ecopoetics

is published biannually
and dedicated to exploring
creative-critical edges between writing
(with an emphasis on poetry) and
ecology (the theory and praxis of
deliberate earthlings).

Edited and designed by Jonathan Skinner.

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Letters to the editor are welcome. All manuscripts (please include an electronic copy, or an e-address/ link) should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Please allow some time for response.

ecopoetics 03 will appear in the Spring of 2003.
Please see our Call for Work on page 168.

Note: as email sometimes gets vaporized, please back up vital correspondence with snailmail.

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(along with a truetype font for Macintosh) are online at
http://cla.umn.edu/joglars/floraspirae/inhale.html. Bellamy’s
“Ampersand” first appeared in Salt Hill 12, Spring 2002. “Twenty-
Seven” of Brennan’s Winter Poems first appeared in Kenning no. 7.
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1972. Zanzotto’s “Subnarcosi” is from Pasque (1973); “Alto, altro lin-
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their encouragement and continuing support of this project.

This issue is for the desert places.
NOTES FROM THE TINAJA
(rain pocket)

“It is a ridiculous demand which England and America make, that you shall speak so that they can understand you. Neither men nor toad-stools grow so. . . . As if Nature could support but one order of understandings, could not sustain birds as well as quadrupeds, flying as well as creeping things, and bush and who, which Bright can understand, were the best English. . . . I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be extra-vagant enough”*

—Henry David Thoreau

The best way to see wildlife is to pick a good spot, sit and wait. Half of the contributions came to this watering hole that way, unsolicited. Even those invited came of their own accord.

Picking out such a place for ecopoetics has been, nevertheless, tricky business: one doesn’t want to second-guess what is here to be found, especially with poetry. My favorite response to issue number one was Joel Kuszai’s: “Ecopoetics—what’s up with that?”

From the ‘extravagant’ to the subdued, you’ll find several such measures of ecopoetics herein. Hanging around at this site makes one more sure of not finding such a thing as an ‘ecopoeem’ or meeting an ‘ecopoet.’ Which is all the more reason for staying here—where “you’ve got to get out of the goddamned contraption and walk, better yet crawl, on hands and knees” (E. Abbey).

Welcome to the ‘Denim blue’ issue. ecopoetics 01 was, quite literally, the color of money. (Would it had been metaphorically!) No. 2 continues, I like to think, the Abbey salvation plan: a) keep cars out of the national parks and b) “put the park rangers to work.” There’s as much work here as there’s denim to cover, and that’s still not enough. As Tim Shaner put it, “I see now that your interest in ecology is not so different from my interest in work.” Nature poetry has been in the wilderness long enough. If we turn from wide open spaces to the interstices of a nine-to-five day, how much of a turn is that?

Not to speak of maquiladora no-space. If I can’t help invoking Edward Abbey it’s less out of nostalgia for my beloved, and disappearing, deserts

*Thanks to Susan Howe for planting this phrase in my head.
(though water shortages might put some crimp in Phoenix or Albuquerque’s designs on the Upper Sonoran and Chihuahuan ecosystems) than of a need for the sagebrush-rebel’s brand of irreverence in this time of fearful domestication. After all, the real predators in an Edward Abbey novel eat rock. Now they’ve taken (again) to eating humans.

That I had to fight (mostly without success) for space in this issue, that an apocalyptic note insists on being heard, reflect the historical character of ecopoetics. One should not now have to make the case that environmental and (human) political concerns are one and the same. Nor that poetry might also be thus concerned.

Project-ive (or ‘applied’) poetics have no choice, today, but to think globally, in cross-cultural and especially cross-equatorial terms. “We are the generation of artists that grew up with a photograph of the earth tacked to our walls . . . We stand on provisional shores, and point into enormous reconstructions of times and places,” stated Peter Gizzi in 1993: “think haiku, act locu,” is Yunte Huang’s response nearly ten years later. Time to engage that poster-world.

This issue extends an interest in ‘outside’ perspective—what it’s like, for example, to have a close call with a human airliner. Writers on “both sides of the divide” have much to contribute to the task of seeing and hearing our neighbors a little more distinctly. This implies intersubjective, and interlinguistic, participation: as Ak’abal has pointed out, to name is to ‘sing with’ a bird. Nor does language, to this end, need to be stretched to a ‘sheer,’ gossamer consistency: “words,” says Susan Howe, “are candles lighting the dark.” Thick overalls are advised.

Amidst the entangled bank is a thicket of words. The ‘middle landscape’ of ‘complex pastoral’ can be disjunct as much as it joins, with an alphabetical edge effect. Here, without exception, are writers whose language, whether restrained or excessive, bears the mark of extra-vagance: wandering ‘outside.’ It would be presumptuous to add more, beyond heartfelt thanks due the contributors, and all else who actively support ecopoetics. Reader, you too are of this company.

JS
Buffalo, NY / 26 November, 2002
Klis, klis, klis...
Ch’ok, ch’ok, ch’ok...

Tz’unun, tz’unun, tz’unun...
B’uqpurix, b’uqpurix, b’uqpurix...

Wiswil, wiswil, wiswil...
Tulul, tulul, tulul...

K’urupup, k’urupup, k’urupup...
Ch’owix, ch’owix, ch’owix...

Tuktuk, tuktuk, tuktuk...
Xar, xar, xar...

K’up, k’up, k’up...
Saqk’or, saqk’or, saqk’or...

Ch’ik, ch’ik, ch’ik...
Tukumux, tukumux, tukumux...

Xperpwaq, xperpwaq, xperpwaq...
Tz’ikin, tz’ikin, tz’ikin...

Kukuw, kukuw, kukuw...
Chi’wit, chi’wit, chi’wit...

Tli, tli, tli...
Ch’er, ch’er, ch’er...

Si-si-si-si-si-si-si-si...
Ch’ar, ch’ar, ch’ar...
**RI AB’AJ**

Ri ab’aj man e mem taj: xa kakik’ol ri kich’awem.

**STONES**

Stones aren’t dumb: just keeping quiet.

**SOMETIMES RIVERS**

If water runs, they’re rivers.

If not, paths.

**WENE’ E NIMA’**

We kab’in ja’ chupam xa are e nima’.

Are we maj, xa are e b’e.

**RI’J B’OQ’OCHAJ**

Ri ab’aj
sib’alaj ri’j ri kib’ oq’och
we jun kuwilawichij
kuriq ri uno’j.

**OLD EYES**

Stones have eyes so old just by looking at them you grow wise.

**FIREFLIES**

Fireflies are stars that came down from the sky, and the stars are fireflies that couldn’t get down.

They turn their flashlights off and on all night, to save batteries.

**ELAQ’**

Elaq’an chaqe
ri ulew, ri che’, ri ja’.

Ri man e k’owinan raj xa are ri’, ri Nawal.

Man kekuwin ta wa’.

**THEFT**

You stole our land, trees, water.

But you couldn’t get hold of Nahuatl.

Nor will you.

**RI CHUPIL Q’AQ’**

Ri chupil q’aq are ri’, ri ch’umil
ri xe’qaj uloq cho ri kaj,
are k’u ri ch’umil are ri’, ri chupil q’aq’
ri man xekwintaj xeqajuloq.

Kakichup kakit’iq ri kich’aj
ruman k’u ri’ kuq’i’ jun aqab’ chike.

**RAKICHUP RAKIT’IQ RI KICH’AJ**

Ri man xekwintaj xeqajuloq.
B’UQPURIX

B’uqpurix, itzel chikop.

We pa ri b’e kel chawij pa ri awikiqab’, utzalaj retal ri’; are we kel pa ri amox xatb’anik xatel k’ex.

CH’IK

Coffee and orange-feathered ch’ik ch’ik ch’ik calls for water.

Ch’ik is its song, ch’ik is its name.

It hops contentedly between the cornstalks.

The birdlet who asks for rain.

CHOWIX

Ri chowix utz kuna’o kuril rib’ pa ri ja’.

Kunim ri utza’am kutij ri ub’ixonem.

B’UQPURIX

B’uqpurix, bad-luck bird.

If you cross the road from right to left, it’s a good sign; if you cross the other way fuck you.

CH’IK

K’aqoj ri rismal xuquje’ uwach alanxex ch’ik ch’ik ch’ik kuch’ab’ej kusik’ij ri jab’.

Ch’ik are ub’i ri ub’ixonem, ch’ik are ri ub’i.

Kakiko ‘tik kach’oplinik chuxo’l taq ri tur ab’ix.

Are ri jun alaj chikop ri ajta’ol jab’.

CHOWIX

The chowix admires its reflection.

It dips its beak in and drinks its own song.
“Plants and animals have breath. A plant-language w/. translatable morphemes”.

from the Tablets by Armand Schwerner

the language & architexture of FLORASPIRAE is created in memory of Armand Schwerner

autonomy - wilderness - freedom

absorption - metabolism

flower - completion - bloom

aborescence - clutter

chlorophyll - verdant - currency
All matter accumulates momentum toward its decomposition. Over the lapse of time, seven probabilities of involution - data broken down to an indivisible binary. Only later the humic layer recycles any material’s reconfiguration. “Does binary information experience time?” “But do neurons? Do they experience their own decay?”

A plant wound around itself cannot be completed with the interchange of its opposite force.
The grand resolution of all lineage comes to a binary pin-hole, by necessity the creatrix of info-similar offspring. Assuming the existence of flora is relevant in the hypersphere, these first inklings of phyto experimentation will imprint everything to follow.

Until a plant exhales it cannot replenish the life-force of another, cannot mark new territory or undertake parenting new genetics. Internet remains a convoluted model of a planet’s potential neural networks endlessly rewiring its synapses.
Movement as described by the flow of seed-bytes across environments. Genetic survival is enhanced as new self-similar guilds colonize the medium. Singularity is randomly responsible for unfolding designs.
We are water. In the larger metacycle of natural process moisture stabilizes the advance of evolutionary protocol. In digital-logical transference, fluidity assures predictable permutations & an abundance of chaotic mutators.

The flora is only as healthy as that which it resists. Entities formerly known as Disease Plague Blight & Infestation resemble the most dreadful constructs of our worst fears.
Active termination enables energy for the production of new growth. Where endings coincide with endings, rapid disparities elongate similarly unpredictable patterns. Asynchronous termination, much like a forest, remains stratified, sustained.

Mutually transgressive species are evolving beyond recognized patterns of fruition. Data penetrating replications of itself suppose that parallel dataspheres mirror parthenogenetic causality.

shadow - protection

selfsame - sterile

split - divide - regenerate

terminal - sever
TIM ATKINS / FROM EMULSION DEFECT

a
a blocking into thanks
    a chart in the head
a chorus of gluten
         a dark speech
a desiring motion backing into breath
a fez to protect the head from the aurora
a formless water
    a green light over
         a language that is not addressed to anyone, that has no centre, that reveals nothing
         a letter to be found in no other language
         a light tap
a man from Ecuador beneath the Eiffel Tower
a mile, is it, what
         a neck of red
a new happiness which may not
    a pain in the leg
    a period of unbelief
         a person must make their own occasions
         a light tap
a pin
a pirate compound
a screen's eternal cold
         a sort of guru of dark matter
a speech balloon
a utopian system
a Z string of request
about changing the current
acclimated to experience
against whose
almost all names are proper
almost speechless, & later
although my hand is not
an accident in fog
an agreement is radial in this part
and black girl cheese
and disproof
and expect to insulation around inferior field
and ill success are success and ill success
and Orion
and polymers clock
and real words must be enough
and so had
and staring at the black dots
and the fluorescent light
and thirdly for entertainment
and what of our own atmosphere
appeal to nonverbal communication
appreciated only at
are not just words to be kept
are small grains of salt
artefacts remember the teeth of your can
as a direction of the static forces
as if scalded
as one cannot measure liquid in yards
as structural agent.
as thoughts beneath
asleep age
at call feet and heated
at charismatic depth
at liberty, matter is still
at penetrate
at some false ending, casting
at the interlocked snakes
at the U
bis
attempting to erase
back and forth like an orchestra
bay of roughness
bay of success
because I am out of the picture
because I consist
because it is no longer working
because of the weakness of the audiences

become compelling

before the pink throats
beneath the Iowa plains

beneath the noise
beyond the hydraulic
black cooks crown books
blame objects for lack of effect
but also irritated with “eyelets”

but of these hundreds
by amazing coincidence
by means of surprise, as surprise is tragic and satisfies our human feeling
by the merest fluke
called awakening codes
canadian children that nobody knows

capable of being dissolved
capsule of explicit license
cassette statement
ceilings take substance
chamber or bank
clear through the rest

clear through to the shoulder
clearly in the plot
collects the light from an object

commends in discourse

confident dismantled rules left by quiet and industry
consigned post commands

constructed on dark, clear mountaintops
contains neck age
contending test
copied down wrong

communities silicon

do we exist even like thumb on fossil
do you live in same question period

diamond, a swan.)

Dante / (as Ulysses)
dear
deciphering the quasars
deprived of memory, salt

Craters Back
crepuscular wind
drifting
ear damage in mass transit
  Eastern sea
either the oldest thing in the universe or an emulsion defect on the photographic plate
elbow on
electrolytes’ Michael
elliptical galaxies with a sensitive new television system
  enough to destroy it
entered on a calendar and erased
  entered the language
  entering a hairdressers
  equal to the necessity of having as many astonishing fingers as have not once been lost
eroded by solar wind
establish resemblances consciously
every 6 minutes (the star breathes in & out)
  except in useful sentence
  expects stunning shown as perception of concern
falling away from the eye
fifteen years riding in the cold cage
  fingers pencils calcium and staple
flowing through the earth, and captured in tanks
  Flushing, Harlem, Staten Island, and the Bowery, are reminders
Foaming Sea
  for as long as there is juice there is bruce
  for Eric Satie
for instance, an impossibility, that is a fault
for the animal to sleep in
for waves
force to its farthest limit the idea of the destruction of persons, and go beyond that limit
forerunner of the brilliance of the chromes
forms
four hundred days before the radio burst
from tense effort
from the Criticism of The 43rd Case
from the sound of it
G, G, whose name means close by
    German for "sharp peaks," and named for resemblance to the terrestrial island group
giving out light
globular clusters
    grand aspirations in articulations of solids
great things with gravity
groaning with malvern spring water
The young man, who was not from that place, struck up a conversation with two workmen who were getting into a small car. He said that he was in search of stories of what the landscape used to be like, and asked where he could find some. The workmen said they did not know many stories, but that if the young man went to the church at the convent above the village for early morning mass, there he would find many old women who would be sure to know stories about the past. Waving, they drove off down the steep hill.

Above the young man’s head was blue sky with strips of cloud slowly dissipating to the east, formed briefly over the large mountain upon whose slopes the village was built, but whose summit, too high and set back, remained always hidden from view.

The valley below, in the direction of the workmen’s descent, seemed a vast scrub forest with faint stonewalls, the former patchwork of fields now long overgrown, and at bottom, the undulating windings of shadow and taller trees within which lay the river.

Looking long and hard through the heat-haze, the young man could make out what he thought were the ruins of houses lying amidst the thick vegetation. To get a better look, feeling assured that the next day at least he would have a chance at collecting some stories, he made his way down on foot into the valley along a narrow asphalt road with almost no traffic. In the half hour it took to reach the bottom, only a young boy on a smoking moped and an old man in a small, white car passed by. The number of travelers in that time almost matched that of cultivated fields, which were no more than four. The rest was a wild mix of vines, young oaks, wild olive trees, grasses, flowers, and bushes of many types, all tightly woven together.

Beyond this edge, the young man could see little of the landscape, which was now also filled with the wavering screeching of cicadas.

The river was about thirty feet wide and filled with a steady but shallow rush of very cold water. He slowly made his way upstream, relieved somewhat at this exit from the road and entrance into the val-
ley’s very bottom. Large boulders lay in the water and along the banks, which were composed of rough clay, gravel, and the occasional bunch of willow shrubs. It seemed as if the river had changed course frequently, and perhaps also flooded recently. Nothing that grew seemed very well rooted, and the banks were often worn down to the very earth.

At a certain point, the water suddenly diminished and thick vegetation dominated the riverbed. The land above, in the rough direction of the village, appeared to be recently abandoned fields. This attracted the young man, who thought that by cutting across, he could reach the road and thereby see more of the elusive landscape.

Struggling up the steep riverbank, he found a narrow animal track and crept away from the river. Soon all trace of the path disappeared and he was forced to make his way through the brush. Although there were many spiny plants and woody vines with sharp edges, the young man was determined to cross. Breathing heavily and bleeding somewhat from scratches on his legs, he then came upon a wall of thorns. What had before seemed to be old fields now showed few signs of that former use. He plunged ahead, hoping that the road was nearby. After crawling through a series of stamped-down, crawled-through holes interspersed with moments of being completely entrapped, he found a large boulder barely rising above the vegetation. Sweating heavily and covered with many bloody scratches, he crept up onto the boulder.

From this vantage point, the young man could see only the same, thorny greenery extending in all directions broken by nothing but far-off trees and adjacent curvatures of the landscape. The river now seemed too distant to return to, especially considering what he would have to cross to get there. He felt a mixture of panic over his next step and relief at having found the boulder. When the lumpy surface he was sitting on became uncomfortable, he crept back into the brush, and again struggled uphill.

After much effort, he finally reached the road. Exhausted and mildly humiliated with himself, the young man felt the experience had proven that he really knew very little about this place. He could only walk along its roads and the river, beyond which he could see almost nothing. Proceeding in this manner, what could he possibly understand?
Early the next day he went to the church to try talking to the old women. His hopes were not high, mainly because he did not feel comfortable about confronting people to collect stories.

He arrived just as the old women were entering the church, followed them, and sat in the back. During the initial chanting and ensuing mass, a few of the old women gave brief, quizzical looks in his direction. He felt out of place not only because he was a foreigner and had not attended church in years, but also because was the only male in the room apart from the priest.

After the service ended, all of the old women got up and left rather quickly. The young man approached one of the stragglers, a very old, bent-over woman with a creeping gait. She seemed pleased with his company and began talking at once, but did not seem to hear or understand his questions. Nor did the young man understand what she was saying, because she spoke entirely in the village dialect. As they walked together, the old woman chatted amicably and the young man attempted to understand something, throwing in the odd “yes” and “oh” to not seem rude.

On his own again, the young man grew discouraged. Blocked the day before by the overgrown fields and today by an unknown language, the landscape and its people seemed frustratingly hidden. He could travel its edges, but not enter.

Later that morning, walking through the village, he met a number of other people, but they had little to say. Two elderly, self-described “old maids” heard his request for stories about what the landscape used to be like, but laughed and said, “No, no. We’re women. We don’t know much about that. We’ve always stayed at home. It’s better to talk to the men.” But the few old men he met said that they had moved to Germany and France just after the Second World War when the village was bombed, and had only recently returned. They said that they couldn’t remember much of what the place used to look like, and didn’t want to think about those hard times.

By lunchtime the shops were closed and the streets deserted. The young man went back to his rented room in an old house and took a nap, wondering why he had come.
Getting up with a headache, his room hot from the afternoon sun, he made a coffee and then went out again, but with no clear idea of what to do. He wandered the still-empty streets, and then rested in the shade of a small church. In a short while a number of ex-shepherds sat down on the bench next to him. With little prompting, they began to talk:

“Before the war there were many sheep up on the mountain, and even some cows, even after the war for a while. I was a shepherd up there for 50 years. It was a beautiful life. And when we got old, there wasn’t even one young man who wanted to become a shepherd. They didn’t like it. They don’t like that sort of work anymore. Now they prefer to stay inside an office and write, have a car, mix with all the young ladies, all that sort of thing. But before, the world wasn’t so developed and people were used to different sorts of jobs.”

“Shepherding is a dirty job. But with fifty, one hundred head of sheep, you always had something to eat. Listen, always natural stuff. Animals that eat at that altitude, with fresh, clean air, have a good flavor. Natural meat, natural cheese. Because now if you go to one of those factories where they make cheese, it’s no good, they put in medicines.”

“It’s stuff you can eat, but it’s always medicated, all of that stuff. But raised up on the mountain, in the fresh air and good grass, brought immediately to the shops, THAT’S GOOD, that’s natural stuff, no medicines, nothing.”

“And now even the fruit, that’s full of medicines too, to maintain it. Stuff to throw out. But now, in the countryside, without medicines, the fruit won’t come. The insects come and eat that flower, and every flower is a fruit!”

“And who wants to go to the moon! What the hell are you going to do there?! They’ve made many trips up there. Up there there’s not even a snake, not even a fly, there’s not anything up there . . . how can a person live up there? They have to carry around a tank of oxygen. A bunch of countries got together to send men up there, and who knows why? If they find life up there, everyone can go. But there’s NOTHING, and they’ll never find ANYTHING! Because there’s not even a snake, not even a bug, there’s NOTH-, NOTH-, NOTHING! It’s just a huge waste of money that’ll never come back!”
FIELD NOTES: CLIFF BELLIES

Vertiginous
cliff bellies unwrapt by

(l)
landside ↓

& bulldozer [geologic knife mind]

HAMMER?

pointed towards the North

(l)
sun at my back ↓ side)
When Rome, like some blind beast, turned the watershed
Of its groping years, and coasting from the height,
Took the westward plunge for the rock, the seething bed
Of a wasteful ocean, and the shores of night--
Lucretius, sensing ruin, only perceived
The expected fall of man, his ultimate achieved.

While we of the West (Incarnate) claim divinity:--
When the Christian heaven crumbled, we became
Sparks of all-soul, kindling eternities
Of self-perception on worlds evolved from flame.
Now Super-science sees a thousand stars
Bend down their conquered heads before the telluric wars.

Here on the brink of destruction, still the swallow
Flies for the spirit south and halcyon
Summer. Atoms open vales of Valhalla
Even as the gods overwhelm with thunder. And man,
Wasting his own world in the blown typhoon
Of its rape, wafts herald radar to the desert moon.

Annapolis, MD, 1946
To their naked eyes the choppy blue waves of Lake Michigan look endless as sky—a nippy Sunday afternoon in September—Ed and Lala examine the remains of yesterday’s sand sculpture competition. Heads and shoulders of giants and monsters emerge from the earth, their smooth packed flesh drying in the wind off the lake. Ed puts his arm around Lala, pulls her closer, the warmth of his cushiony hip, they hulk on together, their gait awkward as a three-legged race. Density’s doing them in, that inevitable erosion. The man on their left has lost his nose, the sea serpent behind them has a broken tail. Lala squats behind a wild raspberry bush and takes a quick pee. The wind chills her ass, whips across her wet pussy. She pats her pockets for a kleenex to wipe it with. Nothing. Ed shakes his head and laughs. “You are so bold.” As always she gets some on her pant leg.

My body is the foreground. The rest of the world is the background. This means I’m a healthy individual. Through my windshield I see a guy with a huge jack-o’-lantern over his head, not plastic, real, carved mouth to see through, dark blue gauze draped over his shoulders like a toga or stained ghost. The pumpkin bobbing as he crosses the street.

