

Interim

:the eco issue

edited by Christopher Arigo

with guest editors Matthew Cooperman & Jonathan Skinner



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Editor: Claudia Keelan

Contributing Editors: Chris Arigo
Matthew Cooperman
Jonathan Skinner

Managing Editor: John Douglas
Layout Editor: Mollie Bergeron

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Editor's Note

“In the heart of what is called the Being of the being—would hang the essence of man.”
—from *Humanism of the Other*, Emmanuel Levinas

This special issue of *Interim* collects sui generis work to pose questions and positions relevant to the on going interactions of human beings and what we call the natural world. I am thankful to Chris Arigo, Matthew Cooperman and Jonathan Skinner for the innovative work found here, and I am indebted to the many writers and artists whose continued experiments in artistic expression further the dialogue and expand the possibilities of what is, precariously, our democracy. Here in these pages is a transfigured, yet communal space, countering the transfiguration of an oil rig planted in the ocean floor. You will find here, our legislators.

—Claudia Keelan, editor

INTERIM

Interim

Contents

Section I

Christopher Arigo

Introduction 14

Kimberly Burwick

Statement 16

Panic Attack 17

Reading the Gospel of Luke 18

And Scant is the Newest Grace 19

Massachusetts, 1978 20

Todd Fredson

In Praise of Domesticity 21

Harbored in the Grotto 23

The Hour of the Fifth Sun 25

Laughter, A Passage of Birds, Some Clay Chipped from the
Tractor's Wheel 27

Five Fallow Notes 30

The Poor Are Chained First to the Plight of the Land, I Hear
My Blood Whisper 31

John Gallaher

Statement 33

In a Landscape: VII	34
In a Landscape: VIII	36
In a Landscape: IX	38
In a Landscape: X	40
In a Landscape: XI	42
In a Landscape: LXVIII	44
Kevin Goodan	
Statement	46
Showings	47
Crag Hill	
Statement	50
Good Adaptation of a Trout	51
Into Space from Top and Abstract	52
Psychic Acts and Their Correlates in Limbo	53
Naïve Realism	54
Alice Jones	
Unshored	55
Ocean	56
Sulu	57
Bay of Bengal	59
Michael Kroesche	
In Considering the Jack Rabbit and Our Landscape	62
Aviary	63
Tod Marshall	
Statement	72
Al Dente	73
Eco Sonnet	74
Brice Marden: Why Long Brushes Are Best	75
Bad Words	77

Michael McLane	
Statement	78
Smolder	79
Imperium (for the Last Residents to Leave Centralia)	80
Teratology of Home	81
Dig	82
Kinderhook	83
Hoa Nguyen	
On Austin, Texas	84
The Problem	87
No One Wants	89
Write Fucked up Poems	90
Medina Apples	91
Virginia Creepers	92
Chinaberry	93
Another Drought Almost Sonnet	94
Hill Country Poem	95
Elizabeth Robinson	
Brink: an Eco-poetics	97
Linda Russo	
Yard Works (I – IX)	101
On and around “Yard Works”	106
Sarah Vap	
Statement	110
The Stillborn God	112
Membrane	114
Less, and Less, to Love. Of Ourselves, too.	115
Silent, Night	116
You Weren’t Meant for Pleasure, You Were Meant for Joy.	117

Section II

Matthew Cooperman	
Introduction	118
Karen Leona Anderson	
Cell Bill	120
Venison	122
Sale: Before 5pm Take Off	123
Receipt: Real Estate	124
Amy Catanzano	
Junk DNA	125
Alfonso D'Aquino	
Spores	126
Sinsabor del Acitrón	128
Citron's Bitterness	129
Alumbra	131
Merrill Gilfillan	
Suddenly in the Sky	133
Crazy Horse Day	134
From La Brea	135
Brenda Iijima	
Apparition—What's Standing Right There	136
Aby Kaupang	
Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified (NOS)	141
Sally Keith	
On Fault	154

John Kinsella	
The Red Cloud	158
Evening	160
Morning	162
Fool's Gold	163
Bones	164
Fire	166
Vegetable Garden?	169
Friend	170
The Red Shed	172
Grass Cutting	173
Warning Signs	174
Daytime	176
Sheeps & Goats & Alpacas	177
Journal	178
Why I Oppose the Genre of 'Nature Writing'	179
Patrick Pritchett	
Twenty-First Century Ecology	185
Forms of Disappearance	186
The Dream of Open Space	187
Ground Music	188
Stephen Ratcliffe	
12.31	189
1.1	190
1.2	191
1.3	192
1.4	193

Martha Ronk	
1. Summer Past	194
2. The Remainder of the Third Chapter or the West Wind	195
3. Relics	196
4.	197
5.	198
Tomaz Šalamun	
I Have Heard	199
Sasha Steensen	
Family	200
Susan Stewart	
Terrarium	203
The Uneven Surface of the Moon	205
G.C. Waldrep	
discrete series: NEWBATTLE ABBEY	207
discrete series: DOG/STONE	209
discrete series: SUNDIAL	210
Keith Waldrop	
Before Leaving	212
Cold Starlight	213
Contingence	214
Elizabeth Willis	
The Oldest Garden in the World	215
Poisonous Plants of America	216
Sam Witt	
Deserter	218
Ode to a Baby White Fern	220

Section III

Kristen Baumliér	
Sky / Crude Oil	224
Jonathan Skinner	
Introduction	225
Jen Jofer & Hillary Mushkin	
Deep Horizon, Deep Water	232
CAConrad	
OIL THIS WAR!	236
Duck Call for Dead Ducks	238
Ian Demsky	
Deepwater Horizon: A Documentary Poem	239
Diana DiPrima	
350	244
Kristen Baumliér	
Carboniferous Forest / Crude Oil	246
Alison Pelegrin	
Lamenting the Pelican	247
Ode to the Pelican	249
Jack Collom	
Admonition to the Ocean: “Offshore Oil” Acrostic	251
Marcella Durand	
The Elegy of Ecopoetics	252
Orifice	258

Benjamin Friedlander Gusher	261
Laura Elrick Performative Ingestion: Mourning Rite of Peak Oil	263
Heidi Lynn Staples How Poetry Makes a Difference in the Era of Ecocide	272
Cara Benson nobodyislisteninginginginginginging	275
Ann Fisher-Wirth & Gara Gillentine BP	285
Sheryl St. Germain Midnight Oil	289
Kristen Baumliér Road / Oil	294
Sheryl St. Germain When Nature Writing becomes Travel Writing: Notes toward a Manifesto	295
E.J. McAdams Fracking Clumsiness	300
Michael Leong The Poem as a Field of Activism	303
Kristen Baumliér Transmission Fluid	305

Michael Leong the transmission of (other subsurface agents may be considered necessary for underground control	307
Christine Leclerc The Enpipe Line	312
Timothy Bradford Contact	315
Kristen Baumliér Sky / Crude Oil	317
Timothy Bradford Waves and the Tide	318
Evelyn Reilly The Grief of Eco poetics	320
Arielle Greenberg Letter to Robyn Gabel, State Representative, 18th District, IL	324
Jared Schickling Conspiracy Against Poem	327
Cowboy Poetry Movement	328
National Wildlife Refuge	329
Laura Mullen Briefing	330
The Story	332
Statement	335
Sharon Mesmer Pimp My Top Kill Live Feed Mothership	336

Philip Metres	
A Poetics of Oil, a Poetics of Action	337
Invocation	340
Crude Oil	341
Kristen Baumliér	
Crude Oil	342
Philip Metres	
Deepwater Horizon Heron (2010)	343
Kristen Baumliér	
Stretch It: Stretching Oil Production	344
Diesel	345
Brenda Hillman	
Report on Actions, Feb 22, 2011	346
Rodrigo Toscano	
“Das Wandern ist meine Lust”	349
Great Awakening	351
Martha Serpas & Heidi Lynn Staples	
Interview	354
Brett Evans & Frank Sherlock	
Spill Life	359
Keaton Nguyen Smith	
No Oil Spills	365
Response from Congressman Lloyd Doggett	366
Abby Reyes	
Parting Song	368
Coda (2011)	374

JenMarie Davis	
Deepwater Horizon	375
Jennifer Scappettone	
Poetics of Enormity	377
Photo Dossier: PARK Rehearsals	385
Allison Adelle Hedge Cook	
Offshore	390
Michael Rothenberg	
Appointment with Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey	391
Shell Beach	393
Andrew Schelling	
Oil & Wolves	396
To the Secretary of the Interior	397
Jonathan Skinner	
Deepwater Horizon: One Year Later	404
Auger	409
Cecilia Vicuña	
Report on a Half/Lost Letter	416
Deep Sea / Deep See	418
Contributor Biographies	419

Interim

Vol 29

Section I

Christopher Arigo, editor

When Claudia Keelan asked me if I would like to edit a special eco issue of *Interim*, I responded with great enthusiasm and immediately began compiling a list of all the poets I'd like to include, which began running on for several pages.

Then I felt overwhelmed and realized that I would need help to negotiate the vast ecosystem of contemporary poetry, I needed to introduce other species to the project, thus I invited Matthew Cooperman and Jonathan Skinner to add their diversity to the wilderness we would create.

And like a wilderness, I wanted it to flourish unimpeded by my oversight (but managed with deadlines! A Department of Natural Resources for Poetry!) and of course, the results of their editorial labors speak for themselves. I am infinitely grateful for their dedication to this project, to their creative acumen, to their being in this world. I am grateful and overwhelmed by their words.

For the past six months I have been working on a small organic farm in the Palouse region of Eastern Washington (which was once arid prairie), a predominantly agricultural area known for its abundant production of lentils and garbanzo beans (and home of the Lentil Festival!). Nary a tree in sight—just rolling hills of green (in Spring) and gold (late Summer). I have been surrounded by talk of locally grown organic produce and the importance of community supported agriculture. Which made me think: why look so far and wide for poets? Many of the poets I have included in this section live in Washington or Idaho (the border of which is only about 6 miles from my cottage on a hill). I also wanted to choose poets who are not typically thought of as “ecopoets”—however we define this term. I also asked each contributor to add an afterthought, a reflection on their place in the world, whether it be local or global. I wanted them to also speak for themselves.

In this way, I presumed one more gesture of engaging with my new surroundings. I have lived here for three years now and still long for the shimmering deserts of Nevada and Utah—my homes for almost eight years. I feel a bit overwhelmed trying to know this new place, so I dig in its soil, smell its frequent rain, and read its words.

Overwhelmed. To turn upside down. To submerge completely. I think of waves crashing over the helm of a ship. I try to imagine that it is a sailboat as opposed to a damaged tanker spilling oil into our oceans. But it's hard. So many waves come at us everyday that I imagine it is only too easy to drown. Think of this issue of Interim as a life raft, a dinghy, bobbing along like a tiny beacon of hope: for poetry and for the world.

—Christopher Arigo

chrisarigo@yahoo.com

Palouse Prairie, Eastern Washington, Cascadia Bioregion

Kimberly Burwick

Statement

When I was twenty-three I began mountaineering in a fairly serious way, meaning – I worked multiple jobs in the off-seasons to accumulate as much wilderness time as possible. When in the backcountry of both protected and unprotected areas, I began to see the plant ecology of these wilderness regions in highly specific ways: the imagistic qualities of Lupine through snow, Indian Paintbrush and Monkshood climbing up the valley in mist. These images of vivication, despite the stern withering of each winter, have had a lasting impact on much of my work. Whether a poem is about the terror of anxiety or the loss of a parent, this ecology stands as a sort of testimonial of the paradoxical nature of nature.

Panic Attack

A living bird smells of flies, loam in
the molded summer fields all petals and muck,
the awful slow-motion lark thrashing
the long grass, robin on the rock shaking rain.
You think the earth is growing past its borders —
black knapweed, ditch stonecrop, gray berries.
What you taste in the bottom of the pool
will nourish, will make sweeter the older rainwater
and oak, lilacs buried deep in the headlock
of grasses, birds and the hill almost sexual in its Fall weeping.
The words for a life more tilled than this are said but once.
The geese get older with us simply by flying away.

Reading the Gospel of Luke

You pass through the mist of them, trees repaired
in passion and starlings in the green down
of sycamores. Everything blessed with utterance
either felled or falling. Nothing of our past is sudden
in the thin bands of these acres arching broad
in Queeche light. The evergreen magnolias,
the before and the sweeping now. The blight
and raspberried autumns in the shadblow of God.

And Scant is the Newest Grace

The dark-veined rotor clouds have no measure
of the new, central bells of daffodils regal
across the valley newborn. I am afraid again
to get not anywhere, not the wheat-ends
of the long road, or to the mildew
of the perfect magnolias in the place where
harvest is the precise tissue of glory.

The hawk chases first the robin
then each starling in the begrimed
willow. O large the miracle of even that.

Massachusetts, 1978

There were apples then
it was winter
and winter we called not
winter but the white-eye,
the glass-eye, the one
crying the Nor'easters up
to our one acre of black
ice and the other brother
was far too quiet
when you raised the chicken
knife to our simple throats.
side by side

Todd Fredson

In Praise of Domesticity

My neighbor feeds the cats that have been left
and perhaps I owe her something
akin to love, like what she gives the cats:

Handfuls of food and a patio to fight for.
Her own tabby sits erect behind the screen.
Desperation here is subtle, or not.

I restrain even my speech,
do not mention that once I ate a cat
to celebrate Thanksgiving away. Gave an American dollar

to a boy when he returned, knocking on the gate.
And we were careful not to ask where he'd gotten the cat—me,
three other Americans, and the Ivorien who'd found the boy.

Later, when the embassy gathered Americans
to ask what was happening—poverty begetting
ethnic tension, begetting violence—

it was easy for each of us to be cynical, to imagine
the war as something emerging from ourselves.
Cruel and lonely, intolerable

as we believed ourselves to have become.
Even with one person holding the cat's feet, and another pulling
back its head, we were all bloody with the first

bite of the knife, clawed and dragging the cat back out
from behind a pile of oven bricks. I tell my neighbor instead
about the sound of that boy's fist on the metal.

Swish my gin and tell her how his knock echoed,
looping across the courtyard effortlessly
like concertina wire high on the embassy's walls.

Harbored in the Grotto

“Odysseus, grown old and restless, drawn on by migratory birds, sets forth to retrace ... the journey of all men down the pathway of their youth, the road beyond tracing.”

—Loren Eiseley

Dearest, there is something I am in love with,
something other than you
that assures

my fidelity, my love for you, is no mistake,
no plight of circumstance.

And when I am speaking to myself,

beloved I am always looking for,
who will die, who has died
and forages

those spans
I was able to crumple in my hands
calling it the past
or memory

but are no more absent or present
than your grief,
your wishing me back,

I am standing
with no reference for judgment
amidst these small fires of conversion.

They float in from all directions.

