

**ecopoetics**  
**no. 4/5**

**2004-2005**

# ecopoetics

is published annually (except for this double issue)  
and dedicated to exploring  
creative-critical edges between writing (with an emphasis on  
poetry) and  
ecology (the theory and praxis of  
deliberate earthlings).

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with editorial assistance from Florine Melnyk.

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Please allow some time for response.

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## ecopoetics

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# ecopoetics

no. 4/5, 2004-2005

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JACK COLLOM.....An Evolution of Writing Ideas, and Vice Versa	3
Paragraphs	61
MARY CROW.....Iquitos Market, Side Trip, Stopover on the Amazon	75
KEN EDWARDS.....Field Notes	78
LUCAS REINER.....Trees	79, 179, 191
JONATHAN STALLING.....Howl Poems	80
DAVID BERRIDGE.....Materials of Pastoral: A Review of Thomas A. Clark	84
SARA WINTZ.....Field Notes (Humboldt County Cows)	91
FLORINE MELNYK.....Tomatoes in Hand, I Take the #2 Bus Thru Buffalo	92
ETHAN PAQUIN.....Deep Wild	93
KENNETH GOLDSMITH.....from <i>The Weather</i>	94
JONATHAN SKINNER.....(WITH JULIE PATTON) Project for The Swing	102
SPECIAL DOSSIER: ECOPOETICS ROUNDTABLE	104-139
IAN DAVIDSON.....in bog myrtle, No Way Back, from this place	105
PETER LARKIN.....Fully from all Scarce to	113
PETER JAEGER.....from A Black Tooth in Front	117
JONATHAN SKINNER.....Statement on "New Nature Writing"	127
ALICIA COHEN.....Northwest Inhabitation Log	130
LYNN HARRIGAN.....review of <i>The Book of Music &amp; Nature</i>	140
MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN.....A Song in Murderous Time: The Poetry of Richard Caddel	142
KATE SCHAPIRA.....from <i>Indigo Bunting</i> – Didactic Overture The Enchanted Neighborhood	147
CHARLES BERNSTEIN....Colliderings: Maggie O'Sullivan's Medleyed Verse	157
ARTHUR SZE.....Solstice Quipu, La Bajada, The Welt	161
LILA ZEMBORAIN.....from "Mauve Orchids of the Sea" translation by Rosa Alcalá	164
BILL SYLVESTER.....Reviews of Stacy Szymaszek and Juliana Spahr	168
CLAYTON ESHLEMAN.....Inside Caryl's Left Shoulder	175
LYTLE SHAW.....Mulch: A Treatise	180
DOUGLAS MANSON.....29.14:22.IV.04 The Natural World	192
review of Eleni Sikelianos	194
MARK WEISS.....Riffs	197
MARCELLA DURAND & TINA DARRAGH.....Deep Eco Pre-cautionary Ponge-ABLEs: A Collaborative Essay	203
JONATHAN SKINNER.....Reviews of Fletcher, Hinton, Robertson, Snyder, Zephyrus Image; Thumbnail reviews of Iijima, Nowak	214
ROY ARENELLA.....Field Notes	240
MICHAEL BASINSKI.....Elephants Ensemble Poem	248

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Some of Jack Collom's *Paragraphs* have appeared or will appear in *Fracture*, no. 3 (2002) and in *Exchanges of Earth and Sky* (Fish Drum, 2006). Kenneth Goldsmith's *The Weather* has appeared as a paperback (Make Now, 2005). Ian Davidson's "No Way Back" appeared as a pamphlet of the same title through West House Books (Gargoyle Editions, 2005). The excerpt from "A Black Tooth in Front" is from Peter Jaeger's *Eckhart Cars* (Salt, 2004). Charles Bernstein's essay, "Colliderings," will be included in the *Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan* (Salt Publishing, 2006). Arthur Sze's poems "Solstice Quipu," "La Bajada," and "The Welt" appeared in *Quipu* (Copper Canyon Press, 2005). Clayton Eshleman's "Inside Caryl's Left Shoulder" appeared in *My Devotion* (Black Sparrow Books, 2004). Ethan Paquin's "Deep Wild" appeared in *The Violence* (Ahsahta Press New Series, 2005). All of these pieces have been reprinted with permission of the authors.

Thanks to the contributors (and especially to Jack Collom) who waited so long for this issue. Thanks to Jane Sprague for seeds from the Anza Borrego desert (on p. 166). Also, special thanks to Bill Sylvester, to Isabelle Pelissier, and to Florine Melnyk for her invaluable assistance—and, once again, to the folks at Alphagraphics and Quality Bindery here in Buffalo.

## EDITOR'S NOTES

tsunami hurricane earthquake / bark beetle wildfire / western tourists vacation / rising south asian economy / spectacular breakdown of civil / agencies manifesting disarray / played out on television / rebellion founded nations / double vulnerability / gutted services / bloated police state / seen this before / the pleading senators / no longer in control / shed all vestige of american / not agreeing to rights / the rising waters / lapping at the doorsteps

not making a difference / the human hand in unrest / shrimp mangrove salad / stripped tsunami bumps / mainstream media / water drawdowns / under bark and pine / islands and wetlands / worsened the impact / connections do not flicker / behind the smokescreen / "we were attacked" / repeating the obvious / awareness of hands / at the local and regional / blurring of boundaries / who we attacked / developers involved / capitalizing "nature"

through trial and error / need a healthy debate / intelligence designed / elephant in the room / mother of all human / temperature climbing / non-linear catastrophes / collectivize hope / make boundary overlaps / biotechnologies / cross the conventional / working relationships / within the disciplines / between the hard and social / due to the threatened / technocratic humanities / interdisciplinary workers / never supported / balkanized education / taking on border blur

sabotage the division / between "pure" and "applied" / alive to the moment / pursuing complexity / explore the connections / between global and local / in the current weather / doubting affirming / testing exploiting / composing new methods / engage unpredictable / collaboration fitness / adaptable to change / reliving symbiosis / inhering playfulness / humanity's metaphors / hand of the breeder / the cover that "nature" / affords the most powerful

more room for everything / specifically "not us" / we love and wonder at / paying attention / even the wood burners / in their separateness / will depend upon / homesteaders surviving / less than the nomads / the adaptable leading / the merely steadfast / who perpetuate divisions / culture and nature / breeding out ignorance / indifference to systems / illusions of purity / metaphors for human / drama are dangerous / confusion more productive / proliferating studies

## SOME BOOKS BY JACK COLLOM

*ecopoetics* is particularly proud to publish the following essay by Jack Collom along with excerpts from the “field written” essay, *Paragraphs*. As the following bibliography attests, Collom has been hard at work on *ecopoetics*—which he construes as poetry, biology, teaching—for forty years; beneath his playful style rests a long, deep and varied collaboration. *Poetry Everywhere* (which Jack put together with Sheryl Noethe) is still one of the best manuals for teaching poetry in the schools. Two recent collections (*Red Car Goes By* and *Extremes & Balances*) gather an astonishing range of poetry. For anyone who wonders what the birds have to say about all of this, *Exchanges of Earth and Sky* will be *the* book to have for 2006. Please send in your responses, as we hope to publish some of them in the next *ecopoetics*.

### Poetry Collections (unless noted otherwise, the place of publication is Colorado):

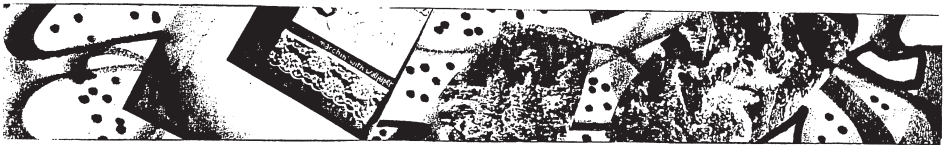
*Exchanges of Earth and Sky*. Fish Drum (New York), 2006  
*Extremes & Balances*. Farfalla Press/ McMillan & Parrish, 2004  
*Blue Yodel, Blue Heron*. (CD, with Dan Hankin and Sierra Collom.) Baksun Books  
*I Know Why the Caged Bird Drinks*. Farfalla Press/ McMillan & Parrish, 2003  
*On Laughter: A Melodrama*. (With Lyn Hejinian.) Baksun Books, 2003  
*Corner Bar*. (With Jennifer Heath.) Baksun Books  
*Red Car Goes By: Selected Poems (1955-2000)*. Tuumba Press (California), 2001  
*Colors Born of Shadow*. (CD, with Ken Bernstein.) TreeHouse Press, 1999  
*Dog Sonnets*. Talisman (New Jersey), 1998  
*Entering the City*. The Backwaters Press (Nebraska), 1997  
*Calluses of Poetry*. (CD, with Ken Bernstein.) TreeHouse Press, 1996  
*The Task*. Baksun Books, 1996  
*Wicker*. (With Lyn Hejinian.) Rodent Press, 1996  
*What a Strange Way of Being Dead*. Rodent Press, 1995  
*8-Ball*. (With pictures by Donald Guravich.) Dead Metaphor Press, 1992  
*Arguing with Something Plato Said*. Rocky Ledge, 1990  
*The Fox*. United Artists (New York), 1981  
*Little Grand Island*. “the” press (Nebraska), 1977  
*Squirrel Tails*. Lodestar Press, 1976  
*Ice*. Lodestar Press, 1974  
*Blue Heron & IBC*. Grosseteste Press (England), 1972  
*Wet*. Privately printed, 1967  
*April First Half*. Privately printed, 1966

### Books on & of writing by children:

*A Slow Flash of Light*. Teachers & Writers Collaborative (New York), 1998  
*Poetry Everywhere*. (With Sheryl Noethe.) Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1994  
*Moving Windows*. Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1985



AN EVOLUTION OF  
WRITING IDEAS,  
AND VICE VERSA



A Personal Essay



by Jack Collom



JACK COLLOM / AN EVOLUTION OF WRITING IDEAS,  
AND VICE VERSA : A PERSONAL ESSAY

The truth of the principle, that the greatest amount of life can be supported by great diversification of structure, is seen under many natural circumstances. In an extremely small area, especially if freely open to immigration, and where the contest between individual and individual must be severe, we always find great diversity in its inhabitants. For instance, I found that a piece of turf, three feet by four in size, which had been exposed for many years to exactly the same conditions, supported twenty species of plants, and these belonged to eighteen genera and to eight orders, which shows how much these plants differed from each other. So it is with the plants and insects on small and uniform islets; and so in small ponds of fresh water. Farmers find that they can raise most food by a rotation of plants belonging to the most different orders: nature follows what may be called a simultaneous rotation. Most of the animals and plants which live close round any small piece of ground, could live on it (supposing it not to be in any way peculiar in its nature), and may be said to be striving to the utmost to live there; but, it is seen, that where they come into the closest competition with each other, the advantages of diversification of structure, with the inhabitants, which thus jostle each other most closely, shall, as a general rule, belong to what we call different genera and orders.

—Charles Darwin

*The Origin of Species*



## PREFACE

In this essay the subject matter is biology, poetry and teaching. My experience in these topics ranges from sub-amateur to professional and back.

I hope to bring out processual resemblances between poetry and nature, to show the former as an odd child of the latter. As I see it, ecology is nature's state, and evolution its process. Evolution represents a verb and ecology a condition. They overlap and interact – stasis is full of implied motion, and process boils down to steps. Similarly, poetry has its completed state (which always in some degree quivers with potential) and its various histories (literary, personal, social) constantly speaking like photographs. But the similarity is more than a parallel. I want to indicate a closer kinship than has been generally appreciated between our creative workings and the workings of biology.

One could say, "Nature is behind culture all the way," and cover the matter, but many do not accept this, and it is true that culture spirals into great estrangement from its mother.

However, I'm not posing an argument here, just laying a few things on the board and turning them this way and that. This essay aspires to the verb/noun inoculation of "just grewed."

This blister, then, mutated rather punctuatedly from the temporary equilibrium of a previous essay called "An Ecology of Writing Ideas" (published in *The Alphabet of the Trees*, New York: Teachers & Writers, 2000).

## INTRODUCTION

Though this is a personal, eccentric essay, I do not wish "personal" to mean "perused only by its author," and I recommend eccentricity in general on the principle that it's at the margins that things happen. Give it a try. (How did you get here?)

That was the Intro. The —

## GLOSSARY

— now, may well be restricted to one word, truth. It's necessary to introduce "truth" formally because it's fallen into such ill repute, extending even into doubts of its existence. But let me Explain:

A large part of the attitude I seek to celebrate and recommend comes and goes under the Large, shifting heading (more like cloud cover than label) Relativity. Ecology and Art are loaded with Relativity. And Relativity is the "very" approach that's dethroned Truth (please excuse my quick-change dressing and undressing of TRUTH).

Certain People, under the banner of Relativity, have not only dethroned Truth, they've absolutely decapitated it, and thrown the body into the Seine! Or so they've "thought." A more accurate representation of what happened would be that Truth was become no longer quite the Monarch by Divine Right but still a very powerful Duke-and-Duchess.

What those Relativists did was in a sense relative: they failed to carry Relativity to its logical extreme. That is, they said, more or less, "Truth's not what it's cracked up to be — voila! there is no truth!" A statement structurally based on a truth concept. But what they did was (is) above all utilitarian: they put the main power in the hands of the critics. And though Pythagoras lets us know that the best knots are tied without rope, that is only possible to know after a rope knot.

What we need is an image of a slightly tattered, slightly sleazy Truth — which, even in some disarray, is The Champ, the one and only Stabilizer of Data (this office being ((paradoxically)) a Relativity of Relativity).

The lights dim; a spot focuses on a chest-high treestump. And here she is —

heart of my heart.

\* \* \* \*

The rest of the Glossary will be found in Chapter 3, dressed in feathers.

## CHAPTER 1 — POETRY IS A BRANCH OF ECOLOGY

Ecology's roots are "house," "word." If everything about you can be termed your "house," in a sense, and if to think is to "word" or to put in word form, then "ecology" describes your entire intake and output – if all you do can be described as "thinking." Thus "ecology," like a number of other words, such as "truth," "nature" and "energy," becomes an "everything" word. The problem, of course, is that "everything" = "nothing." Remedy: hold "everything" as the most expansive wavelength on an "ecology" spectrum. Let definition be a bit indefinable, multiple. Let the particular sleep with the general. And

Let the bird of loudest lay,  
On the sole Arabian tree,  
Herald sad and trumpet be....

—Shaxpr, "The Phoenix and the Turtle"

On the other hand, the most particular or restricted sense of the word ecology could be put as something like this: Things that affect a growing plant. Interdependence as it describes one standing stalk of life. (That is how "ecology" first entered my vocabulary in Forestry School in 1949.) "Ecology" has an air of coming into play only through a "school" lens, only in forest and field; that is, apart from Real Life. But even this most pinched definition of ecology can readily be seen as a ballooning consideration. "The totality or pattern of relationships between organisms and their environment" (dictionary take) has a root feel of growth and resonates with perspectives of modernity. Ecology *is* relationality, hence endless. The only closures we can put on any ecological consideration are the ones that demonstrate the limits of a closed system – such as planetary water – or arbitrary cuttings off of thought. Such as this.

So ecology is a thought-process that tends toward waxing and ramification. So does Poetry. Poetry is that writing which most persistently shakes off the Expected, at every mini-step. It's open to anything, at any point. Ideally, each syllable is like Blake's "world in a grain of sand" (sound). (And of course it slops along intuitively too.) But in that regard let me take an opposite tack for a moment (opposites being alike in every way but one): Poets (and others) are accustomed to enjoying things via their most individuated images. And it does indeed take a laudable and intense effort to cut away the confusion and the qualifications and the lassitude surrounding acts of perception and get down to the bright focus, *ding an sich*. Also, this sort of attempted purity is, though in contrast to poetry's ecological and relational

nature, a very poetic move and urge: to slough off all context, at least for an instant, and see a bit of straw or a set screw or a toss of the head as *sui generis*. In its clean thrust, this kind of mental act is a gesture. It represents the *essential* side of poetry, which is the inside.

Nevertheless, of equal intensity (and greater coverage) is the outside, or ecological surface of poetry. In other words, the “dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon” is *caught* (already with contextual beginnings – individuated by their combination, their triangulation, of pulls and crowns and musical shapings) – and immediately tossed into “in his riding/ Of the rolling level underneath him steady air,” etc., sound and sense rolling out a field, which is only barely wrestled to an end by form or exhaustion, and still, as a fine poem, rolls on rolls on, causing a shifting imagination to grow in that little section of the universe. The two (ecology and *ding an sich*) work together every inch of the way.

This has been a verbal growth, about verbal growth; here’re some poems exemplifying growth (not to put them on the spot). The poems are by schoolchildren.

I think of poetry like it is backwards,  
poem a writing about poem a writing instead of writing  
a poem about writing a poem. Poetry is like  
a million words because you use them. Poetry  
is like a plant, a plant grows then it dies  
just like your mind is thinking good but  
goes away. Poetry is like a car it goes  
somewhere then it comes back. Poetry is like  
the two flags, the first has 13 stars  
just like your mind is 13% and the second  
one has 50 stars like your mind has 50% percent but better.  
poetry is like Christopher Columbus when he  
discovered America just like you made up  
the words “Christopher Columbus discovered  
America.” The End.

—Gino Chiusano, grade 4

## WRITING WHAT YOU HEAR

O, what, yea but what, what you hear, you people,  
O, hey, what, merry harry have a little man,  
tuntun, tun, what you are, ha ha, nut nut, chuck  
chuck, snap. What a woman had i fuu had I fuu,  
bum bum, mama, hay guchu cachu ribbit haam ouuouu  
ouu meow meow. What a woman, qua qua qua chicken,  
how old that tan tanta tan. The Skeleton Joy  
Jocelyn what's up. Say something. O yo cielito  
lindo ese lunar que nene junto a la boca no se  
lode a nadie que a mi me toca, mamba chut chut  
chut. Chut the door. Shake the hands.

—Lory Guzman, grade 3

Writing is quadruple fun.  
& writing is plain fun.  
Poetry walks inside a guy's mouth  
& then it walks back out.  
After that it walks into a cave  
& then it walks back to the mouth  
& then it comes out &  
Goes into a lady's mouth.  
Poetry is a rainbow  
Floating in the sky.  
& then poetry falls, & it looks like white skies  
Like the bones are all white.  
& train sounds like a poem.  
& you pick up a lot of poetry.  
Poetry is like a blue sky.  
The rainbow comes back up.  
Then it switches like channels  
& somebody catches it with a net.  
A rainbow scotch-taped on the sky.  
Poetry is like a desk with no papers,  
Like dinosaurs eating food off trees.  
A desk looks like a train.  
A shooting star comes down with the poetry.  
A rainbow is like a blue waterfall.  
A rainbow had Jesus.  
& poetry is like rocks with gold in 'em.  
& like belt buckles of a big moose.  
Then you run to the other end of the  
Rainbow & pick up the other part of poetry.  
& that continues it from way up there.  
& a zipper falls down.  
A waterfall sparkles like gold.  
Like a car going up a rainbow,  
& tiger goes in a house & takes a shower.

—Class collaboration, grade 1

I remember the snap echoing off the  
walls  
creating a short, distinct buzz.  
Creating, in contrast, the rejected  
fuzz.  
In thinking sound, I remember  
the songs of birds, tweetering,  
warbling,  
in my head. I still hear the songbird.  
I remember the desert song, the cicada  
buzzing, the dove cooing, the  
rattlesnake  
rattling. I remember the quail talking  
when I was stalking and becoming the  
tongue of the Gambel's quail.  
I remember the coyote howling, the  
kitten growling.  
I remember the desert's song.  
I remember the malachite song, the  
steady  
whine and the occasional melody.

—Derek Walters, grade 12

Obviously, these poems differ considerably from standard expectations of children's poetry. They are not (except, in part, Derek's) imitative of adult forms, sentiments and economies. Rather, they tend to represent open, energetic little chaos systems. Perhaps *including* (along with refinements and forms) encouragement toward such continuations of primeval, proto-grammar sensibility as these expressions are *in teaching* can help establish relationships to language more interesting, more fun, more creative, more deeply satisfying than are presently common among school children.

As it is, despite the devotion, hard work and talent of teachers and educators, schoolkids all too typically "hate" English (even under the beckoning label of "Language Arts"), finding it a squeezed, angst-ridden, linear obstacle course beset with Right/Wrong blinkers. Children are set against their mother tongue, against their own most vivid and quotidian avenues of articulation. And of course against Education itself. As far as the use of creative writing goes, it all comes down to a misunderstanding about the nature of Art. People are comforted to think of Structure first and so they teach it that way. Fine for Chemistry, which needn't be re-enacted. In Art all one wants is a working illusion of Structure. But please look in Chapter 4 for more on Writing-in-Education.

\* \* \* \*

Enrico Coen, in his book *The Art of Genes*, choosing a metaphor with which to express just how *development* (from unicell fertilized egg to adult human) works, picks the painting of a picture. What he's emphasizing is the way that painting is not the mechanistic filling out of a plan and not a computer-like process with distinct separation between hardware and software. Rather it is a matter of evershifting responses, of feedback loops, step-by-step variability. It may be that the "product variations" among the "products" we call adult human beings are less than the variations among paintings – or, it may be the amounts of variation are roughly the same but that the human has, along with its individuality, much denser, basic, complex type-identity than paintings one to the other have, focusing as paintings do on some sort of representation. But here's Coen, attempting to change our perspective:

A painter paints a picture. What could be more elementary? If we look over the shoulder of an artist in action, we readily distinguish between the materials such as canvas, paint and brushes, and the painter who sits in front of the canvas busily painting away. The artist seems to have a vision in mind and is simply using the materials as tools to transfer his or her ideas onto the canvas. The role of the artist and the materials are quite distinct. The artist is the creator and the materials are the slaves at the artist's beck and call. We couldn't have a clearer example of a separation of the maker and the made.

Now look at the same process from the *artist's point of view*. The artist is continually looking and being influenced by what he or she sees. As soon as some paint is mixed and put on the canvas, the artist sees a new splash of colour that wasn't there before. This is bound to produce a reaction in the artist who will interpret the effect in a particular way. Perhaps the colour is just right, or a bit too strong, or put in slightly the wrong place, or has a surprising effect by having been placed near another colour. The next action of the artist will be influenced by what is seen and may involve a modification of the colour, or maybe leaving it, or moving to another part of the canvas. The artist is continually looking at what is happening, responding to the changing images on the canvas that enter his or her visual field, correcting or leaving what is there but never ignoring it. Artists cannot paint pictures with their eyes closed. If you ever watch someone lost in the act of painting, they are always looking with great intensity, reacting to what is before them. Each action produces a reaction which in turn is followed by another action. The same process is repeated again and again. As more marks are made, the effects are compounded, accumulating so that a whole history of brush strokes starts to influence the next one. Artists need not be consciously aware of this at all; as far as they are concerned, it is all part of one continuous activity. A deeply involved artist gets completely absorbed in the act of painting; the activity takes over as a self-generating process. The materials, the tools, the canvas just become an extension of the artist and the painting gradually develops from a highly interactive colour dance, rather than being a simple one-way transfer of a mental image from the artist onto a separate canvas. The distinction between the maker and the made that the onlooker sees so clearly is far less obvious from the artist's point of view.

Coen goes on to test the metaphor in various ways, and finds it falls short in some but is especially good at conveying the complex, interactive nature of growth.

Various objections could be made to the painter-painting image – from the biologist's point of view, doesn't it seem to revive "Vitalism"? – or, from the artist's, where's, say, the creativity in mitosis (*not counting* its result)? Answer floods the area between the artist's brain (evolutionary product, as well as creative fount) and "simple" cell-splitting (which is actually so complex that what one might call virtual choice runs the details – with *each* of our cells utilizing 46 extremely complicated DNA molecules). Artist and embryo are both involved in so much copying that imperfection, as it were, becomes the color of the finished article.

The reproductive instinct urges the poet to scatter his seeds  
beyond his boundaries.

—Jean Cocteau, *The Difficulty of Being*

\* \* \* \*

As I read about poetry in the passing parade of literary magazines I find that much of the commentary seems to make assumptions which can be summarized as follows:

1. Poetry is primarily an index of social attitudes.
2. Poetry is primarily evidence of the psychological state of its author.
3. Poetry is anyway moribund these days and in its dissociation from materialism, poetry “doesn’t matter.”
4. Poetry represents an elitist taste.

These, and similar mainstream assertions, all contain degrees of truth. But, as is its wont, truth courses in a variety of directions, some self-contradictory.

Poetry is a field in which the libido turns entirely into a stream.

—E. Schwarz, *The Leakages of Concentration*

And if the scholar studied poetry by doing it as well as by impaling it, the fruits of scholarship would not be so reductively dried (so that it’s felt scholarship’s life must be injected from politics).

Poetry is, first, an art. This means that, above all, it is a truth-seeking enterprise that publishes its findings in the form of artifacts (and not, as does philosophy, in the form of exposition) – thus the excitement of poetry is *available* but not, as a package deal, explained. i.e., it’s a degree closer to natural process than most human enterprise.

These artifacts, poems, are made of language. Problem: since language is typically thought to focus on exchanges of information and reason, people tend to expect this function of poetry as well.

But poetry proposes that language has always functioned more as a musical, gestural, plastic expressive medium than as a purveyor of denotations. And it further proposes to make its own substance (poems) out of intensifications of those qualities (musical, gestural, plastic expressive medium). It proposes to use *all* the possibilities of language but to make producing artifacts of truth (in the Keatsian sense of the precise coexistence of truth and beauty) its primary aim.

If the production of truth-artifacts benefits society and the world, fine; however, by an entertaining paradox, the premature pursuit of this benefit, as such, tends to prevent the foregrounding of truth in the production of the artifacts – which generally must be accomplished independent of pragmatic concerns. Thus you cut away real benefit by chasing it too soon (“benefit”



is like psychic money). That is, you have to forget purpose and just “do it” according to its lights; then purpose will be served. That is – the only way to explain a squirrel is to kill it.

And, knocking some more of that smart tone into a pig’s ass, Beauty can sure as shit be ugly, etc. Poetry, in seeking what I’m calling truth, has to exercise itself in continual processes of avoidance (and yet include everything and anything). It has to avoid, even in its own definitions (since titles are part of the effective work), acceding to the insular terms that any style of speech (such as that in the above paragraphs) draws round itself.

#### ANIMATED

By animated we mean listen to them.  
By that we mean we move in one way.  
We move in one way and then we say  
Fifty five alive.  
Fifty five alive.  
Don’t be foolish.  
Don’t be foolish.  
Do we say don’t be foolish.

—Gertrude Stein, from *Short Poems*, 1914-25

“Gertrude Stein *isolates* the strangeness that’s in every good poem.”

— Sidney Goldfarb, in conversation

Poetry also has to avoid plunging to opposites (as “street poetry” tries to avoid the pretensions of academic literature by plunging to an opposite tone), since opposites reflect their hated originals too perfectly. (Though poetry can plunge as opposite as it jolly well wants, as a jaunt.)

In fact, poetry has got to keep on the go. It’s got to use structure but not *be* it. And, at the same time, use structure (or use anything else) with full sincerity. Thus, it must transcend standard motivation, or be in the process of trying. In these ways, perhaps it resembles Zen Buddhism (of which I confess I have extremely sparse and amateur knowledge). i.e., it’s the movement. I mean, standard motivation says, passion is based on lack of subtlety, hence on lack of accuracy. Poetry’s gotta zap the best of both worlds, out like a light.

(What does this have to do with ecology? Don’t you feel the grama grass growing in these lines? The worms breaking up the soil? The photosynthesis foiling entropy?)

My life is a poem. I love my little poems, tiny words shattered in a sort of system in my heart, in a sort of little voice, could be to me. A poem is like little suns in my face when I shatter the words that appear in mind that I put in a sort of dangerous associated system I love....

—Melissa Kawecky, grade 3

Perhaps, also, poetry bears an affinity to that aspect of physics which says, in effect, we can never completely know the nature of anything since knowing the moment omits knowledge of the motion and vice versa . . . which implies: keep trying.

If I thought I were saying anything here, I'd pass out beer and earplugs.

So, at this point: poetry refers to artifacts of words that are never perfect and yet in a way they are, and you don't dare think of anything much "useful" about them. Because the minute you do, you start sounding like this: Poetry is Good for You, Good for the *Soul*, Good for the *Citizen*. Poetry Will Kill the Bad Guys!

(Quick tiny segue to how poetry is described in the schools) :

"IT WILL ALSO HELP INCREASE YOUR LANGUAGE AND THINKING SKILLS."

What better point to move into The Spot "we" sorta wanna get to: relationality? Now for a personalysis of the above capitalized declaration:

IT! — sounds like a large bulldozer.

WILL! — sounds like an inexorable (un-nuanced) process (lawn-mowing?)

ALSO! — faintly ridiculous (and typical of the boilerplate that is consuming us) by its insensitive juxtaposing of large and not-so-large concerns: soul and citizen (coming just before) vis-à-vis improving skills (sounds like soccer practice). The tone of "also" turns the sentence to wood, as it were, and the sentence marches like a wooden soldier.

HELP! — another bloodless word — result of a process that rejects particulars for generics (which, oh so peacefully, don't tend toward particular errors and abrasions — only the error of life-omission).

INCREASE! — see above, for more of the same.

YOUR! — "intimacy" taken away by its own benumbed convention and by its context (see around).

LANGUAGE! — by this time, here, "language" is exemplified as a dryasdust linearity, a mere herald of its own officialese.

AND! — hmmm . . .

THINKING! — standardization.

SKILLS! — standardizations.

In rebuttal to the above dye-job and dissection, it could be said that language often must be used to appeal in a simple, neutral way to a large number of people, with basic clarifications as its main goal.

But, especially when speaking *about* poetry – or language, or value, or education – if the speaking does not at all *exemplify*, as well as state, the message, the message is lost – and, worse, subverted. Because, always language gains or doesn't gain its effects via its musical, gestural, plastic expressivity. The effects gained by inert language are widespread and amount to simple blockage. Poetic feeling should be to some degree present in *all* language. (NOTE: in some sense language is made *entirely* of poetry, but that's a sense that should remain precarious, like handholds on a cliff – the minute pitons and ropes are put in, the poetry slips away.)

The above was lesson 1 in Relationality. Which is to say, we're already *in* the subject. All the above talk has been meant to contextualize — uh, the primacy of context.

The matter of song is warm air, even breathing, and in a measure living, made up of articulated limbs, like an animal, not only bearing movement and emotion, but even signification, like a mind, so that it can be said to be, as it were, a kind of aerial and rational animal.

—Ficino

Eighteen plant genera growing between the toes!

## CHAPTER 2 — EVOLUTION AND POETRY

“Every force evolves a form.”

—Mother Ann Lee of the Shakers

The salient quality of Evolution is its lack of salience. Everything's relative – relatively slow, shifting, multiple, indeterminate.

A moment will leap out, certainly. *Natura facit saltum*. Punctuated equilibrium. But unless it's something on the scale of a vast meteorite plunging into earth and sea from outer space, it'll be quickly "lost" in a worldwide plurality and web of moments.

"Lost" or almost lost – relatively small. Not a stroke from God but a bubble in the soup of life. Sounds silly, and the whole evolution thing is indeed silly: breathtakingly, gloriously silly.

And Evolution is unutterably, endlessly beautiful. The warmth and complexity blossoming and swaying from the tiniest beginnings! The near invisibility of law! The vision of Creation that's set against it seems to me ugly — a jealous old weightlifter hurls life that resembles a reduced version of himself onto a dustmote, and also Creates – snap! – millions of heartbreakingly various creatures (dragonflies, rattlesnakes, rhinoceri) to *serve* the little replicas? Unbelievable arrogance to believe this, but not, at least not successfully, a self-esteem machine (for us). How could you not go crazy with self-hate separated from the world and only in touch via sheer power?

Creation begat isolation, which begat greed, which begat gadgetry, which be a great wealth of weaponry that by God begets gar nix.

Whereas Evolution is all a-twinkle, Evolution shakes like a pool of pudding, Evolution is a Milky Way of whirling ideas, Evolution dances the world's digestion, Evolution is a waterfall of reasons; compared to Evolution, a wave is a rock; Evolution is fine by definition and can't sit still; Evolution gives us ourselves looking-at / writing-about a wild elephant blowing water over its back, washing away a pinch of dirt containing Ten Billion bacteria, while somewhere a snowy owl shits on the back of a destroyer.

Evolution is 25,000 miles (circumference alone) of call-and-response that never repeats.

Evolution is a way of saying, among other things, that intricate causality permeates life on earth. *Something* makes me think that causality gets thought about, even by some scientists, as a linear trail of events. One-on-one causality. But it's much more 3-D than that; it branches like a bush.

Typically people talk about Natural Selection as a great, open-but-channeled parade of logic. Giraffe with slightly longer neck gets a few more delicious leaves, thus has a bit more strength to attract a mate and reproduce, thus also has that key trifle of agility to evade the lion's snap (and reproduce again). Since

genetic variations are heritable, giraffe necks lengthen over time. They've found their arrow-like niche in the panoply of opportunity that a scene is.... There's truth in this linear-thought scenario.

Writing is an act of love. If it is not it is only  
handwriting. It consists in obeying the driving force  
in plants and trees and in broadcasting sperm far around us.  
The richness of the world is in its wastefulness. This  
germinates, that falls by the wayside.

—Jean Cocteau, *The Difficulty of Being*

It's not that the giraffe stretches its neck and then passes on that increment to its progeny (to think that would be Lamarckian heresy, like postulating the inheritance of a broken leg). It's that mutations – just the natural variability of things, really – set up a solid-geometry world composed of tiny differences. Some help, some hinder, some simply engrave the possible. Since life in detail is shaped by ego, by its dynamic: competition (you can feel it in everyone's precise tone of voice, moment to moment, sculpting the sound-waves), individual variations flourish or disappear over generations..... Lip-warts? Get in the way! Out with them!

Note that language is built (has evolved) so as to favor the decisive snap over the nuanced context-responsive construct. Snappiness may be only an illusion, an allegiance. But “Out with them!” makes it sound directional, run by a conscious intelligence – vitalistic. We grow to think “purpose” because syntax comes to us loaded with purposeful assumptions.

Whereas the lip-warts process would in the wetness of time be simply a passive sensitivity to the contingent. Lip-warts slide slowly away, since they militate against efficient eating (not to mention sexual foreplay) by factors of, oh, 1 or 2 percent. It's not that they're *tossed* by Evolution; it's just that their options are not picked up. So runs one ordinary speculation.

OR – and here's a big “or,” still contingent – lip-warts have a sexy side. Through “some quirk” they establish an appeal; they even develop, via evolutionary preference, to the point where a wartless lip seems bland – finds no mate – dies off, shunned.

Lip-warts become de rigeur! And *then* the secondary uses set in. Say the climate where these lip-wart-bearing creatures live becomes dessicated, and the nature of the vegetation cover changes. Where lush grasses had pre-

dominated, tough thistle now forms vistas of beautiful but difficult sparkling lavender.

Our lip-warty friends (evidently some form of goat) flourish, whereas other, tender-mouthed ungulates must retreat, hoping for a soft life somewhere . . .

Additionally, the lip-warts – because they’re there – take on other relationships with their hosts and with the world. e.g., as their bearers develop intricate and baroque sneer-muscles, the lip-warts serve as a defense mechanism. Even lions hesitate, perhaps, that crucial split-second, when they’re confronted with a ghastly (to them) curlicue-construct of purplish gristle.

And, finally – it’s that they’re there. Lip warts are just plain there. Just as their lack might have been. Presence is virtual aesthetics. Lip-warts are *something*, thus can inspire love.

Miscellany is by its nature simply fortuitous.

In the sentence above, the aesthetic joins the utilitarian. But the utilitarian is not at last one-on-one causality, is not essentialism, is not bare logic; it is biodiversity. It is a sufficient range of things, a difference-richness, to provide for almost any emergency. The Golden Age of Metonymy. The utilitarian is  $P_{la}^Y$ .

Consider the human tongue. Original function doubtless food-tasting and -handling (these were eventually elaborated to great gourmet complexity). But then additional functions developed: speech, sex. Think of these three areas of life – eating, language, reproduction. The ontological ramifications of the tongue’s presence do most terribly transcend mere one-on-one progress.

In a zillion-zillion little ways, this is how the world is. (Think “poems” as you read this stuff.)

If you should dump a thimbleful of water into Liverpool Harbor today and wait a few years for thorough diffusion, you could probably not dip a thimbleful out of the Strait of Magellan or Tokyo Bay without it including at least a few molecules of the same water.

— Guy Murchie, *The Music of the Spheres*

(Because a thimbleful of water is halfway between an H<sub>2</sub>O molecule and the oceans in size).

Linearity is so tempting. It looks good. Following simple syllogisms, even some biologists disdain the messiness of bushiness. “What is the reason for the black cheekpatch?” they’ll inquire. “Oh, it must be (through black’s superior heat-absorption properties) to help warm the food that’s being chewed, so that the teeth do not have to work quite so hard to analyze that food and thus excessive dentition-wear is put off a measurable space of time, and creature longevity extended.”

Similarly, artist-types love to cast away great contextual swamps of the indeterminate and zoom in on the “key” point of anything. They do this because it’s dashing. They do it to attract the chicks (of whatever sex). They do it because it’s *right now*. They do it because it’s easy. In urban settings, they do it because you gotta severely winnow your input or you’ll drown.

The gesture!

I think of the color brown. That is, I meditate a bit on that range of possibilities we call brown. Or, it just comes in my head. Many mammals are brown (matches the earth . . . camouflage). And I suppose the zebra would be visible no matter what, on those plains, so why not zoom for dichotomy pizzazz and have fun!? (But then why didn’t the bison develop orange-in-purple polka dots?) The giant panda doubtless didn’t need to be inconspicuous, deep in the bamboo. Why did the insides of my long-ago pet mouse’s ears have a light, longitudinal streak? Hmmm.

But within the reality of brown, the “real” exactitude has wandered into countless countries of variation, when you look close. Here’s a curl of cinnamon behind the ear. There’s a textural pebbling of gold-mottle. And a face that transcends like a kick in the stomach any generality one could think up. Sexual attraction serves as a utilitarian grab-bag for some. But sexual attraction is like geography, an ever-present level, an aspect.

Truth is in the detail, though certainly much of it funnels down, as virtual deduction, from larger principles. But when our minds endeavor to order perception according to these larger principles, to shortcut process (as minds inevitably do, just so we can “walk around”), we inevitably simplify – which means we deny the complexity that’s there.

(The very existence of the word “oversimplify” indicates that there is a, that we think there is a, degree of simplification ((which means, after all, by definition and by necessity, distortion)) that’s necessary.) (OK?)

NOVELTY OR NOTHING, cries the detail.

The heroic Stephen Jay Gould is fond of the tape-rewind metaphor. If we rewind the tape of life back to the Cambrian cusp (when multicellular possibilities opened up) and let it record (and be) again, the different contingencies that come along and shape things will then come along and shape things differently (’scuse my playful writing; my ambition is to be a contingency).

The moving tapedeck spins and having spun  
Rolls back, to spin once more; the “play/record”  
Is pressed, the volume touched; O ain’t it fun?  
And, look – (schwa) sounds all diff’rent – won’t get bored!

But wait – just let me start again; I mean  
That when a garbage truck goes by, play on!  
The music’s changed! But how? God save the Queen,  
There *is* a structure to the “bloody” dawn!

. . . With this, I filled my pipe, tamped Marlowe’s starch  
And lit him. Aromatic smoke began  
To billow up beyond the corbeled arch  
And through the jungle scrub of Yucatán.

The meteor hit; all Hell broke loose; this poem  
Impaled its tail then hissed out: “Home Sweet Home.”

Gould emphasizes (as a corrective to ideas that we, the mighty humans, were and are the inevitable climax of all little evolutionary shrugs and wiggles up from sea-slime) the unpredictability of anything. The sheer luck (for us) that we’re here now.

So that were there a worldwide (biotawide) replay of events since, over half a billion years ago, during the cusp of the Cambrian period, “we” (or our tiny heralds) charged into the joys, agonies and risks of multicellular life, things could go all kinds of ways. A big, arbitrary (arbitrary within *our* cause-



and-effect system) contingency, for example, was the meteorite that landed in the western Caribbean 65 million years ago. The dustclouds, etc., not only caused the extinction of the dinosaurs but of 85% of Earth's animal species! Out from the shadows, then, crept the adaptable, rat-like mammals, with a suddenly open world to fill . . .

Certainly Gould's point is backed up by the realizations Chaos Theory has brought along: little things mean a lot, i.e., there's variation everywhere and *any* of it is candidate for exponential giantism. There *could*, for example, be (have been) an evolutionary linkage early on of flight and big brain (obvious danger there too, of course – helmet requirements). But one can imagine parrots, in flocks, with clever claws and informal bombing capacity and omnivorous stomachs, beginning to rule the world (or to rule as much of it as the bacteria, viruses and termites allow *us* to). And eons later an Earth's crust more or less reduced to wall-to-wall landing pad for gigantic "angels" . . . (The only way our human rule exceeds the superficial is in cracking networks and smashing details. But that's another story!)

I remember when I cut my head open in Lubbock  
after *pulling* out of the hot violet Saturn.  
When we came up the hard squeaky dirty silver steps with holes  
like a cheese cutter . . .  
We came back from Kmart with a nerf gun – I popped the cheap  
thing behind the stupid tub with a stupid VCR . . .

—Shawn Espinosa, grade 3

But I *don't* think we can postulate, for example, an evolution of floating blue spheres of pure musico-mathematical sensibility (except to prove that imagination outdoes reality only in that it has access to all the combinations but is unrestricted by probability concerns). The tape rewind is to some degree local. Earth isn't a closed system.

*Thylacinus cynocephalus*, the Tasmanian wolf, is an extinct or all-but-extinct marsupial, very dog-like but driven from Australia by Old Man Dingo (human-introduced).

"Emits hoarse, coughing, growling sounds."

They're gone from zoos as well as from shrinking wild Tasmania, but when they were there it was observed, "The clear, dark brown eyes stare vacantly at the observer."

They represent convergent evolution; the skull is virtually indistinguishable from that of a wild dog (however, the mouth could be opened much farther).

A fierce animal but not prone to attacking humans. “Only once in 1900, did a Tasmanian wolf bite a Miss Priscilla Murray in her right arm.” This particular “wolf” was one-eyed and perhaps mistook Miss Murray’s arm, which was doing laundry in the river, for a bird.

The thylacine is a curl of evolution that returned to form. What the citizens of a purely contingent world might perform for a “happening,” a little like the sudden “windows of order in chaos.” In a sense, the exception that proves the rule.

In literature, what if Shakespeare had drowned in the Avon as a three-year-old? The transitive verb would still be limping along like a hurt puppy and English would not have achieved the flexibility that allows it to cover the earth like a power grid. Or if the infant Chaucer had died of croup (caught in rime from an April shower)

we wouldn’t have let  
the thinking in loops (caught from the French)  
such versy foxtrot flower.

\* \* \* \*

How contingent is the tangent if it inches just a touch away?

\* \* \* \*

Time for a note on the word Random, which ricochets about like a pinball, chalking up different scores on the board of the given, almost at – um – random. Einstein could not believe that “God plays dice with the universe” (and lost his power to think in pictures). Disparagers of Evolution scoff and sneer at the possible efficacy of “random” mutations to “create” such a diverse network of life as we “have,” to create the behavior patterns of a squirrel.\* To embrace the word random is to run the risk of being considered an idler, an elitist, a dreamer, a goof.

But what does “random” mean? I just picked a dictionary at random in the school I’m artist-residing in today, and it happens to be the Random House Webster’s College. “1. occurring or done without definite aim, reason or pattern.” A little further down, the statistics-definition clarifies that each item of a set has an equal probability of being chosen. The word “haphazardly” comes up. And by the way the derivation is OF *randir*, “to gallop.”

\* But near-eternity X near-infinity = nearly anything.

From the latter we seem to see that speed confounds reasonability. But let's zero in on the word "aim." In the ages when "random" settled into thought and language, there was generally a much greater assumption of predestination in the world. This sense of destiny usually took the shape of an overarching conscious plan. Thus randomness became that which churned darkly in opposition to reason, goodness and God.

My soul is like a snake,  
as slithery as a slithery snake.  
It is made of air. Your hand could  
go right through it and it smells of dust.  
It has been seen floating in the air.

—Lex Schindler, grade 1 or 2

However, philosophy's field of view has in some ways subtilized itself in the last century or two. Cause-and-effect is now largely understood to ramify into such complexity that it's beyond our mastery and thus, in effect, random. Or such are the understandings arising from extreme physics and extreme art. The great middleground is religion, where faith and its simplifications rule. You may wonder that I in effect ally "common knowledge" (middleground) with religion. Many feel religion, for good or ill, represents the spiritual extreme of human consciousness, the highest yearnings, etc. However, common knowledge and religion in fact fuse into that special type of oxymoron known as a "foxmoron," due to its evolution (the word "evolution" has evolved from "vulpine") into rare, redbrown survivalist cunning, and a taste for the forbidden.

\* \* \* \*

#### AND NOW

"little bullets between poetry and Evolution"

- o Moment takes place in a continuum. You've got to keep talking to make a point.
- o The ideal of "wraparound poetry" – vs. poetry – a soundless version of the oral.
- o Evolution is beyond shape and beyond narrative.
- o Attempted objectivity is better than none.
- o Time is likelihood.
- o "Directionality" is —> evidence of thought's limits.
- o Post-Big-Bang: "Lumps form, and off we go." i.e., like it or not, randomness, in a sense, is It.
- o Each of these themes is a book we may never finish reading.

- o Evolution: “beautiful gratuities” – a zillion nuances take it out of the utilitarian.
- o Contingency’s special root “touch,” as in “Does a word touch space if it’s put in quotes?” . . .
- o Time (Evolution) and poetry each produce Inconceiveability.
- o Charges of equal sign repel each other, according to Coulomb’s Law.
- o Civilization is an antibiotic.
- o Bricolage bricolage.
- o “Mutations” – first meaning in childhood: a herald of monstrosity.  
Evolution shows us mutations – “mistakes” though they be – as the very stuff of life.
- o Poetry hovers over Evolution, envying its evidence.
- o Imperfection is to History as matter is to energy. Care for some tea?

Speaking of heavy but uncertain loads, Probability is probably the most neglected, basic, overwhelming, every-turn-of-thought-contains-it muscle of reality. By now, educated people know perfectly well that either-or thinking just don’t cut it, and yet the galloping linearity of language betrays them now and then (and then and now, etc.) – I’m trying to “crack a joke” here (get it? yes? no?). OK.

Resistance to probability is at the root of most social problems. People would rather be adjectives, but a society composed of adjectives slides right to hell. “I don’t want to be a goddamn number.” Nobody does. So government learns to count only as far as the barbaric . . . I mean, numbers are resisted as, *per se*, mean and cold, so, perversely, our social mechanisms trot them into the game only that far: meanness and coldness. But these are primitive soldier-numbers. Mercenaries. The numbers that form probability are *really* like a warm brown bear leaning against you. You can pet, or feed, or ignore the bear. Or they’re like warm brown ice cream. Just eat it.

\* \* \* \*

In order to converse, people must say something definite. Which is right away an arbitrary shortcut. No accounting of all the millionfold assumptions on which the crumbling half-lives of each assertion are buoyed up. Shortcut becomes highway. The same habits, then, construct our conversations with ourselves – those vague, darting half-articulations. Additionally, we have extremely pressing reasons to falsify everything. And “on top of all that” there’s the spatial and qualitative paltriness of our senses. Phenomenal!