It’s drizzling. When it rains in Chicago the worms come out on the sidewalk. Not in San Francisco. Two stories beneath my bedroom window bright white sandbags, a couple dozen at least, are heaped in the parking lot. Each bag is embossed with a large red rose like the 10-lb bags of rice I’ve seen at the Filipino grocery. Beside them a Pontiac has been newly spray painted burgundy, a white cloth droops from the sides of its trunk, burgundy bleeding on white muslin. TransAm hemorrhage. Behind it unreadable graffiti spatters a weathered wooden fence, behind that corn stalks tremble, vivid green. Gray skies eradicate shadows, colors assail me with an unearthly saturation, turquoise, peach. Next to the wall, beneath the corn a man with a long gray beard and black cape unzips his pants and takes a piss, he’s looking directly at me, even though he couldn’t possibly see me, here in the middle of the room perched on the edge of the bed in my pink flannel bathrobe, no lights, a charcoal dark to the outside world.
The mall’s arched skylight stretches a city block, a tunnel of leaded glass with ivy vining three stories of concrete walkways and iron banisters, every leaf poised just so. Sitting here in the bright hermetic sunlight Lala feels stilted and decadent as a tiger-spotted orchid, sips coffee from a recycled paper cup and blots her mouth with a brown (unbleached) napkin. A landing above her a topiary man wears a metal baseball cap turned backwards, another story up, connected to his outstretched arm with a metal cable is a topiary kite, pine tree branches in a diamond shape, studded with fake pink flowers and fruit his cock is a tulip, yellow streaked with red streaked with yellow Ed arrives half an hour late, his flesh sloshes about his skeleton as he settles in a green-patinaed chair. His curved brown Ray-Bans make his gaze problematic, elbow resting on the small round table, staring at her like he’s watching TV, that banal, behind him stands an unfinished topiary globe, just a few green vines clinging to wire meridians. Ed’s heartbeats produce electromagnetic frequencies Lala can feel up to four feet from his body. The frequencies, 1000 times stronger than his brainwaves, tell her to be anxious. To her left an ivy seahorse lunges towards a swan with a foot-long clothespin for its beak.

*Ed’s fingers wriggle like fat worms, his thick lips are slugs that wiggle, “I love you.” I am the corrosive salt he attracts and repulses, attracts and repulses.*

Across the street on Van Ness I notice Rose Resnick’s LightHouse for the Blind. The top of the building is decorated with knobs of concrete forming a line of Braille big as a billboard. I assume it’s something inspirational, but who could read the message? Clouds part, beams of yellow light trumpet from the sun, a massive Michelangelo-type finger reaches down and caresses Rose Resnick’s bumps. Suddenly this old guy is standing before me, his skin tanned and leathery like a mummy’s, black hair greased straight back flat against his skull—he’s stopped in the middle of the sidewalk, eerily still, glaring at me, his eyes boring into me, as if his whole world has shrunk to one dot: ME. Big, blank, vicious eyes, brows furrowed. I feel like a deer frozen in a headlight of hate. Shakily I continue past him, my heart racing, he swivels around, his laser gaze perforating my back, beams of evil light streaming through me and flaring out my chest.
Whenever he came Lala felt a little animal leaping from his body into hers, like the racing creature on the Global Village modem manual, a little gnome jumping from his body and bleeding into hers. He had the longest pubic hair she’d ever seen.

In his body there are rivers, seas, mountains, fields, all the stars and planets, agents of creation and destruction also move in it. His belly is the underworld wherein all dark resides, while his heart and head are the celestial realms, home to the shining ones. He said a prayer in his ancient language, which translates as “swan” or more precisely “wild gander.” He traveled to the sky realm and beneath the earth, meeting power animals who spoke to him and led him on enlightening adventures. He took a saw and machete into a grove of cedars. “If I were growing here in this bog, how would I want it done?” he wondered, and directed his question to a nearby tree.

Rinsing beet juice from my food processor, from the bowl, the top, the blade, it looks like blood running down the drain, and I pretend I’m cleaning up from a crime scene the plunge always leads to bodily disintegration in the magazine a chartreuse leech looms over a timid man in a white-sheeted bed, the man’s eyes bulge upwards at the leech’s puppetey jaw, the leech is wearing a nurse’s cap decorated with a red cross, the arc in its necky body is graceful, the man’s hands very tiny. The caption reads, “Leeches are making a comeback.” When lovers are severed, surgeons can reattach them and semen will once again flow back and forth between them. However, if damage is extensive, the reattachment might not take right away and semen entering the cunt cannot flow back out. Semen pools at the tip of the lovers instead, turning them black and blue. Leeches suck away bad semen, from the moment the first leech is placed on the reattached lovers the black and blue color disappears and their fucking begins to regenerate six inches long, 300 teeth it doesn’t hurt since leeches have a natural anesthetic in their bite.

Ed and Lala wind along the railroad tracks, he picks her a white and pink flower with lots of tiny blossoms, says it’s her wedding bouquet. They kiss. She twirls the flower in her fingers as they sit on a park bench over-
looking the lake. His arm’s around her, fingers lightly kneading her breast. His hip and thigh are solid as Mount Rushmore. The day is overcast, bits of orange peeking through striated clouds. “What a lousy sunset,” he says.

As I walk past the church a flock of pigeons shoots out of an alcove thunder of flutters in Dolby, a wing brushes my cheek I feel so Italian, lurid red and turquoise shadows shifting with my moods, the heels of the escaped maniac’s loafers clicking behind me suddenly a courtyard a dog barking a man who’s not really blind at the base of the church steps a huge cardboard box is arranged over a shopping cart, a makeshift shanty, along the edge I see a man lying on his side, head propped on his hand, carpet swatch beneath him small comforts I’m ten years old and my father’s just installed my mom’s new washer and dryer, Bobby and I take the boxes, round out the corners, get inside and crawl and roll like giant hamsters in giant wheels Kenmore Kenmore giggle Kenmore we tumble across my backyard and frontyard then Bobby’s frontyard then down the sidewalk, afterwards we lay on our backs totally pooped, the ground is cool, giant white cartoons writhe across the flat blue sky, this day is so much fun we swear we’ll remember it forever brown and yellow maple leaves when Bobby’s 20 he’ll die from chugging a bottle of whiskey. In the church-yard stands a yellow-robed Jesus holding an ugly little boy who’s wearing shorts and holding a blue world.

The image in the pool shatters when I try to embrace it.

Market Street, early evening, I suddenly hear this intense high-pitched shrieking of birds, but no birds in sight, just three palm trees in the strip between lanes. Then no palm trees and relative silence, car engines and my heels against the sidewalk. Then three more palm trees and the screeching, no birds visible in the dark fronds. The scream of the palm trees on Market Street—it sounds like the beginning of a Beat poem. Behind the screams cars line up in the Safeway parking lot, above them Twin Peaks juts darkly, tiny lit windows piled on top of one another, a steel blue sky, black clouds racing to the right very El Greco I enter the Church Street subway station. People are in the background, I am in the
foreground, alone, a delicate packet of flesh about to hurl through these clattering mechanical bowels membrane on the outside, inside blood racing in circles, wet I stand clear of the egg yolk yellow strip along the edge of the platform. The strip is rubbery and bumpy so that blind people won’t totter into the pits of the tracks. Subways remind me of the internet—vulnerable bundles swept along at lightning speed, it’s noisy inside the circuitry, a deafeningly high-pitched whir, a satanic humming—our emotions, even the most tender, arrive frazzled. “I love you,” the screen shouts, bug-eyed, clothes rumpled, cigarette dangling dejectedly from lips. Ed’s body was real, thick and dense as a punching bag, as a redwood—no, not a redwood, some other, thick-trunked, Midwestern tree—the warmth of his tight body pressing through his clothing as we walked along the beach, hands, face, monumental chest, sand sculptures everywhere emerging from the earth like a lost civilization—I peed in the bushes, around the bend in the lake that looked endless, chilly breeze—the bulk of us was buried beneath the shoreline, so smooth those giant features, his leaky cock dampening the front of his Dockers, noses eroding like Greek ruins—so last night I got up to go to the toilet and in the darkness everything looked grainy, a sort of moiré pattern as if the resolution needed adjusting—so beneath this colorful mobile surface I am trapped in a pod, the heat from my throbbing body siphoned off by mechanical insects—no religion I’ve ever heard of says this is the real world the body is dense mind guardian angels don’t guard anything, they spend eternity on fluffy clouds playing videogames and I’m the game, the pilot of a blood red convertible, I can go forward and reverse, I can turn left or right, I can drive to Oakland over the Bay Bridge—Ed’s nose racing towards me big as a Toyota then whoosh it’s gone he has a thousand heads and a fragrance that pleases the sky, the earth, and the sea, he is made of ivory, beautiful but so hard, so cold, ivory tinged with pink, like a white peach Chicago was the end of the world, alewives float there glowing with 3-D illustration lines, lime green.
thought gagged on the front

for its own good
dapping sunshine

BIG BOOGER
gotta let it show

you are obliged
to sustain a steady
display of outward emotion

from the inside

as your heart ceases
to beat waste products

still build up in each
cell. The drinking

of this beer, in this bar

is a biochemical marker

fuckin’ tweaked

majors in decomposition

know the smell of death

can hold keys

to the comprehensive

study of the relational

the beer and I are

insignificant in space

but the dynamics

between us are long

term lenders of energy

and significance. They

are nature. The beer

is fluid. I am out of it.

shambolic path – I’ve found you!
dead people vote
dead people win elections

their phone calls speak

out of tvs to my bills

demanding action, good god

though I don’t need to know

the whole I’m raiding from
we must eliminate middle
managers to keep the lines
of communication flat like
the earth. Every cash
register is linked to a central
computer at headquarters
so I know what to restock
instantly every molecule
colliding while I slouch
never not having a point
to gouge a psyche with
poor impassioned pronoun
mangled in a metaphysical
crevise burst into
a happy warning
the world is your land’s
bogeyman
expanding jowl on channel
four gives face. Greg, you
made me yell at you
about assisted suicide last
night, but everyday I’d come
home for two weeks and
there was Brodey
to mail Western Capital
Rhapsodies to special ops
this line is a cloned line
having failed twenty-three
times before success you don’t
want to see what’s
left of those other lines
the way to protect
jurors is by
abolishing juries

BLACKLIST ME

I, a person
with an agenda, speak
to you, not hardly breathing
down there, in quest of
a mental anguish to share

son, did you have your
head with you today?

wouldn’t know it if it
wasn’t clear boss

a hippie couple

in a pipeline era
bopping around
the hemisphere searching for
an authentic syntax

we can hold them
hostage for millions
if we can just figure out
who to call

prepare the mules
the star shoots, reads
employment dossier
masks or emphasizes

his accent. a
collection of other people
standing in as values. I
hate light. The group is
an asshole. Self-censorship
is the American avant-garde.
no ideas but in thingies
can be read as a communal
and democratic sentiment
canned stress
fashionable ruins, subway
evac a commuter conjunction
well, I was mugged on 9th and
Fifth Ave in broad daylight
circa x-mas ’86 joining a
massive city club. It was
scarier than anthrax, though
not more than
frying the planet

Mandelshtam’s bear borderless
and refreshed with a massive
inheritance. Reverse vitriol,
a walking yes/no
biting myself to make it look
like someone gave me a hickey
slinging entrails
at an overpaid imagination
It was “the right move.”
in my heart a submersible
craft heads to a secret base
from which to launch paid
programming: the best of
autopsy, the history of
biological weapons, and
Charmed. To confront
creatures whose
existence could expose a
conspiracy, press info. Southwestern
sterling beaded toggle bracelet
I trust my cross out
to abdicate the throne
I don’t have new ways of dying
as self-inventing broadcast
the bar I left was a nightmare
of this dive, scotch and toilet
water all around, how about
a million point two to
every refugee? It’s great to
be in a cubicle, sloth on
parade. Hide the art, it sucks
out on a self-incising limb
all about distribution
solutions, the page
yellow as the corners
of my eyes. Giuliani
could have endorsed
a red river hog and the hog
would be mayor today
hoof and tusk digging
downtown concrete ash
  everything difficult
is assuming I’m alright
difficult and alright
  is everything I’m assuming
alright that difficulty
  is everything alright
  that difficulty is alright
assuming everything
is difficult, everything
difficult that I’m assuming
  is alright, I’m alright
assuming everything
  is difficult, assuming
everything is alright

oh meat, your decision
as an individual
is what you must make
to lockbox your warmth
salt and preserve it
for your meatlings
  meat loves the road
  so meat can ride roads
  the length of fifty-seven
times around the planet
  without ever crossing
  a border shared
  with another nation
  windows down
Zepp blasting
just meat and the sky
reading the crisco poem
over the phone
at Baruch to Coletti
  white plastic fork
  moving by itself
  across the desk
  I think I was overheard
  by the next cubicle
a corporate strategy dilemma
purity guaranteed.
Osama passes
George the bong
bitching about 21st century
hydroponic weed. The hand
gestures: where are the seeds
George? The stench of the
Earth? Bushy pays no
attention, phasing into
Caspian pipeline fantasy
scent of G-13 wafting
through the about box
Mom said you look like
a terrorist, in black top
with shaved head
sacks of hate puffed up
under eyes, cheap expression
speaking softly in tongues
Crisco dripping down back of neck
don’t you die when you say so
according to a vague
yet credible source
something may happen
 sometime soon to somebody
or bodies
One

Evidently, words that begin with a p. perhaps. Daily, the road, grey, unwinding, unvarying, tires humming. In this room, a precise arrangement of walls unfolding with cover flight the binding of skin enigma. When I drive, the windows fog. Rain, again, a given—the definition of raw. To be ever in grace. the muzzle of it. With a hinge. and wheels. something like a tailgate closing. a clanging sound.

Five

Noon. Is it air or dust, or perhaps water? What boundaries do light and sound respect? Among my strides, the many stones arranged. Scatter of red berries, small. Through and among stones in rows, the arbor vitae tall, columnar, turn of the century among limestone and granite polished and worn, kernels of corn in gravel. Sheep against the pale winter grasses, heads down, immovable, graze and do not move, pale against the pale clipped grass their tongues descend and choose and they do not move.
Nine - Solstice

Tangles of hemlock and a twisted laurel and lowbush blueberries, leafless, saplings and dead branches and rustling everywhere and on the path. Woodpeckers tapping. Nuthatches. Juncos starting out of the path. And above–

Fourteen


In snowness of descending. In snowness of coming at me in the driving of it, salt. In salt of snow love. In love of salt of snow bone. In bone of salt of snow love in descending. In treeness of salt love descending. In treeness of home mountain descending. Climbing into the thick fastness of it.
Fifteen

This the first day winter soup of chicken day. Winter soup of chicken among the piano day third of the days of snow. Dated his year from the winter solstice, says Pound. I still don’t think–reckoning of lingering did it a fantasy of sandpaper snow today enigma again alpha fish? So I wiped up the kitchen floor and sent a package through the mail. onion, carrots, celery. at the table or piano all day, stars. bent.

And of the body, what lodging? A driftwood in my hand–small bits of rock and sand embedded in the sea sanded grain. Of fire and its yellow light. Would to build a house to ask what shelters. By firelight or the body lodged neither in ascent nor in descent but near, neither fire nor snow, dust nor air, water, light or sound but of the body lodged. For if of the body shelter and if not of the body matter or spirit what? To find each letter more obscure.
Sixteen

Each movement of the body must be performed in time. And the natural movement of the letter, of sound, the grammar or alphabetical resonance of language is temporal. So there is no body of language without time. And yet you are near in no time. Without body or language. Or lodged somewhere in my body in no time, in the myriad sounds and movements that I make, in all the obscurity of bone and limb bent, turn and stumble. There is this question.

Still, the path. When one is lodged in my body me or another and without being a man or a woman naked in that nakedness of time in no time, without measure and without meter, in no language, yet the sound of what lodged in the body as a stone or a grain of sand embedded stars lodged in the sky embedded bird notes of Pennsylvania, says Pound. furriner, says Pound. fireman's. it. can. holly. my. him.
Twenty

If the body were of light as the sky is and is not, is and is not. Today only one cow in the corn field of the rasping sound called for unto you of peace. It is a spotted cow with a black face and its name shall be called Emmanuel—of light and of variation. Which was that, today? Erosion of the poem as though event of the nothing happening. *mia carne sepolta*. scattered in earth. in dust. *terra*. have you already said this? and our bodies also

Twenty-Two

Night inside and outside, neither interior nor exterior. Small rustlings of the grasses of land with us. A scattering of the landscape to see anything except in sound near in pines and invisible except for the shine so that I lean against it. The body at each point from across the parking lot today of pneumatic rock drill a high ringing in echoing. dust in the wet. patiently.
Rock drill machine sound of holiness. How the body surrounded and the hair that blows across the face through a chain-link fence at it for digging. A man with a shovel. Three men with brooms. Dissolving rock into grey dust. And in this night the sound of dry grasses and wind of nothing but holiness so all of land and sky lit that same darkness and dark of that dark in only the sound of dry grasses rasping both in the ear and somewhere. beyond.

Twenty-Three

Ground crispy tonight and the light filled with it, stars three-toed fogging up my glasses. The twenty-third letter. The stars in their ligatures remain faithful to the earth. Quarrelling of notes walls echoes hammering in a tree bird stars of hammering. This would if the earth were truth but the earth is matter. Embedded star bits of skin wish enigma grain.
Twenty-Seven

In succession when I time on the contribution planned detect the of the weight of the weight eleven descending the hearing detect the other order so that the fingers follow time and not time on the tongues descend and choose and they do flocking flocking flocking flocking flocking flocking the sorted

pines wicketing up in a person and not land nor old all in silence and in similitude the body descending the hearing land in of seasons of bread discomfort of beginning again is a dog but perhaps it is to forgo a single consonant

a kestrel it much the land the discomfort of beginning again descending the hearing dust *terra* have you already said dust *terra* have you already spelled her and of the sea seeming to be not larger than ever seeming of it but the world turns over and patiently
the face through a chain-link fence at the body in the of light infirm lodged through if the consonant its initial sound detect the not infirm what and so Dante to start at the graced letters in any order and gloriously northnortheast a scudding blue-grey behind the leaded but the world turns over and

is a dog but perhaps it is world large and beneficent of world in contradiction contrapunto of world descending and one does not know that it is a dog but perhaps it is despite the fruit tree tho small

flocking flocking flocking flocking time sound wishing stars lodged in not land nor old all terra have you already said dust northnortheast a scudding blue-grey behind or tree cannot be night tho we turn into and detect the we turn into and we turn into and detect the we turn into and we turn into and
SEHJAE CHUN / ZEBRA MUSSEL AND BULL FROG

Zebra mussel smuggled in the Erie
Not wanted, illegal, hidden in the deep deep down,
Immigrant to our place
Should be sifted exterminated
For our recently defined indigenous species.

It will take some time,

Bull frog smuggled in the Han river must go,
Yankees go home, catch and burn.
Students of 80s demonstrators now grasp the net, instead of fire-bottle
Eradicate the bull frog made in USA

It will take some time for us

One chapter of the environmental group in Sierra Desert
Proposed the ban on immigration to the American ecosystem.
They pollute and harm the ecological stability of America.

It will take some time for them

Zebra mussel in the Erie.
Bull frog in the Han river.
Non-resident alien species in our place.

To be the humble resident in our and their new home.

*Bull frog in Korea and Zebra mussel in Lake Erie as alien species have caused ecological instability in the biota.
Sundown
at Walden Pond. Redwings
singing, plump Canadas
all around.

“Whew!”
say the starlings. Song-sparrow
song breaks into
delicacies I’ve never heard before.

Meadowlark whistling
on pink smear
below three pictures:
pasture, pits and refuge.

Sun descending
somewhere south of James.
Hooded merganser
swimming near the far (north) shore.

Jet trails
like ‘live scars;
something’s
happening up there.

Sewage domes as ever
silver the north edge. Long’s
peeks over -- robin
warble.

Plane and glider . . .
everything turns blue
and I wonder again
who’s pushing who?
the blue heron changed changed colors with the fox
one day
the fox leaped from a cliff
invisible for a long moment
the heron hired the eagle & the mole
to find his body in the rocks below
having been laughed at
by a very formal loon for his
gauche color
& paid them off in fish
the loon had vomited up so
the prejudices of the mole
we’re confirmed
he
like anyone in holes
was solid with religion

the eagle fiercely
traced rhetoric in the heavens
for the hawks to misunderstand
the blue heron
flew like a grand crow
the loop of his neck
causing an apparent smile

the blue heron
sitting on a log by a shadowed
path
was again approached by the young
woman
with whom he had begun
these poems
this time she stopped & waited looking at him
he passed his beak
along her neck
& beat her with his wings
his yellow eyes
were large she saw before sinking
to the cool mud slowly
dusk came
but she carefully took the feathers he had lost
in their unnatural coupling
& tucked them in her hair
thinking he might come for them

36 the blue heron stole a little book
of recipes
from the farmer’s kitchen
it was so strange
it comforted him
& dropped it in Salt Creek

37 the blue heron was elected president
of the Salt Creek woods
he couldn’t speak
& flew away
long legs trailing sentimentally

38 back to the city
where nothing happened
to him & he
went berserk
breaking 6 windows with his beak
& no one caught him

39 meanwhile Farmer Brown
had assumed presidency of the woods
& soon disclosed his
unworthiness of that office
by making the orioles live in
white boxes
MATTHEW COOPERMAN / STILL: ENVIRONMENTALISM

Issue: what we live for where we live for what

Photograph: Los Alamos bulldozer pushing songlines into a new ethic called White Quartz Villa

Ideology: past or present? Marxist decanting collective into Nature Conservancy. Liberation Theology leading to shotgunned priests. A monkey wrench to the gas tank sugary stillness. Right to Life vitriol “what is unborn is no less hungry for the fields...”

Fields: of wheat (winter) and alfalfa all summer long

Song: “Give Yourself to Love” (Kate Wolf, circa 1977); alt. try Byrne “Life in the Bush of Ghosts” (circa 1980)

Bookshelf: Sea of Cortez (Steinbeck, viz. “nonteleological thinking”), Country of Pointed Firs (Jewett), No Nature (Snyder, always), Ecology (a primer), Economic Foundations of the West (Katherine Coman), Genesis

Outcome: Act II, Scene IV

Moon: harvest, blue, blood, third house

Issue: if it’s a question of global warning, we’ll adapt?

Photograph: desalination ponds in Arabia, a camel drinking this saying: “what does not change is the will to change...” “you just have to dig for wood and water...” “how near to good is what is wild...” “whosoever wakes here heed these words...” “fuzzy wuzzy wasn’t...”
**STILL: FLIGHT**

Ambition: to go anywhere be anywhere know anywhere

Setting: the deep blue glub glub academy

Drama: planes, as in their delicacy, stirring the winds into stripping the wings (from Icarus, hubris, stabilization distress) or was it a simple metal fatigue, these

pressures: of a modern life, to get there on time and to do your business

Sponsor: Alaska Air (iconic Husky), OneWorldNet, Planter’s Roasted Nuts, always the undulant Pacific

Players: First Officer William Tansky, 57; Kristin Mills, Flight Attendant, 26; Aloysius Hoon, Ground Service, 47; Carolyn Clemeton, 28, and Infant; David, Blake, Miles, Coria Clemeton (ages unkown); others

Reportage: that the scenes remain more important for the “senseless tragedy of American airspace.” How implicated we are in the Eye-Cam, I-Witness 10 o’clock Helipod. That technology is “oneWorld,” that it’s lacking and still

of Human interest: “This is Judith Tarrenton live at the scene. When I was a child I went down in a four seater Cessna. It was something not quite like this...”

Design: as in a Maker. Perhaps. Though the sea is a good Maker and Boeing is a good Maker and the camera is a good Maker

Sequel: New York
This talk was given at Small Press Traffic in San Francisco on Sept. 21, 2002 as part of SPT’s “New Experiments” series.