All day my body stands around me. Grievances
arrive in long lines, and I listen.
I close my eyes
and remember how my mother first attracted me.
Those garish, blue fires
of heaven's guilt,
inflictible. Sure now that that child is gone.

The Hour of the Fifth Sun

This far along, there could have been no way of knowing what comes next.

The younger brother licking his lips, which are dry

with charcoal. The older brother's face is painted white to his neck, each nostril rimmed black also, his lips and eyes.

He paddles without looking over his shoulder, speaks mm-mm-mm-mm-mm without opening his lips.

On the back of the raft, the younger brother shucks gold into the lake. This

was the moment in his dream the younger knew they would stand, bodies melting as the raft burned across the lake.

The chief, covered in gold dust, is rowed away while their own rings and bracelets sink through the hissing embers.

Or: gold bands have pulled them down

into what must then have felt like a sanctuary. They did not hope for one death over another. It was the absolute confirmation of death that they considered most beautiful.

The dream itself arched earthward.

The hour forgiveable.

The hour has slackened. The more glorious the nearer—the more supreme
the sacrifice...

In his sleep, a bridge builds toward the older brother. Ropes of cotton
are spun over the gorge

and float toward him, then weathered drift logs.

In late morning, the sunlight wakes on their red walls.

The younger, in tremors.

The pleasure of the spirit not yet pulled away.

Whatever is opposite, whatever causes the body to conduct, his a dousing rod

to find what the bridge could bear.

The brothers went back and forth for months.

But there is no memory weighted
against those last movements. That belongs
only to them—debris that never arrives to shore.

Laughter, A Passage of Birds, Some Clay Chipped From the Tractor's Wheel

It was a mild winter.

The river grew and we could hear it in the canyon walls
like a child inventing its mother.

Nipping at her breasts,
pinning her deep insider herself for months.

The rational, the wistful, the lavishing—
all of the cliff's faces were changing.

And that blue haze, where the horizon is
siphoned off,
deepened with smoke

until the pine cones' pitch was spent, and the fire
racing through the dried needles

stopped like a stallion at the tree line,
panting.

~

At the edge of the canyon, our skin was electric.
We set the dead bird in a box.

We would set the box on the washing machine

and, I would say, are you ready?,
began to build our life around it. The first of many unforgiveables

by which we are committed to one another.

The colt that followed us from the rim, love-sick,
biting at our supply horses.

And, this spring, Dante
caught in barbed wire near the mile marker, bb
in her eye

clouded now with a white cataract.

That was the case for us, too,
wasn't it?
The sanctity of isolation
a dazzling blue river.

Bitter, blissful.

Like halves of the canyon, we surveyed it
side by side

until you rode Dante down the bright green shale.

~

All week, this glacial blue sky—
and because you were first to speak, let me finish

smoothing the tablecloth
where we sat watching that girl dance
out of her formal recital

into her own personal dervish across the marketplace.

My eyes dizzy from tequila, let me pick
that confetti from your hair
and say,

yes, I felt him too.
Saw that blue pilot light flicker on inside you.

~

And our son
older than he is now, from the barn,
woodchips in his hair, reaches down to wipe off a bruise,
a smudge on his knee.

Sometimes I think we would like to go on like that.

The white noise of memory
pruning back

those hurts
that distinguish us into ourselves,

that make us unassailable, like those long cliff walls?

Do you remember the watercress shadows lulling beneath
the clear shock of stream
where we buried his umbilical cord?

And that dragonfly on your finger
when you lifted your hand from the water—

I have come to believe in that ring, cobalt
and royal, as if come to say, then if we cannot become the same
at least let us fly apart together.

Five Fallow Notes

“The original Being, desiring companionship, split itself. Therefore arose pati and patni. And she (patni) bethought herself: ‘How does he copulate with me after have come from each other? Come let me hide myself.’ She became a cow. He became a bull. With her he did indeed copulate. Cattle were born. She became a mare, he a stallion ... Then horses were born.”

—A Vedic creation story

On the haunches of sleep, still dreaming
the ceremony of naming.

Exhale and decay.
The vapors and gases, cold nectars of stars.

The dust is stiffening.

Desire relaxes the feeding ocean
—she loves me, she loves
me...

The Poor Are Chained First to the Plight of this Land, I Hear My Blood Whisper

When I read what Lorca wrote, “There is a wire stretched from the Sphinx to a safety deposit box/that passes through the heart of all poor children,” I think, actually, of animals. Of poor children, too, but of animals. I think of West Africa, where I lived several years ago. The village was in a jungle diminished by monoculture and subsistence farming. In two-plus years, the only time I encountered a “wild” animal I was far to the north, in the dry country, riding my small motorcycle on an empty dirt road. I thought the animal was a dog at first. Then I realized it was a large monkey crossing on all fours.

I saw little monkeys, occasionally, chained to trees in courtyards. They were vicious with rage or hunger, or from detox-ing as the koutoukou (moonshine) they were sedated with had run out. You have never seen something so sad as a monkey unable to catch a branch because the monkey is drunk. The chain slips across the branch and the monkey’s body, collared at its neck, slams into the Mango tree’s trunk.

People imagine there is wilderness, but I don’t. In Koh Kong, outside the Cardamom Protected Forest in Cambodia, the shores of that town are thick with plastic bags. My three-year old son asked, “are those jellyfish, is that seaweed?” Out on the river, barges are again moving sand dredged from beneath the Mangroves to ships waiting out in the Gulf of Thailand. This is the sand that supports the development of Singapore.

Is there anything we do not “manage?” In the seas off of Newfoundland, the most recent generation of northern cod has evolved its rate of maturation in order to reproduce while still small enough to slip through the nets of trawlers.

Contrary to reason, perhaps, there is some joy under all of this for me. Joy, like some exuberant energy that orchestrated the wilderness we once knew and still imagine when someone says that word. I feel that exuberance. My jaw set just right, fingers not clenched. Taking the world in at just the right intervals—beauty is as furious as the sorrow. Overwhelmingly, I feel gratitude, a gratitude for what there is. The ancestors still send out their pulse.

This transmission—my duende, Lorca might say? Little earthy creature feeding upon/
dislodged from the world? I try to stay connected to this transmission, this pulse, though
its appearances are probably less obvious for me than for my children. I am tempted to say
my recognition of it is fainter but more nuanced. I suspect, though, I am just less forcefully
engaged by it than, say, my youngest son who sees it and doesn't stop identifying it:

a moon!

a moon!

a moon!

a moon!

a moon!

a moon!

a moon!

John Gallaher

Statement

Terms such as “responsibility” and “ethics,” and subject positions within the ecological imperative, have always made me uncomfortable. Rather than expanding issues, they can be used (usually by those hostile to what they see as the political mission of the art object) to reduce them, and I feel art is best when it is able to resist getting a pin through it on a board somewhere in someone’s science fair project. At the same time, I’m drawn to what makes me uncomfortable, as that’s a site of energy, and as we’re constantly surrounded by questions regarding our relationship with our world—because these questions are really questions about our relationship with ourselves—I find myself continually back at these squares.

All our ways of being in the world are manifestations of our ethics. All our ways of imagining ourselves and our societies are connected to the world. How overtly, how directly, we address these issues, this obvious existential truth, does not change the fact that all of us are at all times parts of the world. We’re talking to and of ourselves. We can say there is a figure in the landscape, but the landscape is, finally, the figure.

In a Landscape: VII

“Changes that are characteristic of a living room include couches and wall treatments, but most commonly begin with an eye toward the television, whether the orientation of the seating would be toward optimal viewing or interaction among people.” There are a lot of things we can make up like this that are probably true. It makes me wonder why truth is so contested. It seems to come naturally: the silver drawer opening and closing, and you might call it music, and we can all kind of see the truth in that. And then we suddenly break into a loveliness of water faucets and doors.

What you intend to do mixes quickly with ambient, unintended things, and perhaps the car ride is better this way, but the second thought comes that catches me up, that “how many times can one move out from zero,” which, from one perspective isn’t much of a question at all. The answer is “yes,” as it needs to be for us to keep sane. But still, there are more times than the present, much as it sounds nice not to think so, as the idea of presents makes each day feel just like a birthday, right? The eternal present that we keep hearing animals live in, or live closer to . . . this place we’re supposed to meditate toward, as if counting cars as they pass goes one and then one and then one.

But then there's this other car ride, isn't there, where
I'm knowing it's the last moment with someone,
that it's the last moment we will still be in love,
and the car door closing still sounds beautiful,
because it's a solid car. What was it Margo
said once about Jenny, back when we used to talk
about Jenny? "If one is admonished
to do no one harm, is it implied
that it's OK to do no one any good either?"

In a Landscape: VIII

Are we on the right track? Should it have been
the leaves in piles or the leaves in a row? And now, of course,
it turns out it's neither one, as Julie from across the street
is currently mulching them for her garden
with her hose-mulcher, telling us it would have been even better
if they'd have been left where they fell, as that
would've allowed her to see the sticks and other things
more easily. Well, there you go. But then
it's anytime later, and we're asking ourselves if we're on the right track,
as we move around in a landscape of houses on the new bicycle path,
hoping that this is good exercise after reading that car exhaust
is slowly killing us. And what about that conversation
where we were going to find a lake, and ourselves suddenly
younger and on a weekend full of sex and watching the leaves turn?

Which is that all ways of disposing of leaves are metaphors
for death. An arrangement of leaves asserts a truth
as if the truth is firm and final; firmness and finality
are deathlike. Every raking that heads for a big pile and finds it, inevitably
finds mortality—and mortality is dreary. All the old
ways to pile leaves lead us to the same dark threshold. This includes
the ones that spell out “I love you” because the love
is shadowed by change and change is the livable version
of death. So Julie's leaf-mulcher came along and invented
the Great Escape: leaves that evade endlessly. As long as she is out there
sucking them up, we are not dying! But there is always an opposite
kind of death—not the death of the pile of leaves
but the death of chasing them around. Or to put it in better terms,
not the death of completion but the death of sheer mess across the yard,
which is why people dissolve sooner or later, too. Julie, out there,
is allowing me to say “Oh well, let it go” whereas I keep looking
down the block at the little fires that seem to say “Here is this good thing,
or this truth, and I refuse to let it go.”

It's out there. We just need the right question that will make the right answer suddenly appear, though this sounds an overly airy way of planning things. Most days we don't talk like this. We say things like, "How many leaves do you think are out there, I mean over the yard? How long do you think it would take us to count them?"

In a Landscape: IX

Now the scene changes, we say,
and the next few years are quiet. It's a form of curse,
the inverse of the "interesting times"
the Chinese were said to go on so about. Nevertheless,
it is, as the emptiness needs a something
in order to be defined as empty, which then means
we spend the next few years talking
about other years, as if that's what's important. Maybe
that is what's important. It was terrible,
the hospital stay. The children. Not the children
in the abstract, of course, but those
times worried that this would go wrong, or that,
and then things do go wrong
and it almost feels like we'd wished for it to happen, so not only
do we have to go through this terrible time,
but we also have to keep reminding ourselves
that we didn't wish for it. It's Problem One. And there's
our two-year-old son strapped to a board with an IV, crying.

And doesn't it feel like a formal device then? As if
expecting it was the same or is the same as willing it,
but then almost willing it, saying something like, Please God
or whomever, get it over with already . . . if the world
isn't going to be a museum only. How museums keep calling out
that there's so much more to find in the past,
like ourselves, for instance. The simplification of forms.
The question of why it might be important to have ideas,
or at least genres. We have these things in common.

We will sit on a wooden chair in the sun
and we will like it. We will run the numbers
and think it sounds like a good proposition. We
will consult a map. We will ask directions. There's

always an analogue, and someone will tell us about it. The sun's out right now, in fact, and it's all a matter of doing the next thing, driving home, say, and then it's a manner of having done something, driving past the car wash, yes, forcing a matter of doing the next thing, which is filling out the accident report, while the old man who hit my car starts crying, and then I'm walking around the car, picking up the pieces and putting them in the trunk.

In a Landscape: X

X marks the spot, and yes, we are the center of the universe, but we've nothing much to show for it, as everywhere else is equally the center. Everything extends. Well, there you go, then. So what else is inevitable? Like how many people who I don't know are going to call me, saying "John!" and then try to sell me something, saying I'd then have something to show for it? And that I might even impress my neighbors, be the envy of the neighborhood. My brother, Richard, before he was adopted, was named Richard Cory, and as he was nearly six, then, our parents left that as his name, no one saying anything about the suicide of Richard Cory in either the Simon & Garfunkel or the Robinson versions. As I was adopted before I was four, they changed my name from Martin Lynn to John Jerome, no literary allusions there, but still, I think of the Chinese saying, that "The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names," and wonder if that has any bearing on my usual lack of self-awareness.

It's all practice, I guess, moving from a landscape to a souvenir, and then from meditation to dream, and we can catch a ride for a bit. See some trees. We come back with a postcard and a t-shirt, and then the ones who don't think they'll come back, and then don't. I don't want to be one of them, even if we just call it a coincidence. "Co-inky-dink," as we sometimes say, making it seem, for a moment, harmless. Fun even. To be lost or misplaced or wanting to be.

DNA and the stars both make music, I've read, and sometimes it can be quite affecting, a kind of furniture music of furniture itself. But how does one decide when the composition is a composition? And all these people who say they're attuned to it, OK, but those who say they're keeping time, they certainly must know better, as there's no keeping anything, and really,

all those drills I used to go through in school
where I'd open my Science book and put it over the back
of my neck, and curl into a ball under my desk,
they were not really meant to help us survive the disaster,
but just to give us something to do, to mimic being born maybe,
and to practice saying, "We're ready now."

In a Landscape: XI

We do, as we say, what had
to be done. The way things are often, as we also say,
at an impasse—when there's no way to go
but through another person
in much the same predicament. Does
being a nice person help? We were driving around
this morning. I got some coffee from McDonald's.

Maybe it is what had to be done, as
it's only logical that some things must get done. But
even with that, there's always that
little click of a radio station
that asks if the things we're doing
are strictly necessary. Looked at that way
it's hard to get a theory up
about most things. The way I had a theory
of birds called Retribution of the Landscape,
after the third or fourth one pooped (shit?
did its business?) on me. It was the 4th of July,
I was at a parade. It landed in my rainbow
snow cone. Last year it landed on the back
of my right hand while I was riding my bicycle
on a clear day in summer. And then again just a few days ago
on my left arm while at a dairy farm
on my daughter's second grade field trip
where she tried flavored milk for the first time, saying,
"It's OK, but I like them better as steaks."

I'm at work again after being sick
yesterday. At least I felt sick in the morning,
and then I felt better. In that way, I'm going to become
a different person soon (John XI maybe), as the probability of weather
or the probability of dinner. Or maybe I'm going

to remain this very same thing
continually. I'm not sure which fills me with hope,
and which terrifies me.

