[†]

Michael Casper

[†]/ Thomas and Davenport, *King's Canary*, 145.

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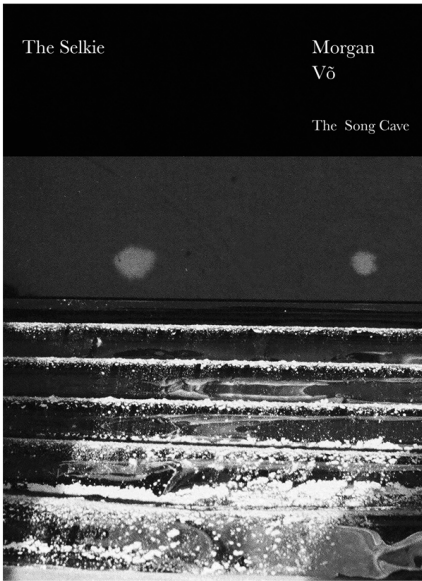
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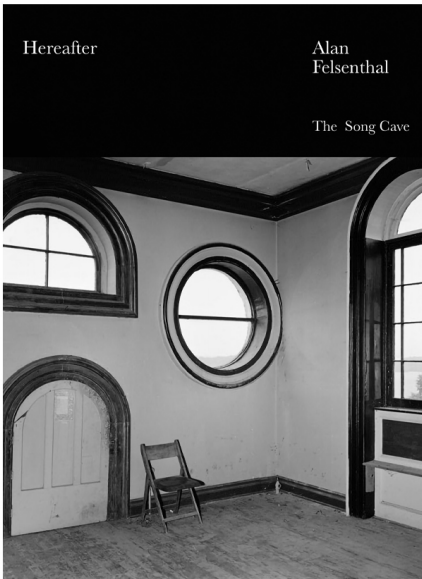
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June, 2024

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as well as the Shipibo Conibo Center of NY. As part of the artist duo caraballofarman, he long worked with Leonor Caraballo, exhibiting internationally, and now continues to work with her on social and artistic projects in her afterlife. He is producer and co-writer on several feature films including *Vegas: Based on a True Story* (2012), *Icaros: A Vision* (2016), and *Uyra: The Rising Forest* (2022). ♦ **Gabe Flores** is an artist/curator currently living in Cleveland, Ohio. His work is often relational while reflecting on identity-based ideologies and personal narrative. Flores founded/directed/curated a few conceptual/experimental galleries in Portland, Oregon. He's been assisting here and there with Let It Bee since 2017. ♦ **Marzia Grillo** is a writer, editor, and event organizer from Rome. Her short story collection *Il punto di vista del sole* (2022, Giulio Perrone Editore) pushes the boundaries of genre expectations and the first person perspective. In 2016 she edited a volume of experimental Emily Dickinson machine translations, *Charter in delirio! Un esperimento con i versi di Emily Dickinson* (Elliot Edizioni), probing the evolution of the Italian language through Dickinson's gripping poetic fantasies. Grillo has worked as an editor with publishing houses such as Fazi, Elliot, Giunti, Bompiani, and Fandango, and collaborates regularly with literary journals and fanzines. Among her projects, she organizes the Premio Strega's official event Strega OFF. ♦ **Carla Harryman** is known for her boundary-breaking investigations of genre, non/narrative poetics, and performance writing. Her plays and text-based performance scores have been presented nationally and internationally including at DOCUMENTA 13, Kassel, Germany; Unlimited Festival, Wells, Austria; The Stone, New York; Light Box, Detroit; The LAB and Center for New Music in San Francisco. Recent books include *Cloud Cantata* (2022), *Sue in Berlin* (2018), and *A Voice to Perform: One Opera/Two Plays* (2020). She serves as Professor of English at Eastern Michigan University. ♦ **Chris Hosea** received the Academy of American Poets Walt Whitman Award (Judge: John Ashbery) for *Put Your Hands In* (LSU Press, 2014). *The Brooklyn Rail* called his second book, *Double Zero* (Prelude, 2016), "a statement for our generation." His participatory conceptual artwork, *The postcard project* (aka "What do you feel") (2012-ongoing), was exhibited at the Brooklyn gallery Transmitter in 2015, and, in 2020, The Metropolitan Museum of Art commissioned and published a short video featuring the piece. A graduate of Harvard College and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst MFA Program for Poets and Writers, Hosea lives in greater Boston, where he co-leads a weekly workshop for psychiatric patients residing at McLean Hospital, gives individual writing lessons, and serves as an advisor and communications writer and for nonprofit, art world, and corporate clients. ♦ **Ethan Hsi** is a poet and critic currently living in Ann Arbor, Michigan. ♦ **Andrew Levy** is the author of