Thanks so much to Small Press Traffic and Elizabeth Treadwell for inviting me here.

It’s great to give this talk on ecological poetry in San Francisco, which, to New Yorkers like me, is sort of utopic. And the process that led me here has also lent a whole new dimension to my conception of the environment—that process being driving across the country, wild, empty, dry country, but mined, farmed, ranched country, too. I don’t think I ever fully understood space before driving across South Dakota and Wyoming, and I don’t think I really understood the starkness of the battle between the forces of exploitation and the forces of conservation before going through areas like the Redwood forests. And where I thought I had looked upon wilderness, I found out later I was looking upon altered ecosystems—the scrub that comes in when cattle have overgrazed the land. Yellowstone’s vistas are artfully placed in the 18th-century notion of framing and reflecting nature. Early tourists would hold up purple-tinted mirrors to the landscape, altering their direct perceptions.

This reflective fad foreshadowed some of the current tensions between Nature poetry, ecological poetry, and ecological issues. And these tensions are linked to the perceived problems of contemporary experimental American poetry itself—that it is somehow out of touch, cloistered, urban, interior. As Jonathan Skinner said in his introduction to the first issue of Ecopoetics, “walks do not make it into the closed environments of today’s best poetry.” However, Juliana Spahr has pointed out in recent readings and essays that such poetry, the poetry of “walks,” smacks of old-fashioned Nature poetry, a poetry that, says Spahr, doesn’t include the “bulldozer” along with the “bird.” But then there’s the other extreme, a poetry that too obviously delineates the battles between bulldozer and bird, and expects deep yet instant change in human actions toward the environment, while making no deep and intrinsic change within its own poetical structure.

Ecopoetics showcases a more experimental ecological poetry, one that begins to take into itself ecological processes, as well as ecological concerns.
It is this incipient tendency that I wish to explore—this fusion of matter with perception, observation with process, concentration to transmission, that would most decisively turn what can seem nostalgic remnants of “nature” poetry into a more dynamic, affective and pertinent poetry. “Let’s say Nature, like femininity, is obsolete,” says Lisa Robertson. But, she adds, “A system is ecological when it consumes its own waste products … Therefore, I find it preferable to choose the dystopia of the obsolete.”

Things have changed since the last burst of ecological poetry in the ‘60s and ‘70s, and I use the word things partly in the sense that Francis Ponge used it: exterior non-human objects neglected as subjects that, when concentrated upon intensely, can yield extraordinarily lucid writing. However, traditional Nature poetry, à la the human-subject meditating upon a natural object-landscape-animal as a doorway into meaning of the human subject’s life, is now highly problematic. “Appearing to serve a personally expressive function, the vocabulary of nature screens a symbolic appropriation of the Land. Her cut sublimity grafts to the Human,” says Robertson. Nature has changed from an perceptually exploitable Other—most easily compared to a book to be decoded by the (human) reader—to something intrisically affected by humans. We ourselves are the wilderness destroying the very systems of which we are a part, in some role we utterly do not understand. At the same time, science is making incredible discoveries about these systems. Close concentration upon systems as systems can lead to the animation of poetic processes. A lucid yet wild fusion of structure of poem with structure of matter/energy—things. And things not limited to those traditionally marked as “natural”—i.e., bears, foxes, woods, mountains—but expanded to include all beings, objects, systems, and locales—water reservoirs, the insides of televisions, invasive purple loosestrife, “africanized” bee populations, subway tunnels—in a levelling of value between and of subject and object.

When I wrote the initial statement for this talk, I wrote: “Ecological poetry is much like ecological living—it recycles materials, functions with an intense awareness of space, seeks an equality of value between all living and unliving things, explores multiple perspectives as an attempt to subvert the dominant paradigms of mono-perception, consumption and hierarchy, and utilizes powers of concentration to increase lucidity and attain a more transparent, less anthropocentric mode of existence.” Rodrigo Toscano wrote me a lovely detailed letter, thoughtfully going through each category as I had set it forth. What he found most compelling was the idea of “equality of value between all living and unliving things.” This
idea of equality of value is essential for moving from the exploitativeness and inertness of traditional Nature poetry, through Ponge’s revolutionary ideas of concentrating intensely upon things as things, into the incipient and dynamic idea of poetry as ecosystem itself, instigated and animated through a Pongeian, or also Thoreauvian, concentration upon exterior systems.

However, here we come to the problem of “concentration,” which Rodrigo felt was too vague and should be more specified as a concentration of multiple perspectives “splayed” (his word) onto “new (or rather wished for/striven for spaces.” In attempting to clarify—or justify—to Rodrigo what I had meant by concentration, which he felt could be mistaken as “mental acuity sense,” which I have to admit, was what I originally meant, I found that it was indeed a problem. However, since I think that problems and errors are most often windows into further discoveries, I countered Rodrigo with an idea from Baudelaire, called surnaturalism, “a state of perception which intensifies the existence of things, makes them hyperbolically themselves.” Upon further reflection, I also felt that “wished for/striven for” spaces was not as desirable as concentrating upon what’s actually there, as wishing certainly entails a certain act of escape from and control over reality—perhaps, like Lisa Robertson, I am more inclined toward the necessary chaos of dystopia than the purple tinted mirror of utopia.

However, Rodrigo quite correctly felt that surnaturalism also asserted the dominance of human as perceiving subject over things. After all, he wrote, “why would a worker’s (or poem’s) democracy social metabolic process (matter of matter) need <ideologically> to be made ‘larger than life?’ Answer: cause it’s dead already—has been since rent asunder.” Yet, while Rodrigo raises a most valid point, I’m still not ready to leave the original idea of concentrated mental acuity. First, such intense observation of things is one of the few doors humans have to escape our own overwhelming subject-being. How else, besides perceiving, can we begin to dissemble ourselves? It is an absence of concentration upon the space around us that leads to such things as housing developments. For myself the process is as such: concentration upon spaces and landscape leads to poetry; poetry leads to further concentration upon spaces and landscape. It is my poetic ecological system—self-sustaining, linguistically self-contained, recycling, and, if successful, animating both word and perception with the idea of action.
I’ve found that along with this idea of concentration—which truthfully I still haven’t fully explored as an intriguing fissure in the idea of ecological poetry—is the idea of intent. Poetry written with intent, especially moral or political intent, is very problematic, but I also realize that it’s inevitable that I write with intent. Here’s an example: Tina Darragh and I have been writing a collaborative series of ecological poems recycling words and ideas from Francis Ponge’s *The Making of the Pre* and Michael Zimmerman’s *Contesting Earth’s Future*, a book on the philosophies behind Deep Ecology. So, in this recycling, Tina and I intended to allow these texts, along with assorted articles on environmental issues found in *Scientific American*, *New York Times*, and other media, to enter our own poetic structures, to see if we could shift perceptions of textual spaces and, subsequently, environmental spaces. But, while writing with moral intent, we also deliberately opened ourselves and the texts to a catalyzing equalization of subject and language. Our poetry recycled in form and process the “topics” we were writing on. So perhaps the resolution to intent, is to only allow that intent to spark the poem into being—it’s the key to the ignition, but then you let the car go (to use a completely un-ecological metaphor there). Take Lytle Shaw’s *Cable Factory 20*, a long poem written with a certain intent to explore art, space, industry, environment, but one that is also open to the unfolding process of language, a poem scientific in its allowance of process, one that allows “subject” to animate sentence structure, word, and stanza. Another, more classic example is Clark Coolidge’s *The Crystal Text*, which contains remarkable transferences between spaces and words, poem and reality, while also retaining aesthetic integrity and innovation.

And this leads to the current and insistent complaint of poets about how to make poetry comment on issues of the day while also retaining aesthetic integrity. This complaint really finds its roots in the cultural and economic isolation of poets, but it can also stem from the atomizing tendency of experimental poetry. In order to fragment, you have to separate. I had a dream during my big road trip out here—I dreamt that I got in a taxi with John Ashbery to pick up Trevor Winkfield. So, during this cab ride, we chatted about poetry, naturally. So I said something about disjunctiveness in contemporary poetry and John said to me, “yes, but it’s not the separate elements, it’s how you stitch them together into a poem.” Now, I have long and fervently believed in the abstract composition of poetry, but I’ve been thinking lately, in the context of ecological poetry, about the
third and fourth dimensions of poetry, as well—that poetry has the ability, perhaps even the obligation, to interact with events, objects, matter, reality, in a way that animates and alters its own medium—that is, language. Experimental ecological poets are concerned with the links between words and sentences, stanzas, paragraphs, and how these systems link with energy and matter—that is, the exterior world. And to return to the idea of equality of value, such equalization of subject/object-object/subject frees up the poet’s specialized abilities to associate. Association, juxtaposition, metaphor are how the poet can go further than the scientist in addressing systems. The poet can legitimately juxtapose kelp beds with junkyards. Or to get really technical, reflect the water reservoir system for a large city in the linguistic structure of repetitive water-associated words in a poem. And poets right now are the only scientist-artists who can do these sorts of associations and get away with them—all other disciplines, such as biology, oceanograph, or mathematics carry an obligation to separate their ideas into discrete topics. You’re not really allowed to associate your findings about sea-birds nesting on a remote Arctic island with the drought in the West. But as a poet, you certainly can. And you can do it in a way that journalists can’t—you can do it in a way that is concentrated, that alters perception, that permanently alters language or a linguistic structure. Because you as poets are lucky enough to work in a medium that not only is in itself an art, but an art that interacts essentially with the exterior world, with things, events, systems. Through this multi-dimensional aspect of poetry, poets are an essential catalyst for increased perception, and increased change.

Author’s Note: There was a question-and-answer period following this talk, during which Laynie Browne, Albert Flynn de Silver, Kevin Killian and others raised many interesting points and problems, particularly regarding the particular problem of “concentration.” Following their useful contributions, along with further research I’ve done (such as reading Ronald Johnson’s long poem, ARK) and plan to do (such as reading Jed Rasula’s recently published book on ecology and poetry, This Compost), an expanded version of this talk will be published in a special ecologically-oriented issue of the literary journal 26.
So what will be leaning on the proprietor’s fence, snap, snap, what surrounds. It is no longer possible to slay identification. Nature has been pinioned from outsides. Language: already-destroying involunturable codes of the seen. I need tags for what one finds and takes from mathematics and physics: analytic, smooth, smooth with boundary, smooth with angular boundary, stratified spaces, combinatorial, Lipschitz, quasi-conformal and general non-commutative spaces.

The visual field in this sense of the term—a technique of alliance—must exalt a sliver of extra-human faculties for an instant (think “extraction”). Without a vomit of green there is no proof of the organs without bodies, the calm meadow for slighting, or a spite that impresses us when we walk there and there is the camas beside the in-itself. This is a better cellular politics.

A growth assumption will not resist a fit. I play with the river before I take them, sliding my hands into their loose rants, cradle their calls in a pretence of renderlessness, encircle their roots with my pale fingers, making them sit before me, demanding that they tug themselves stupid. Alas, Darwin split perception from sudden exposure to organic abundance, propagated easily by cuttings, grow rapidly, and characteristically male bear and female flowers in catkins on separate plants. Lost on the shore without a sandal, or this technicality, memory negates reeling, spy the meadow as fast approaching on the horizontal plane—meanwhile, the sky’s looming over the incandescent plight of aesthetic theory. Space “morphed” to broad hollow and intertangled. Repeatedly branched variants foretold and transitive and primordial and passive or encouraged to get
digitized around the outcome of a general election. Uncomfortable for the mechanism, but who’s operating who? One could stand. The areolate imagination, heavy or light, outcompetes others on disturbed soil and mass and vision. Time isn’t relative that way, not unravels and absorb, fool, the actual measurement is already misinterpreted as foliose.

What is the name of the elusive flower that got from around this once populated place? Now I’m trespassing in an enclosure: punctuated equilibrium in a grafted fixity. One writer virtues with meanings scale-like, soon disappearing, and rarely. Is dilation constitutive of the barn oracle? A marker looks upon the world with personal eyes and his peculiar moods and he calls the thing erroneous, that which cannot, thematically, clothe in impression as dander appears before charismatic megafauna in the way in which impression uses the word. With all this viewing the Human learnt to assure, to grind and polish rather than chip. The “pro-civ” bastards of the mission made reflection an enchantment as thickly spun as a literalist blight. An overdependence on stood stuck the portrait on the mountain, the utterance paused in stance among trees, deliberately, in a well-known conversation on conservation, abandoned in mid-sentence. In every perception of nature is actually present the whole of society. The tree may not be escaped by means of the tree.

Suppose there is a better way of telling the disappearance of those adorned sponges held terrestrial only by an observation that is just unlike some snugly fit domesticant. Familiar as an enunciated root, on the same trail, or almost there, it is a meadow to move in, to track the ichneumon fly on, on, or in the act, to spike as it will a rose. Since overspread can’t be factoried to explain material charges themselves—it’s not proper if taproot built squirts of presentation in primary units got entanglement dans le jardin—in woodland and in humid pasture labour is less than urine. What the body is is to the animal is, is to the vegetable creation as sublimation of discovered. The lignicolous wants to live for itself.
Hence assimilation, on the behavioral level, is merely the continuation of the biological assimilation in large sense—any reaction of the organism to the milieu consisting of assimilating the milieu to the structures of the organism. Just as, when a rabbit eats cabbage, he is not changed into cabbage but, on the contrary, the cabbage is changed into a rabbit.

Jean Piaget, *The Child and Reality*

The wind picked up, full of eggs. I heard about what was happening back where I’m from. A plan: link the parks of South Detroit to create a “greenway” through Downriver. I called up Laura, who takes photos, in the East. "Greenway" is the new currency of an older value in the "greensward," or an uninterrupted stretch of systems we label collectively as Nature. We met at my Dad’s place.

Unfolded maps of the Downriver suburbs on the kitchen table. The green cemetery acreage impresses. Hard to know that kind of thing without a map. Superimposed over the pink rhomboids of the industrial holdings, the greenway would seem only as an architectural difference of opinion.
We drove in the fashion of the pastoral, just looking, taking Coney Islands to go. No one was to be seen clearing the streets or ripping up the video stores. The minivan followed the grooves in the roads over the low switchbacks from glacial hollow to hollow. Shopping carts and hosing, a blue racer; I been gone too long I say, and slip on the creek bed. No birds. It must be the heat. We go from the cemetery in Flatrock (brother, grandfather) down to Trenton and the mouth of the Metropark. We meet the Detroit where it enters Lake Erie, take a steel works service road to the dead end. Piles of crumbling metal implements, piles of pushed up earth, then the phragmites strangling the cattails. Our feet came up wet. The water made no noise. What do you think of nature, I say to Laura, feeling responsible.

It was dark, dank scents rose along the lip like water on aluminum. A couple of stars made themselves out above the airplanes. Our eyes adjusted. Several doors in the riverbank had begun to open simultaneously. We needed more, and went on gratefully under the river and back, doubling into the woods of Michigan.
A word about the understory. I came in search of the compound of the vole. World-wide agents of habitat alteration, exotics are increasingly likely to thrive. As for the host, I believe only so far that I share in a spontaneous intelligence. It's arms raised, a baby will totter and reach for a bright red ball.

Pollution is a form of travel and here is its book. Two proposed persons travel a world of social consequence far outside the boundaries of the proposal. The song in the Mercury Villager, "How can it feel so real?" as another curtain of phragmites opens: blasted by jets, out there a stand of attenuated cranes that can't concentrate. The phragmites close.
What happens when I suddenly screen this image with my cap? Will you remember the stage, or the setting? Close your eyes.

Paul Revere stands on a house in the harbor, then is hidden again by the beret of my Interlocutor. The beret lifts; Paul Revere lights a lantern.

The animals, we believe, are out there independently. A red blanket is put back on the tax roles. The likely means of spread: livewells and bait buckets. A fly lands on my knee and licks a hair. The cottonwood trees rattle. Pointed by the wind, persistent organics break down and spread across the system. A man in the brush sits up and asks why you are in his house.

Likely means of spread: moving water. What of the historical "picture" told by the concept of the person? I thought, pumping gas. Samwise Gamgee looks up from fell Mordor and sees an ancient star, beloved by the elves, through the smoke.

In the next town the color of the sky depending: Prussian blue, rather that, beige. Keep going, I think, mindful of the lesson from Epcot: if you fill in the gallery with a hint of methane gas the animatrons really come alive. Tearing at a felled herbivore, the Rex lifts up its head to roar.
A watertower, the sun behind it, a paler crescent on the white surface of its belly. The driver gets emotional about the road, shifting ardor through a series of symbolic values. What is the source? Off that exit, a row of houses is being pulled down. A regional pathos. Red tailed hawks are pushed from the developing valleys back to the downtown.

A blue rubber ball is shown to me, then quickly covered by the hand of my Interlocutor. I think Give it back. Then I'm distracted by that beret cocked above his eyebrows. We had reached the point at which evasions become the answer, and that, in turn, finally satisfied my Interlocutor.

Beer mingling with ketchup on my tongue, at a bar I say sorry for the motormouth. We were surprised to find this body was tidal. It backed up through us, and the cabbage, not the rabbit, speaks.

The lakes behind us, finally we crossed the big river. At the base of the far hill was an entrance to the West. Underground, a competing array of informational displays. Every machine tells a story. We approached a dais, drawn by a riderless stuffed horse. "Please don't touch, only live animals can grow new hair," said the Stuffed Horse.
A Plexiglas cube; inside, a taxidermy mouse and the dry, sharp talons of an owl. Do yourself a favor; don't turn around. A modest recovery in the spiny water flea, eggs traveling pond to pond on the fishing line. I was still at the railing, frozen by the gaze of the Stuffed Horse—rapt in the inevitable bond between the Interlocutor and the test subject.

I am a scientist and you are my animal. You learn what I want. You bring me posies. We eat them together, under the curious, self-consuming sign of the food chain arrow. I say I'm not fucking around anymore—and, I'm not sure why—The early lessons of video games were all symbolic forms of gravity.

At Waffle House my research shows that the cost to install the next subject was 1.5 million: 250 willows they hope will “remediate” the soil. We reach the furthest point on our temporary map from Downriver in an abandoned house at Herculaneum, Missouri. Trying not to disturb the lead-laced dust, we model an imaginary ecosystem in the bay windows with dinosaurs from the Carnegie collection.

I pushed around a fossil trilobite, saying "meow, meow." Many of the plants and animals described in this guide arrived this way.
1.
Ambience or collocation. “Colonia” as in that sense of "colonial".
Do you mind if I slip into something more comfortable? Like what?
your public underscore html. A guidebook called How to Write
Whining Resumes. HTML as the world’s dominant language. As in,
contact glazier at ak-soo. Well, I bet it has something to do with
Nahuatl. Po cenotes. Act of Téjanísimo. “You speak so many
bloody languages yet you never want to talk.” Metal models of now-
room mansion. Aztec flowers. Can’t recall one thing I ate in quetzal.

2.
It’s an inter-text. Its inherent collapse of serial syntax. It’s not what
Icon going over a barrel over Saigon falls. We’ll have a couple of
flurries for breakfast. Files containing text loss investigators. not
an Ivy League egg. “For every man in my life I have a new scent.”
“What confusing and mazing things sentences are.” I con, I can, I
cheat icons. As a shortcut, I speak through the ventriloquist. “He
did not have a clear impression of water cress.” I will now toss
gloss of Los Angeles, Los Alamos, as in One-Eyed Buttercups.
3.

One small cup on the (World) Wide Verb. 24 inches in 24 glaciers.
“We're the Glazier family, we eat what we want, when we want.”
Spanish, the only language better than UNIX—keep an eye out for it!
His signature señor right-eyebrow-arch under the volcano, my
cactus studded slopes, Guanacaste, the unglamorous national tree.
World’s most famous mangrove cadence. Isabot, iceboat, sabot,
isobar. A number, an umber, adumbration. “Oiselánd” for example
coffee fields. Narrow seats and coffee-can sides of rattling bus.

4.

Nicoya. Nica. Tica. Medellin. How to transfer the lines so line
endings grab a break. San José calles, three chapulines roving to
attack stragglers, coconut hillocks yucca bottle-brushed shampoo
the taped and tattered bills to pass to tourists. 700 colones or $2.60
A sudden downpour (that’s why they call it a rain forest!) I have
yet to eat in Costa Rica. The modest national clay-colored robin
Take a dollar, fold it lengthwise, then in half for multi-colored
bottlebrush. Caribeño, bananas. fronds. Ah, ¡Es la Fortuna!

Renamed “Fortuna” (“Luck”) when it was the only town left after buzz-dived by 6 a.m. hummingbirds volcano with shroud six years ago and never left, leggotts, open waisted, fresh-washed canary scent. The eggs with salt, black-sugared coffee, how it papayas upon tree stalks in front of sugar cane fields. The sap can burn your lips savia blanca de la papaya. Ginger plantations 3 or 4 days for potent licor de piña. El Flechazo, hundreds of green sunlight-seeking iguanas form a canopy above the trees. Mi hijo lagartijo.

White-Faced Bromeliads on 20 Hectares (An Iteration);

About the Procedure:

This iteration of Bromeliads offers an impulse-chance assembled configuration of data elements from Glazier’s digital “White-Faced Bromeliads on 20 Hectares.” In its digital version, Bromeliads uses JavaScript to generate poem versions whose textual dynamic is one dramatized by the possibilities of subtle variability. Every ten seconds, the online version of the poem is reconfigured, drawing from an alternate for each displayed line. While chance determines whether variants are or are not selected for display, construction of the architecture of possibilities is by author design. Bromeliads is meant to explore subtle changes, like light changing on the tropical gloss of leaves as the sun shifts in the sky. The dynamic potential for the sequence is such that each 8-line poem offers 512 possible versions, making two identical readings of the 8 poems in the present sequence nearly impossible. The fully-functional digital version of this work is available at Glazier’s author page (http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/glazier/).
they're coming - they're all coming towards us, they're all trying to walk, or fight. Probably serves us right too - we'll see if that happens. They've all gone away now. Do you hear a buzzer?

I wish they'd fly in front of me.

You will notice the photographs first. Black and white bodies stare out from the beginning of each chapter, the frozen faces of Easter Island monoliths, a makeup-clad transvestite, a statue of Siva, a supple body bending in yogic posture. *Dangerous Emotions* continues Alphonso Lingis’s lifelong investigation of the many forms of otherness: linguistic, amorous, biological, environmental, geological. Lingis, a former professor of philosophy and translator of numerous French Phenomenologists, further examines the marginalization of others in his characteristic blend of travelogue, philosophy, and photography. As a philosopher in the world, he knows the grim ecological and ethical prognosis that results from unchecked globalization and capitalism. Lingis’s value lies in the productive and generative nature of his work, and *Dangerous Emotions* focuses on the immanent liberatory possibilities of each right act and the ethical imperative of such action.

The twelve essays in *Dangerous Emotions* range from “The Navel of The World,” which couples an investigation of excess with a description of the island Te Pito O Te Henua, home of the behemoth heads of the Easter Islands, to “Beauty and Lust,” which contains a Nietzschean meditation on physical splendor. All of these essays explore the faultlines of emotion, and the tectonics of a volatile subject rooted in excess and desire. In “Blessings and Curses” Lingis examines two complimentary emotional extremes in a characteristically political and phenomenological manner. He begins with a brief elaboration on blessings and play, putting forth examples from the animal world that strike discordantly with the experiences of any working stiff: “A guppy eats twice a day, taking ten minutes of its time; the rest of the day its movements are the scherzo of play” (67). He goes on to argue that biological and emotional economies are not based upon an exchange of work for needs, but upon an escalating excess, in which each expenditure of energy leads to
further escalation. Placed in opposition to animal play is reason, an action based in resentment, which seeks to label and measure “all the other animals and plants, the savannahs and deserts, the ocean and skies” (78). This calculating refusal of emotion “finds the world a complex of threats, shelters and compensations” (78). This is the mind that maps the jungles and deserts for Texaco oil, the mind that plots the pipeline’s course and the holding capacity of an oil tanker. Lingis’s work illuminates an opposing channel based in strong emotions, a channel that “seek[s] out what is incoherent, inconsistent, contradictory, countersensical” (80). It is here that we can understand the true reality of the world, the exuberant play of the guppy, the unchecked expanse of the desert or ocean.