In a Landscape: LXVIII

There's always a point at which each of us says
I no longer know the answer. Wittgenstein's famous
passing over in silence moment, hanging there like a carnival.
There's a place where we're always eight years old, like my daughter,
Natalie, standing here, and each word a possible real state
of events. Each question a part of something real
that's missing. Here we are in the window looking out
at the moon. It's full right now, or close enough,
December first, 2009. A sort of ethics, looking out.

I've been away from thinking about the landscape
for a week. We soon become distracted, lose
the thread, and begin to think of other things. K
has lunch with her ex-husband, and he's suddenly
everything he should have been when they were married,
but wasn't. I read once that the Son of Sam
sometimes would go out with his gun and all,
and not kill anyone. He'd get all ready
and then not do it. And he liked that, he'd say. And this week
we got word that my cousin Bill, who's been a pilot
for close to 40 years now, was in a plane crash
at take-off. It was a cargo plane, with seven crew members
on board. Three died, four lived. He was one of the
ones who lived, and he's just been upgraded
from critical to serious. He'll be a long time recovering,
if he ever fully recovers. They're already
talking about his "new normal."

When I was four, Bill and his brother Jim
would hold my arms and make me hit myself,
saying to me, "Why are you hitting yourself?" while
I was laughing and having a great time. I knew
they were on my side, so it was OK. I told Natalie

and Eliot about that the other night, and made them hit themselves while asking them, “Why are you hitting yourself?” That night, at 4 a.m., Natalie woke and called out, “Daddy, I need you.” When I got to her room, she was sitting up in her bed. She turned to me and asked, “Why do I sing?”

Kevin Goodan

Statement

From my late teens until I was thirty, I worked for the U.S. Forest Service on the Lolo National Forest in Montana, fighting forest fires. On the crews that I worked on, from the District level on up to the Hotshot crew, we employed what was called “Light on the Land” tactics, which meant that instead of using bulldozers to create hand-line, we would use elements of the topography to help create a barrier to stop the spreading of the fire, thus creating minimal impact upon the eco-system in that particular area. This “Light on the Land” tactic is something that I still engage in my life, by trying to live in such a manner that does little damage to the natural world, and by paying attention to the landscape around me. This also happens in my writing.

Showings

I.

I open my eyes and taste God.
A sky blue through bare trees
then birds. The spirit moves
surely but not upwards.
I make a fire but no words come —
Fodder, I say, for tomorrow
As green boughs take their time
coming into flame, as smoke hangs
in the smallest of places,
a sweetness that makes the lungs
constrict, as I strain toward the visible,
the stunning labor of breathing
As fire now builds its force,
As voices work their way
to the surface of a river —
Sweet glory of the foresting,
Bright flicker of the bodying,
Burgeoning flame-lengths of the spiriting,
as I am my own offering
When the unsayable is lodged in the throat.

II.

I follow the narrative up the mountain,
Great arcs of flame mending and sighing
A moment in the world, terra firma
Sloped and rucked-up with till,
Stobs and understory kilned by the radiants
Ghosting the sucking air, ember-thronged
The far ridge flecked then submerged with light
As wind blows from a large place through a draw
Sprawling flame down the backside of the drainage
Strange light canting the surge and bevy,

Making small the labors of men
Hunched to soil as flame-loosened boulders flail down upon them,
Prayers heard, adorned with rivets of fire.

III.

I've mended the fire and again it's dying.
The wind heaves off, trees rattle, then still.
Maybe sun is best at this hour,
Birds gone to rapture in the swaying,
Hard nubs pulled into leaf-hood,
Fields in their sudden-green,
The lived scents of morning.
I am here, watching light edge down the trees
Wondering if you are sleeping, there.

IV.

Here are flames as I know them,
A fire's dentition across my back —
The wind keeps parsing the trees,
Radiant strength of hot wafts to ignite unburned deadfall strewn before me,
Spot-fires twitchy down-drainage in the night,
Filed rakers of skip-tooth chain glinting through steam of a saw's bright kerf.
The fire has caught now, is roaring in allowance of its own wind,
Creosote flecking cheeks, hair burned and stenching,
The roiling spores hissing —
Heat bellows forward, the head, the body, the Christ, the fire —

V.

Before us the cindered land,
Shifting calibrations of light, ash, feldspar,
Juts of stumps and smolder —
The further we are the less we are sons
Tainted, of a time, of place —
Fleeting visions of the valley, the dry flat hills beyond,
The points of vantage called memory, agent to any soul.

We are far from the river, the witness of the river, far from granted
From bounty, from rapture, beyond it —
The stillness of otherness we're led from,
The wilderness we are taken into.

Crag Hill

Statement

The poem is an ecosystem, a dynamic interaction of abiotic (letters, syllables), biotic (words, syntax), and cultural (semantic) elements negotiated in the germination of seeds and pollen, across the tips of swaying branches, quivering leaves, the heads of grasses, short and tall, upon the blue calm of a bay, in rumbling scree washed down to the base of slopes, the screech of water against rock in the bend of a river running fast, whispered or whipped by fingers of flame, wisps of smoke, from ocean floor to sandy beach to rolling prairie to sweeping desert to rugged alpine ceiling.

The poem—the poem that does not repeat itself, for rigid repetition leads to ecological collapse, to extinction—conveys energy and matter inside itself and outside, creating and solving new problems, adapting to unexpected forces, form and content enhancing its opportunities to thrive in the world of the page, print or digital.

Infusing, exchanging, regulating, reciprocating, supporting, the poem continuously organizes itself into different levels of function and complexity. The poem is a flow of energy cycling through body and thought, our body and our thought, our tenuous chances for cognitive survival.

Good Adaptation of a Trout

We not only see a connection venerated by continuation,
but also completeness and coherence,
though fumed with oregano.

The same trend of development in a tube fed from outside,
impenetrable,
not even breath.

The prestige of your language
creates the image of mouth from string.
The fish, when seized, do not all spawn.

Into Space from Top and Abstract

Our mode of perceiving the world had sensation.
It was no longer the fear of change-resistant elements,
a terror of the strange.

What would she tell her mother,
coarse paint and fine classically dignified hieroglyphics?
Matinee idol with feature of sky, plain,

the pedestrian, the saunterer.
In his heart turns every leaf, migrating water, air.

The man would mutter obscure text.
I am whose back was to that ended wispy trail.

Psychic Acts and Their Correlates in Limbo

Had she died, meanings eliminated?
The urgency of acidity conditioned by passage,

she tried to orient aspirations and attitudes and feel,
if nothing else, the oranges.

That surely would overcome the edge
from crumbling to a muck swamp in the woods,

black outlines in bloom.
The air dried them, brick reds instantly seized upon.

Hung free a few feet from the present,
a stupid investment.

Naïve Realism

Things are as they seem to the things themselves.

Things are not errors in perception,
the distance between microscopic and macroscopic.

Naïve realism was a point of departure,
case applied to analysis isolated from theory

supporting the idea of openings in the clouds,
namely questions, the hub in the vapory masses.

There is enough fact between him and the sun.

I have exactly the same rays,
the means of seeing love and desire behind thought.

Alice Jones

Unshored

Shore, boundary, skin, edge, interface between here and there, where everything happens. But what about deep immersion on the other side of the line, the boundless Other full of our cast offs and castaways, flotsam, jetsam, and its own unnamed creatures? While there is no ecology untouched by human life and waste, there are huge areas untouched by human consciousness, other than imagination. The mind too has its reserves of untouched, unthought regions, and any writing project involves the shore between the speakable and the wordless, the observed and the unrecognized. Membranes are semi-permeable. The various endeavors of science, journalism, poetry, photography try to increase that which in terms of ocean is called the mesopelagic zone, the territory of slight light.

This sequence of Seas inhabits the shore between poem and prose, myth and science, news and lyric, between the human and everything else. The title “Unshored” is taken from Melville:

Death seems the only desirable sequel for a career like this; but Death is only a launching into the region of the strange Untried; it is but the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored;

Ocean

Is the land tugging at the sea from under? (Elizabeth Bishop)

At sea, song was the compass, chantey-guiding,
creating straight lines for a ship to follow, up from
the human throat, a path out of nothing. No such thing

as straight on the globe's surface curve. All lines bend, go
under into liquid edged with rot-smell, garbage-swirl,
the land-carver, designer of continents. Saline explores

each conceivable channel, coral, fjord, vein, tongue, brain,
waves writing dirges for sea burial. Vanishing point, verge,
horizon, where we sink like the molten sun-orb, heavier

than water, wishing not for the golden bird of paradise
to burst forth from his underwater home, but to dive down,
able to breathe in an alien medium, into a watery netherworld.

Shore, where the mind meets mindlessness. Mother of no one,
ocean gives forth; mother of everyone, ocean idles. A body, overboard, becomes fish
food, crab-torn, flesh to flesh, salt to salt, we disembark.

*When for a moment, like a drop of rain, He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan, Without
a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown.* (Byron)

Zones of the ocean column: epipelagic, closest to the surface, sunlit; the mesopelagic or twilight, down to about 1000 meters; the aphotic zone, perpetual darkness, subdivided into bathyl zone, the abyssal, 3000 to 6000 meters down, then hadal, where temperature rises a bit due to pressure. Abyssal plains cover 50% of earth's surface. 71% of earth's surface, ocean contains 97% of finite water, glaciers 2%, less than 1% is fresh.

Sulu

Why so clear? What does it say about light?
Torrents, bucketless. Over-wash, underplay
sidle up. Shore, where the unseen meets the just

quite possibly so. Manic nimble bird feet in a hurry
between waves. Turquoise see-through green sea turtles
swim in tree-grown, walking on atolls hole of nothing.

Like shining from shook foil; It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil (Hopkins)

Sand amethyst, tree rings, dead tree skeleton rings,
atolls roundly accumulating, a culture atomized,
dispersal chief principal of civilization, ethnic murders,

batik, ikat tablecloth, sandpiper, the unclothed sea
growing wormier deeper, sand bars sinking,
row, row, the little boat so frail upon a radiant sea.

“Exxon Mobil Corp. is set to drill its third well in the South Sulu Sea. The West Aquarius is a deepwater semi-submersible rig, which is designed to operate in water depths of up to 3,000 meters” (Business World, April 4, 2010).

“They came in the dead of night and pulled off the first heist on Baguan Island this year. The thieves, possibly armed, quietly left on board a boat taking about 600 green turtle eggs in this protected wildlife sanctuary” (Inquirer.net, July, 2010).

The Sulu Sea is known for its internal solitons. Discovery of the soliton: “I was observing the motion of a boat which was rapidly drawn along a narrow channel by a pair of horses, when the boat suddenly stopped – not so the mass of water in the channel which it had put in motion; it accumulated round the prow of the vessel in a state of violent agitation, rolled forward with great velocity, assuming the form of a large solitary elevation, a rounded, smooth and well-defined heap of water. I followed it on horseback, and overtook it still rolling on at a rate of some eight or nine miles an hour, preserving its original figure some thirty feet long. Such, in the month of August 1834, was my first chance interview with that singular and beautiful phenomenon which I have called the Wave of Translation” (John Scott Russell).

Bay of Bengal

Brown water issues aqua, glacial tarns,
Himalayan run off loses clear altitude, confluence,
everything joins the Ganges. The holy falls

through open mouths, cholera, odorous, cyclone-born
floods, collapsing frail homes, wet saris,
funeral pyres, lotus flower ashes washing out.

Pity the wet wanting to be dry, rain-pitted sand,
monsoon rice paddies soaking up excess drenching,
sponging what flowed over into houses, even

the egrets go hungry. Birch bark slipping off its skin,
water table rising, all are served waves, eat shore.
Erosion, evaporation, the cold witch time sinking

teeth into each, burned bodies, sea-scattered, leaf-cupped
flowers with small incense flames floating, fragile
offerings burn a few minutes then become a piece

of the swill of parts, mud, ash, shed cells,
word-trails of prayer wheels breezing out across
into the waves' reply to human folly.

The Bay receives the Ganges, Meghna, Mahanadi, Godavari, Krishna, Irrawady, and Kaveri Rivers. Zone of merger, Sunderbans (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sundarbans.jpg>) where the largest tidal halophytic mangrove forest forms the Ganges' river delta not far away from the Bengal tigers' habitat.

Barents

In Finish myth, a merman, Näkki, a fish-tailed man
with a handsome face but an ugly, hairy backside,
green-bearded, pulls children into the depths if

they lean off a pier too far. He can change himself into
a voluptuous woman with three breasts.

A shallow sea shelf, rich in fossil fuel, the sea

co-mingles three water masses: the warm, salty North
Atlantic

Drift, cold Arctic water, and a warm low-salinity
coastal water. The warmth makes for rich Spring

phytoplankton blooms. These feed zooplankton which
feed krill, polar cod, capelin and Little auk. The capelin feeds
cod, harp seals and guillemot. Seals feed the polar bears.

Russia and Norway resolved a territorial dispute over how to divide the Barents Sea into economic zones, planning on oil and gas exploration. “It just shows the greediness of Russia and Norway that the first thing they talked about is not global warming, which is what’s making this area suddenly accessible, but resource extraction. This part of the planet is extremely sensitive. It is often covered with ice and there is no technology to clean spilled oil and chemicals out of ice” (Truls Gulowsen, Norway’s Greenpeace) (NYT, April 27, 2010).

The polar bear, nanook in Inuit, the largest terrestrial carnivore, is twice the size of a Siberian tiger. Among the most sexually dimorphic mammals, the males are twice as large as the females. Well-insulated with fur and blubber they over-heat above 50 °F. They practice still-hunting at the interface of sea and ice: using sense of smell to locate seals, they wait. When a seal exhales, the bear smells its breath, reaches into the ice- hole and seizes its catch.

Arafura

Involute and be gone,
be one small fish, elated
in magnitude, filling each crevice

demersal fish, out on the continental shelf,
not in abyssal depths, they want a floor,

in the rich, as-yet-uncollapsed fishery

My mother is a fish (Faulkner).

where utter contact floats you up,
dreams' membrane, air/liquid interface,
eye brine: the face is yours.

Flat boats with glass bottoms, safe seeing, hover at the membrane, eatery of halves, sky/
water, binary combinations. The wave that remains after the wind-wave fades is a swell.
Wind-waves have shorter wavelengths than tsunamis, though a rogue wave can reach 30
meters in height. Sustained by surface tension, the broken wave sinks into sand, dissolving
flume green tubes, foam flutes, free ride peters out, shells launching, side-sucked, the
white bubbles' razzmatazz. The soft coral called dead man's fingers, scattered spicules,
flesh colored gelatinous mass rising 8 inches from the gravelly bottom. The mermaid's
last remains evaporated, lust metastasizing onto dry land, the mind's placebo, salt pools
consume, flower and flow over.