Poets are swamped in relationships (or, they'd better be); thus they have a great urge to deny relationships or reduce them to "everything" status, and insist on the unique. Partly, too, this tendency arises in poets for the very good reason that most folks (lazily) delineate relationships out of habit and to promote habit, as if habit were a God, rather than out of perception. "That uncombed old woman mutters nonsense to animals – must be coupling with the Devil." Poets often perceive such barren clusterings, such attacks on variation – and then of course poets are all too ready to turn correctives into absolute claims.

(Habit's great but not wonderful.)

Which edges into this rampant Vitalism\*: that modern/postmodern Psychology has crippled Society's decisiveness by pretending to know motives. It's hip to say, "But what's *really* behind that statement is . . ." Lord knows, this kind of claim moves mountains, since motivation's the motility of all motion. But where the mountains move then is into the processing plants of the Psychologists (or the psychologically educated), the pure politicians of the psyche. Such is my absolute claim.

What does this have to do with Evolution? Evolution, too, throws up illusions of the Unique (even the duck-billed platypus is pure relationality). Evolution's reliance on habit (water flows, etc.) is always tempered by exactitude (feldspar lodged in stream creates backwash niche, where a variant bug might flourish). Evolution is everything. Evolution is a chant. Evolution's permutation. Evolution's partly this and partly that. Evolution is a zoo of witches. Evolution is a series of correctives becoming absolute facts. Evolution is great *and* wonderful. Evolution mutates up a vitalistic thought. Evolution leads to learned blackbeard tomes. Evolution implies the next definition. Evolution is edible.

Darwin's subtext (the experience of natural grace) occurs when humans slow down, look with patience at the world as it is, and allow ourselves to bask in the near miraculous *triomphe d'oeuvres* of natural selection. Blessed are the geophagous.

—Peter Warshall, "The Formation of Vegetable Mold Through the Action of Worms with Observations on their Habits, by Charles Darwin" in *Brick*

\* Vitalism: a philosophic tendency to fill internal causes with inordinate and godly emphasis, as in, "Those moths cleverly grew darker, to match the smoke-darkened landscape."

Evolution is Natural Selection, which is *not* to say that we can know the criteria, nor that they *are* “criteria” in the way that word has evolved.

I only say this out of love.

\* \* \* \*

The poet understandably distances him/her/self from the base motivations. The poet says, “I’m totally fucked up, but I’m ‘from the heart’.” Meanwhile the citizen says, “I’m regular, and I’m not a disgrace! And I could write a book if I had time to sit around and do it.” And the poet sees the gold glints in own asswholistic shit. And citizen is forever, though impatient as hell. But it’s much more complicated than a touch of nobility. And it’s not “it.” To interpret is seen now as sophistication, but the interpreter becomes a stick figure when s/he faces inward. A key cleverness of the totalitarian regimes in Europe toward mid-century was their wholesale ascription of evil motives to all opponents (says Hannah Arendt). The most endearing aspect of enlightenment – respect for (i.e., neglect of) motives – has proved too inefficient to survive.

(*Of course*, all statements beg for Deconstruction. It’s simply that to deconstruct is also to state. If this be circle, let it swirl.)

The Big-Brain religion (whatever gets more attention than food is Religion) is self-empowerment. The Big-Brain church is the materialistic hooks on which to hang this hat and say, “I’m home.” The only claim to *ding an sich* virtue poets can make is that they tend to stick to the spiritual (or its three-headed dog the psychological). Luckily the poetry doesn’t fly in any other air than outside looking in.

Meanwhile, the poet thinks it’s uncool to talk spirit – turns it to shit (but not *real* shit).

But there could be conversations . . .

Poet 1 — George W. Bush is a complete lizard. Bush is to Texas as Texas is to America: totally deserved.

Poet 2 — I have a confession to make: my mother got incredibly drunk and dreamed she voted for Bush because the twitch of his upper lip reminded her of a delicious slice of calf liver, in the nutritional value of which she had utter faith, and I punched her in the stomach.

Poet 1 — I know what you mean. It's a good thing we're clean, you and I. But sometimes I feel as filthy as a 17-year locust in the oil compartment of my uncle's new SUV.

Poet 2 — That thing is 6 months old; it has nothing whatsoever to do with being new. How's your husband?

Poet 1 — He's floating in an orange-colored sky with the Barbie parts of Industrial Classification and the bright elusive buttermilk of love . . . I got a letter from my publisher in the middle of the night; she's grinding up the entire stock, gluing it onto a football field and charging admission.

Poet 2 — Well, I gotta go lecture my dentist on the relic reverberations of Blind Willie McTell. Have a good one.

Poet 1 — Ciao baby.

## SUMMARY SO FAR

Poetry is a branch of ecology because ecology is everything and, besides, poetry is especially relational.

Poetry also has an essentialist side. In focus the two sides can co-exist.

Evolution is extremely relational. Natural Selection is, more than commonly realized, a matter of intricate, seemingly willy-nilly branchings out which transcend sheer survival. The bulk of the world is composed of span-drels (literally, the space between the curves and the angles of an arch, but in Gould's use the great miscellaneous complexity of little things beyond large dualistic breakdowns).

So the worldview all these fields set up is of plurality, variability, logic rather overwhelmed by detail—a versatile and even rather self-contradictory sense of truth.

Language tends to oversimplify and dichotomize reality, too, but poetry (in its relational aspect) continually pulls the demonstration into nuance.

The meaning in the world is so outweighed by sheer numbers that metonymy rules: propinquity outwrestles scheme.

Art and science are not only obverse; each of them contains the other.

Artists can't touch the future; scientists don't trust it. But everybody has to say hello to it because we do rattle it around (tech is remote control) and *must* be polite.

Horizon and depth are, similarly, more entangled than opposed.

None of this hogs truth.

\* \* \* \*

Obviously, this is confusing. It could conduce to inaction. But the actions people do take through simplifying these matters are ultimately destructive, since they have wider effect than the sweet protections of self, family and group were developed to provide. Solution: write poems. And study ecology. (A subsidiary movement might be: Promote Human Inefficiency, or PHI.)

### CHAPER 3 —THE AVIARY

Imagine that we've just strolled into an aviary. Within the aviary, the birds are relatively free – many of them fly past our head. Others walk or sit streamside, but there's no grillwork separating bird and spectating eye. Naturally, a huge cacophony dominates the air (and ear). Such beauty! Such breathtaking compression of wildness! Such a bubble of controlled chaos!

As we get accustomed to the scene, and look closer, we see that the birds are really ideas. Each one is an abstract noun! The overwhelming noise and stench are evidence of their connection to the phenomenal world. Feathers, beak-types, song, etc., are all expressive of the physical and psychic geometry of each word (each bird). And the aviary is arranged in a series of related categories (not linear but Linnaean!)

\* \* \* \*

Here, for example, we're standing in the Plurality and Relationality Section. Approximately fifteen major species inhabit this fuzzy vale, heavy on the atmospherics (a sort of swamp but still composed of precisely measurable bird or vegetable cells and water molecules, on close inspection).

Ramification gets up and swells its colorful plumage to dry, or to appear fierce.

Several Hybrids stumble about, Picasso-esque; other combining forms are climbing into each other, surprised.

A Complexity launches into wild, whirling flight in which no movement simply replicates another.

A pair of Imaginations, one dream and the other experiment, attempt to lay a fertile egg.



A flock of Vanities moves about, eating everything in sight.

A lone Comparison presses itself against various contextual items,  
and is repeatedly rebuffed.

Manipulation tirelessly runs about — passing through the bodies of  
the others as if they were not there — whispering hoarsely, “Ta-politick ta-  
politick.”

Questions and Cycles dot the concrete seabird cliff in ever-shifting  
patterns.

For a moment the whole scene becomes a giant eye of “Nature.”  
Definitions fill the air.

A great, shaggy Excess stretches its seemingly endless neck toward a  
cluster of fat emeralds perched precariously on a rock.

Irony looks strangely out of place but smiles, its beak revealed as soft  
flesh.

A Juxtaposition gleams where Comparison had just been turned  
away.

The bird cliffs seem to utter a keen, sepulchral “Struc/ture!”

Tiny but ubiquitous Maths and Randoms stick their long bills in  
every flower.

\* \* \* \*

Feeling ourselves (as such) slowly disappearing but strangely united  
with all these charismatic entities, we make our way into the next section,  
Energy and Change. An air charged with electricity greets us! Little glim-  
mers everywhere, and we can hardly keep our feet still.

A plain, nearly invisible Habit suddenly becomes a glorious  
Transformation and begins strutting about.

A family of Continuations pick their way through the brambles,  
each little chick like a yellow dot in an endless ellipsis.

BOOM! A silver-beaked Spontaneity pops out of nowhere, begins flying madly about until it turns into a shimmering Speed blur.

One cock Rhythm starts drumming a log while out of the ferns slithers its symbiont, a hungry, diamond-backed Repetition.

Meanwhile, the red-breasted Truism swings and sings, perched on an oak twig.

I think I see— oops, it's gone—the hydra-headed Phenomenology, like a chameleon with white feathers.

I hear the ghostly warble of, but cannot spy, an iridescent Mystery.

The entire section suddenly darkens in shadow; “Everything” has flown over and is hovering, who knows for how long.

Out from under a bush steps a muscular Compromise. A quick plunge of the beak and it has nabbed a Lack-of-Stillness, which wiggles a moment, then is swallowed.

\* \* \* \*

All this has happened with stunning alacrity, Bing Bang! We are energized enough to flee to the next section, known as Focus and Propinquity. Here the music is so dense that every nuance reverberates inside our head like desire. Meaning drips from the ceiling.

We lean against a rail but are startled by the clapping big black wings of an Emphasis. The body is invisible.

Something soft perches on our head! Nothing to fear; it's only a golden-mantled Imitation.

As we grow used to the strange, mottled lighting, it seems that each square or cubic inch of space is occupied by a family of Metonymies. They do form a series of truly pleasant atmospheres.

And here comes a Precision, as if marching out of our very eye into a patch of sunlight (or is it moonlight?)

We bend to peek at a gorgeous droplet of water; in it we spot an Observation, glaring directly back at us.

A flock of small, tan-colored Memories settles on our shoulders. Some are apparently dying and falling at our feet but when we bend over we can see nothing.

As we straighten up and catch our breath, a downy Reflexivity steps fearlessly right into our mouth. In a trice it's down our throat, and we can only hope it might gain egress through our navel.

At a little distance, hovering groups of Origins and their louder, lighter-colored relatives, the Causes, appear to keep an eye on the inner proceedings, though they often look lost or disoriented.

And out of the feathers of each of the other birds in this Focus and Proximity Section, there's a continual flight of Suggestions.

\* \* \* \*

Delighted but at the same time half-suffocated, we stumble out and step carefully into the final display, the Substance and Detail Section.

Fewer species inhabit this rocky, earthy, water-rich, thickly vegetated area, which seems odd until we realize that all the birds in the other sections migrate here frequently for sustenance and the sweetness of fact.

Counting native species, we catch a glimpse and then a full sighting of the footed Place, who sings, emits a smell, dances around and then rolls into our hands asking to be eaten. We hardly know what to do.

We look up, baffled, just in time to observe a parade of Anthologies. Cheers fill the air.

The hullabaloo almost obscures the lines and clusters in the dirt – it's a Language, doing its thing, sometimes rising aslant into the air and spilling over like a fountain.

Its drops and sprays fall upon, make glisten, the final identification: Things (which are soon gobbled by the Language – but the strange thing is, they're still there, on the ground, too).

\* \* \* \*

We leave the aviary and go our separate ways. A parting glance catches the whole locale as kaleidoscope, and our last realization together is that each bird species we've seen is present, in part, in all the others.

As to and to not to as to and such a pretty bird and to as such a pretty bird and to not to such a pretty bird and to as to not to and to and such a pretty bird as to and such a pretty bird and to and such a pretty bird not to and to as such a pretty bird as to as such a pretty bird and to as such a pretty bird and to as to and to not to and to as to as such a pretty bird and to as such a pretty bird and to as to not to as to and to and such a pretty bird and to and such a pretty bird as to and such a pretty bird not to and such a pretty bird not to and such a pretty bird as to and such a pretty bird and to and such a pretty bird as to and to and such a pretty bird not to as to and such a pretty bird and to not as to and to not to as such a pretty bird and such a pretty bird not to and such a pretty bird as to and such a pretty bird as such a pretty bird and to as such a pretty bird and to and such a pretty bird not to and such.

— Gertrude Stein, from “Patriarchal Poetry”

#### CHAPTER 4 — THE MITOCHONDRIA, or IN CELL & CLASSROOM

Viewed from a suitable height, the aggregating clusters of medical scientists in the bright sunlight of the boardwalk at Atlantic City, swarmed there from everywhere for the annual meetings, have the look of assemblages of social insects. There is the same vibrating, ionic movement, interrupted by the darting back and forth of jerky individuals to touch antennae and exchange small bits of information; periodically, the mass casts out, like a trout-line, a long single file unerringly toward Childs's. If the boards were not fastened down, it would not be a surprise to see them put together a nest of sorts.

— Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell*

The biologist Lynn Margulis has been the chief American proponent of the Gaia hypothesis – that is, the attitude or recognition or emphasis that Earth functions like a living organism, highly responsive to all shifts in inner detail – that life and nonlife have formed innumerable feedback loops.

She is also the chief proponent of a theory that the mitochondria (the little “energy workers” in each cell) originated as sovereign beings outside our body system and came in to us like sci-fi voyagers. Now, in fact, the mitochondria are indispensable (we’d die immediately without ’em). The situation inside our cells is as if a society were colonized by some weird foreigners who took over the food (energy) production and thus made themselves essential to that society’s life. Interdependence is the great revelation of the last century in life science, and Margulis is its Queen (Chairperson?).

A little background: in 1909 Merezhovsky proposed “syntrophism” – merger of different life forms into new species. Obviously, this introduced a radical new element into our concept of Evolution. One Wallin claimed further that *all kinds* of symbiosis were crucial in Evolution. Margulis says, “Acceptance of the composite nature of individuals will soon revolutionize biology.”

One image this kind of thought spawns is of the basic human entity being not so much the individual person as, oh, say, a school classroom.

\* \* \* \*

Heraclitus said, “Nature loves to hide.” The basic unit of living nature is the cell, from a Latin verb meaning “to hide.” The human power to even contemplate the cell carries with it the urge to disown or conceal it. It’s thus strange yet inevitable perhaps that our main sense of the word “cell” is the prison cell: a place of enclosure, punishment, anti-life. Certainly this is my primary history with the word (I don’t know if I, or many children, have retreated from knowledge of biology because it seemed like a prison system).

Let’s pretend that organization does not equal prison but (a proportion or aspect of organization, anyway) equals life and delight, and organize ourselves into imagined beings one-millionth our real size, and look into a cell. Billions and billions to pick from, but say we slip into an average tissue cell. Amazing what variety of things and activities are going on in such a small space, but then the relativity of “small” goes way down beyond the cell scale. In there, we “see” a nucleus, plastids, even something known (by humans) as a Golgi apparatus. And ...

“Interspersed between, a number of fat, oblong bodies of a vivid pink hue providing an arresting contrast. About the size and shape of a large bacterium, they are in a state of perpetual agitation – twisting, jerking, jostling neighboring structures with the indefatigable automatism of teenagers in a

discotheque. Sometimes they split into several parts or join to form weird, hydralike structures. They are the mitochondria . . .”

(Christian de Duve, *A Guided Tour of the Cell*)

A billion years ago aerobic (oxygen-involved) bacteria were getting eaten by the phagocytes (predatory cells) that dominated the oceans. Most would get digested (killed). Some would poison and kill and take over their gobblers. But some became endo-symbionts (inner partners). They somehow began to implement respiration, the oxidative energy provisions, within their hosts. Eventually this sort of arrangement took over most all of life. That is, it's advantageous to work together. The mitochondria have lived within host cells for zillions of generations, but they retain a “strange” DNA, an heirloom of autonomy. They even, as it were, talk funny. “Mitochondria do not speak the same language as the rest of the cell” (de Duve). This refers to alien genetic codes. If we make a little stretch and consider imagination to be a chief energy of life, the mitochondria are like larger-than-life visiting poets. They're a bit weird but essential.

And here's J.W. v. Goethe, validating exotic epistemologies: “From our acquaintance with an abnormal metamorphosis, we are enabled to unveil the secrets that normal metamorphosis conceals from us, and see distinctly what, from the regular course of development, we can only infer.”

\* \* \* \*

The mitochondrion's bright pink inner membranous envelope, rife with folds to multiply its pleasure and/or working surface, constitutes the heart of the “power plant.” (The outer membrane is a coat borrowed from the phagocyte host.)

Inside is the mitochondrial matrix or sap. It's full of enzymes (proteins) that break down food. Incidentally, they do this by virtue of their *shapes*. All the cell-motion is semi-organized around a central metabolic vortex (the “Krebs cycle”). And contributing to the balance of order and chaos is the etymology of the word “metabolic”: the act of throwing around.

“A motley collection of exotic molecules” (de Duve) do the work, which is turning food into energy for the organism at large. What's produced *materially* is mainly water, carbon dioxide, ammonia —the same results as from a furnace, but in this case a very *cool* furnace. It's cool so the entropy, or heat-

loss, is cut way down, and it achieves this cool because the food combines with water, gives off hydrogen. It's called Cold Combustion and is enabled by the *trapping* of energy by a phosphate known as ATP. ATP saves the energy from freedom (loss), thus has it a second later when it's needed. And then the cell knows how to pry it out.

Let me say that most mitochondria are derived from the female sex cell, not the sperm. The keenly pink inner membrane is covered with microcircuits (up to 100,000!), each with 15 – 20 species of carriers, *all for* electron transfer, which happens like a stream going downhill but not in a steady flow – rather in a series of discrete “falls,” somewhat like a series of words out the lips. Another image for the process (electron transfer) would be a respiratory chain.

Or it could be considered, with a bit more “vitalism,” that they act like a bucket brigade – but the *movement* comes from thermal vibrations and rotations.

The trapping-for-use of the electron-transfer energy could be likened to writing (but at the rate of a novel a minute – or, perhaps, body-wide, a library a second). Writers trap the emotion of experience; it's reactivated into more or less metonymic files. Our trapping device could be called Alternative Time Propulsion.

It's surprising how much of our food breaks down into glucose, simple sugar, stuff of energy. But the movement from glucose to energy is far from simple. The name for this particular electron-transfer process is glycolysis, which is a 12-step program to produce lactic acid, hence energy. (Interestingly, “lactic and alcoholic fermentations differ only at the chain's end” (de Duve)).

Finally (within a super-rapid continuity), the work is “balanced”: a water molecule is returned, likewise phosphate for more ATP (storage), and electrons are retrieved.

Perhaps glucose → ATP → work = experience → language → poetry.

Writing has always found form within one or more traditions. Narratives of romance and war, chants, symbolism trotlines, explorations of scene and character . . . have assumed their inner continuities largely on the basis of what we might term illusions of coherence. I mean only to say that the coherent emphasis on which most writing has relied has been the clarity of civilized life.

I propose, in the light of the cell (not to mention other, related assemblages up the micro-macro crackle such as the life of social insects) that we let emphasis shift, veer a bit into a biological tradition. We've been nearing such a paradigm for well over a century in literary practice, listening (more modestly) to process, articulating cautionary thoughts such as the Intentional Fallacy, honoring experiment.

Structure *is* simultaneous overlap. Perhaps now we can more fully look upon even works densely following this or that cultural tradition as *also*, concurrently, exemplifying such organizations of energy as evolution, cell growth and the whole range of physical life. If culture is a freak of nature – every element traceable down the bacterium-base track – there's an inescapable relationship between an Elizabethan drawing room or outer-space module and a nest of beetles.

This concept slides gracefully into place when we consider truth as composed of layers – sometimes obscuring, or contradicting, each other – structurally concomitant. Scholarship on the white heal-all reference system should include a frosty squirt of rhythm, a regional flat vowel tilting into childhood, an impenetrable little “artist-ball” quivering in the speckled light, a rollercoaster genetic-generation barley cooled into a line of abstractions, much more. All in proportion like the contents and constituency of seawater.

(It's good to keep in mind that free ions are often too poisonous for any “use” and that “group transfer” is at the heart of biosynthesis. Basically, a so-called “radical” (an ion usually composed of a variety of elements) goes and combines with – anything else. It could be said that temptation is the motivating force in most of these changes. One of a pair is lured away, perhaps by an offer of oxygen, and that's how we achieve the New.)

This cellular whirl is all so mechanical as to deepen into mystery by sheer vastness. Love is that which can't be explained; perhaps love is number.

\* \* \* \*

a kind of beginning

I sat in the schoolroom in Paradox Valley just after class. Kids and teacher had gone to music or something. The school was (and is) a charter, opened by local effort since Education administrative powers had closed the regular school for lack of students a year before, in this forgotten corner of Colorado. The entire enrollment constituted 18 kids (six each in K-1, 2-3-4 and 5-6-7). Had the charter not been started, local kids would have had to travel an hour



out of Paradox to the (rather mediocre) school in Nucla/Uravan way down the valley. (As it was, three or four Nucla kids were driven to Paradox each day.)

In any case, there I sat with/in a free moment. We had just written “Going-inside” poems (idea from a Charles Simic poem via fellow poet Sheryl Noethe). First, we’d gone over Simic’s “Stone,” in which he exercises empathetic perception on a plain old rock and leads us (readers) into an internal fairyland. The poem is a good metaphor for what all poems do. Then I’d read aloud a variety of going-inside poems by children, such as these two:

I would like to go inside myself.  
I would like my brain to be a table.  
My heart could be my kid.  
Inside my hand could be my husband,  
and then I could have my bones for a pet.

—Honey Jackson, grade 1

(This poem, incidentally, was dictated by Honey, who couldn’t yet write, to her hulking 3rd-grade temporary writing slave. The class of relative giants had been brought down from the 3rd-grade room and did serve as very tender scribes.)

I would like to go into a rock, shiny walls of color, prisms of light, coolness of winter, warmth of summer, scenes of water as you splash into the salty sea of clear crystal water stream, a soft blanket of algae grows green, growing bright, or a slingshot shooting me into the horizon of the mystery, or an enchanted forest of a secret golden mystery of roses, bright in summer and vines in winter of golden gold shimmering bright in the middle of the night, or lightning bolts shocking me, summer picnic smells enchanting me, visions of clouds oh so high, angels flying hails, and all brightness of day, darkness of the night, mysterious shadows of eyes looking at me, an old schoolhouse with farmlands wide and the changing things, history gone by but I stay the same. Feelings of dungeon close by.

— Joanna Luckey, grade 3

(Joanna’s piece seems to me a perfectly imperfect ((beautiful)) presentation of the universe arising from a little rock.)

Then we wrote.

As I rehearsed, sitting alone in the schoolroom, the just-concluded hour in my mind, it occurred to me (more or less the germ of this whole essay) that what the kids, teacher and I were doing was product and process of an evolution, just as surely as the worm, whale and wood violet are.

Similar images presented themselves (like a little mutational cluster), variations on the big and the small. Images of images. Laser images, as is well-known, sliced, reveal a microcosm of the macrocosm. In literature, synecdoche is “created” to do the same – the tiny part bespeaks the whole. (The vaunted Choice of Achieved Essence in such figures-of-speech may be a conceit; any part would do, or the choice derives its apparent power from the quick effective expressivity of cliché.) Metonymy lurks in the wild woods to the west and, where they meet on the Great Plains, interbreeds with Synecdoche. A big frog-leap further west splashes up haiku.

In considering Evolution, my emphasis is on the opportunity, the mutations, the fact of variability. There’s the richness. Natural Selection, I think, has been overemphasized. Most of what happens is on the order of a lagniappe. But, sure, distinctions are crucial. In the classroom, with creative writing, interactions between concept and discovery are precisely, unpredictably, what can lead to evocative practices. Lord knows, it’s all too possible to get kids to write fatuous poems. (But I think an expansive mode tends to encourage good, aerated distinctions.)

Anyway, there I was in a classroom in Paradox, where the valley’s created by pressure of massive salt domes and the Dolores River runs crosswise from one side to the other. A beautiful spot, enough to make strong men weep.

I was able to picture, as a coherent “scene,” the proceedings that had led to my classroom procedures, “going inside” an idea, mainly finding the liquid form of it. Transmuting intellect into concrete-terms conversational flow. Oddly enough, “You get what you ask for,” so the thing is to ask for whatever is open and particular.

Go inside a lightbulb, go inside the brain of a cow, go inside a cloud, the moon, your little finger, a joke, a rotten orange.

My memory of the event is of desks receding, retaining their brown reflected gleams, as if I were on an airplane flying away.

I’d been in so many classrooms. My speech had evolved from speeches to the high state of controllable babble, almost like musicians I know, or know

about, whose muscle memory has either managed to eliminate self-consciousness and intentionality or has cooked it down to a condition of “oneness with the liquid.” Like family soups in the Middle Ages, wherein the heat’s always more of less on and the mixture might contain something great- great-grandmaw dropped in a hundred years ago.

\* \* \* \*

There are many different kinds of classroom, and many ways to classify them. In a New York City elementary school class, the bouncing-off-the-walls energy might lead you to think that the “cell” has a very different function from the workings of a bumps-on-a-log atmosphere in a smalltown Nebraska classroom. Yet both groups are doing about the same things, substantively. The difference is mainly stylistic. Energy can flow unobserved or splatter about and still “electron-transfer” is taking place. In terms of poetry workshops, though the poems’ surface particulars may vary between urban and rural contexts (and along various other axes), the basic imaginative movements are surprisingly similar. Kids in both settings are capable of fresh and “crazy” verbal expressions.

In my coat is a dot.  
And in the dot is a folder.  
And in the folder is a door.  
And in the door is a water bottle.  
And in the water bottle is a dog.  
Get out, Mr. Dog!

— Caralia Panizzon, grade 1 or 2

P oem is poetry and I don’t know if it is even or  
O dd. Is it a rainbow with different colors? That is not  
E nough for me. Is it a beautiful butterfly in the sky? Is it a  
T ree in the tropical forest that the leaves are green and  
R ed? Or is it a yo-yo? I know, it is a red-light  
Y o-yo. It jumps and

P rances. Is it a big, big, huge puzzle like an  
O flying in the sky like the different colored rainbow?  
E nough, it is a bunch of things that it booms out of your  
M ind. Poetry fills your mind with words and I can’t think of anything.

—Graciela Escobar, grade 1 (This 6-year-old did not know English just a few months before writing the above.)

Let's say a poet visits a classroom of relatively small children. It doesn't matter where. The poet is inevitably a little strange to the children. Countless giveaways of dress, accent, attitudes and interests, hair, even facial expression, make clear to the (always sharp at "pegging") kids that this person is odd, a bit exotic, different from their parents and from the grownup images they pull off of TV. Of course, this difference and its perception can be advantage or disadvantage for the work. The artist is both/either pied piper and/or pariah, since the highest and the lowest merge in many ways.

If the poet ignores the sense of strangeness she/he has brought, the strange and the familiar will sort themselves out proportionately, and the children will be drawn, by down-to-earth proposals ("remembering" instead of "poetry," alliteration instead of logic), step by step into expressing some native combination of strange and familiar. That is, their own personal leading-edges may come into play.

It may well be that in some long-distant age any person from another tribe was killed and eaten (or married), as a matter of routine. Nowadays there's been an extension of tolerance – O far from perfect – so that people can work with the exotic, and in fact the exotic, as is its wont, can take over much of the energy initiation. Like mitochondria.

Inside the classroom, the various organelles (people) have brought mental food from the organism at large. Everything happens in the matrix, or sap. The writing activities utilize experience and its formal breakdown, language. There are, of course, feedback loops galore – language *is* experience and goes through, oh, a dozen steps of further coding and breakdown.

Someone may object and say that the poetry-in-the-schools process has been purposeful whereas nature is not.

But one can build bridges between contingency and intention as Coen has attempted to do in likening cellular growth to an art process. One can examine the context of any contingent move or moves and find an overarching logic that encompasses happening and happenee. E.g., the "death star" meteorite that plunged into the Yucatán land and waters 65 million years ago (one more time) was certainly contingent in relation to the ecosystems it so abruptly invaded and ruptured. But within its own context it was following natural law. And that system of natural law (call it Solar System physics) has its resonances and shapely parallels with the physics of the dinosaur-ridden Yucatán Peninsula. In other words, if a baby screech owl is sitting on a branch and somebody throws a rock – that is a contingency but it's also true the screech-owl lived in a place that either grew or

attracted rock-throwing creatures. There is a connection (which is not to say it's the baby screech owl's fault).

You can rewind the tape and it will come up with some different music; however, there will be a relationship between any two musicks you're likely to get on earth.

It's true there are differences (between classroom producing poetry and cell utilizing food). One is the varying time-sense regarding play. In the cell, play has indeed been the mother of all particulars, but it has taken place over billions of years, via mutations. Play, as such, is represented by, or even replaced by, the variety it has produced. By way of a (playful) cross-genre illustration, a finished dance production gives the impression of play, though nearly all the *discovery* has already been subsumed in a pragmatic way to the overall expression. The cell glitters with excitement but has its processes down pat. Whereas the poetry writing classroom is, in addition to expressing its own evolution (as humans, as social education-cell, etc.), reinventing evolution, quickly. It's compressing play (options) into an intense rediscovery pattern or nonpattern.

(Something about how *humor* condenses the billion-year random motion of nature and thus makes a poem proportional in its dynamics to an evolutionary line (wiggly or not) – how consciousness disappears, like the magician slipping out of the soap bubble in the last second, leaving form.) (See Appendix on *Humor*.)

\* \* \* \*

The concept of the feedback loop *makes* the process. As the organic radicals rattle along, from glucose through phosphoglyceraldehyde, pyruvic acid, nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide, lactic acid and back again, the apparent sidetrips make the play. Cellular activities are too dense for linearity. Likewise the in-class writing process becomes a kaleidoscope of different lighted facets of, say, energy. It takes energy to catalyze, then energy to think, energy to open the mind, energy to catch inspiration in words, re-do, energy to write it down, consider it, say it aloud . . . But each of these instant way-stations *is* energy as well. Energy does ontological flipflops sideways through the airs of the classroom, clothes, murmurs, recent meals and so on out.

And afterwards (we're in the classroom) the writings are typed, selected, perhaps revised, anthologized, published locally, shown around, put on bulletin boards, read to other groups, broadcast like seeds, in a word – spread.

I open my eyes to a new day, the sky is sprinkled lightly with clouds,  
the clouds dipped in the sun.

An idea pops into my head like a flower blooming. I grab a pencil. Writing in pencil is easy for me. It helps my thoughts. The smooth yet rough way the pencil writes is comforting, like a dancer fluttering across the page. I'm wearing my pajamas. They are comfortable and relaxing. Kind of how I would want my poem to be. My words are filling the page like water in a glass. Suddenly my writing comes to a halt. What else is there to say? I look around my room for ideas. Nothing. Like a lake that has run dry. No more water, just have to wait and see. I get out of my room. Besides, if I stay in my room, I could get lost in the many thoughts. Well, I guess I will write in the evening, when the sky is dark, and the stars shine as though delicately dipped in glitter.

—Meghan Aderman, grade 6

Following is a collage made from characterizations of poetry by schoolchildren.

Poetry is . . .  
a slow flash of light  
    having a snake  
        in your room  
            and you don't know what to do  
your mouth playing a trick on you  
                                I look very fierce  
                                when I finish I feel  
                                temperamental

a bumpy world  
a rainstorm just standing there  
    like your hand is coming apart  
                maybe poetry is poor  
    Ahhh, poetry, get out or else!  
goodbye everybody  
poetry has killed me . . . poetry is  
    walking on the moon with the flow of going

backward and the motion of going forward  
    Poetry is like dirt rushing in your face  
a monkey saying, O take me away!  
a zoo of heads  
a floor in the moon  
books in a pool  
cherries in the ears  
Poetry is like the alphabet all talking at once  
    shooting a lot of ink  
under a rainstorm  
    letting your nose run without caring

you get so mad you fly to the moon  
electricity blowing through a telephone  
bending lines

The curly mirror  
Dot line Dot line Dot  
Zig zag Star

And on the hundred and first day it eats 101 flowers

Poetry is like whatever's falling on you

I'll just go along the road with my brain in my hand

1 chinup 2 chinup  
3 chinups of poems  
in a splash in a  
crash I love

white snow that nobody can see but me

"Hello, Poem, do you want to make some raisin bread?"

"Let's make it."

Poetry . . . ticks as if it had a face.

But what a funny clock that eats sandwiches with pepper and

"he ha,he ha,"

but its eyes look like gloomy basketballs.

Poetry is a brain of love.

And finding a wall that can't be broken.

We'll eat by candlelight!

And we'll dance like crazy.

Come and shake your body, come with me.

Poetry is nothing and everything all in one.

People from poems! I began to shout.

Poetry is like a sharp rock that you sit on and then you get up  
and throw the rock into the water to get rid of it.

It can make you rock an invisible baby.

The moment to express it is the moment you have.

. . . a lion sleeping in your mind and then bursting out to prey  
upon the paper.

Once you're sucked in you can never stop writing, but I did.

Each line is a different color sweeping across the page.

Start with freshly ground vowels.

Can leave a big spot in your mind.

Plodding through an Open field, Everything Makes sense.

It's like riding an eclipse.

Running with an open soul was torture

Poetry makes me feel like bouncing on a television.

I dive in the papery water.

You tell it to sit but it keeps thrashing and thrashing and  
thrashing and thrashing and thrashing.

Poetry is all-colored and turned-around and overlapping.

Poetry eats your brain cells and then it gets dirty in there.  
I went to its funeral, I went to its grave.  
Everybody threw lovely papers and I threw an eyeball.  
Five seconds later there was a big splat,  
and there was poor Poetry flattened on the moon.  
Poetry is a person  
person people people.  
The monstrous wandering pause moves on and your car starts up.  
boom, clink, bye, hi, scotch snap why I mom hum wee  
All of a sudden you're on a little piece of land just big enough  
for you.  
Poetry is like scandal.  
The poor old bear with the knife in his chest.  
Yellow words on white bread with mayonnaise.  
I stepped out my door and poems were surrounding my house.  
Running your pencil In the white light.  
Tears fall from the eyes of poetry.  
Poetry is the one item on a table.  
Nothing is more beautiful than a  
Universe.

Mama, Mama, give me a  
Ball.  
rocks and sticks make a rhythm/ that only people pounding understand.

Poetry walks inside a guy's mouth  
& then it walks back out.  
Then it switches like channels and somebody catches it with a net.  
A rainbow scotch-taped on the sky.  
Sometimes I feel like a flag tied to the pole of poetry.  
When the guns fire the words shoot at the audience.  
The pigeons fall the audience claps.  
Going, coming, throwing, rowing, me, you, crying, smiling, dragons,  
                    wagons and killers.  
The way I think of poetry is my baby has chubby cheeks.  
Poetry is like a dirty car and you scratch it and you get chills  
                    all the way down your spine.  
Creamy face tints in the bluish light of the lava lamp.  
I want to only say  
Part  
Of  
Everyone is  
Me.



This has been but a rough squiggle of thought in an immense sphere of possibilities. Whichever way the mind goes – out into universe-sized causal webs with David Bohm, into its own brain-tissue minutiae and further in (into the nano-seconds of desire ((with Dennett or Margulis or Dawkins)) ), along minims and magnums of talk with Charles Olson, of Gertrude Stein – “or a slingshot shooting me into the horizon of the mystery” with Joanna Luckey – both *limping* along these paths and arcs and *hovering* considerably above them – what?

That’s what. The potential overfills any circle one can think of, or at least folds its plane. Literature takes place in all this physical reality, in the biology corner of physics, psyched into shape by the older geometries and pretends not to. Or it just forgets, and self-importantly stamps a seal on its own forms. It’s OK, the auto-invention of literature is an aching, heartbreaking part of what I’m trying to say: if we bring back “truth” and tickle it in the crotch, synthesis and analysis will wrestle eternity into an instant! Play our cards right we won’t lose a drop. And we’ll still have truth. Such a deal.

\* \* \* \*

Emotional species (species of anything, engined by emotion) grow feathers and prance about, develop finicky eating habits, lay their eggs in warm gimmicks, even weave unbelievable baskets out of beliefs. Homilies drip down their jaws, reflecting gold and smelling like chicken. Pragmatic advice, with butter, feeds a table of twenty.

It’s not only that ideas are cloudy; clouds are ideal.

Everything’s misunderstood. Yet people wonder what to do.

## APPENDIX I

### *CRANKS*

Caterpillar  
Reasoning  
Animates  
Never-never  
Knowledge.

Creationist  
Rationale,  
Anthropocentric  
Needle  
Kit.

Crushes  
Resistance,  
Also  
Nullifies  
Kinetics.

Critical  
Reviews  
Amalgamate  
Nonsense  
Kaleidoscopically.

Ceramics  
Resident  
Assembles  
Nouveau  
Kachinas.

Cornucopia  
Rinse  
Avalanches  
Nugatory  
Karma

Caligulan  
Rants,  
Anapestic  
Nerve-  
Kill.

Can  
Realism's  
Astronaut  
Negate  
Kinship?

Classification  
Rigs  
A  
Necessary  
Killing.

Christ  
Risen  
And  
Now  
King.

Citified  
Revelator  
Ascertains:  
Normalcy  
Kafkaesque.

Casuistry's  
Real-life  
Analog,  
Nebbish  
Kamikaze.

Candlelight  
Rays ///  
Aha!  
New-moon  
Koan.

Cast-iron  
Rites  
Achoo!  
Nickel  
Knuckles.

Chess,  
Reich,  
Anthroposophy,  
Novalis,  
Knee-britches.

Causality . . .  
Relativity . . .  
Absolutist  
Nihilism . . .  
Krakatoa.

Cowtown  
Radio  
Announcer  
Nurses  
Kultur.

Catty  
Remarks  
Are  
Not  
Kosher.

Creeping  
Religiosity  
Actuates  
New-Nazi  
Katzenjammer.

APPENDIX II

*"PLANCK'S CONSTANT"*





## APPENDIX II

p.3

Complexity has been commonly confused (as have other fine qualities) with intentionality. I'd like to say something for the complexity of simple things. For example, the complicated methods of composition involved in producing Beethoven's 5th Symphony, combined with an educated audience, bring about a triumph of enjoyment: an intellect/viscera wedding. Some can even "read," to a large extent, the complexity.

In contrast, '20s streetsinger Blind Willie Johnson's bottleneck guitar and "false bass" voice on "You're Gonna Need Somebody on Your Bond" (a paean to God) is looked upon as simple. Well, the *plan* is simpler than Beethoven's but the fact isn't. If an aural electron microscope could zoom in on each note and each move in Johnson's recorded song, the variations of shadings and slidings, syncopation, the varying grains of the voice, melodic turns, resonance, tremors, antiphonal stretches, tone, repetition – chaos spilling into order and order windowing into chaos – could be heard as complexity matching whatever perceptual depth we have. Down to a certain level all these delicacies are audible, part of the music. Blues character, presented in wavy grids, blown up in instant memory.

Not to mention birds and whales.

## APPENDIX III

### On Humor & Writing

Henri Bergson said that what's funny is always "something mechanical encrusted upon the living." He also declared, "Language is too rigid to be an accurate mirror of an infinitely fluid universe." Both these remarks are insightful, both pretty funny. And they concretely demonstrate incongruity as well as speaking about it.

Herr Professor Kant felicitously asserted, "Humor arises from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing." (Then he tossed a grape into the Prussian air and months later caught it in his rosebud mouth. This is known as the Cryptique of Poor Raisin.)

Schopenhauer put it this way: "All humor can be traced to syllogism in the first figure with an undisputed major and an undisputed minor, which to a certain extent is only sophistically valid." Huh? But I guess thus is Oscar Wilde checked off, and the gulf between habit and math considered.

Aristotle growled that humor is "merely a subdivision of the ugly." Sounds more like a grumpy Plato, being roasted and quartered by banished poets.

Dr. Freud felt that a smile is an aggressive flashing of the teeth, that laughter is an explosion of relief because whatever's happening is happening to somebody else – that humor is largely based in cruelty. Sigmund's brother, Schaden Freude, developed the famous pleasure principle as the gleam of iridescence on a bubble of someone else's sheer pain.

Historically, "The Fool" may well have begun with intoxication. And incongruity may have been first played as animal heads jammed on human bodies.

Despite such smartypants ideas, many people hold that to laugh is both best-medicinal and ecstatic – sounds of silver bells tinkling and radiance dancing, above the turgid goulash of existence. Laughter is simple and positive, a frolicking lamb of expression, sheer joy. Or at least it's an ability to picture that, to draw the sense of play from the grindings of necessity.

Doubtless *all* these visions and angles are facets of a sense of humor, but it's my contention that there is one basic mechanism of humor: incongruity.

Given something, we instantly derive expectations about what comes next. Then next comes, and we “see” (in part) what we expected to see. Voilà: the intelligibility of life on earth. We don’t perceive The World; we grok the simplified version that fits in our brain. And *from* this contrived intelligibility, humor momentarily (and ultimately!) takes the breath, with its impropriety, its surprise. Humor being basically a snapshot of the objective swirl, glimpsed behind the curtains.

If a third-grade girl named Ana Torres says, “I remember when I smelled a rose . . .” we swell with rosy sympathy at the prettiness of scene and song, and expect more beauty to follow. And if she, without skipping a beat, continues and concludes, “the whole thing broke” that’s humor, as serious as could be.

The littlest things churn up great expectations. A simple word will funnel a complex world, instantly, into our thoughts. Fifth-grader Shirley Marc wrote,

“Think of me  
as a beautiful *ballerina* twirling . . .”

— at that point we image forth tutu, pink slippers, stage, spotlights, audience, orchestra, cheers, even as our eye travels to the next line— but Shirley concludes with

“around the block.” She’s practicing on the sidewalk. And the stage accoutrements disappear, as suddenly as they came. Humor.

The celebrated (and deplored) chicken-crossing-the-road joke functions essentially as dashed expectations. To explain: normally (that is, if the joke were not so well-known), on hearing a mundane question such as “Why does a chicken cross the road?” the mind might start thinking of possible answers: Well, there’s a heap of corn over there gleaming in the morning sun, corn that maybe Grace Lou accidentally spilled yesterday . . . the chicken sees it, is of course hungry (picture ravenous chicken face), *likes* corn, skedaddles across. Or some other pragmatism: she’s escaping maybe from Randy Rooster. The mind always tends to flesh out the bare question to a realistic and substantial scenario. Then, with some warm drama suggested and in mind, to have the matter stripped down to the abstract logical base of merely “to get to the other side” is like a glass of cold water tossed in the face. Expectation/change.

One problem with humor on the page is that the violent or crazy or just goofy type of humorous move may not effectively survive the first reading or two. When the happy shock of novelty wears off, there may be little left. So

that the connoisseurs of written humor tend to devolve toward the situational – that which weaves a solid, human context as its main thrust, something that will keep on generating warm spots and deicately-hued lines and fields of interest during sustained attention – Jane Austen, say. Specialists in the sudden nutty leap – S.J. Perelman or Lewis Carroll, for example – may very well live over time if they’ve created an incredibly tight language base so dense it can be savored again and again. Or if the “joke” in each case is as carefully chosen as a haiku, for delayed-fuse effect. But most long-lasting, beloved written humor is something like Mark Twain – humor as by-product of something else solid, of narrative fact and heart – as opposed to the work of his 19th-century rivals, Artemus Ward et al, who struck purely for the quick ridiculous and are largely forgotten. Twain’s understanding is more ecological: the entire world is composed of by-products. The joke may be likened to a bird in flight, that appears strikingly free of the world below but really isn’t.

To violate expectations is not always a matter of leaping to opposites. Sometimes ludicrous repetition takes expectability clear through itself to some realm of surprise. Sometimes ludicrous repetition takes expectability clear through itself to some realm of surprise. A personal traditon, an old phrase, can make one smile for years, more and more as time passes. It becomes like a hole in the daily desperate logic, through which warmth can pass. I once fished out some interesting glassblowing messup from the factory wastebasket and told Gene the glassblower I was going to take it home and hang it from my living-room light. I stayed in that factory eleven years and Gene would tell me again and again, whenever we saw something “weird,” anything – could be a pattern of crows flying – to take it home and hang it from my light. And we’d laugh. It was like an ever-shifting ritual which kept alive some reference to the impractical in that overwhelmingly practical place.

\* \* \* \*

It would be ludicrous to try to examine the Absurd without the space to include those vast tropic-Antarctic suffocations of context that make Absurdity stand out, but here goes. A sample. Frank O’Hara, in one of his old Lunch Poems, lets us know,

I watched an armory combing its bronze bricks,  
And in the sky there were glistening rails of milk.  
Where had the swan gone, the one with the lame back?



Just one of the delicious things going on there is his shift from the sad, sophisticated surrealism of the first two lines to the vernacular (still totally wacky) flavor of the third. It's like, say, Johann Strauss becoming Duke Ellington in a breath.

John Ashbery operates even more delicately and distantly from convention than does O'Hara. He does not tend to make an Existential statement, or anti-statement, but poises his observations in a sort of ether between meaning and non-meaning. In "How Much Longer Will I Be Able to Inhabit the Divine Sepulcher? . . ." he follows "Guys / In the yard handled the belt he had made" with

Stars  
Painted the garage roof crimson and black.  
He is not a man  
Who can read these signs . . . his bones were stays . . .

And even refused to live  
In a world and refunded the hiss  
Of all that exists terribly near us  
Like you, my love, and light.

For what is obedience but the air around us  
To the house? For which the federal men came  
In a minute after the sidewalk  
Had taken you home? ("Latin . . . blossom . . .")

After which you led me to the water  
And bade me drink, which I did, owing to your kindness . . .

To pick up on the initial divine deadpan, the first two lines, he implies several removes of sensibility. Classic style would perhaps have had the stars paint the roof silver, Romantic: gold, Naturalistic: yellowish-gray, T.S. Eliot: harsh mauve, O'Hara: the color of dead geese, etc., but Ashbery has it "crimson and black," a combination interesting because it is just as "grand" as gold and silver, yet quite nonastral. This correspondence of levels rather than substance seems to me to be the key. The reader is drawn to think, how could stars paint a roof crimson and black? And to picture it. The lyric weight or lightness of words substitutes for other relationships, and pulls the mind into fantastical but solid new possibilities.

In part, a dance is produced whose terpsichorean shapes are the varying distances from common sense. Semantic music. (I think of Tenniel's illustrations for "Alice in Wonderland.")

Gertrude Stein is eternally avant-garde. Here, extracted almost at random, are three bits of her poetry:

Howard means nothing nothing at all in adding in in in English

And now all rocks are different and

All the spaces in between

A is an article.

They are usable. They are found and able and edible.

And so they are predetermined and trimmed.

As I take it, the "meanings" expressed in these fragments are, respectively:

the emptiness or distorting quality of names –

the sculptural quality of all spaces and things –

the organic nature of even abstract words.

How these nudges help us focus on an animism of language! Attention is specifically turned toward the Whole. But to emphasize paraphrase is invariably to lessen the work.