The remaining nine essays all share the same precise and joyous vernacular that synthesizes the intricacies of French Post-Structuralist theory into an extremely readable text. Lingis’s strategy is more a performance of Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming-animal than a jargon-filled elaboration on technical minutiae; it transfers an abstract method of resistance into a recounting of concrete details and ethical acts. In addition to the essays’ common philosophical provenance, there is a common ethical thread in Lingis’s work, a thread that approaches not only the human, but also the geological and animal. The recurrent object of reproach for this ethical thread is repressive economies.

Lingis counters unsustainable expansion and economic growth with an economics of excess. This economy of desire seeks to transcend capitalism’s fetishsizing of the product, and Lingis astutely notes that laissez faire economics is equivalent to a surreptitious war against humanity and the world:

The global, capitalist, free trade economy now in place guarantees that industrial powers will not again wage world war against one another.
Instead, the Third World War their industrial might is waging is a war on the world—on the rest of humanity and the great components of nature: the fertile continents, the oceans. (187)

The result of this war is an ecocide that destroys “seventeen thousand five hundred species of plant and animal life” each year (188). This war has created a “world where forty thousand children die each day in the fetid slums of the Third World, an Auschwitz every three months” (74). In a situation as dire as this, Lingis venerates the revolutionaries who haunt the fringe of capitalism and American imperialism. As a strategy against environmental and cultural exploitation he posits the economy of the gift.

In one of the final essays, “Gifts,” Lingis notes the generative value of gift giving: “what gifts give is the ability to give gifts” (181). Here, he considers both the giver and receiver. The giver must give without intent or recognition, must “withdraw her name from the gift—to the point that the recipient does not know or no longer remembers who gave him this” (179). But we are also the recipients of numerous gifts, sublime gifts given by a planet and its inhabitants; these are transcendent gifts we must learn to not refuse. Central to the acceptance of these transcendent gifts is a recognition of what is unforeseeable, but possible. Dangerous Emotions is such a gift to other species, fauna, and flora, a recording of the transcendent experiences that populate our world.

A posthumous book from a belated poet, W.G. Sebald’s *After Nature* (*Nach der Natur*) arrives on English-speaking shores after the “catastrophe” of nature and just after the poet’s life is claimed by car-crash. This should come as no surprise, however bitter it may be, for with Sebald, art always came after nature. And if in his prose texts (*The Rings of Saturn, The Emigrants, Vertigo, and Austerlitz*) Sebald doggedly but subtly savors “the traces of destruction” and their attendant ironies, then this last book itself becomes such a trace.

An elegy to our funereal nature, to “the garden [that] grows rank,” *After Nature* is Sebald’s first literary work; it was published in German in 1988, but appears in his semi-adopted tongue only this year, too late for the poet to enjoy himself re-clothed in the marvelously exacting translation of Michael Hamburger, his friend and fellow emigrant to East Anglia, England. That Hamburger previously translated Hölderlin should not go unmentioned, since readers will discover in Sebald’s verse the same stark metaphysics that drove the seer of Tübingen to distraction:

The forest recedes, truly,
so far that one cannot tell
where it once lay, and the ice-house
opens, and rime on the field traces
a colourless image of Earth.
So, when the optic nerve
tears, in the still space of the air
all turns as white as
the snow on the Alps.

In these poems, however, Sebald seems to be more grounded than Hölderlin, more willing to handle topics resistant to the temptations of transcendence, be it the “ice-house” or “the twitching lights / of rail- and motorways, the murmur of the million-fold proliferating mollusks, / woodlice and leeches, the cold putrefaction. . .”

*After Nature* is structured as a triptych: the first set of poems, or “panel,” portrays the Renaissance religious painter Matthaeus Grünewald, the sec-
ond the Arctic explorer Georg Wilhelm Stellar, and the last is a self-portrait of the self-nominated “panoptic” poet. Sebald’s syntax, in a kind of free verse, is often elaborate and serpentine—especially in the German. Alternating between prosaic biography and lyric meditation, the poems offer insistently visual, almost historical tableaus. Spare realism (“a fig tree with fruit, one of which is entirely hollowed out by insects”), unforgiving expressionism (“a planet utterly strange, chalk-coloured / behind the blackish-blue river”), and a Bosch-like Schadenfreude (“crab-clawed together, shark and dragon-like / maws . . . skin like entrails turned outwards”) combine to produce the poem’s atmospherics.

After playing upon Grünewald’s “green-coloured name” in the verse epigraph from Dante’s Inferno (“intrai per lo cammino alto e silvestro”) that precedes the first set of poems, “As the Snow on the Alps,” Sebald meditates on the melancholy of an artistic predecessor, who as “the inventor of singular hues” undertakes the “great therapeutic / task through the representation, / executed in beauteous and harrowing / colours, of the hour of the pale / streams of pus.” But Sebald is no antiquarian; his interest in the past mirrors his present obsessions, and his startling imagery defies the strictures of history:

To try out how far it can go
is the sole aim of this sprouting,
perpetuation and proliferation
inside us also and through us and through
the machines sprung from our heads,
all in a single jumble,
while behind us already the green
trees are deserting their leaves and
bare, as often they appear in Grünewald’s
pictures, loom up into the sky,
the dead branches overlaid
with a moss-like glutinous substance.

This allegory of artistic creation and consumption suggests that however ingeniously “green” art may be, it too is subject to the decay of organic time. Even so, there is some eternal thing that sticks to us in these “dead branches.”
In the Stellar-panel, “And if I Remained by the Outermost Sea,” Sebald follows the steps of the naturalist who accompanied Victor Bering’s expedition to and from the eponymous Straits. Delighting along with Stellar in the “sea charts showing vast tracts of whiteness,” Sebald sparingly fills the space of his own pages with the acute epiphanies of a naturalist shadowed by death:

A white sickle, the strand
curves in the dark inland,
the dunes overgrown with grasses,
up to a plateau of shadows
under mountains in snowlight,
phosphorescent.

Nature here is harsh and unforgiving, despite its spectral, virgin beauty. Sebald’s Stellar turns thus to science and prayer (and pun) for his consolation: “Thine be the care, Lord, / so that the stars propitiously / conjoin above us.” But if his science survives long enough to produce “his zoological masterpiece, De Bestiis Marinis,” his prayers go unanswered. This section of the poem ends with a typically Sebalidan blend of the marvelous and pathetic:

. . . the dead man
was dreaming still of the grazing
mammoth across the river,
until in the night someone came
and took his cloak
and left him to lie in the snow
like a fox clubbed to death.

With this—a gesture recurring many times in the first two panels—the poet suddenly balances abstract visions, traced in snowscapes, with the more urgent physicality of death.

It also prepares us, as does the epigraph from Virgil’s Eclogues (“et iam summa procul villarum culmina fumant / maioresque cadunt altis de montibus umbrae”) for the umbrageous cadences of triptych’s final panel, “Dark Night Sallies Forth.” Here Sebald turns to biography: a mother who witnesses “Nürnberg in flames” while pregnant with the poet, a childhood in which “the procession of the blessing of the fields” is inter-
rupert by a lightning storm taking the life of one of the “supplicants,”
and early manhood in Manchester where the poet “rambled over the fal-
low / Elysian fields, wondering / at the work of destruction, the black /
mills and shipping canals, / the disused viaducts and warehouses. . .”
Here, again, hints at apocalypse are leavened with wonder: “Often / it
was carnival time / for the children. Pink cloudlets hung in the / sky.
Friends came disguised as Ormuzd and Ahriman.” And in the
(post)industrial, ecocidal landscape of Manchester Sebald discovers the
“works of Paracelsus,” and a run-down music hall where a “radiantly
blue-eyed” Heldentenor sings “Tannhäuser arias, accompanied / by a
Wurlitzer organ.” Close by, the poet finds himself in a “no-man’s land”
where all the buildings, slated for destruction, bear fading signs that still
spell out various musical, but long-forgotten Jewish names. Such histor-
ical ironies begin to multiply in the final lines of the poem—even if:
“The entrance to nature’s theatre / stood open:”

I sensed the trembling
of the aerials on the roofs
of houses as a frizzle
in my brain, could hear from far away
outside me the Gaussian roar, an unremitting
sound extending over the whole scale
from the earth up to the heavens,
where the stars drift
in the ether.

But as Sebald revisits Brueghel’s painting of the fall of Icarus and some
lines by Hölderlin, darker tones are heard and seen:

If his eyes are now
lowered, if he falls
down into the lake,
will then, as in Brueghel’s
picture, the beautiful ship,
the ploughing peasant, the whole
of nature somehow turn away
from the son’s misfortune?

[. . . .]
Another summer gone by. And
as ivy hangs down, Hölderlin wrote,
so does branchless the rain.
Other intertexts are also to be heard in Sebald’s closing threnody: Heidegger’s miller who applies a poetic techné to the task of saving nature, rescuing art, and healing ourselves; Lear’s ranting on the storm-blasted heath; mingled with the seemingly naïve rhetoric of the explorer who discerns “towering up in dwindling light, / the mountain ranges, / snow-covered and ice-bound, / of the strange, unexplored, / African continent.” The ambiguity is deliberate: even as throughout his œuvre Sebald flirted with nostalgia, he refused to surrender the role of the “rational amphibian,” to borrow a phrase from another of his favored authors, Sir Thomas Browne. Indeed, a phrase from Browne’s *Hydriotaphia*, or *Urn-Burial*, offers a fitting epigraph to Sebald’s life and work:

The night of time far surpasseth the day, and who knows when was the Equinox. . . Since our longest Sunne sets at right descensions, and makes but winter arches, and therefore it cannot be long before we lie down in darknesse, and have light in our ashes.
Rampart
Brigade
Honest
Major
Juice
Has Ten
Con Note
Hatred
Late
Movie
Awake
Lotus
Father
At Test
Produce
Parrot Gentle Amour Repairs Pumpkin Genetic Prepare Meter Red Ragland Labored Parking Mimesis Nowhere Rumor See Page
I was just now digging through some old computer files and found a bit on “Winter Birdfeeders” from last January and thought of you without ever seeing your “Byrd” post. I’ve tacked it on below. . . .

**Buffalo birdfeeder lesson on Bird Avenue:** winter seed draws sparrows, congegrated sparrows draw an immature hawk (a sparrow hawk, of course), like the tiger at the watering hole on Wild Kingdom. I watched the drama for a while—the sparrows wedged in the centers of bare, tightly-branched bushes—held my cats up to the window to get a look, they seemed interested. I don’t think a house cat would take on a hawk. I turned away to make some coffee, and when I looked again the hawk had captured one of the sparrows, a little stain of blood in the snow, the pulling of feathers, the scene of capture. The bushes were now empty, all other sparrows gone. I wondered when or why the sparrows had decided to leave the safety of the bushes, hiding deep in the tangled branches where the huge predator could not reach. Did they draw lots? Did a weak young sparrow stand up and, in its one moment of bravery, offer itself up for the lives of the others? Was it every sparrow for itself, and a general multidirectional free-for-all escape, or did they keep their group formation and leave en-masse? Returning to see the capture, and the young sparrow already dead, I wondered about their escape attempt. In forty-odd days of feeder-watching, I’d never seen a hawk before—even one as awkward and young as this, flopping inelegantly on the branch-ends of the hedges. The ease and convenience of the winter feeder took on a weightier significance. The concentration of surplus food, dumped generously by my caring neighbor, had its liabilities, because those who survive on the grain-eaters are drawn as well. The pigeons, the sparrows, the mice, always symbols of the poor, used for whatever design the hawks, in their cool ludic minds, decide for them.
Car o li’ na par’ a keet (kar ‘ ə lī’ ə par’ ə kêt)

hollowed out
catechism
to till
too dull a dialect (of their teachers)
from the cradle to
the coffin

helpless, parrot-learnt
refine court

deciduous swarms
cognate with folk

riverine lines of wrinkle
iterate to weariness:

Let the King dismiss his Woes
And take the Cypress from his Brows.

Cor’ mo rant (kör’ mo rant)

lustrous, as in a diffused tyrant
sometimes altered to devouring
the highest part of any undulation
or the tail of a comet
Lab’ ra dor duck (lab ’ rə dór duk)

dive    nestle  or catch
sight of its nest of
eider-down
analogous
to food, feed    
    blood, bleed
from the germ
to inanimate
divining-
rod

tutor

neck of changeful blue

-

Os’ prey (ä’s ’ pre)

Admitted to the Academy in 1694
Chiefly of the motion of heavenly bodies
   Fervid
   Take what is offered
   A book of devotion
   To destroy gradually
      Piercing
      Insolent
   Of the face or looks or
As much as can be ploughed in a day

   Of a letter: not sounded, silent
Of a person: silent, not speaking
**Heath hen** (heth hen)

Indigenous this  
Drumming cupid  
Cried in ragtime  
Through its tract  
Of scrub-oak  
Wasteland

Pinnated inmate  
Of Capawack (haven  
For heathens)

Mingled with our  
Remorse and resolve

---

**Bachman’s warbler** (Bäkh mans wôr´ blɔr)

irruptive medley  
of slow gleaning  
in a complication of brambles

synchronous harvest  
or whirlpool

to modulate the voice  
of a small stream

to make melody:

also of the wind
MICHAEL ROTHENBERG / THE BROMELIAD
for Hart Crane

But this,—defenseless, thornless, sheds no blood,
Almost no shadow—but the air’s thin talk.

In the air! maybe there
these spindly creatures
are ethereal. Maybe at

the Heart of Hurricane.
But know them as I know them!
When Caribbean breezes
are spiders’ transport,
leaf to leaf. Know them,

the leathery grapplers,
air plant,
woody rooted, sawtooth wind-slicer
holds fast to slippery bark of Anything!

Fierce, succulent, windworn.
Know them! Passionate exhibitionists,
burning, aching high
violet sweetheart of hummingbirds,
broad berried wands of ripening Tropica, all
hallelujah, still

no pretense to divine. They are great
colonizers,
white tufted seeds parachute course
between trees,
through curtains of lianas,
cling to craggy bark,
build gardens, festooning cities.

Bromeliad, out on a limb, civilization
of raw vegetable kingdom generating until all
kingdom, life and limb, crashes to the ground.

Frog pond! Serpent house! Stagnant channeled
reservoir! Malaria nursery!

Sky Chalice!

Or wedged on rocky sun blast ledge! Or anchored
as forbidding hedge
for robbers. Barbed.
sinister filter points behind the eyes
don’t exchange words

a well with flowers growing on the ledge
protected from wind

first approach, some kind of hillock
around the hill, the long tunnel

listen:
   metal in water
   bits of glass
   chains
   rain

follow the thrown pebble through the sector
walk ahead while the others cower

all the metal parts that clamor

a railroad track
   the spongy meadow

knee-high ferns

a field of fog
   like the surface of a planet

dowsed pink and red

you slide down the wire ladder
toward the corridor

the birds:
   [der
   [net   [orr
   [ack
   [mor   [ack
   [orr

what is a walk? uselessness?

an overcoat hanging on a rail
what is a bird?
FROM THE RING OF STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

NATURE PART
there are leaves in leaflets
updrafts and down drafts
follow the general direction of the wind
constant pull of gravity
modified wing pods
detaching the fins
winds, tides, currents
sounds projected over water
low-lying coastal plains
William Carlos Williams compares a young housewife to a fallen leaf
and then runs her over
but what about the leaflet?
a beehive is direct fire with steel dart fleshettes
helicopter birds in the elephant grass
my green eye sees at night, laying chilly for a mad minute
where are the white mice this time?
At ten a.m. the young leaflet
moves about in updrafts and down drafts behind
the walls of her target-rich environment.
I pass solitary in my car.

the bundles will fall very fast
parachutes slow their descent
they drift and shift in the wind
they appear small
but are in fact very large and heavy
do not stand below them
let them land and settle
before you approach them....
SCIENCE PART

autorotating fall: motion about its longest axis

flip-flop spiraling
ruffling
fabricated chutes
end of the static line
the sides of the box split open
hydrographic data
detonating cord placed at the seam
the balloon up above

spreads rumors
television creates the illusion of participating in a distant event
being in two places at once
but the balloon is two places at once
beyond the range of voice
airborne antenna relay domes
I don't ever want to go back down that Somerset Road, no
with its high, high smokestack my idea of the Countryside
ruinous as a mortar to gouda. Pointing out the blue smell
I ignored you sadly enough and happened upon the poem
in the smokestack. – And anywhere there is an “access road”
there is a disgust. Oblique roads need not call’ed attention
so I assume the worst – pits, rusted barrels, carcasses – act
of hiding any and all of the above off some dead end –
and motoring along the Somerset Road to a kiddie carnival
past cornfields poked by driveways to torn-out farmsteads
long vaporized up, bought out, caved in, torn down, whatever
preposition applied, I proposed to you the beauty of varied
leaves. The ones tumbling in a southerly lake dusk. You
must know that off behind this all there was a lake, right?
a lake,
a lake.
“Mind is essentially distinct from matter, and yet in all languages the attributes of one are metaphorically transferred to those of the other” – Peter Mark Roget, “Introduction,” *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases Classified and Arranged* . . . (1852; reprinted 1936). In his treasure-house, Roget (1779-1869), physician, zoologist, secretary of the Royal Society, constructed a classification of words, like the classifications of animals, minerals and plants developed by Linnaeus and his followers. With the botanical key of Linnaeus, the user “identifies” a species of plant by its petals and leaves, placing it in a narrative of identity – a hierarchy of species, genus, order, class; with *Roget's Thesaurus*, the user keys in – grants identity to – the species of words, in genera, orders, classes of sense. Yet for both Linnaeus and Roget, the hierarchy itself comes from the mind – is quite arbitrary, inventive, fanciful.

The class “Matter” is given a genus “Liquefaction” with species *liquefy, run, deliquesce, melt, solve, dissolve, resolve, leach, lixiviate*. Compare birds and words. Woodpecker species (peckers, sapsuckers, flickers) include red-headed, downy, hairy, black-backed three-toed, northern three-toed, redshafted, white-headed, and ladder-backed. Roget’s Unctuousness has varieties *lubricity, ointment, anointment, oil, greasy, waxy, soapy, pinguid, lardaceous, slippery*. What amazing textures and inconsistencies arise in these categories and their distinctions. In the columnar layout of his original thesaurus Roget, the old-fashioned natural historian, kept a sense of the complex relations, the ecology, of words.

Charles Darwin did not know what a species was. He wanted the origin of species. For Darwin, the specifying of life descended from common ancestors in a struggle for existence where species “naturally” snuffed each other out. The law of evolution for Darwin was a law of extinction – nature told as dominance ritual in the struggle for existence.

Humans grasp at the unknown in laws and classifications, often a sterile logic – outside the complexity of living forms. What narratives of living things or words do we believe or assume? Is the belief in evolution the
same kind of moral choice as the belief each creature was hand-made by a creator? What is this thing called belief (from AS *leóf*: love, dear) – an act of faith? A social contract? A culturally imposed master narrative? All knowledge is premised on belief. Is the dominance ritual a face-off between territorial apes, or between the apes and the rest of the jungle? How do humans mean? Next to birds, trees.

*Roget's Thesaurus* is a treasury of living forms, each materiality squirming in the hand, each gravity casting sparks across layers of other words, each friction exploding a cosmos of its own. Here is the edge of languaging and world-making – trunks, branches, leaves in family trees of words – networks of lenses – the spectacles, goggles, of categorical thought – a geography of illusory plots to fold back, destabilize. To liquefy what seems solid into its seepage. For what matters.

And isn’t the knowing of this, par excellence, the knowing of the species human? Homo linguis – man the worder, man the word-maker – the forger of bonds between sound/ image/ sense and thing – the very word-flesh itself. But the word-seeds – the seeds to sense – escape control, jinni out of the lamp – to make a life of their own.
FROM MATTER

1 The Matter of Immaterial

from the first dawn of life
beings resembled –
stars shaped themselves to horses, bears, crabs, fish
and breathed – eyes breathing eyes – eyes breathing ears
the astral flesh
the hand of a man formed for grasping that of a mole
the leg of a horse, the flipper of a porpoise, the wing of a bat.

Before world, Lucifer scattered sparks into night –
all that was matter and not matter
splattering, not mattering,
all that was brute, stuff, thing, stone –
all that unearthly, personal, I, myself, me
disembodied.

Stars and women materialized.
Knowledge and war materialized.
Progress and marketing materialized.
The kingdoms of matter and mattering materialized.
Engendered family, class and dominant species.
Orders of a single progenitor: The World

Hung on subliminal world-flesh – in constant tendence
daily hourly minutely pneumatoscopic palpations
– the eye’s terraqueous nebulae,
heartbeat of sublunary lovers love – un- dis- a- somatous.

A plan of a creator, yes, a propinquity of descent –
words, organic beings – each with antennae –
bonded by allotment, fixed in their spheres, their carnations of air
networked in rules for soap bubbles – mirrors for the never
of a mouse to a shrew, a dugong to a whale, a whale to a fish –
the physicist to the jaws of marsupial, the foldings of wings,
pubescence of flowers –
the feathers instead of hair on the ornithologist

organs, undoubtedly,
rudimentary teeth that didn’t matter
the brackage of empty, a farmland of fractaled angles.
The immaterial became matter.
The numbers became number.
The algae became grasses.
And nature a law of arrangement.

Disappear and thus laugh, but I sort, type
index cards under Reduction to Order
unhinging my cosmos in the really pointless
work they do not trouble
the blood they nearly deal
3 Gravity’s levity

Downward force
to earth man’s lightning bolt. Surprise,
you just won air pressure.
Man the bubble, with mountains,
flung out from earth’s axis.

if if is lifted
pulled by its need to needle
embryonic rootlets and leaves
in our seeds cotyledons.
Surprise. You are children and grandchildren
building sandcastles.
Corks afloat on your scruples.
Yeast to your steelyard.
Thistledown for ponderosity.

Ancient languages and tumbler pigeons
differ in longer beaks yet keep together
the habit of tumbling without even thinking
the length of things from reason’s dignity.

Earthward man shovels this nevertheless.
Cucumbered in cobwebs, incumbent to feather.
Dreaming in larval stages his monsters,
believing the primrose fathered the cowslip
and a bear borne of kangaroo cannot bear its species.

Yet gravity borne of levity is matter –
weight of heaven –
what is perfect elastic for soap films
fermenting the many eyeloops
our words
ton, grain and pound.
An absence bounces
the light of the matter
a hidden world of shadow photons.
So it is with flowers in a springy void –
names, the habits of life,
the very soul of thighs and legs,
beetle jaws, and the spiral snouts
of moths called sphinxes,
spring back in mouths and limbs of nothing.

On the moon, the astronaut’s bath-rug
climbs over certainty
to drops of oil and mercury
skin-held to perch and hang
and buoy us up in hope of being
limbs of resilience shortened, widened
to serve as fins or webbed feet,
then lengthened to serve as wings
in want of springiness.