Michael Kroesche

In Considering the Jack Rabbit and our Landscape

Connecting to the landscape and finding a place within it is contingent upon recognizing that you are indelibly part of it. In the case of my poem, it began in the Las Vegas desert landscape, taking notice of its characteristics and recognizing the various flora and fauna. In writing the poem, I see the Jack Rabbit standing straight among the red rocks and it becomes—it is—a part of my landscape, just as much as I am a part of his. Even dead, placing the creature's body out in the rocks in the vast scrub and burr desert behind my house in Henderson, we are not "returning" the rabbit's body to its home, its natural habitat. In truth, because of the connection between me and the rabbit—cohabitants in the same landscape—the rabbit never left. It is simply moved from one space, to another, and then a final space; the red rocks and scrub brush behind my home.

The primary word to use here, I believe, is among. There is no outdoors, nor is there an interior when we took the rabbit into my home in an attempt to nurse it. My house is itself among the other parts of the desert landscape, differing only in texture and material. The hum of the steel air conditioning units are just as natural to this new landscape as the Joshua Trees or bundles of thistle, the coyotes snuffling out hutches and snapping up insects for their meal. By dissolving whatever illusory or manufactured barriers exist, we succeed in establishing a more sincere ecological poetry through the poem's acknowledgement, the very noticing, of the fact that these spatial differences do not exist. There is no inside or outside, no wilderness that we aren't a part of already. There is only a landscape, and its contents, and it is the poem that takes sincere notice of this, establishing, most important of all, our relationship to this landscape simply by saying that we are of this landscape.

Aviary

for W.M.

you sang it a spring
new earth
its fur moved but

breath & dirt
not from heart or
very love

instead you took
every rough igneous
stone from my chest

placing them among
the small patch of desert
the rabbit lay
open in

On neck breast
a cross
you traced my cross
& new legs
found me from

I lay my head in
your lap
felt another
hand for the first time
a space
it never left

raise the still rabbit
in me held

between
our bodies on
the mahogany “A”
a piano bench where
our song/drink sprung
inside you is
an aviary
bird . wind

filling whole
a space at times
flown through

at times
a raw Spring

then deluge
& suddenly

laurels
ivy
the sparrows

are meaning are
sincere in being only—

your hands do not
flutter or alight
in my hair in caress

painted fingernails
finding my every space

A breath
cedar near

the edge I slide
my arm along as you
hold my bandage on

little bird reminds me
in every lattice of

our blood
our blood

chirrup the name
God gave me

I don't know my name
but you hear God
& tell me **** pointing
to the little nests you made
by saying my name

each nest a call threaded
in small silences &
the dusky strands from
your holly hair

I lower my head
become
an elm a bough
for my names

//

little nests
only you can say or sing

I sing my
drink/death/Spring song
become a rabbit

inside stones

find me
fur-soft
unmoving
you raise me up

to spirit, desert sun
warming bone & nail
us kissing tongue
to hot
tongue
& find

New Love! New Love!

every aviary opened
out to sky
your perfect lattice
lines in your palm

Here is your hand
defines a space I inhabit
my body
a nest of names

you know
from silence
and God

from feather litany
recitations of my

body sinew bone

I mend keys
place fingers
to
ivory

your hands remember my
shape & I
translate the sensation
of holding
your pattern close
clef crests raises
up white & up inside
my touch into your

hollow aviary bones

you raise

One look & we
translate into
a new wildlife

elk
sandalwood

soft paws of a coyote
loping towards
a warm hutch we made

children
mountains in
their bedsheets
grow as strong & slow

never loved two

slow mountains
or come close

until recitation
my nest is you
is safe among
elms & ivy, always
sincere in you

& my whole! my whole
echoes the same place inside
 perfect twin
 desert canyons

you press into
soft clay
our flora

latticed trails
in their cedar
& pine minds

your flight line guides
my river to

very rain water slipped
from your sparrow feather
to new earth to
my spirit in
river water bends
elm boughs

found me
sunk inside dark mud
there was the bar with

mirrors all around

& the perfect
shape of you

inside a black dress
your cocktail a wet jewel
set in lined grip
your eyes find
& find a small rabbit
my fur movements through

then nothing, you
annihilate every
old recitation
 a world
 then deluge
I say my name
& God makes it mute, gives
you my true name

your hands folding
fingers into a nest

I am annihilated
wisp & torn

your feather love heart
aviary full of chirrup
all I have on wing
drawn into a shoulder
your fingernails trace

February promises
song & May

of March & the piano
bench you made into
an airy world with

3 words
my true names

cat's cradle veins
bind tendons to muscle
finger tips
forming a space
along the spots of
my spine every

vertebrae a new stone

this is our wildlife
landscapes in open wing
among my water
tumbling through

my paws bend the new
grass damp in
what remains of dew

I had never seen
any human, heard
my names until
you breathed a flight

a wind carried
through space I filled
at times, at other times
not

All at once I perceive

you
wind

my body
a thing

Desert surrounds me
I pass sand

the red scorch
mountains into
dark horizon

every bird in flight
is you is wind
carrying me through

windy aviary
I am shaken
reach towards

reach the latticed currents
I come with you into a space

of sky our mountains
the elk ivy & desert
beneath pause

Tod Marshall

Statement

In the Clearwater National Forest, kokanee pile up in the shallows like cast off rubies—or so my first figurative gesture might errantly go. Eight to twelve inches long, they lack the glamorous strength of salmon, their only gymnastics an occasional wiggle up a side channel or tributary creek. Bears, eagles, raccoons, and osprey feast. And the fish keep coming—literally, sexually. Necessity befuddles and amazes: the spawning urge driving them leaves the fish grey and rotting (sometimes chomped in half). “Urge and urge and urge” is Walt’s phrase and part of my imperative to find art that affects so deeply, art that speaks to us as if from the cells. To put it another way: to find and inhabit language in places where necessity begins to outweigh desire; that is a scale in which an eco-poetics might seek to weigh the world. The brilliant red of the fish matters, but not more than the act of seeing matters, the biological urge that leads to their journey matters: as does the recognition of the system in which all of this unfolds—has unfolded/will unfold—without depredation, degradation, debasement. No need for jewels: O fish carcass, your grey smell is glorious and sweet.

Al Dente

And there's this: a while back in autumn, leaves
gave up and piled without the help of a rake. As if
they knew spring was coming like a shit storm
in the incubator or a bunch of cracked eggshells in the sink,
like having to make amends for saying
something you meant, "I never loved you much"
or "stop being a prick"
or "this chicken soup tastes like boiled crap"
or the wool pulled down over your eyes and you don't even care.
Gonna harvest some stem cells on this beautiful autumn day,
Gonna cook some baby teeth with diphen-hydra-meeeeen into a concoction that can
grow lungs or a good buzz.

Gonna go for a hike among the calm yet twitchy trees.
O pity this afternoon, o dread sock, o television turned against
a white day, cutting your gums on a sharp spoon, butter knife gone blue,
the police are here to create a document, a policy, an outcome, here to tell you to
clean it up.

When I came into the kitchen, the colander
was still on the stove from last night's cooking. Splatters
of spaghetti sauce, green bits of oregano, a blob
shaped like a national park, some New England state: eat me
says the metal pot. Suck on this. I picked up one piece
of stringy pasta and threw it against the wall. It stuck.
Carb loading against an unpredictable future, twirling my fork
around a planet and slurping
the mutha-fucker up. Sit, grate some cheese,
sit, sprinkle hot red peppers. See here,
watch me do it again, see the splat as it flattens and sticks,
see how it does not fall, my bestest and brightest creation,
knowing that it's cooked, ripe, ready for sauce, done.

Eco Sonnet

Not that I sleep or smile much.

Not that thick red cedars swaying in the wind bring worry.

Not that the dog came inside with muddy feet, burdock in its fur.

(Industry walked into the kitchen and slid something out of the top drawer.)

Not that, not clever metaphor, slick conditional.

Not that wet fetish in the afternoon called symbol.

Not those canine prints across the clean tile.

Not that picture, that sculpture.

Definitely not another theme-song tune.

Come on, don't do that

Or at least do it in the other room.

Brice Marden: Why Long Brushes Are Best

The guide said a golden eagle
will smack a mountain goat

from steep cliffs and gather
the fractured body with talons

to lift the carcass—usually a
kid—back to the nest.

Those Elusive Creatures That Call Us Home

No one knew what lived in the burrow,
although some were sure of badger
or rats. A few claimed a hole to a cave
to a huge volcanic chute,

gullet through the center of the earth.
Most doubted this, skeptical of the fantastic
and because no fire or steam
spouted on cold November nights.

The philosopher and the biologist
both believed in tiny owls, delicate feathers
so light you could cup one on your palm
and blow beneath and watch it float for hours

on the invisible currents of air
that carry kindness
through the world and keep butterflies safe
from snapping dogs.

What is the palm but a bowl full of false hope
and a place to live to make up for necks
that allow fate to sneak up on us,

grab our large heads, and go snap?

They set up traps with triggered-cameras
but never catch
a glimpse of feathers, those little rotating heads,
the tiny triangles of downy ears

that must listen to the clamor outside
and hide from a world
with its search engine that scavenges
for the best possible answer.

Bad Words

Pikeminnow, squawfish,
ugly sucker. Smack it

against a rock. Bash
its brains. Throw it

as far as possible
into the bushes.

Michael McLane

Statement

From time to time there is reclamation. The meadow beautiful where it blurs into monument. There is an interrogative residue here. Questions precipitated by the rotation of earth. Dominion has its parallels. Men down the markers one slow stone at a time while the coyotes articulate the bones.

Skip the middle man and ignite the coal at its source. A town burns and a bypass is built. Home is a bad neighbor incinerating his trash. Home comes home to roost. The telephone lines are down. The shortest distance between two points is below foundation and it glows. Seen from the air, it appears a burst capillary.

Beside the highway, a red carpet of hatched crickets. They devour the pony express trail. Ground moves, and later air. We watch the skies for birds, it is how we were raised. Deliverance swarms or flocks. We give flight to gluttony to make less feeble our small claims. But the lineage from Plymouth to Zion is not as a crow flies but twists round every butte and mountain, a receding Rorschach of lakeline.

Behind the house was a stretch of field that ran right to the foot of the Wasatch Mountains. Wild grasses and trees. It was full of snakes and skunks, deer and ticks. It was all there was. Then, when my legs were longer, I found the gravel pits hiding behind the last line of trees, gnawing away like termites. I feared the mountain toppling over onto my house. The next day I set the field ablaze with fireworks. The firemen drowned out my protests. When I tried to follow the water to its source, they laughed and laughed.

Smolder

the last house built by hands had no windows. he painted the walls like tundra in the kitchen.

jungle in the living room. the sun always starting its arc from the quarter round. this was after
the rest had moved.

the fissure. earth rolling a young neighbor in its mouth. spitting him back
like disagreeable candy. occasional smoke plumes came from under the doors. they were easily mistaken for fog or blowing snow. he said

such colorful language for a place forgotten. fumarole. chamber. vulcan. pushed aside like an island or threatening mountain. nauseous and primitive

what is in the muscles is not memory. push hard against the earth to stay warm.

then they came for him. crouched in the early morning living room. when the door came down.

noise like a rendering. when the world opened. he would pounce.

Imperium (for the Last Residents to Leave Centralia)

just before the barbarians knock, they allow
one weekend to burn our leaves and trash.

once spartan, now faux pas, now refugees
the oops that sets the minotaur chasing

its own tail deep in the earth, what sacrifice
is made when the monster devours itself,

the great suck it leaves behind, oxygen
lust pulls in a fawn here, a bicycle there.

carpet may smolder for hours before
its frenzy, this place is more kind.

we take long naps on the crust, dream
of winter, the steam erasing all but this island

where children remember the ground, stomp
to see it breathe, that heat is no error

indelible, this place unlike all places
does not mask the violence on which

we walk, on towards roads that circumvent
memory or faults, that circle the flickering

in the night like wolves and coyotes.
when a single house bursts into flames

no one around to care, no longer hearth
but the post and lintel of hell, its curtains melting.

Teratology of Home

American spiritual precipitate a Kinderhook or Cardiff giant
Bonneville dregs desert hoax surely harem in the sand
and sultan across the wide Missouri to land of table salt
and evaporative cooling a calling or best guess better to feed
the Indians than to fight better still to lead away bury
like locusts beneath I-15 or baptize in Jordan River
that flows to a dead sea that sinks nothing gives up its bodies every
spring crimes of passion is a fruit that grows
like jimson weed near every porch and alley if you eat it in summer
you dry up a lake bed but leave high water table and what is that
conceit in a desert a corpse that blushes come to be and leave on a grid but not
believe on one not that easy to escape birth and teething the tit
a place pregnant with reputation that follows as a tail shooping flies
back to reservation to Topaz or Skull Valley shoed by difference
in forgery or translation wives or tithes downwind from ground
zero a monster head in sand holds a glass reflects
a face unaware of itself chirping and gurgling aphasia or appeasement

Dig

the bones show
achilles tendons cut clear
to marrow. this was before
quick death. heavy furniture
dragged across soft floors.
do not try to blame the backhoe
that caused all the trouble to begin with.
some sounds cannot be imagined.
such as repentance. when this becomes too much,
there is silence. men sing
“Closer my God to Thee” to drown
out the digging.
the others, unable to walk
pull themselves slowly
upward.

Kinderhook

Kinderhook. Lance the hill with homemade shovels. Pike men. Like water witches or pirates or ditch digger's revenge. Bring all the high brass. A short translation of charisma. Belief must come from the ground. Things that keep their bellies close. From translate or translation we get train or late or ion or scoffed plate or transformer. Doppelganger. These things are heavy. Like a giant's bones unearthed. Found to be hollow like pipe. Pied piper of Hamblin. William J, I mean. Prophecy merely puns. With no reference point. But once the compound is administered. The bird does not have long. Or choice. Tern or hen. Or a heavier, clumsy species. Let it be said. That the froth on the rapids of spring rivers. Looks like sweet cream or rock candy. Do not take your children there.

Hoa Nguyen

On Austin, Texas

Austin straddles two distinct ecosystems: the Blackland Prairie and the Edwards Plateau. The Colorado River divides the city north and south. A highway divides the city east and west.

The river is not the same Colorado River as the one that carved the Grand Canyon, but was surely also named by Europeans after its red silted waters. The river is also known as “Lady Bird Lake,” named after Claudia Alta “Lady Bird” Taylor Johnson, the late First Lady who advocated for its improvement. The lake meanders like a river but is named a “lake” because it has been dammed at intervals to control the area’s flash flooding.

The highway is Interstate 35 and follows the division of ecosystems nearly precisely. The divide might be the difference in human use; farm land versus merchant land. I don’t know. What I do observe is that the west/east division is one that follows class lines. When Austin city planners built the highway in 1960, it demolished a vibrant Latin- and African-American corridor owned and frequented by these communities. It had been a site of renowned art production. I35 became a barrier then, segregating the city and blighting the area—though now, as Austin grows, these neighborhoods are being gentrified.