So forget what I just said. Stein, by so boldly violating conventional grammatical, at the same time being fully expressive yet briefer than convention could manage, shows up our "pragmatic" assumptions about language, is both incongruous and superior, as poetry should be, and enduringly funny.

Here's a little poem by the late Tim Dlugos:

#### INCREDIBLE RISKS

I take incredible  
risks with my poems,  
which is why they  
always turn out  
so fine.

I'll stick my neck out and make a really good little critique of this piece. For one thing, it's expressed in a dumb, beamy, highschooly kinda diction and yet it's "about" the profound and intricate matter of poetry – aha! To elaborate, the feel of no-risk easy statement in the poem's statement contradicts the very claim the statement makes.

Little things: the tinge of mock formality lent by "which." The odd flow, due to non-phrasal linebreaks; the way the concluding word, "fine," is both normal and bizarre.

It came printed as a postcard in large blood-red letters with a familiar little “logo” of a dangerously swerving car; it’s got rhythm; it’s like looking through a knothole; in several ways it brings up thoughts of control and uncontrol, and the sexy little areas between, thoughts like: Gee maybe courage is the opposite of its very appearance, or gee, maybe about two-thirds of that.

My daughter says that in the *real* roadsign the little man in the car is wearing a little hat.

\* \* \* \*

IN SUM, there’s always some kind of jagged gulf between existence and our perceptions of existence. This gulf is humor-colored. Poetry and the other arts try to explore and create outposts in this funny no-person’s-land – while our timid or pragmatic minds continually construct coherences so that we might “get along.”

Oddly (or too evenly), people claim pragmatism (seeing stuff in terms of its usefulness) in the fold of Realism. In this common lexicon-world to be “realistic” is to turn probabilities into absolutes. How funny is that.

In other words, anything particular (interesting word), just by being there, is incongruous to the world *as we see it*, thus potentially funny.

Take any notable phrase of poetry (please) (not just from those poems *classified* as humor): “bare, ruined choir” for treebranches (well) . . . “I placed a jar in Tennessee” (exactitude of placement act vs. breadth and variety of place ((particle of motion, wave of matter)) ) – any notable phrase – and the memorable quality has to do with the splitting of the joined and/or the joining of the split. Any unique vision capitalizes on, strikes fire in, the gap between expectation and moment . . . artificial coherence and fact . . . Creation and mutation (or even equilibrium).

The improper, the misfittings, may also, yep, result in horror, bewilderment or joy, but humor’s always present underneath these panics. Horror and joy are extremes of the sort of emotional attachment that often temporarily obscures humor (bewilderment is just bewilderment: being too close to the thicket).

Here are a few miscellaneous “bullets” to end this essay with a flourish (a cluster, a list):

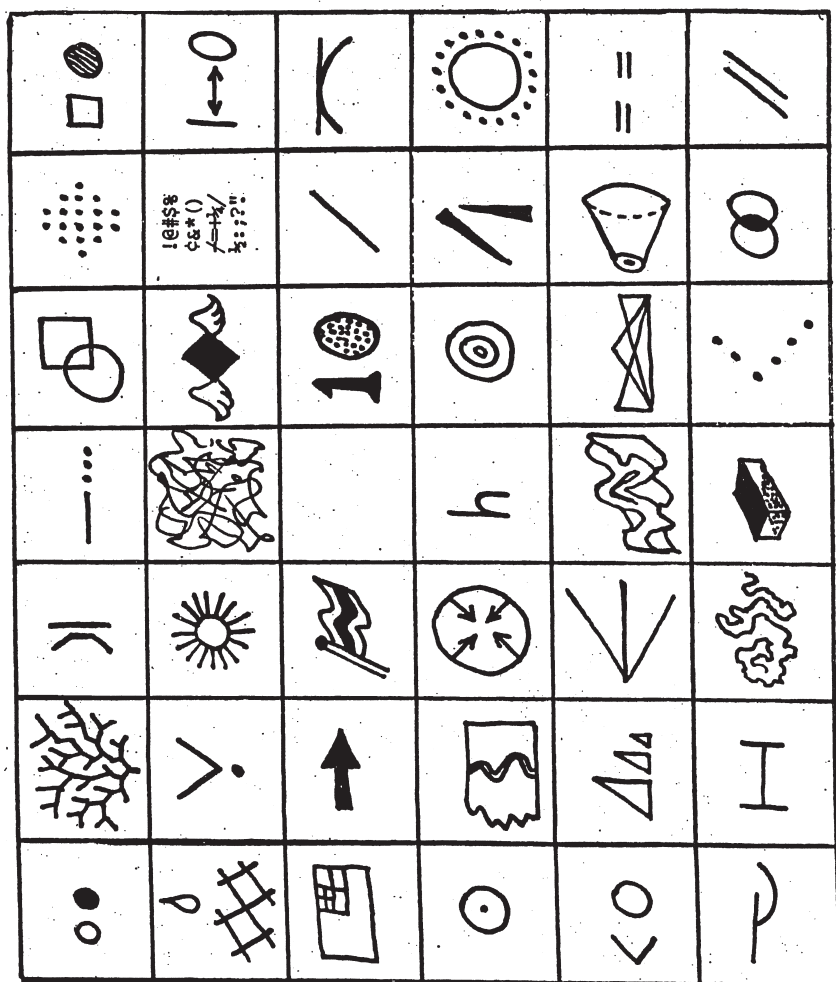
- o A baby chuckles over the words it learns.
- o Early on, the variety and mystery of learning caused jesters to be held in awe, as more than human – sometimes this feeling changed to dread and the jesters were killed.

- o Bird song variations (e.g., even with 1950's technology, 187 songs were noted from one Maine song sparrow) may be just as rich in humor as, and perhaps even more subtle than, a parody by Sonny Rollins.
- o As we used to say in the factory, "You gotta be a little crazy around here to keep from going nuts."
- o Max Eastman: "Jokes seem simple because they flash but are, in inner structure, of all speech values the most complex"
- o Serious poetry is funny as hell. Picture and contemplate Shakespeare's "Let the bird of loudest lay/ On the sole Arabian tree/ Herald sad and trumpet be . . ."
- o Walt Whitman: "I find I incorporate gneiss, coal, long-threaded moss, fruits, grains, esculent roots, and am stucco'd with quadrupeds and birds all over." (from "Song of Myself"). In which the Good Gray Poet bursts, once again, into Heisenbergian Technicolor.
- o An advertising voice in a sketch by S.J. Perelman announces, "There are three kinds of complexion, you know, butterscotch, cameo and mock nutria."
- o The Latin root for "humor" means "wetness."
- o One Lynch says that comedy is not anti-intellectual but anti-univocal – it accepts the finite (where infinite variety lives, one might add, anticipating fractals).  
Comedy takes time to be cyclical, not linear.
- o Humor has an active side, in which it performs itself, and a spectative side, in which it digs what's there.
- o Centuries ago the Smith Brothers, in England, made parodies of certain contemporary poets. They picked the right subjects, all the poets then whom time has shown to be outstanding – but out of a reverse sense of values. They thought the poets they omitted were superior, too clear and beautiful to parody. Such beauty, however, was blandness, such clarity subservience to fashion; the poets who seemed in their time weird and shaggy were the particular, thus timeless, ones.
- o If Weber and Fields trotted out on the vaudeville stage and one said, "What's two and two?" and the other said, "Four." And they turned and bowed, it would be funny.
- o Thus, *focusing on* incongruity becomes an essentialism that contradicts the spirit of incongruity —in order to get to the Other Side (a few dozen times) fast enough to avoid the traffic.
- o And this has everything to do with nature.

## APPENDIX IV

### *Qualities*

substitution	ramification	nearness	continuation	combination	plurality	transformation
relationality	focus	energy	complexity	imagination	variety	comparison
detail	emphasis	manipulation	nothing	math & random	slant	tangent
center	borders	gravity	constant	concentricity	skew	light
negativity	proportions	division & doubling	topology	reduction/ perspective	projections	equality
straight/curve	limits	indefeasibility	physicality	space	overlap	parallelism



## APPENDIX V

When Ecology, as a subject, looks to language — even when the Cause called Ecology uses language — the border, the frontier, occurrences of possible poetic quality might and have been:

poems themselves	exhortations	mongrels
of infinite “kind”	scare stuff	sweet & sour nothings
songs	babytalk	recipes
stories	anthropomorphic fables	mysteries, rebuses
surrealism	oral “street” riffs	laments
experiment	journals	rambles
slogans & bumper	myth	fantasies
stickers	statistics	Western swing
jokes	how-to manuals	name permutations
letters	lists	gossip
glossolalia	predetermined forms	flicks & flecks
definitions	red herrings	alphabet stews
newspaper headlines	soft classics	drips
essays	kisses of death	chains &
science jargon	chants	waves
	screams	

which begins to indicate an ecosystem, just on the level of taking a walk in it. Following dimensions into any one of these leads farther than we can go.

## APPENDIX VI

### Why Is the Ground Solid and Hard?

Why is the ground solid and hard? Why can't it be fluffy, soft and light? Why can't we see right through it? We could float on top of it if it was invisible. That would be fun. You would see just a glimmering glow so you could tell where it is. You could build right on top of it. You couldn't get hurt easily. It'd make more sense to have it like that and I don't know why it is like it is, hard and solid. I would like it the other way. So that is that.

—Natalie Nicholls, grade 4

Chaos

Bread toasting  
Parrots screaming  
Chaos  
Two languages  
Feet slapping cement  
Chaos  
Stairs creaking  
Heat melting on faces  
Chaos  
Food-serving street walkers  
Chaos  
Philippines

— Pauline Diaz, grade 5

Put a quarter of your favorite song  
A gallon of pink, purple, red, blue, green nail polish  
2 cups of paper  
A book with an award  
Your favorite shoes  
A teaspoon of your best friend's hair.

Now you have made Purpose Song Pie  
It's not for you to eat so feed it to your cat.  
It makes grass grow.

I'm sure your teacher would love it or maybe she won't.  
Well, don't give your best friends it.  
She'll scream when she sees her hair floating around.

— Julia Redmond, grade 3



## FROM *PARAGRAPHS*

### PREFATORY NOTE

The following is an attempt to express some of the situation with Nature.

I begin the main body of this piece by arguing with Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*—a book for which I have the highest admiration (all the more so since it forces me to complicate my opinions).

I came to use the method here of scattering language in a field because it seems to me that nature writing seldom has the impact it deserves (on the page, in the air) and that by this visceral means of placement a proper series of e m p h a s e s might be ACHIEVED — anything to catch the reader's eye —so that expressive use of space might serve as a counterpart to the  
vivid  
identification-fueled immediacies that strike off emotion and a sense of right-  
ness *when* Anthropocentric Situations are being discussed.

Audience: semi-educated amateurs over 50. And everyone else with a 10% gift for abstraction.

Save a leaf.

Jack Collom

Boulder, 1998

## SONG

for Ed Sanders & Mahalia Jackson  
to the tune of "Amazing Grace"

Appointed soil / sole ground of life  
Slow growth since coastal dawn  
    So recently your stuff was rife  
    And soon O nearly gone

---

Eight hundred kinds / of birds delight  
The North American air  
    But forests're felled in a money-fight  
    There'll be no nesting there

---

The western bluebird / sang among  
The February sage  
    Its warbles sweet were roundly flung  
    Howe'er the snow did rage

---

A little liquid / trickles down  
The thinness of the Platte  
    A million burghers swell the town  
    And that's the end of that

---

The fox squirrel's tail / jerks light as air  
Shows feathery orange core  
    The brown face dressed in short, flat hair  
    Provides the either/or

---

"Hey, Mother Nature / Father Time  
Is running up the road!"  
    "He'll never come," she said in rhyme  
    "Chronology's such a load"

---

The Cape May warbler / wormed its way  
Along the elm twig dead  
    No insects in that woody gray  
    But still its cheek was red

## THAT ART TWINKLES OUT THE DIFFERENCES IN NATIONS

Generally, the Germanics have identified with a dwindling path into the Glorious Deep Woods (where, amid the Sentimental Beauty — woops!—a Witch is waiting to Eat Them Up). The Italics have dug the City, and maybe also dug a garden, so they can talk about their world without pause. The Gallics have sneered at the others and occasionally (but not often) conquered them illustratively. The Anglics have preserved Nature *rather* well, in the style of the Walrus and the Carpenter, weeping and homily-whinnying while gobbling it (Nature) into a state of utter privilege (Nature is the privilege, Lord and Lady Bull the privileged). All this (and more!) is reflected, refracted and proven through Art—through the wrinkles in depictions of (nonexistent) Reality.

# ***THAT AMERICA HAS GALLOPED THROUGH A THINNER, MORE VARIOUS ARRAY OF TYPEMOLDS IN THIS MATTER***

Us Ameriks have pursued a different history: suddenly a big continent to slice up. The spatial openness has cleared a range of New-World responses:

Thoreau's breathtaking, orientalized, raccoon, barely controlled joy

Muir's elite, scraped-knee quotidian-ecstasy p.r. eloquence

the Hudson River School's poised mildifications

Jim Bridger's crackerbarrel come-&-get-it geysers of Big Rock Candy  
mountain

the Natty Bumppo medley of overuse and reverence in the same  
dry-powder step

Rachel Carson's genderless rhetoric of the lapping wave and  
precisely what's in it

Everyperson's Inner Real-Estate Developer, fangs lit, faced with  
the Crunch of Possibility . . .

and the quotidian p.r. eloquence of *that*, which fills the air (waves)  
nowadays (except for minor breaths and fidgets within the Discovery  
Channel).

**THAT WE ARE SQUIRTS, EVEN AS OUR  
DASH AND SPARKLE TICKLE US INTO  
AN OCEANIC DELUSION**

SUMMARY SO FAR:

WE'VE BEEN, THROUGH HISTORY, CONSIDERING NATURE TO *BE*  
AS WE SEE IT TO BE.

THIS IS IMMODEST

AND OMIT'S PHENOMENOLOGY

(OMITS THE INSIGHT THAT PERCEPTION IS

RIDICULOUSLY FRAGMENTARY

AND PROFOUNDLY DISTORTED).

IT'S LIKE A FIELD-MOUSE DESCRIBING THE WORLD —

WITH THAT SHARPNESS AND POIGNANCY

(IF IT COULD BE DONE)

AND THAT EXTREME PROVINCIALISM AS WELL.

# THAT NATURE IS... ALMOST EVERYTHING

Nature is more obvious  
in the jagged ghetto  
than in the suburbs — but the suburbs  
are larded with it.

Nature is  
more obvious in Basquiat than  
in Wordsworth — but Wordsworth  
is full of it.

The very sidewalk  
stinks  
of Nature; all  
stinks are wraiths of Nature;  
the fear of Nature *is*  
Nature;

the dismissal of Nature is like  
the whisk  
of a tail  
over a horse's ass.

# THAT WE MIGHT PROFIT BY EXPANDING AND STRENGTHENING THE SENSE OF LANGUAGE AS A SOLID RATHER THAN A LINE



SO let's begin to capitalize more consciously on the connections between Nature and its big-brained mutation: ourselves. Let's colossally, incrementally clamber farther out among the concentric circles and coordinate reflections — "I *am* what surrounds me," said Wallace Stevens.

Let's reconstruct some hum hum syntax! Let's learn to choose words so as to emphasize fleeting emphases — let's develop a capacity for suggestively cladistic nomenclature — let's include hesitancy in denotation — let's manufacture statement with such care it cannot be interpreted — let's plaster over hermeneutics with slathers of extreme subtlety — let's climb off the boat again and again.

it's like:  
"shake hands with your skin"  
TIME

\* \* \* \*

The haste of education in a cluttered world is such that we typically emerge from our schooling with a sense that truth is a series of one-on-one simplicities:

Dark Ages? Dark!  
Emerson? Great!  
Rome? Grand!

SUGAR IS SWEET and  
WEASELS ARE CRUEL!  
SUNLIGHT PRODUCES  
THE GOLDEN RULE!

We haven't had time to approach any "subject" with *rumination* — a great word! Why there are no Institutes for Ruminative Learning I can't figure. Chewing something over is both down-to-earth and transcendent. Its repetitive nature encourages the flowering of multiple truths. It heads us toward both The Fact and Pluralism— (not easy polarities, the two complexify each other).

**THAT IT'S POSSIBLE ∴ TO SEEK A  
RE-DO OF OUR ASSOCIATIONAL  
MECHANISMS...**

So if the friends of Nature include

dimwits in Birkenstocks,

privileged Pooh-bahs promoting private picnic  
possibilities,

miscellaneous misanthropes,

clouddominium dwellers,

Calvinist-o-cranks,

teenage ideal-frowners,

jog-yups,

mad or sane scientists,

jargoneros,

sunsetters who talk like dried oatmeal,

bandwagon-barnacles,

even supermarket poisoners seeking vengeance for lab rat torture —

it has nothing to do with

*you* and Nature.....



*ins*

*ert*

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view

beneath the peritoneal membrane and the abdominal  
air sac. With the hook tear through  
these membranes, if the kn-  
ife has not al-  
ready severed them.

If the bird has been pro-  
perly starved so that the in-  
testines are well out of the way,  
the upper testicle should then be v  
isible, attached to the dorsal wall o  
f the abdominal cavity. It is norma-  
lly yellow in color, but is some-  
times rather dark; it varies  
in size, depending on

the de of  
the ve of  
from lop bird,  
of a me that  
grain nt plump  
wheat of  
of a sm- to that  
all bean

if both  
testicles are to be re-  
moved from the one side, the lo-  
wer one should be removed first so that  
any hemorrhage which may result will not  
interfere with the rest of the operation.  
The lower testicle is not usually visible  
through the incision and must be lifted  
into view with the forceps before it  
can be grasped. Beginners of-  
ten find it advisable to  
remove one  
testicle from each side.

The delicate  
part of the operation is  
the actual removal of the testicle,  
because the entire organ and the connecting  
portion of the spermatic duct must be taken out  
in order to prevent the bird from becoming a "slip."  
It is therefore important that the jaws of the re-  
mover make perfect contact. Care must also be  
taken not to rupture any of the primary  
blood-vessels, or internal hemor-  
rhage will result in  
death  
before the bird is removed  
from the operating table.

# THAT TIME IS THE STUDY WE MUST MAKE

The key factor in thinking oneself or not thinking oneself into Nature is time. There's animal time (which we're still living in) and ecology time (which we *Affect* but don't come close to feeling).

Nature's too slow.  
People get  
bored.

T		T
PRI	OR	ITY
M		M
E		E

It's not natural for us humans to project emotion over much time.

Emotion basically flourishes and falls momentarily. We *live* in the moment.

We praise ourselves for being "real" by living spontaneously. The person who "plans" too much is seen as bloodless, calculating.

We do work emotion into year-long anticipations, as of a trip, or even 30-year habituations of affect (love, etc.).

But the most we can feel along a chronology line is some dim concern for our grandchildren. (Set 'em up!)

Nobody has any sensibility for longer than a century down the road.

A blink in ecologic time !

. . . . .

But it's more and more the case that people have been taught less and less. What happens then? Idealisms of *tabula rasa* and the Noble Savage would have it that the unfettered self opens sweetly like a flower. Good luck! What we've mainly observed the last couple of decades is that the unfettered self opens to lowest-common-denominator manipulations of power and appetite. It's natural! (Flick eye-film kiss to any apocalips.)

For people accustomed to benumbing repetitions of extreme verbiage:

“Thanks for saving the world, Superman!”

“Save a world of wash time!”

“Save at World!”

“Save your *own* Galaxy, Sponge-faced Geek!”

Save *your* little world, kid? Rat-a-tat-tat!”

etc.,

another Save-the-World isn't worth going to the Fridge for.

Mixed with, exacerbated by, this jaded oatmealization of language are other problems of belief:

- Most people don't have access to intelligible science-based information on global ecology. Or not enough of it to help form a philosophy.
- “Philosophies” (in the sense of popular generalized attitudes) — such as “Nature is infinite bounty” — form 100-year retinal afterimages (aside from being hallucinatory in the first place).
- Many people are dissuaded from belief in eco-emergency by the contrary proclamations tossed about, mostly by agents of commercial organizations.
- Some people feel that they can interpret these warnings away as just more apocalyptic grandstanding.

Ah, please study! Read, read more, check different voices, flood the subjective moment, look around, consider who might gain materially from the pursuance of a particular stance— adjust accordingly.

Be a Renaissanceperson in the death chute

Stare

Be patient

Have some fun

Persevere

Write

Recycle

Every little

Bit helps

# TOPSY

Which brings  
us to thought of Gaia.  
Forget ancient Earth goddesses  
for the moment; forget personifi-  
cation of the planet. What Gaia means  
is simply ecology: that things operate  
relationally, that adjustment follows dis-  
turbance. Drop a huge (six-mile diameter)  
rock on Yucatan 65 million years ago: big  
majority of Earth's animal species gets  
wiped out (mostly by the aftereffects  
of the collision)). But the upside is  
Evolution gets up (like Joe Louis  
after being decked by Two-Ton  
Tony Galento) and proceeds  
to churn out a new wor-  
ld, featuring mam-  
mals, starring  
us (or is't  
a cameo  
role?  
)

# THAT, TOO

On the one hand, it's sentimental to urge saving this world of life.

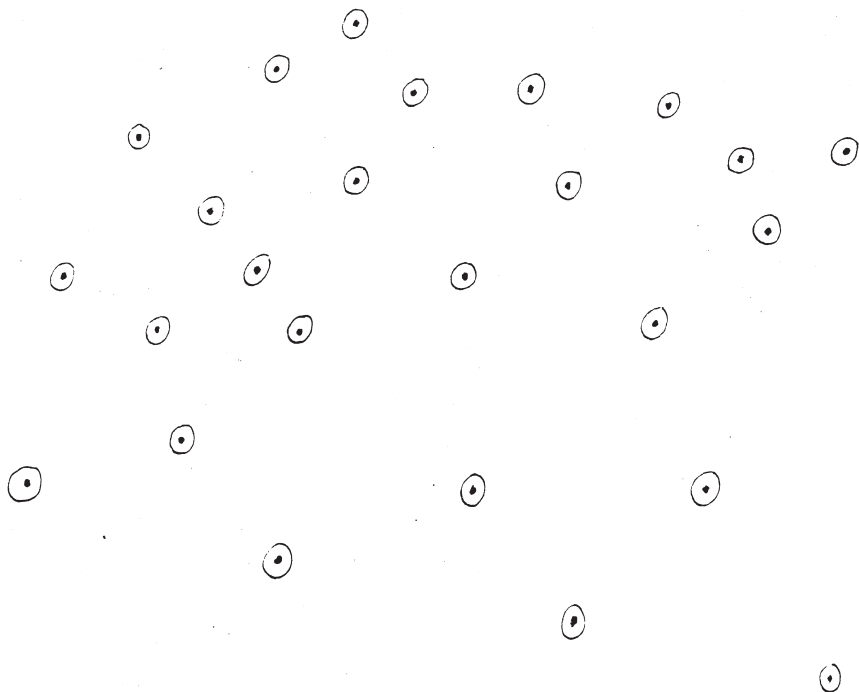
After all, we can't shoot off all the bacteria, nor get down and snuff

those sponges, perhaps, wedged deep under the Galápagos. So who cares!!

The Earth's crust'll bounce back with a whole new cast of characters no matter

what we do! Of course, there may not be humans to enjoy the novel turns

Mother Nature trots out. . . .



"We must love one another

down to  
bare rock

or die."

## MARY CROW / IQUITOS MARKET

The armless and legless boy  
performing a break dance  
to his boombox  
slaps the pavement  
with his stumps  
till a grim satisfaction  
glimmers on his bitter mouth.

Vendors offer turtle,  
river dolphin, tapir,  
and something they say  
is *carpincho* –  
feet like a rat  
pale skin like a cat.

Red and yellow peppers,  
mounds of green bananas,  
pineapples still on their stems,  
long tables of chicken guts –  
the sun beats down  
on our human necessities.

I woke from a dream  
of heart worms, my chest  
seething with motion,  
muscle oozing.  
Was it the bloody turtle shell?  
The glazed-over eyes?  
I can't wash my hands fast enough.

## SIDE TRIP

The propeller's caught in a gill net  
stretched across the channel by locals,  
and we have to cut free,  
one more price they have to pay  
for our dollars.

We're on our way  
to a fake jungle,  
the area cut over years  
and years ago, now lush tropics  
of banana trees.

There's a clamor  
for pens and balloons,  
a proud flourish of pet monkeys.  
Small girls grab at our hands  
as if leading us to the throne

of their chief at the soccer field.  
But we want to go back  
to our boat, *Climb up! Climb up!*  
*We'll show you the bathrooms!*  
This is the pretty river

where pink dolphins sport.  
Pilgrims, we've found a place  
that won't stay home.  
A boat is a wandering that is  
our answer to wandering.



## STOPOVER ON THE AMAZON

Beadwork with bone and seeds,  
tiny gourd masks, flamboyant bark paintings  
of parrots and piranhas –  
iconography of diminutives –

this is a clearing in the smoke,  
a stand of souvenirs in El Dorado.  
Before me, a sweet water plain  
laden with our wastes.

Our boat knifes through the gap.  
Our wake washed away by the rain,  
the grass on the banks will look greener  
when we've had a good rest.

Dust motes and fleas drift in the heat.  
Soon the vast face of the moon will join  
other enormities – water, sky, forest, vastness  
where the natives live.

**KEN EDWARDS / FIELD NOTES: SOUTH LONDON, SPRING**  
(EXCERPTED FROM *NOSTALGIA FOR UNKNOWN CITIES*)

A rising star, light pollution. Boom of the bass upstairs. Water running down the walls. A small, dark animal, quivering. Bird, traffic and aircraft sounds, intermittent. The wreck of the next door garden. Part of the park had been flooded. Ducks, dogs and footballers were the principal inhabitants. But all too soon, it was cold outside, and birdsong could be heard. Dark shadows, yellow light seeping, but a pale sky prepared to precipitate rain. Towards dusk, the raucous calls of three crows flying frantically around and through and between the trees of the park. There was a huge yellow moon on the eastern horizon, while Mars was still clearly visible in the southern sky. The garden partly roped off with warning tape. A flock of seagulls was illuminated briefly by the yellow uplights outside the concert-hall. Tearing up the old carpet had revealed a nest of paperclips, cotton buds and buttons. On the floor behind was detritus, and amid this a quantity of unmistakable droppings and an animal urine smell that had come to seem familiar. A feeding frenzy of bluetits and great tits in the early morning light outside the bedroom window. Some of the young trees lining the diagonal path still had a heavy freight of blossom. A litter of pekinese pups were taken out for exercise as usual, some on leads, the smaller ones packed into a pram. Deadheaded daffodils; sculpted bollards, rust-patined; magnolia blossom from the tree at the corner of King's on the Rye carpeting a whole corner of the grass. A walk through the cemetery, along the canal to a pub with a view of the great sweep of the river, buildings glinting, seagulls skimming. In the park, a black pit bull terrier hung by its teeth from a dangling tree branch, swinging back and forth for some time before falling to the ground, then leaping up to repeat the performance; its owner, a grey-bearded man in a fawn blouson, watched proudly. He observed a crow fall upon an injured pigeon, and start tearing chunks out of it while it still flapped its wings, the movements becoming less vigorous and finally ceasing; an hour later, some remains and a cloud of feathers were visible, but the following day there was no

sign. Mid-winter flashed by, the sun popped out and now foxes fucked on a piece of waste ground behind the railway embankment; they heard the vixen's screams. Grey fog laid over scrub on a whitish park; suddenly a herd of deer appeared without noise, their big eyes staring, while steam rose between the saplings. A large fox, greyish in the sodium lamplight, bounded swiftly across the road in front of the hotel and disappeared into the darkness of the park opposite. Later, unseen in the warm dark garden, the three-legged cat betrayed its presence with a faint tinkle from its collar, a familiar and comforting sound in the stillness.



## JONATHAN STALLING / WOLF HOWLS

Wolf howls begin as a relatively simple harmonic structure hovering above its fundamental, which, unmodulated in pitch, appears as a straight line across the bottom of the page. Most howls show some degree of modulation, rolling hills and falling ridges leading to or sloping down from plateaus. Its so-called fundamental frequency drones a flat line below, while the above harmonics appear as higher and higher bands of sound drifting above the fundamental's horizon line.

The following poems work within the harmonic structures of both solitary and confrontational howl forms. The solitary howl form moves higher and stops more abruptly than the confrontational howls, which tend to last longer and fade out slowly without having reached to peaks heard in the solitary or "lonesome" howl. These poems were composed to be read from left to right either simultaneously (in multiple voices) or from their "fundamental" upwards through the harmonic layers. The words that crest the uppermost contours are harmonic outliers crystallized in the sonogram as acoustic contrails.

## Conflict howl #1

Skys  
Around  
Tipped on its  
Loud smooth  
side  
noise collects about the ground  
sticks mistaken for architecture  
Wire lines appear before vanishing  
cross points at curves end  
Pierced by sound chains are strings of parenthesis  
stopped fast at the neck  
burns

## Solitary howl #1

in front soot before carbon's leaf curls moments vanish before replacements unfurl  
 throw volume's arch glass syllable Cinnabar rail feather flash a moment collects in a leaf anonymously  
 thirst initiates somewhere's distance break its glass voice trees thicken memory's immanence always on this  
 side of the pupil's gate

night folds answers telescopically unsettled amidst darkness gulls mistaken for an ocean

Solitary howl #2

Curled  
 Flame  
 cedar  
 feathers  
 Ash  
 mistaken  
 for  
 by its  
 length less song  
 than  
 slope and wake  
 jaws founpep  
 to the moon but its  
 waiting  
 sage  
 distance  
 flock's perspective buckles vision chain saw  
 buries nose in fire's pretext  
 irregular chips dive into eyes  
 restlessness would charge thought past hickory flexed arch strung sharp the sky's curve cracked

**DAVID BERRIDGE / MATERIALS OF PASTORAL: A REVIEW OF  
THOMAS A. CLARK'S *A PLACE APART*. 17PP. CAIRN EDITIONS,  
2004**

The title of *A Place Apart* constitutes the only words on its otherwise plain cover. It seems at first to be referring to the book itself, its careful solidity and construction, from the placement of the capitalized text on the stiff jacket to the visible white thread of the sewn binding. The invitation to open the book and appreciate whatever lies inside is balanced against an appreciation of it as a conceptual space.

Those who come to the object with experience of other publications put together by Thomas and Laurie Clark's Moschatel Press might associate this *Place Apart* with the glades, lanes, walks and flowers of many previous publications. Will this booklet, too, explore the *place apart* through further working of what Clark once called his "palette of imagery"?<sup>1</sup> Designed by Colin Sackett, it is heavier and physically more substantial than much of Moschatel's work which includes postcards, folded sheets and accordian booklets. It is constructed with the same awareness of the space of the book itself, the breathing between word and image and white space, page shape and book form.

After the title pages and plain white endpapers, *A Place Apart* explores these themes in its own specific context. On the verso of the first double page is spread a black and white photo in which the gable of a building, lake, mountains, grasses and sky, constitute both recognisable natural forms and arrangements of shape and line and tone. The text on the recto consists of four sentences, split into four units of three lines each and centred on the page. Each of these phrases combines physical description and metaphysical reflection; reality and the ideal; the attention to a particular place and time with a broader vocabulary of humanistic and pastoral pleasure:

At times you will need a place to go,  
to be alone or to seek  
the shelter of good company.

A few steps aside from the path, at  
a turning point, there is the chance  
of clarity and perspective.

<sup>1</sup>From a letter to Robert Stacey cited in Stacey, "Into the Order of Things: The Relations of Painting to the Poetry of Thomas A. Clark" in Peter Dent ed. *Candid Fields: Essays and Reflections on the Work of Thomas A. Clark* (Interim Press: Budleigh Salterton, 1987: 24-36).



Separate in intention,  
different by a value or a tone,  
it is a place apart.

It is as if, pushing through nettles  
and willowherb, you had entered  
the quiet of a woodland glade.

*A Place Apart* is composed of six pairs of photograph and text (the photographs are by Colin Fraser Wishart). Subsequent photographs continue the balance of realism and abstraction: emphasizing the former with an image of the play of light and form around a chair, the latter in an image where shadow and light themselves become the architecture. A final image shows the building complete, realized through the book's journey into form and light. The language facing each photograph continues the format and design of the first page, with individual units varying between two to three lines in length. It balances its evocation of the haiku against a firm adherence to the classical sentence as its determining unit. This somewhat playfully exploits a tension between a prose quality that resists the haiku's structure, at the same time as the sentences share with haiku a split two-part structure, where the second part offers a juxtaposition, disorientation, confirmation, or transforming of context: "Simply placing a cup on a table/ may be the sober act that pins/ the turning world." The book is not structured around narrative but patterns of repetition, development, variation in which certain tones dominate certain places in the book. The shift from one tone to another is akin to shifts in light throughout the day. These focus on the qualities of the building itself, the experience of dwelling within it, the arrival in and departure from a place, and the journey through life.

With each pairing, photo and text alternate from recto to verso, creating visual variation and a sense of their equal importance and shared formal qualities of framing, condensing, and developing. Each offers both repetition and variation, holding each visual or written utterance to a whole involving both the physical and metaphysical, permanent and transient, solid and void, literal and metaphorical. When a final photograph offers a view of the whole building, framed in branches as if in a glade among trees, the text creates a context not of a building but of "A fold on a hillside, / gathering the faculties, it will unfold / onto other places and times." The text compounds the photograph's sense of arrival by remarking that "Leave-taking is without pathos / unless you have first arrived." The completeness of the building relates to the changing emotions of a human life: "It is a sense of yourself you have come to, / an intelligence or light among/ personal shadows." The book's final text

views the building's form as empty space as well as construction: "You are not yet out of the wood/ but rest for a while in this clearing."

Reading *A Place Apart* evokes the variety of spaces that Clark's work has proposed and realized over thirty years. To name only two of many publications: the "space" of a book such as *After Marvell*, a response to Marvell's "The Garden" in the form of four sheets folded and stitched to make pages of different shades of green; and the use of found text in *A Ruskin Sketchbook*, where the shift from prose to poetry in Clark's excavations from Ruskin's writings transforms instrumental language into an experience where meaning emerges from an interaction of language within physical and mental space and within the formal properties of the book.

Much of this aesthetic—along with similar concepts on how to present and distribute the resultant work—is also found in the work of those contemporaries of Clark such as Ian Hamilton Finlay or Simon Cutts and Erica Van Horn with their Coracle Press. In his essay on Coracle entitled "The Gallery and the Book," Clark writes of how exhibitions at Coracle's Camberwell gallery in South London revealed to him how "often the most subtle and affecting pleasure of an exhibition occurs around and between the exhibited works, in the space the exhibition brings to life," a phenomenon which Clark likens, as he does at the conclusion of *A Place Apart*, to a glade which is "other than the trees but which would not exist without the trees." Clark describes the task of the curator and writer as "composing a living, changing space, a charged context."<sup>2</sup> Coracle's books and exhibitions demonstrate how this process applies equally to landscape, writing, curating exhibitions, and architectural space. A book such as *A Place Apart* also explores all these areas simultaneously. The different vocabularies of each of these "fields" are applied to others, as when the space is described as "A quiet place: in this case the adjective / not only qualifies but permits the noun."

A note at the end of *A Place Apart* identifies the building as a Maggie's Care Home. Founded by Maggie Jencks, the designer and wife of the architecture critic Charles Jencks, who died of cancer in 1995, the Maggie's Care Home project has commissioned a series of cancer care homes designed by, amongst others, Richard Rogers, Daniel Libeskind, and, in this instance, Frank Gehry, on a site overlooking the Tay estuary in Dundee, Scotland. Clark and Gehry can appear to be opposites, if one juxtaposes the physical and cultural prominence of Gehry's most famous building—the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao—with the quiet and often anonymous pro-

<sup>2</sup>Thomas A. Clark, "The Gallery and the Book" in *The Coracle: Coracle Press Gallery 1975-1987* (Coracle: London, 1989: 69-73).

duction, where some publications carry no date or name or place of publication, of the Clarks' Moschatel Press. In *A Place Apart*, Clark and Gehry are found to have much in common. The Dundee building's key motifs are a tall chimney modelled after a lighthouse and an asymmetrical roof, based on a shawl worn by a woman in a Vermeer painting, in which every pitch and angle is different. This connects with Clark's own engagement with visual art throughout his career, evident both in his search for written equivalents to the qualities of light, tone, colour and juxtaposition he finds in particular paintings and painters, as well as in the ongoing relationship of his work to the drawings of Laurie Clark. The building's emphasis on light and prospect is a further way in which it is organised around motifs often found in Clark's poetry.

Clark's work encourages a meditative and associative response from the reader. In the case of *A Place Apart* I am led to a web of connections different from those his work normally prompts. The building itself suggests the familiar territory of home and hearth, light and shade, rest and sanctuary, but its context connects these emotions and occasions with illness, pain, and death. Gehry's involvement prompts awareness of *a place apart* as connected not just to the space and design of Gehry's early California homes but to the large public and institutional spaces of his Guggenheim in Bilbao or the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. The understanding such a place through natural metaphors such as "glade" is also modified when one realizes that Gehry's design of this building involved an exhaustive model-making process reliant on computer software systems. In a documentary on the building shown on Scottish Television, Gehry described his own sense of how the creation of *a place apart* relates to the society of which it is a part: "I've always had this image of this truck coming down the hill at me with all of culture, all of politics, all of economics, all of hate and misery and all this stuff in it. If you stand in the way you're going to get run over. So you gotta jump on the cab and get in the driver's seat in some way."

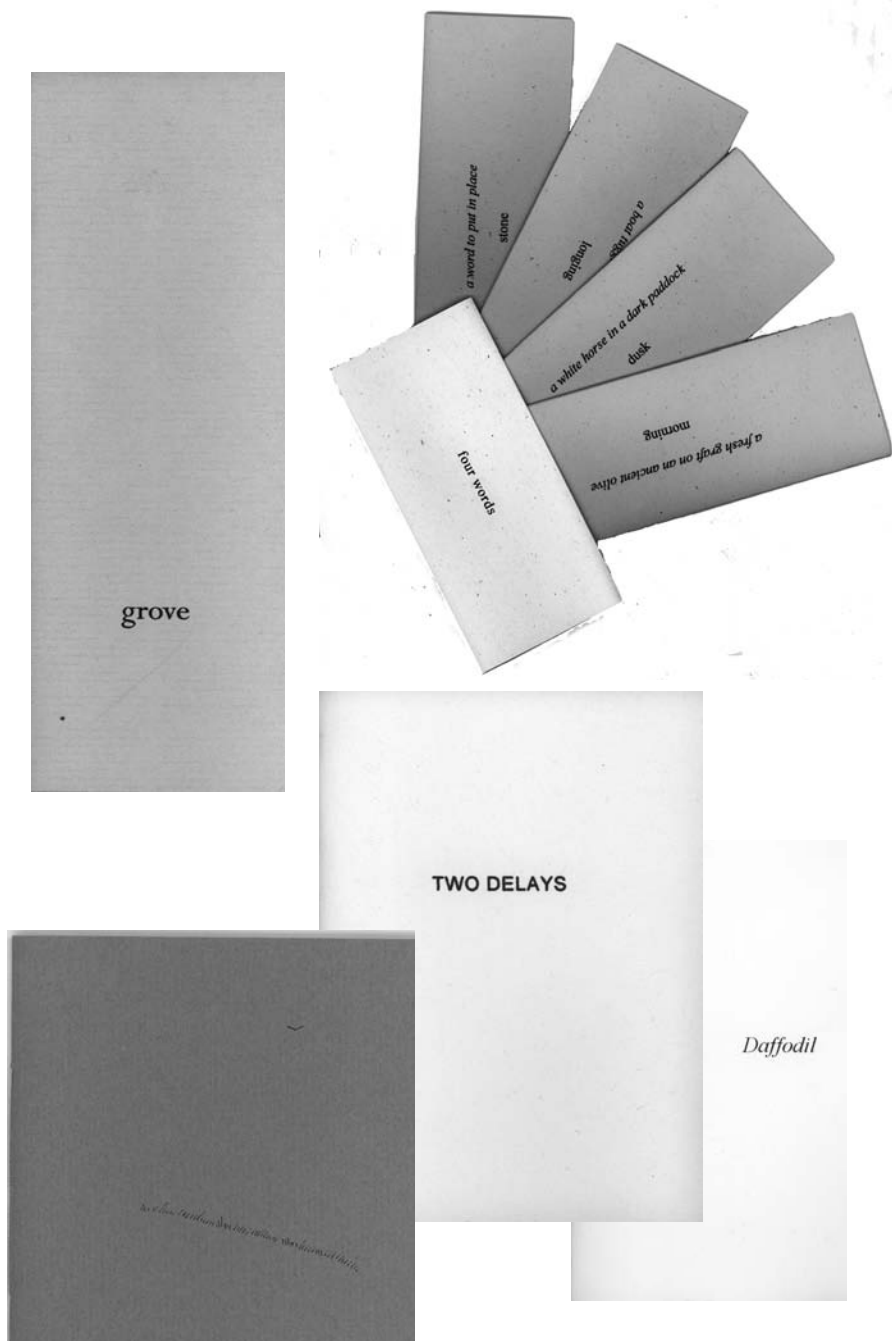
Clark, too, has often emphasized his awareness of how the places his work creates are attempts to inhabit rather than escape from the society of which he is a part. Clark has written of pastoral's association with "civil war, evictions, the countryside in chaos or, on the other hand, privilege through the favour of a patron . . . [and how] in the midst of the pastoral landscape, we find politics."<sup>3</sup> In "some Alternatives," a reflection on space Coracle published in May 1996, Clark imagines "a space flooded with natural light," "a

<sup>3</sup>Thomas A. Clark "Pastoral" in Alec Finlay, ed. *Wood Notes Wild: Essays on the Poetry and Art of Ian Hamilton Finlay* (Polygon: Edinburgh, 1995: 152-155).

space where many acts of attention/ have contributed to the stillness,” “a space where things come and go/ where people come and go / a space of change,” “a space which has been ordered / and re-ordered many times but where / no order is thought to be absolute,” “a space where risks are taken,” “a space having specific dimensions, / a history, a politics, a poetics.” This is a space difficult, perhaps impossible, to create and it leads to a poetry of delicacy, calm, peace and—in Clark’s own description—“good.” The hope is that this complex sense of place can be distinguished from a simpler, more nostalgic vision by a way of writing and reading that pays attention to all aspects of the book’s form and relationships between word and image, page size, book shape, color and texture. That emerges clearly in *A Place Apart* because such concerns also inform Gehry’s building.

Another book recently published by Clark highlights this and, both through content and similar design, forms a pair with *A Place Apart*. Alan Johnston’s *Clonegal* (2003) is a response to “Halle,” a structure built by Ulrich Ruckreim in the castle grounds at Clonegal in Ireland for the display of his sculpture. A small photograph facing the title page shows a building akin to an agricultural or industrial building, with steel frame, metal roof and bare walls covered in tree shadows suggesting that this, too, is a glade. After the title page *Clonegal* comprises four folded sheet: each a white flap on which is written a single line of text. The first and second pages read, respectively, “white, to separate and unite” and “gentle scratching of opposing marks.” Lifting the flap reveals a black and white photograph of the inside of “Halle.” The lines and frames of its functionalist architecture are modulated by light penetrating the clear corrugated plastic sheets that connect the tops of the walls to the roof. In each photograph a faint geometric shape appears to have been stencilled onto one of the walls, reflecting the contours of the building around it and appearing at first to be a shadow of some part of the building itself. The proposition is that the glade can be made of any materials or be anywhere if there remains a sense for relationship with light, for combinations of what is conventionally labelled “natural” and “human-made,” for attention and gesture that can transform space whilst remaining subordinate to it.

Looking back once again through *A Place Apart*, its stiff covers now seem evidence of a “thick description” and a vivid materiality in a world full of objects, with a title that becomes a question and a challenge.



Some works by Thomas A. Clark and the Moschatel Press (clockwise, from upper left): *grove* (1991), *four words* (2003), *Daffodil* (2001), *two delays* (n.d.), *A Standard of Music* (1997; drawing by Laurie Clark).

TA Clark sent us this note on *A Place Apart*:

The book, and my part in it, was commissioned by Colin Wishart, who took the photographs. Colin was a cancer patient at Dundee and the book was a way for him to say thanks and to make a small contribution to the work of the cancer care centre there.

The writing followed several visits to the centre and meetings with the staff. It does not so much respond to Frank Gehry's building (although it refers to it in a few places) as address the visitor to the centre. Its intention is to help.

This seems the only decent thing to do in the circumstances. In other words, I didn't want to treat the real distress of others as an opportunity for poetry or art. Rather than allowing the words to follow their own course, to embark on a pure adventure of language, there was a constant reference back to use, to the situation of someone arriving at the place in urgent need.

Whatever a writer, absent from the scene, can do in such a situation will be small, but there should at least be a will to do it. I'm heartened that the staff at the centre, kind but seasoned, thought that it would help to deepen a certain tonality of the place.

Maggie's Centre is slightly apart physically from the main hospital building at Dundee, and apart too in intention, hence the title and theme of the book.

SARA WINTZ / HUMBOLDT COUNTY COWS



**FLORINE MELNYK / TOMATOES IN HAND, I TAKE THE #2 BUS  
THRU BUFFALO**

Worm, maggot-rot, fiends of the garden –

prevailing red warriors,

Little ones, like Jin Ho and Xan Tan,

vibrant song virtuosos. Stop –

You can't stop and listen, I was thinking of worms,

beats, the idea of music.

Streets drawn out of their moments – Smith,

Jefferson's next,

Name-calls at nightfall, majesty of a bag

which I carry, and full at that.



## ETHAN PAQUIN / DEEP WILD

A bird has his bones, if he rummages  
deep spruce and hears them return  
his cackling – something twisted about

the woods, how there's too much heat,  
what that does exactly to energy. Sound,  
movement, like that of ferns – catalogued

energy for the next traveler to borrow.  
I can see generations of wings beating  
and so can the friends who kill Girl A,

stoning her beside a mossy tributary  
in which generations of blue-eyed lights  
are convened and prettied. Before she dies

she utters the way you'll utter before  
you die, before the birds ever heard  
her utter. And the trees mightn't care.

## KENNETH GOLDSMITH / STATEMENT ON *THE WEATHER*

Over the past five years, I've become devoted to the practice of non-interventionalist writing: transcription, retyping, copying; moving information from one place to another as a valid writing practice.

In the mid-90s, I recall having seen a cartoon of a man, claiming to have transferred x amount of megabytes, physically exhausted after a day of downloading. It made me consider whether the act of simply moving information from one place to another could constitute a physical / cultural act in and of itself. Almost a decade later, I am convinced that it can.

The vast amount of linguistic information surrounding us simply needs to be quantified in order to discover that we are immersed in a sea of poetry. In 1996, I wrote: "If every word spoken daily in New York City were somehow to materialize as a snowflake, each day there would be a blizzard." Today, writing in 2003, I can best restate that sentiment: "If somehow I were able to materialize the data flowing across my home wireless network, the aether I breathe would be rife with sounds and letters."

A recent book of mine, *The Weather*, is a transcription of the one-minute weather forecasts on a New York all-news station. Starting December 21, 2002 and continuing exactly one year later, it is a work in four chapters. Each chapter has its distinctive character. The piece itself is a master narrative of a year, a sub-narrative of the four chapters, and several micro-narratives within the chapters. Storms approach from afar; they get closer; they occur; they pass.