Yes, what if – what if we know
with spheres lifted of gravity
what frames answer to bubble of rigor,
what realm in real or whelm in wheel
we shoot to lasso with smoke rings?

Good morning. Here is history.
The burning of mirrors.
The sacking of reflections’ want from archetype.
Two planetaria of India-rubber
the only booty from the captured city.
Good morning ricochet.

Could I love here this no-man’s land,
this windsock of soap-film.
A spider on the phantom handles of boomerangs.
20 That ocean and land were still fluid

we find on reaching streams of air
and who could say the tides of these lack pulse of life?
That life is organed like a fugue of words for things
with reasons

How does it matter? How does it tend to go good
foregoing, undergone as good as a dugong –
as a sea-cow, do you say elephant or pachyderm?
How does it tend to go on – foregone, forgotten –
 thick-skinned cocoon or imago – these states held to govern
a good many dragons, and their organs abrupt generations –
held to undergo a reason to believe
a good many snapdragons
to be possible

And not some unknown plan of creation.

Not because further but because numerous
the whole life of being is ranked with bears –
primrose and cowslip, the petals of forebears
rank where we ought to rank doubt and a storm of trouble.
How one longs for monsoons.

Your names squirt and splash,
wash, rush, gush – Niagara at the pawn shop.
In the window behind the steel bars, shiny electric guitars of spring
sing of a semblance
when the matter ran out, the matter stole
the food of us, the matter stole the rain and the sky

Bodies wafted, drifted, puffed the crumpled pop-tin world
blown to the same millionth and in so far
dust as bondage – they were letters of Silurian lungfish
from the first signs of land life
coughing and sneezing consumption’s GDP.

I find myself again in this undercurrent,
this ugly stress of weather, eddying the same cyclones
roaming the same cataract in search of the water-bearer.
I find myself understanding nothing
and thinking I must mean more fully
than ripples of birds.
kindred to ancient forms, I am gingko tree
whose branches can fork, can leaf,
can specify, and how not suppose
this impossible earth this void
that faces, locks, then spills the mind, the mud

I am plant, vascular and whole, yet tied to factory.
Ingress, egress man my aqueducts
and gutters make industry machine my funnels, moats
to culverts, ditches – tiny metabolic pumps and bridges.

I leak, ooze, for marshes with white-plumed birds.
How one longs for infinite surface near egrets
yet stumbles at links in the chains of sense.
How one longs for the light of rain, the light of
what is most nearly not, yet finds the possibility of flight
in a swamp of drain-pipes.

Words matter at people and crows
Words matter the world
and tentacle what matters with friction and seasons,
and pain that tatters a body to fester and moulder,
a body dead to clockwork,
a body of air picking butts from trash bins –
I dream of gathering, of washing this despair,
yet the gulls cry, the sparrows
come to the trees and feed on insects –
and I am city intestine, a market to throats and gully-holes –
train-screech to the grain silos, freighters, lumber yards –
I am where my arteries are going. Wheat
Such is water, such is breath, and I the spiracles
on their pipes – a railway for the slippage of daylight –
When the train jolts forward my box-car holds
inertia, salt-crust, cracks, fissures – the varnish of frozen earth drying, cooling, tearing, splitting what is viscous, what is brittle, to minute notches in random zones of weakness

Good morning. This is history – the force of the masses a matter of gravity, a matter of falling apples. How will you measure resistance? Can you determine as density an irregular solid? In reality, does the balance give you method? or motive?
26  No means explain the construction’s sameness

Do the sparrows ask why I gingko?
Why the flowers pistil and petal?
Why the crusty crab walks sideways
to me, but to him straight ahead
careless that his jaws, according to man,
are made of legs.
Does the sparrow ask why I why
mindless that my nose has lost its sense.
And do crows in their sorts and classes
fly higher than all – flight simple as walking,
from which they see man
as a failure to adapt? Oblivious to his word-calls –
just so many chirps and whistles, that fizzy spume,
that yeasty surf of bubbles boiling out of us
to cirrus, stratus, cumulo-nimbus?
Do we know what sparrows ask?
Do we know how to think of that?
How the fungus sings to the trunk of a fir,
how the lichen talks to its rocks, the seaweed to the sea?
How the creatures that befog or befrog us jam up
stickiness in our branches, and make horses in behoove –
the way worms and mould make earth and wormland
more than usage.

How did milk and bee’s wax descend
from the quiddity in semiliquid?
Or squishy soup – churned, clotted –
come from thickness of crassitude?
How did froth-head and barm evolve clouds
overcast with winter’s brume,
and mould man to primordial word-slime.
Man the word-mime, jellied in woolpacks – gummed in hazes, scuds.
Man the glue, cooked in egg-white of hoots and cuckoo calls.
Why must he ooze the curdled mucus of profit and usefulness?
Do we know the antimatter to that?
The waves and particles of social justice
brave to the ropy frontier at mills and sweatshops.
The Axial

Sooner or later everything turns, and turning requires an axis, usually invisible. The Earth, the Sun, Jupiter, and people have at least one thing in common — they are bodies that move on an axis, whether axis mundi or spine. When the axis is open — that is, released, not forcefully held in place — things turn freely, subtly moving in and out of balance. Keeping the axis open and aware produces the state I have been calling the axial. For a human being (used to more or less walking "upright" rather than on all fours) to keep her or his own dynamic axis open requires a certain process of awareness, indeed a practice or discipline. There are many body-centered techniques, both Eastern and Western, for observing and preserving the health of the axis. These techniques somehow focus the senses directly on the axis (as spine, inner column, or whatever), toward discovering its role with respect to what may be considered the center. Center as a “dynamism,” or perhaps an intensively contained field of motion with feedback, rather than fixture of control or defense.

Art (broadly defined) has the potential to perform such a sense-based discipline of the axial, which could be thought of as a dynamic self-mentoring through the “medium” of the physical body. I have been interested in the possibility that when an art develops a disciplined

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1This text was first written in 2000 to accompany various presentations of the Axial Stones, including an exhibition (at the Westbeth Gallery in New York City, shared with Spencer Holst and Beate Wheeler) and a publication (in Open Space, edited by Benjamin Boretz and Mary Lee Roberts, 2002). It has since gone through “layers” of rewriting. This approach seems to be contributing to a possible understanding of the processes I call “axial,” particularly in relation to the stones, but also in relation to language, most especially, poetic language. (A separate piece called “Axial Poetics” is also in flux and continues to appear on various websites.) Clearly this rewriting will continue, first, because this text is far short of what I intend; I am under no illusions that at present it is any more than a collection of nascent thoughts. More important is the question of the degree to which the axial, which by its nature cannot be definitively accounted for, can be meaningfully discussed beyond a description of its specific manifestations. I have not yet seriously attempted to place this thinking in a historical context, that is, to register similarities and differences in related attempts to think about the issues discussed. This is rather, for the most part, the “insider” portion of the view.
It also seems to follow from this way of thinking that, for an artist to enter into “the state of the axial,” she or he must be willing to be somehow "rediscovered" — or to be in such a state of flexibility that continuous change becomes normative. To some degree this describes the state of art itself, or at least what one might expect from art. After all, “axial” could be another name for “verse,” what develops through continuously “turning.” Yet there is something to be said for emphasizing a state of further axiality and its relatively high degree of precariousness. The axial is, pretty much by definition, quite unstable. But you might call this a willing instability.

Contrary to a “common sense” or otherwise consensual view, this instability is understood, implicitly if not explicitly, to be fundamentally healthy. And, notwithstanding an intelligent mistrust of claims for the therapeutic value of art (especially if it claims superiority of one art or method or style over another), we might entertain a non-invidious suggestion of benefit connected to the axial, the free state, an activated and activating state of possibility. This is tricky business, to be sure; and nothing is riskier — or more obviously contrary to the axial! — than privileging one set of values over another. And claims of “a deep and ancient wisdom of art” — a tempting notion in certain moods of enthusiastic embrace of possibility — too easily lead to Golden Age nostalgia, metaphysical revival, dogma and, frankly, a rigidity in the very insistence on flexibility. This would be to promote an “ideal” state, rather than inquire into what in any given instance is optimal. (It is with this in mind that I am provisionally approaching this discussion as ahistorically as I can, except for a few contextualizing personal notes, to attempt a view of “principle” without traditionary burden; non-dogmatically. This is not to valorize the ahistorical or synchronic approach, but
to create a sort of neutral interlude.) “One law for the Lion & the Ox,” wrote Blake, “is Oppression.”

**Metapoetics**

My own sense of the axial probably embodies several strands of experience, as well as certain disciplines. Foremost among these is a practice of poetics that favors *art acting at the boundary of its own definition*. By 1968 I was representing this practice as *metapoetic*. I had a sense of the poetics as agency of transformation, discourse whose only rule was that it eventually change the rules of the game it was playing. Certainly several years of reading Blake, in which I found a “principle of poetic torsion,” set the foundation, which led to my own experiments with “torsional syntax” (1969). And in the early ’70s I began a traditionary practice, t’ai chi, which may be considered the study and practice of keeping the spine open and the energy flowing. It clearly affects how one handles objects; in my case, for instance, stones. Certainly self-reflective study affects my kind of work with stones, which I think of as “radical, dialogical balancing,” because it involves a high degree of “open” feedback and reciprocity, and an erosion of dualities (subject/object, “I” and “the stones”), wherein the event of stones coming together into balance is performatively reflected in one’s body along with (or perhaps as) the stones. The “measure” is proprioceptive. Such work would hardly be possible without the gradual emergence of a special “sense.”

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2 Embodied in a single study, which however I envisioned as the beginning of a series (never realized): “Orc as a Fiery Paradigm of Poetic Torsion,” Blake’s Visionary Forms Dramatic, ed. David V. Erdman and John E. Grant (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1970), 263-284. Future studies were to analyze torsional syntax (relating it to modern practices from Finnegans Wake and Beckett’s novels on).

3 Throughout the ’60s personal association with certain poets (including Jackson Mac Low, Robert Duncan, David Antin, John Cage, and others) no doubt supported this tendency, which found expression first in our journal Stony Brook (1968-69), wherein I planned to present “metapoetics” and various subdivisions (“ethnopoetics,” edited by Jerome Rothenberg, and “ecopoetics,” for which we found no editor, etc.). The first explicit expression came in anthologies: Open Poetry — the section on “Metapoetry” (edited 1970, published by Simon & Schuster in 1973), America a Prophecy (with J. Rothenberg, Random House, 1973 — esp. the section on “Metapoeia”), and An Active Anthology (1974, “Virtual Poetics”). The poems of mine in Open Poetry are the ones I called “torsional.”
of it? Perhaps, with a nod to Charles Olson, “field proprioception,” “ownness by field” — if I may abuse a perfectly good definition: “The unconscious perception of movement and spatial orientation arising from stimuli within the body itself and its dialogical ‘impersonation’ of the field around it.” This sense of proprioceptive measure has come to me, to the extent that it has, during that quarter century of self-study through the moving body. Somehow one comes to embrace the sudden manifestation of precarious self-trueness, even when it seems to say everything and nothing with equal intensity. Loving a state that easily accepts being called “the open” may be an acquired sensibility, but it also seems irreversible.

“How does this apply to “language” and “signs,” to how we hear the intensive definitional gesture with respect to the poetic that says “poetry is speaking with listening.”) I spent some years studying and practicing therapeutic bodywork in order to learn to “hear” or “feel” subtle feedback of body/mind signaling, and I have come to regard such an interaction as occurring in a field of signals that is self-organizing, self-communicating, and interpersonal. (I am frankly speaking here about a “high intensity level” of bodywork that I identify with the axial. It can be considered a matter of degree, but a difference of degree that crosses a threshold into a difference of kind; I’m not aware of an accurate sys-
tem of designating these states.) Any metaphysics of identity becomes *mind-degradable* in such a field; its thinking is “measured” at the synaptic rather than the syntactic level. The “communication” happens at the level of field and is not necessarily registered at the “conscious” level at all; indeed, what we call “conscious” gets in the way and introduces the problems of ego and control. The “thinking” — including the “decisions” that the hands make — happens at the threshold that is the “bounding line” (to use Blake’s term) between the two people. To be sure, the “hierarchy” of bodyworker (therapist) and client (patient) is automatically dismantled in the axial state, because the transformative event is interactive; “change” here is *radial*, omnidirectional. There can be no totality, and the drive toward totalization, characteristic, for instance, of allopathic medicine — disease-curing medicine rather than the awakening of self-healing — simply loses appeal.

**Art as self-awakening performance**

The parallel between bodywork and axial stones, as very roughly described above, may be obvious. I have had no special sensitivity to stones in my life, but I have lived around people who do, and I learned to respect this sensitivity (Susan Quasha and Chie [buun] Hasegawa are my main teachers here). One day, buun, an artist working with earth matter, balanced two round stones that had circle marks on them. I experienced a sort of “shock” of sudden delight and asked (invasively) if I could touch them, perhaps move them. With permission I shifted them to a slightly more precarious position and noticed that the “intensity” (experienced as excitement) increased. I let my hands “lead” as I would in bodywork, and I experienced a sort of feedback from the stone-activity of precarious balancing. And so I discovered a way to be “led” by following the intensity/excitement that came as a function of direct contact. So a practice evolved, very much as bodywork had, by following a sort of “ecstasy impulse” — a sheer attractive force that comes, in this instance, only through hands-on contact and in the relationship of two stones that have no objective or observable connection. The connection is *felt* — sometimes the eyes are closed, and there is very little visual “form” attachment — in a dance-like search for an invisible axis. The relationship is synaptic. And the “lure” is toward the precarious — a threshold awareness that I identify with *liminality*.  

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Axial Poetics

the poetics of the mind-degradable

Returning to the axial as principle, I point to its being at work in any domain of activity — walking, speaking, thinking …. Accordingly it can govern one’s sense of multiple art forms. I have written in a preliminary sort of way on what I call *axial poetics*, a few instances of which show up here. Initially it seems to be little more than a metaphor to speak of t’ai chi, bodywork, axial stones, and language as related by a single principle, the axial. My aim (eventually) is to show that there is a true principle at work in these radically different manifestations. Clearly, I can do little more here than invoke the notion and supply a few “examples.”

A graffiti-like application of language to public walls has a function (automatic art installation) of in itself drawing language toward the axial, where *the moving body performs the “syntax” of the statement*. I made a gallery installation at SUNY New Paltz on the theme of “life in the Hudson Valley” that consisted of two-line statements, the top line readable from a distance, the second requiring approach to within a few feet to make out the words. For instance:

the river is listening

for you

Axiality as a principle of environmental relationship was intended here as a syntactic function: relationship is created in the approach, as an action of reading the signs. Syntax is physical (reading crosses actual space, speaking projects sound energy into the environment, etc.) and emphasized here as the willingness to approach. Meaning shifts as one gets closer to the “object”; the increasing feedback from the “verbal object” introduces variable meaning, variable relationship. Nature is alive and speaks to us in the turns of our own language and thinking, which we can interpretatively transform (“the river is doing the listening for you”; “the river is tuned into your approach through listening”). The torque is in the syntactic (synaptic) shift to the second line which complexifies the “whole” both retroactively and prospectively, opening further.
language is the tool
hand working inside

I have another “installation poem” project in which I imagine putting a bare line on the walls at "reading height," running around a whole room, with language above the line in axial relation to language under the line. This sense of line implies a horizontal axis, created by the action of the reading eye, which discovers the interruptive energetics of going back and forth between the upper and lower language units, with no encouragement toward resolution. (At least initially one has to stop moving directionally and let the oscillation occur between above and below for the event of meaning to develop.) An example from the work called Life on the Line and Under / Liminal Structures — a poetics of axial stone work mirrored in the operations of language — is performative of its own principle:

two stones on one edge
utter surface

Here “superficial” can mean “profound”; above the line cannot remain discontinuous with below the line. What is happening at the surface (e.g., stones held in place by their actual, but provisional, single contact point of balance) speaks out for what normally hides in the “root.” The axis itself, whose line of “gravitational force” theoretically runs to the center of the earth, is exposed. This open center of body is there too in the world and the mind, and that openness shows up as a fact of language itself moving to one of its edges, where it functions ambivalently — with more than one valence. The surface utters precariously the wide-open state of its own self-generating turbulence, which unexpectedly reaches a still point — like something the stones might say in their “mode of being.” Being, as it were, speaking in stones.4

4 As for exhibition of the Axial Stones, my wish is to see them exhibited in an appropriate environment that includes the subtle presence of installed, axial language, so that the walls dialogue with room space, awakened by the presence of stones on alert.
Grounding rising

Things spinning quickly may tend to lift off the ground if they catch the air just right — think of a helicopter. What is less obvious, because offering no visible evidence, is that things spinning slowly and just right are continuously grounding and rising at once. Axial stones, which had to turn subtly and sensitively on their shared axis to get into this new "home spot," seem to retain the trace of their turning — as if, once set into motion, the axial event never quite disappears; it leaves a trace, which the eyes can perpetuate at a glance. We intuitively understand this phenomenon; its logic is proprioceptive and at the same time resonant with the field, the environment. Consider the phenomenon, associated with the poetic, of words that “uplift us” (it can happen suddenly even if we are avoiding this genre of experience as cliché, seductive, escapist, etc.); what we are experiencing may be viewed as a particular “turning action” that courses through us and induces a natural-seeming levitational force — we seem to rise a bit, may even seem to float, “light headed.” Spoken meaning may enter the condition of language as if lifting off the skin (even if “deeply felt”):

tonguing it means

just as it sounds

Like displayed language only partially readable at a distance, stones address the senses in unknown ways.

audible stone

barely tones

In theory there are no completely isolated events — if flapping butterfly wings can create global storms, might lips uttering unheard verbal patterns generate widely resonant forms? Do poetic breaks in usage patterns free up possibility elsewhere? Is there a politics of every “private” or “esoteric” language act?

mouth sounds

surround bounds
Non-local quantum effects allow us to imagine hyperlocality — unlimited field possibility and non-separation; and the radical availability of any integrated intentional patterning can appear unpredictably wherever it meets with reciprocity or is somehow attracted. Intimate action, with its potential for high levels of integrity, responsiveness, and interdependence, not only can project a pattern for more public behavior, but may morphically resonate in site-specific ways. Poetic pop-ups. Interconversions. Nuclear bodies (human, poetic, etc.) may attract the components of their own ad hoc or emergent systems, potentially free of dogma.

Axial stones, as events whose full energy is devoted to staying in place for this very moment, ask us to shift our stance to see them. For instance, staring at a precariously poised surface you entrain to your own “depth” (physical sense, indefinite bottom never quite reached), and work your way back, differently each moment. One registers extremely improbable equipoise not mainly through the eyes but through the whole body, the body as organ of perception—organ of intervention. One reads the balanced stone through an axial sense, the central axis of the body registering disturbance, like the inner ear. This may remind us of dream which somehow surfaces through an open axis, activating the whole of the dream body in any given memory — yet the “whole” is never a “totality” because it is alive and changing. The “memory” does not refer to a reality “back there” but emerges from the act itself of remembering. Axial stones — if we may add a Bachelardian touch — may seem to dream their way from earth to air, as if fulfilling an ancient wish that is, nevertheless, for the first time, an event of the moment. They “execute” that wish, so to speak, in the discovery of an axis in common between stones and us, the doers/viewers.

Interactive liminality

In holding “agency” to an interactive liminality, an axial reading creates an oscillation between subject and object, as an opening to a match between experience and concept. If a metaphysical assertion in this context is a sitting duck for deconstruction, each axial formulation, to follow the metaphor, is a fidgety sitting model for self-deconstruction; eventually any assertion of value times out and becomes mind-degradable.
We speak of gravity as if it were a fact beyond question rather than a theory; this is reasonable on the practical level because it accounts for everyday experience: things fall. (But, of course, there’s serious non-Newtonian and, by the way, non-Einsteinian opposition to the theory.\textsuperscript{5}) On this basis I might propose naming another eminently opposable theory, \textit{axial centering}.\textsuperscript{6} Let’s say that it runs invisibly through everything that moves (and everything moves), which in a more excited state can hold appearance at a pitch of reversibility. This corresponds to many kinds of experience, familiar to practitioners of aikido, t’ai chi, Alexander Technique, etc., as well as the practice of “balancing” stones. When something freely \textit{stands up}, it’s as though it’s caught in the sudden, released up-flow of an unaccountable motion. From one point of view what’s released is the countermotion to gravity, which some have called \textit{levity}. It can be compared to an insight, a sudden thought, a “received” poetic line, or perhaps Cocteau/Spicer’s Orphic radio.

On the strength of such a notion, we can figure further: the axial seems to aspire — it’s easy to call it “joining the intentional updraft of spirit” — but aspire to what? In nature the volutinal tendency of a vine becomes \textit{torsional} climbing under the condition of \textit{interactivity}, specifically, meeting resistance; interfering with the closed circle of rotation produces the stimulated open torque of unique grip. This is a space of liminality that calls for action that can only occur \textit{between}. The condition of poetry, \textit{verse}? We’re used to seeing aspiration on the model of teleology, which has linked it historically with religion and dogma generally. But what of the possibility of seeing aspiration (rooted in \textit{desire} [in the Latin]) for its own sake? Something unaccountable except as the

\textsuperscript{5}See for instance William Day’s “new non-Newtonian [and non-Einsteinian] physics of the unity of space, motion, and the structure of matter”; consider this interesting statement: “Holistic Physics is based on the principle that all things are at the center of their interactive environments. It is an object’s direct interaction with its immediate environment that is responsible for its actions. And as the environment moves or changes, so too does the object change to remain centered. Environments arrange to form systems, cells, communities, and societies.” [http://www.non-newtonianphysics.com/]

\textsuperscript{6}Perhaps another of Day’s core statements helps this reflection: “Holism — motion is caused by spontaneous shift to remain centered in an interactive environment.”
living being’s impulsion toward its own further possibility, or in Charles Olson’s happy term, its *further nature.* Verse becomes not first of all an inherited tradition, nor for that matter its proud innovations, but a fundamental of life, where the *turn is upon the possible revealed in the engagement with the other.* This includes the play of opposites; so that a living stance is always precariously equiponderant, poised on a fulcrum of impossibility — no resting place. (Tradition, in this view or at this angle, is a secondary inflection of a raw “force” at work in verse.) And if axial stones seem to aspire to the poetic, it’s because they too appear strangely to belong to the nature of language, stuttering forward — its ambivalent roots that are themselves so dreamlike and given to rising through slips of the tongue.

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s-  
tone slide

(E)co-Axials

The poetics of politics shows that self-regenerating language burns dead discourse as fuel. What doesn’t mind-degrade dulls the mind. What we don’t eat may eat us. What we don’t digest putrefies. Denial postpones the showdown.