*

I moved to the east side of Austin in 1996 to a 1940s bungalow originally built for returning WWII veterans. It was situated next to a creek named Boggy Creek. It was indeed boggy. It feeds into Waller Creek, which feeds into the Colorado River; it empties into Matagorda Bay of the Gulf of Mexico. Boggy Creek runs parallel to the train tracks. It was very much an urban setting even though residential.

Birds we saw by Boggy Creek:

Barred owl staring at us at dusk from a decrepit black walnut tree

Red tail hawk in a sycamore: the first sighting ever was just after we heard Robert Creeley had died

Nest of Night Herons

Grackles always—also Inca doves, Goldfinch, Ruby Throated Hummingbirds and Nashville Warblers

Once a Road Runner in the driveway—sighted during the unusually wet summer of 2008—probably enjoying the abundance of lizards, frogs and snakes

The soil of this native meadow is deep and clay. Because of dairy farming, the prairie doesn't exist anymore as such, although a recent redevelopment of the old airport includes reestablishing several acres of Blackland Prairie with wildflowers each spring.

We had a very large and very old Chinaberry tree in the back yard. The yard was what you would call a “disturbed site” and had been neglected by the previous homeowner for about 25 years. We had stands of poison ivy including vines around the Black Walnut as thick as a human thigh, thickets of the invasive *Nadina*, a 40 by 50 foot stand of tassel top cane, *Arundo donax*, (another Asian transplant) with accompanying rhizome mat, a Mimosa tree, a Tree of Heaven, a Chinaberry. In other words, many fast growing feral imports from Asia.

Along Austin's greenbelt the city and volunteers regularly remove the more invasive species particularly the Chinese ligustrum. Austin's greenbelt is massive, following spring fed creeks from downtown and heading north for miles. The greenbelt, I thought, was like a native American reservation. The imports were free to roam and insinuate themselves in all contexts, occupying land and displacing others as they went.

*

In 2009, we sold our home of 11 years and moved to a rental on the west side of town. We were only 10 minutes away from old our place on the prairie, yet we were most decidedly living in a dramatically different ecosystem, The Edwards Plateau. The Edwards Plateau is marked by limestone escarpments, deep aquifers, and rolling hills. The plant life changed with the landscape, craggy Escarpment oaks, cedar elm, and what Ed Dorn called “spicy chaparral.” It marks the beginning of the Hill Country, which, geologically, is related to the uplift that formed the Rocky Mountains.

Our duplex sits on 30-foot piles abutting a cliff that was formed when this site was a limestone quarry. A hundreds years old Escarpment or Live Oak tree shades the drive. And then again, between our flat and our neighbors down below (the neighbors below living in

the area that had been quarried) grows a Chinaberry in the neglected space between our structures. It is tall; its entire crown is at eyelevel to our deck where I can observe more closely it's cycles:

Lavender flowers in spring, very briefly, with a lilac smell, sought after by butterflies. The golden berries hang all winter and upon which, on March 10, 2010 Cedar Wax Wings suddenly swarmed and fed on the fermented fruit for hours. In summer the Chinaberry greens and ripens. Insect seeking birds love their limbs in fall when the tree's slender leaves, like pecan leaves, yellow and drop, spinning in the wind.

*

Where am I in this landscape: import, displacer, gulping too much water? In Austin, I drive my car. As I write this, a machine washes my clothes and I watch the trees for birds. I hang my clothes on a drying rack. I marinate beef for Vietnamese steak. I write poems and watch the weather.

Why won't the Waxwings come this year? Will it be another drought year? Will invader and native interplay?

My son collects fossils from the creek, rock shells from ancient inland seas.

The Problem

The problem with the lights and the
smell of apples rotting sliced apples
I put into the lights
cleaning them out
in order to see better not a good spot
for apples

I talked to the invasive tree
how to replace China Berry Poison ivy
Running bamboo humans Literally
knocking it over crack the big limb
how to restore as in the children's book
looking for the ordinary snortle pig
plants animals and homes equally numbered

Peed in the backyard long black skirt
to mark this mine
I talked to the tree pee smell
for raccoons and possum natives

Death is the return to the mother
return to the wet place

Our local creek: Boggy
my fear of it stagnant smell trash
and rats nesting lesser herons rocks and
bottle tops

Water sample August 4, 2006

North Boggy Creek at Airport Blvd.

Nitrate 2.08 BAD

Phosphate .07 POOR

Sinking reading of massive phyto-plankton
& algae bloom
Hypoxic zone Gulf of Mexico dead zone
Sized larger than New Jersey

August Perseids seen
from the stoop

No One Wants

No one wants to remove
our poison ivy not even for money

I drink out of a jar
“Fermentation is permaculture”
and drive too much—everywhere

“There is no there there”

Driving a hole
in the ozone layer

Grey transformer box
hulks in the backyard
and we have the 60th anniversary
of the bombing of Hiroshima

White refrigerator on
all day

Write Fucked up Poems

Write fucked up poems round or layered
You know cabbaged and I will egg you
Full moon Spring Equinox
just passed and heavy rose blooms
unseasonably cold and record snow
The rose is called “Katy Road”

A fucked poem from the start and the
rattling beak of Road Runner
in the driveway descending cry
of Road Runner
eater of snakes and lizards

Egg in the sky May
a fertile time
Strawberries from CA

In the Magic Kingdom
lies Tomorrow Land
the “first great malls” and
the “worship of vehicles”

Tape a stone over your womb
called Black Apache Tears

Medina Apples

Medina apples ripen and arrive
this week more flies rain
more complaining and mud
in the house

I might literally shut down
like a bug little legs
curled in the air

US houses
have little relation to the outside
and nowhere
for walkers to walk

Now it's August
AC: in
Hot: out

Also headlines
of brain dead woman dying
after giving birth
and peaches from "the hill country"

Virginia Creepers

Creepers whorl of 5 leaf
medium green against creamy shingles
and high whistle from neighbors' cooling unit

Fluffy contrail
sweet blue
A 5:15 PM light

Maybe should move with more drought
"Record Heat"
racoon what

And beef sliced in Iowa
shipped to Oklahoma

Chinaberry

“Throwing myself at the cut.”

—Vic Chesnutt

Also called Bead Tree
grooved seeds and
a “force unknown
to me” yellow hanging
clusters through winter
growing black
smooth
striped bark

Feral tree
Desert tree
Invader
Timber
like mahogany

Seeds for making
rosaries

Drunken songbirds

Another Drought Almost Sonnet

Pig farmer says they use
most of their water (tap)
to make wallows for the pigs

in the yard so they can stay
cool I said I'd pray
for rain for them

Why did I say that?
There were no free Popsicles
at Home Depot Dry permanent

climate change?
I would like to see it rain again

Hill Country Poem

Striped not straight want to say
pileated
and not usually found
in trees unless chased

Road Runner also called
Medicine Bird Strappy
leaves adorn your beveled
being

Driving into summer
Paisano also running
in front of the car because we are
along the bends of an old bend

Several piles of shit
(dog?) used diaper
trash from a river gone down
with drought

No driving
in the bed the sign said

Clever to mate
for life

Hide the egg
clutch When you turn
the engine off

It's hot
quiet and cicadas
burr

Windows down
to ask what is it that goes down
in the low stems

Elizabeth Robinson

Brink: an Ecopoetics

It could be that both poetry and environmental ethics are practices of balance. It serves us to go to the edge and see what happens there, at least sometimes, but not to exploit the edge. Measuring that balance seems to me to be a mode of dialogue, how world-as-agent and agent-in-world address and interact with each other. Rachel Carson's fear was that we would create a silent spring. She wanted those many voices that we call environment to speak and be alive, proliferate, even interrupt each other. The texture and overlap of that language creates new forms of balance and is its own poetry.

Rachel Carson talks to a blank sky
I speak to you the way some
others pray—

if prayer is applying
the essence of the self

to the edge. A myth
of the borderline, where

the sky breaks its own
tide.

Try this:
the edge of the sea
would be

me and the edge
of the sky

would not be you
but where
I was not myself.
Like the way, for a sleepless
woman,

a tune presses itself
into her consciousness.

She doesn't know she
hears it, can't resist humming
parts of it.

There you have your edge.

*

Overhead,
nothing.

Just as, when I lay back
and look up—underneath:

nothing I can see.

Beneath the overhang of the sky,
all horizons are

indifferent, neither

land nor sea. So, my research

makes me speak upward, upward

of my own position. When

I lay back, is it the gravity
of landmass

or the buoyancy of ocean that keeps me clinging

at its periphery? All such discussion

is questioning. With you, the ultimate trust:

blankness. The intersection of voice and no voice.

*

Once, when you were the sky, you

readied yourself

with fear. The misuse of poison, pulled like a treble

up the elevation of your silence,

then rain repeats itself. We are both bathed in what we

say.

I return to my first premise, that a prayer

is a kind of residue.

Dew. What if I were to wake

beneath you, still mute, under a blanket

of wet. I should find

that I remembered the full sequence of the
melody too late. Where the edge of a song

is its ending. Wherever

*

the forms of intimacy that, as they abide,

most matter

trail off into this

or that

brink.

I haven't tumbled off yet,

but knowledge is like a tune. It has

its own verge. What appears infinite

like the firmament balances precariously

on its voice, which it has since

rescinded.

Linda Russo

Yard Works (I-IX)

“Look, the woods, the sky, our home.”

—Lorine Niedecker

I. One Yard

part of it has to be given

while the rest is a repository

beds overgrown with grass and inviting our little wagers

will we have flies, we have flies

whether or not

beetles, gnats, fireflies, centipedes
and a rarely visible mouse

some clay, intensely dirty years, perennial eyes yet no reply

with our experimental modern improvements

coiling into the local geography

we've got our houses to keep

us company

II. Winter

our yard, though partly grown and hardly deep

gets attention

and it is surprising

(the juices of the grass)

covered with, dappled with snow
keeping tree trunks, think tree trunks
spiky, true crystals
of an appealing architecture

one advantage in our yard
is learning to love the seldom disagreeable wind

III. Sky

floors of heavy cloud in any shape they please, blown by
electric currents at the horizon

from wells of brick see the air up there spreading in slaty shadow
cutting across the park, catching a glimpse of blue
opening imaginary lungs so constantly

as we see a mountain in the distance we doubtless follow its lines
surprised when at sunset red lights play over a faded web

(a cohesive social force – skyward poetry)

IV. Spring

because of delays and damages
we pull down magazines on gardening
encroaching on the space
like reformists, all spiky and weeding

you have only to whistle before they are eaten
and pine and shrink into the earth
as nothing else we want

grubs and bugs, repellent (sun and air and rain)

rainbow-green as these new things –
designs twice as sorry

V. City and Country Life

I do not live here because I want to, but because
being free is a kind of sympathy.

Americans are growing afraid of rural life and crowding
and claiming privileges that we must associate with
the calmly artificial politics we call society.

Only in the country can I say this with a certain smartness
though doubtable (meditating in clatter).

Memorizing text as a cure for distress, or flinging oneself
at the landscape. The saddest part. Do not ask for crowding.

VI. Summer

among the baking bricks and blistering asphalt
drink, toil, grumble, and die, and all that
and look down at the lush anxiety of greenery, yes
like victims without work

buy your flowers and after try the thrifty weed
I will leave my brains in the briar
wack them, it doesn't matter

insects take most of our time

VII. Flowers and Insects

some object of natural interest
in a shady corner of my yard
music in it, in the shade corner of our yard
turning into wild permanence

royal purple throated with gold
and fooled

the freak branches always drew my eye
managing change as I keep my personality:
pulling it out, cropping its shoots, assured

there's always time for that

VIII. Autumn

the yard partly bright and brassy, no tapestry, is passing —

the populace is improving
with commercial merchandise picked up for a song
(in a botany box you never show me, that never appeared)

the dark green of undergrowth is startling
every tree brawling resplendently

after the first experimental batch we jammed them deep and rippling
one morning, to our distress, they detect our fallacies

exhibiting dumb surprise

IX. Everything Now

in spite of our habit of describing
(as widening circles spread in the water)
we forget

so we watch the cities
to shut out the woods
(the woods we can't live without)

we look for corners wooded in their manner, impressed

a container garden – and other works of this kind

drawing life from your soil like a parasite as

the repose of water features

(babbling and strife)

softens the details

tries to give us accidental substance

On and around “Yard Works”

There are many poems titled “Yard Work” that are about yard work; there’s a rich living tradition of “backyard poetry” (including Dickinson’s 328, “A Bird came down the Walk,” and others) – poems written as dedications to the yard and the chance occurrences that unfold there. Can a poem contradict yard-logic (yard from the Old English *geard*, meaning enclosure) – stray outside its boundaries and link up with ecological and economic systems? “Yard Works (I-IX)” is part of a larger ongoing project that asks.

I. Observation

Marcella Durand, in “The Ecology of Poetry,” makes a case for an ecological poetics based on observation – what she calls “concentration.” She addresses the poet’s “specialized abilities to associate,” by which she means a kind of cross-breeding or the making of unorthodox juxtapositions prohibited in other information-creating and organizing disciplines, like the sciences. Using these abilities, breaching conceptual boundaries, the poem doesn’t succumb to the problematic isolation of “self” and/or “nature” in the classically-conceived “nature poem,” but starts from the idea that “we ourselves are the wilderness destroying the very systems of which we are a part” (117). Thus, she points out, poetry can “be an essential catalyst for increased perception, and increased change” in the “exterior world” that the poem interacts with (124).

Since I moved into a house in a Land Grant university town, I’ve been writing as a way of doing yard work. I’ve taken up seasonal residence in my yard, and at a nearby plot at a community garden, to practice a writing that inhabits my contact zone, where human and the non-human meet. Approaching this “community” in Barry Lopez’s sense of this word – as extending beyond the human to include the land – this yard work rethinks possession (“our”), investigates the terms on which meeting proceeds, and searches out the ideologies and institutions that mediate an experience of these spaces. Taking from the field of Cultural Landscape Studies, which seems entirely too given over to the car as a vantage point, this yard work reads the landscape as a “field of perpetual conflict” between its designers and users, down to the renegade squash patch hidden behind the compost heap at the community garden. A yard (and other “natural” spaces) is a hotbed of “designers” – from developers and city planners down to spiders and moles – and at some point the distinction between designers and users grows fuzzy; the “designer-user” and “user-designer” become

forces that play out in the physical world. As Durand's idea of "concentration" suggests, one must look closely to see these things happening. I see my own yard work as situated in the interaction between poem (as a site of language) and "exterior world," and feel very familiar with her poetic process: For me the process is as such: concentration upon spaces and landscape leads to poetry; poetry leads to further concentration upon spaces and landscape. It is my poetic ecological system – self-sustaining, linguistically self-contained, recycling, and, if successful, animating both word and perception with the idea of action. (120)

II. Specialized Abilities & Reappropriation (the idea of action)

From her the late 19th century American West, Mary Austin asserted that art is a response "to the impact that the totality of [the artist's] experience makes upon them, and that there is no sort of experience that works so constantly and subtly upon man as his regional environment." For my 21st century America, "retail" impinges upon (to the point of effacing) "regional," even as it tries to camouflage its agenda to create an undifferentiated topography of capitalist exchange. Think of the adobe CVS in Sante Fe or, on the Palouse where I live, the dried-wheatish ochre in the Walmart façade that presumes to complement the cultivated grasses (or is perhaps meant, as part of a larger 2009 redesign, to echo in earth-tone their goal of "Global Sustainability"). Such corporate tactics necessitate the sort of embodied poetic acts that Laura Elrick calls for in her essay "Poetry, Ecology, and the Reappropriation of Lived Space." For Elrick, the productive response is to ground poetics in a spatial practice "that challenge[s] the 'nature' of capitalist space, a practice that rejects the separation of our bodies from the spaces we inhabit" (196). Similarly, my yard work stems from embodied experiences of my local spaces; it is a spatial practice that impels me to think and act further into them.