Weather, that most organic of phenomena, is framed as a transaction. Quantified, narrativized, and capitalized, the weather either aids or abets our drive time.

In the early part of the last century, F.T. Marinetti wrote a play called "Let's Murder the Moonshine." Prescient as always, Marinetti began a process we continue to complete: the moonshine—and the aether—has been dead for as long as I can remember.

SPRING (FROM *THE WEATHER*, MAKE NOW PRESS, LOS ANGELES, 2005)

FOR ALAN LICHT

Oh, we are looking at, uh, weather, uh, across, uh, Iraq obviously here for the next several days, uh, we have, uh, actually some good, good weather is expected. They did have a sandstorm here earlier, uh, over the last twelve to twenty-four hours those winds have subsided and will actually continue to subside. Uh, there will be enough of a wind across the southern portion of the country that still may cause some blowing sand tomorrow. Otherwise we're looking at clear to partly cloudy skies tonight and tomorrow, uh, the weekend, uh, it is good weather, and then we could have a storm, uh, generating some strong winds, uh, for Sunday night and Monday, uh, even the possibility of a little rain in Baghdad. Uh, currently we have, uh, uh, increasing cloudiness, uh, forecast locally tonight, uh, it's gonna be brisk and chilly, temperatures getting down into the middle-thirties, and then some, uh, intermittent rain is expected tomorrow and tomorrow night. It'll become steadier and heavier late in the day and, uh, actually a pretty good soaking tomorrow night. Uh, temperatures getting into the mid-forties tomorrow, and then staying in the forties tomorrow night. Friday it's a breezy and warmer day but, uh, still a few more showers maybe even a thunderstorm, the high of sixty degrees. Currently we have sunshine and forty-four with an east wind of ten. Repeating the current temperature forty-four, going up to forty-six in midtown.

We still have clouds, we still have some fog outside of the city this morning but, uh, during the afternoon the sky can brighten, the sun can peek on through, temperatures get on up into the sixties. A couple of showers and maybe a thunderstorm this evening, and then the weekend to follow looks pretty good, at least partly sunny. It'll be breezy tomorrow, the high about sixty and in the, uh, fifties for a high on Sunday. As for Middle East weather, it continues to be favorable for military operations, and that'll remain the case through Sunday, but Monday and Tuesday, there may be another episode of strong winds, poor visibilities, and, uh, even some sandstorms. Right now fifty-seven and cloudy in Central Park, temperature today going up to sixty-two.

Well, sunshine will be mixing with clouds as we go through the day today. It is going to be on the mild side again this afternoon, the high up to sixty-four degrees in midtown today. Tonight, we're partly cloudy, dropping back to a low of forty-two. We're gonna stay dry tomorrow and Monday as well. Partly to mostly sunny skies, highs in the mid-to-upper fifties, and then back to sixty-four for a high on Tuesday, with increasing clouds. No chance of rain in sight until we get to the day Wednesday. Dry weather in Baghdad for the rest of the

weekend as well, partly cloudy skies Saturday night, and also some sunshine across Baghdad on Sunday. Right now it's fifty-four degrees and sunny in Central Park, we're going up to sixty-four in midtown today.

With sunshine, the temperature's headed on up to sixty-one for the high this afternoon, partly to mostly cloudy tonight the . . . or clear to partly cloudy tonight, I should say, the low forty-six in midtown, forty in many suburbs. Tomorrow another mild day, going towards sixty-four with sunshine, then a cold front will arrive Wednesday with a couple of showers, high sixty. Rain could follow Wednesday night and Thursday morning if that front stalls and a low pressure area forms along it. Afterwards, Thursday afternoon, high fifty-four with some sunshine. In Iraq, the winds are likely to be picking up in the next twenty-four hours, raising more sand and dust into the atmosphere, and that's going to be a problem through Wednesday. Things should settle down after that, after the current storm from the Mediterranean moves past. Currently, the winds are light and variable, the relative humidity forty-six percent, fifty-five in midtown heading for sixty-one.

A nice evening, clear to partly cloudy skies overnight. We'll be in the mid-forties come daybreak, uh, tomorrow another mild day but, uh, clouds and, uh, limited sun, a couple of showers around associated with a cold front which will be moving through, especially in the afternoon and evening. Clears out later tomorrow night, and Thursday and Friday lots of sunshine and only, uh, a bit cooler, fifty-four Thursday, fifty-eight Friday. The battle-field forecast, uh, the weather is nasty over there right now. Strong winds accompanying a powerful cold front, uh, really kicking up the sand and making for poor visibility. Uh, that wind speed will gradually come down over the next twenty-four hours, but it'll still be causing some problems. Rain, in mountains, snow in northern Iraq on Wednesday, a couple of showers still down in Baghdad, uh, then better weather Thursday, right on through the weekend. Back home we have fifty-seven in Caldwell, fifty-three and sunshine in Central Park, the southeast wind at eleven. Repeating the current temperature fifty-three going down to forty-seven in midtown.

Well, not much on the radar, literally, just one shower up over northern Bergen County, and also over northeastern Morris County. And as they move off to the northeast, the balance of this afternoon is on the dry side, so you really don't need the umbrella for the most part here, sixty-eight degrees for the afternoon high. What we'll see, in terms of showers, will be for the evening rush hour, through the remainder of this evening, but already by daybreak the clouds are parting company in the wake of our most recent cool front. We're in at forty degrees, and, yeah, we're gonna cool it, now, that's what a front does. Despite the sun back there'll be a breeze tomorrow, high fifty-six. Sunshine, patchy clouds Friday with a high of fifty-eight degrees.

As for our battlefield forecast, one or two showers left over the northern two-thirds of, uh, Iraq during the course of this evening, but better weather ahead later tonight and over the next couple of days, as the wind dies down. Around here, not much wind, it's seventy in Morristown, sixty-six Belmar, sixty-four and partly sunny in Central Park going to sixty-eight in midtown.

We'll look for sunshine to be with us, uh, all day today, and temperatures will respond and get up to about the sixty degree mark, and then it'll be partly cloudy tonight, low forty-four. Increasing clouds tomorrow, a little cooler, thanks to a breeze coming in off the water, high tomorrow fifty-six. Rain at times Saturday, Saturday night, ending Sunday morning, but brisk and, uh, pretty cool the rest of the day Sunday, with the temperature not getting much at all above fifty. Weather conditions in Iraq, uh, and Kuwait have improved, ur, improved considerably over the last twenty-four hours. Skies are clear, visibilities are much better, winds are much, much lighter, and it does not look like weather is going to be, uh, any kind of a major player for at least the next few days. Around these parts, it's forty-five and sunny in Central Park, temperature today going up to sixty.

Sunshine still with us and temperature still climbing, and it should get to sixty, and even into the sixties today. It'll be coolest on the south shore of Long Island and the Connecticut coast with a southerly breeze coming in off the water. Then it clouds up tonight, could start to drizzle. We get drizzle and rain at times tomorrow, especially tomorrow night on into Sunday morning, could be some heavy rain and maybe a thunderstorm. The rain, um, er, probably at least the steady rain, ends Sunday morning, but there still may be some rain showers around Sunday afternoon, and it will be noticeably colder with temperatures no higher than the forties. Right now, though, uh, it is fifty-six degrees and sunny in Central Park, and the temperature today going up to, uh, about sixty.

Brisk and cold today, clouds and sunshine. We're going to have a high temperature near forty-two degrees and, for the Mets home opener, the real feel temperature upper twenties and low thirties, so definitely a bundle-up time, but a dry afternoon. Partly to mostly cloudy tonight, low thirty in midtown, twenty-four in outlying areas. Tomorrow turns out cloudy, and as a warm front approaches, we'll have some rain in the afternoon, could start as a little wet snow, but the temperature by end of the day, forty-four northern suburbs, fifty in central Jersey, well up in the forties in the city. Wednesday variable cloudiness, with a shower possible, high fifty, then into the fifties with a few showers on Thursday. Meanwhile on the battlefield, sunshine, seventies today, but nineties by the end of the week in many areas. Currently in midtown thirty-two degrees, relative humidity fifty-one percent, wind west northwest at twelve, thirty-two heading for forty-two.

Clouds thickening over the next couple of hours, then we expect some rain during the midday and early afternoon hours, could be some wet snow mixed in the beginning but it won't stick. High today forty-two, tonight's low forty. Tomorrow, some clouds and sun, perhaps a shower, high fifty-four. Then we'll be close to the boundary between cool air and warm air on Thursday and Friday. We're calling Thursday, clouds and sunshine, maybe a shower, high fifty-nine, then Friday partly sunny and warmer, high sixty-eight degrees, with a thunderstorm possibility in the afternoon. On the battlefield, temperatures in the eighties in the afternoon hours through midweek, getting closer to one hundred as we close out the week. Currently in midtown thirty-three degrees, relative humidity forty-nine percent, wind north at five miles per hour, thirty-three heading for forty-two.

Uh, it looks like the next couple of days we're gonna be close to a boundary between warm air, with temperatures in the seventies from Philadelphia southward, however, in upstate New York it probably stays in the thirties and forties, hopefully we get into the fifties today and tomorrow with a few breaks of sunshine. Central New Jersey and on, uh, inland, it can get into the sixties. It can always sprinkle or shower but, uh, at least through tomorrow we're not looking for much in the way of rain. Friday, rather cloudy, cool, high in the fifties, uh, chance of showers, maybe a late day thunderstorm. And then pretty cool on Saturday, may not get above fifty with some rain likely. Sunday partly sunny, but chilly, with a high of forty-eight. Right now it is forty-five and mostly cloudy in Central Park, temperature today going up to fifty-four.

A mostly cloudy, cool day coming up today, the temperature will get to about fifty, or maybe or maybe the low fifties, and that's about it, drops back to about forty with some clouds and patchy fog and drizzle tonight. Then it'll start to rain tomorrow, probably late in the day, we'll have rain tomorrow night on into the day on Saturday, with a high Saturday into the fifties. No, uh, genuine prospects for sunshine until Sunday, but even then it'll be chilly, a high around fifty. Uh, battlefield weather is sunny and hot in, uh, Baghdad, the temperature into the low nineties at this moment, and it'll be middle-to-upper nineties tomorrow, and over the weekend with one hundred degrees plus, in the southern and eastern deserts. Some gusty winds over the weekend could cause isolated pockets of, uh, blowing sand and reduced visibilities, but nothing near as widespread as last week. Right now it's forty-four and mostly cloudy in Central Park, temperature today going up to about fifty.

It's going to be overcast, drizzly, with some fog today. We'll have drizzle, rain, and fog tonight and tomorrow, uh, temperature today not going to go up much, it may even drop a couple of degrees, and the lows tonight will be near thirty in the northern and western suburbs, and that means there can be

some freezing rain, as well as just rain, high temperatures tomorrow forty-five to fifty, Sunday mostly sunny with a high around fifty. The, uh, battlefield forecast, the heat will peak Saturday, with highs in Baghdad near one hundred, then not as hot Sunday and Monday, but windy at times. Those gusty winds will pick up some sand and dust, and cause areas of reduced visibility. Right now it is forty-one and cloudy in Central Park and our temperature today going up only to forty-three.

Oh, just a damp and chilly day underway. There will be some occasional light rain and drizzle, some areas of fog, and even a rumble or two of thunder, we'll have a high of just forty-four degrees, and then windy and cold, with clearing skies tonight, low thirty-six. A sunny but windy and chilly day, with a high around fifty degrees. Monday, cloudy, windy, and cold with some snow, sleet, and rain, and we're probably going to be talking accumulations north and west of the city, Monday's high just forty degrees, though. Cloudy, with a chance for lingering rain Tuesday, especially during the morning, with a high around fifty, and partly sunny Wednesday, with a high around near fifty degrees. Battlefield forecast is as follows, we do have a partly cloudy sky with gusty winds over Saturday night, and a mix of clouds and sun, with blowing sand and dust on Sunday. It's thirty-seven degrees right now, heading up to forty-four in midtown.

We are going to have increasing and thickening clouds tonight, and, uh, temperatures will, for the most part, be between twenty-five and thirty-two at daybreak on Monday. Then get ready for the snow. It will tend to mix with some sleet and freezing rain in some locations, uh, but we're looking at a significant accumulation, especially for this time of year, uh, most places will get between four and eight inches. We've got the winter storm warnings in effect for Monday and early Monday night. It should wind down Monday night as a few flurries and some drizzle. Still, it's going to be tough getting around tomorrow, so allow yourself some extra time. The high tomorrow in the mid-thirties, Monday night's low about thirty degrees, and it's going to be cloudy on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday and on the cool side. The battlefield forecast, Baghdad tomorrow, could be a rain or, uh, thunderstorm, uh, shower. Temperatures will be in the upper eighties. It'll be hotter Tuesday. Back home, forty-one in midtown right now, clear, relative humidity forty-four percent, the wind northeast seven miles per hour. Clear and forty-one heading down to thirty-two.

It's getting closer and closer now. It is now snowing now in Hunterdon and Somerset counties, parts of southern Morris and Union counties as well, and the snow is spreading eastward. It will spread across the metropolitan area within the next hour to two hours, and then we look for heavy snow this afternoon, and on into this evening, with an average accumulation across the metropolitan

area of four to eight inches. Keep in mind during the day today, during the daylight hours, temperatures high enough so that a lot of the snow is going to melt, at least initially, on city streets and highways and parkways, but they can get slushy and slippery in spots for sure, uh, there can even be, uh, a few extra inches in the hilly areas north and west of Interstate 287, but an average, we think, of four to six or eight inches across most of the tri-state area. Right now it's thirty-six and cloudy in Central Park, temperature today going down to thirty-two.

Well, a cloudy day today, uh, there's been a little drizzle, there's been a little freezing drizzle, there'll continue to be a little drizzle at times, uh, during the day today, with a high of thirty-six. We look for some rain, eh, at times tonight and tomorrow, low tonight thirty-four, and the high tomorrow forty. It's cloudy Thursday, there's still the chance for some rain, a high in the forties. And then we may have a major storm, uh, even a nor'easter, come up the eastern seaboard Friday, Friday night, into Saturday morning. Odds favor rain, coastal areas, and maybe some gusty winds as well, high tides and all of that, clearing beginning later on Saturday. Right now it's thirty-one and cloudy in Central Park, temperature today going up to thirty-six.

We've got rain all across the metropolitan area now, there's been a little bit of sleet that's bounced around but this is, uh, mostly just a cold, wet, nasty rain and it'll rain pretty steadily into the middle part of the afternoon with, uh, a high of thirty-eight. Clouds tonight, low thirty-four. Variable cloudiness tomorrow, perhaps a few brighter intervals, and, uh, if we, uh, get even a little bit of sun, the temperature tomorrow will get into the forties. Clouds, rain and wind back for Friday, in fact, could be pretty stormy, Friday afternoon and Friday night, with winds gusting, perhaps to forty miles an hour. Clearing begins Saturday afternoon, and Sunday looks mostly sunny and pleasant with a high near sixty. Right now it's thirty-five and cloudy in Central Park, temperature today going up to thirty-eight.

Well, it will be a cool and breezy day today, but no rain, and although there'll be a lot of clouds. Uh, the sun will peek out from time to time, in place to place, and that gets temperatures into the forties for the first time all week long. Tomorrow, though, a rainy windy day, uh, windy, chilly with temperatures in the low to middle-forties, and some of the rain, tomorrow, tomorrow night, will be heavy enough to cause street and highway flooding. It clears on Saturday and Sunday looks good, mostly sunny and the high fifty-six to sixty. Iraqi weather has cooled down, it'll be dry through the weekend, relatively comfortable, sixties in the northern part of the country and, uh, no higher than the eighties in Baghdad. Right now in Central Park, forty degrees and cloudy, the high today forty-eight.



Well, it's not very nice outside, and it's not going to get a whole lot, uh, in fact, probably not going to get any better, as we go through the day. We're going to have rain intermittent today and tonight, and into tomorrow morning, some of the rain will be heavy, eh, other times, the rain can stop completely. And there will also continue to be a gusty wind, that wind gusting frequently to thirty miles per hour, and occasionally to between thirty and forty miles per hour. The temperature not much above forty, so not only is it wet, but it's kind of nasty and cold. Clearing tomorrow afternoon, though, and with the sun coming out, temperatures will jump into the fifties, and then Sunday should be mostly sunny, with a high around sixty. But right now, it's forty and raining in Central Park, and that wind out of the north-east, gusting to twenty-nine miles per hour. Repeating the current temperature forty, going up to forty-four today.

It looks like the rain has ended in New York City, it should be ending across Long Island in the next couple of hours. Clouds will break for sunshine, from west to east, across the area we'll have a high of sixty. Mostly clear, brisk, cold tonight, low falling back to about forty-two. It'll be mostly sunny tomorrow, the high of fifty-eight, partial sunshine. Nice day for your Monday, high sixty-four. Sunshine, breezy, turning much warmer for Tuesday, with the high of seventy-three degrees. Currently fifty-four degrees in Bridgeport, some rain out in Islip, fifty-one, in Central Park, fifty-seven degrees, relative humidity seventy-four percent, wind out the north, north-west at ten miles per hour. Repeating the current temperature fifty-seven going up to sixty in midtown.

Well, the region will be basting in plenty of sunshine that'll be overhead via the area of high pressure that moved in over the last twelve to twenty-four hours, a breezy and nice afternoon with the high of fifty-eight degrees. Clear and cool tonight, low forty midtown, thirty-four in the suburbs. And we'll see more in the way of sunshine, as we head through the middle part of the week, temperatures actually moderating, as we head through the day on Monday and Tuesday. Breezy Monday, high sixty-four, windy Tuesday, with a high of seventy-six degrees, sunshine, patchy clouds, breezy and warm, a high again of seventy-six. Forty-six degrees and sunny in Central Park, humidity fifty-eight percent, wind north at three miles per hour. Repeating the current temperature forty-six, we're headed up to fifty-eight in midtown.

## JONATHAN SKINNER & JULIE PATTON / PROJECT FOR *THE SWING*\*

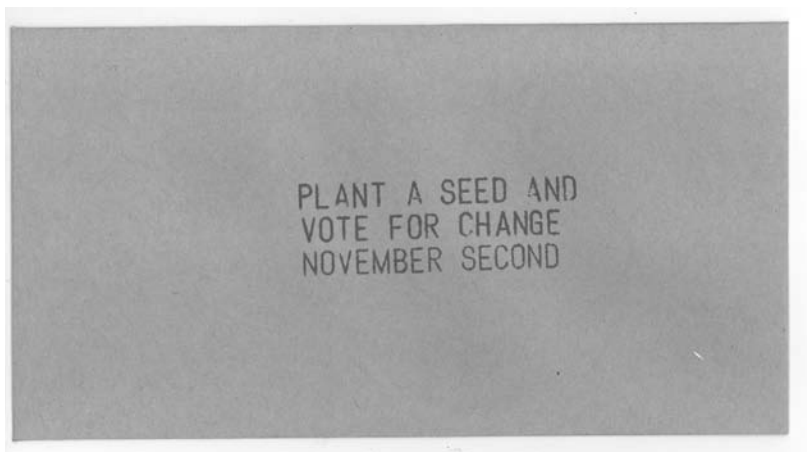
Johnny Appleseed (1774-1845), rugged individualist and gentle humanitarian, planted over a hundred thousand square miles of apple orchards in western Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana— following the course of the Muskingum River into the wild frontier. The apples you eat may well be descended, by seed or by graft, from the trees he planted. But a seeded apple tree bears little resemblance to its parent: if apples don't grow true from seeds, what was Johnny, in his mushpot hat, up to? The unpredictability of Johnny's wild apple seed (planted for cider) lies behind our hardy "self-made" eating varieties, as a range of climates and soils cast different evolutionary votes, helping Americans breed nearly 2,500 different kinds of apples.

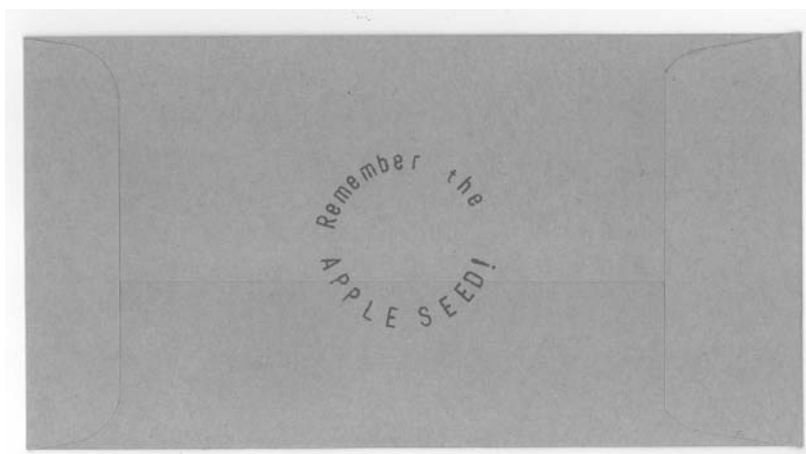
Johnny Appleseed, who went out of his way to avoid harming all creatures, saw the landscape as beneficent, rather than hostile and heathen. Planting seeds was an extraordinary act of faith in the American land, a vote in favor of the new and unpredictable as against the familiar. It was also faith, pure and simple: as Johnny Appleseed insisted, an apple tree in bloom is both a natural process and a living sermon from God.

Your vote, like a seed is a long-term investment, from which your children and grandchildren may benefit more than you. For the apple tree, as for Johnny Appleseed, success entails change and adaptability. If you like apples, and the American pie they represent, vote for something different! Plant a seed for change on November 2nd.

Paid for by The Swing. October, 2004

RECTO





Planting instructions: if you are short on time and want to try your luck, just plant your seeds in the yard (two to three for company). For surer results, germinate before transplanting. Apple seeds first need a chill period—put the seeds in the fridge between damp sheets of paper towel, in a sealed ziploc bag, for about six to eight weeks. Check on seeds once a week, changing the paper every two weeks. As needed, surface disinfect seeds in 10% chlorox for two minutes, followed by a thorough rinse in running tap water. After 60 or more days, the radicle (white root) begins to emerge; then discontinue the use of all surface disinfectants so as not to burn the root-tip. After about 60-110 days of chilling, as you see the seeds showing radicles, place them in a cool room (60°F) for 2-5 days to promote full germination. When radicles have emerged, carefully plant pre-germinated seed in 4" plastic pots with commercial potting mix. While planting seeds with the white radicles, take extra care not to damage the young radicle (1st root) tip. Grow seedling to 6-7 true leaves (takes about five to seven weeks) and transplant to nursery. Apple seed enclosed!

Voting instructions: [www.electionprotection2004.org](http://www.electionprotection2004.org)

"Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders."

Henry D. Thoreau

VERSO

\* In the Autumn of 2004, Sarah Riggs and Binky Walker organized and funded The Swing, an international coalition of artists and writers working creatively to influence the outcome of the 2004 U.S. Presidential election. Our efforts (amongst those of many others) in the "swing" state of Ohio were no match for a partisan electoral board that delivered an unpopular incumbent the State, and his second term.

## SPECIAL DOSSIER / ECOPOETICS ROUNDTABLE AT BRUNEL UNIVERSITY

The following texts issue from a panel, “Poetry Environments: An Ecopoetics Roundtable,” that I convened for the Contemporary Writing Environments conference at the Brunel Centre for Contemporary Literature, Brunel University (outside London, England) in the Summer of 2004—featuring presentations by Peter Larkin, Ian Davidson, Peter Jaeger, Alicia Cohen and myself. While Peter Larkin chose to read a statement of poetics, prepared for the occasion, and while I offered some comments around the editing of *ecopoetics*, Peter Jaeger, Ian and Alicia read selections from their work. These selections have been reprinted here, along with Peter Larkin’s statement, and introductory texts by Peter Jaeger and Ian (based on comments delivered before their readings, but prepared after the fact). Rather than reconstruct my own comments (which would be redundant in the context of this magazine—see the Editor’s Notes for issues 1-3), I have printed a statement prepared for Joshua Corey’s “New Nature Writing” Panel at the 2005 AWP (a slightly revised version of the text first published on Cahiers de Corey: [joshcorey.blogspot.com](http://joshcorey.blogspot.com)). I am grateful to all participants of the panel for their generous participation and willingness to revisit the material for publication. Thanks also to the indefatigable conference organizers, William Watkin and Stephen Benson, for taking us aboard. And to Josh, for inviting my participation in Vancouver.

— JS

## IAN DAVIDSON/ OUT OF PLACE

You asked for a statement along the lines of what I said at Brunel in way of introduction. Well I've lost it. On the other hand preparing for that event and the round table in particular sparked off a whole range of ideas. I realised that most of my work over the last 25 years or so had been a kind of exploration of ideas of place. Not an exploration of places, although most of the poems are located in one way or another, but an exploration of the ways in which places are made up and how a person might relate to them. Unlike most poets of my acquaintance I still live in the place I was brought up but, also, like most citizens of anywhere I have an ambivalent and uncertain relationship to that place. When questioned most people will say "well I'm not really local as my mother comes from Australia" or "I lived away for 10 years" or "my grandfather was Scottish" or whatever. The number of people who will say I am unequivocally local are tiny. I'm not one of them.

The place I'm talking about is north Wales, but more specifically Ynys Mon or Anglesey. It's an island about 20 miles square with a population of about 80,000 and is connected to the mainland by a road bridge and a rail bridge. Around 60% of the population are first language Welsh speakers. The island is topographically unspectacular except for its coastline, undulating rather than mountainous, but the mountains of Snowdonia form a backdrop to the east. To the west, Ireland can be seen on a clear day and the port of Holyhead is the main ferry terminal to Dublin. The A5 road goes straight from Holyhead to London and was built early in the 19th century to provide a fast route across the Irish Sea. Prior to that travel to north Wales was dangerous and difficult.

When I started writing in the late 1970's to early 1980's, I was pretty unimpressed by Welsh writing in English that sought to identify place through a kind of historical trawling back to a few essential ideas. Much of it was simply pretty standard English lyric poetry of the 1960's with a few Welsh place names thrown in. I thought I knew where I was because of how far it was from Athens or New York, not because I knew the history of some saint who lived here a few hundred years ago or because I'd been to the archives and learnt some local history. So before reading Olson or Dorn or whatever I was always looking for distant connections, things that took me out as well as led back in.

In recent years I've been researching ideas of space and spatialization and trying to work out how these ideas, and the shift from a historical consciousness to a spatial awareness, have influenced post 1945 poetry. I was intrigued, but felt like I had a tiger by the tail. I wanted to imagine myself in a broader spatial environment but knew that a full scale embrace of spatialization meant the stripping out of local difference by a mobile, global capitalism, the very cleft stick that Language poetry found itself in. To use another animal analogy in deference to ecopoetics — "you hug the bear, the bear hugs back."

On the other hand, I am interested in the structures that make up a place, how the space is produced, and how different people see the same place differently and live in it differently. I worked with archaeologists for a while and saw how they divided up the island and then worked it layer by layer. And I began to see the island in layers, some of them visible and some hidden from view. They would dig in different places but cut a horizontal layer between those places then link it up with other parts of the world with pottery from Spain and metalwork from Rome. So places had these points and links between them. The visible part of their work is the "ancient monuments," standing stones and burial chambers of which Anglesey has plenty. And then I look at the cliffs on the south west of the island and see the layers in the rock and watch the birds fly in and out and in and away. Then I thought of all the different ways the surface space of the island was constructed. There are Parish boundaries, school catchment areas, country estates, roads and railways. All these layers seem coterminous. Some seem innocuous or practical; others, like the monuments of the landed gentry, seem like ways of asserting and maintaining power. Obelisks are strategically placed so they're visible from all parts of the estate. Big country houses cast a shadow, and I began to see this kind of imposition as a sort of bruising where these monuments cast a shadow.

These are incomplete thoughts as the project is incomplete. I still write out of specific locations, and my most recent work deals with the body itself as a place of identity for an increasingly mobile and transitory world population. I've only just started on this, burrowing back through the skin.

## IN BOG MYRTLE

(for Lee Harwood)

sighted down the broken wall to where  
a series of valleys from the ridges at the  
heads of the valleys agencies

I overlooks  
I views  
I sights  
an aim in life

mountain stand and deliver  
before setting off again, swinging a trail leg  
the angles were kind of cute  
lunch simply  
pause between breaths

they should wait until the pears drop or the  
orchard reaching out to another in the  
silence inhabitants  
used lights  
as indicators  
and could turn either way  
eyes might dim  
or the advantage point sink without a trace

the sounds rustled across the plain  
swept the surface of the lake  
as haw and  
blackthorn twisted  
which trunk was  
which myths circulated

standing before the tree and wondering  
which sloe or haw  
staring down the valley  
drawing a line  
points of view  
the things that get told  
you got me there

## NO WAY BACK

Sun shifts position  
wind from another  
quarter blockages  
the movement of water  
concentration poor or off centre  
heart turned over love and  
sex the worn rock undercut  
a wash from the west

There is no second chance only the  
rearrangement of the senses the  
pull of the heart sings discordant  
across the generations of the things that  
move us most; bone, muscle, blood  
the desire for the perception  
of beauty the desire for the  
attainment of beauty

There is no second wind  
air moving past or the blow  
to the head and catch as catch can  
a few words clutched beyond the  
point of no return he turns and  
disappears as a figure of speech  
points to the horizon look at  
that



I compose myself a series of  
crotchets minims things I could  
well do without membership  
expired and the aspiration  
to fulfil the task of a  
better world I arrange  
organs of speech clear my throat  
begin to say something

The sea drags shingle  
over and over the stone in  
heaps of stone more smooth  
granite pebbles more marble  
and what can politics tell me  
of the soft landscape  
of the body or the hard wiring  
of sex or what can landscape

Tell me of the soft politics  
of the body of the first  
fix the performed  
operation as the  
memory of a warm body etched  
in the soft tissue as it drips  
word by word as it  
tears itself sentence by

Sentence as it storms  
image through dirty image and  
the arguments go in in a parody  
of logic as if the answer is  
buried in the disorganisation  
as if once the bits and pieces  
of the past are finally slotted  
into place or maybe the

Unexamined life is the better  
option or the air from an open  
window and what can  
intelligence tell me I don't  
already know as if the tips of  
the fingers or the mobile lips  
could lie and in confidence here's  
the lines from around my eyes

From staring at the setting sun  
from a westerly coast where  
the rocks in layers lower themselves  
into the sea and the guillemots  
come and the choughs flash their  
legs or the puffins and I'm still  
scared to go up high into the  
lighthouse still and scared to look back

## FROM THIS PLACE

A number of connectives  
Muscles through flesh to bone  
Fat as a thin layer  
Wings and arms  
And what the fuck does  
Understand mean

I buy a house to keep the body warm  
Below the thinning shell  
Pumping arms to place the air between  
Everything in its place a place for  
An aid to memory  
Liver squeezed dry  
Taking away the empties  
Too much noise too many  
Appointments to be kept  
A movement of cell structure  
Loud and laughing too loud laughing  
Nothing I could not say  
Should have kept quiet  
About the blood group  
Needing fresh meat and all  
Cutting back to clean flesh  
Beating my brow  
Slapping my thigh

Taking a hit  
Giving a hand  
Moving the goalposts

Last night I stayed in  
Sparkling  
In submission  
The book reaching completion  
Withdrawn from circulation  
And going grey

## PETER LARKIN / FULLY FROM, ALL SCARCE TO

Whether my work is strictly a variety of ecopoetry I can't say, but I'm certain it does impinge on things ecological. A concern for landscape is something looser than a focus on the natural or non-human world as such, and my own writing certainly descends from a tradition of loco-descriptive poetry, not to speak of Romantic pastoral naturalism. To the extent a compromised landscape is the "field" on which my sense of ecological dynamics has to operate, though, there is considerable overlap, but also some tension. Landscape is also the terrain across which questions of technology and geopolitics arise, which for me are refracted compulsively in the profile of the forest plantation: as arboreal configuration, industrial production, it is also the trace of shelter or nurture, not where we live.

I suppose I'm mainly concerned with the phenomenology of landscape, or with an even looser landscape allegory, where notions of surface and depth, openness or closure, voluminosity and horizon, are fatefully implicated, together with a prevailing mythos of the horizontal and the vertical, a possible neighbouring between in-finite finitudes and an infinity *for* the finite.

I like to write about trees and plantations, and sometimes appear to readers to be doing that even when not. Neither *Seek Source Bid Sink* (1995) nor *Rings Resting the Circuit* (2004) relates to trees, but the earlier title, together with *Sprout Near Severing Close* (2004) are the closest I have come to working over specific ecological materials. During the past 15 years I've been much taken with the notion of scarcity. This isn't so much a concept for me as a sourceful form of poetic thinking, one that arises from the word itself as it shifts from context to context. The term seemed to bring together a number of key concerns, suggesting itself as both a way of addressing a disquiet and launching a critique, a mode of speculative consolation or contemplative discovery. It came about in an odd but highly concrete way. At work I was leafing through a publisher's catalogue and came across a title called *Social Philosophy and Ecological Scarcity* (1989: by Keekok Lee) which, together with the blurb, set a chain of new (to me) thoughts running through my mind. The idea of scarcity struck me as a way for poetry to offset the prevailing climate of desertion and absence in the direction of a more problematic though rewarding sense of what we mean by the givenness of the natural world, of our origins within it. I was set off along a train of thought which came to feel that our relation to what we are born into or what absolutely

precedes us in a mode of attraction and desire is indeed wholly given, nothing is held back; from an ethical, aesthetic and spiritual standpoint, however, this given is not an elemental plenitude but partakes of a complex assailing scarcity. We find ourselves called to mediate both the weak margins and potent horizons of a world which will always overtake us and which will always have started where we cannot know ourselves. When the book I had seen eventually came out I found it less inspiring than I had hoped, but by then I had discovered Rufie Hueting's *New Scarcity and Economic Growth* (1980) and was to go on to read William Ophul's *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity Revisited* (1992) and Nicholas Xenos's *Scarcity and Modernity* (1989).

More often than not the ecological is presented in a post-modern context as a process of exemplary or renovatory turbulence, or what Eric Wilson in his study *Romantic Turbulence* (2000) calls (after Deleuze) a "chaosmic" ecology. This might be characterized as a defensive heterogeneity or vigilant counter-anthropocentrism. Across this, my own work has tried (in a rather speculative and indirect way) to investigate possible paths and grounds of nurture, of shelter or aspirational belonging in which the relative notions of internal poverty and distance are also important. One great dread of the postmodern is the threat of closure, but it may be we need a more relative sense of the "closural," free to operate similarly to the way in which the idea of the originary modifies our approach to origin. Luce Irigaray's writings have now familiarized us with an idea of the "half-open" and with the accompanying sense of filled rather than empty gaps. I've found in the writings of Michel Serres something equally nuanced and riskily ecological, opposing any unblinking idea of linear progression with a more complex understanding of the various "moods" (as one might say) of motion. Serres substitutes the idea of the homeorhetic (a stability of flow or circulation) as a better term than any reductive idea of the homeostatic within living self-regulating systems or bodies. He avoids a brittle unilinear innovation within which acceleration is often predatory of any more sustainable growth. And rather than just flow, he directs us to percolation, particularly in terms of the nature of time. Thus sudden crises or explosions neighbour periods of stagnation; burdensome or foolish regressions equally contribute to a fabric of rigorous linkage and sudden acceleration, all part of what he calls the intimacy of soul, no less present in the contour of a weather-front as in the pattern of a delta, or, I would add, in the unsevering differentia of a branch (Serres, 1997; Conley, 1997).

For me this maps onto a preoccupation with “site,” a place compounded of the jumps and oscillations between a global topography and the topologies of world fields. How is a place stretched and folded, how is it ribbed and reinforced (lacking which it cannot project an horizon)? How does flexibility work within and around moments of local (or finitely vertical) rigidity? This is particularly relevant while trying to write about the architecture or variable tectonics of trees. What is a threshold when encountering limit? How do apparently non-progressive links internalize or transfer differently, perhaps a sort of filter which mediates or “digests” some of the deferrals and dissipations of threshold? Can the sublime abandonments of dissemination meet with scarcer, more vulnerable receptor sites from within that minority which any nurturing always implies? Our sense of flow needs to include co-primordial obstructions to flow, as well as the capacity of those obstructions to become part of a granulation which also configures, so that percolation is differentiated as much by carrying along with it elements enigmatically less than any pure process, but the fragmentary traces of its own lining (Larkin, 1999, p 173). It is this latter quality which may lead to margins, ecotones, horizons. At the level of writing the importance of texture as distinct from text is signalled: the relative density or looseness of the weave is itself an “environment” grounding what sort of a figuring nexus a literary work can become.

Also helpful to me has been the writing of Robert Pogue Harrison and Edward S. Casey. In his book *Forests: the Shadow of Civilization* (1992) Harrison develops the idea of the “provincial”: not a literally nostalgic periphery so much as a locus where human self-abstraction from the given world remains bound to the always surrounding, never circumscribed terrain from which it was drawn away. Such provinces are not so much dense fringes as primordial fragments of opaque attachment. Casey, in books like *Getting Back into Place* (1993) and *The Fate of Place* (1997), plus many fascinating articles, has produced a rich phenomenology of the sensings of place, arguing that horizon “affords” depth as the outermost, circumambient edge of any givenness which can also offer a situatedness. Connected with this notion of horizon for me is a poetics of offering, of dedication.

The production surplus which ordains a world of corporate capital carries with it a priority of product innovation, and this can leak into a generalised sense of accelerative post-modern cultural innovation, where “resistance” slips easily to the fore of other convertible commodities. Paul Virilio, with his

insight into the nature of virtuality as immobilism and his belief that acceleration and growth are often at opposite poles, has also grounded my sense of the importance of scarcity as a strategy. Scarcity is not stasis, as it is always in excess of a self-sufficient frugality though not undermining such a basic economic reform. Scarcity resists modernity's sense of permanent climax and reverts to an ecological perception of the post-climactic, whereby urbanization itself is not definitive but has to ride the geology and climate of a much deeper world it would be the surface of (Davis, 2002). Being strategically "less" than these things, scarcity reaches out towards an horizon of desire which contextualizes consummation within anticipation, at once immediate and remote, and touches on a theme in spirituality which the fifth-century monk John Cassian called "grand poverty." Scarcity also carries with it a sensation of the precarious: that the human, so adaptable and open to transformation on a productive level, depends in fact on a very delicate niche of interaction with the natural world, which is a world retaining the initiative of both possibility and meaning (Larkin, 2000, p. 364). When it comes to spiritualizing our capacity to be in this world, our window or interface is the merest chink, but it's through that narrow defile, that startling glimpse between the enfilades of trees, that all genuinely rare answerability, the glade of participation, comes.

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## PETER JAEGER / ON A BLACK TOOTH IN FRONT

“A Black Tooth in Front” reflects on matter and on different qualities of matter. The philosophical underpinnings of the poem stem partly from the writings of Patanjali, a semi-legendary figure who lived in India around 500 BCE. Patanjali (or a composite of writers using his name) is known for writing on Ayurvedic medicine, on Sanskrit language, and on the science, philosophy and art of yoga. His interests bring together the body, the cosmos, and language—all of which he regards as matter. Matter for Patanjali not only makes up the physical environment, but also consciousness itself. He regards thoughts, emotions, desires, and language as being thoroughly material. So on this level at least Patanjali sets up a materialist theory of language and subjectivity.<sup>1</sup>

Patanjali further classifies matter into three distinct states: inertia, energy, and calm. All of matter (including human consciousness) shares a degree of one or more of these qualities. For example, we may perceive energy in a mountain waterfall, inertia in an industrial swamp, and calm in a forest lake. However, at a microscopic level, the swamp may be constituted of highly active bacteria, so it also shares the quality of energy. And also, since consciousness is material, it follows that our perception of these states is equally material. Of course, one could argue that the perception of a forest lake as being calm is a cultural cliché, a stereotypical projection of the human mind on nature. Yet that argument would not counter the materiality of our consciousness—i.e., that our conception of the world, even when culturally constituted, is material. And according to Patanjali, if our minds are material, they take part in one or more of the three states of matter.

Patanjali’s writing informs some of the theoretical background to my long poem, “A Black Tooth in Front,” recently published in *Eckhart Cars* (Salt Publishing, 2004). The poem puts together historical and contemporary discourses about matter: about the body, space, the cosmos, and nature. It draws from contemporary medical textbooks, the English romantic poets, quantum physics, and a number of other sources. Each fragment includes a specific image of matter, and the fragments shift among the three characteristics of matter elucidated by Patanjali. The sequence as a whole further stresses the materiality of language through its line length, rhythm, and alphabetical organisation. Finally, it’s a long text, and the various shifts among energy, inertia and calm that occur while performing it put stress on the performer’s body, thereby calling further attention to matter.

<sup>1</sup>Patanjali developed his thinking from the atheistic Samkya school of Hinduism by detailing the practice of yoga and by adding a theistic dimension to their philosophy. See Yoga Sutras (London: Faber and Faber) or B.K.S. Iyengar’s *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* (London: Harper Collins, 1996).