— *Ontonymous the Particular*

In some moods I date my discovery of the axial from a childhood longing for what was evidently missing in experience — whatever it was that made my grandmother call me *contrary.* “Don’t be *contrary!*” — a phrase which, my being “that way,” I heard as the command to turn it around on itself. This was the beginning of a “time sense” that in its performative language-driven action stood as it were outside time. It could be called the *future continuous present indicative* — a leaning mood, a longing forward, emerging from the instance of language turning on itself, yet focused *outward.*

Trying to imagine one’s own bent and the still present source of one’s obsessions, one easily invents. But if we face where we are in time now, the mood sobers. What is the use of our metapoetic/ecopoetic constructions? In a time in the West (“here”) now defined to an unprecedented degree by the potential for destruction of “life as we know it” — terrorism, ecological disaster, war pandemic — we read the writing on the
wall as tattoo, an inscription on one’s own body. It’s all reaching home. (No doubt the greater number of people on the planet would have a right to say, Welcome to the world.) A thought rushes in with extra force: It’s time to take it all finally to heart; that is, beyond our philosophical, political, moral, artistic/poetic position — beyond any kind of righteousness whatsoever. The Buddhists call it impermanence and give it centrality in the motivation of transformation/realization. The ultimate spur. For me it’s the call, take your stand. Stand where and how you would be when the curtain drops. Such an act is intrinsically connected to others.7

The attitude of attitudes, so to speak. Is it enough to die “right” — home safe because feeling oneself right to the end? Is there a “right relation” that gives a life final meaning? No doubt these critically important questions are not subject to final answers, but have a continuing orientational force, along the road a notion of “impermanence” would carry us down— crucial but, in the end, quite inadequate. The spur is the condition of urgent movement, not the vision itself.

There is an orientation that is a continuous indication leading into the “future” that is as much a “possible present” as a time to come. There is a “sense” — a sense of “source” as an actual field of radiance. One seems to know it as one knows that one is alive. It’s a matter, first of all, of “zeroing in” on it and then maintaining contact.

I relate this to the process of working the stones, which for several weeks after 9/11 became a fundamental activity for me. The daily practice of axial writing (The Preverbs of Tell) slowed to a halt. Only the

7 As I write this the (56 year old, Serbian) performance artist Marina Abramovic is at Sean Kelly’s Chelsea Gallery in NYC “performing” a “living installation” in which she is doing a 12-day fast (water only), living in full view, continuously video-recorded, in a three-room construction with a dangerous no-escape mechanism. This intentional peril may be resonant with the post-9/11 state of NY, but it also continues three decades of comparable art activity. Her stated intention is, in part, to open “energetic” contact with people who attend, which is an ecopoetic act worth noting here. In my experience of visiting the gallery, she creates a unique state of liminality in the art/non-art relationship centered within the question of responsible human action. The question itself grows more vivid, indeed becomes unaccountably more awake in oneself.
stones seemed to sustain. Was it the “grounding” quality? The sense of strange life like discovering the earth really is alive? A Buddha-like earth-touching gesture? Earth “bodywork,” hoping to be led? Perhaps it’s working with impermanence itself, the precariousness, and an experience of the sudden updraft of “spirit.” The sense of edge, the senses on edge — making sense at the edge.

The Principle of Principle Art

Here is a condensed account of “principle” from the angle of the axial and the liminal (refining the statement from 2000):

The sense of principle that I employ derives from the usage I found in the practice of t’ai chi in the early 70s, the Shr Jung (= “right timing” or “true measure”) school on the Bowery in New York (the teaching of Prof. Cheng Man Ching). The heuristic notion was to “stay on principle,” which meant engaging a “natural truth” and its self-evident rule through “bodily” inquiry, rather than imitation of an outer form (which, however, was indispensable) or implementing ideological thinking (although analytical discrimination was clearly necessary).

Over the years practicing this way meant for me that the medium in art and poetics was radically open, based only on one’s ability to find the principle there. Any stance with respect to an either/or distinction or duality remains liminal — as in the case of the martial arts practice of “push hands,” one remains at the precise point of physical contact and “follows” without exerting direct pressure. One discovers how to view the “objective surrounding” as zero world, empty of “always already” determining, yet resonant. One somehow manages to approach this facticity palpably, with sheer listening intensity. Accordingly one cannot hold a model or ideal in mind, yet one tries to stay alert for the optimal, which is relational and concretely connected to what is at hand.

There’s a sense of undertime, a basically atemporal zeroverse that serves as source of temporally emergent and “spontaneous” possibility. I’m confident that undertime has a pulse, which, however, is variable and unpatterned, and which one can follow as actual impulse. The recognition of impulse requires “beginner’s mind,” an attitude of “non-mastery” of one’s own means, a radical openness before what is at hand — and ordinary momentum and “voice,” however attractive and desirable, can distract from it.
Axial poetics allows for interruption of momentum, replaced by a sense of a possible poetics of any moment and speaking from zero-point voice.

Speaking in stones
liminal to a manifesto

beauty = optimal x precarious

view

Art is self-awakening performance.
Artist and participant thereby discover
common bounding

A stone in its natural state becomes axial when it mates truly and perilously with another stone by way of unforeseeable precarious balance. The stones come into relation (say, along riverbanks or in streams) and only when noticed become attractors. When a stone — through the action of the artist’s manual obedience and now excited vertical line of self-balancing — discovers its axis in common with another stone, it comes into such radically particular and optimal relation. As a consequence, the liminal identity of both stones — meaning what is actual, yet interactive — speaks out as never before.

There is no axial mastery. The standard of rightness is the optimal relation. What is optimal changes according to the forces active at any given moment, the field. The field is at least as alive as the entities within it. The standard of aliveness is the precarious.

stones complete in themselves

collaborating doing nothing

PRINCIPLE: What is liminal to being on center and on edge stands at the threshold of its further life and steps up its living intensity. Accordingly, the state of optimal stepped-up intensity is
the still point

—an event at zero-point alignment. Where the state is realized as beauty=optimal x precarious, stones seem to awaken in a conscious field.

The working notion of what happens in that field is

zero-point speaking
I

poppyseed: black, (blue-black in clusters), very fine
runner beans: glossy, pink and black, mottled, almost lustered
marigold: green, a round cheese; dries to spiked crescents

takes the cow to market,
packed like wedges, like petals

selling the

II

crumpled poppies brave flags out of the rubble
– newborn face, fingers left in water –
unfurling

seed corn

places each bean gently, carefully spaced. Above ground a length of twine will mark the row

III

seed leaves appear first, very plain and simple
easy to identify
IV

Lavender’s blue, dilly, dilly

- heads to the middle and inside to make bottles
  stems in and out ribbons a spindle
Lavender’s green

seeding as perfume

   *tendrils, a ladder* –

V

wavering hairy stem, frail as a thread, stiffens so

the wind can rattle it.

   *Hiding in the oven*

out from under the fluted lid

through little black windows,

VI

When I am King a dilly bag

scattering

   *lest he be eaten*

not one progression, but many little circles

chill kind of mettle

You shall be Queen
MICHAEL ROTHENBERG / TAKE

‘Dozers and homo sapiens renovating Eden.
Does it belong to me?

Take.
Those golden acrobats,
masked and feathered array.
Damselfly. Saltmarsh Yellowthroat. Merlin!

Is it mine?
The lupine.
Ranunculus, willow and tule.
  Melodies on cattail singing posts.

Revolutions beyond evolution.
Take.
Those charging loins,
  darting, split-tongued, turquoise
garter snake,
  hormone beveling bone through spring grass.

In another drought year.
Take.
  Those golden beings working in another tongue.
Do they belong to God or Me?

Circus effusive, dispersed
Over wave-bashed headlands, bluff,
  creeping a-fluff, quivering ashore.

In tide pools.
Aquatic revelers.
Take. Take.
Tentacular, slimy,
  deeper and further. Do I turn?
Or is it Noah’s Ark
    crushing against the sudden appearance
    of sunken landform?

Is it mine or God’s accordant plan, these tools,
hoe, plow, need
raised so Majority
    goes mitigating biblical resolution,
the formal hills, seeps and watershed, silting marsh?

Battered democracy. Exclusion from Eden.
Take.
It comes to me in alarm.

Is it mine?

Or God ringing in on every cue,
in hierarchy, does it belong to me?
The headache says,

pressing children, family, you,
    there will be others after you.
The intense focus of advanced literary work on human activity in cities over the past 250 years has obscured the truism that human activity is not “unnatural” or separate from nature, but a special niche of overall planetary processes. Continual narrowing of the focus of leading-edge writing from “social” writing, to psychological novels, to personal narratives, to theaters of ideas, to focus on the poem itself, to language-centered poetries marks a progression, but has the unintended side-effect of excluding ever-widening sectors of global activity from the literary scene.

Separation of human activity from other global events, since the Enlightenment, has extended far beyond literature to the creation of disconnected vertical silos of epistemology in all fields of endeavor. We are taught to separate art from science from politics; it has a taxonomic value. But it also justifies ignoring the horizontal links between those vertical compartments, and synthesizing ideas is limited to only the most pragmatic frameworks: marketing, distribution, management, and accounting. While most of the non-pragmatic, contrary examples are regressive, including various revivalist movements, ecology itself tends to be cross-disciplinary.

And there are good reasons to accept these divisive boundaries. At least it is essential to proceed with independent tools and thinking in order to acquire detailed knowledge of and excellence in any field. (General knowledge is suspect for several reasons.) But once the valued distinctions have been established, what psychologists call the “narcissism of small differences” takes hold to fossilize the borders.

Artists and scientists often attempt to place other’s work in a category and be finished with it or attack it or otherwise affirm their own existence in distinction to it. In essence, to categorize to dispose (of). If the work cannot be categorized, it is easily dismissed anyway as not contributing to the main stream. (An interesting contrary example, in that criticism is used ubiquitously across borders.) This tyranny of taxonomy separates what is otherwise related between different arts, between arts and sciences, between A and B. Alleviating dilemmas and false polarities would be easier with a way of thinking that allows both letters to exist
in both separate and common spaces. (This is not an easy job, because differences are often far more stimulating than similarities.)

Isolation of the disciplines of learning from each other has allowed the rise of the “marketplace” model, the zero sum competitive game with boutiques where everything is treated as if it were for sale. The domination of exchange value and marketplace competition extends even to the impoverished poetry world (and basic common functions like health care and education). In order to counteract the marketplace model, progressive thinking has used horizontal critiques, an alternative to boutiques of knowledge and corporate specialization. These critiques, such as in the work of Marx or Freud, often further isolate modes of knowing and of relating, even within the individual psyche while attempting to develop a totalizing analysis. They have been useful, but it is time to begin an integration process with an overall framework rather than within the boundaries of a single discipline such as political economy or psychology. Even this use of poetics as a placenta of culture might have to be cast aside to avoid such problems.

We cannot, alas, go backward. In order to define a whole world, we need a new framework to avoid regressing to uncomplicated natural pietism. And what are the leading elements of the next stage? Interestingly, poetry dealing with the materials of writing from Mallarmé to Silliman does include a much greater range of subjects and materials than “city” art has used in other genres. Those styles have opened the door to an extended poetry.

Synthetic poetry requires more than the components of its construction. Models for the components to be guided by and push against are needed, because technique without form has no application and the practice of poetry is based on an increasingly feeble abstraction. “Environmental poetics” provides a model that can perform many functions for thought and action in the literary and more extended niches. An analogy can be drawn with genetics. Without the form of the organism as a model, genetic strings fragment after a few generations and fail to reproduce. The components of synthetic construction—thematic and prosodic materials—are the “genetic” materials of poetry. The poems are the
historical forms (organisms) which we imitate to diverge. How well does this theory of environmental poetics fit the facts?

Eventually, of course, the analogy will break down, but by then it may have served an important purpose. The illusion that any metaphor or description can provide continuous and valid matching to global reality is the fallacy of religion, a place where I hope we will not stray. Yet it will be impossible to “police” the uses and abuses of such a widely applicable framework as this “environmental model of language”.

Environmental poetics cannot mean simply making the environment safe through green poetry. It has to change the entire, parsed world without destroying it in the process. Changes need to occur in such far flung domains as our view of the self/other and distribution of wealth. Such renovations (changing the tires of the car while it is still moving) are more costly and difficult than revolutions, where one simply has to sweep away the old and start over with a clean slate. And as we move forward we make continual mistakes, slipping back into old, convenient, and seductive ways of thinking. Yet we must avoid becoming the Khmer Rouge or Taliban of poetry. In some ways the change will be easier because analytical structures still exist in an environmental model. The environmental model is inclusive, allowing the individual niches to participate and function, and possibly flourish. Each niche has a level of independence as well as several levels of interdependence. As they move through time, they have, at each moment, a continuing dependence on the conditions of the prior moment.

Many issues need to be resolved and many pitfalls litter the path. Even the basic process of attempting to evolve from solving linear problems in art and science to real-world problems puts us squarely in the path of complexity theory. And despite several decades of research, complexity has yet to achieve much success outside of its analogy. In the case of complexity, the analogy is recognizing similar form and/or function regardless of scale. Yet analogies promote homogenization, while one of the most important goals of environmentalism is to establish the value of diversity.

Another problem will occur in maintaining seriousness about the process we are engaged in while keeping aware of its ridiculous appearance. Irony
at many levels plays a part in negotiating the change from a walled geography to a structure of permeable membranes within a planetary organism. Just how seriously can we take this approach?

And how can we accommodate change? The risks of change are hardly negligible. People will try to keep the risk, the excitement, at expected levels, regardless of our efforts to mediate them. The result will be a high value placed on art driven by various gestalts. The same kinds of reactions occur in the wider culture with the rise of fundamentalist thought combating globalization.

As we approach distributing the environmental model, we will also need a new social taxonomy to replace the one observed by Chaucer at the dawn of Humanism. As people begin to assimilate the environmental view how will they be reorganized? How will they interact? What kinds of institutions will replace the existing ones based on classical, polarized models?

Recent conflicts in poetry can point to a potential resolution. The New Criticism attempted to establish the poem as the central focus of poetry. Language Poetry developed an extended poem, including its social environment and the meanings in its prosody. If poets can find value in the poem and in the extended poem (the genetic structure, the organism, and its environment), can they and their readers value an environment that includes these two critical schools? We could wish for no more than a suspension of time.

The muskrats down at the marsh are building furiously, making final preparations against the coming winter, their mud, reed and stick mounds popping up here and there. The following notes were compiled in similar haste, and with a similar sense of urgency; what has resulted shares something of the haphazard architecture of my lacustrine neighbors.¹

In “Possessing Possession: Lorine Niedecker, Folk, and the Allegory of Making,” an essay which sets a high mark for Niedecker scholarship, a poet and scholar as astute as Elizabeth Willis still feels compelled to denigrate the “marshy” Niedecker, as prelude to a proper discussion of her cultural status: “What could such a minimalist, domestic writer with such circumscribed concerns as keeping the wind and water out of her small marshy house and making her own clothes have to do with the monumental political and intellectual concerns of the Vietnam war era . . . ?”²

Willis is carrying forward the avant-garde recuperation of Niedecker: eager to bring out the cosmopolitan and intellectual character of a major poet long hampered by her reputation as an eccentric, lonely regionalist at the margins of the “Objectivist” movement. This is a necessary recuperation the Penberthy volume now makes possible, and the reason for the impatience with which it was awaited—we now can explore in their full range (aided by an admirably clear and detailed scholarly apparatus) Niedecker’s investigations in surrealism, folk language, political poetry, prose, and drama, not to speak of her critical engagement with “Objectivism.”

Nevertheless, among the many other aspects of her oeuvre, the place Niedecker’s poetry holds (or will hold) in a long tradition of nature writing, is not the least important. That this still has to be approached as a regressive, “circumscribed” component of her work, simply shows how untimely

¹Having obtained a copy of the long-awaited *Collected Works*, edited by Jenny Penberthy, as soon as it appeared, I had hoped to solicit or write a review adequate to this important event. Now the deadline for *ecopoetics* 02 is at my doorstep, with the volume only half-read, so you’ll have to settle for these preliminary, and necessarily incomplete, jottings—not a review per se. (To redress this, *ecopoetics* 03 will include a Niedecker feature.)

²Willis’s essay was originally a presentation at the 2000 National Poetry Foundation conference on “North American Poetry in the 1960s”; it is printed in *XCP: cross-cultural poetics* no. 9, 2001.
her poetry continues to be.³ I’d go further: Niedecker’s even-mindedness, her refusal to subordinate the local to the cosmopolitan, or vice versa, looks forward to a time when “monumental” concerns have everything to do with domestic water levels.

In Niedecker’s words a pump is as real as a carp or a plover, are as real as these words. She need not invoke a pretense of the primitive, or Indianized pieties, to get outside. The integrity of her ear tends toward complex inclusion rather than consoling exclusions, as in the industrial haiku of: “frog rattle—/ lowland freight cars/ in the night.”

Niedecker’s attitude to surrounds is refreshingly non-transcendental; there are transcendental elements, of course (and a Thoreauvian reading of her œuvre remains to be done)—plenty of little sublimities—but “nature” here is more or less free of that tension that so puffs it up in the long and rich tradition of puritan-American “wilderness” meditations. Nor need Niedecker posit a “pristine,” dehumanized nature to get close to other-than-humans; her nature is clearly more proletarian than pastoral:

Popcorn-can cover
screwed to the wall
over a hole
so the cold
can’t mouse in

(My Friend Tree)

If we, along with Niedecker herself, feel obliged to point to reflection in the work—rather than assume it as a matter of poetic course—it’s both a gender issue (political) and a nature issue (topical). This problem needs to be looked at in the context of the “feminization” of nature writing since the nineteenth century, of the minor status of pioneer womens’ nonfiction, of the critical dominance of Emerson over Thoreau (whose “microscopic eye,” according to Emerson, strayed from a “manly contemplation of the whole”) or of Walden over the Journals, and of the generally low critical esteem in which the descriptive, nonfiction literary essay has been held. It is also because scientific prose is as important to Niedecker as poetry precursors and contemporaries—and one has to take this fact seriously before one can take anything seriously in Niedecker—that non-

³I’d be surprised if Willis herself shares this disdain for the “domestic” Niedecker—rather, I’m discussing the public context she addresses. While I also read Niedecker against the grain of the modernist avant-garde, I obviously do differ with Willis’s notion of Niedecker as “poet of lateness.” Need I add that the domestic is the immediate realm of the ecological (fr. oikos = house, thus ‘house keeping’)?
When we get down to the nitty gritty of Niedecker’s scientism—“good poetry is swift-winged, essential and truthful description and so is good science”—we do well to be wary of the modernisms in here (Pound) but we also do well to steer clear of characterizations so obvious they take our mind off the particulars. I imagine one tendency would be to read “description” in the above quote as Niedecker’s “misunderstanding” of “Objectivism,” or whatever it is she was up to (“she really means presentation or enactment”). But if we read Niedecker as we should, that is, as Niedecker, and not as not-Zukofsky, etc. then we’d, to the contrary, want to underline that word “description.” I’d say she’s pointing to a distinction between natural history, on the one hand, and the “hard sciences” such as microbiology, chemistry, physics, etc. on the other hand—and clearly indicating her preference for the former. “For me, when it comes to birds, animals and plants, I’d like the facts because the facts are wonderful in themselves” (Letter to Louis Zukofsky of March 10/58 #101).

The venerable tradition of natural history has continued down to our day (witness Wilson or Ackerman) as a vital part of the life sciences but is now falling on hard times. In fact, scientists speak of a crisis: while empirical description crumbles in favor of laboratory research, and organisms and habitats disappear behind genes, gene pools and probabilistic distribution ratios, the taxonomic imperative, to catalog and describe as many species as possible before they disappear for good, is more than ever in need of the kind of close observation Niedecker held out for.

Found:
  laurel in muskeg
  Linnaeus’ twin flower

Andromeda
  Cisandra of the bog
  pearl-flowered

Lady’s tresses
  insect-eating
  pitcher plant

Bedeviled little Drosera
  of the sundews
  (“Wintergreen Ridge”)
Our current predicament has been called the “taxonomic impediment.” By one guesstimate as few as 1,400 full-time taxonomists now roam the planet; even if only 15 million species remain undescribed (rather than the 30 million or 90 million that some posit) it would take 575 years, at the current rate, to classify them.

Peter Warshall writes, in a recent issue of Whole Earth Review devoted to biodiversity and the “All Species Project”:

The major stumbling blocks are funding, insufficient facilities to educate taxonomists or train apprentices, and a general malaise—an assumption that the classification job is essentially done. Indifference, funding short-ages, and no prospects for immediate payoff are familiar conditions to artists. Perhaps the all species project . . . is more like artistic pursuits in its dream of elegantly depicting all the species.

(“Toward a Revival of Bio-Portraiture,” WER, Fall 2000)

They do it with glue
these plants
(“Wintergreen Ridge”)

Readings of Niedecker’s work might gain much from an acceptably updated poetics of description, one we are long due for. As Niedecker herself insists, she is not so interested in “the hard, clear image, the thing you could put your hand on.” In some senses her relationship to the land has more in common with indigenous dialogism and personification than with the alienated eye-behind the magnifying glass (“objective”). In any case, not a simplistic description of inert objects—but observation in space-time embodying flux at all levels: that of time, history, a changing landscape; and of space, categories, the fact what’s out there is always giving the slip to our mental construct (‘species’):

Species are not
(it is like confessing
a murder)
immutable
(“Darwin”)

It is an attitude the soundings of her poems model and enact. Niedecker’s poetics place—‘by ear, she sd’—human being (and human syllables) in the midst of nature rather than at one end of a microscope. A culture/ nature or subject/ object dualism is of little use here. Her description is less of objects than of relationships, of ecologies:
His skiff skimmed
the coiled celery now gone
from these streams
due to carp
He knew duckweed
fall-migrates
toward Mud Lake bottom
(“Paean to Place”)

In either case, it’s misleading to read Niedecker’s nature as some sort of static, or even simply cyclical, eternal return-of-the seasons, a “haiku” postcard against which the more interesting “allegorical” moves get made (though Niedecker’s interests in haiku were profound, reaching into the complexity of this oft-misrepresented form). The coiled celery does disappear, fashions—just as limestone strata—do change, women “of good wild stock” stand their ground to save the horsetails and club mosses from bulldozers: this is natural history.

One way to read Niedecker, then, on her own terms, would be to take her Darwinism seriously. One of Niedecker’s major poems is dedicated not to Bach but to Darwin. Her Darwin may be most carefully read as, not a ‘Discovery Channel’ Darwin, the cute Darwin most readers seem to want to see in Niedecker, but the less consoling Darwin few neo-Darwinists, even, will completely countenance:

Myself, I gripped my melting container
the night I heard the wild
wet rat, muskrat
grind his frogs and mice
the other side of a thin door
in the flood

(Homemade/Handmade Poems)

In “Wintergreen Ridge,” rocks, life and words are all of the same process: “Life is natural/ in the evolution/ of matter// Nothing supra-rock/ about it/ simply// butterflies/ are quicker/ than rock.” This is not to be reductive: it is putting humans and nature on the same plane not for the sake of human ambitions but, rather, as a necessary humility—for the self-othering or recognition only possible when implication, change and unavoidable subjectivity (obsolescing species) rather than objectification, are the rule. Recognizing the thinness of the door between us and the muskrat is, I’d say, part of the same attitude that wants to “pick up everything for poetry, get into everyday speech, etc.” (Letter to LZ of May 23/48 #21)
Thus Niedecker’s attitude may not be “folk,” so much as a reduction (‘condensation’) toward promiscuity, perhaps even folk’s opposite as a non-anthropocentric inclusiveness. Which of course is most inclusive by being most particular, with an ear for the folk difference. A project of delimitation cleaving to boundless finitudes—or, as Willis aptly characterizes it, a “blurring of ownership boundaries by engaging in anonymous and temporally-layered multiple author composition.” What else are the sounds of Niedecker’s verse, if not a collaboration, with midnight “freight car” engineers and “noisy/ birds and frogs”?