Another of the poet's specialized abilities is to make products (poems) in a way that consciously connects with one's surrounding culture(s) relatively cheaply and with few resources (some would say it's too easy). One thing the poet can do is create and nourish culture(s), enter into cultural production as a way of sketching out the contours of what it is "to human" (as a verb). Wendell Berry observed over two decades ago that "humans differ most from other creatures in the extent to which they must be made what they are – that is, in the extent to which they are artifacts of their culture" (141). I prefer, however, to start with the idea that we are more "facts" of our cultures and, at the same time, to

emphasize the means we have of surmounting an “artifactual” existence. Thus, to posit writing poetry as a means of doing so, as a way to resist being trapped squarely in the ready lines and definitions. As Lyn Hejinian has said, poetics engages form, which suggests “decision-making and choice [...]. And the creating or inventing of artistic form would hopefully suggest the possibility of making choices and decisions in other experiences in life, too. [...] If there’s any hope at all for people, it’s that we can make our lives rather than just sort of be dragged along by them” (136). Form, Hejinian’s work reminds us, is not just on the page, but in the thinking process.

“Creating culture” seems like a lofty claim for the individual poet though it is not unfounded in American poetic tradition. The poet doesn’t invent “real world” systems, but she can bring her specialized abilities to her interactions with them. “Unthink Global Corporate Agendas, Act Local” might be a mantra in an agricultural community (such as mine) devoted to strengthening its local food system: “farming” in yards and community gardens, shopping at farmers markets and the local food co-op, and supporting CSAs or the foodbank are some of the many points of entry into inhabiting/reappropriating spaces in an embodied way, as growers and eaters.

III. Writing Within

“Yard Works (I-IX)” are winter poems, written without getting much dirt under my nails, recycling language, keeping a hand in while waiting for the thaw. The poem thinks about the ways we inscribe and are inscribed by “our” yards, about the yard as part of larger economic systems – a site through which we both insert ourselves into and retreat from them.

Notes

“field of perpetual conflict”: Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays, ed. D. W. Meinig and John Brinckerhoff Jackson (NY: Oxford UP, 1979)

The Wendell Berry quotation is from Home Economics (SF, CA: North Point Press, 1987). Durand’s and Elrick’s essays are published in ((ECO)(LANG) (UAGE (READER)): the ecolanguage reader, ed. Brenda Iijima (Brooklyn & Callicoon, NY: Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs/Nightboat Books, 2010).

The Lyn Hejinian quotation is from Some Other Frequencies: Interviews with Innovative American Authors, ed. Larry Mcaffery (U of PA Press, 1997).

“Writing Within: Eco-poetics as Spatial Practice” is published in the “Eco-poetics Feature” edited by Harriet Tarlo in How2: www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/vol_3_no_2/index.html

Sarah Vap

Statement

I live at the end of the Skokomish Valley on the Olympic Peninsula. This is a 7 mile long valley, and at one end of it, right behind our house, is the Olympic National Forest. And behind that: the Olympic National Park. At the other end of our valley is a saltwater finger of the Pacific, a fjord called Hood Canal. So, 7 miles away, the river opens out into crabs, seals, shrimp, oysters, salmon, the Salish Sea, and then the Pacific. There is a river-sized creek that runs through our back field, and a smaller winter creek that curls around our house like U. Each day we see or hear 10's of logging trucks, packed full of freshly cut trees, moving through the logging roads of the mountains behind our home, leaving our valley, driving the 101 to the incinerator for electricity, and to the mill for boards. Each day we smell the smog of the incinerators burning in the small town down the road. Each winter, the inversions cause dangerous levels of pollution in the middle of this rainforest, and school recess, both the 10:15 and the 1:15, get cancelled. Each autumn we wonder if the salmon will make it all the way up into the winter creek behind our house, where we lie in bed at night, the 4 of us, and listen to the salmon rutting and splashing. Each year, they count the dead zones in the saltwater, and measure the number of inches the riverbed rises above the valley floor, because each year the rains flow down even more slopes of clear-cut mountains and fill the river with even more soil. Each autumn and each spring, the floods from this erosion fill nearly the entire valley, and our family drives backward, up into and through the mountains, on the logging roads, back into the town where they take the trees to be burned and to be cut, so that we can buy groceries, primarily grown in Chile and Mexico. Some years the salmon don't come. Some years they do, and we count them. Every 2 weeks there is a herd of elk that move through our back field. One year there were 12. One year there were 15. This year there are 35. Our house is cold in winter, and we burn a fire to warm it. We cut up trees that fall over from the floods that are caused by the silt filling the river as the rains pour down the logged mountains, we wait one or two years to dry them beneath a tarp, and then we burn them to warm our family. Our house is dark in winter because the days are short and the rains are gray for months. In the summer, we eat food we grow. You drop a seed anywhere here, and it will grow. I get my period about once every 32 days, except when I am nursing or pregnant. When I am pregnant, I wait through 3 seasons, and then the baby comes. After the baby comes, I nurse the baby for

about 24 moons, maybe more. During this time, I never bleed at all. As soon as the baby stops nursing, I get my period every 32 days. When the baby first is with us, he is quiet and he sleeps for about 2 moons. Then the baby is awake and then the baby walks. Then the baby speaks, and then another baby comes. We fall asleep when it is dark and we are tired. We wake when the first baby gets hungry. We plant the garlic in autumn when we prune the raspberry canes. The wild mushrooms that we love come after the wildfires in late summer. Each day our day is organized by the children's hunger. We wake when they are hungry. We make them breakfast, we clean it up. Right now, I have about 20 minutes while they play together, and before they are hungry for lunch, and when no one has a diaper that should be changed, in which I will consider how my poems engage the natural world. Soon, though, the children will be hungry, and I will make them lunch, and then clean it up, and then change their diapers, and then I will have another few minutes, and then I will tell you more.

The Stillborn God

You will rip
your own dear body to hold

your share of what hurts —

as Columbus ran the Santa Maria
aground a reef of Hispaniola, Christmas Eve.

On Christmas day she foundered,

and he built La Navidad— the military fortress

from her remains. So, even in human terms,
we are no longer

what we were. In the pool of long memory,
he said, the tiny la Nina

could not hold his men

nor take them home.

In a hearth
built of pure white stone,

the comfort we need is inhuman; the curtain
of water, fallen silent.

The wildflower patch where we scattered the ash of three dogs
The triplet fawns' home this summer

where my sister's wedding portrait was taken

on a white velvet swivel chair. In distant time, my love,

we were also married.

In smallest time my sister
and I played horse right here, my baby

sister the filly. Three children

for the three worlds—when we

were also holy animals: I the mare and our brother
the bay colt. There is a stone

quality to time —when the poorest
cannot make their bodies good. A woman's body

is a list of hard facts

of her body. How it feels,

and what it has done

shivering with seed. I am his mother, lifted

and laughing
across all the substances. And he is flesh

in envioning earth. But, is this true? —
that we will we only remember

that which stains our heart
across the stars. And some cold rock

left of the fallen star across this prairie.

Membrane

The horizon is simple: a sheet of light

with long grass bent toward it.

A surface

that will hold our worlds together.

He is beautiful. Strong fat legs—he stands.

You have loved a woman more beautiful
and less careful than I—now, incubating

our star. My column of dust burning, just
unfolding under our baby who left

in the blood while my parents
held my hands. While you wrapped the leftover cake

in his old cloth diaper that we use for a rag.

Sea turtles, my father whispers, will die of fear.

We watch the river switch courses
through our window—one of seven channels
in this valley that it might follow.

Less, and Less, to Love. Of Ourselves, too.

The cat followed you all day, then swam
across the pond when you called her—

you have tried everything. Our children, waiting in a circle.
Horoscopes, the tips

of a ministerial light—
the warm and cordial light of Temperance

crossed by the knight in our Tarot.

Very soon, teeth will emerge one by one.
You will pound a circle of nails

to the side of the barn

and wait for the sun to strike it.
To mark it with the B.

Silent, Night

Set the table, blades
facing in

to the star
on the forehead of the calf.

Blaze, where our bed is. Where our sleep,
like two secrets,

competes for our attention. We have loved each other,
and you —
you have loved me
sometimes out of myself. Into our dream of two horses,

one gray and one brown,
with the Christmas baby approaching

them both

until we are more capable of love. Until we,
old stars, give up the ghost

a billion years from now, to some other

kind of lovers. To some other kind of time
where history is not simply

a form of exhaustion. Watch—the last of our light falls down
on some other kind of planet.

You Weren't Meant for Pleasure, You Were Meant for Joy.

—Thomas Merton

The white cloth doll I once loved, her neck
twisted around the cotton batting. Her face

drawn by my grandmother's black pen —
she loved and hated herself.

I twisted that head

and I lost her under the holy dread. And now? There he is,
two years old. Reading lichen

on the tree branch, foreseeing the cloud of bison
to descend on this prairie.

I think this world
might be too terrible, and the sacrifice

will be too much. But the boy

I watch and the baby inside me—one a fluttering

dovecote to my life.

The other— the deepest, most silent floor

that the ocean lifts.

Darkly. Softly. Then falls

back again to that babydoll,

riding a ghost herd of bison,
and all of them running at a single tree. Fig,
hardened to my dress, and lost to me.

Section II

Matthew Cooperman, Editor

Interim Special Feature: an Eco-poetics

“I am glad I will not be young in a future without wilderness.” So said Aldo Leopold nearly 100 years ago. As I gather my thoughts about this special issue of Interim, the nuclear reactors at Fukushima Dai-Ichi continue to degrade. For over two weeks, since the March 11 earthquake, Japan has been pouring sea water on the core in an attempt to cool it down. But as a consequence it must find a place to store the radioactive water. Trading curses, or treading water? The destruction in Japan is truly unfathomable. It is not a concept and it is not a future. Meanwhile revolution grips the Middle East, and our planes bomb Libya. I can’t help but think back on a similar moment—Colorado Review’s 2005 “Trouble in the Garden”—for which I was poetry editor, the “global scene” is just too familiar. Then it was “smart bombs” in Iraq and Afghanistan, earthquakes in India and Pakistan, the tremendous losses of the Asian tsunami. Sandwiched in between we’ve got Hurricane Katrina, Chinese mining disasters, record heat waves in Europe (and the disappearing glaciers), countrywide wildfires in Greece and Russia, the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, catastrophic floods in Australia, Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh, state-size icebergs calving off the Ross Ice Shelf, the collapse of the world’s bee population, the Holocene Extinction Event ... I mean you name it (and we do), we’re in serious shit. Wilderness? The word sounds nostalgic. Whatever lessons in environmental stewardship we’ve learned since Leopold’s time seem increasingly quaint in the current scene. The Mayan calendar ticks. Yet I am alive; this is my wilderness. In this special feature of Interim we three editors explore what it is to read and write and edit with an environmental imagination. I’m not sure what my comrades have come up with, but my approach has been painfully personal. “Limits are what we’re all inside,” Olson tells us, and that’s been true this year. Not exactly a collapsed house and bad water, but given the strictures of my life—a wife in OT grad school, two kids (an autistic daughter), directorial responsibilities for a large MFA program, winter, depression, a neighbor’s suicide, a dear friend’s end in an avalanche, sleep-deprivation, horizon-longing, cash-yearning—I’ve done what I could in the hours of clarity. I’ve reached out to those

most immediate in my understanding, poets and writers who are my wilderness, who I am reading, who I need and relate, by will or accident, to the current circumference of my world. As such, it a loose but intentional gathering, an ecopoetics. I make no claim for the direction of “the field” other than the sense it is wide, and its vision is applied to real things, Olson’s projectivism (I am reading “Projective Verse II,” Chax Press, 2010) is alive in an acute sense of attention. To earthquakes, quantity, water, DNA, mortality, family. In the textual ecology of this gathering you will find radical deterritorializations of language and body (Brenda Iijima, Aby Kaupang, Alfonso D’Aquino) and crystalline quietudes of perception (Keith Waldrop, Merrill Gilfillan, Susan Stewart); you will find the nominative embrace of place (GC Waldrep, John Kinsella), and the conceptual fretwork that makes our contemporary landscape seem so interconnected (Karen Leona Anderson, Patrick Pritchett). Attention: elegy, satire, generic conflation, lexical telnet, moral outrage, ecotopia and ecophilia, nostalgia, pastoralism, diurnal resistance, childhood dew-haunting, atavistic memory. In our remaining interim, I’ll take the connection.

—Matthew Cooperman

Karen Leona Anderson

Cell Bill

frogs calling all-network:
across the marsh's mall:

out of air con, but money
on the phone: green-

silver skins turned in
for high drone or The Twang:

battery undead, yet,
by egret-beak mom:

and her snaky neck:
wrecked by no ring,

no repetition unto
death: bath & body

works: arrested sex
and the signal: a single:
fake vanilla scented candle
cell: divide or mend:

hell no: texts
the female: boneless:

fore-
foreplay: at the mall's

door: the boys' noise
saying nothing but:

their gestures making:
the world's hard bill.

Venison

Are coin of a past realm: degraded
and worn down by the calmer meats,
de-beaked, ink spashed, dumb;

the deer inflate across the towns,
tick-rich, collared, some sterilized,
but still a numinous stew of brown boxes,

on stripling legs, or the sun strained divine
through their ears' big pink shells,
are bark being skinned, teeth in a blind.

The park of hinds and hounds is gone
highway; tawny is ordinary to the lawn.