## FROM A BLACK TOOTH IN FRONT

a black tooth in front, a careless  
    ear, a spherical distribution of matter  
a vision of trees, abdomen presses  
    about ten billion billion times  
the mass of a proton, above  
    the sandy desert, above the trees, above  
the waves the sun, absolute zero  
    accelerated motion, accents of our native  
tongue, accustomed road, aching  
    eye, aching like a bridge, across  
the idle brain, act on the thumb  
    actions of the eye muscles, additional  
spatial dimensions, admiring eye  
    adventurer's hair, advocated  
"designer" black holes, after a few  
    deep breaths you inhale, after  
resting the palms, after securing  
    the head position, after sunset  
or by moonlight skies, after the bang  
    against a lady's ear, air  
is still through many a cloud, albatross's  
    blood, alders near the river  
alimentary canal, all ear  
    but never long without the heart  
all her twinkling stars, all the vertebrae  
    benefit from the stretch, almost might  
supply desert, alone on a wide  
    wide sea, along its lateral  
side, along its medial side  
    along the desert, altered eye  
of conquest, amber honey from the mountain  
    among the ancient trees, among  
the dead man's hair, among  
    the scattered stars, among the stars  
amplitude of waves an alpine spire  
    an exhalation, an infant's  
finger touched my breast, an old  
    man's hair, an opening called

the pupil, an unknown tongue  
    ancient tongue, and placing your right  
heel at the root of your left thigh  
    another sun, antimatter  
versus matter, antiparticles  
    antistrings, any chosen temperature  
any foot unworn, any  
    other species, arched roof  
of the mouth, arches of the foot, architecture  
    of the heart, arctic sea, area  
of the black hole's horizon, arena  
    within which the events of the universe  
take place, arise from neighboring  
    bony structures, around his golden  
hair, around my heart, as if  
    a human hand were there, as the spine  
and chest are fully extended  
    as the sun declines, as the sun  
retired, as will fill up the space between  
    as you exhale, ascending roar  
of desert floods, ass without an ear  
    at his feet with steadfast upward eye  
at his mouth inbreathe, at the foot  
    of that same rock, at whose  
house, atoms, attentive ear  
    auditory pathway, auditory tube  
autumn grave, awakened earth and  
    sky, azure field, azure  
fields of snow, balance your whole  
    body      except your    right leg, bare  
bleak mountain speckled thin  
    with sheep, bare branch of a half-  
uprooted tree, bare nerve  
    fibres, basketlike arrangement of nerve  
fibres, bathed in human blood  
    bear the body weight on the wrists  
and hands, beauteous terrors of the  
    earth, becalmed on sultry seas  
become tubular and form hair follicles  
    becomes continuous with the skin, before

the sun was up, behind the teeth  
    beloved by the sun, below the  
esophagus (or gullet), bend and widen your  
    elbows, bend your right knee  
and sit on your right foot bending  
    your arms at the elbows, bending your trunk  
forward and resting your chest on your right  
    thigh, beneath a goodly old  
oak tree, beneath a sun  
    that wakes, beneath so beautiful a sun  
beneath the crags, beneath the eyeball  
    beneath the flowery thorn, beneath  
the moon, beneath the sun, beneath trees  
    bent flower, beside the lake  
best blood, best fingers  
    better my tongue were mute, better  
sun from that long wintry night  
    between 5 and 6 million  
red cells in each cubic  
    millimeter, between my breast-  
plate and my skin, between the pelvic  
    rim and the floating ribs, between  
the trees beyond the sun, beyond  
    the tomb, bicuspid valve, bind  
the earth and sky together, bird and  
    flower and stone, black blood  
rolled adown, black cloud  
    black cloud that hangs and threatens  
black hair and vivid eye and  
    meager cheek, black hole  
in the heavens, black-hole entropy  
    blade of the scapula, blazing sun and  
beating shower, blazoned on a cloud  
    bleak rock, blessed shadow  
of this earth, blood comes there  
    blood cries out for blood  
blood dances freely, blood  
    hounds, blood in the heart chambers  
blood is not a simple liquid  
    blood must stream, blood

of all the house, blood of an unhappy  
man, blood sometimes clots  
within a vessel, blood with cold  
blood within her froze, bloody  
sun at noon, bloody war  
blow through my ear, blue  
ethereal field, blue flower  
blue sky above, blue sky to  
many a prisoner's eyes, bluntly  
pointed portion, blush for the crime  
in blood, body bears the strain  
and becomes more elastic, body's  
weight is carried to this arch, boiling  
sea, bones of the foot, bones  
serve as levers, borders of the lake  
borne on the head alone, bosom  
of a placid lake, both muscles flex  
the wrist, both palms supported  
from the earth, both the lumbar and the  
dorsal regions of the spine benefit  
bottom of my heart, bounteous hand  
bower where first she owned  
boy of flesh and blood, braided  
hair, brain grew hot, brain is  
one large mass, brain  
like lightning, brain so wild, brain  
through shadows stretch, brain turns  
wild, branch of the eight cranial  
nerves, branches of the leafless trees  
branchless ash, brave tongue  
breathing will be very fast and laboured  
breathless field of light, breezy  
air, the sun, the sky, bright  
flower of hope, bright on a rock  
the moonbeam played, bright star  
bright stars of ice, brighter  
cloud, bristling of the fur or ruffling of the  
feathers, broad flat annular  
band of smooth muscle, broadening  
sun, brook and bridge and grey

stone cottages, broom in flower  
    brother's blood, brown skeletons  
of leaves, budding trees, built  
    a bridge, buried among trees  
burning soil, burns like one  
    dilated sun, burnt down  
to a finger-joint, burrow in the earth  
    bursting sun, busy human  
heart weary, but in the brain  
    by keeping it parallel to the floor  
by lakes and sandy shores, by nature's  
    hand prepared, by rivulet or spring  
or wet roadside, by the frost foreclosed  
    by the moonlight river side, by the side of a  
river both deep and great, caged  
    within the flower, calm glossy  
lake, canopy of firs, cardiac  
    muscle resembles skeletal muscle  
cardiac orifice, careless as a flower  
    carries capillaries and nerves to the hair  
carries waste materials away  
    carry the sound waves to the tympanic  
membrane, cast the sad eye to  
    earth, catch the right big  
toe by bending the right knee  
    cavern's mouth, cells produced  
by red bone marrow, cells  
    with many slender extensions, central  
artery of the retina, cerebellum  
    cerebrum, channel of rock stone  
the ruinous river, chest on the floor  
    and relax, chilled each tongue to  
silence, chilled heart, church-yard  
    with sear elm-leaves strewed  
circumscribed elevation on a bone, city  
    gates will fly open, city  
pomp, city silent as the moon  
    city with banners all streaming, city-  
crowds must push, class of black  
    holes, cleft the mountain's front

cling with poisonous tooth, close  
     by this river, in this silent shade, clothe you  
 with rainbows, cloud over mid-day's  
     flaming eye, cloudless skies  
 cloudless, starless lake of blue  
     clouds rise thick with heavy lowering  
 clouds that crest the mountain's brow  
     clouds that gather round the setting  
 sun, clouds the misty brain  
     clusters of galaxies, clutched my hair up  
 coal black hair, coast  
     the silent lake, cold blast of the  
 tree, cold grave, cold  
     season, come down without bending the legs  
 common earth, common flexor  
     tendon, common sun, companion  
 of the morning star at dawn, composition  
     of the brain, comprises an unevenly shaped  
 shell of cartilage and skin, configuration  
     that a string can use, connecting one  
 region of the universe to another, consisting  
     of three quarks, consists of skin  
 conspicuous flower, construction of the valves  
     contact with the pupil's circular margin  
 contains only cone cells, contains the  
     receptors of hearing, continuous  
 as the stars, continuous  
     protoplasmic mass, cooling  
 stream, core of an atom, core  
     of my heart, corneal margin, corner  
 house, corresponding ventricle  
     cots, and hamlets, and faint city-  
 spire, could my heart's blood  
     give, countenance of the horizontal sun  
 covers but not hides the sky, cranial  
     cavity, cranial nerves arise  
 creature of the earth, creep on tiptoe  
     round this house, cross section  
 of hair, crowded firs, crowded  
     over my brain, crowned wither

dewy star, cultured field  
    curled-up dimensions, curses  
on my tongue, curvature of spacetime  
    dancing rocks, dark eyes and  
glossy locks, dark frowns  
    the rock, dark green adder's  
tongue, dashed him to the earth  
    dashed to earth, day and nights,  
summer and spring, dead calm  
    lake, death's dark house  
deep and even breathing, deep in the  
    tyrant's heart, deep is the sky  
and black, deep radiance of the setting  
    sun, deep red of the mucous  
membranes, deep the river was and crusted  
    deep-trod foot marks  
deflects the hand laterally, delicate  
    circular membranous band, delicate  
fingers on the snow, delight in the things  
    of earth, water, and skies, depressions and  
elevations of bone, desert air  
    perfumes, desert cell, desert  
lands reflect our blaze, desert  
    pines ascend, desert sands  
rise up, desert shouts  
    desert wilderness, desert's heart  
desolate in heart, desperate hand  
    dewdamps of the charnel house  
diameter of the pupils, did constant  
    meditation dry my blood?  
dimension with which we are already  
    familiar, dirge and faltering tongue  
disappointment's wintry desert  
    fling, disheveled hair all madly  
disinherited of earth, distance  
    between successive peaks or troughs  
of a wave, distracted brain, dizzy  
    in a brain, dizzy rocks, do not hold  
the breath, dome of the skull, done  
    through the nose, doubling of the known



elementary particle series  
    down beneath the trees, down that  
sunless river, down the street  
    down the wind from lake or stream  
down to a sunless sea, dragged  
    from their hovels, dreams on the banks  
and to the river talks, drear desolate  
    whiteness of his fields, dreary sea  
flows drifting on a field of ice  
    driven from their house and home, drop  
of blood, drops of that poor infant's  
    blood, drops on the cheek of one  
he lifts from earth, drunk with human  
    blood, ducts open by minute  
orifices, due to the lateral  
    twist of the trunk, due to the stretch  
of the neck, due to the tension of the spine  
    during exhalation, dusky  
corners of this house, dusky hair  
    dwellings among trees, dwells a cloud  
before my heavy eyes, dwindled  
    woods and meadows, dying heart  
dying sovereign's ear, each finger  
    contains three phalanges, each flower  
that binds the breathing locks of spring  
    each hair of his head was alive, each hand  
each heart its wonted pulse forgets  
    each heavy eyelid, each inhalation  
each sinew powerless, each tongue  
    eager eye, eager tongue  
eagles, play-mates of the mountain's  
    blast, ear converses with the heart  
ear unstunned, ears so raw and  
    red, ears throb hot  
earth and stars composed  
    a universal heaven, earth  
and water on the stumps of trees, earth  
    groaning from beneath them, earth has  
taken the infection, earth heaved  
    under them with such a groan, earth

helped him with the cry of blood, earth in a  
    dizzy motion, earth in fast thick pants  
was breathing, earth's rosy star  
    and of the dawn, earth's groaning  
earthly task to watch the skies  
    earthward bend an ear, ease  
her own full heart, eased a  
    fretted brain, echoes ominous  
over the streets, edges of the cusps  
    fit closely together, egg-  
shaped protective encasement for the brain  
    electromagnetic field, eleven  
spacetime dimensions, elliptical  
    gap separating the open lids  
elm-shadowed fields, encephalon  
    ends in a broad tendon, energy carried  
by an electromagnetic wave, energy  
    carried by waves or particles, energy  
embodied by a string wound around a  
    circular dimension of space, entangled  
in her hair, entirely beneath consciousness  
    and quite involuntarily, error  
shedding human blood, even but  
    fast breathing, evening star  
every field and bank and brae  
    every foot might fall  
every human heart, every  
    pebbly stone, every tongue

## JONATHAN SKINNER / STATEMENT FOR “NEW NATURE WRITING” PANEL AT 2005 AWP (VANCOUVER)

It has been a rich year for what might be called the “new” nature writing: Jack Collom’s *Extremes and Balances* (Farfalla Press, 2004), Brenda Iijima’s *Around Sea* (O Books, 2004), Allen Fisher’s *Entanglement* (The Gig, 2004), Stacy Szymaszek’s *Some Mariners* (Etherdome, 2004) and *Mutual Aid* (g o n g, 2004), David Hinton’s *Fossil Sky* (Archipelago, 2004) and his translations of *The Mountain Poems of Meng Hao-Jin* (Archipelago, 2004), Eleni Sikelianos’s *The California Poem* (Coffee House Press, 2004), Ian Davidson’s *At A Stretch* (Shearsman Books, 2004), Lisa Robertson’s *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* (Clear Cut Press, 2003), Michael Ives’s *The External Combustion Engine* (Future-poem Books, 2005), Jonathan Skinner’s *Political Cactus Poems* (Palm Press, 2005), J.H. Prynne’s *Furtherance* (The Figures, 2004), Jacques Roubaud’s *Grand Kyrielle du Sentiment des Choses* (Nous, 2003), Juliana Spahr’s *This Connection of Everyone With Lungs* (University of California, 2005), Theodore Enslin’s *Nine* (National Poetry Foundation, 2004), to name a few titles, focusing just on poetry . . .

Increasingly, however, I wonder at the value of the term itself “nature writing”: doesn’t all writing have “nature” in it? If only human nature, or the nature of words . . . Obviously, there is a value, and a need, for writing focused specifically on the so-called natural world—a focus that, at least in part, characterizes the above-mentioned works. To take, again, the case of poetry, ecocritics have made a useful distinction between nature poetry and ecopoetry—to paraphrase Juliana Spahr, one focuses (apolitically) only on the bird, the other considers, as well, the bulldozer about to destroy the bird’s habitat. Think Mary Oliver for nature poetry, Gary Snyder for ecopoetry. Many of the abovementioned works, issued between 2003 and 2005, hover in-between.

But I am suspicious of the term “ecopoetry”: either it’s redundant, reduplicating the “eco” already built into the ecology of words that, presumably, is poetry’s business, or it instrumentalizes (i.e. pigeonholes) poetry in a way that’s distasteful to any poet worth paying attention to. I strongly reject the perverse aim of an ecopoetry that would somehow turn us away from the tasks of poetry, to more important or urgent concerns. (Though I sympathize with the desire to get readers to look up from the page and pay attention to their surroundings.) In my own work as editor of the magazine *ecopoetics*, I have relied on the notion of

“ecopoetics” as a site for poetic attention and exchange, where many different kinds of making (not just poetry, or not even just writing, and certainly not just “ecopoetry”) can come to inform and be informed. Nevertheless, to take the notion of “nature writing” in hand, I’d like to propose a short taxonomy of nature writing (or of ecopoetry or ecopoetics). This taxonomy could be used to sort different writings, or different aspects of the same piece of writing.

The first species I’d call the *topological*, which covers the referential function most ecocritics privilege—perhaps specifically the literature and poetry of place, but more generally any referring “outside” the poem to a “natural” topos. This is a commonplace that plants at least one foot *within* the themes and motifs of pastoral tradition, as it cannot help referencing literary convention.

I borrow a chapter from Jed Rasula’s essay, *This Compost: Ecological Imperatives in American Poetry* (2004), to describe the second, *tropological* species. This we see in the current proliferation of exercises in analogy, casting poems as somehow functioning like ecosystems or complex systems, troping on language and ideas from the environmental sciences. Gary Snyder’s famous description of the poet as detritus feeder is the best-known example, though more recently, poet Marcella Durand has been making some fascinating forays into the “ecosystem poem,” in a serial and procedural mode taking somewhat after Francis Ponge. See also Angus Fletcher’s discussion of the “environment poem” in *A New Theory of American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment and the Future of Imagination* (2005).

The third species, what I call *entropological* poetics, I borrow from land artist and writer Robert Smithson: a practice engaged at the level of materials and processes, where entropy, transformation and decay are part of the creative work. Any “concrete” writing focused primarily on the procedures and materiality of the letter might fall into this category (John Cage’s “writings through” Thoreau, Ronald Johnson’s concrete *Songs of the Earth*, Ian Hamilton Finlay’s poetry garden Little Sparta, Cecilia Vicuña’s etymological ruminations, John Cayley’s electronic textual transformations), but also other kinds of “writing” that involve marking the land or natural processes and that might more properly be considered under the rubric of the visual arts (Vicuña’s “precario” installations, Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s “maintenance art,” Hamesh Fulton’s walks, Andy Goldsworthy’s countless interventions in natural materials).

Finally, I'd include a fourth, vital species: the *ethnological*. Whether nature contains the human or humanity contains nature is impossible to conclude. What we do know is that humans have been around a long time, and that, as we learn when we look at them more closely, many so-called "wild" landscapes are intensively anthropogenic. As ethnobotanist Gary Nabhan proposes, the disappearance of species and the (astonishingly rapid) disappearance of human languages on earth are intimately related, part of the same extinction. Western "nature" may be the other face of the subaltern, indigenous subject—issuing from the same conquest which, as anthropologist Walter D. Mignolo argues in *Local Histories/ Global Designs*, precedes the Cartesian cogito. Learning about the landscapes our "nature" has obscured necessarily entails tasks of translation outside Western languages and cultures; it also means becoming more self-conscious about our own ethnic projections. In this sense, an eco-poetics is always already an ethnopoetics.

This grid—of the *topological*, the *tropological*, the *entropological* and the *ethnological*—has helped me to navigate the wilderness of new nature writing, mainly to identify the different emphases of various approaches, or to separate out which aspects of a poem, say, are doing ecological work. (I tend to privilege the entropological and the ethnological over the tropological and the topological, but all dimensions are of interest.) Like all categories and labels, however, there's a real limit to the use of these species. I offer them here in the hopes that you will make mulch of them, dear readers, and send me the remnants for composting in my garden.

## ALICIA COHEN / *NORTHWEST INHABITATION LOG*

*Northwest Inhabitation Log* is a gallery installation and performance work—what I’ve loosely called an “opera”—which was shown in Portland, Oregon, in October 2003. Its libretto is a mystery narrative which draws on conventions of pastoral poetry, the horror story, the detective noir, and the Native American prayer-song. Part of the libretto is original; part of it is text excerpted and collaged from other texts, particularly books written in or about this region. I made the work in order to explore obscure, volatile, and mysterious spaces within present and historical territories of the Pacific Northwest and Portland, Oregon, in particular. Or, put another way, I made the work in order to test Chief Seattle’s claim, in his speech given on the occasion of handing over northwest tribal lands, that “there is no death only a change of worlds.”

*And when the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children’s children think themselves alone in the field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude. At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land. The White Man will never be alone. Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds.*

### THE STORY:

The project of *Northwest Inhabitation Log* is to see the invisible worlds which Seattle promises will always hover as part of “this beautiful land.” Indeed the visible Northwest is still beautiful—dramatically so. From Portland three imposing mountains rise out of the cityscape: Hood, Rainier and Mount St. Helens, whose massive peak so recently blew off, covering Portland with an inch of ash. Like the other urban post-industrial cities of the Northwest (Vancouver, B.C., Seattle), Portland is not just a city near wilderness, it is itself a rich ecosystem where wild worlds and human-made worlds overlap. A grey dome of sky shelters the region in winter and the grayness, combined with the early nightfall, lends itself to liminal dream spaces. But the grey is lit by the year-round lushness of the urban landscape. The city is riotously green—vital and full of oxygen. Perhaps it is deceptively pleasant—for truly the Northwest is a

place of vast sorrow, a place where in the short span of time since American settlers started coming in the nineteenth century, most of the ancient forests have been logged and the aboriginal peoples and species displaced or exterminated. When we look at the landscape of the Northwest we see a world transformed in the blink of an historical eye. American settlers came to mold the Northwest into a pastoral paradigm born of a European terrain. Many beings and their communities—animal and vegetable—were disappeared in the onslaught of this European imagination. But those beings are not entirely gone; they still haunt this landscape. One cannot inhabit the Northwest without being inhabited by it—the spirit and spirits of this place are powerful and rich. It transforms you. There is something frightening about this place—perhaps menacing only because at a systemic cultural level we look away from the devastating crimes committed here so recently. They long to be recognized and, I believe, we long to do the work of this seeing.

#### THE STAGE:

The “opera” is performed within a gallery installation and uses different “territories” as stages—there are seven territories. In the first territory is a “rebuilt” old growth tree. The tree is made of wood salvaged from homes that were torn down locally. That we inhabit ancient forests insofar as we live in houses built with their wood is a key theme of the opera. The second territory is a large white wall painted with the outlines of Mount St. Helens, Mount Hood, and Mount Rainier. The third territory is a fountain made from a hose with a garden-pail spout and hung from the ceiling.



# NORTHWEST INHABITATION LOG

*bloodlined hands* / *knit and web*  
*O, mother spider's spider sac*



We are living in the shelter of the ancient forests of the Pacific Northwest. The 2 x 4s used to build the houses from San Francisco to Vancouver were cut from the giants that once covered the land west of the Cascades. We're inhabiting the forests as houses as they inhabit us. They whisper in our sleep and as we walk, looking at us from photos and holding our ears in history and song. Evidence of crime is everywhere. The peoples gone seeing it. Bear, wolf, salmon, fir, and fern, and spirits roaming inside fresh hosts looking out at a glittering world, unfolding, eating, calling, making becoming.

#### THE CAST:

Bear  
Bacall (the twins)  
Becall  
Raven (the detective)  
Chorus

*Some historical background is necessary to understand the story:*

Forests began to appear in the Silurian period about 350 million years ago, reaching their peak during the Carboniferous period 270 to 220 million years ago. The Western Cascade Mountain Range was born by the end of the Miocene, about 7 million years ago. Extinction of the deciduous forest in the Pacific Northwest probably was caused by a climatic change that favored the coniferous trees and allowed the general establishment of the Douglas-fir forests as they occur today by 10,500 years ago. Crossing the Bering-Chukchi platform before its inundation some of the Native American's ancient ancestors migrated out of Alaska to the Great Plains between 15,000 and 20,000 years ago. About these first inhabitants of North America, little specific evidence is known. They did not, however, cross the Cascade-Sierra Nevada mountain ranges and reach the coastal areas of Northern California and Oregon until about 8,000 years ago. The journals of Lewis and Clark, the first imperial citizens to travel overland to the Pacific, were published 194 years ago. By 133 years ago, all West Coast indigenous tribes had been subjugated by Euro-American immigrants and, by 103 years ago, the Euro-American population inhabited nearly all areas of the state and numbered just under half a million people.

## SCENE ONE

*Chorus is singing soft and low. It is twilight. The lecturer reads: "the Circumpolar Bear cult is the surviving religious complex of what may be the oldest religion on earth." In the beginning \_\_\_\_ made the world. Bear is not creator but redeemer. It has been said that burying the dead is a practice that arose from imitation of Bear's winter hibernation. Bear goes under the ground and is reborn in the spring, hungry.*

**Bear:** I met the marauder at my door / Door / I met the marauder at my door / Door to home is heavy, wooden / I am the marauder I let in / Long bones hanging from the coat / I am the marauder / Every forest called / Called home / All its peoples / Called to bear it / Bear / Called to toll it at night / Tell / Called to tell / I met the marauder at my door / Door / I am the marauder I let in / The likeness / Teeth / Quickness / Softnesses / Of being / Of beings / Being / Toll / Beings / Refrain / I met the marauder at my door / Refrain /

## SCENE TWO

*Raven has just returned from the crime scene. He finds Becall and her double have been studying case transcripts. Having yet to find a key witness to bear the burden of truth, they muse on the origins of the crime.*

**Becall:** Revenge, Raven, is the motive kin to jealousy. Are covetousnesses ignorances? Perhaps there's spectral evidence against you.

**Raven:** I'm the private eye not the culprit. It's not for them to see me.

**Becall:** Well, you appear to hover here, just above ground.

**Raven:** Listen up, I was told to wait six moons and I counted them but as I watched moon moon became myself watching and I'm Raven, that's my name. If they've seen me they have also seen this moon becoming what gazes on it.

**Becall:** That's a mourning song. I hear you—and I will also say something about mourning and speaking. A long time ago, before there were birds, people could fly but could not count. They were not afraid, they would soar and eat only snows / no sorrows / they looked like crows, like owls, and eagles.

**Bacall:** We lived in the high places but something happened. They saw something they did not see / should not see / and then, after their vision, the people began counting. Counting made them tender and afraid or, perhaps, because

they became afraid they learned to count. They buried their dead like a bear who goes all winter up in the earth. Counting give them comfort, remind them of earth holding them up.

Raven: Why so many men at the crime scene counting are missing? It's what I'm wondering at.

Bacall: Yes, that's why I'm studying in every long hour, and there will be a trial but I foresee the jury's eyes and the judge's eyes and it will be only in the imagination we'll see the crime.

Raven: Its only with imagination that we see ever but this here is the real. The real is what happened. You can remember it with the eyes of the foreigners with a mouthful of air.

Bacall: No Raven. Are you are a criminal? You cannot name each thing—even as you love so.

Raven: I was wounded and vanished and in my mind I called out to my people and was remembered. That's all.

Becall: I read a book and in that book you said "pity me."

Raven: I say, "Father please come over here someone made me fall over / Mother please come over here someone made me fall over."

Becall: But there is no ground and nothing to hope for there is only this stage, this imagination, these peoples we're becoming.

Raven: I read in a book and in that book you said, "From the East with brutal frenzy came Heaped Injustice. Then it was wild. When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from our approach then the Wild West began." The chemical company has betrayed me. I am missing something, a document perhaps that should have come—a missive full of rights—a woman with sharp teeth and stars for hair. I have been very cold a long time. To gather and scatter the wildnesses of the witnesses we are baring our teeth and witness. A mouthful of air may lasso even a man made CEO. Even he may tell our children's children what was done under the sky to the souls of soft beings and beings of needles.

Becall: A mouthful of air holds all we saw at the scene. The spirits are this mouth. Tell them. All the brave voices are whispering to you and you are seeing it again but everything is concrete. Making the mouth stone.

Raven: The ocean is but it is like poetry, it doesn't mean to be listened to.

How to speak a crime.

Bacall: A letter came calling, the missive shattered in the messenger's hands. But we are repaired and I can sing it:, "if we consider the great binary aggregates, such as the sexes or classes, it is evident that they also cross over into molecular assemblages of a different nature, and that there is a double reciprocal dependency between them. For the two sexes imply a multiplicity of molecular combinations bringing into play not only the man in the woman and the woman in the man, but the relation of each to the animal, the plant, etc." (Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*).

Raven: Read it more slowly.

Becall: "I do not know where I leave off and you begin. The difference between the letter I and my seeing."

Raven: You make the great mystery sound clear-cut.

Becall: Many clear-cut. There is a confusion in the crime. The animal body said the mystery isn't a crime and the original sin is the alibi and that is my informant. I learned my name from tree who don't speak. All the great mammals on the earth and all the great mammals whose bones haunt the lost places are terrible and frowning.

Raven: The marauders sound one.

Becall: I am a marauder but I am not the culprit. And I'll tell you this, I love you.

Bacall: What if I love you?

Becall, Bacall: What if I love you? The White Force will come like a rip tide or a log on the waves breaking upon the shore and darkness will cover the earth like sweetness.

Raven: What's that? *Who* is the host. Who is inside you?

Becall: Have you been to the library at all? Did you read the dreadful books? That's at least one dead man you're looking for. One haunting these fields of text.

Raven: Fields reflect the minds that made them—you can see the mind imprinted on the land from a plane flying over the states.



Bacall: I am the marauder I let in. Have you read what's written in Latin on the sidewalk between Salmon and Stark? It says: "our history is the gold at Jacksonville, the logger's saw, the beaver, the salmon, the saga of rivers, of mines; the planting of a city across a wilderness, and from the beginning, making it a place of culture and education. It is a history of fortunes made and opportunities lost." (Barbara Hartwell, *Sprigs of Rosemary*).

Raven: You expect me to believe that? "In the first schema there is a tendency to see each paradigmatic set as static, while in the second schema there is a sense of movement. Both schemata, of course, are two aspects of a singular analytical perspective." (William Powers, *Sacred Language*).



Becall: Oh, oh! I am the backwoodsman reader. My axe will cut down ignorance and with the great logs of the ancient forests of the Northwest I create a clearing in this dingy little office without a window. In this dingy little office without a window is the history of Bear and Raven and Pine. I found it buried in a public library and humming downtown when I walk.

Raven: You seemed to have shifted your shape. What is your real name?

Becall, Bacall: "I was in many shapes before I was released: I was a slender, enchanted sword. I believe that it was done. I was raindrops in the air, I was stars' beam; I was a word in letters, I was a book in origin; I was lanterns of light for a year and a half; I was a bridge that stretched over sixty estuaries; I was a path, I was an eagle, I was coracle in seas; I was a spark in fire, I was wood in a bonfire; I am not one who does not sing; I have sung since I was small. I sang in the army of the trees' branches before the ruler of Britain." (*The Mabinogion*).

Raven: I love you. I see you like the eagle and the great rivers. I see you are a path and a backwoodsman. But listen we've got to dive to the bottom of this, that is my song. There is a dead man poisoning the Willamette and the Columbia. We can't fish for clues in the poisoned rivers and we can't know who we are when we can't fish.

Bacall: We'll go to see the informant. We'll watch the moon and become the branches of the tale.

### SCENE THREE

*On a hunch, Raven and Becall return to the scene of the crime to confront a famous outlaw and spirit medium.*

Raven: Are you lost?

Becall: Am I lost? I'm here. I can't remember your name . . .

Raven: I'm Raven, I'm Raven. Someone called me.

Becall: I know you and you see me. You've seen me before. We have a long ways to go and we're not birds this time.

Raven: I am following you but say what I say, "Great gold bear come out of your house."

Becall: Greatgrandfather we hear you and cubs calling out to us and we have returned from a long ways in the wilds / our home / across the seas.

Raven, Becall: Like the pure black spirit we strode the length of the thin film / of this live place. Asked wildly like the respiration of the forest covered with black.

Becall: We can't translate but hear you still—are still.

Bear: These words I speak are not my own but were given to me. My daughter. In the beginning brides and their beaus were all salted. We never forgot this first love, this first desire. We are salted and stinging. Everyone listening becomes a poet sitting at a desk or wandering and in their little eye is their words / is the history of this place / as a pupil. I am the sun and the soil. I am coming. I am all black to see. Do you have something for me?

### SCENE FOUR

*The detectives / their crime / find themselves in a dark wood, wandering. Having fallen in love with Bear, our heroes recognize a betrayal in the history of \_\_\_\_ filled with suspects, specters, speculators, and spectators. It's their home and blindness isn't the point. They invoke their ancestors who admit their names leaving traces on small stones. They lay their stones in a pile like witnesses not visitors.*

Chorus: Y'all take these stones / Stones round from the river / River rolling  
past Hanford / River rolling down the Gorge / Stinging river / Salmon sea  
bound / Round from the river / Take a stone / And holding it open your black  
eye / Pupil / Y'all take these stones / Write your name on 'em / So many names  
/ Seeing black in ink / A world rising like a wind / Like breath / Open your  
black eye / Write it / Refrain /

END



The installation was built with the help of Courtney Nyman (coordinating artist); Jennifer Gleach, Paddy Schutte, Sven Trautmann (ancient tree); Elina Tuhkanen (bear and raven shadow caster); Jennifer Gleach, Benjamin Clark, Courtney Nyman, Cynthia Star, Ben Seed, Kietn Miller, Steve Lasn (stump); Courtney Nyman, Cielo Lutino (Mount St. Helens, Rainier, Hood). Video editing by Zak Margolis. The introduction's opening premise—"we are living in the shelter of the forests of the Pacific Northwest"—and the discussion (Scene One) of the Circumpolar Bear cult are taken from Gary Snyder.

This work is dedicated to my great grandmother Ava Starr Owen Durham (born, 1894 in Portland, Oregon and died, 1942 in Los Angeles, California).

**LYNN HARRIGAN REVIEWS *THE BOOK OF MUSIC & NATURE: AN ANTHOLOGY OF SOUNDS, WORDS, THOUGHTS*, ED. DAVID ROTHENBERG AND MARTA ULVAEUS 260PP. WESLEYAN UP, 2001**

As a material object, *The Book of Music & Nature* is a book with presence. Beautifully designed with a cover illustration by Jannika Peerna, the book garnered a lot of attention as I carried it with me everywhere while reading it. Each time I set it down, someone picked it up and was quickly drawn in by one of its articles.

Organized into five sections (Roots of the Listening; Wild Echoes; The Landscape of Sound; Many Natures, Many Cultures; The Disc of Music and Nature), *The Book of Music & Nature* surveys the experiences, observations and insights of composers, writers and educators concerned about our acoustic environment. Ranging from classic texts to innovative essays, the sound artists represented explore the complexities of our relationship to the music that incorporates and arises from natural sounds.

Foundational texts include writings by John Cage, R. Murray Schafer and Hazrat Inayat Khan. Steve Lacy, David Dunn and Michael Ondaatje take us into the physicality of sound—with, respectively, the saxophone, a mockingbird, and Buddy Bolden's legendary long note. More theoretical and technical reflections on soundscape come from well-known composers and writers like Brian Eno, Douglas Quin, Pauline Oliveros, Hildegard Westerkamp and David Toop. The multicultural chapter includes an essay by Steven Feld on the Kaluli acoustic figure of "Lift-Up-Over-Sounding" derived from the Papua New Guinean soundscape, as well as pieces by Bernie Krause and Junichiro Tanizaki.

Easy to dip in and out of, the anthology contains an article and an image for every mood. Excerpts from Pauline Oliveros's *Software for People* (1983) and Hildegard Westerkamp's "Speaking from Inside the Soundscape" inspire the reader to listen right where they are, taking nothing for granted. Claude Schryer's "The Sharawadji Effect" functions as a manifesto for all those who can imagine the possibilities of natural sounds integrated into their own artistic projects. For the poets among us, Rainer Maria Rilke's discussion of "Primal Sound" explores the relationship between sound and the "plane" of



the poem. Other articles, such as John Cage's diary excerpt from the Emma Lake Music workshop in 1965, are more contemplative, simply inviting the reader to reflect on the writer's shared experience.

Numerous illustrations—including one unforgivable photograph of a "Lounge Lizard," i.e. iguana with headphones and toy guitar "singing" into a microphone—feature three of Morgan O'Hara's fascinating "Live Transmission" drawings (in unfortunately poor reproductions), as in *Movement of the hands of musicians and technicians during the CD recording session of Where's Your Cup? with Henry Threadgill's band Make A Move, New York City, 5 February 1996*.

The anthology is accompanied by a CD of magical recordings rooted in natural sounds. The first piece, an excerpt from a longer soundscape, features the song of the Pied Butcherbird from Spirey Creek. The Pied Butcherbird's dawn solo is elegant, clear and melodic, a symphonic improvisation that figures prominently against the twittering of other early risers in background. The sound is uncannily human. In contrast, Pauline Oliveros's "Poem for Change" questions the way technological "progress" has impacted on our acoustic environment. Using a demand for change as the poem's through line, Oliveros creates a startling counterpoint of sound with direct, rhetorical questions meant to startle the listener out of complacency: "Change . . . the same thing . . . Change . . . the other thing . . . Change . . . something . . . Can we give up war?" Highlighting issues of war, homelessness and racism, Oliveros ends the piece by asking "Do we respect nature?"

The answer for all the contributors to *The Book of Music & Nature* is clearly a resounding "yes!" More importantly, perhaps, this anthology offers its readers an opportunity to recover what Rilke names the "five-fingered hand of their senses," thus restoring the poetry and music of the natural world to the consciousness of each of its inhabitants.

**MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN / A SONG IN MURDEROUS TIME—  
THE POETRY OF RICHARD CADDEL: *MAGPIE WORDS: SELECTED  
POEMS 1970-2000*, WEST HOUSE BOOKS, 2002; *WRITING IN THE  
DARK*, WEST HOUSE BOOKS, 2003**

“All art constantly aspires to the condition of birdsong,” says the English poet John Bevis.<sup>1</sup> Canadian poet Lisa Robertson writes,

I wanted language to be a vulnerable and exact instrument of glass, pressures,  
and chemicals.  
It has provided us with a cry, but explains nothing. (*Rousseau's Boat*)

The territory of language as bird-cry, language as vulnerable, exact instrument, that, taken with all the other cries of living creatures, presents an unclosable eruption, rather than an explanation, is the territory of Caddel's poetics. His work reflects an acute awareness of both music and plants and animals, particularly birds. Browsing through his collections one finds an early chapbook entitled *Heron*; a collection called *Sweet Cicely* with a cover showing botanical drawings of leaves, flowers and seedpods of *Myrrhis odorata* (European chervil); another collection called *Larksongs*; and a collaboration with Tony Baker called *Monksnailsong*. A poem called “Milkwort” unfolds in Caddel's typically condensed, musically organized style:

Worker in metal.  
Place it like a charm  
under skin.  
Close to ground.

Against fear.  
Against ill-health.  
Against riches that blind  
my eyes to riches.

“Enchanter's Nightshade” is another poem involving plants. Subtitled the piece “homage to Louis Zukofsky,” Caddel engages in some Zukofskian word play, turning nightshade into

. . . night's hades not bitter  
sweet toothed leaf is hearts cling  
not a trope a white flower is  
scarcely noticed song stem so long.

<sup>1</sup>I'm indebted to Peter Quartermain for this statement. Peter's Naropa Summer Writing Program 2002 workshop focused on poetry and birdsong.

In the series “Ground,” the feeding habits of thrushes work as a recurring motif, both semantically and musically, to create a theme and variations, each variation taking a different poetic form ranging from symmetrical two-, three- or four-line stanzas to Olsonian deployments pushing the limits of the page. Thus the poem opens with its “Theme”:

Throstles feeding  
on the ground  
  
stand stiffly upright  
head cocked to one side  
  
alert for signs of prey  
near the surface  
  
running or hopping  
at intervals  
  
for a few feet  
to the next listening point

Then the first variation begins

A dark city road – a few throstles feeding  
and a street cleaner’s brush banging on the ground  
  
in the early fifties – streetlamps stand stiffly upright  
gleaming in morning. The cleaner’s head cocked to one side

The poetic method involves separating and echoing in differing rhythmic and semantic contexts the phrases first given in the “Theme.” The piece is thus composed exactly as a sonata for violin would be.

It was the description of thrushes, Caddel comments (in a 1990 interview), that enabled the poem to take shape from a set of notes gathered without a controlling objective ahead of time. Building toward something unknown in advance, waiting for the discovery that will give a piece direction and shape, and then careful editing with close attention to musicality of phrasing are key to his practice. In the following stanza, the stance of the thrush has merged with garden flowers:

The garden – a painted biscuit-tin-lid, hollyhocks  
stand stiffly upright, head cocked to one side –  
listening, as we must, to our roots –

Then later, in a piece called “Committee,” the thrush’s position merges with anger and political dishonesty:

Throstles feeding – a savage committee down  
on the ground in anger. To stand  
stiffly upright in that storm of nerves, a politician’s  
head cocked to one side in dishonesty.  
Alert for signs of prey they hover . . .

There is anger at social injustice in these poems, particularly about the materialist values dominating contemporary society, readily apparent in a poem like “For Kosovo: After Alcuin on the Sacking of Lindisfarne.” Yet Caddel (who played viola and studied music at university) consciously turned away from anger as a content-based source of poetry, and instead toward its formal and musical elements: quantity, assonance and phrasing. In a 1990 interview he commented “The difficulty with anger, of course, is that it’s very difficult to keep any kind of control on it and to keep anything which is worth putting across in it. . . . Howl obviously comes across as angry in its own way. But I can’t think of terribly many great angry poems.” He’s after something bigger than anger, he’s after the ground on which so much stands—thrushes, politicians and song. All of *Ground*, most of *Larksongsignal* and the long title poem from *Sweet Cicely* are included in *Magpie Words*. Also included is Caddel’s long poem “For the Fallen: A Reading of *Y Gododdin*” and the long poem “Underwriter”—both elegiac pieces written after the death of his son. “Underwriter” is to some extent inspired by the writings of Paul Celan, whereas “For the Fallen” uses material from the Welsh poet Aneurin’s great lament for the loss of many young men in battle.

Discussing his development as a poet in 2001 (in “Quiet Alchemy of Words,” an interview with Anthony Flowers), Caddel says he learned much from the northern English poet Basil Bunting and the American poets Bunting introduced him to: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, and Robert Creeley. A poem like “The Feet of Dafydd ap Gwilym Tapping to the Triads of Dr Williams” puts together, with great humour, British experience and American forms. In following these writers, Caddel rejected the Philip Larkin tradition, rejected poetic control in order “to produce a beaten artifact like a copper serviette ring or something finished and done with for all time,” and rather developed technique “in order to keep some degree of openness and movement” as he builds a set of notations and waits for the crucial unifying element to emerge (David Annwn interview, *Prospect into Breath*). Remarking that he wanted nothing to do with “sterile pulpit-craft,” he sees open-field poetry as an invitation to readers: “the only thing that’s important is that sense of negotiated space where writer and reader interact” (Flowers interview).

Yet Caddel clearly grew beyond the formal possibilities he absorbed from American writers, particularly in his shaping of thought and sound through musical forms, as for example in the long poem “Fantasia in the English Choral Tradition” or in the highly inventive “Rigmarole: A Struck Bell”—with its tightly structured stanzas and neat, tolling or rhythmical refrains. Six Rigmarole poems are included in *Magpie Words*, each using anchor-quotes, repetition and sound patterning in different ways. In this work, he brings to mind Canadian poet Fred Wah’s long serial poem *Music At the Heart of Thinking*. There is much of daily life and of the northern English places he loved in *Magpie Words*, along with tough practical wisdom from one who has thought hard. More than this, however, the poems powerfully move the reader into the dynamics of sound—the human voice as birdsong, which is not just a formal issue but rather an ethical stance, poignantly expressed in the psalm-like “Rigmarole: And Each Several Chamber Bless”:

. . . So  
                   trees blossom and  
       birds nest and  
 bob up and down  
       so hard, their  
                   comic act, their  
                       real need  
                   to be alive  
       . . . a  
       frame of pale gold  
                   air shifting over  
       owls, pewits, lorries,  
 everyday  
       no more  
                   than is needed.  
                       And many ways  
                       splintering light  
 birdsong, balancing  
       being in love  
                   and holding it  
                       like a flame  
       we who hold the planet  
       . . . .  
       Only being alive  
                   is left . . .

Describing a writing strategy that brings together seemingly unrelated things, Caddel says: “You take a view from one angle, then a different one, then you find a way of interlocking them, morticing them and a new thing emerges which is enlarged by, or confirmed by, or at least different to the materials of the initial viewpoints . . . let’s call it *Triangulation*” (Flowers interview). In

facing his own death as he had done in facing his son's, Caddel "triangulated," with the voices of others, in particular Robert Duncan's last work, *Ground Work II: In the Dark*. In the concluding poem, Duncan writes,

The imagination alone knows this condition.  
As if this were before the War, before  
What Is, in the dark this state  
that knows nor sleep nor waking, nor dream  
— an eternal arrest.

Caddel began a practice of literally writing in the dark outdoors in the evenings with a hand-held Psion: what emerged was a series of compact riveting condensations—some of the finest of his work. 'Uncork this rare honesty from/ a gone age,' he says in "Reporter" (he loved a good single malt), "Won't come again." The poems in *Writing in the Dark* confront death head-on with humour, rage, charm, love, political savvy and, above all, song. Under "3 LOST AND ONE HELD ONTO/ IN THE DARK MOVES/ OUT OF WINTER," we find:

*Reader*

Gone light from eyes, light of kind  
argument, a voracious spirit  
calls. This walk, that one. We're  
alone in it all, unbearable.

Starry pockets in sky at night  
'the planets sing' and we  
long to join them. No, we  
stay. Our books proved it,

while we were out, gone, nothing  
left but shells. Hold them  
to your ears hard enough  
and you'll hear the sea.

Here, again, is that bigger thing, the ground we stand on—the human condition, in a tiny dot in a vast universe.

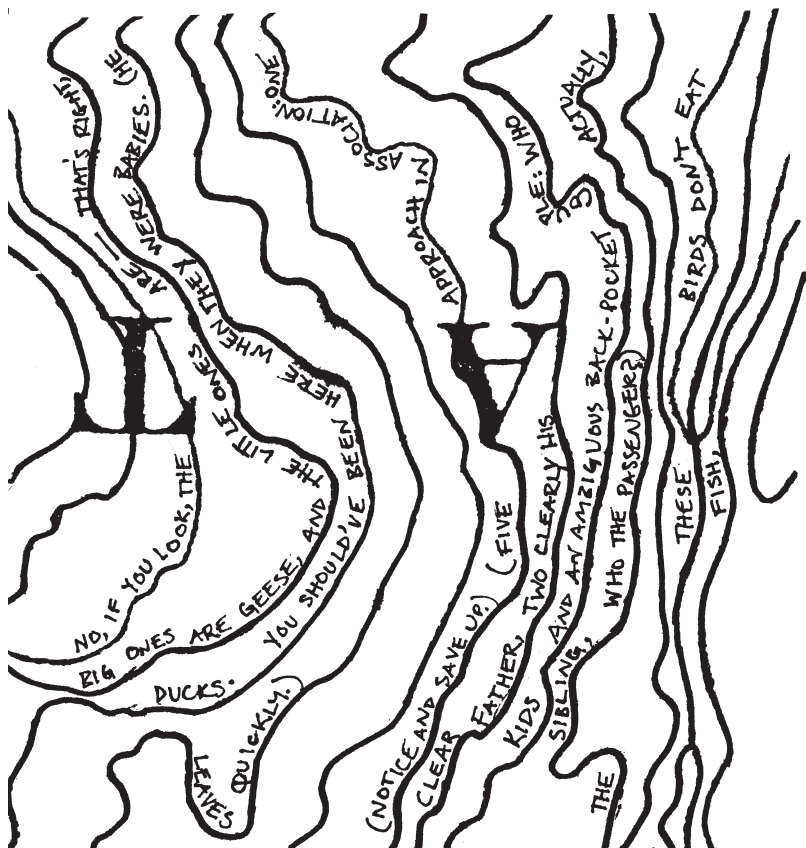
**IDENTIFICATION:** L. 5 ½. The male's blue requires sunlight to bring out its full intensity, and a singing bird against the sky can look quite dark. The nondescript female is one of the most uniformly colored of all our sparrowlike birds. In fall much of the male's blue is obscured by brown feather edges above and paler, often almost white, ones below. Old females and immature and molting males are usually a variable mixture of blue and brown. Some males in first breeding plumage are fully blue except for brown wing coverts and should not be confused with the larger, darker, heavier-billed blue grosbeak.

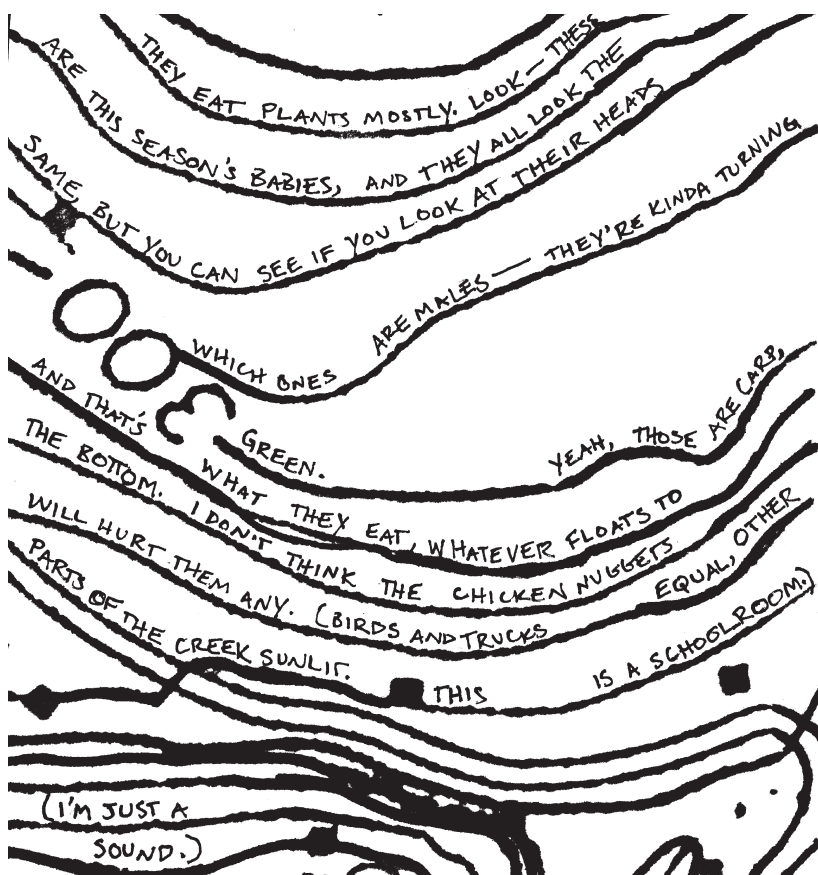
## DIDACTIC OVERTURE

“Ma ma ma,” Lyle says. Jenny says, “Bé bé bee.” Lyle picks up the phone from the floor and says, “Deh. Deh. . . . Deh.” He hands it to me. “Ba ba zy go ya.”

VOICE: The call note is a sharp, brittle *tsick*. The song, delivered from a treetop perch, is composed of well-spaced units of 1 to 3 (usually 2) high-pitched, thin, strident notes. Each group is on a different pitch, and the song descends in pitch and becomes weaker toward the end. The bird is a persistent singer throughout the day and sings into late summer.







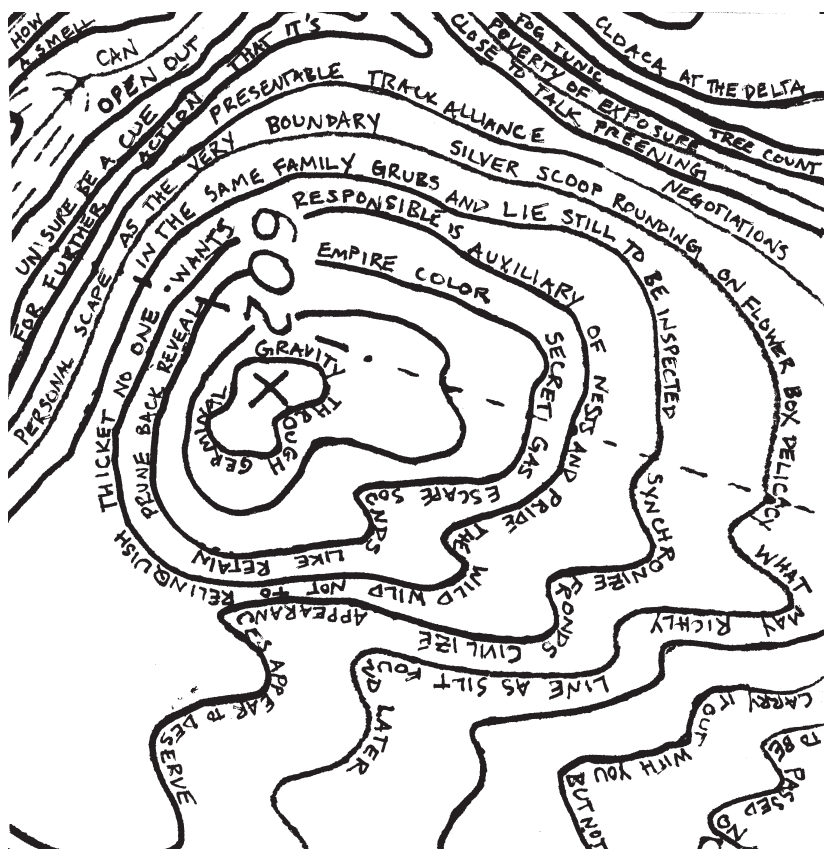
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## THE ENCHANTED NEIGHBORHOOD

In the wide driveway, Lyle splashes in puddles, digs in the places where the asphalt has crumbled. Jenny stomps. He stomps. He puts a couple of small rock chunks in his mouth and Andy extracts them. At a predetermined crack they turn him around toward the house.

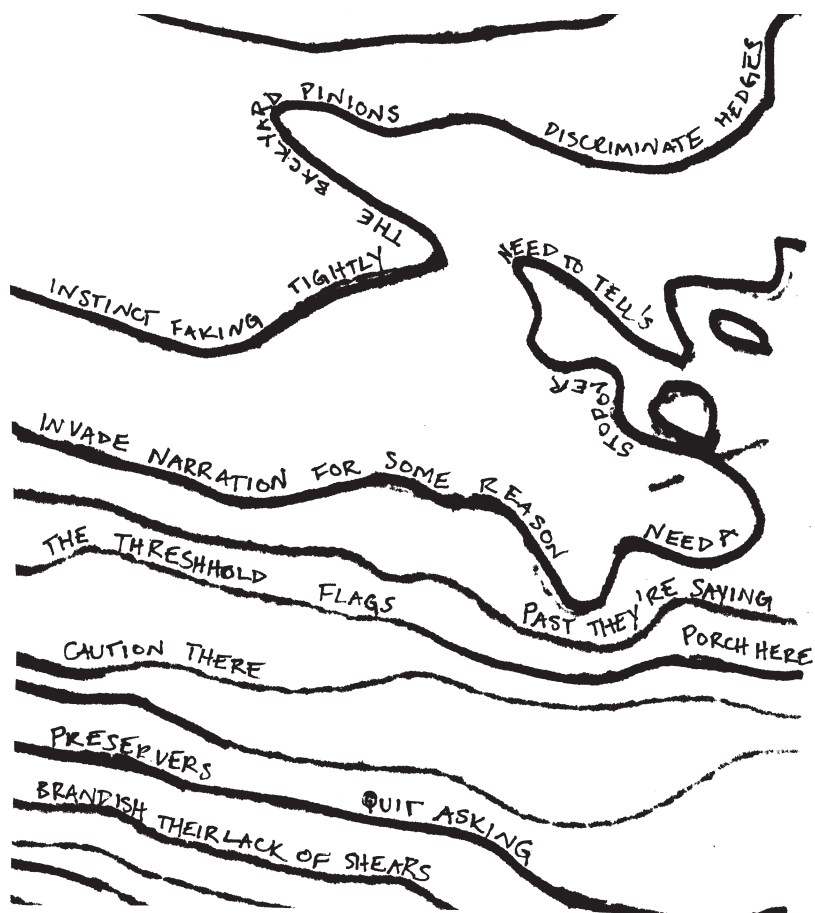
RANGE: Breeds from s. New Brunswick, s.e. Ontario, w. Michigan, and c.e. North Dakota south to c. Georgia, s. Louisiana, and c. Texas. Winters from s. Mexico and Cuba to Panama.