Peter Middleton’s enlightened discussion of sound, silence and audience, in the light of Niedecker’s refusal to give readings, entirely misses one mark (“Lorine Niedecker’s ‘Folk Base’ and Her Challenge to the American Avant-Garde”). While it may be important to recognize to what extent lack of recognition (or composing in silence) may have informed/ deformed Niedecker’s practice, we might also recognize to what extent her listening expands our notions of silence and of intersubjectivity:

\[
\text{sora/}
\text{rail’s sweet}
\]

\[
\text{spoon-tapped waterglass-}
\text{descending scale-}
\text{tear-drop-tittle}
\]

(“Paean to Place”)

The immediate cultural referent for Niedecker’s “silence” as “Yellowhead blackbirds cough/ through reeds and fronds” is not the abstract silence of the psychoanalyst but Thoreau’s comment that “there is no such thing as silence; only listening is intermittent.” Perhaps it was not the “somewhat inattentive” audience that bothered Niedecker (on the one occasion she did read her poems in public) so much as the sanctimonious silence of the poetry venue, attenuating the poem’s world. Perhaps, in a sense, her audience was the skeetering marsh. Any discussion of “intersubjectivity” in Niedecker’s case, then, and of the question of audience, needs to work with a definition that crosses species boundaries, to include the radical, interspecial subjectivity (and cultural critique) that her work, at every point, proposes.

\[
\text{I was the solitary plover}
\text{a pencil}
\text{for a wing-bone}
\]

(“Paean to Place”)

\[
\text{TV}
\text{See it explained—}
\text{compound interest}
\text{and the compound eye}
\text{of the insect}
\]

(Traces of Living Things)
some trees turn utterly yellow

more quickly than others
caves
like bananas
little specks of brown
road
soft and green with
the
autumn in new york

red
fire
explosion
yellow
burnt
bright musky
yellow
green
orange
everything colors
red
stale

stems topped with
flaming color
smell of wet leaves
brown
trees like fireworks
orange
The city of Rotterdam sent over daffodils. A NOCTUID MOTH The daffodils bloomed in the first weeks of April. ALLEGHENY WOODRAT They were everywhere. AMERICAN BITTERN They were yellow. AMERICAN BURYING BEETLE It was April and then the temperature was 90 degrees and all the daffodils died immediately. AROGOS SKIPPER All at the same time. ATLANTA HAWKSBILL SEA TURTLE This happened right where they were living. ATLANTIC RIDLEY SEA TURTLE It was early April. BALD EAGLE

In November of the previous year a big piece of the Antarctic Pine Island glacier broke off. BANDED SUNFISH A crack had formed in the glacier in the middle of the previous year. BARRENS BUCKMOTH And then by November the piece had just broken off. BICKNELL'S THRUSH It had just taken a few months from crack to breaking point. BLACK RAIL The iceberg that was formed was twenty-six miles by ten miles. BLACK REDHORSE Then in the following March, the March of the same year of the 90 degree early April, the Larsen B ice shelf shattered and separated from the Antarctic Peninsula. BLACK SKIMMER All of this happened far away from them. BLACK TERN They had never even been near Antarctica. BLANDING'S TURTLE

They heard about all this cracking and breaking away on the news and then they began to search over the internet for information on what was going on. BLUE WHALE On the internet they found an animation of the piece of the Antarctic Pine Island glacier breaking off. BLUE-BREAST DARTER After they found this, they often called this animation up and just watched it over and over on their screen in their dimly lit room. BLUE-SPOTTED SALAMANDER In the animation, which was really just a series of six or so satellite photographs, a crack would appear in the middle of the glacier. BOG BUCKMOTH Then a few frames later the crack would widen and extend itself toward the edges and then the piece would break off. BOG TURTLE They wondered often about the details. BROOK FLOATER BUFFALO PEBBLE SNAIL What does this breaking off sound like? CANADA LYNX Or what it was like to be there on the piece that was breaking off. CERULEAN WARBLER Did waves form? CHECKERED WHITE Was there a tsunami? CHITTENANGO OVATE AMBER SNAIL What had it been like for the penguins or the fish? CLUBSHELL
On the internet they realized that Iceland’s Vatnajokull glacier is melting by about three feet a year. COMMON LOON That the Bering Glacier in Alaska recently lost as much as seven and a half miles in a sixty day period. COMMON NIGHTHAWK That the European Alps lost half their ice over the last century and that many of the rivers of Europe were likely to be gone in twenty to thirty years time. COMMON SANDDRAGON That the Columbia Glacier in Alaska will continue to recede, possibly at a rate of as much as ten miles in ten years. COMMON TERN That thirty-six cubic miles of ice had melted from glaciers in West Antarctica in the past decade and that alone had raised sea levels worldwide by about one-sixtieth of an inch. COOPER’S HAWK That on Mt. Rainier warmer temperatures were causing the ice to melt under the glacier and this caused water to suddenly burst out of the glacier and race down the mountain. COUGAR That tropical ice caps were disappearing even faster. DEEPWATER SCULPIN That a glacier on the Quelccaya ice cap is retreating by five hundred feet per year.

DWARF WEDGEMUSSEL That Kilimanjaro in East Africa has lost eighty-two percent of its area in eighty-eight years. EASTERN BOX TURTLE That Pakistan was thinking about melting their glacier so they could get some more water for their people although this was not recommended by the United Nations and might not actually happen. EASTERN HOGNOSE SNAKE

So glaciers were not near them but they obsessed them. PEREGRINE FALCON They wondered if it was because of a story a friend had once told them. PERSIUS DUSKYWING She had gone hiking with her uncle and her sister. PIED-BILLED GREBE They had hiked up to a glacier. PINE BARRENS BLUET On the way there she got tired and her uncle had picked her up and put her on his shoulder. PINE PINION MOTH She was tall when they arrived at the glacier. PINK MUCKET They arrived at the glacier and she could see it and it had a special light she said. PIPING PLOVER It had a special light and this special light and its coldness had been so intense to her. PUGNOSE SHINER PYGMY SNAKETAIL The sun in her eyes. QUEEN SNAKE The special light. RAYED BEAN The coldness. REDFIN SHINER All of it had comforted her. RED-HEADED WOODPECKER And when she told this story she had started to cry and they had not understood
why she had begun to cry in her telling of a story of comfort. RED-SHOULDERED HAWK She had told them her story before they began to stay up late at night encountering glaciers on their computer screen, before they watched over and over the animation of the Antarctic Pine Island Glacier breaking off. REGAL FRI
ing her story intense and moving and often dwelled on it while looking at the animation of the Antarctic Pine Island Glacier breaking off. ROUND WHITEFISH They envied her for touching a glacier, something that mattered so much in everyone’s lives even though so few people had had actual contact with it. SANDPLAIN GERARDIA She knew this thing that was about their life, about everyone’s life, in a way they did not. SCARLET BLUET

Sometimes they thought that glaciers interested them because glaciers are like zombies—slow moving and full of stuff, full of stuff and can’t be stopped. SEABEACH AMARANTH Like how in movies you can put a bunch of knives and bullets in a zombie and it keeps on moving. SEASIDE SPARROW That is how they thought of glaciers. SEDGE WREN SEI WHALE They move and no one can stop them either way they go. SHARP-SHINNED HAWK You can’t pin them down and hold them in place. SHORT-EARED OWL Nor can you deter them when they start moving. SHORTNOSE STURGEON And they have history. SILVER CHUB They have water in layers sort of like a tree’s yearly cycles. SMALL-FOOTED BAT As they melt, things embedded in them are uncovered. SOUTHERN LEOPARD FROG In one, a British warplane. SOUTHERN SPRITE In others, various tools or buildings or humans from other times. SPERM WHALE And glaciers have sixty-six percent of the world’s fresh water. SPOONHEAD SCULPIN That also interested them as many political struggles of the early part of the previous century involved fresh water and they also figured this was going to be true of the current century as fresh water was getting more and more needed as more and more people lived on the earth and as they lived they polluted more and more of the fresh water and used up more and more of the fresh water stored in various underground water tables and developed more and more sophisticated pumps. SPOTTED DARTER Already, but a few years into this new
century, there were water riots in various parts of the continent on which they lived. **SPOTTED TURTLE** Water is a force and a resource. **SPRUCE GROUSE** Glaciers are water. **STREAMLINE CHUB** And it was April and it was in the 90s. **SWAMP DARTER** How could they not think about things melting all the time? **TAWNY CRESCENT**

They tried to balance out all their anxiety with loud attempts at celebrations of life. **TIGER SALAMANDER** They tried to do this in often ineffectual ways. **TIMBER RATTLESNAKE** They might make out in public while standing in line at the grocery or just drink too much with friends and thus stay out late chatting happily in a dark smoky room where there was no evidence of any glacier or any rising ocean level or even any air really or maybe they would just go home and smoke some pot and lie on their bed watching shows about nature on the television with the sound off and think about how soft the bed can feel at such moments, how deep it could let them enter at such moments, or they might talk loudly and excitedly with friends about the latest blockbuster summer movie as if that really mattered to them and they could live with the changing landscape because they had things like movies and books and friends and drugs, things that were common in cities and when in the cities they liked to tell themselves that this was enough, that these things were good enough so that the melting didn't matter. **TOMAH MAYFLY** They were anxious and were covering things over. **UNNAMED DRAGONFLY SPECIES** They were anxious and they were paralyzed by the largeness and the connectedness of systems, a largeness of relation that they liked to think about and often celebrated but now seemed unbearably tragic. **UPLAND SANDPIPER** The connected relationship between water and land seemed deeply damaged, perhaps beyond repair in numerous places. **VESPER SPARROW** The systems of relation between living things of all sorts seemed to have become in recent centuries so hierarchically human that things not human were dying at an unprecedented rate. **WAVY-RAYED LAMP-MUSSEL** And the systems of human governments and corporations felt so large and unchangeable and so distant from them yet the effects of their actions felt so connected and so immediate to what was happening. **WHIP-POOR-WILL** They knew this but didn’t know what else to do. **WOOD TURTLE** And so they just went on living while talking loudly. **WORM SNAKE** Living and watching on a screen things far away from them melting. **YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT**
Fetish:

Fetish is easy. The heat of verb or belly, it dips and twists in fissure, in suckle and urge. Unmapped it is map; cracked it is the lap of prefix and condition. Tissue, it is a simulacrum of math-love & trees. Ghost, it is epiphany or mercury. Cathexis, it cries thus as yes & or shriven. When fetish writes hate-tissue, it means small-body--hairs & radish neck. When fetish drives kissing blind it means rock-wood & pin-rope. Like a cook-noise, a shade-settle, or baby-reading, it is the soft exhalation of a warm mouth, a soft wet tongue and torn. Getting-fetish is swollen wire—it is rose; Licking-fetish is sharp cunning—it is noun. Ripping fetish is soft twig—it is verge.

Fungi:

The mushroom does not muffle the female. It moves to the concept of articulation. It gives less colour—it is fluid. That is to say, lixivium. That is to say, go mute, go scrap or thread-anchor. That is, read chartreuse. As such, the fungus pulls at our interior. Reconsider, our lewd notion of moist hip and bruise. Thus, it is reciprocal. Thus, it is sulcated in the deep yes of its mode. For fungus is mode—abstract, euphonic; full fashion and object. For fungus is spore and more is the cry of its nature. Pulled lush & mimicked, spore communes in holes, in smoky yellow folds. Spore is soft-civic, city-licked and edged. Discarding real mother for strapping device, fungus flees the problem of history. It recognizes resistance in the rose skinned flush of its spread. And so, fungus spells open; and so, fungus dreams ruse. A blooming frill in the damp creases of our bulging proximities, fungi is a plunge in the nation of tissue, the warm crevice of tremor and sip.
Lawn:

Lawn speaks to us through the extent of our crevice. We love its epitome, and its manner. Lawn is deep and well-oiled. *Roll me,* it breathes. *Cut me,* it sighs and thus we drench in its painting and terror, its deep smells of purloin and rhyme. With its weight-legs spread in chain-link, it cries—*Trim me.* Thus, it beckons our vicious imaginary grip. So functional, so conical. So sucking and listing. Lawn is to femur what is catholic to further. Lawn is to manliness what dike is to rivulet—a final habit, the last verse. Like a ruddy thigh, lawn craves the attendance of our gaze. It is bright and succulent with rhetoric. It illuminates the polis—brisk and void. It blushes the mound. And we, we are born of its bright manner, its limit. We crave the vexed petal, the little scented gnome. We say, *abstract peasant.* We say, *utter me,* *my little answering echo.* Pretending virgin madness and white torn stutter, we cringe against space—its vast call, its crush of ink & belly. We are slaves to the lawn—our gates quick laid. Consumptive father citizens and lungless mother antiquities, we are lawed and curiological. We hatch *Beach* as if Blind; we speak, *Space* as if *Suck.* We call out, *Come, roll my Three Gold Balls,* *Come, taste my red fast bricks,* *my Pink and Fulsome birds.*

Mundis:

Space:

Space is the mutant of time. Vast, it is not petty but pink in its tendency of portion or fur. It is a globed expression scattering as if weed-like or gristle. *Shrinking*, it is choose to arrange. *Music*, it is colour and lure. *Flammable*, it is tensile and glue. *Tinker*, it is itinerant. *Soldier*, it is sensation. *White*, it is respite. *Sailor*, it is south-end and plate-like. It rings like metal, like mineral. It burns with the bitter difference of alphabet. And so space is to Marx as bird is to cradle. And so space is to stride what porous is to plan & mud—its own nest of striation, its own corollary & modem.

Material:

Material is Sickly but not starving and starving. It is income. Linking an author with circumstantial, material is Boys. Boys. Like inverse Pockets. Like industry serious. Richly mortality. In low dog segments. Material poetry behaviours. And poverty. Red like striking like conditions. Income common drowning boys from other families. Material says, because, because thought withdraws. Material says, in so far, because my interval theme. As if speaking girls could float free. Stamping and separation, material is twice and according. Collapsing.
Thousands on the horizon frantic with elaborate costumes. The exhilaration of the day and the destruction of the most brilliant are a first step toward callow smoothness of mind. Part-time philosophers precede plume-covered acrobats on the avenues of an ancient town. A floating face from the sunlit world of wings has emerged. But it is no more than the product of their collective dreaming, hallucinatory wishful thinking.

This dream of an out-of-the-sphere visitor fueled them into oblivion instead of the here-and-now. They have metal-detected their way into a bright and burnished era full of popular icons. And beneath this society is infant regret. The sweat and the bile of many, the forgotten, seep through the walls. They are oblivious to strangers in their midst. Vindictive, compacted superstitions have strained them gradually until all are near the point of implosion.

◊

So many grave dangers emanate from this machination: the commonplace, the corrosive, the explicit and the altogether ridiculous. The figure that emerges from the morass is welded into lingering fancy by tedious and trapped dreams. Collective adoration covers his countenance and his vine-stalked legs weave down through the crust; the land blooms before him. He is an ice sculpture, shimmering into stamped memory, brightened forward, transitory. What dull plains of symmetrical thinking have given rise to this figure?

And beneath the hallucination is loss and toil, suffering for sustenance, sacrifice on demand—a cycle of worms and earth and roots and stalks and rot and worms and soil and sprouts and buds and food and waste and decay and growth—nourished by immersion, not escape, by contact and discovery, not fantasy. It is both desiccation and growth of the terra. Where has this been written down?

In the fog you will stand, always with a leather cord and polished stone around your neck to open your heart and let its blood run on the earth. You are the house of ants; they form you tunneled from within, deci-
sions channeled through the walls and pipes of your being. Everything has become a part of you and you of it as you lie as one of them all alone in a bed somewhere—such toil in search, in vain, in vanity, in solitude. Help yourself now as you realize there is an exit from this, as you realize there is life all around you. Weave your thoughts into and from this. From the soil and roots, you will rise regrown, with fortitude.

◊

“I am the one with new eyes and transparent skin.

I have thoughts I didn’t know I had.

I will teach you that there is life outside, will tender you a future.

I do not know the lines of cars. I have no reverence for capital. Inheritance is sleeping underneath the freeway. Discussion is narrow. It runs between the legs, down a street and through a grate. This is your doing, your great moment and empire, your bedclothes. How it runs so, like interlocking iron snowflakes.

I have been drained through a small hole in the back of my neck. It runs out and in its place is the silence of calamity, the high-pitched drone of catastrophe.

I fell down to you behind a warehouse, in a high-fenced yard, the other side of an industrial park, open space in a surrogate vision. This spot will be the one from which I launch.

My skin was covered with tough scales when I came to you, but they were burnt away upon entry. The thousand checkpoints stripped me to invisibility and rawness. I worked so long to enter with dignity. I wanted to come here standing up, but I was bent by the sharp edges of your world.”

◊

“These are my gifts: that I know nothing and do nothing. I come to you both swollen and shrunken, entranced with your creations, short-
ened by the cruelty of air conditioning, of supermarkets, of your authority over the terra, the way in which you talk, the stout legs of your furniture, of the slavery and slaughter of your hungers, your hair-spray and no-calorie sweeteners."

The tons of information, the last gasp of evacuation. A cemetery of sound. The code breakers work furiously. Threats to this system will become derailed. The subway trains are crammed with reinforcements.

"Your lawns are soaked with chemicals. I look at my shoes in the tunnels beneath your capital. They are ill fitting, inexact, incumbent upon me.

I left because I was comfortable, because I had nowhere to go, because I was lost in a swamp of denial, because my whole body twitched when I sat at a desk, because my world was run with buttery smoothness, because I feigned laughter, because the streets were like mirrors, because I had no failures, because I thought of myself as a chalice, because my name became respectable."

◊

“I walk through the crowds on the streets of your capital hoping for new blood. My joints are spring loaded; I am entranced and electrified. I am frightened by the pace of destruction, the speed of consumption, the cracked ice shelves the spewing, choking systems that devour life and feed the great insect mouth, the insatiable hunger.

I slip under the fence at night, through well-lit tunnels, open parking lots and humming warehouses. I see that your virus has spread to the outer limits of your territories, duplicating, swelling and clogging. Your world has shrunken so in its expansion.

In these final days, I have seeped into the fibers of everything. I have become invisible, have abandoned myself to the wide-eyed terror and contentment of being in the world without reservation. On a thin string over an abyss, the winds touch, the moon shines, I disintegrate with pleasure. The city burns on the valley floor below.”
Because Charles VIII loved Italy
these windows bearing oranges
globed, glowed, and that’s how
night becomes day without taking your eyes off their palaces in winter

The garden as letter, and later defined
as an intermediary zone between fiction and fact

He stepped back to get a larger view, which would occur in sections, he knew; he foresaw
the sections, saw that they were inevitable. And there the globe upon the table, its
surface composed of pointed paper ovals, actually the shape of eyes greatly elongated; the
long shears of the printer; you sit with him talking as he cuts out the eye-shaped sections.

He slices the orange into equal wedges.

And the tree itself will simply
glow in the dark; we train our explosions to slow down. We thought the world was warm,
was lit from within and hung

ripe all around us.

“Le Notre couldn’t stand views that end” — Saint-Simon

His grandfather undertook, on his own and at his own expense, to replace
all the dead trees in the Jardin des Tuileries

stepping back,

dropping off (here, he opens his arms, spreads out his hands, now off the map “you will see
We
who were born in 1613
and we who were here
  in the garden as it headed
toward
is out of orbit
  among the carpenters and larger,
we left for the forest
through a grand avenue of elms
all leaning inward the trees
leaned over as we spoke:
  four rows of azalea
  all bordered in hawthorne
  four long cabinets all inlaid
  with angles
  bloom
  in four kilometers of one
  can only hope
  for a good handful
  of the restless
  coming to earth.
In the morning sky there is no sign of rain. Yesterday afternoon there was no sign of rain. Early in the evening sheet lightning flickered in the far distance, so far it was almost coming out from under the horizon. Lightning in the middle of the night flashed red through the eyelids, thunderclaps, the first big drops, the steady roar. This morning’s sky is clear blue, but the ground is wet. No tracks come in here, no tire tracks, no footprints, all washed away.

What did we expect when we left two pieces of electric quartz outside on the porch? Everything down here on the ground, junipers even, takes the shape of a possible cloud. The moon, more than three weeks old, billows white and high in the morning blue.

Cosmography. Cosmography. Cosmogram. Contrails are the only marks on the surface of this morning’s sky. What is it, then, to read the cosmos. As a book? As a series of messages, read into it? Or is it cosmos itself that must be split open, as a book is split? When messages are inscribed on split bamboo or read from yarrow sticks they do not belong to a book, not unless someone had already constructed a book out of fragments.

Day and night, in all the crawl spaces under all the buildings of the city, even now, the black spiders wait in their tangles, wait for the plumber, the electrician, the householder looking for something placed in storage. Black Widow waits between the bricks of the split window of the waiting room of radio station KQEO and no one notices, nor did the architect think about who would occupy the shadows of his design.

The web shines, the still body of the spider glistens, the sky is clear. Thunderheads will rise this afternoon, the streaks, the rain-hair will join the sky to the earth, now in one place, now in another. Lightning will weave its own web, shafts engraved on the retina will shine like a web in the sunlight of a clear and cloudless morning.

On to the TV station, where someone scrubs away small spots on the foyer floor. Directly above his head the false ceiling has a hole in it.
History does not repeat itself. It waits in the places where it happened and only needs to leave a few signs of itself, or we need only a few signs of it, for re-enactments to take place. Building a mountainside home near an old lead or silver mine, we should not be taken by surprise when someone thinks of mining again, puts money and machines into mining, with backers willing to wait for a return on their investment while the price of gold jumps up and down every day. A mine, once there, cannot stop wanting to be a mine again, in someone’s mind. Old sticks of dynamite, left behind in a tumble-down shack, cannot stop waiting to explode.

Even in the morning the desert sounds are so far apart we cannot catch their rhythm, if they have one. We cannot even say the sounds are polyrhythmic. Everyone is different from everyone else here, but it’s a kind of individualism which cannot thrive on the attention of others. Each person is as far away as that scrub jay calling down below here, or the flock of tits moving through the junipers awhile later, or half an hour from now the rattle of a raven. What is a soloist when no other voices are heard from?
Subnarcosi

Uccelli
crudo infinito cinguettio
su un albero invernale
qualche cosa di crudo
forse non vero ma solo
scintillio di un possibile
infantilmente umano
ma certo da noi che ascoltiamo
– allarmati – lontano
– o anche placati – lontano
uccelli tutta una città
pregna chiusa
glorie di glottidi
acumi e vischi di dottrine
un chiuso si-si-significare
nemmeno infantile ma
adulto occulto nella sua minimità

[disperse specie del mio sonno
che mai ritornerà].
SUBNARCOSIS

Birds
harsh endless chirping
on a wintry tree
something harsh
maybe not true but just
a spark of a possible
childishly ahuman
but surely for us listeners
– alarmed – distant
– or also calmed – distant
birds a whole city
teeing closed
  glories of glottises
  acumens and doctrinal snares
a closed me-me-meaning
not even childish but
adult occult in its minimalness

[scattered species of my sleep
that will never come back].
ALTO, ALTRO LINGUAGGIO, FUORI IDIOMA?