We are gone from wolves to bad fawns for them,
nuisance tin at the heart of silver; to be picked off;
in our cars; delicious saplings in the mown—

Sale: Before 5pm Take Off

Receded, we could have heavy fall
of a skirt cut correctly, the Designer sweater
that finally drapes us into less. Investments,
but then again, it was always so willed,
blessed by the mannequin's upturned hands.
The men's department end-times more rapidly,
but who cares about men's? It's the women's
coat floor, with its murderous trims and swings,
everlasting feather collars. Can we check out in time.
The chance of good value depends on the balance
of the insane with the classic: wide legs, vests, the holy a-line.
Wild wings sprung into being through a tailor unused to our class.
No one thinks of returns till they're out in the lot.
Ducks on the way home in sable and green
spread oil through their feathers and lift up
their arms to the south. They rise to the chance.

Receipt: Real Estate

In it, rabbits' ears are salmoned by the sun.
New windows, hardwood, subfloor, perked porn.

Bees have restored the holes they left the porch with.
Dead red squirrels restored; morning glories restored

by the shovel that severs and buries, severs.
St. Mortgage, let us, please,

secure this multitude of ants and boards
before the universe finds and deploys us again.

A dead bird is a grey feather skirt, strung on the bush.
Its head is a hawked black hole in our nests imagined

and singing mornings. No matter. We won't want to go out.
Poison glory to spout

from the twisted blue trumpets of home.

Amy Catanzano

Junk DNA

In dddd-descriptions of nature
we seek animated charms
the attachment industry lucidly warns
in the authoritative nests I was told
to author my powers, as such I
IQ poisoned the flowers—

Composing by nerve center
at increasingly pandemonium scales
attracts a diversity of readers
predicting kaleidoscopes
in the trivial I make a cock
appear in the meter's base pair—

Internally resembling a pierced star
my italics weigh in the hand
like a hurt bird
breaking codes viewed by cobweb
I everywhere techno these
undersea volcanoes—

My luminosity upgrades separate
the hypothesis from hysteria
freeing belief ending the eye, now
nightless, like gravity's
loveborn burial dreaming by
orgasms' o'omegas—

Alfonso D'Aquino

Trans. Forrest Gander

Spores

a.

Interminable verdancy *	Plains of plants *	Calligraphic raceme
Written tangle *	Verb stem *	Speaking spearment
Style of flowers *	Tongue's stigma *	Veins of leaves
Word-enzyme *	Letter-husk *	Syllable-stylus
Labiate verse *	Iridious verse *	Dehiscent verse
Nutbrown verse *	Wild verse *	Butcher's Broom verse
Rhythm and rubble *	Lily and line *	Bough and ballad
Felled rhyme *	Sessile rhyme *	Foliate margin
Ideographic bulb *	Hemp undertow *	Inflorescent line
Thought's nut *	Sonorous membrane *	Lingual root

b.

Inspiration and expiration	*	Flora and fable	*	Alalia and aloba
Fruitful hymns	*	Racemes of rhymes	*	Verbal figs
Herb lyre	*	Forest as ink	*	Thorny voice
Speaking in ligules	*	Babbling bulbs	*	Shushing mushrooms
Mumbling mosses	*	Shaft of signs	*	Shouting palms
Scanning pollen	*	Planting misprints	*	Ravishing ink
Verbal sap	*	Echoing fungus	*	Lettuce lips
Forest stylus	*	Decasyllabic salvia	*	Fronde and ode
Thistle psalm	*	Pyrocanthus	*	Cryptographic bracken
Grass and grapheme	*	Encrypting spores	*	Deciphering fibers

Sinsabor del Acitrón

Se trasluce el sol...

Como si no acabara de masticarlo nunca / como si no supiera que ya no sabe
a nada / como a través de un vidrio / desde la otra mañana / aquella calle sola
/ desde un invierno intacto / otra mañana helada

Vidrio vivo por dentro / en su red de reflejos / entre aristas que asoman de
infantiles resabios / sol que no sale aún / pero que ya ilumina la corteza a trasluz
/ una sombra insipiente o una duda jocosa / me cruzó por los ojos y me tocó
los labios

De aquella fruta opaca / la translúcida pulpa / por dentro iluminaba / lo que
aún no sabía / el vidriado espejismo / apenas alcanzado / la dulzura del ámbar
/ que mi vista anegaba / y esta red que mi lengua fue dejando vacía

Y aun su luz acre guarda / un ácido secreto / o un resplandor errante / que de
pronto restalla

Y la sombra furtiva / como un deslumbramiento / daba vuelta a la esquina
como a través de un sueño / en el instante mismo en que el filo del sol y la costra
de azúcar se fundían en mi boca / y el cercano horizonte / me cortaba el aliento

Como si no supiera / que a cada dentellada / la calle centellea / y el paladar se
empapa / como si no alcanzara / a saber todavía / desde el áspero hueco que
mis dientes traspasan / que el insípido oro de la luz que regresa / es la sombra
que escapa

Perspectivas cambiantes / entrecruzan reflejos / sobre una misma cara que
miro a la distancia / como a través de un vidrio / por atrás de mis ojos / a la
luz que se fuga / ilusión del recuerdo / y en los ojos del niño / otra sonrisa

Citron's Bitterness

The sun transluces...

As if I couldn't stop chewing it
as if I didn't know nothing is known
as through a window
onto another morning
this single street
through a winter intact
another icy dawn

Life passes through glass
through its net of reflections
along sharp edges that loom from the aftertastes of childhood
sun still not out
but the bark going lucent already in the near-light
an incipient shadow or a ludic doubt
flitting across my eyes and grazing my lips

From that cloudy fruit
the translucent pulp
lit within
what couldn't have been known
the glazed mirage
almost within reach
a sweetness of amber
flooding my eyes
and this net emptied of my language

And yet even its light has a sour
bite a masked acidity/ or a snap /of errant blaze

And the furtive shadow
a kind of bewilderment

turned the corner as in a dream
at the same moment the sun's spike and crusted sugar melted in my mouth
and the near horizon
cut off my breath

As if I didn't know
that with each bite
the street flashed
and my palate was besieged
as if I wouldn't ever
come to realize
from the astringent hollow my teeth tore through
that this insipid golden returning light is
escaping shadow
Shifting perspectives
crosshatch my ruminations
on the same face I make out in the distance
as through a glass
from behind my eyes
to light that spills out
an illusion of memory
and a child's eyes
are beaming

Alumbra

Entre las fibras finas / que no saben a nada / sino a la pura miel de este vidrio
insondable / ah dulce lucidez / que a mi gusto revela / un segundo espejismo
de esa misma mañana / de un invierno radiante

En tu espejo sin brillo / regresa aquel vislumbre / que alguna vez tuviera / la
sombra que refleja y mis secretos urde / cuando roza mis labios / y un
resplandor incierto / que no termina nunca / cristaliza en azúcar el corazón
del cactus

Y siento otra dulzura debajo de la lengua / como un dejo terroso en las venas
doradas / que colma mis sentidos y despierta mi anhelo / como fulge en el
vidrio la cruda resolana / de tocar bajo tierra / disuelta en mi saliva / amarilla y
opaca / la raíz del destello

Between fine fibers
that know nothing
but the pure honey of this unfathomable glass
ah sweet lucidity
which reveals to my taste
a second mirage of that same morning
in a radiant winter

In your lusterless mirror
the shimmer you once had
returns

the shadow demonstrating and plaiting my secrets
when it brushes my lips
and a uncertain radiance
that never ends
crystallizes as sugar in the heart of a cactus

And I sense another sweetness under my tongue
like dross leftover in mined veins / that floods me with feeling and spikes my need
like a glint in the glass the raw and promising
joining underground
dissolve in my saliva
thick and yellow
the scintillant root

Merrill Gilfillan

Suddenly in the Sky

The final days before departing the Pine Ridge country I went out each late afternoon to the lovely hills along upper Bordeaux Creek and sat for an hour in the late August change-of-things, taking in the first of the cool autumn tones and bidding farewell to a favorite place. One of those afternoons I heard a plaintive bleat from down the wooded slope, and finally saw a youngling goat emerge from the box elders. He had seen me and proceeded straight up the hill, bleating as he came, to stand beside me, obviously seeking simple nonspecific companionship—I guessed he was a castaway. I scratched his brow and ears and stared at his great gold-leaf mantis eyes. We sat there a good while, enjoying one another's company, talking a little, not much. Just before dusk, all of an instant, the nighthawks were there, suddenly in the sky, then more, and I believed I was actually seeing them rise from the pines nearby at the very moment of stirring, of take-off, like the instant of a leaf breaking off from its twig, a tribe or family moving out against the pastel sky, lofting up and off to deploy for the evening's work, gregarious and graceful. They began to hunt, looping and tacking in a loose unassuming group. Every few minutes they passed above, giving a soft, unfamiliar mutter of a call among them—wik-wik, wik-wik-wik—and we looked up as one to watch them go over.

Crazy Horse Day

White River days pile up like tree rings in the small candy-box canyons, white ledges trailing yellow grapevines onto spent ash and pines, wasp-lazyplaces to conjure and bide.

Bright cress all-you-can-eat bobs in the body-wide streams. Snapping of pewee bills a thin castanet above first murmurs of old flame in the wild plum leaves.

A late cicada sizzles, hums. Men turn to see. Magpie flies away

into the hills,
taking the hair-trigger heart
of the matter with him.

From La Brea

Just a few short blocks from La Brea—
during the 1830s and '40s, wandering Utes stole women and children
by the score from Paiutes in the Great Basin and sold them readily as
slaves and house-help to Mexican traders moving along the Old Spanish
Trail between Santa Fe and L.A., enterprising men who resold them like
hot cakes for good urban prices on both ends of the route—scores of
them, staring at the sea, brooms in their hands, pinon in their dreams,
ten or fifteen words to say—

she waits today at a bus stop with grocery bags, shading her eyes,
just a few short blocks from La Brea.

Brenda Iijima

Apparition—What's Standing Right There

a repellent thing a very pretty thing

g e r t r u d e s t e i n

d electable limb shook of plasma and veins
corpuscular bulge muscular from the chin to the ear
a neck lance

she merges with stereoscopic visionary fidelity
dearest of dear captivity narrative
they slept all day after day as escape transmission hall
where the minute rendition of a jasper spear

quickens the hunt $n = \epsilon_n n + I_2$

mastodont topple on top of mega vegetation near
plasticized hat

... ϵ_n gathering hunters and hunters don't

gather

erotic poetry in a language all tongue

summer for a freedom in time

summer so the freedom is time

ate eat eaten

$\epsilon_{n1} + \epsilon_{n2} (r - n),$

stress

$\epsilon_{n1} = \dots r \quad n + \dots \quad n + \dots \quad u_r, \text{ couple}$

stress

in which ϵ_{n1} is the force stress

(which is a symmetric tensor

in classical elasticity but is a s y m m e t r i c h e r e)

out of the can *comes the arrow*

lean meat onto meat

se ep into act ion

per cep tion what a ura p erce ption

gathering happening pride g reat ga me

what unravels the spool from the core

words combine with foliage are foliage

ch ild ren club the *s eats*

the birds who couldn't fly were clubbed

m _W is the couple stress (or

a fence around the nuclear facility looked n*ice* actually

there was a supermarket selling the red fatty meat of whale
freeze dried a decade ago to eat it is to eat it is and mountains, erasures

causerie radical interlocution

cumulus clouds fatal

a radioactive map of the brain

i want to see the se tting s un

juicy larvae reveal their flavors

more succulent than beetle brittle

an aftermath of attack

killed as a symbol, the remaining, depressed

to be in love, empathy

varying capacities, seasonal

epilogue and legacy despicable john cotton and ilk

cursive despicable legal legal is his song in choir minister (ad)

the right to conquest is written in hefty books prayers players choose

pettycoated coddling grief

soiling soil with possession as cult

ure

husb

andry

he's just one *un* culprit

genesis has eaten has eaten *m mm m m*

a strain to envelope alligator through the jaw

that's hinged torpor or whisper dazed

bones thank you

garish gardenish ambience not, but silence (ing ing)

remorse so ever present eventual like time like lakes like ice

demise dismissed missed moiled re-enterprised loveliness does not apply

false departure from geo

GRAPHICFORMECOLOGICALFORM

DREAMTIME FANTASIES ROOTING

w h a t ' s s t a n d i n g
right there, left standing stand of trees
the stance and —standability understanding
u n d e r o r a b o v e e n d i n g
l i k e n i n g a n d e n d s
s h o t p u t b a d l a n d s n i p p e t
i n p u t o u t l y i n g r i p t i d e
a s i n s u l a r a g g r a v a t e d n e c e s s i t y
c a t c h c a n c a n n o t s c a n s i o n

you will be swept away—

primal eyed indeterminacy traversing
an imaginative response (to) (at) the fox farm
red ink as authentic human encounter
bodies were swept away sludge debris silt
something cryptic about the shark (talk)

stand up, *stand*by

**however slow is history—by the
children of the stones. nizar**

q a b b a n i

what cracked open crackpot longitude

*M*onogram of fangs

gnaw the surface dimension
where the footsteps go obsolete
admixture hot treasure marker

epidermis *singing bone*

so many alarm calls when to jump, jump
the delight of editing the body as the fog takes over electric barkin,
a-ttributed to humans cooing a-ttributed to humans then we
humans or lowing meaningfully as gravity seeks

remission try to find **you** sensations compromised in the
tactile air stacked with rank toxicity still still your body is the
interplay **YOUR BODY**
host to numerous-ity i imagine pointedly a pock marked desert bod:
deserted if you were to soldier a-ttributed to gun fire a-tt-a-ttributed
moats or bridges glow of girlfriend generation generatively
mirror-osity manifestly we prevent industry from finding us by a
scintillating spiral that sings of succession

later let down the animal
time and time again

the animal let down
denaturalized so it seems just you and me

catlike congruity meat
what does spatiality mean rights

to call this war a clearing (sing off) (tender to remove thread) (full
inside) (insidious)

the days seem spooled (with empathy) (vision throngs) (deliverance c
the level of a nano model)

her (because of) splendor (ardor) resiliencies (risk)

look (become) see (the hosts) we wend

to say kinship alters touch (do) (that) (thanos)

immediate density (fit) and (fits) (doing done value work)

biological headdress (nudity?) (body melded) (sake)

infra (structure) (i) deology (i'd) cope (cap) able (to) day
ax specific

Aby Kaupang

Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified (NOS)