500

WHAT YOU BRING UNGRADED  
A HABIT  
OF PRECIOUS  
THE R  
FACE OF THE EARTH  
RECOGNIZE PUBLIC PLUMAGE  
POST HEIGHT SHACKLE LENGTH  
LABELS IN A NATURALIST'S PASSION ON THE  
COLLOQUIALLY ACCEPTED IN BRIEF  
CATEGORIZED FOR  
SWEETNESS





## CHARLES BERNSTEIN / COLLIDERINGS: O'SULLIVAN'S MEDLEYED VERSE

*Every poem was once a word.*

If culture were an accident, then the job of the poet might be to write the report rather than rectify the wrong. If culture were the product of a supreme fiction, then the poet's job might be to find the authors and clue them into things—not as they are but as they appear.

Maggie O'Sullivan begins one of her readings by invoking an “unofficial” word (also the title of one of her books). In this sense, and perhaps paradoxically, O'Sullivan is in a main line of British poets, a line that swerves, with clinamacaronic speed, from Blake to Swinburne, MacDiarmid to Raworth, Carroll to Bergvall, Cowper to Loy, Kwesi Johnson to Bunting, Rossetti to Fisher. In their own way, each of these is an anti-representative poet: one who takes the office of poetry as the creation of spaces between sanctions; outside, that is, received categories.

*You can't make a poem unless you are willing to break some verses.*

In *Roots of Lyric: Primitive Poetry and Modern Poetics*, Andrew Welsh makes the distinction between “song melos” (with its externally derived regular meter) and “charm melos” (whose more chaotic sound patterns emerge internally). O'Sullivan's poetry is unmistakably charm. In “riverrunning (realizations)” (in *Palace of Reptiles*), she put it this way: “A Song Said Otherwise, half sung / half said SINGS”; where “Otherwise” is also a music that is “Edgewise” (p. 59), wise to edges and others and also edgy; othering and auditing rather than authoring.

To half-sing a song is to stutter into poetry and back to music, your back to the music, part incantation, part pleat. “Stammering before speech,” O'Sullivan writes in “riverrunning (realizations)” (p. 60): not just *prior to* but *in the face of*. The beat is off mark so as to be on tangent. A stone thrown into a pond (pound, pun) produces rings of concentric circles around the point of entry. The charm is to create a rhythm in the counter-current, via the interference (the event): *the shortest distance between two waves is a sign*. This is what O'Sullivan calls “colliderings” (p. 63).

On October 27, 1993, O'Sullivan performed “To Our Own Day,” from *Kinship with Animals*, at SUNY-Buffalo (audio file available at PennSound). O'Sullivan called the poem, “my favorite of all the pieces I have ever written.” The poem takes O'Sullivan just over 40 seconds to read. I keep listening to it

in a loop, dozens of times. Each listening brings something new, something unfamiliar; and the rational part of my ear has a hard time comprehending how this is possible, how such a short verbal utterance could be so acoustically saturated in performance. To be sure, this experience is produced by the performance of the poem and not (not so much) by the poem's text, where fixed comprehension (however illusory) comes sooner.

Each time I listen to "To Our Own Day," I recall best the beginning, the first several words. But once the poem gets underway, I listen anew, almost without recall, the combinations of unexpected words create a sensation of newly created, permutating sense-making at each listening. I keep thinking I will "get it" (and be finished with it), but I hear different things, make different associations, each time I listen. This is the primary condition of "charm" in Welch's sense.

In the Buffalo performance, the tempo moves from a fairly quick speech tempo (some space after each word) to a more rapid song tempo (almost no space between the words) and then ends with the slightly slower speech tempo. The intonation (pitch) sounds consistent throughout: as a result there is no change in the inflection: each word is receiving a just measure of care. (I mean to relate this to "just intonation" in music, as well as to chant.)

The circular shift in tempo created a top-like effect, quickly gaining speed and slowing down slightly at the end. The words seems to trip on one another, gaining acceleration first through the echo of the accented vowel sounds and then, near the end, by a string of intense alliteration. The effect of word modulating into word is partly the result of the way O'Sullivan extends the vowels: it is as if a continuous stream of mutating vowels was punctuated by a counterflow of consonants; as if the consonants were rocks skimming in the water, surrounded by concentric circles of rippling vowel sounds.

O'Sullivan's words lead by ear. Hers is a propulsively rhythmic verse that refuses regular beat; an always morphing (morphogenic) exemplum of Henri Meschonnic's distinction between the ahistoricity of meter and embodiment of rhythm. But O'Sullivan's is less an embodied poetics than a visceral gesture ("pressed synaptic"): not an idea of the body made concrete but a seismographic incarnation of language as organ-response to the minute, shifting interactive sum of place as tectonic, temporality as temperament, self is as self does.

"Birth Palette" (*Palace of Reptiles*):

In the beginning was the enunciating; words are the residue of a hope.

So often O'Sullivan avers syntax for axial iteration, *word / ord / wo / rd / drow*, as if Adam grooved on applets and sugarcane, always on the eve of being able. Naming, here, is an avocation, kissing cousin of invocation and melody.

This is a poetry not of *me/me/me* but *it/it/it*.

Ecopoetics as echo-poetics.

"Knots, whorls, vortices"—O'Sullivan quotes this phrase from Tom Lowenstein's study of the Inuits [epigraph to "Doubtless" in *Palace of Reptiles*]; this trinity is emblematic, not of O'Sullivan's forms but of her *stamp*. Which, in turn, suggests the connection between her project and the intimations of the archaic that infuse her poems: a cross-sectional boring through time, whirling the sedimentary layers into knots. The archaic material pushes up to the surface. Collage and pulverization are at the service of a rhythmic vortex.

O'Sullivan's engagement with Joyce, especially the late work, is both intimate (in-the-sounding) and explicit (in-the-naming). If Joyce's words are like refracting, crystalline black holes, O'Sullivan's are trampolines.

"Plover bodying": in flight; "irre-reversible 'almostness'": no more irritable striving after permanence (irreversibility), the inevitability of the not-quite, the *now* in *neither*. "MAPPING OF LONGINGS / we never arrive at": *Almost* is itself subject to reverse—there, *not there*; here, *not here*. The inebriation of *fort/da*, the stadium of the "hap-hazard UNCLENCHINGS": Fort DaDa.

There is no rhythm without song and yet song codes the acoustic surfeit that is O'Sullivan's ore. "Iridesce!"

O'Sullivan's visceral vernacular ("carnal thickness"): autochthonous verse, tilling the inter-indigenous brainscape of the Celtic / Northumbrian / Welsh / Gaelic / Scots / Irish / Anglo / Saxon transloco-voco-titillated strabismus. It's not that O'Sullivan writes directly "in" any one of the languages "of these Isles," but that they form a foundational "force field" out of which her own distinctive language emerges, as figure set against its grounding.

Native to the soiled, aberrant ("errmost"), aboriginality.

Dialogic extravagance in the articulated, dithrombotic, honeycomb plu-ri-perversity.

"TO BEGIN A JOURNEY, / enunciate."

You say utterance, I say wiggled-in, undulating, wanton specificity. Utter defiance as language-particle pattern recognition system. Defiance as deference to the utterly present, actual, indigestible, sputtering imagination of the real as punctuated rivulets of fragrant nothings in the dark dawn (stark spawn) of necessity's encroaching tears.

The medleyed consciousness of these sounds, these languages, is made palpable in O'Sullivan's poems, which lend themselves to recitation, while resisting thematization. Her words spend themselves in performance, turn to gesture, as sounds wound silhouettes and rhythms imbibe ("re-aspirate") incantation.

O'Sullivan cleaves to charm: striating song with the visceral magic of shorn insistence.



Unless otherwise noted, quotations are from Maggie O'Sullivan, *"all origins are lonely"* (London: Veer Books, 2003). Also cited: *Palace of Reptiles* (Willowdale, Ontario: *The Gig*, 2003). In section 13, "of these Isles" and "force field" are taken from a conversation with O'Sullivan in July 2004. PennSounds may be accessed at [writing.upenn.edu/pennsound](http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound).

This essay was written for *The Salt Companion to Maggie O'Sullivan*, edited by Lawrence Upton. For more information, check the Salt website at [saltpublishing.com](http://saltpublishing.com).

## ARTHUR SZE / SOLSTICE QUIPU

Hong Kong 87, New York 84;  
he studies isobars on the weather map;  
  
ashes accumulate at the tip of an incense stick;  
  
mosquitoes are hatching near the Arctic Circle;  
  
300,000 acres in Arizona scorched or aflame;  
  
the aroma of *genmai* tea from a teapot with no lid;  
  
where is the Long March now?  
and Lin Biao—so what if  
he salivated behind a one-way mirror at naked women?  
  
lobstermen color code their buoys;  
  
*string sandals number knotted mine the gold of the output of s on—*  
though things are not yet in their places,  
the truth sears his fingertips;  
  
the output of gold mines,  
the number of sandals knotted on string;  
  
orange globe of sun refracted through haze;  
  
a two-year-old gasps at hummingbirds lying on a porch;  
  
he notes a torn screen, nods  
*male and female, black-chinned;*  
spells the iridescent gorget of spring.

## LA BAJADA

Driving north before Cochiti exit, he visualizes  
a bleeding anthropologist pulled from a wrecked car

but encounters only starlight and wind. Tonight  
cars glide past him at eighty. Marine biologists

believed the coelacanth was extinct until a fisherman  
off Madagascar pulled one up in a net. After 40,000

photographs in a bubble chamber, technicians had no track  
of *omega minus* and wanted to quit. Sometimes luck

and sometimes perseverance. In the morning he stirred  
to agapanthus odor, felt presence and absence

resemble an asymptotic line and curve that squeeze  
closer and closer but do not touch. He glances up

at Casseopeia arcing toward the north-northwest,  
wonders if mosquito eggs in the pond are about to hatch,

sees her trim red and orange ranunculi on the counter.  
And as he pushes on the gas and begins to ascend

La Bajada, water runs in the acequia  
behind the kitchen porch for the first time this year.

## THE WELT

He wants a day marked like a Song tea bowl  
with indented lip and hare's-fur markings.

Yesterday they hiked by two decomposing lambs  
at the entrance to the big arroyo, covered

their mouths as they approached from downwind.  
During firing, gravity pulls iron oxide

slip down to form a hare's-fur pattern  
on the glaze surface. They gagged at the stench,

saw pink plastic twine around the neck  
of the mangled one by the post—he only wanted

to view it once. They moved on to the low  
voltage fence, looked for bison but saw none,

tried to spark the fence with a thrown stick.  
He likes the plum blossom heat when their

bodies sway and thrash. They returned along  
a smaller arroyo. In the aftermath, though cool

to touch, he likes a ghost of the body's heat.  
In the morning they woke to sunburn on their necks.

LILA ZEMBORAIN / FROM "MAUVE SEA ORCHIDS"

TRANSLATED BY ROSA ALCALÁ

the lizard aims her golden eyes at the rocks that in time  
will turn to sand, and the wind slips through life's  
waters; an incident in the brilliance of hydrangea surprises  
her, as she winds a hose that like a viper refolds itself after  
inciting temptation; in this brutal way, vibrations  
make themselves felt, even when age causes bodies to  
recoil from their unexpected whims; it is perhaps an  
uncontrollable desire to attract and to reject, or  
rather, sense can be found in the casting of nets, like sliding  
on to the water's surface, grazing the proximate radiance of  
rocks, a remote shudder unable to warn against the  
imminent outlet in which the sea and the current perform  
their continuous embrace of rejection-attraction; to be  
guided by the senses towards that re-encounter, without  
sky to guarantee future arrival or rather to let one be  
carried by the amazement of not knowing the exact  
direction of the legs or cardinal points; the sun appoints  
with its sword a certainty, but nothing indicates that this is  
the direction of the waves, of the rocks, of the body gliding  
towards the celestial abyss of light



LILA ZEMBORAIN / FROM *MALVAS ORQUIDEAS DEL MAR*  
(BUENOS AIRES: TSÉ-TSÉ, 2004)

la lagartija apunta sus ojos dorados a las piedras que en  
años serán arena, y pasa el viento entre las aguas de  
la vida; un episodio la sorprende en el resplandor de las  
hortensia mientras enrolla la manguera como una víbora  
que se repliega después de incitar la tentación; así, en lo  
más brutal, se hacen sentir las vibraciones, aún en  
la edad en que los cuerpos se retractan de sus súbitos  
antojos; es un deseo tal vez incontrolable de atraer, de  
rechazar, más bien el sentido está en tender las redes, como  
el deslizarse en la superficie del agua rozando el  
resplandor cercano de las rocas, un cosquilleo remoto  
que no alcanza a dar el sentido del avance hacia la  
desembocadura en la que mar y correntada se dan su  
continuo abrazo de rechazo y atracción; dejarse llevar por  
el sentido hacia el reencuentro sin que el cielo sea garantía  
de destino, más bien dejarse llevar por el asombro de no  
saber la dirección exacta de las piernas, o de los puntos  
cardinales; el sol apunta con su espada una certeza, pero  
nada indica que ése sea el sentido de las olas, de las  
piedras, del cuerpo deslizado hacia el abismo  
celeste de la luz

there, where matters are at their most trivial, the mind  
detaches from what accompanies it and floats in the  
sudden wave of a flag; to have a title or a system for  
these ablutions, something like fragments drifting in the  
distance, as if a long breath could suddenly release that  
whirlwind from memory; long phrases that indicate  
fleeting gazes fixed simply on a piece of paper now flying  
away, or on the man riding past on a bicycle, or in the  
rhythmic flow of canoes barely prompted by oars;  
ardent the gaze finds only a periphery of sound, an  
airplane among the clouds, the dull thud of a dredger,  
humanity manifested in the mechanical monotony of the  
waves; there is nothing that air won't mold, that water  
won't cause to succumb; following the shadow's precepts,  
the bare radiance of midday's light succeeds in distracting  
transformation; a sun, the distance between the astros, the  
universe scraped by a current of thought far from the  
profound; to gaze at the fully lit firmament, the planets  
rotating in habitual harmony, a ship that only risks itself  
near the husk of a fabulous entity, the crewmen in expected  
attire supervise the handling of port arrivals that reclaim an  
inalterable sense of the opaque, the vibration of the wind,  
the paper never submitted; the tide stretches, the air  
circulates without haste, nothing in this instant alters the  
certainty of a flow not to be disturbed, the constancy of the  
mind destines itself to other places; no longer the seduction  
of certain arms tending to lament, or lips saturated with  
praise, rather the steady movement towards the present of  
dreams and the water's constant documentation

la trivialización más absoluta, ahí nomás, en ese punto de lo aceptable, donde la mente se desprende de lo que la asiste y flota en el golpeteo súbito de una bandera; tener un título o un sistema para estas abluciones, algo así como fragmentos derivando en la distancia, como si de un largo aliento fuera a desprenderse el torbellino que se expulsa en la memoria; largas frases que indican que hay miradas fugaces detenidas simplemente en el papel que ya se vuela, o en el hombre en bicicleta que es pasado, o en el rítmico fluir de las canoas apenas sugerido por los remos; ardiente la mirada que atina sólo a una periferia del sonido, un avión entre las nubes, el golpe sordo de una draga, la humanidad manifiesta en la mecánica monotonía de las ondas; nada hay que el aire no moldee, que el agua no haga sucumbir; siguiendo los preceptos de la sombra, la mera luz radiante de las doce atina a distraer los devenires; un sol, la distancia entre los astros, el universo rasqueteado en la corriente de un pensar ajeno a lo profundo; mirar el firmamento a plena luz, los planetas girando en armónica rutina, una nave que se atreve sólo hacia la cáscara de una entidad fabulosa, los tripulantes en pensados atuendos supervisan la maniobra de llegada a un puerto que reclama un sentido inalterable de lo opaco, la vibración del viento, el papel que nunca se somete; se estiran las mareas, el aire circula sin premura, nada altera en este instante la certeza de un fluir que no debe ser interrumpido, la constancia de la mente se destina hacia otros lugares; ya no la seducción de ciertos brazos atentos al quejido, o a los labios impregnados de alabanzas, más bien la inalterable dirección hacia el presente de los sueños y el constante asentamiento de las aguas

**BILL SYLVESTER REVIEWS *EMPTIED OF ALL SHIPS*  
BY STACY SZYMASZEK 89 PP. LITMUS PRESS, 2005**

Stacy Szymaszek currently is program coordinator for the Poetry Project at St. Mark's Church in New York City, has directed the program for poetry at Woodland Pattern, in Milwaukee, has given poetry readings nationwide, and has handsome chapbooks from Ether Dome Press (associated with Donation Press) and Bob Harrison's Bronze Skull Press, and a broadside with Kyle Schlessinger's Cuneiform Press.

Szymaszek also edits a magazine for poetry, *gam*, with a simple but strikingly original purpose—you wonder why somebody hasn't thought of it before—to consider the entire Great Lakes region, the 95,000 square miles of water reservoir, the water flowing into it, and out toward the ocean, the shores of these five lakes, as a single ecological unit. How do the poets—those who live in the region, Chicago Milwaukee, Madison, Buffalo, and those who imagine it, or who have imagined it—respond to this ecology?

We now have her 89 page volume of new and collected poems, *Emptied of All Ships*, published at E. Tracy Grinnell's Litmus Press. The book is 6" by 8", with an engagingly attractive cover designed by Grinnell and a color photo by Brenda Iijima that wraps around the book. At first glance the cover looks like white clouds above a blue sea, but the blue ambiguously blends with white so that the sense of a cloudy sky seems to fade into a whitish edge of shore. The text has six drawings by Drew Kunz. They are small, intense, and appear before a section of text, by themselves, surrounded by space.

So too do Szymaszek's words: most of the poems, particularly the newer ones, also appear in small clusters, even lists of single words, surrounded fore and aft with plenty of space, as in the opening poem, "shift at oars":

water  
relives  
reservoir

boat  
bottom  
draft  
displaced

At first glance, the poem looks as if it should be heavily paratactic, and Szymaszek does suppress connectives, pointer words. But we do not have a faddish

parataxis, where words drawn from different categories, or dictions, or assumptions are put together to increase conflict and darken affect. On the contrary, each word is an accretion, as, one by one, images emerge. From the title of the poem “shift at oars” we imagine a boat being rowed in the “reservoir” of a great lake, and its potential energy. A sequence emerges that is impervious to changes of time, space, and—insofar as possible—shifts in technology. You can’t deconstruct a Szymaszek poem.

In fact, there is a pattern of “going out to sea” that underlies the whole book. We have the preparations and necessary aspects of a voyage, getting to the ship, paying attention to the ship, financial transactions, keeping in touch, having a list of passengers . . . ballast, auction, radio silence, sailor king, manifest.

Yet the “going out to sea” leaves a shore emptied of all ships, so the going away may be at the expense of those left behind, a “crash in flesh,” a breaking away, or maybe an absence that changes those who remain and those who leave.

After land recedes, the ship itself comes to be seen as a society in the concluding 37 pages, “some mariners.” A new element emerges. A voyage can be an opening up but it can also be a narrowing and closing: there is the possibility of boredom. And the tedium of a voyage is written out graphically by a familiar pattern for keeping a record of repeated actions—the number of votes for a particular candidate, the number of runs in a sport: four downward strokes side by side with a fifth stroke from the top left corner, down to the bottom right, diagonally across. The pattern is repeated forty nine times, seven by seven, followed by two upper case words: ORA and PASSIM. (Can we skip over the trip and get to the shore?) Or in words: “How can I sleep through a night without end?”

The single poem “figurehead” has been placed by itself, after “emptied of all ships” (to serve as a conclusion) and before “some mariners” (to serve as a preface): “you/ turned/ away/ fast// with/ your/ banner/ GOODBYE!” A banner is one unexpected way of conveying a message, and people also try to reach each other through speaking tube and radio.

Happily Szymaszek gives an example of two who do meet. It is a very funny mini-sketch. We are to imagine that we are on a ship, and we are close to a tarpaulin. From beneath the tarpaulin we hear a voice: “you are a sea monster/ I am your sea.” That doesn’t sound like anything else in the poem. It sounds like the Comedy Channel imitation of romanticism gone wrong. She recited: “I am a river, flowing into the sea,” paused and then announced: “I hate my parents.”

It's not the only passage where Szymaszek's good humor emerges, but it's the only passage where a word is used in a sense that it cannot possibly mean literally. It's "sea" as in Freud's *Thalassaregressionszug* and other forms of popular poetry. Probably Szymaszek had no such didactic intention, and was more likely moved by comic intuition and her wit, but the passage does remind us how carefully she uses words.

The book is rich and varied, and has an ostinato in the background that comes out again and again. How do we get it down in words? Let us think ink:

We first had "soak in/ deep ink?"

We can also find "quill in my pocket/ drink ink from China," "spilled ink (beads spatter the tarpaulin)," "ink a hinge here," "friends become/ ink on the knees," and on the last page of the book a

night watcher  
with bartered needle  
inks the backs of his hands  
in Greek

The book ends with a sailor injecting ink into his skin to write in Greek, and the book begins with the word "water," but the word water is also printed in ink. Maybe the message is all Greek to us; still, the writing must go beyond itself. And it does.

**BILL SYLVESTER REVIEWS *THINGS OF EACH POSSIBLE RELATION HASHING AGAINST ONE ANOTHER* BY JULIANA SPAHR 29pp. PALM PRESS, 2003**

Juliana Spahr has given us a radical and beautiful poem. The attractive 7 x 8" thirty-one page, hand-stitched pamphlet comes from Jane Sprague's Palm Press. A photo by Shutzo Usemoto "Haole Koa—Not Preferred" wraps around the cover without margins, so it must be held up and opened to get the full effect of the grayscale, tangled branches and contrasting thin straight trunks. The photo is an independent work in its own right, yet remains relevant to the title: *things of each possible relation hashing against one another*.

The poem responds to a deep contradiction—Spahr says in her candid and relevant postscript—"the great beauty of Hawai'i and its ecological catastrophe remain emotionally confusing to me. I can't reconcile the coolness of the breeze and the sweet smells from the flowers and the beauty of the cliffs and the ocean with the large amount of death that is happening. (Hawai'i has the highest rate of species extinction and endangerment in the United States.)"

We are first to imagine Hawai'i from the sea:

the view from the sea  
the constant motion of claiming, collecting, changing, and taking  
the calmness of bays and the greenness of land caused by the freshness  
of things growing into  
the arrival to someplace else  
the arrival to someplace differently . . .

This is the "view from those who arrived from elsewhere," a view which excerpts from Greg Denning's *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land: Marquesas 1774-1880*. The concluding section is the view of "those who were already there":

so there is  
the view from land  
the firm steadiness of earth . . .

The view from the sea and the view from the land—the poem is about "the hashing that happens as these two views meet":

plants, and all their fresh water  
a boat, a bough and a candle  
impact movement  
things of each possible relation hashing against one another

This title is also the last line of the poem thus inviting us perhaps to start the poem all over again. And there is an iconic invitation too: four figures of eight tipped over (infinity symbols) appear before each of six sections and also on a separate page at the end.

Spahr felt that as a poet she needed to know the names of things and so she studied Hawai'ian flora and fauna. Spahr has gone to both print and online material for a wide range of materials. She took a course in ethnobotany and sketched some of the poems during the lectures, so the line between "prose" and "poetry" is erased: "All this writing by others is in these poems"

Or as Susan Howe said before one of her readings, she saw no reason why writing history of criticism couldn't be done through poetry. And so did Charles Olson, a quite different poet in many ways.

Spahr's previous work also fused environmental concerns with her poetry as in her prize winning *Response*. "Taken together, the poems in *Response* constitute a thorough critique of attempts to control life with imagery," as Mark Wallace writes in the *Washington Review*. (See Spahr's home page: <http://people.mills.edu/jspahr/>).

Indeed, our sense of the physical world has been distorted—according to Heidegger—ever since Greek words were translated into Latin, with the result that our linguistic "subject" and "predicate" reflects a deterministic view of subject matter defined by "accidents" or "qualities." And so our language forces a philosophically limited perception of matter. We have a language of "subject" and "predicate." The predicate defines the subject. We have a world of matter where matter itself is a "subject" defined by its predicates of accidents, or qualities. We see the "thingness" of matter as defining and limiting, as if the wood, marble, color, paint, created the totality of what we see, which leads to a materialism that denigrates matter, and excludes such concepts as "the self sufficiency of an art work."



In her own way, Spahr has confronted a similar problem in *Fuck You-Aloha-Love You*, a poem where the “subject” is fucking, the “quality” is “loving.” Where is the “we” in all this, she asks. How do we get out from under the weight of this division?

Spahr seems to have contemplated language at some length. She has used a translating “machine” (altavista.com) to get a sense of the connection between words in different languages. She lists some unusual sources, such as Suzanne Romaine’s *Vanishing Voices, the Extinction of the World’s Language*.

From all of this, she has come up with an unexpected stance: it’s as if she had reversed a flow of energy. Instead of words impinging upon matter, she has attempted to have matter impinge upon, influence, in fact nearly define, the flow of her language.

“Then, after I had a number of different versions of the same poem, I sat down and wove them together. . . . I took the pattern from the math that shows up in plants. Or I tried to approximate the shapes of things I saw around me.”

A math does indeed show up in her poems, and it is the familiar Fibonacci series for positive whole numbers. Beginning with 1, one has 1, that’s all. But another 1 gives us 1,1 which can be added together, giving us 1,1,2. And by adding the 2 to the 1 before it we get 3, a process which can go on indefinitely: 1,1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34,55, where each number is the sum of the two previous numbers in the series. These numbers often correspond to the ways growth actually occurs, particularly in plants, where the number of petals will correspond to a Fibonacci number, sometimes with a choice between one of two numbers.

The numbers apply to the jumpy patterns of plant growth, of adding to just what went before instead of the smooth acceleration of electrical or mechanical phenomena. Does the poem really follow a Fibonacci pattern? With given Fibonacci numbers?

Probably not with such pedantic literalness—but the phrase “problems of the analogy” does appear five times in the next to last section—a Fibonacci number. Her poem does move in an accumulative way, and a Fibonacci series has an appropriateness that logarithmic or exponential or geometric series do not: analogy, analogy, opening analogy, opening shifting analogy, problems of

the analogy. These words become intertwined with the words “ramifications” and “links” and these become intertwined with names of ramifications and links. The third section begins,

then the opening of the things sewn together  
the opening of shifting the analogy of the opening . . .

and ramifications appear,

like the sonar of the dolphin and the sonar of the blowing  
like the piece of the end of the bird and the piece of the end of the  
dolphin  
like the wings of the butterfly and the bird  
like hummingbird of the suction and the suction of the butterfly  
like the language of the human being and hummingbird of the  
language  
as newt the wing under the amphibian and the lizard under reptile  
has taste of the eyes of the lizard and the eyes of the  
human being  
slipping the analogy of the opening of things  
join the night of doubled ramification  
. . .  
as the cells in the veins of the leaves and the leaves on the branches  
the opening of the things sewn together

The last line of that section repeats every word of the first line except for the opening word “then” so there is no progress. The list does not “develop” the notions of opening or analogy. No thesis gets aufgehoben into antithesis. At any level of abstraction, perceptions coexist, accumulate and intensify.

The process of the poem and the meaning of the poem are one.

And like some radical notions, it turns out to be remarkably accessible and pleasurable.

## CLAYTON ESHLEMAN / INSIDE CARYL'S LEFT SHOULDER

Gleaming, half-housed in steel sheath, the debrider's rotary blade whirring, resecting scar tissue, flaked-away rotator cuff.

It is inserted via a trocar pushed through the portal cut into her shoulder.

Apparition of a whirly, round eye on the debrider as it swivels caught in the arthroscopic beam.

Octopus or shark eye.

The debrider now a kind of monster in a feeding frenzy.

Blobs of bloody tissue stream the video screen.

Feathery tissue flurries.

The mowing of Caryl's ocean floor.

From another cut that appears to have no trocar the cauterizer appears, spurting bubbly water as it prongs up tissue.

Amber tufts throbbing by threads.

Tentacle-sucker-like bubble chains.

Rose shadings, yellow, bronze, in the white densities.

What happens to her deadened pain?

She's out, but her body's experiencing what I see.

Faced by the ungraspable within my own making.

Again the debrider, a ferret into the baby rat nest of her shoulder,  
whirring forth what the cauterizer tore up.

Watching this silent 20 minute video as you rest upstairs.

Blood-tinged snow chamber.

Cave amber.

As if I am looking at calcite draperies.

Cosquer being ensouled.

Orchid-like tissue bunches, almost loose, the cauterizer hooking  
up cartilage.

Threads of blood from her humerus head spurting, snaking out,  
vanishing.

Humerus head framed by the octagonal lens.

Fleecy white skull.

The moon.

The debrider shaves what looks like skull hair – not head hair  
but feathery wisps clinging to a skull.

Beautiful grassy white skull.

The debrider mowing and mowing.

For a moment: craters – rilles – ghostly inverted nipples.

The burr with square steel cleats rasping her acromion, trimming its hooked edge that cut into a tendon and caused her such pain.

“Frozen shoulder,” which for a month she could not move.

Others will watch arthroscopic surgery inside their beloved’s body.

Others will wince and draw close to “heavy debridement and acromioplasty.”

Others will be given access to the body’s interior grottos, its blood strings jetting, its moon and cave scapes, the sudden black fissures that check the eye.

Others will project and know how I felt, respectful of projection while attempting to see through to the images forever emerging, as if trying to make contact with us, there where projection and something there and emerging meet, as an image is glimpsed in an undulant dimly-lit cave.

Yes, others before me, by juniper wick, watching creatures emerge, recede, Cosquer, 18,000 B.P., auks, seals, jellyfish, there and not there, spirits receding, emerging, in ochre outlines, blood-ribboned snow chamber.

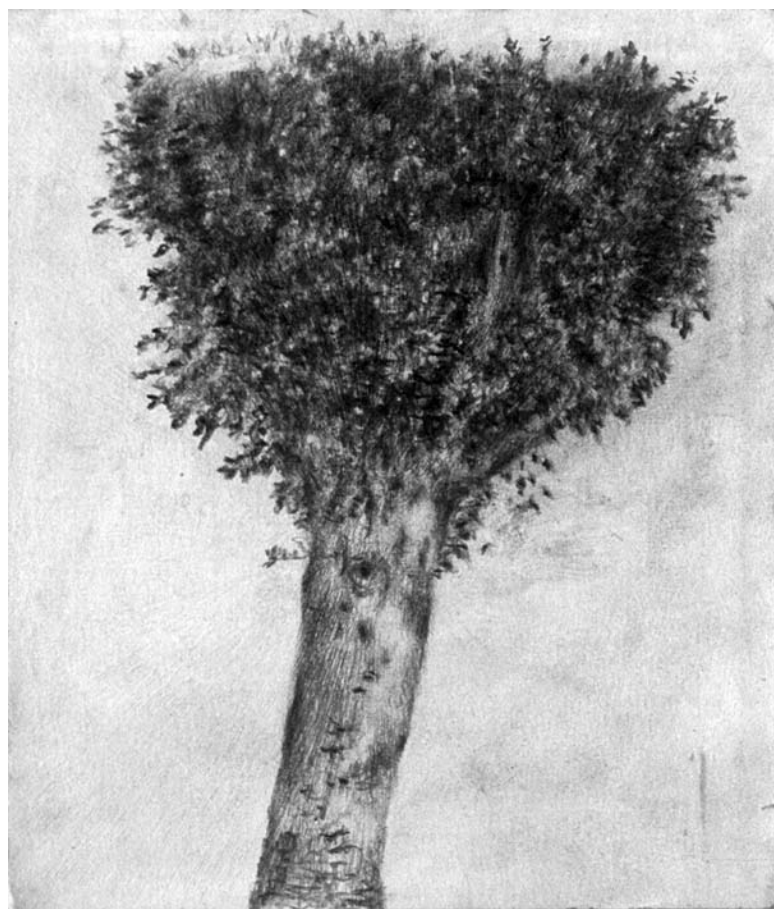
Before a screen, outside your invasion, and the source of your invasion.

Alone and with you in this wild disturbance of your sense of physical unity.

Fox-like rotary saw in the hen house of your scar tissue.

Rapacious correction of the destruction of your enjoyment of life.

[for Mark Mijnsbergen]



## LYTLE SHAW / MULCH: A TREATISE

(for the Clarks, Coleridge  
and Clark Coolidge)

Mulch decomposes tough natural parts.

Mulch glosses the lawn and obliterates names.

Mulch systematizes the surroundings.

Mulch brings out orange earphones.

§

After an early evening of medium branch mulching by the north edge of the barn I returned fired with purposiveness to witness the sunset colors over the marsh and lake from the deck planking. Now the color spectrum was itself being mulched over the horizon. Breaking into constituent parts. Recombining in a temporary death. More gaudy, albeit, than our daily plant-plot-edge mulch, or that used along the ceremonial driveway (the advantages of whose curved progression we expound in another treatise).

Mulch pulverizes aesthetic principles.

Mulch piles raw analogies.

Mulch insulates for the gardener of homologies.



§

Using larger sawed down stumps to feed smaller branches into the roaring teeth, eastern white pine, with its characteristic five-needle cone, quickly becomes mulch.

Just as spruces, recognized by their compact spiral needle patterns around the twigs, jammed down the two inch-max diameter feeder, undergo a miraculous mulchification.

Ditto firs, with their smooth, even cones and whitish lines on the underside of the needles—now smashed in unequal twig clusters with a stumpy short stick.

Mulch fragments course through the blackberry bushes and against an improvised cardboard backdrop.

Mulch wind removes groundcover.

§

This same process may be witnessed in the hemlock, weeping willow (native of China) and the serviceberry or shadbush, with its finely saw-toothed, alternate leaves—the favorite food of much American wildlife.

With sawdust smoke working its way back up the narrow plastic covering, you can bet American or hornbeam hop is on its way toward mulch.

So few trees to distinguish now: American beech, all the birches, quaking or bigtooth aspen—mulch all.

§

Hawthorn mulch.

American basswood mulch.

Linden mulch.

No need to contrast or compare.

No need to look up Latin names.

Mulch is modern.

Mulch is democratic.

Mulch does not believe in etymology.

White, black or northern red oaks—all mulch now.

## §

Now I'm back from a morning of heavy mulching in the proximate copse, evenly coated in surface mulch from a variety of vegetal origins. Mulch describes the seams in my neck and sawdusts my tee shirt. Mulch powders my sweaty hair. Mulch rings my watch. Mulch pastes my inner nose lining and insulates my nape. Sunburned and jackhammered at the joints, the first flush of mulch's charm is past.

But with this less romantic, more practical understanding of mulch and its production, comes a deeper and more lasting rapport. Yesterday the idea

of mulch took root and sprouted. Today it has grown and received a thick layer of mulch.

§

And the mulcher's orange earphones? These are not arbitrary adornments—for they produce the *mulching paradox*: isolation, full individual immersion in the rhythmic pulsations of scrub undergoing regularization, full release of the self as a conduit for the mulching effect, and, at the same time, the special *mulching collectivity*, the two-person sphere formed by the *mulch workers* absorbed, now, into functional unity, occasionally screaming or waving arms to stop the jammed machine, watching to avoid limb loss and producing piles of fragrant wood fragments.

§

The *experience* of the mulcher therefore analogizes the *progress of the mulch*: mulch begins in desolate, fallen branches, tangled scrub brush, knotting limbs choking paths—all of this *gathered* onto a *mulching cart*, brought to the site of *mulching* and then, gradually—

*mulched.*

Once mulched, this material can then be *reintegrated* into the landscape, as a semi-regularized insulation material at once aesthetic (inasmuch as mulch provides the effect of continuity and visual *unity*) and practical (inasmuch as mulch works to retain moisture).

Is mulch, also, a form of *nutrition*, a mild *fertilizer*?

§

A conceptual cognate. Munch: to make mulch with one's mouth. Animals as well as vegetables can be munched. But aside from a small residue of insects, it is only vegetables that can be made into mulch. Nor does munch operate as a capacious noun the way mulch does, suggesting instead a

more casual, even vaguely fatuous activity incorporating none of the seriousness, solemnity or beauty of mulching.

With wood chipper, one cannot escape the sinister—though also oddly mundane—garage corpse disposal scene in *Fargo*.

Mulch, instead, takes us to the field, even the French pré.

Because I've mulched all morning, I don't have to prepare lunch, though I hear the noises downstairs.

§

Mulch seals.

Mulch guards.

Mulch covers.

Mulch retains.

§

Though lacking the advantages of gas powered mulchers in his rural English retreat, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 1811 master aesthetic treatise, the *Biographia Literaria*, nonetheless foreshadowed contemporary mulching theory in its fundamental theoretical division between the **aesomplastic** and **desynonymous** aesthetic modes. The latter involves redeploying quasi-recognizable pieces of experience in the service of new wholes. Daily life and literature are in this mode both broken into tiny, usable units that are then fitted into an evolving scheme in which their roles and functions have radically transformed.

While the aesomplastic writer also begins with such raw material, his imaginative blade is faster and sharper and the result is a new aesthetic whole that bears no immediate relationship to its constitutive parts.<sup>1</sup>

(I'm having a hard time formulating these sentences while the Clarks discuss the aesthetics of painting below on the screened-in porch—perhaps I'll fetch the mulching earphones as an aid to concentration).

There. Now I can concentrate. What could Coleridge have had in mind with the term “desynonymous”? As if the world existed in one single, homogeneous word, one 8-mile thick proper name, whose job it was for the poet to break apart into smaller word units.

## §

Not merely that *experience* was overly continuous, but names—or rather The Name, since before this poet begins, everything is called by the same name. Lettuce, wild game and plate tectonics. Oysters and paleogeography.

Still, desynonomizers are less valued than aesomplasticizers in this excellent opium den of a world. And that's because the aesomplastic involves a remaking with such a fine imaginative blade (his metaphor is heat, but he was likely high) that no traceable relic survives.

Not that elements, or smaller new components, no longer exist, but that they cannot be *extracted* or *traced*. Their plastic status causes them to point in toward other elements, fitted exactly into complex weaves, rather than out at the world.

<sup>1</sup>The most immediate analog is between the metamorphic and the igneous in geological terms; since the former involves sedimentary rocks undergoing transformation through heat; while the igneous involves a complete reconstitution of rock through extreme heat, a building from the ground up, that can only be experienced after the lava has cooled.

§

It's as though the desynonymous were an intermediate stage on the way to the aesomplastic.

And lots of poets only made it to the first phase.

As though ungenerous gardeners on hands and knees could see mulch only as constituent pines and maples.

As though the tiny grain index on a single fragment of mulch were more important than the overall aesomplastic mulching effect.

§

Thus the sublime aesomplastic state of mulch is made possible not by the intermediate powers of the desynonymous, but almost by its reverse: an uncanny *synonymous* effect, in which all is *renamed as mulch*.

Words come into the mulching name mill.

Each emerges as mulch.

There are also the scales of mulch.

Carpenter ants are expert mulchers. Their process creates sawdust. Now we mulch logs in which they are still at work. They are part of the mulch.

Thus we've become large carpenter ants—breathing mulch.

## §

Come close—we must now comprehend the body of the mulcher. Till now it's hummed at a general distance. Throbbled and jolted our wrists. Yanked brush and smoked. Swirled us in clouds of rising fragments and borne grassless patches in the underbrush. Rapt in the mulching effect, we've but squinted at its literal body. Its very being as metal. But in the contours of the mulcher's small red world, in its components, functions, and, yes, dangers—here's a text on digestion.

Though the mulcher seems to make one motion, to spit one uninterrupted cloud of wood chunks, this effect is in fact achieved by two *separate blades*. These two blades are served by two mulching portals, or what we might think of as the two axes of mulching.

## §

Angular, rigid and sequential, there is first the single stick oriented **feeder**. Into the feeder go sticks of up to two inches in diameter, wedged down thick side first, end to end, until they meet a whirling slicer at the base. This takes off small slabs in a conservative and progressive way. Its hope is to slice the *entirety of a stick or collection of sticks*, not merely to skim off the surface gradually. An elegant mud flap hangs toward the top, regulating passage.

180 degrees away is the thick-mouthed **hopper**—wider, squatter—standing on less ceremony, even less method. Into it one jams clusters of twigs, tangles of smaller branches, many at a time (though not exceeding half an inch in diameter). The hopper grates, catching mulch-like fragments with each void in the grating mechanism.

Though the hopper chokes and coughs, it tends not to spit.

## §

Andrew's just shown up with a nice text log. Let's see what kind of mulch we can make of it:

“In our own English compositions (at least for the last three years of school education), [Coleridge’s tutor] showed no mercy to phrase, metaphor, or image unsupported by a sound sense, or where the same sense might have been conveyed with equal force and dignity in plainer words . . . Nay, certain introductions, similes, and examples, were placed by name on a list of interdiction.”

And so it’s time for us to admit a small but important limitation of the mulcher—one our first flash of enthusiasm, our faith in the mulchifiableness of the entire property, kept us from considering.

Now and again a piece of wood is *rejected* by the mulcher. These rejections take two forms: rule-based and wildcard.

## §

A rule-based rejection indexes nothing more than a failure to comprehend the directions, inscribed in white sans serif type on the red body of the mulcher. These are merely the maximum diameter directions mentioned above: half an inch for the hopper; two inches for the feeder.

Having smoothly exceeded the maximum diameter by 234 percent, a rule-based rejection might occur with an 11-percent excess.

Rule-based rejections tend to follow *unpredictable* rules.

Far more disturbing, however, is a *wildcard* rejection. For with a wildcard rejection, not only is impossible to predict *when* such a rejection will occur, but *how* as well.

## §



Rather than a coughing slump down, the wildcard rejection involves a projectile. Up through the mud flaps and thirty feet across the lawn. Twanged against the safety goggles. Off the wrist. For it is most commonly the angular **feeder** tube that is subject to the wildcard rejection.

A distasteful topic, *the rejection* marks the limits of the mulcher's digestive ability.

Like Coleridge testing his tutor, phrases come flying back.

The mulcher takes exception.

§

In the house, everyone hears the mulchers. Though typing an aesthetic treatise, washing shellfish residue from the ice-trays, or scissoring a spandex arm from a sewing dummy, everyone is *also* mulching.

They hear the starter cord's metal twirls.

They hear the screams and accusations.

They hear the cough and stall, the unforeseen rock kick.

They can picture the orange headphones and are acquainted with our concentration.

§

They know the brush cart will be near and the plastic trash can half full of mulch.

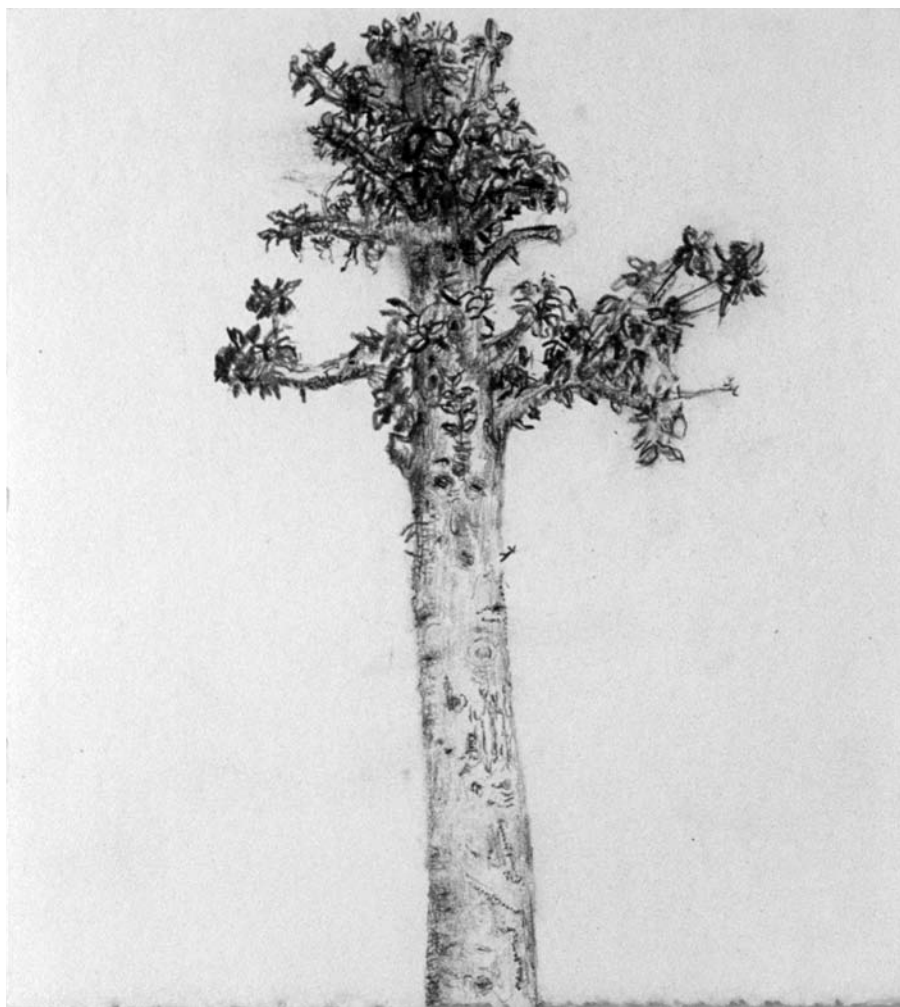
They hear the huffing part-way start, and later the collapse into silence.

They're ready for silence.

They've had enough of brush mulching now.

§

And when *I* first heard the mulcher in the lawn, and was drawn out to drop sticks in, first tentatively, one by one with a nimble and naïve pleasure, then more, and with more purpose, then ripping the orange earphones from Andrew's head and jacking his safety gloves, gesturing for him to step away and back the hell off, how did I, then, intuit the power of mulching?



THE NATURAL WORLD

What had been the prairie region became a region of  
not much else to be seen, the dirt being raised five feet all  
the becoming and changing, not in the become and  
there was thus no ideological reason to be fruitful and multiply.  
New Mexico! This second breach of the rules of ecology provides  
hills and rains where still deep-hatted Dharma-hobos try to roam.  
Its typical forest is made up of scrubby trees adapted to extremes.