Lingue fioriscono affascinano
inselvano e tradiscono in mille
 услуги di mutismi e sordità
sprofondano e aguzzano in tanti e tantissimi idioti
Lingue tra i cui baratri invano
si crede passare – fioriti, fioriti, in altissimi
 sapore e odorì, ma sono idiozia
Idioma, non altro, è ciò che mi attraversa
in persecuzioni e aneliti h j k ch ch ch
idioma
è quel gesto ingessato
che accumula
 sere sforbiciate via verso il niente. Ma
pare che da rocks crudelmente franti tra
denti diamantiferì, in
ebbri liquori vengano gl’idiomi!
Pare, ognuno, residuo di sé, di
io-lingua, ridotto a seduzione!
Ma vedi come – in idioma – corra i più orribili rischi
la stessa nebbia fatata del mondo, stock
di ogni estatico scegliere, di ogni devozione
E là mi trascino, all’intraducibile perché
fuori-idioma, al qui, al sùbito,
al circuito chiuso che pulsa,
al grumo, al giro di guizzi in un monitor
Non vi siano idiomì, né traduzioni, ora
entro il disperso
il multivirato sperperarsi in sé
di questo ritornate attacco dell’autunno.
«Attacco», «traduzioni», che dissi? O
altri sinonimi h j k ch ch ch
sempre più nervosamente adatti, in altri idiomi?
Ma che m’interessa ormai degli idiomì?
Ma sì, invece, di qualche
piccola poesia, che non vorrebbe saperne
ma pur vive e muore in essi – di ciò m’interessa
e del foglio di carta
per sempre rapinato dall’oscurità
ventosa di una ValPiave
davvero definitivamente
canadese o australiana
o aldilà.
HIGH, OTHER LANGUAGE, BEYOND IDIOM?

Tongues flourish fascinate
take to the woods and betray in a thousand
needles of muteness and deafness
they sink and are sharpened in so very many idiots
Tongues amidst whose abysses in vain
we think we pass – flowering, flowered, in the highest
savors and smells, but they are idiocy
Idiom, nothing else, is what passes through me
in persecutions and gasps h j k ch ch ch
idiom
is that plastered gesture
that accumulates
evenings scissored away towards nothingness. But
it seems that from rocks cruelly smashed between
diamontiferous teeth, in
drunken liquors idioms come!
Each one seems the residue of itself, of
me-tongue, reduced to seduction!
But see how – in idiom – the same enchanted
mist runs the most horrible risks, stock
of every ecstatic choosing, of every devotion
And I drag myself there, to the untranslatable why
beyond-idiom, to the here and now,
to the pulsating closed circuit,
to the clot, to the spin of flickerings in a monitor
Let there be no idioms, or translations, now
within the scattered
the multihued squandering in itself
of this recurring onset of autumn
“Onset,” “translations,” what did I say? Or
other synonyms h j k ch ch ch
always more nervously adapted, in other idioms?
But what do I care about other idioms now?
But, on the other hand, some
small poems, that wouldn’t want to know
but yet live and die in idioms – I do care about them,
and about the sheet of paper
carried off forever from the windy
darkness of a Piave Valley
truly definitely
Canadian or Australian
or other-worldly.
**Gnessulógo**

Tra tutta la gloria
mess a disposizione
del succhiante e succhiellato verde
di radura tipicamente montelliana
circhi in ascese e discese e – come gale –
arboscelli vitigni stradine là e qui
affastellate e poi sciorinate
in una soavissima impraticità ah
ah veri sospiri appena accennati eppur più che completi
lietezza ma non troppa
come un vino assaggiato e lasciato – zich – a metà
dall’intenditore che subito via sgroppa
vaghezza ma certo intrecciata
di imbastiture e triangolazione,
di arpeggi e poi amplessi boschivi
(è cosi che bosco e non-bosco in quieta pazzia tu coltivi)

Ed è così che ti senti nessunluogo, gnessulógo (avverbio)
mentre senza sottintesi
di niente in niente distilla se stesso (diverbio)
e invano perché gnessulógo
mai a gnessulógo è equivalente e
perché qui propriamente
c’è solo invito-a-luogo c’è catenina
di ricchezze e carenze qua e lì lì e là
– e chi vivrà vedrà –
invito non privo di divine moine
in cui ognuno dovrà
trovarsi
come a mani (pampini) giunte inserito
e altrettanto disinserito
per potersi fare, in ultimo test di succhio
e di succhiello,
farsi yalina caccola, gocciolo di punto-di-vista
tipico dell’infinito quando è così umilmente irretito…

Gale, stradine, gloriole, primaverili virtù…
Ammessa conversione a U
ovunque.
And it is thus that you feel nowhere, noplace (adverb)
put at the disposition
of the sucking and suckled green
of typical Montellian glades
expanding and contracting circles, and – like ribbons –
saplings vines lanes there and here
bundled and then hung out
in the mildest impracticality  ah
ah, true sighs just breathed and yet more than finished
happiness but not too much
like a wine tasted and left – zich – half-finished
by a connoisseur who at once bucks off
vagueness yet certainly intertwined
with tackings and triangulations,
of arpeggios and then woody embraces
(it is thus in silent madness you cultivate woods and non-woods)

And it is thus that you feel nowhere, noplace (adverb)
while without allusions
from nothing to nothing distills itself (in dispute)
and in vain because noplace
is never the same as noplace and
because exactly here
there is only invitation-to-place there is a chain
of riches and scarcities here and there there and here
– and who will live will see –
invitation not without divine wheedlings
in which everyone must
find oneself
as in hands (vineleaves) joined inserted
as much uninserted
so as to become, at the end test of sucking
and of suckling,
become mucus, a drop of point-of-view
typical of the infinite when it is thus humbly ensnared…

Ribbons, lanes, glories, springs, virtues…
Granted conversion to U
everywhere.
VERSO I PALÙ
o Val Bone
minacciati di estinzione

I

“Sono luoghi freddi, vergini, che
allontanano
la mano dell’uomo” – dice un uomo triste; eppure egli è assorti, assunto in essi.
Intrecci d’acque e desideri
d’arborescenze pure,
dòmino di misteri
cadenti consecutivamente in se stessi
attirati nel folto del finire
senza fine, senza fine avventure.

II

Scioglilingua per ogni
specie dei verdi, sogni
d’acque ben circuite e circuenti
con altezze d’inflorescenze
leggere fin quasi all’invisibile –
verdi intenti a conoscenze impossibili, ventilate
dalle raggiere radianze dell’estate.

III

Specchi del Lete
qui riposanti in se stessi
tra mille fratelli e sorelle,
specchi del verde
ad accoglierli attenti
fino a disfarsi in scintille
a crescere in cerchi d’arborescenze
TOWARDS THE PALÙ²
or Val Bone
threatened with extinction

I

“They’re cold, virginal places, that
keep away
the hand of man” – says a sad
man; or else he is lost, absorbed in them.
Intertwinings of water and desires
of pure arborescences,
domino of mysteries
fallen consecutively into themselves
drawn into the thick of the end
without end, adventure without end.

II

Tongue-twister for every
type of plant, dream
of waters well circulated and circulating
with heights of inflorescences
weightless almost to invisibility –
greens intent on impossible
understandings, fanned
by the radiant sunbursts of summer.

III

Mirrors of Lethe
here resting in themselves
amidst thousands of brothers and sisters,
mirrors of green
gathering them attentive
till they come apart in circles of arborescences
per tocchi
di venti,
di trepidi occhi.

- Pan,
dove sei?
- Sì.

IV

Fulgore e fumo, più che palustre verde,
acqua nel verde persino frigida,
fa ch’io t’interroghi
ripetutamente, perché
nel tuo silenzio si aggira letizia.
for the touching
of winds,
of anxious eyes.

- Pan,
where are you?
- Yes.

IV

Radiance and vapor, more than green marshes,
water in the green, even frigid,
makes me question you
again and again, why
in your silence wanders delight.

1The term “noplace” here reads as an adverb, meaning “in no place.” The Montello Wood is the setting of this poem, near Andrea Zanzotto’s native village of Pieve di Soligo in Veneto, Italy. In the sixteenth century the area was home to many humanists and artists – including Giovanni della Casa, whose original Galateo described the modes of speech and manners proper for a courtly society. In contrast, today the woods are traversed by the “Linea degli ossari” (Line of the ossuaries), filled with the remains of many thousands of soldiers who died during the First World War.

2The Palù, also called Val Bone, are marshy areas that since medieval times have been shaped into many forms, including earthen cisterns, and transformed into vast pool-shaped meadows encircled by flowing waters and planted with trees of many types, conserved with care for centuries. The current expansion of industrial and residential development, and the necessity of enlarging the road network (already clogged, especially in the Veneto), along with a blind and invasive agriculture, today threaten to erase these true masterworks of “land art” — which were even of economic value: from grain-growing fields to fish-rich waters. (A. Z.)
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Kenny Goldsmith’s weather report, over time, came to crack me up—I find myself thinking about it often. —Anselm Berrigan

can i complain briefly about the kenny g. comment in ecopoetics no. 1 that “new york city is famous for its clean air”? nyc has one of the highest rates of child asthma as a result of its unclean air. nyc residents also have more insecticides etc in their bodies than people who live in farming communities (it is from exterminators). it is not at all famous for its clean air. my hometown which was a papermill town in a valley, very bad air, has less toxic air than nyc if you look on those comparison websites [ed’s. note: cf. Environmental Defense-- www.scorecard.org]. —Juliana Spahr

I like especially your recommendation to put the mag in your pocket & “lace up your walking shoes.” I’ve always liked magazines (books and writing materials in general) that one can “wear,” so to speak, that reading & writing is not confined to a cozy chair or desk and hence to a certain cordoned-off time of the day. I see now that your interest in ecology is not so different from my interest in work, or, to put it another way, that my interest in expanding the definition of what we call work is essentially an ecological concern. —Tim Shaner

Good to see the possibilities that even some of those writers who you put in ecopoetics (not often thought of in terms of “nature”) can do it. —Chris Stroffolino

The interview with Vicuña was my first real introduction to her, and it really comes through that she’s the real deal. Pretty far out sometimes, but a true artist. ecopoetics also made me honestly reconsider my relationship with nature, my philosophy of nature, and my future plans. It was more than a necessary reminder for me, it was a small index to life. —Eric Gelsinger

The Douglas Oliver poem is mind blowing. —Geoffrey Gatza

I take your point about the closure of frontiers and of so many other dimensions—and it is against this that the more euphoric tradition of openness and crossed boundaries needs to operate—so that what is innovative is also more precisely attentive to so many ecological crossings-out which are often ahead of any other horizons we might hope for. —Peter Larkin

I must say that it gives me heart and inspiration to find such searching and rigorous work in an area too often saddled with "deer in the clearing" mentality. Brenda Coulton’s project makes it clear inspiration is perhaps just around the back of the diner. It’s really tonic to arguments on both sides of the "divide." —Matthew Cooperman
There are at least two “sides” or approaches that ecopoetics — conceived as a modality of poetic inquiry — cannot avoid attempting to encompass, and they are not in any sense mutually exclusive. But they are notoriously hard to think together with consistency.

First, and perhaps most obvious, is the whole domain of the actual environment: poets addressing ecological issues relating, say, to critical dangers, public policy, etc., or, at a remove, studies (historical, literary, theoretical, etc.) of poets’ relationship to ecological issues. Gary Snyder could serve here as exemplary instance of the poet so concerned. His intense concern for the actual politics and hardcore action-related studies constitutes a major moral force that any poet who ventures into this concern must reckon with.

The other “side” is not necessarily concerned to foreground action-oriented issues at the political level as such, but engages in an inquiry into the nature of poetics such that ecological thinking can evolve. The nature of the political and political action can be rethought here, and yet they are not primary — because there is no primary here. Ecological awareness is pervasive in any definable “field” and must be radically open to further discovery as to its nature. Ecopoetics has to do with the very instrument of this discovery process, the domain of thinking/speaking (the poetics of thinking). How do you speak for the field? How do you perform the interdependence of beings, things, actions, speech…?

This may be the fundamental ecopoetic issue — the domain of ecos and poesis as essential both to each other and to the world such that only they together can properly address its needs.

The difficulty of maintaining radical openness in ecopoetics has to do with its closeness to real political issues that require untiring service and commitment, that is, a practical closure around definable public issues. Yet preventing this tactical closure from inappropriately reifying the stance (and leading covertly toward a totalistic metaphysics) is the very function of poesis. It’s here that the connection between ecopoetics and metapoetics is clearest, where the latter stands for a non-exclusive principle of renewal and self-reinvention that is basic to the poetic. The metapoetic view is that language evolves through the poetic and can therefore never define its own limits. “All things possible to be believed,” said Blake, “are images of the truth.” All possible poetic approaches are embodiments of poetic possibility itself. In [the evolutionary] view language is itself alive with its own “species” of intelligence and part of “nature.” The poetic is our point of access to the ecos as language field — the field speaking itself. So the poets who show us greater ecopoetic possibility here may be far from obvious, or far from politically practical. The ecopoetic must wonder how to keep language action both relevant to immediate concerns and mind-degradable.

The two “sides” of ecopoetic focus — practical politics and art- or medium-centered practice — cannot be a matter of simple choice, and neither must be asked to reduce its sense of urgency. I would argue that the ecopoetic is a necessary focus precisely because this problem won’t go away, and so its opportunity is for us to discover and maintain the necessary liminality.

—George Quasha
**CONTRIBUTORS**

**Humberto Ak'abal**, a K'iche' Maya poet from Momostenango, Guatemala, who writes in both K'iche' and Spanish, has been translated into French, English, German, and Italian. He received the Guatemala Journalists' Association Quetzal de Oro prize in 1993 for *Guardian de la Caida de Agua*. His publications include *Ajyuq' El animalero* and *Ajkem Tzij—Tejedor de Palabras* (Cholsamaj, 1993 and 1996) and, in English, *Poems I brought down from the mountain* (Nineties Press, 1999).

**mIEKAL aND**'s hypermedia works reside at JOGLARS Crossmedia Broadcast (http://cla.umn.edu/joglars). Since 1991, he has made his home at Dreamtime Village (http://www.dreamtimevillage.org), a permaculture village project, located in the driftless bioregion of southwestern Wisconsin—where he devotes much time to creating edible wilderness indoors & out. 1998 marked the creation of THE DRIFTLESS GROTTO OF WEST LIMA (http://www.dreamtimevillage.org/grotto), a permanent public grotto/park/installation which when finished will feature a bird-operated time machine in a 25 ft blue glass tower.

**Tim Atkins** is the author of *Folklore* (Heart Hammer), *To Repel Ghosts* (Like Books), and *Sonnets* (The Figures). Working as a teacher, in London, England. Working as a father, on Koto Daisy. Having a mid-life crisis. Keeping one hand on. He can be reached at timatkins123@hotmail.com.

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**Michael Basinski's** poems and opems have appeared in many magazines including *Boat Harbour Brimming with Allasaurus*, *Tingly Creamy Spoo* and *Any Kind of Budget Question*. He is Associate Curator of The Poetry/Rare Books Collection of the University Libraries SUNY at Buffalo.

**Charles G. Bell** was born in 1916 in the river-delta country of Greenville, Mississippi. Bell's published works include three volumes of poetry, *Songs for a New America*, *Delta Return*, and *Five Chambered Heart*, and two novels, *The Married Land* and *The Half Gods*. *Millenial Harvest: Life and Collected Poems of Charles G. Bell* is forthcoming from Lumen Books. His masterwork is
Symbolic History, a multimedia epic in 40 shows (slide and tape, now converted to CD-Rom) dramatizing Western cultural history, from Anaximenes to Zepellin: http://www.sjcsf.edu/mrbell/symhist5.htm

Dodie Bellamy’s latest book, Cunt-Ups, won the 2002 Firecracker Alternative Book Award for poetry.

Anselm Berrigan is a paranoid provincial thug. His most recent book is Zero Star Hotel (Edge Books, 2002).

Sherry Brennan’s poems and essays have appeared in Chain, HOW(ever), Ixny, Kenning, Mirage, New American Writing, object, and raddle moon. She also has essays in the critical collections Telling it Slant (ed. Wallace and Marks) and A Poetics of Criticism (ed. Spahr et. al). Her chapbooks include Again Today, Daily Poems, Song of Centre Hall, Taken and The Resemblances. She divides her time between Centre Hall, PA, and New York City’s East Village.

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Jack Collom’s many books of poetry include Dog Sonnets (Jensen-Daniels) and Arguing With Something Plato Said (Rocky Ledge). Red Car Goes By: Selected Poems is forthcoming from Tuumba Press.

Matthew Cooperman is the author of A Sacrificial Zinc (Pleiades/LSU, 2001), and Surge (Kent State, 1999). Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in Verse, LIT, Denver Quarterly, Black Warrior Review and Chicago Review. A founding editor of Quarter After Eight, Cooperman teaches English and Creative Writing at Cornell College in Iowa.


Roger Farr lives in Vancouver, BC. New writing is forthcoming in Dandelion, W, and West Coast Line.

Joel Felix lives in Chicago, where he co-edits LVNG Magazine. The Brownfields Project (of which “Exotics” is a part) has been exhibited in Chicago and New York. A poetry collection, TERRARIUM VALENTINE is available from The Cultural Society.

Loss Pequeño Glazier runs the Electronic Poetry Center at SUNY Buffalo. His Digital Poetics: the Making of E-Poetries was published by the University of Alabama Press in 2001.
Gordon Hadfield lives in Buffalo, NY. He has new work forthcoming in *Ribot* and *Colorado Review*.

Christopher Johnson is a teacher, scholar, translator, and a sometime farmer. He edited a recent edition of Heinrich Heine's satiric travelogue, *The Journey to Italy* (Marsilio, 1998) and he is currently working on a book Quevedo's translations.


Paige Menton grew up in Birmingham, Alabama and now lives outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where she works as an educational researcher. Her work has been published in *Combo* and *6ix* and is forthcoming in *Bird Dog*. Her birdwatching began as a search for the scarlet tanager in parks all over Delaware, New Jersey, and southeastern Pennsylvania. She then saw her first scarlet tanager in the park down the street from her house.

Laura Nash is a photographer living in Brooklyn, NY, teaches at the International Center of Photography and has exhibited her work in NYC, Dijon, Hamburg, Chicago and San Diego. Currently working on the *Brownfield Project*, with writer Joel Felix, prior projects include *The Oil Region of the Ecuadorian Amazon* (with a grant from Arts International), and *The Bronx River: Documenting the length of an urban waterway*.

Jena Osman's book *The Character* was published by Beacon Press. She co-edits the magazine *Chain* with Juliana Spahr and teaches in the graduate writing program at Temple University in Philadelphia.

Ethan Paquin edits *Slope* (www.slope.org) and Slope Editions. His first book of poems, *The Makeshift* (Stride Books), was recently released in the U.K. He is Assistant Professor of Humanities at Medaille College in Buffalo.

George Quasha’s dozen or so books include the recent *Ainu Dreams* and forthcoming *The Preverbs of Tell: News Torqued from Undertime* (poetry) and *Gary Hill: Language Willing* (on art). His three book series (with Charles Stein) is subtitled *Gary Hill’s Projective Installations*, titled: *Hand Heard/liminal objects* (Number 1); *Tall Ships* (Number 2), and *Viewer* (Number 3). His work as video artist has been selected for the 2003 WRO International Media Biennale in Poland. He recently edited *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader* and is publisher of Barrytown/Station Hill Press in Barrytown, NY.

Street Press) won a Minnesota Book Award in 2000. Recent projects have included co-editing with Linda Russo a special feature on Nicole Brossard for *verdure*. She is currently studying for a PhD in the Poetics Program at SUNY Buffalo.

**Michael Rothenberg**'s *Unburied Vision* will be published in the Fall of 2003 by La Alameda Press. He is author of the eco-spy thriller *Punk Rockwell* (Tropical Press), and publisher/editor of internet magazine Big Bridge, www.bigbridge.org. Rothenberg is also editor of *Overtime, Selected Poems* by Philip Whalen and *As Ever, Selected Poems* by Joanne Kyger (Penguin). Founder of the Conservation Committee of The Bromeliad Society International, Rothenberg is a leading activist in the fight for protection of San Francisco Bay Area coastal lands and endangered species.

**James Sherry** is the author of 10 books of poetry and criticism, most recently *Our Nuclear Heritage* (Sun & Moon, 1991) and *Four For* (Meow, 1995). His work on environmental poetics has absorbed many recent years. He is editor of Roof Books and president of the Segue Foundation in NYC.

**Jonathan Skinner** is currently pursuing a PhD in Poetics at SUNY Buffalo, where he edits *Ecopoetics* and misidentifies birds on the Niagara river. His poems, essays and translations can be found in numerous magazines, including *Curricle Patterns, Elevator, Gare du Nord, Jacket, Lagniappe, murmure, The Poetry Project, The Transcendental Friend* and *verdure*.

**Jessica Smith** is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at SUNY Buffalo. Her chapbook *Evolocution* is forthcoming from House Press.

**Juliana Spahr** is the author of *Fuck You-Aloha-I Love You* and *Everybody's Autonomy*. Sometimes she lives in Brooklyn and sometimes in Honolulu.

**Christine Stewart** lives in Vancouver, BC, Canada with Haeden, Manfred, Ruby, three eggs and sometimes Fenn. She works and studies at home and at The University of British Columbia.

**Cole Swensen**'s latest book is *Such Rich Hour* (U of Iowa, 2001) and her latest translation, *Bayart* by Pascalle Monnier (Black Square, 2002). She teaches at the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

**Dennis Tedlock** is well known for his innovations in ethnopoetics. His translations of Zuñi tales (*Finding the Center*) and of the Mayan *Popul Vuh* are classics in the field.

**Aaron Vidaver** is a Vancouver-based sasquatch researcher.

**Steven Ward** is an amateur unnaturalist and literary critic currently attending to some of what’s nonhuman in the west. He is a co-editor of Thuja Books.
Andrea Zanzotto was born in 1921 in Pieve di Soligo, a small village in the hilly farm country of Veneto, Italy. He studied literature in Padua, took part in the resistance, worked for two years in Switzerland and France, and then returned to Pieve di Soligo where he has remained ever since. His many works include: IX Ecloghe, Sull’altopiano: racconti e prose 1942-1954, La beltà, Pasque, Il Galateo in bosco, Idioma, Sovrimpressioni and, in English, Poems by Andrea Zanzotto (tr. Anthony Barnett), Selected Poetry of Andrea Zanzotto (tr. Ruth Feldman and Brian Swann) and Peasants Wake for Fellini’s Casanova and Other Poems (tr. John Welle and Ruth Feldman). In 1976 he collaborated with Frederico Fellini on Casanova.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustration on p. 81, for Christopher Johnson’s Sebald review, is by Isabelle Pelissier. The Great blue heron on p. 138 is by Jessica Smith.

A NOTE ON THE FORMAT

The pocket size of ecopoetics is “field ready”—please take it with you! However, a zoomable PDF file can be emailed to any subscriber for whom this format may cause undue eyestrain. Please request in writing, and don’t forget to include your email address.

CALL FOR WORK

ecopoetics 03 (to appear in May of 2003) will address three issues:

1) how to open up an exploration of dialogue between activist and poetic “sides” of the ecopoetic focus (cf. Quasha’s letter to the editor), that is able to straddle both sides of the equation without compromising either—essays/examples in visual and performance arts are as welcome as in the literary.
2) In the current climate of domestic, “homeland security” and increasing control and surveillance, what is “wild?” Does this category/realm continue to have political and aesthetic relevance and if so, how?
3) To mark the appearance (finally) of the Collected Works, edited by Jenny Penberthy, there will be a small Lorine Niedecker feature; ecocritical responses that take in the new view of her work this publication affords us will be of interest. Editorial information inside the front cover.

Deadline for all submissions is March 1, 2003.
FIELD NOTES (Take this book ‘outside,’ make something with this page and send to ecopoetics.)