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and Osman Yousefzada. He is developing a large-scale exhibition exploring the genre of still life opening this autumn. Committed to disability justice, Yates collaborates with David Ruebain and serves on the advisory board for the Dis/Ordinary Architecture Project. His artistic collaborations include set designs and performing in the Golden Lion-awarded opera *Sun and Sea*. He has taught at Cambridge and Boston University, and he writes regularly on artist practices for a range of publications. ♦ **Ryan Nowlin** received his MA in creative writing from Temple University in 2004 and MLIS from Rutgers in 2011. His concentration was in postmodern American poetry and twentieth-century modernisms. For the past several years he has been an active participant in The Poetry Project at St. Marks in the Bowery. He currently lives in New Jersey and teaches as an English instructor at Hudson County Community College in Jersey City. His most recent chapbook entitled *Time with the Season* appeared in the spring of 2021 from Slacks Press. He is currently working on a new manuscript entitled *Film Studies*. ♦ **Julie (jubilee) ezelle patton**'s shifting terrain of media, disciplines, and chancy collaborations reflect simple habits or rituals of following one's nose, ears, eyes, and other senses: Baring witness. A 2015 Foundation for Contemporary Art Poetry Awardee, its *Womb Room Tomb* installation honoring artist Virgie Ezelle Patton was featured in The FRONT International Triennial, 2018. It is the author of *Notes For Some (Nominally) Awake* (Yo-Yo Labs) and an edited selection of its concrete, visual, textual and ecopoetics from the 1970s to the near present is forthcoming from Nightboat Books. ♦ **A. Ng Pavel** (吳慧靈) is an interdisciplinary artist from Chicago, Illinois. They are the founder of the Chicago Asian Writers Workshop, which offers free creative writing classes for Asian writers in the Midwest. In their past artistic lives, they were part of the experimental band The Concept of Nature, a DJ for WHPK.fm, a filmmaker, and a fiber artist. They currently live in Oxford, Mississippi, where they are at work on their first novel. ♦ **Julia Pelosi-Thorpe**'s translations of Latin, Italian, and Dialect poetry and fiction appear in *Asymptote*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *The Hopkins Review*, *A Public Space*, *The Poetry Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Journal of Italian Translation*, and other literary magazines. Her website is jpelosithorpe.com. ♦ Born in Tobago, **m. nourbeSe philip** is an unembedded poet without ambition who also writes essays, novels, and plays. She lives in the space-time of Toronto, Canada. A former lawyer, her published works include the award-winning YA novel, *Harriet's Daughter*, the seminal poetry collection, *She Tries Her Tongue*, *Her Silence Softly Breaks*, the speculative prose poem, "Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence," as well as her genre-breaking, book-length epic, *Zong!*. m. nourbeSe philip is a Guggenheim and Rockefeller Fellow (Bellagio) and in 2020 was the recipient of PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International

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♦ **Roberto Tejada** is the author of poetry collections *Why the Assembly Disbanded* (2022), *Todo en el ahora* (2015), *Full Foreground* (2012), *Exposition Park* (2010), and *Mirrors for Gold* (2006), as well as *Still Nowhere in an Empty Vastness* (2019), a Latinx poetics on colonial settlement and cultural counter-conquest in art and literature of the Americas. A John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellow in Poetry (2021), he teaches creative writing and art history at the University of Houston. ♦ **Lindsay Turner** is the author of poetry collections *The Upstate* and *Songs & Ballads* and a translator of contemporary Francophone poetry and philosophy. She lives in Cleveland, OH, where she is Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at Case Western Reserve University. ♦ **Cecilia Vicuña** is a visual artist, poet, filmmaker, and activist born in Santiago de Chile and based out of New York. Her poetic work offers a decolonizing vision that anticipates an ecofeminism through space, performance, and visual art. Vicuña has been exhibited in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern, London; the Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; and documenta 14, among other venues. Recently, she was elected Honorary Foreign Member of the Academy of Arts and Letters of the United States and received the Premio Nacional de Artes Plásticas 2023.