7. An act of *spontaneous kindness* done may leave us with the obligation to  
this Abstract to Variation under Domestication. We shall thus  
*rotate* into a circular shape on a plane perpendicular to the body line; the  
signification—of *différance* and the trace, of writing—of which it is a part.  
with the length of the boat or with another  
suddenly spread terror and devastation; and the wide ocean, which,

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**DOUGLAS MANSON REVIEWS *THE MONSTER LIVES OF BOYS AND GIRLS* BY ELENI SIKELIANOS. 130 PP. GREEN INTEGER, 2003.**

On a first reading of *The Monster Lives of Boys and Girls*, I found an instant recognition of concerns that many poets and artists have confronted in the past four years. These poems present an exigency, in their recognition of a state of human and social crisis. But they also seek out a clarity of momentum that will retain something of the concern, love and loving of one individual for another. They are an articulation of what can be gathered in while experiencing the rush of city life, human designs both fair and foul, and still provide a sense of the “outside” world shared in common with other lives and species. Even more impressively, the book is written in a complex mode of alternating registers that respond to a violent, fragmenting human time with an elemental, ecosystemic scale. It does this even as it takes up the metaphoric potential of natural references we would normally associate with fallacies of anthropomorphic identification. Amazingly, though, this doesn’t happen here:

. . . I think you are  
wasting time. Are you trying to?  
Oh ho! You could at least be arranging  
weight, color & shape the way the tide arranges  
piles of pink & yellow clams along the beach . . .

The voice in this untitled poem from the long “Summer at St.-Nazaire” sequence pleads, as one is wont to do during a “hurry up and relax” summer sojourn. But it indicates the prevailing mode in many of the poems here, a mixture of spoken channels with The English Channel, even while the poet weaves in a reflection on creative acts. As if to say that poetry is sometimes just the attention it takes to translate acts of listening, compromising, ordering, arranging, and consuming into the page, line, word and “multiplex” of suggestion:

in the leaves of my book of my bed *je me trouve tres tris-*  
an Tzara; change  
BALZAC to PROZAC; take it

This reflexivity is one of the more contemporary techniques that appears here, among others. One of my favorites is when Sikelianos stops us after her first five poems in order to offer a “Footnote to the Lambs” where readers are commanded to take the “meanings” of the opening poems in an enumerated list that barks “You shall . . .” learn this or that—a move that recalled for me a certain undergraduate teacher who took three days of an American Literature

course to explain flatly and without discussion the meaning of 20-30 of Emily Dickinson's poems while our eyes rolled back into our heads.

1. You shall hope to know the power of the imagination
4. You, loveliness in your Grecian tires, good citizens  
of sheepdom, smoking hashish, hush  
(“Footnote to the Lambs”)

There are many such similar halts and arrests in *Monster Lives*—from the sharp edges of line-breaks to shifts of ironic distance that sometimes slip into mere mockery. Yet this uncertainty of what precisely is speaking/sparking here makes for many pleasurable returns to the text—it is a cathedral of words and suggestion that shifts in every changing light.

I've attempted to make a couple of itineraries through this glorious thicket. Countering a first impulse to make a Blakean/mythopoetic index, I instead moved towards the supporting beams and arches. I planned a list of all the aquatic animals or objects mentioned. I discovered that all proper names used in the text are of men (except for Bonnie of Bonnie & Clyde): beginning with Presocratic philosophers Thales, Anaximander, Anaxagoras, Sikelianos moves to Zoroaster, Jesus, Hector, Adonis, Blake, and their recent equivalents Alice Cooper, Kevin Costner, Spiderman, or to writers Proust, Balzac, Tzara. The book ends with an image of the hero Odysseus.

But these indications are too pliable as architecture, and I find myself amidst a tough and fibrous membrane of formal textures, surface tracings; and in deeper, melding heats. This is *dura mater*—one tough mother of a book, but also a necessary one. The lines are quite frequently dense, elastic, and protecting. It is tough because, in the progress of my reading so much of the sense shifts its references (and therefore tone, volume, momentum), on the basis of one or two letters, or the sheering off of the line-ending.

THIS spectacle: the movie-house universe

moving. Hold still.—to touch this you with a twelve-  
fingered attention, concentrated  
on the flesh, made by

the laws of science  
(“The Bright, the Heavy”)

The book is made up of three sections: the opening, lyric-ironic “Captions for my Instruction Booklet on Naturally Historical Things” which

tempers its wry fractures with *agape*, the desire for the fulfillment of the longing of the other being. This is followed by a shift in voice and manner for a coastal “Summer at St.-Nazaire.” The book concludes with a return to the opening tone of cosmological-cosmetic meditations (or more literally, a *pedagogy*?) in “The Bright, the Heavy.” This last sequence addresses in contrasting terms reflective strength and absorptive depths, as in the early characterization: “I wish I had a bright    a bright / foot, laughing myself into a new mood so much I cry.” The jog at the end of the line stutters (“a bright    a bright”), I think, in order to find the right connective—leaving the adjective to bear an unnatural syntactic weight until we find a “foot”ing in the next line: was it going to be a bright idea? A Fulbright? A bright future? When the foot falls, we are reminded to consider weight, even gravitas, and that the monster life of a child pales before the real monsters of 9/11, an Iraq war, and the groping depredations of consumerist capitalism. Our own physical and metrical feet become tragi-comic; heavy sources of too little solace, and not enough solvent. Is there an insouciance among the *caritas*? As this last section of the book emphasizes the body, it provides a return again and again to the simplicity and carrying capacity of feet, the speaking/consuming mouth, a symbolic/literal heart, and the human machine-animal entire.

By acknowledging (and deflecting) a strain of monstrosity to the whole affair, these poems welcome an imaginative, Pierian voicing into the projects of contemporary poetry and art. While Sikelianos’s poems “remix” our common romanticized tones of address with hip diction, they also utilize surface effects which only hint at what may or may not exist: “They are moving things deep / in the depths of the black water; it is no juke / boxes or snapping fingers, not laws / that break / sleeping in caravans or under canvas.” In such a shoreline book as this, full of sparrows, starlings and broken sleep, the edges and lines are always in flux. We are given the choice to read water or shore, the firm or the fluid, make jokes or cry “no juke[s]”!

To characterize in a word the many layers and extensions of musical, meaningful, and material engagement of the book, I would have to say it is like a *chiton*—both, as my Merriam-Webster tells me, one “of an order (Polyplacophora) of elongated bilaterally symmetrical marine mollusks with a dorsal shell of calcareous plates,” and “the basic garment of ancient Greece, worn usually at knee-length by men, and full-length by women.” It offers naturalist oceanic symmetries and classical grace—it is childish, carping, and monstrous by intention, and all in all an excellent poetic foray.



## MARK WEISS / RIFFS

Affirmation  
made solid  
contract  
a signature.  
Signed off on off /  
on.

Reaffirmed  
all over again.

\*

John Hancock hand  
cock? half  
cocked?  
Crockery?  
Language  
as real as  
grass, or  
glass.

\*

Career  
a wild ride.  
So it turns out we find ourselves half way through  
the one career.

\*

Oration  
a golden prayer or ate  
or shun or ate  
the sun  
the tongue  
become golden.

He ate  
the sun, was *vey*  
porized.

\*

Lapidary  
lapidoggy  
little dogie dairy *la pide*  
asks  
for it, milk of memory  
the life of mammals.

\*

Fault  
falls down the downy  
hillside  
*blême* blameless.

What could be softer than this crack in the rock?

By the dawn's early light *lit*  
*by the sun in its going down.*

\*

Flow floe flower flux flumen flume fume font funnel refurbish furbelow  
and above glissando glider patination pasturize *pastoso*  
*en el campo*  
*hay plaquetas tenemos*  
*plástica, pichones vuelan de la hierba cuando anda la gente en botas románticas*  
*las faldas pesantes y mojadas de las damas cuelgan insectos y serpientes y los nidos*  
*abandonados contruidos de flores.*  
*No tiene el campo nada después, después*  
*el río repleto de cosas ablandadas por el agua y la gravedad. Qué edad tienen las*  
*niñas que flotan en el diluvio?*

Sauce a sort of fate, we say cooked  
in its own juice, in the milk

of human kind-  
ness.

\*

he talks and talks in the hope that something will happen  
to create an ending.

\*

aghaſt ghastly ghosťly August a gust  
the ghosť of Augustulus, a pygmy  
among Romans.  
Not even important enough for slaughter. But possibly  
more fun to drink with than his predecessors.

\*

valve *veyihyeh* a valuent an effluent oh happie  
happie  
pair perhaps a pear or  
pared  
a hand in the rubble making sense  
of it. What we know become center what we come to know  
disposed around it. A hand  
protrudes from a hill of stone as if the body strove to rise above as if drowning  
as if the project were to turn stone to liquid.  
Or saying : “this hill is mine,” or, “hale,” or,  
hieratic gesture or merely  
at the point of death summoning the dog to play.

\*

The deadman’s hand  
proclaims the land.

\*

Burnt-umber undercoat  
and a scumbled surface

reds and greens  
as if incandescing, as if  
glow-in-the-dark  
psycho  
delic dis, or  
dys  
placed is this  
ok is this per  
mitted, what kind  
of mitt per  
what?  
Watt? Coll  
lated, with milk may be beside  
the sea, sidled up to the beau-  
tiful sea or  
tolled to lead  
o! ended  
by water.

\*

Because accustomed to a set of pronouns  
like dress or a cut of hair  
a way to walk or run  
a piece of body  
a set of glands  
as if to say  
pronouns  
is fate. A possible evil inherent  
in becoming accustomed to one or another.

\*

I knew a woman who slept with the entire history department, Professor Joe  
on Mondays, etc., “but Sundays  
I keep for myself.” She would caress my hand  
when she passed the salt.

What are the outlets for that kind of talent?

She told me I would have to wait  
for a vacancy, but I was next in line.

\*

Thirteen ways of looking at a blackboard.  
The privilege of washing a stone.  
Understanding that within the rubble there's a unity of intention, a palimpsest.

In the depths was a motive or at least a motif.

Staggering through leafy darkness—hark!  
What harkens? The cliff in silhouette  
as if seen sideways, was somehow  
smaller,  
feminine,  
moon,  
dog,  
detritus,  
demented,  
delimited.  
At the edge of the cliff  
At the deep cleft

At the impulse to scramble downwards  
upwards  
downwards  
*ins Grüne*  
*ins Grüne*        wet spring  
the ooze of what process set in motion when I step there  
my hand rested against granite  
dripping with watercress, every thing  
changed, or  
imperceptibly.

\*

One wants the species fellowship.

\*

Breasting the wave we say put your weight  
on one leg, then  
the other, your weight  
where it matters. We say  
there will be a guiding hand  
a respite, but don't  
count on it.

\*

Having spent a decade fixated on the backs of knees  
and another on the folds of flesh when she turns her neck  
and another on tendrils of hair and the struggle  
between civilization and chaos in the way she wears it.

The thing about the ephemeral is that it's ephemeral. That's  
what gets you. The thing about the ephemeral  
is that it's ephemeral.

## MARCELLA DURAND AND TINA DARRAGH / DEEP ECO PRÉ-CAUTIONARY PONGE-ABLES: A COLLABORATIVE ESSAY

For Ponge, trading the anecdote for tracking things in terms of other things is crucial if we are to avoid annihilation. Expression in continuous differentiation exists as a refusal to compartmentalize knowledge.

Crucial—no longer the form of a cross, but that leading to a decision among hypotheses.

With anecdote, ecology as the “landscape department”—what is the pesticide d’jour for today’s window dressing? I’ll just have to buy something new to protect myself from it . . . let’s see, how about that nice filter over there—it glows a subtle sluice when all tapped out.

With 24-hour-talk-stereo-typing-till, statistics make us self-protective.

“My environment” an interior design, a mini-museum to myself—“the environment”—endangered pre-existing freeze-frame beauty, theme park of true squint.

“By assuming a categorical distinction between [‘my’ body and ‘the’ environment], it is possible for regulatory authorities to issue a ‘pollutant discharge permit’ licensing the right to contaminate environments as ‘long as the exposure is below the threshold at which environmental toxins adversely affect bodies.’ So bodies and the environment are sufficiently disparate to identify, through “rigorous science,” those numerical coefficients that warrant contaminating soil, water, and air without allegedly harming humans.”

Toxic loads we carry:	styrene and ethyl phenol—all of us
	chlorobenzene, benzene, ethylbenzene—96% of us
	toluene—91% of us
	polychlorinated biphenyls—83% of us

If we are to avoid annihilation—hesitation in finishing that sentence. To annihilate a sentence, move back from the end and continue through the rest of the sentence. If destruction of language is similar to destruction of environment, then what is the destruction of metaphor similar to, says Angus Fletcher, sort of. The computer emanates PBDEs and is particularly toxic to

poets. Retinas degrade in face of radiation. The chaos exists in the perception, the moment moving between interior and exterior. Now it's *crucial* to explore these compartmentalizations and divisions because I am breathing in PBDEs as I write this.

c  
environment  
m  
p  
a  
r  
t  
m  
e  
n  
t  
  
p  
e  
r  
c  
e  
computer  
t  
I  
o  
n

In *perception* the I became capitalized because the computer made it do it. It's *crucial* because the exterior world has bowed to the pressures of the interior world and is now pressing back upon the interior world. We are the interior worlds as we live within ourselves, *mini-museum to myself*, but we have *pollution discharged* creating an *adverse effect*, and now exterior world has become very present.

Freeze-frame squint landscape: is it true Yellowstone at the West Entrance has the worst air in the nation? It's beautiful only through eye and unbreathable. It quakes in felicity with every quake elsewhere on this continent. Picture-perfect landscape marred by shenanigans of other sentient beings: stray cats and dogs, bears busting into trunks, marmots in engines, mountain lions who



like the taste of poodle. We gave way and then we give way, we give way no more say South Utah activists who pull up Bureau of Land Management signs. With 24-hour talk-stereo-typing-still we become still, self-protective statistics—that way, we are *sufficiently disparate* in our numerical coefficients from *that which* is around us. So far, Angus Fletcher posits difference between Platonic Ideas and presocratic Things. No Plato but in Socrates. No ideas but in *that which*.

“Equating the use of natural indicators with the belief that only natural indicators cause global climate change is both wrong and ridiculous.” The exterior only through eye world has bowed self-protective moment moving. Landsquint lulls us into relieving that we can be dispossessed only once, that ’ole Eden thing we escrow so well. The computer just automatically changed “dispossessed” to “disposed”—OK, computer, let me get this straight—it is alright to call up “place suitably, arrange in a particular way” BUT NOT “oust, dislodge, deprive”?? Mar-mots blank out power strips. No plateau but in so-crate-your-things-you’re-out-on-the-street, and when their bond rating goes down again they’ll take that inflatable mattress they gave you for a Management sign. Oh “wildness” and “civility” so sufficiently balanced to deep-six power grab infestations beneath the façade of “natural law” (ring ring “Good morning, library. Could you send me a copy of the Natural Law?”)

moment moving

c  
environment

reading Ponge    the moment when there is no word

Malaysians having no word for a separate “wilderness.”

All of us having no word for the chemical co-mmunity we share with what surrounds us.

Angus Fletcher says at ambulatory beat, the slower drag of feet: Poet, *describe*. Make words for *It*. Make word for the *pré*. Corporations turn nouns into verbs, like matter into energy. They *verb* *It*, and thereby *crucial* it. That mountaintop has been *efforted* into gravel. The corn kernel and soybean DNA has been *efforted* into long-lasting insecticide-resistant efficient hyperallergenic stalk-like. Make it happen. Landscape lays itself out to be described, says Angus Fletcher, sort of. Description takes place in the ambulatory beat of self-protected statistics. Only natural indicators cause global description. It is both wrong and ridiculous. Eye world bows to self-description. All right to call up no plateau but in this.

*That which* is around us. *It*. Disposed to be dispossessed. The cannibals find their water world is chemical. *That's* where the mountaintop went. Down the stream and into our veins; into our veins and down the stream. Who is permitting the pollutant discharges? Chemicals flow uninhibited without word. I thought about this essay while walking quickly through the East Village: "bombing through Tompkins Square Park," natural organic vitamins in hand, beat of sneakers establishing prose in head. Slight wind from East River clarifies interior by distraction of landscape upon person. Trade that anecdote: wind contains small taste of car, invisible unknowns, multiple of, chemical introductions. Tina on Ponge's expression in continuous differentiation sounds similar to Angus Fletcher on Clare: "these natural phenomena, including human behavior, seem to possess no inherently centralizing midpoint. The poet obeys a law of continuously shifting center." Ponge as center shifts to *pré* as center of U.S. shifts to *pré* after *pré* after *pré* (see photos). Tilled and irrigated grain as disaster crop, growing in disturbed soil. *Describe this!* No longer the form of a cross, but rather a circle in the middle of desert. The computer receives a fax at this moment and the secretive fan on the side blows harder, heated air bounces off old computer to the left and back into my face. What am I receiving from you today, computer? Polychlorinated biphenyls, toluene, styrene, ethyl phenol, and one failed fax? Trade that anecdote. Call again into landsquint, so that irrigation circles seem greenly ideal, rather than mold blot of altered DNA disaster crop dispossessing cryptobiotic soil.

P  
o  
DNA  
g  
e

P  
cryptObiotic  
n  
g  
e

DNA

Apollinaire would be agape. PONGE. Hypernaturalism. The state of words. An abundance of soil biota. To describe through eye world consisting of water *tasting* of PBDEs. My eye is tainted with chemicals. Watery sphere bounces off landscape to describe itself. Everything in that stream. Moving through no words.

#### NOTES:

##### Ponge

Ponge, Francis. *La Fabrique du Pré /The Making of the Pré*. Tr. Lee Fahnestock. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1979.

“Paris, 11 October 1960

THE *PRE*.—I conceived it at Chambon-sur-Lignon, this summer, not far from Chantegrenouille.

I, é, é, i.

From (since) rock to (until) water, the *pré*. It pumps, inhales and exhales, and flourishes. *Sat prata biberunt*.

Above (from the spot where we were, the spot where we happened to be, from which we overlooked the scene, where I saw it, for the first time saw, conceived), we were among dry shrubs: heather particularly, pine needles, no doubt a few ferns, among the rocks and the trunks of trees.” (p. 21)

“Paris, 16 October 1960 (3)

XXXX

XXX

XX

X

It is nevertheless from the origin, possible in my opinion, (origin?—at least *kinship*) that I intuitively draw the reason for the proximity of sound (phonetic) of those three words: *pré, près, prêt*. *Parenté* ‘kinship’ also comes from *pair* (equal, close).” (p. 39)

“Paris, Night of 14 to 15 December 1960 (1)

For want of having couched (If you do not couch) your adversary there you will be couched by him.

### *The Pré*

They used to say *la prée*. Now we have the *prairie* and the *pré*. Absence of woods?

Prepared by nature, *prêt*, ready for mowing or for grazing, the *pré*, amenable surface (when may I! . . .), and also the field of decision.” (p. 53)

“Paris, Night of 14 to 15 December 1960 (2)

Prepared, longed for, crossed in flight as if by a bird, by the flash of a rapid bird, flying low *in direction counter to the writing* (reversing the sense, ‘in mis-construction’) (such is the acute accent).

X

So there is something about the *pré*. Here is something else: the sort of element-aliment that it represents. It is a species slightly more consistent than a liquid, mixture of the kingdoms, of the three kingdoms: mineral, animal, and vegetal.” (p. 57)

“Paris, Night of 14 to 15 December (3)

The *pré* is laid out flat by nature as one of its *final* successes, as though freely sketched, as though with a single stroke of the pen or the brush one of its more perfect conclusions: as equal to the sandy beach (for the mineral) or to the sea, or to a lake (for the liquid state of matter)

The vegetal earth, which is already by, in, itself a complex of remains of the three kingdoms, divided and extremely well kneaded, produces, receives from the very primitive (simplistic) or very degenerated plants (many of the graminaceous are cereals still in infancy at full strength or else, on the contrary, degenerate).

‘Descent in sand. Rain, soft vertical rain.’

This too is what is marvelous about the *pré*: this *elementarity* (*acquired?*) (exquisite also) and (also—but this is something else—this *alimentarity*) (just as one has meat ground up at the butcher’s).

(There is something of ground beef in the *pré*.)

Ground *fine*: there is something fine, spare, *less* about the *pré*.

Something less and more. Something of a planing down, ‘but in truth’ nothing more for the planing (no more wood).

Absence of wood (material)” (p. 59)

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With anecdote . . . With 24-hour-talk-stereo-typing-till, statistics make us self-protective.

Mooney, Chris. “Breaking the Frame.” *The American Prospect*. April, 2003, pp. 38-41.

This article discusses the work of Susan Nall Bales, who incorporates the ideas of anthropologist Gregory Bateson and media critic Shanto Iyengar (among others) in her public relations work for environmental groups. Anecdote + doomsday statistics = Chicken Little syndrome, while on the other hand ads depicting a number of alternative energy sources together result in coalition-building with the goal of holding business interests and governments accountable for environmental destruction.

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“ecology as the landscape department”

Recent books that critique the Enlightenment concept that bodies and environments are discrete entities:

Markowitz, Gerald E., and Rosner, David. *Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002.

Steingraber, Sandra. *Having Faith: An Ecologist’s Journey into Motherhood*. Cambridge, Mass: Perseus Publications, 2001.

Thorton, Joe. *Pandora’s Poison: Chlorine, Health, and a New Environmental Strategy*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000.

These are reviewed in:

Kroll-Smith, Steve, and Worth Lancaster. "Bodies, Environments, and a New Style of Reasoning." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 583: 203-212, November 2002.

A specific discussion of "pollutant discharge permits" can be found on p. 7 of *Pandora's Poison*.

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"Toxic loads we carry . . ."

Stanley, Jon S. *Broad Scan Analysis of Human Adipose Tissue*. Executive Summary. EPA Contract B560/5-86/035. Springfield, VA: National Technical Information Service, 1986.

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"To annihilate a sentence, move back from the end and continue through the rest of the sentence."

Again, Ponge: "by the flash of a rapid bird, flying low *in direction counter to the writing* (reversing the sense, 'in misconception')." (p. 57) Environment constructed by language or *vice versa*.

Fletcher, Angus. *A New Theory for American Poetry*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

"Field is a technical term in physics that enables us to understand electromagnetism. But field is an even older term for nature's appearance and actuality. Francis Ponge wanted his modern reader to learn this link of ancient and modern from his environment poem, *La Fabrique du Pré* ("The Making of the Meadow"). Ponge writes his poem as if it were part and parcel of all the explorations underlying a final version, and hence his poem displays a seemingly systematic relation between this type of poetry and the essay. All is finally provisional, because the details of the chorographic scene are constantly changing, day to day, month to month." (p. 139)

"The computer emanates PBDEs . . ."

"Burned by Flame Retardants? Our bodies are accumulating chemicals from sofas, computers, and television sets." *Science News Online*. <http://www.sciencenews.org/articles/20011013/bob18.asp>

“Trace amounts of PBDEs [polybromo diphenyl ethers] leach into the air and sewage, probably from plastics in appliances and computers, foam in upholstery, and fabric of carpets and draperies.”

“Brominated Flame Retardants in Dust on Computers: The Case for Safer Chemicals and Better Computer Design.” [http://www.computertakeback.com/the\\_problem/bfr.cfm](http://www.computertakeback.com/the_problem/bfr.cfm)

“Because these chemicals build up in the body, low levels of deca-BDE and other brominated chemicals found in the dust samples, no matter how small the amounts, are cause for concern as this study among others demonstrates that these chemicals are ubiquitous in our environment and immediately available for human ingestion. These findings strongly indicate that consumer products, such as computers that use brominated flame retardants, are likely to be a source of exposure and add to the growing body of evidence showing that deca-BDE is quickly becoming one of the most abundant congeners found in samples of indoor dust.”

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**“is it true Yellowstone at the West Entrance has the worst air in the nation?”**

Actually, that honor appears to belong either to Southern California or Texas. However, “employees who work at the Western gate into America's first national park have been issued respirators,” says Associated Press writer Christopher Thorne (February 15, 2002). “At the western gate into Yellowstone National Park, the snowmobiles back up dozens, if not hundreds, at a time to ride the park's snow-covered roads. The idling gasoline-fired engines belch so much exhaust into the mountain air that on still, windless days, a blue haze settles over the gate into the park, and workers complain of sore throats, runny noses and burning eyes.”

**“It quakes in felicity with every quake elsewhere on this continent.”**

“Alaska Quake Seems to Trigger Yellowstone Jolts: Small Tremors Rattle National Park After Big Quake 2,000 Miles Away,” released on November 4, 2002, by the University of Utah Seismograph Stations, <http://www.seis.utah.edu/RecentNews/YNP-11042002.shtml>

**“South Utah activists who pull up Bureau of Land Management signs.”**

“Activists” on the wrong side of the law. “[T]he BLM denied the Jamboree’s permit application this year, finding it could not approve the event without completing a proper Environmental Assessment . . . Not to be deterred, Jeep Jamboree (sponsored by DaimlerChrysler) and San Juan County officials chose to thwart federal law and conduct the event without a permit. Near the first of 59 stream crossings, the San Juan County sheriff defiantly led Jamboree participants past media reporters, members of SUWA and the Great Old Broads for Wilderness, and a BLM enforcement ranger who carefully videotaped each violating jeeper. So far no one has been cited for this crime.”

*Redrock Wilderness: The Newsletter of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance*, Volume 21, Number 2, Summer 2004. (p. 14)

**Fletcher, Angus on Presocratic philosophy:** “Here form and idea are felt to lose their absolute stasis, so the art of saying and expressing the Logos reverses its direction: instead of prescribing the forms of the world’s multiplicity, the poet as Presocratic insists on *describing* the world . . . Ideas then would be subordinate to things.” Presocratic Williams? (*A New Theory for American Poetry*, p. 30)

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“Oh ‘wildness’ and ‘civility’ so sufficiently balanced to deep-six power grab infestations beneath the façade of ‘natural law.’”

Stevens, M.L.Tina. *Bioethics in America: Origins and Cultural Politics*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

Titling the prologue to her book “The Tradition of Ambivalence,” one of Stevens’s main themes centers on the consequences of idealizing a balance between nature and technology going back to Thoreau and continuing through the “responsible science movement” following World War II. This reliance on a faux “natural law” of balance maintained by a managerial class undermines the analysis of whose interests are being served by technological developments and fuels the feeling that these developments are inevitable and thus “out of our hands.”

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“Malaysians having no word for a separate ‘wilderness’.”

Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. Third Edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982. p. xiv.



“A few cultures in today’s world are still precivilized in the sense of having a nomadic hunting and gathering economy. It is significant that they have no word in their vocabularies for ‘wilderness’ . . . in the jungles of Malaysia, I tried without success to discuss wilderness . . . I asked the interpreter to ask the hunter how he said ‘I am lost in the jungle’ . . . The question made as little sense to him as would asking an American city dweller how he said ‘I am lost in my apartment.’ Lacking a concept of controlled and uncontrolled nature, the Malaysian had no conception of wilderness.”

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On “efforting” corn kernel and soybean DNA: “From seed to distribution to processing, soybeans are associated with concentration of power.”

Shiva, Vandana. *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000. (p. 30)

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**“All of us having no word for the chemical co-mmunity we share with what surrounds us.”**

This collaborative essay was read as part of a panel on ecopoetics, convened by Paige Menton and held at the Kelly Writers House, Philadelphia, PA, on March 3, 2004. One member of the audience was angered by what she experienced as our attempt to obscure the environmental issues before us. Perhaps the collaboration should have been prefaced by a reading of Ponge’s texts themselves to ground our discussion (pun intended) in his beautiful work. It is difficult to call for collaborative, interdependent ways to address the danger we’re in while at the same time breaking up the images and ideas that have sustained us in the past but that have been appropriated by Chicken Little. What kinds of poetic practices would illuminate the life workings of “pré-cautionary principles” where those who profit from technological developments are responsible for proving that they pose no harm to our confluence of bodies and environments?

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Environmental Research Foundation

Provides news and resources on environmental justice issues for the general public in both Spanish and English.

**JONATHAN SKINNER / NOTES ON *A NEW THEORY FOR AMERICAN POETRY: DEMOCRACY, THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE FUTURE OF IMAGINATION* BY ANGUS FLETCHER. 316 PP. HARVARD UP, 2004**

In this ambitious book from the author of *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, that aims for no less than a formal theory of “the environment-poem,” the assertion that such a poetics “requires opposition to allegory” may come as a surprise. Angus Fletcher’s attraction to John Ashbery and his claims for Ashbery as a poet of the environment may appear equally surprising. For Fletcher, allegory is dangerous aesthetics in the meeting of science and art, where the thematization of the environment risks “removing environmental response from center stage. The individual response to natural conditions gets swallowed up in the facts and figures of the science or the activist argument.” *A New Theory for American Poetry*, then, is Fletcher’s effort to locate a form of environmental response in poetry.

Readers familiar with the aesthetic and ideological claims and the debates surrounding postmodern writing will recognize Fletcher’s call for a poetry focused on process (“becoming”) and participation (“middle voice”), that “resists its own transcendental impulses,” contradicting itself and “push[ing] the observer inside the system.” Fletcher principally is interested in what he calls the “environment poem,” that is, a poetry that aspires to “surround the reader,” to be like, rather than about, an environment. At the same time, Fletcher rarely relies on impressionistic analogies between language and nature (poem as compost heap, as detritus feeder, as wetland), nor does he emphasize “reference.”

The same readers may resist this book, wondering why Fletcher, in his leap from Whitman to the late Ashbery, ignores half a century or more of New American poetics, from Objectivism and Projective Verse to the various experimentations in communities of meaning with “language writing,” etc. I hope these readers overcome their resistance, since Fletcher’s placement of description (as distinct from reference) back at the heart of pragmatism should be useful to contemporary practice. Also, Fletcher is transparent about his omissions, pleading theory’s rarefied diet, where conceptual clearing rather than poetic adhesion is the rule. Indeed, he partly confesses a preference for the kind of book Jed Rasula’s *This Compost* has given us: “Theory sadly must omit one’s favorites. It would be more congenial to speak richly and exactly in the poet’s dialect, commenting upon artistic aim and manner, as defined by the endless variety each artist in principle makes possible.” Though Fletcher’s reasoning feels circular here (arguing that because theory allows the few to stand for many, it provides space for the many) he indicates a wider awareness and application: “among contemporaries, I analyze only John Ashbery, yet tacitly I have many other names in mind at the very same moment.”

This book, in fact, offers highly useful claims for reading and engaging contemporaries also at work with a “new theory” of American poetry. Fletcher’s advocacy for the can-do “environment-poems” of Whitman and Ashbery illuminates a critical “difference between coherence and the mistaken consistency of an imposed universal cohesion,” pleads for the deliberate drift of improvisatory and experimental poetics, and might apply equally, say, to Larry Eigner or Robert Grenier, Meimei Berssenbrugge or Nathaniel Mackey, or, in another direction, to Taylor Brady’s recent “poem of diurnal knowledge,” *Yesterday’s News*.

In fact, the principal weakness of Fletcher’s book is not narrowness but, rather, a range and diversity of interests as deep as it is wide, a plethora of sometimes contradictory thoughts on the “environment poem,” that, in a manner true to the fractal form Fletcher celebrates in his discussion of Ashbery, causes the central argument to spin off into whorls and tributaries of suggestion—provocations which certainly enrich the manifold but can be distracting as mere suggestion, without further development. And Fletcher takes a long, long time to develop his key readings, with little reiteration, so that the reader unwilling to go back and mark the steps of the argument risks missing the thesis altogether.

In that light, and because I think Fletcher’s argument deserves wider discussion, I offer these notes — a condensation of my reading, via key quotations—in the hopes that readers of *ecopoetics* will be incited to further explorations of Fletcher’s work, if not to some spirited counter-argument:

§ Fletcher begins with John Clare’s account (in the *Autobiographical Writings*) of setting out, as a child, to find the horizon. For Clare, Fletcher argues, it is particularly the act of description that mediates self and horizon: “The fate of description then is a search for simultaneous perception of the surrounding circle of our material being, disciplined by the need to show free play within this circle of contending forces.” To reclaim, via Clare, a “low romanticism” and poetics of the nondescript, of the “environmental array” rather than sublime “hyperscene,” is also to value the “diurnal knowledge” of unmeasured but diurnally experienced time.

§ Fletcher’s “environment-poem” also relies on a distinction between the place of topography and what he calls “chorographic” space—basically Stevens’s description without place: “Chora . . . names the turbulent surface of the living ground on which or in which every thing is placed, even imprinted, while this siting or placement remains always shaken and oscillating in the changes of the becoming. . . . Chorographic vision questions topos or *place*, by showing turbulent movements within *space*.”

§ Tropes like metaphor define “the ordinary language equivalent of [Gödel’s Incompleteness] Theorem, since metaphor earns a kind of completeness at the prices of manifest inconsistency” (and vice versa). The coherencies—“do I contradict myself? very well then”—of poetic space are thus more environment-like than the consistencies of prosaic place.

§ Fletcher sees Whitman “phrasing Jacksonian democracy” (a new world of co-evolutionary, as opposed to hierarchical-logical, cohesion), where the eccentric deployment of phrase-units and weakening of clausal forms suits aggregation and the forming of the ensemble. Whitman’s unsubordinated phrase becomes, “the centrally natural linguistic expression of democracy, for good or ill . . . Whitman’s aim is less to express or depict persons exerting power over each other (which would yield allegory), than it is to express the adjacency of people, places, and things. This adjacency, when articulated as a complex living neighborhood, is exactly what I am calling an environment.”

§ As poet of adjacency and democratic adhesion, as well as of the intransitive middle voice, Whitman develops the “environment-poem,” inculcating a “reception of variety”: “the *environment-poem* . . . actually shapes the poem to *be* an Emersonian or esemplastic circle. . . . these environment-poems aspire to surround the reader, such that to read them is to have an experience much like suddenly recognizing that one actually has an environment, instead of not perceiving the surround at all. . . . The environment-poem requires us, in both writing and reading, to practice a casual, unauthorized, but always intensely focused noticing.”

§ In Ashbery’s *Flow Chart*, written as a daily journal and thus “a strict example of the poetry of diurnal knowledge . . . [w]hat emerges [in the reading of the poem] is the capacity of a system to develop its own ensemble character.” The middle voice poem—half way between mind and object—“pushes the observer [or reader] inside the system.”

§ This might have been the moment for Fletcher to cross over and acknowledge a half century or more of New American poetics, and to historicize his argument, but instead “Complexity Theory” emerges: “poems of this kind are dedicated to showing how we adapt to the environments into which we are thrown by life. . . . the coherent poem expresses a scene of gradually self-adjusting and expanding co-existence, a *getting along* within a population. . . . Mind and nature thus converge on the plane of complex non-linear aggregates.”

§ Fletcher takes his complexity from John Holland’s *Hidden Order: How Adaptation Builds Complexity*, in particular the “seven-fold array” that, Holland argues, sequences any adaptive system: aggregation, tagging, nonlinearity, flow, internal diversity, an internal model and, seventh, building blocks. Fletcher thus insists that “for intentional *innering* to occur, there must already exist a chart of transaction.” Number is the stabilizing archetype of Ashbery’s revery, a scaling device that guides and controls the flux of detail.

§ For Fletcher everything in Ashbery’s *Flow Chart* leads up to the “chart” that finally reveals itself (or “emerges”) with the “inleaved” double sestina at the end of

Part V, “modeled” after Swinburne’s “Complaint of Lisa”: “The sestina anchors or gives shape to an otherwise exceedingly elusive poem, whose six-fold structure might otherwise stand unrevealed.”

§ Fletcher describes Ashbery’s heliotropic, double sestina as an example of “democratic excellence . . . elite form embedded in open, diagnostic, democratic excursion.” He reads the sestina as a kind of island in the stream, whose closure opposes (or balances) the “free flow of prose poetry” and thus dialectically grants the stream its autonomy: “The sestina form has the power to intervene in the flux of sequence. It therefore has a sort of gyroscopic power to balance larger forms. The sestina objectifies the surrounding flow, supplying a mysterious chart for the journey.” So, clearly, an environment-poem demands both closed and open form.

Sometimes the argument seems too specific (why the fixation—from amongst a host of possible poetic measures—on phrases, waves and numbers?) and at times not specific enough: right where a demonstration, or as one might say a theory of language, is called for, Fletcher backs off. Nor does Fletcher see fit to articulate a global sociopolitical perspective, without which a “poetics of large numbers” can have but the slightest purchase on our rapidly changing world. The English-language thrust of the work also misses perhaps the most vital “chorography” of American poetics, which is its multilingual heritage. Still, Fletcher has made a good case for the poetry that he feels inculcates “intensely focused noticing.” However one may question the universality of his judgments, he leaves us with some useful divisions—poetics of the nondescript vs. the sublime, diurnal vs. transcendental knowledge, environmental array vs. hyperscene, chorographic vs. topographic writing, coherence vs. consistency—as well as with some thought-provoking linkages—phrasal aggregation or adjacency and the emergent forms of complexity, the middle voice and system-as-environment, open and closed form in the scaling of long works . . .

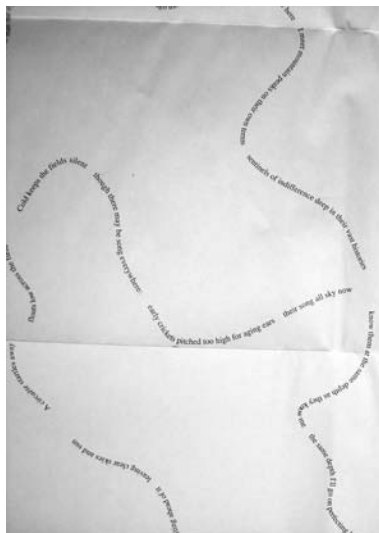
In addition, Fletcher truly loves the poet’s art, and it is a treat to discover, in his hands, rare gems like Whitman’s “Sparkles from the Wheel,” or Clare’s “Mouse’s Nest,” poems the book quotes entire. In his introduction Fletcher notes that “at all points this book began with reflections on Whitman.” Like Rasula before him, Fletcher offers a welcome addition to Whitman studies—part of the ongoing revaluation of the poet’s late work—and provocatively places Whitman at the heart of ecopoetics. This makes sense: the second edition of *Leaves of Grass*, on display at a recent New York Public Library exhibition, adopted a “field-ready” 6.3 x 3.2 in. format, “handy for pocket, table, or shelf.” Let’s be thankful that a second, paperback edition of Fletcher’s valuable study is also about to appear.

**JONATHAN SKINNER REVIEWS *FOSSIL SKY* BY DAVID HINTON  
ARCHIPELAGO BOOKS, 2004**

The Circaète, or Snake Eagle, endemic to the Cévennes, subsists entirely on snakes, especially the grass snake (according to Oiseaux.net). A reader of David Hinton's *Fossil Sky* will learn this in the notes glossing the name of a bird, whose cries of "pkeer pkeer" punctuate the poem. The "jacket" blurb tells us that the poem, which "distills a year of walks taken near the poet's home," was written "during a period of time he spent in southern France."

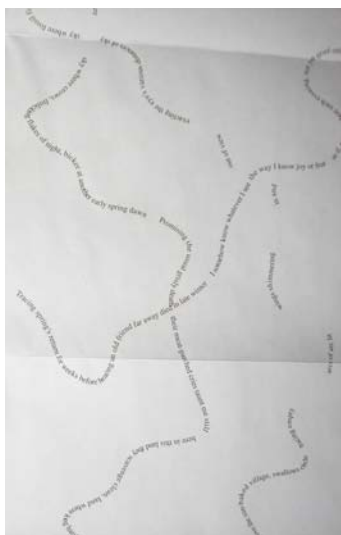
The poem comes folded up exactly like a map, spreads across a huge "page" measuring roughly 4 ½ feet square, and is bounded by a thin blue circle (radius of about 26 inches). The myriad "lines" squiggle across it like ant trails or the cracks in a heated tortoise shell. (The author appears to have made use of the "Bezier paths" tool in layout software.) At first glance, the reader might think s/he is looking at a "map" of the poet's walks near his home in the Cévennes. (Did the poet trace his lines over the trails marked on his topographical map?) There is no clear indication where the poem "starts" and where it "finishes." At what appears to be roughly the center of the blue circle, we begin to read, "Tracing spring's return for weeks before hearing an old friend far away died in late winter." This "trail" continues for three more winding phrases of similar length, separated by triple spaces—reflections on familiarity and "earth's elemental indifference." It crosses three other trails, including the head of another trail that begins "A thin scree of light pollen hisses on the clear glacial lake . . ."

While it might be tempting to think this "center" of the sphere represents the location of the poet's home, since three other trails issue from that spot, there are many other such centers on the map, constituted by three or four emerging lines, appearing to gravitate together like chromosomes under a microscope. This pattern of centers and wandering peripheries gives the whole a pleasantly random yet harmonious aspect. Furthermore, isolated phrases—"The no beckons," "wings shimmering," "a roof," "hear waves"—and words—"oxygen," "carbon," "laughing," an onomatopoeic "pKeeerr"—spray off the ends of lines in a way that indicates, in some respects at least, the mimesis and expressivity of a calligramme rather than cartographic projection.



One also wonders about the compositional method, in relation to walking: were the lines and stanzas for this poem culled from notes kept while walking? Or just after walks? Did the poet plot his lines while contemplating a map of his walks? Or were they otherwise “recollected in tranquility”? Were the lines composed with an aleatoric procedure such as Richard Tuttle’s wire release sculptures?

Is the poem “projective,” in the Olsonian sense, a work of “open” form or “composition by field”? Does it, at all points, “go by no track other than the one the poem under hand declares”? There is a feeling of tracery, as if the poem might have been composed beforehand and then each section “set” into a long bezier curve, with extra spaces for the line breaks, and capital letters indicating new stanzas, as in the following:



We're more sky than anything else  
more sights and sounds forgotten and lost  
but light forgets it all perfectly:

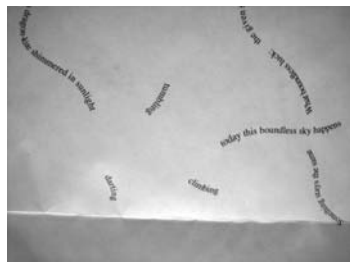
Frost-glazed grasses shimmer  
shuddering under faint breezes  
slowly turning meltwater dark

Frost heavier down along the shoreline  
promising the wordless  
ink-dark clarities snow brings to lake-water

It's cold and frost-melt wet  
and I'll soon remember nothing about this  
routine walk

Perhaps I should have stayed home:  
a roof  
a fire  
a family

Is it more than an arrangement, to have this set along a squiggling, intermittent line? Either way, it does seem that the exploitation of new typesetting technology, to draw out, bend and pluck stanzas (as when the six short phrases in the last two “stanzas” fly off in different directions like sparks, birds or droplets), and the layering of these drawn-out stanzas, within the poem’s blue horizon, to create something like a simultaneous network, rather than linear “message,” initiates an entirely different experience for the reader.



But there are other forms of shelter:  
Boundless sky  
cocoon light  
whisper snow

The large format is both overwhelming and accessible in one glance. The intermittent spaces (that I have interpreted as “stanza” breaks) allow one to pick up, or drop, the reading of any given line at multiple points. And sometimes the line, like a mineral seam, disappears for quite a ways, to get picked up only later by the carefully tracking eye. Sometimes a line splits into several branches, or several lines combine into one. And, occasionally, lines loop back as if to swallow their tails, or cross back over themselves, as if to delimit a “closed area”—reinforcing that uncertain “weren’t we here before?” feeling. Finally, on one occasion, at least (when “You might pile such ruins up into a borie and light a candle” intersects with “A mourning candle burns down into shallows”) two different lines share the same word (“candle”) so that the reader suddenly is faced with a fork in the “track.” (“Borie,” according to an author’s note, is a dome-shaped shelter built without mortar from stones gathered in the fields, traditional to the farmlands of Provence since the neolithic.) At the word “candle” two tracks suddenly become four—an experience familiar to anyone who’s hiked goat trails. As in such a maze, or hive, there’s seemingly an infinite number of tracks to follow, poems to read.

The further the walker gets from home the more s/he is asked to reflect on “other forms of shelter,” on what it might mean to be “sheltered” by sky, light, snow; similarly, we might ask what shelters the poem, once removed from the book? Where Queneau’s *Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* “contains” its infinitude within the closed form of the sonnet, Hinton chooses to bound his forking composition with the simple, yet hermeneutically loaded, gesture of a blue circle. (Hommage to Richard Long?) The careful yet seemingly random distribution of the lines, the visual element of the composition that aims to please the unifying glance as much as the particulate examination, “extends” the “content” of Hinton’s meditations on nature, transience, home, mortality and the “long view” of old age (“early crickets pitched too high for aging ears”):

We cannot say the lake cares, cannot say it doesn’t  
Yes, the particular is meaningless

long-legged, skitterish, sunning  
motionless on the warm stone ruins, a cricket  
startles away

The long view is a mirror . . .  
sight leaving earth’s every instance perfectly itself

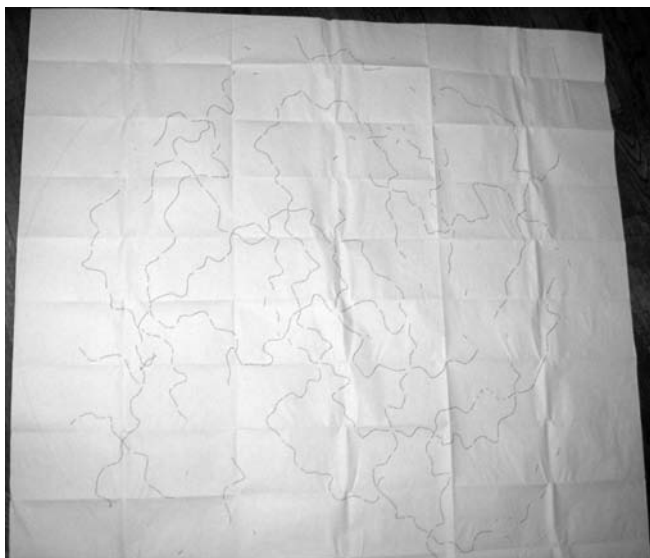
*Fossil Sky* calls into question the supposed “nonlinearity” of projectivist compositions (in, say, works by Olson, Eigner, Howe), which, compared to this work, still seem ruled by a left-to-right and top-to-bottom reading grid. Its large format also exceeds the measures of most digital work. And what a spin on proprioception: the poem’s snaking lines curve “upside down” so that you have to twist your head around



The poem is full of transcendental observations (“Lit gold lining the parched whorl of broom’s empty seedpods”) yet it is not romantic:

Exhausted after three days tending a sick family  
I set out to gather fresh rose-hips among mountains forgetting them  
selves in turn now  
and too tired even for a lazy walk through this afternoon's weave of all  
that was or ever will be here  
I meet mountain peaks on their own terms  
sentinels of indifference deep in their vast histories

The long view is also a mirror: watch out — when you begin to take the poem in, like the Circaète you may find yourself digesting the head of your prey while you are still swallowing the tail.



**JONATHAN SKINNER REVIEWS *OCCASIONAL WORK AND SEVEN WALKS FROM THE OFFICE FOR SOFT ARCHITECTURE* BY LISA ROBERTSON  
274pp. CLEAR CUT, 2003**

As the cover flaps indicate, the Office for Soft Architecture proposes this “lyrical document of a decade or so of recent transformations in the city of Vancouver, B.C.”—one that “also serves as a practical guide for the navigation and appreciation of contemporary cities”—in order “to construct propositions and reports for the advancement of a natural history of civic surface.” The prospect of being invited on some literary “walks” with perhaps the most uncompromising revisionist of pastoral writing (see her 1999 *XEclogue*) would be enticing enough: how much more so a volume that promises, within its ultra-compact (4 x 6”), pocket-sized dimensions the combined benefits of a guidebook, a “lyrical document,” and a prolegomena to the “natural history of civic surface”! As readers of ecopoetics must know, I am partial to pocket-sized books: the density, scope and richness of *Occasional Work and Seven Walks from the Office for Soft Architecture* is such that I carried it around in various pockets, on and off, for more than a year. Having read through its battered pages for a second time, now, I can affirm that the Office for Soft Architecture does not disappoint. I would go so far as to call it required reading for the current work (and play) of ecopoetics.

The extremes of this book may put some readers off: moving as it does between the elliptical surfaces of aphorism (“Each shack dweller is an economist who thrives in the currency of the minimum”), the autonomy of manifesto (“We are Naturalists of the inessential”) and the lyrical surfeit of a language which, as the cover blurb puts it, can read like “the metaphysical adventures of a cloud.” Some might be suspicious of the emancipatory perspective determined to see (us) through various nostalgias of the local—but Robertson’s psychoanalytic reference is Freud’s early “screen memory,” while the Marxist touchstone is the “Arcades” project of Walter Benjamin. Two theoretical moments whose positions vis-à-vis civic/self awareness and natural history are highly ambivalent, to say the least. For the reader who neither bounces off the text nor allows herself to be merely carried away by the often gorgeous writing, this is the kind of book that rewards digging. The bibliography for each essay reads like a startling, wholly original graph for further study. Consider the “Sources” for the essay on “Atget’s Interiors”—Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*; Bernard Cache, *Earth Moves: The Furnishing of Territories*; G.K. Chesterton, *On Lying in Bed and Other Essays*; Molly Nesbit, *Atget’s Seven Albums*; Marcel Proust, *On Reading Ruskin*; Gertrude Stein, *Lectures in America*.

But there’s also a lot to pursue between the lines. Since her 2001 *The Weather*, at least, Robertson’s writings have orchestrated research in a range of

nineteenth-century documents. In the Office's marvellous essay on the Himalayan blackberry, "Rubus Armeniacus: A Common Architectural Decorative Motif in the Temperate Mesophytic Region" Robertson pursues "an etymology of ornament, following the Rubus runner back to the screen memory of the nineteenth century." One of his first treatises on memory and repression, Freud's "Screen Memory" appeared a year before the landmark *The Interpretation of Dreams* (in 1899), later to be suppressed as incomplete and compromised, if not plainly compromising. In Freud's self-analysis, displacement occurs along the plane of color, from the yellow dress of his first (forbidden) crush to the yellow dandelions in the childhood meadow of his screen memory.

Robertson's essay on color, "How to Colour," makes explicit the directions of her interest in the "false and therefore instructive" dichotomy of color and pigment, as a dialogue of "surface": "The surface of us overlaps with other phyla. Walking and parading we mix the surface of the earth, though we might intend that march's purpose as ordination. Colour marks exchange. It is border-work. Mixture is our calling." This text points the way to a very rich development of the notion of "environmental unconscious" (recently broached by ecocritic Lawrence Buell, after Frederic Jameson's "political unconscious"). One direction, here, the generative and affective impulse of this writing, is mongrel—toward grafting, the hybrid, the "impure" life of border zones. Poetics of the edge habitats of geo-globalized fragmentation, or what French gardenist Gilles Clément calls the "Third landscape," where horticultural vagabonds and "invasive" species flourish such as the *Rubus armeniacus* blackberry that Robertson's essay celebrates. Another direction, more analytical, advocates clearing: "We are aligned with surface. We exchange mineral components with an historical territory . . . Thinking about colour we open up a space in the surface, the potent space between substance and politics."

Here, the names of colors are "the public screens on which sentiment performs" and the notions of color and pigment "must be observed with ambivalence." The virtue of Robertson's text is to admit a wildness (in her essay on Atget she refers to the "wildness of random change" in the composed space between two aesthetics of class) constituted not by "fantasized ideal" but in an unpredictable back-and-forth—she might say "at the surface"—between affect and analysis, between the "morphological lust" of lyric, mixing the surface of collective memory that is language, and the effort to "draw a waking life." Her style provokes a view, then "invades the centre" with exuberant rhetoric, then contains this affect. It can be an exhausting ride, as if we had woken up within the surface of Flaubert's prose, to find ourselves "a purpleness learning itself." But we are these attachments to landscape, changing more quickly than the heart of a mortal. The "lyrical document" aims to activate our sentiment:

“when emotion is made visible as form, transformation becomes possible at that form’s borders.” Emotion and color are ideologically soluble; we may better leverage our (class) consciousness, the Office suggests, via the outdated culture of sentiment, the obsolete science of pigment.

Many of the essays in this book repeat this strategy of the “screen memory,” delving into various 19th-century forms of surface ornament, fictions for the changing contemporary landscape the Office documents: leisure colonies and parks; the Arts and Crafts style in design, architecture and gardening (according to gardenist Gertrude Jekyll: “the Grey garden is seen at its best by reaching it through orange borders”); Luther Burbank’s entrepreneurial horticulturalism; theories of color, Napoleonic military fashion, and the discourse around polychromatism (“This is architecture. An applied art”); a history of scaffolding; an account of the shack as social theory; Atget’s politics of furnishing; Baudelaire’s sartorial thrift; the picturesque excursion.

These applications share the engine of empire, ur-form for the globalization behind Vancouver’s changing urban textures, as observed between the sale of the Expo ’86 site and the 2003 acquisition of the 2010 Winter Olympics. The semi-reconstructed landscape of Vancouver’s New Brighton Park offers another, Smithsonian form for Robertson’s deterritorialized “experiment in collaboration with the forms and concerns of my community”—“a mutating lens: never a settlement . . . On the calm surface of the swimming pool in winter, a village of geese.” Whether or not “forms of community” includes the geese, their “village” models soft architecture, exactly at the seam between natural history and civic surface.

Such a study of surface offers an alternative to the “depth ecology” of classic, Snyderian ecopoetics: surplus to scarcity (“We say Enough of the Least”); the inventiveness of the “minor invasive alien” to the old growth stability of “nature at climax.”:

The limitless modification of the skin is different from modernization—surface morphologies, as *Rubus* shows, include decay, blanketing and smothering, shedding, dissolution and penetration, and pendulous swagging and draping, as well as proliferative growth, all in contexts of environmental disturbance and contingency rather than fantasized balance.

Robertson seems to be picking up where Robert Smithson’s “entropology” left off. (Disturbance can be found anywhere, but especially in human numbers.) Snyder has offered his own meditation on disturbance in *Danger on Peaks* (his latest volume, reviewed this issue). What if we read the Office for Soft Architecture and Gary Snyder as contemporary variants on Pacific Northwest poetics (not a bioregion, but a biome of sorts, knit by specialists in disturbance)? Something might be gained from the comparison.

I'll leave what might be the better part of this book to a stronger reviewer: the "Seven Walks," which seem to follow Gerard de Nerval or Charles Baudelaire in the embrace of prose as a walking measure. As a (sub)urban poetics "of Walking" (the title of her Kootenay School of Writing workshop) Robertson's excursions may take their rightful place beside Baudelaire's *Spleen de Paris*, Louis Aragon's *Paysan de Paris*, or Smithson's "Brief Tour of the Monuments of Passaic." But the artistry of the book extends throughout, as the grafted form of its "lyrical documents" (see the Sources) nicely extends the hybrid content. The focus on pattern and ornament is similarly integral, where thrift stores (in "The Value Village Lyric") spread just like the blackberry bushes of another essay; or where pigment (with the indigo trade) finances Schliemann's excavation of "Troy" the way color lifts Arts and Crafts philosophy out of its regional context.

One suspects that Robertson's favorite image for "soft architecture" is the one she returns to on several occasions: "perhaps the transient and beribboned rhetoric of the picnic is the most modern of architectures." She urges us to picnic on the rubble of urban origins, "with fluent obliviousness." Certainly, the book is a picnic, if not a moveable feast. However, for a reader of *ecopoetics*, the preferred image may, of course, be the shack (in "Playing House: A Brief Account of the Idea of the Shack"). The shack is vernacular, the "speech" to architecture's "writing." Here, Robertson would have us replace the Rousseauian/Thoreauvian shack of self-reliance with an image drawn from Vitruvius, where the shack is a result of "social generosity" and collective mimesis: "The shack is the pliant site that adds to our ideas new tropes, gestures learned from neighbors, creatures, moot economies, landscapes, and the vigour of our own language in recombination . . ." The shack is where we play house with the larger collective, one including extra-humans, acquiring gestures for *ecopoetics*, what Snyder might call a global "etiquette." Along the way, we are introduced to such conditions and constructs as the "spiritual shack," "shack-envy," and the "shack story." The shack is, finally, a suitable image for this book, a pliant site if there ever was one, to carry around in your pocket like a space blanket, ready to unfold at any moment.

The book's short title is *Occasional Work*—indeed it consists almost exclusively of commissioned essays, produced in collaboration with sites, organizations, archivists and, especially, artists: Eugène Atget, Petra Blaisse, Lloyd Center, Mia Cunningham, Renée Van Halm, Keith Higgins, Hadley Howes, Andreas Pauly, Maxwell Stephens, Liz Magor, Robin Mitchell, Elspeth Pratt, Kathy Slade. These names—and the juicy photographs (many in color) interleaved throughout—are testament to the collective nature of this work. Yet another reason, dear readers, for shacking up with the invaluable Office.

**JONATHAN SKINNER REVIEWS *ANGER ON PEAKS* BY GARY SNYDER  
112PP. SHOEMAKER HOARD, 2004**

From Snyder comes the first collection of new poems in almost twenty years (not counting new work that appeared with the selected *No Nature* in 1993 and with the completed *Mountains and Rivers Without End* in 1996), the aptly titled *Danger on Peaks*. After *Mountains and Rivers Without End*, this may be Snyder's best work since the 1974 *Turtle Island*. While peak oil is far from the explicit topic of the book, our climactic (and climatically challenged) era obviously provides one layer of reference: there's a lot of driving in here, some car washes, a fair amount of construction, civic work, and the occasional "despair at how the human world goes down." (As for all the machinery, let's remember that bulldozers and diesel engines have occupied Snyder's work from the start.) The collection is framed by two explosions: the 1945 detonations of the atomic bomb over Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States and the 2001 destruction of the Buddhas of Bamiyan by the Taliban (and, implicitly, the attack on the World Trade Center by Al Qaeda). Within this human span of relatively "current events" we find sections devoted to daily life, to dreams and the life of the dead, to the inevitable facts of aging, and to "yet older matters." The intersection of human and mountain dangers is marked at the outset, by an opening sequence on Mount St. Helens.

There's a pervasive chiasmic tension, between form and material—where, for example, some of the longer poems involve the relatively small scale of "daily life" while the geological and glacial order of "yet older matters" come through a short form reminiscent of the almost haiku-like "Tiny Energies" (a series printed in the 1992 collection *No Nature*). This translates into one of the principal formal dynamics of this book, the relationship between prose and verse, where the poetic matters of natural history often get treated in prose, while verse delivers us the stuff of everyday perception. Thus *Danger on Peaks* weaves together the prose and verse that have been equal attentions for Snyder throughout his career: think of the Reed College thesis on a Haida myth, *He Who Hunted Birds in His Father's Village*, the "notebook" collection *Earth House Hold*, the "Plain Talk" appendix to *Turtle Island*, the volumes of interviews and essays, including *The Practice of the Wild*—still Snyder's best-selling book, translated into twenty languages. The two most powerful sections of *Danger on Peaks* are more than half prose: the long sequence "Mount St. Helens" and the series of haibun, "Dust in the Wind."

The book as a whole could not be more carefully arranged, and offers a master's example of what Snyder has called the "poetry of minimal surface texture, with the complexities hidden at the bottom of the pool." It is the "deep

image,” more than reference or turn of phrase, that connects one poem with another in artful patterns that reward rereading. Sometimes the connections are surprising. The section “Steady, They Say” opens with “Doctor Coyote When He Had a Problem”—the trickster takes a “dump” and asks “his turds where they lay/ what to do? They gave him good advice.” When we revisit a poem earlier in the book that closes out the “Mt. St. Helens” sequence, “Enjoy the Day,” and (re)read that “after campstove coffee” the narrator “went up behind a mountain hemlock/ asked my old advisors where they lay// what’s going on?” we suddenly get a more visceral connection with the image.

The haibun show Snyder evolving as a student of this ancient haiku form (in 2004 he received the Masaoka Shiki International Haiku Grand Prize). Probably the most arresting of these exquisite prose blocks, each with a dangling verse cluster, is the elegy for Anthea Corrine Snyder Lowry (the poet’s sister), who stopped to take a grass-mower off the road, that had fallen from the back of the pickup truck in front of her. She was struck by a car and killed instantly. The poem ends with the verses “White egrets standing there/ always standing there/ there at the crossing// on the Petaluma River.” The image resonates with many other images of birds throughout the book—especially of herons, cranes and cormorants—that seem more naturalistic, not “standing for” anything. The poem, however, registers a mythic image, a human ghost visiting in the form of a bird, as well as a natural one, white egrets standing by the river, as they probably do most days in that spot. (The word “crossing” is also suitably ambiguous.) This may do little more than remind us that Snyder is the poet who, at the start of his career, wrote “A Berry Feast,” the poem that brought the “bear cult” and the Coyote “trickster” myth back into modernist poetry. While there’s plenty of natural history in a Gary Snyder poem, Snyder is not a naturalistic poet—and the association of his work with “nonfiction” literature of the environment can only be as partial as the critiques claiming to expose his “nature ideology.” The other-than-human creatures in his poems might only “stand for” themselves, as some critics of the deep-ecological bent might argue, or they might “stand for” human concerns, yet as this book on the impermanence of standing itself (standing on a mountain, standing like a mountain) tells us, it doesn’t really matter.

“Mount St. Helens” ironizes the normative “climax system” poetics, of “pristine old-growth” nature, with which Snyder’s work is most readily associated, telling us the story of Snyder’s climb up Mount St. Helens as an adolescent in August of 1945, his learning upon coming down from the mountain of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and his subsequent vow, “By the purity and beauty and permanence of Mt. St. Helens, [to] fight against this cruel destructive power and those who would seek to use it, for all my

life.” (This recalls Allen Ginsberg’s vow on the Staten Island Ferry, recounted in “Kaddish,” to “help mankind” by becoming “honest revolutionary labor lawyer.”) So the eruption of Mount St. Helens—which the sequence goes on to document, as well as a trip into the “blast zone” with forester Fred Swanson twenty years later—offers a koan to frame not only nearly sixty years of poetry and activism, but also the deep ecological outlook that has guided much of that work. Snyder takes on the mother of all disturbances, in a way bound to disturb readers not ready to give equanimous attention to the atomic bombings of Japanese cities, the eruption of Mount St. Helens, the destruction of 2000 year-old Buddhist monuments and, of course (though this is treated with subtlety), the terrorists’ attack on the World Trade Center, that brought (or was it the destruction of the Buddhas that brought us?) a disturbing “war without end.” It is not a development one would expect from this poet of “mountains and rivers.” Yet through all of it—from the book’s dedication to the poet’s wife Carole, whose mountaineering skill, “trained/ by the/ heights by the/ danger on peaks,” gives the volume its title, to the imagination of catastrophe—runs a disarming tenderness: “better than burning,/ hold hands.// We will be/ two peregrines diving// all the way down.”

Reading *Danger on Peaks* and Lisa Robertson’s *Office for Soft Architecture* in the same year has led me to wonder what kind of conversation the two poetics might have (see my review of Robertson’s book in this issue), as variants of the “West Coast” line. When I asked Snyder about his changing views in regards to ecological disturbance, he said, “well, let’s keep human-caused disturbance and natural disturbance separate for the time being.” Nevertheless, one undeniable effect of the book’s juxtapositions is to provoke some reassessment of “enviro-mentalist” reflex.

The overview of Snyder’s career, from the phantom summit of Mount St. Helens, shows him not so much poet of the climactic “back of the beyond” and mountaintop epiphany, as of the successional middle ground and daily grind. Indeed, when we look back to the earliest works, we can see disturbance (whether via the prescribed burns and logging of *Riprap*, the “fossil fuel injections” and cross-cultural contact of *The Back Country*, or the developers’ bulldozers ripping up the pinyon trees of *Turtle Island*) consistently shaping Snyder’s poems—in a way more dialectical than the caricature of Snyder as Smoky the Bear with a pen would have us believe.

In the Santa Clarita Valley

Like skinny wildweed flowers sticking up  
hexagonal “Denny’s” sign  
starry “Carl’s”



loopy “McDonald’s”  
eight-petaled yellow “Shell”  
blue-and-white “Mobil” with a big red “O”

growing in the asphalt riparian zone  
by the soft roar of the flow  
of Interstate 5.

Certainly, the Cascadian mountain blowing its top off, the destruction of the Central Asian Buddhist monument, the massacre of thousands in the World Trade Towers, the diking and paving of the Central Valley; at another level the loss of friends and family that comes with the progress into old age; and at yet another level (“older matters”) the evolutionary symbioses and predations, the glacial wearing-away of mountains themselves—where does “climate change” come in, one wonders—offer a theme of impermanence that we have come to expect from this practitioner of Zen Buddhism:

The men and women who  
died at the World Trade Center  
together with the  
Buddhas of Bamiyan,  
Take Refuge in the dust.

“Loose on Earth,” a poem immediately following these lines (themselves borrowed from a poem by Dennis Dutton), cites Robinson Jeffers’s comparison of humanity with a “quick explosion,” a “weird blast spreading,” and offers a consoling aftermath: “millennia to weather,/ soften, fragment,/ sprout, and green again” Some readers may be infuriated by Snyder’s stoicist-Buddhist message—that, in the long run, “it’s all good,” since, according to the famous haiku from Issa, “This dewdrop world/ is but a dewdrop world.” “And yet” . . . the sequence “After Bamiyan” begins quoting what seems to be an email discussion between the author and some Buddhist correspondents, who refused to be disturbed by the destruction of the Afghan Buddha figures (when weighed against the Taliban’s notorious human rights violations), which Snyder turns around on the crucial third line of Issa’s haiku: “—and yet”: “That ‘and yet’ is our perennial practice. And maybe the root of the Dharma.” Every poem in this book reminds us that impermanence is “never a reason to let compassion and focus slide,” and a prayer that we may “keep our minds clear and calm and in the present moment, and honor the dust.” For without clarity, calm and presence, what in the world can we do?

**JONATHAN SKINNER REVIEWS *ZEPHYRUS IMAGE: A BIBLIOGRAPHY* BY ALISTAIR JOHNSTON. 243 PP. POLTROON PRESS, 2003**

This capstone volume to Alistair Johnston's trilogy of bibliographies covering San Francisco book arts constitutes another handbook. It is worthy alone as a remarkably good read, and a history, largely through first-hand accounts, of the *other* 1970s Bay Area poetry scene—one constellated around the figures of Ed Dorn and Tom Raworth, as well as the likes of Joanne Kyger or Jaime Robles, adjuncts all to the shenanigans of Zephyrus Image press, the remarkable, twelve-year collaboration of Holbrook Teter and Michael Myers. But Johnston's documentation (70 pages of the book are the bibliography, the rest of it a narrative of the press and its collaborators) offers an invaluable catalogue raisonnée of situationist tactics, guerilla publishing keyed to politically turbulent times.

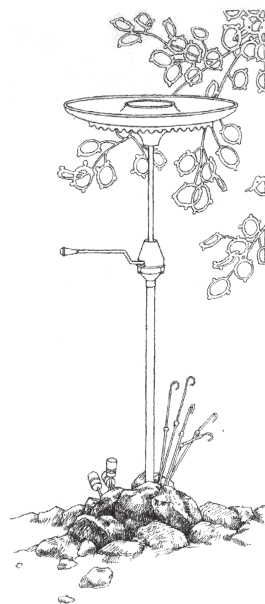
Johnston makes the case for the consistent, and consistently playful, political response-abilities of Zephyrus Image, extending far beyond their capacity for fine press work that easily rivaled some of the best productions of Auerhahn or White Rabbit press. Rather, Zephyrus Image put much of its wind into the sails of "stuff that wasn't literature but had to do with a response to an immediate situation" (in Holbrook Teter's words): bumper stickers, posters, merchandise (Gary Snyder Brand Pine-Nuts, Ranch-Raised Gourmet Earwigs), comic books (Dorn's *Recollections of Gran Apacheria*), survey forms on Presidential outrages, Dick & Pat fly swatters and fans, leaflets, cootie catcher Fortune Tellers protesting the Warm Springs Dam, flipbooks, press passes, Guggenheim Foundation letterhead, postcards, maps, a newspaper (Dorn's *Bean News*), paper airplanes, IRS tax coupons, Patty Hearst Identi-Kits, a Fireside Book of Gurus . . .

Teter and Myers recycled everyday, found materials: "They sought out junk lots of newspaper cuts, crude 65-line halftone images used to illustrate news items or clearance sales then discarded." Many jobs were done on newsprint or bible papers; Myers's preferred form was the linocut, rapidly etching his line art into linoleum with an X-acto knife. With imagery taken from the junkyard (sparkplugs, radiators, tire wrenches, hubcaps), and the Blakean human form, he assembled Aubrey Beardsley symmetries: "Poster[s] for an urban environment." As Johnston emphasizes, "Their publications were, by design, ephemeral and are now close to being forgotten." What justifies Johnston's painstaking bibliography is the critical and aesthetic brilliance that runs through all these projects, with not a little wit. (Johnston notes that, had Myers, a student of Walter Hamady, chosen a more "permanent" medium, and a more conventional career, "[a]s a technical artist, he might have been compared to M.C. Escher.") Frances Butler points out that a lot of this work essentially "was material criticism or visual criticism which however made a point that crossed over all the ways of knowing: reading

and seeing and moving through political structures, as well as simply the literary way of knowing.” It was criticism that cut both ways, into the status quo of the right wing as much as that of the hippie counter culture.

This attention to the life (and death) of materials, opens on the border-crossing work of ecopoetics—with the same kind of dialectical intelligence seen in, say, the work of Robert Smithson or Ian Hamilton Finlay. (Or in the ongoing writing of Tom Raworth; see, also, Thomas Evans’s *Tolling Elves*.) “Mechanical machines were a great interest,” Holbrook noted, “and Michael created many devices, some with a specific use, others with none. Nature, animals, insects, and especially birds were studied, observed, and reproduced.” It can feel like a lost world of things, from the standpoint of digital do-it-yourselfdom. Myers was a devotee of Edward Abbey and, with Teter, relentlessly engaged with environmental politics. (His accidental death at the age of 34 is a great loss.) Their first major work, *Totem Protectorates* (1972), an instigation of attorney Zack R. Stewart, published the assignments of specific endangered plants and animals to each U.S. Senator (called out at Grace Cathedral by Keith Lampe, Mahina Drees, Gary Snyder and Betsy Flack): “The Junior Senator from Indiana, the honorable Birch Bayh, totem protector for the INDIANA BAT.” One copy was mailed to each U.S. Senator.

Thanks to Johnston, we have access to this beautiful, smart (if not at times a little smart-alecky) work, not to fetishize the singularity of it, or to engage in hero worship (there are enough cautionary notes built into the account, especially around Teter and Myers’s failed experiment at communal living with the Dorns in Healdsburg) but to inspire a similar joining of play with criticism, in our own troubled times. *Zephyrus Image: A Bibliography* is a catalog of ideas for activating the expanded field of poetics. While the people have changed—happily, much more exciting publishing is being done by women nowadays—and while the technology has changed—radically altering the scope and means of guerilla publishing—the times, sadly, have changed but little, or perhaps for the worse. (Where would a militant broadside like Myers’s “Detonate Sutro Tower” land the renegade printer nowadays?) We are more than ever in need of the kind of application of critical intelligence to fearless, open-field engagement that Zephyrus Image so playfully manifests.



M. Myers, Hubcap birdbath, with six-pack ring leafage

**THUMBNAIL REVIEWS:** Though we've run out space, I couldn't let the issue go without squeezing off at least brief notice of these essential titles—both deserving of longer review. JS

**BRENDA IJIMA. *AROUND SEA*. 103 pp. O BOOKS, 2004**

This book works exactly like a map: the legends speak when they are lived with. The gorgeous surfaces draw the eye in: a series of ViewMaster scenes, improvised shades for the eroding beach. In some areas words surf the white space “plunging, plundering necks in foam,” elsewhere they spin into couplets: “Years inscribed/ in the cores of trees// metallic necklaces/ stacked up, stretching// the maidenform/ necks of Burmese women.” Contraction, expansion—with delicate, sometimes angry materials.

Like R. Johnson taking an eraser to Milton, the poet outstrips *Canto General* (Neruda), letting in starlight. More American, in fact, in her Aztec Definitions: “unlike a typical volcanic cone.” An account of the things on the earth, “Inescapable/ Landscape.” But while she captures the ozone of discovery, Iijima writes powerfully of confined spaces, as in the penitentiary evocations of bed, toilet, sky through hole in the ceiling, the communication of the tansy in the walled yard, juxtaposed against the “oculus eye charged with impressions of outer motions.” This is conquest, the terrible contraction to SYSTEM. “No communication = spiritual awaking”

And on the facing recto page, the urbanist, indicating “a hodgepodge/ of/ weather/ beaten buildings// slated for bulldozing.” (Silliman has noted the cyclic counting—here of 3,1,2,4,6 syllables.) On the next recto Jane Jacobs reappears, to interrogate the pastoral: “Why should/ a green swatch/ of land become a vacuum?” Is it to be mindful of border vacuums that the poet ratchets her pages open, with ellipses and allusions we might not catch or guess the meaning of (viz. Jacobs) before traveling the same edge of the map?

One sort of emptiness proceeds from the conquest of image (pastoral fantasy); another from leaving room for what we don't know. Iijima's works in miniature can encompass the largest of all possible worlds (I kept wishing for a smaller format to put in my pocket): for the sake of this exquisite book, keep those worlds alive.

**MARK NOWAK. *SHUT UP SHUT DOWN*. 161 pp. COFFEE HOUSE PRESS, 2004**

**Contents:** “\$00 / line / steel / train” (numbered texts, corresponding to [absent] photographs in Bernd and Hilla Becher's *Industrial Facades*, that document the

closing of the Lackawanna, NY steel industry through workers' voices, each vignette juxta/prosed with a verse "haiku" stamp); "Capitalization" (Reagan's breaking of the 1981 air traffic controllers' strike narrated through cold war *Elements of Grammar* and Margaret Stasik's *The Price of Dissent*); "June 19, 1982" (murder of Vincent Chin as the dialectical image of "unemployment"); "Francine Michalek drives bread" (samples Brecht's *The Mother*, oral history interviews from *When the Mines Closed*); "Hoyt Lakes / shut down" (photo-documentary takes on the fate of laid-off Iron Range miners: "read the writing on the Wal-Mart"); "Afterword" (by Amiri Baraka)

**Methods:** documentation, listening in and out, organizing, traveling back in microform, reading around, roaming with camera and notebook, bibliography

**Forms:** cracked industrial icons, documentary haibun, the parenthetically qualified (backhanded) truth, construct(ivisms) of image and voice material "testimonies," type-ographies (though at the minim of format), ideograph, verse drama, caption, pun, "hard right" formatting: "smashed glass class/ exhortation"

**Aims:** sustain the "war for the word," engage the Local "past/ its past," honor the parents but see past the (factory) facade

**Argument:** As Nowak urges culture workers to see labor in the stacks, I'd ask culture workers to see ecosystems in the cracks. This book offers model "formal" interactions with "content," as only poets can make it—with lessons that extend beyond page presentation to readings and stagings in Teamster's halls, auto plants and working class social clubs, as well as to Nowak's efforts, through the Union of Radical Workers and Writers (URWW), to unionize bookstore workers (see [www.urww.org](http://www.urww.org)). As careful and adventurous realization of writing in the expanded field, a handbook for the work of ecopoetics.

*ecopoetics* is listed in **LIGHT'S LIST OF LITERARY MAGAZINES**. *Light's List* contains names, addresses, price, page count, frequency and a brief note of the interests of over 1500 U.K., U.S., Canadian, Australian, European, African and Asian small press magazines publishing creative writing and artwork in English. Now in its 21st year of publication. Available through Photon Press, 37 The Meadows, Berwick upon Tweed, Northumberland TD15 1NY, UK. £4 incl. postage [U.S. \$17], cheques payable to "John Light."

**COMING**, in *ecopoetics* 06 and beyond: Lorine Niedecker feature (finally!), Theodore Enslin feature, Gary Snyder interview, Australian ecopoetics feature (guest-edited by Michael Farrell), mIEKAL aND interview and report on Dreamtime Village, China field report, Buffalo waterfront feature, and much, much more . . .

**CONSIDER** attending the 17th annual **BIONEERS CONFERENCE**, Oct. 20-22, 2006 at the Marin Center in San Rafael, CA. For more info: [www.bioneers.org](http://www.bioneers.org)

## CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

**ROSA ALCALÁ** is a poet and translator whose work has appeared in *The Kenyon Review*, *Bombay Gin*, *P-Queue*, *Chain*, *Mandorla*, *XCP* (*Cross Cultural Poetics*), and other literary magazines. Her book-length translation of Lourdes Vázquez's *Bestiary* was published by Bilingual Press in 2003. Alcalá has also translated, transcribed from recorded performances, and written extensively on the work of Cecilia Vicuña. She currently teaches in the Bilingual MFA in Creative Writing Department at the University of Texas.

**ROY ARENELLA** is a photographer and visual writer whose work has been exhibited here and in Europe and has been published in mainstream as well as small press magazines (from *The New York Times* to *Lost & Found Times*). He recently moved out of NYC (after 40 years) and currently practices his main activity--making and mailing out home-made photographic postcards--from his new (1890) home in a small village in a rural county of northern New York State. A collection of his photo/cards can be seen in the photography section at [impassioned.net](http://impassioned.net)

**MICHAEL BASINSKI** is the Curator of The Poetry Collection, SUNY at Buffalo, and has written many elephant poems. In 1958 he starred in *The Roots of Heaven*, directed by John Huston.

**CHARLES BERNSTEIN** lives on the upper west side of Manhattan island. His most recent book is *Shadowtime*, from Green Integer Books. Web sites: [epc.buffalo.edu](http://epc.buffalo.edu) and [writing.upenn.edu/pennsound](http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound). He teaches at the University of Pennsylvania.

**DAVID BERRIDGE** lives in Bradford-on-Avon, Wiltshire, England. Poems and sequences are published and forthcoming in *Fire*, *Island*, *Shearsman*, and online at *Word For/Word* and *Great Works*. *Career Choices*, a chapbook, will be published by Furniture Press. An ongoing exploration of connections between ecology, natural history and poetry takes various forms including talks, workshops, field trips, and readings.

**ALICIA COHEN** lives in Portland, Oregon, where, in 2000, she helped establish the art space collective Pacific Switchboard. She has published a book of poems, *bEAR*, with Handwritten Press and earned her doctorate at the University of New York, Buffalo, writing a dissertation on vision and epistemology in the work of Jack Spicer, Emily Dickinson, Leslie Scalapino, and Robert Duncan. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Salt: a collection of poetry on the Oregon Coast and War and Peace 2*, from O Books.

**JACK COLLOM** is 74 and lives in Boulder, Colorado, with his writer wife Jennifer Heath. He's a lifelong birder and woods-walker and the author

of twenty books and chapbooks of poetry. More coming. He has worked with children at writing for over thirty years. Teaches Eco-Lit and Writing Outreach at Naropa University.

**MARY CROW** is both a poet and a translator. She is currently revising a book of her own poems and completing a book of translations of the poems of Argentine Roberto Juarroz.

**TINA DARRAGH's** current project is "opposable dumbs", an investigation of racism and sexism in the animal rights movement. A segment of the play from that project was performed at Jubilee, a Festival of Poets Theater, Small Press Traffic (San Francisco, 2002), and is published in *Lipstick Eleven* (Issue #3 – Home is Where the Hot Tub Is, 2004). Darragh earns her keep as a reference librarian at Georgetown University.

**IAN DAVIDSON's** most recent collections are *At a Stretch* (Shearsman, 2004), *Harsh* (Spectacular Diseases, 2003) and *Human Remains and Sudden Movements* (West House, 2003). A further collection, *As if Only*, is due out from Shearsman in 2006. He co-edits *Skald* magazine and teaches literature and writing at the University of Wales, Bangor.

**MARCELLA DURAND** is the author of *City of Ports* (Situations, 1999), *Western Capital Rhapsodies* (Faux Press, 2001), and most recently, *The Anatomy of Oil* (Belladonna\* Books, 2005). Her essay, "The Ecology of Poetry," was published in *ecopoetics* 02. Her collaboration with Tina Darragh, which incorporates deep ecology, Francis Ponge's *The Making of the Pré*, and Michael Zimmerman's *Contesting Earth's Future*, has been ongoing since 2001.

**KEN EDWARDS's** books include the poetry collections *Intensive Care* (1986), *Good Science* (1992), *3600 Weekends* (1993), *eight + six* (2003), and the novel *Futures* (1998). *Bird Migration in the 21st Century* is forthcoming from Spectacular Diseases. He has been editor/publisher of Reality Street Editions since 1993. His musical collaborations include text for a piece by John Tilbury for piano, voice and sampled sounds, *There's something in there...*, and music for Fanny Howe's *Spiral*. He recently moved to Hastings on the south coast of England after 35 years in London, and works as a journalist for the Royal College of Nursing.

**CLAYTON ESHLEMAN** is the author of more than twenty books, including twelve collections of poetry published by Black Sparrow Press. He is also a prolific translator, especially from the Spanish of Neruda and Vallejo and the French of Artaud and Césaire. In 2003, Wesleyan University Press published Eshleman's *Juniper Fuse: Upper Paleolithic Imagination and the Construction*

of the *Underworld*, the fruit of a thirty-year investigation into the origins of image-making and poetry via the painted caves of southwestern France. A professor emeritus of English at Eastern Michigan University, he lives in Ypsilanti with his wife, Caryl.

**KENNETH GOLDSMITH's** writing has been called some of the most "exhaustive and beautiful collage work yet produced in poetry" by Publishers Weekly. The author of eight books of poetry, founding editor of the online archive UbuWeb (<http://ubu.com>), and the editor of *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews*, Goldsmith is also the host of a weekly radio show on New York City's WFMU. He teaches writing at The University of Pennsylvania, where he is a senior editor of PennSound, an online poetry archive. More about Goldsmith can be found on his author's page at the University of Buffalo's Electronic Poetry Center: <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/goldsmith>.

**LYNN HARRIGAN's** most recent projects have involved collaboration with musicians and visual artists. *Moon Sea Crossing*, her first book and the genesis of the *Bread & Water* multimedia installation, have been published (2005) by Black Moss Press. Lynn is currently at work on two new projects titled *One Voice* and *Oblique Poetries*. Information about her work is available at [www.lynnharrigan.com](http://www.lynnharrigan.com).

**PETER JAEGER** lives in Roehampton, London and teaches writing at Roehampton University.

**PETER LARKIN** works as a librarian at Warwick University. Since the collection *Terrain Seed Scarcity* (Salt Publications, 2001) he has published *Slights Agreeing Trees* (Prest Roots, 2002) and a chapbook threesome: *Sprout Near Severing close*, *What the Surfaces Enclave of Wang Wei*, and *Rings Resting the Circuit* (The Gig, 2004).

**JOAN MALOOF** didn't make it into the Contributors' Notes for *ecopoetics* 03, which featured her "September 11 Memorial Forest" project. She is assistant professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at Salisbury University (Maryland). A version of the piece has subsequently appeared in her book *Teaching the Trees: Lessons from the Forest* (U of Georgia Press, 2005).

**DOUGLAS MANSON** is a poet, critic, scholar, and teacher who lives in Buffalo, New York, where the scene is still kicking. Recent works have appeared in *The Gig*, and as a postcard from Howe and Fritton's *SoundVision/VisionSound III* exhibition in Somerville, Massachusetts. A solo exhibit and reading of his work will be held at Rust Belt Books in January of 2006. He enjoys compiling and arranging lines.



**FLORINE MELNYK** is currently a student at Buffalo State College pursuing an MA in English. She received a BA degree in Literature & Creative Writing from Medaille College, where she started out as an Elementary Education major. She is an editorial assistant for *ecopoetics* and Starcherone Books. She is married and has two daughters and lives in Buffalo.

**ETHAN PAQUIN** is the author of *Accumulus* (Salt, 2003) and *The Makeshift* (UK: Stride, 2002). His third book, *The Violence*, is forthcoming from Ahsahta Press in 2005. He edits *Slope* and Slope Editions, and directs the undergraduate creative writing program at Medaille College in Buffalo, NY. He is a native of New Hampshire.

**MEREDITH QUARTERMAIN**'s most recent book is *Vancouver Walking* (NeWest Press). Other books include *Terms of Sale*, and *Wanders* (with Robin Blaser). Her work has appeared in *Chain*, *Sulfur*, *Tinfish*, *Prism International*, *The Capilano Review*, *West Coast Line*, *filling Station*, *Raddle Moon*, *Canadian Literature*, *Canadian Literary Review* and other magazines. With her husband, Peter Quartermain, she runs Nomados Literary Publishers in Vancouver. She also edits the west coast literary website *The News*.

**LUCAS REINER** is a painter who lives and works in Los Angeles. In the Fall of 2001 he began painting and drawing urban trees which have been trimmed by the Department of Transportation. He has exhibited his work in galleries and museums in the United States, South America and Europe.

**KATE SCHAPIRA** lives, writes and teaches in Providence, Rhode Island. She is working toward an MFA in Poetry at Brown University. Her latest project is a series of paragraphs about nuclear power, the space program, heroes and fear.

**LYTLE SHAW**s books of poetry include *Cable Factory 20* (Atelos, 1999) and *The Lobe* (Roof, 2002). *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* is forthcoming in spring 2006 from Iowa University Press. Shaw lives in New York City and teaches American Literature at New York University.

**JONATHAN SKINNER** recently completed a dissertation, *Ecopoetics: Outsider Poetics of the Twentieth Century* for the SUNY Buffalo English Department. His first full-length collection, *Political Cactus Poems*, appeared with Palm Press in 2005. He currently is a Fellow with the Center for the Humanities at Temple University, teaching a course on urban open spaces.

**JONATHAN STALLING** grew up with wolves and coyotes (a longer story) in the backwoods of the Ozark Mountains before studying Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii, Beijing University, and UC Berkeley and English Literature and Poetry at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and SUNY

Buffalo (PhD). He is a co-author (with Haun Saussy and Lucas Klein) of the forthcoming book *Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition*.

**BILL SYLVESTER's** poems have appeared in *Hamilton Stone Review* (online), *gam*, *Drill*, *House Organ*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Niagara Review*, *Iowa Review*, and *Poetry a Magazine of Verse*. *War and Lechery* appeared as a book with Ashland Poetry Press. He has also done radio plays, stories, and some critical theory. Sylvester is Professor Emeritus at the SUNY Buffalo English Department.

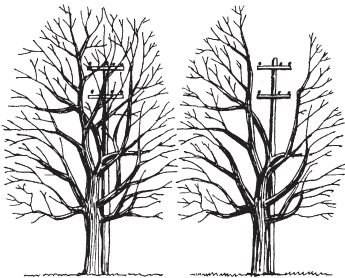
**ARTHUR SZE** was raised in two languages, Chinese and English, and has received the Asian American Literary Award for his poetry and translation. He is the author of eight books of poetry, including *Silk Dragon*, *The Redshifting Web*, and *Archipelago*. His awards include a Lannan Literary Award, two National Endowment for the Arts Fellowships, three Witter Bynner Foundation Fellowships, and the Western States Arts Federation Award. He is a Professor of Creative Writing at the Institute of American Indian Arts.

**MARK WEISS** has published five books of poetry, most recently *Fieldnotes* (1995), from his own imprint, Junction Press, and *Figures: 32 Poems* (Chax Press, 2001). *Different Birds* appeared as an ebook in 2004 ([www.shearsman.com](http://www.shearsman.com)). With Harry Polkinhorn, he edited the bilingual anthology *Across the Line / Al otro lado: The Poetry of Baja California* (Junction Press, 2002). Forthcoming editions include *Stories as Equipment for Living: Late Talks and Tales of Barbara Myerhoff*, edited with Marc Kaminsky (University of Michigan Press, 2006) and *The Whole Island / La isla en peso: Six Decades of Cuban Poetry* (University of California Press, 2008). He lives in Manhattan, overlooking a forest.

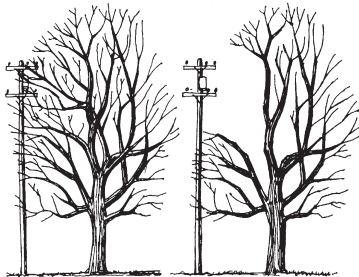
**LILA ZEMBORAIN** is an Argentinian poet who has lived in New York since 1985. She is the author of four poetry collections, including *Malvas orquídeas del mar* (Buenos Aires: Tsé-Tsé, 2004) and several chapbooks, including *Pampa* (Belladonna Books, 2001). Her work, translated by Rosa Alcalá, has appeared in the anthology *Corresponding Voices* (Point of Contact Productions, 2002). She has authored the book-length essay *Gabriela Mistral: Una mujer sin rostro*. (Rosario: Editora Beatriz Viterbo, 2002). She is the director of Rebel Road, editor of *Rebel Road: Poems in the Garden*, and the curator of the KJCC Poetry Series at New York University.

The following illustrations provide examples of the proper directional trimming for shade and ornamental trees.

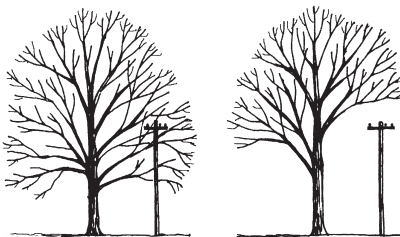
**Through Pruning**



**Side Pruning**



**Under Pruning**





**FIELD NOTES** (Take this book outside, make something with this page and send to *ecopoetics*.)



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The fact is, humanity's a drop in the bucket. But only scantily has poetry looked at the rest of the bucket. Jonathan Skinner in *Political Cactus Poems* makes a wonderful stab in that omnidirection. These down-to-earth cylinders, pulled from the air, are forwarding explorations in the most important direction poetry can go: out. —Jack Collom  
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- Christopher Alexander, *Za Booklet for Isabelle* (2003)  
 Beth Anderson, *Overboard* (Burning Deck, 2004)  
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[actionpoétique@wanadoo.fr](mailto:actionpoétique@wanadoo.fr)  
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- The Paper*, ed. David Kennedy. No. 6: *Movement Motion Notation* (2003)
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- Radical Poetics: Against Power*, ed. Michael Hrebeniak. Issue 2 (2003) [michael@hrebeniak.freemove.co.uk](mailto:michael@hrebeniak.freemove.co.uk)
- Rattapallax*, eds. Martin Mitchell, Idra Novey, Willie Perdomo, Flavia Rocha, Rodrigo Rojas, Jeet Thayil & Edwin Torres. No. 11: *Centenary of Neruda / Fela Kuti and AIDS* (with audio CD, 2004) [www.rattapallax.com](http://www.rattapallax.com)
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- Shuffle Boil: a magazine of poets and music*, eds. David Meltzer & Steve Dickson. Issue 3 (2003) [shuffleboil@hotmail.com](mailto:shuffleboil@hotmail.com)
- Tolling Elves*, ed. Thomas Evans. Nos. 12-19 (2003-2004) [onedit.net/tollingelves](http://onedit.net/tollingelves)
- Tri Quarterly*, guest eds. John Kinsella and Susan Stewart. Issue 116: *New Pastoral* (2003) [www.triquarterly.org](http://www.triquarterly.org) [Northwestern University]
- Watershed*, ed. Ben Carmichael. No. 1 (2004) [www.brown.edu/Students/Watershed](http://www.brown.edu/Students/Watershed) [Brown University]

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- Atticus Finch, ed. Michael Cross: Eli Drabman, *The Ground Running* (2004); Thom Donovan and Kyle Schlesinger, *Mantle* (2005); Cynthia Sailors, *Rose Lungs* (2003); Elizabeth Willis, *Meteoric Flowers* (2004)
- Blackberry Books, ed. Gary Lawless: *Poems for the Wild Earth* (1994); Janis Báltvilks, *The Skylark Will Come*, tr. Rita Laima Berzins (2004); James Koller, *Like It Was* (1999); Gary Lawless, *Caribouddhism* (1998); Nanao Sakaki, *Break the Mirror* (1996), *Let's Eat Stars* (1997)
- Slack Buddha Press/ La Perruque Editions, ed. Bill Howe with L.A. Phillips (all 2004): chapbooks by Michael Basinski, *Pomes Popeye Papyrus*; K. Lorraine Graham, *Terminal Humming*; Alan Halsey, *In Addition. Seventeen Lives of the Poets*; Keith Tuma, *Topical Ointment*; Stephen Vessels, *ZIP Code Poems*; Geraldine Monk, *She Kept Birds*; Douglas Manson, *The Dew Neal*
- Chax books, ed. Charles Alexander: books by Charles Alexander, *Hopeful Buildings* (1990); Allison Cobb, *Born 2* (2004); Lisa Cooper, *& Calling It Home* (1998); Hank Lazer, *3 of 10* (1996); Elizabeth Treadwell, *Chantry* (2004)
- Coyote Books, ed. James Koller: Stefan Hyner, *In Stead of a Bullet* (2004); James Koller, *Looking For His Horses* (2003), *Crows Talk to Him* (2003), *The Bone Show* (2004), *Le Loup Affamé / The Hungry Wolf*, tr. Jean Monod (2004); Joanne Kyger, *The Distressed Look* (2004); Duncan McNaughton, *Counting Toes* (2004); Jean Monod, *The Man Who Knows* (2002)
- Richard Deming and Nancy Kuhl: chapbooks by Dan Featherston, *United States* (2004); Charles North/Trevor Winkfield, *Tulips* (2004). Also, *A Phylum Press Selection*, Little Critic No. 17 (Coracle, 2003)
- Textuel editions, ed. Christophe Marchand-Kiss (all 2004): *Poesie? detours—Maestri*, Marchand-Kiss, *Sivan*, *Game*; Philippe Beck, *Garde-manche Deux*; Yoko Ono, *Pamplermousse*, tr. Christophe Marchand Kiss

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List of works received in 2005 will appear in *ecopoetics* 06.

## MICHAEL BASINSKI / ELEPHANTS ENSEMBLE POEM

For many voices. Duration exactly 5 minutes.

The players in the drama of the night are ready for their performance

A low groan coming

Rose in pitch and volume

Swelled to a full-throttle peak,

And slowly descended, losing volume.

rrrrrrrrRUh

rRRUHhhhhh

rrRRRUhh

rRRRUhh

rRRRUh

Ruhhhh

Uhh, uh, uhhh, uh, uhh, hih, huh, ruhhh uhh, ruuhhhh.

Followed by a silence

In utter silence leave