Disorder,
Not Otherwise Specified (NOS)

| Aby Kaupang |

they that were at the psych ward they that on the pavilion parented they that refined
their faces in the sieve of seizure

in the daylight met the carded men the parking arm the vertical blades
of the guillotine elevator

doctors rose as did their entourage

June a morning
moving a sun-glinted
box of what faces
people

disappearing

they that wanted coffee thousands must not have wanted coffee they that were
wanting watched from the insular cart they that wanted were clairvoyants of sea
tanks tubing and cardiums

cardiums: heart bouquets, whack jobs

staring

they that were the cardiums wore it on their sleeves their crimson gowns
their forehead temples and they wagoned | there were they that were in the
wagons and those that carted others in wagons it was numerous who or who all
were cardiums |

they passed through the foyer we drank coffee admired sea tanks we too being
cardiums

chairs were gliding smoothly door to door real wheel chairs into rooms where
procedures occur it was icecapades linoleumcapades

balloons on wrists carnations on laps
those that were more cardium stumbled in the parade

we feel lucky often during
the parade

Student First Name: Maya	Student Last Name: Goepfermann	DOB: 14-Jun-06
Health Information -- Conditions (Health Tab)		
Condition: Other (explain)	Genetic testing was done in the past and all testing was within normal limits.	
Condition: Autism/Asperger's	Diagnosed with and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Hx of sensory processing issues in the past, but has improved after going to Star Center.	
Condition: Other (explain)	gluten and casein free diet as an attempt to lessen autism behaviors. However, due to Maya's reluctance to eat, parent wants her to touch and taste any snack foods served in the classroom with the exception of milk. Not allergic	
Condition: Other (explain)	Sleep disorder. Erratic sleep patterns. Will scream for hours if made to stay in her own room. Sleeps in bed with her parents and this has helped. She continues to have difficulty getting to sleep and staying asleep. Awakens in the middle of the night screaming still making the parents question if she is having seizures at night.	
Condition: Gastrostomy	Feeding tube since 10/07 due to declining weight as would only breast feed. Receives all nutrition via tube as of 1/09 (mom makes gluten and casein free feeding). "Wt gain failure in childhood" noted on paperwork from Dr. Guenther dated 9/4/09.	
Condition: Developmental Delay	"Delayed in many areas" per parent on application form. IEP and Hx IFSF. Paperwork from Dr. Guenther dated 9/4/09 lists "mental retardation" as a diagnosis. Essentially nonverbal.	
Condition: Other (explain)	Be aware of activities that might catch g-tube and pull it out.	
Condition: Failure to thrive		
Condition: Allergies/Environment (explain)	noted on application form but no specifics given	
Condition: Kidney/Urinary problems -explain	hx of 2-3 urinary tract infections. Watch for signs at school--fever, dark foul smelling urine, discomfort, pulling at diaper area.	
Condition: Seizure/Neurological (explain)	Per mom, one of Maya's health care providers says she may have mild seizures and is being monitored. During a seizure, Maya may appear to stare without blinking. Eyes may appear "glassy." Or, she may have an abrupt change in mood or may appear to be having a "panic attack." Paperwork from Dr. Guenther dated 9/4/09 states seizures "maybe"--takes Lamictal 1/2 tab since 8/09.	
Condition: Other (explain)	hypotonia per paperwork from Dr. Guenther dated 9/09	
Other Health Condition(s)		
I voluntarily provide this health information to my child's school and understand that it is confidential and is only shared with staff on a need-to-know basis.		
Parents's/Guardian Signature: _____		Date: _____

our daughter not being in certain parts during | of the spectacle she is in pageant
on an elevator with twenty -ISTS in entourage

| and us |

not being she is pageant
this spectacled and elevation of accounting
during | of

us disappearing

it is our ethical duty to not escape

Autism Treatment Evaluation Checklist (ATEC)

Bernard Rimland, Ph.D. and Stephen M. Edelson, Ph.D.

Autism Research Institute

4182 Adams Avenue, San Diego, CA 92116

fax: (619) 563-6840; www.autism.com/ari

Project/Purpose				
Item:	I	II	IV	Total

This form is intended to measure the effects of treatment. Free scoring of this form is available on the Internet at: www.autism.com/atec

Name of Child _____ Last _____ First _____ Age _____
 Form completed by: _____ Relationship: _____
 Date of Birth _____ Today's Date 12/16-11/8

Please circle the letters to indicate how true each phrase is:

I. Speech/Language/Communication:

[N] Not true [S] Somewhat true [V] Very true

- N S V 1. Knows own name
- N S V 2. Responds to 'No' or 'Stop'
- N S V 3. Can follow some commands
- N S V 4. Can use one word at a time (No!, Eat, Water, etc.)
- N S V 5. Can use 2 words at a time (Don't want, Go home)
- N S V 6. Can use 3 words at a time (Want more milk)
- N S V 7. Knows 10 or more words
- N S V 8. Can use sentences with 4 or more words
- N S V 9. Explains what he/she wants
- N S V 10. Asks meaningful questions
- N S V 11. Speech tends to be meaningful/relevant
- N S V 12. Often uses several successive sentences
- N S V 13. Carries on fairly good conversation
- N S V 14. Has normal ability to communicate for his/her age

II. Sociability:

[N] Not descriptive [S] Somewhat descriptive [V] Very descriptive

- N S V 1. Seems to be in a shell - you cannot reach him/her
- N S V 2. Ignores other people
- N S V 3. Pays little or no attention when addressed
- N S V 4. Uncooperative and resistant
- N S V 5. No eye contact
- N S V 6. Prefers to be left alone (depends on mood)
- N S V 7. Shows no affection
- N S V 8. Fails to greet parents
- N S V 9. Avoids contact with others
- N S V 10. Does not imitate
- N S V 11. Dislikes being held/cuddled
- N S V 12. Does not share or show
- N S V 13. Does not wave 'bye bye'
- N S V 14. Disagreeable/not compliant
- N S V 15. Temper tantrums
- N S V 16. Lacks friends/companions
- N S V 17. Rarely smiles
- N S V 18. Insensitive to other's feelings
- N S V 19. Indifferent to being liked
- N S V 20. Indifferent if parent(s) leave

III. Sensory/Cognitive Awareness:

[N] Not descriptive [S] Somewhat descriptive [V] Very descriptive

- N S V 1. Responds to own name
- N S V 2. Responds to praise
- N S V 3. Looks at people and animals
- N S V 4. Looks at pictures (and T.V.)
- N S V 5. Does drawing, coloring, art
- N S V 6. Plays with toys appropriately
- N S V 7. Appropriate facial expression
- N S V 8. Understands stories on T.V.
- N S V 9. Understands explanations
- N S V 10. Aware of environment
- N S V 11. Aware of danger
- N S V 12. Shows imagination
- N S V 13. Initiates activities
- N S V 14. Dresses self
- N S V 15. Curious, interested
- N S V 16. Venturesome - explores
- N S V 17. "Tuned in" - Not spacey
- N S V 18. Looks where others are looking

IV. Health/Physical/Behavior:

Use this code: [N] Not a Problem [MI] Minor Problem

[MO] Moderate Problem [S] Serious Problem

- N MI MO S 1. Bed-wetting *yes*
- N MI MO S 2. Wets pants/diapers *yes*
- N MI MO S 3. Soils pants/diapers *yes*
- N MI MO S 4. Diarrhea *some*
- N MI MO S 5. Constipation *some*
- N MI MO S 6. Sleep problems *huge*
- N MI MO S 7. Eats too much/too little
- N MI MO S 8. Extremely limited diet
- N MI MO S 9. Hyperactive *at night*
- N MI MO S 10. Lethargic *yes*
- N MI MO S 11. Hits or injures self
- N MI MO S 12. Hits or injures others
- N MI MO S 13. Destructive
- N MI MO S 14. Sound-sensitive
- N MI MO S 15. Anxious/fearful
- N MI MO S 16. Unhappy/crying
- N MI MO S 17. Seizures
- N MI MO S 18. Obsessive speech
- N MI MO S 19. Rigid routines
- N MI MO S 20. Shouts or screams
- N MI MO S 21. Demands sameness
- N MI MO S 22. Often agitated
- N MI MO S 23. Not sensitive to pain
- N MI MO S 24. "Hooked" or fixated on certain objects/topics
- N MI MO S 25. Repetitive movements (stimming, rocking, etc.)

* n.b. wear able to listen to music again after 1 yr +

most children do not die in children's hospitals
in the air *en route* they die in helicopters
on east Colfax in ambulances they die they do not die
with such a smashing view of the Rockies

arise. fluffing the
nimbus helicopter
blades whirl up and
up the light
soulpuffs

the truth of the hospital
system is death
prevention and
sometimes death theft
and the truth of the ER
more so so acuity
decreases in proportion
to the degree of the
field therapy in the
hospital then is polish
is a strategy of low tiers
and sympathizers

dollars to distance
material a|e ffect
pages of reconnaissance

when we are not with the dtr we visit the offices of payment and mercy and records we
walk and walk again somehow we are walking |we| stunned by the elevators the gift
shop the loan library the jellybellyjoycarttheredwagonstation photos of fundraiser and
patients in sunchairsandtherabaths and centeredinpuppiesanddonors we weaving
among the the the cardiums and anti-guides

then we walk back

| again 12x |

| my forehead tent |

I went to the pharmacy she was not there

I went to the surgeon she was not
there

I went to the tv the nurses station the family respite station
she was not there I was not there

a WE everywhere

MOCs and FOCs as assemblies
of pills

inoperative pillars

with limbs in our various

stumbling mouths

Sally Keith

On Fault

I've not imagined well enough the composition of the earth.

I confess.

As for the weight of the air held above the falcon's right wing

I have considered

it heavier for farther it tilts as it dives, as I watch

its soundless fall from the long bands of volcanic cliffs.

Lower down, porous lichen sheets peel from cypress.

"Are you Catholic?" is a common question people ask

of others they figure feel too much guilt.

Fault is defined as a flaw inherent to the self,

if not the responsibility for an accident.

But is it my fault

when whatever it was couldn't be helped or

when the outcome looking back is better than you first expect?

A fault is an extended break in a body of rock.

"I've had this house too long to watch it fall"

is the man's objection to the drilling

the seismic response to which

one cannot predict.

"Blemish" suggests a fault of the body. Although fault implies

failing, failure is much more serious.

"I did not intend for it to work like this."

"It may resolve itself, I hope."

"I just cannot anticipate."

"Fractures well cured make us more strong"

is George Herbert's advice, easy enough to hear in retrospect

for example having recently fallen and injured myself

but not so for the one whose house in the hills on fracture rests.

I want to see how an underground river heated to steam
is pressured up. “I’m sorry,
the next tour takes place in three months.”
Here is the nation’s largest producer of geothermal power.
Up in the hills you can see the cooling towers work.
Inside the visitor center: a Make-Your-Own-Earthquake machine
Just jump on the ground and watch the pen shake.

“Believe, intend, expect, anticipate, and plan”
are all forward-looking phrases,” reads the information sheet.
I hate feeling wary of the things people say.
In the play King Lear, Lear is on the stage
on the heath asking that the thunder
“strike flat the thick rotundity of the world”
a plea that is impossible, of course, but metaphorically it works.

Around the earth’s inner core a fluid outer core circulates
affecting the earth’s magnetic force. Every 500,000 years
it shifts. To say one thing in terms of another
connotes both metaphor and myth.
“We do cause quakes,” is the straight-up admission
of the employee at the plant.
“I hope” is one thing; “I had hoped” quite another.

I saw an orange-red wildflower on the path. I saw a yellow bush.
The pattern of eruptions from California’s Old Faithful
some call a predictor of quakes though the science is mysterious.
Surrounded by bamboo and pampas grass, tourists sit and watch.
Mount St. Helena is the backdrop.
That night at the bar when I ordered a glass he brought me a flight.
He did it twice.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“I’m sorry” is the phrase from my vocabulary I’m learning to strike.
Millions of gallons of treated waste water are pumped from Santa Rosa County.
Fissured rock, a water source, and volcanic earth
are a geothermal plant’s three basic requirements.
That magnetism is on the decrease is one fact.
That Lake County has the cleanest air in all of California is another.

See: Troy Thompson, Lake Malawi in Africa, and characteristics
of lava-eating fish to learn Old Faithful’s healing legend
there posted on a plaque. It wasn’t his fault.
But he wasn’t allowed to do it. Was he sorry? I don’t know.
Ash from volcanoes is used to make Comet and Ajax.
Volcanic ash is the best kept secret
for mud baths say the world’s elite beauty spas.

“You are cautioned that any such forward looking statements
are not guarantees for future performances”
is from the statement’s final paragraph.
I spent three nights in Calistoga.
I never had the mud bath.
It’s not my fault. I just didn’t want it.
I’m like that.

“It may be that Lear is asking for a storm
less than he is actually describing it,” surmises the actor
when the director suggests he play Shakespeare coolly
regardless of the fact that Lear is hot.
“Don’t bash it, breathe it,”
is how the director explains realizing the text
without layering on the emotional self.

In fact, if you remove the glass from the windows
in Europe’s oldest cathedrals, you’ll find them thicker at the base,
a fact proving the viscosity of glass.
Because the concrete box culvert is a barrier

for the Steelhead Trout, making the seventy mile trip,
from the Russian River to upper regions of Big Sulfur Creek
the company adds a chute and ladder to help.

“Do you know how many phone calls come in the summer
reporting what appears to be a fire in this hills
but really is the cooling towers at work,” she asks
off-handedly flipping through the binder thick print-out,
record of all the local quakes.
Have you seen the Russian River where it empties at the coast?
Green-soaked and lush the lowland almost rocked.

It was spring when I made the trip.
To look and look, mist in exit, clouds separate, so light falls
through a slat casting a line bright on the flat of the sea
is the kind of looking that you cannot pull back.
Two guys surf. An unusual green colored rock.
To be sorry to have not yet had lunch, as far as guilt goes,
does not count, but remember the rule before that.

For eccentricities, “foible,” or “shortcoming” is better than “fault.”
The way I understand it, up from the earth in pipes
diamonds just shoot.
Faults are a natural characteristic of the earth.
To have done so many things so wrong already—
To have not done anything so very wrong yet—
Looking back, longing seems irrelevant.

John Kinsella

from Autography at Jam Tree Gully

The Red Cloud

We will never forget the day the red cloud arrived and ate the sky, and, indeed, the world. I was outside securing loose stuff on the block because I'd heard a storm was approaching. I looked up and in the north-east a bizarre red-black plume was billowing, cascading, and looming. I thought it was a fast-moving fire and we were finished. But there was no smell of smoke, no burning at the back of the throat.

I called Tracy out to take a look and by the time she got there the cloud was massive and red and almost on us. We ran inside and shut the door. Everything went red-black and then black, though it was 2.45 in the afternoon. A thunderous rush of air, like a vacuum being filled instantly, rocked the house. Winds that must have hit 120kmh suddenly ripped in like whirlpools. The tree on the block whipped across the screen of the window before vanishing into the red-black howling. We didn't think anything would be left, or that the house would be left standing. But it was.

However, many in Northam and York lost roofs and much more. Mum's place, where we lived for many years, was devastated. Barely a tree was left intact. Old York gums and flooded gums were splintered, jam trees ripped out by the roots. A neighbour's house lost its roof, another neighbour's parts of the roof and infrastructure of the house. The entire town is in ruins. And apart from the trauma experienced by humans in the area, birds and animal life are disturbed and stressed.

Our house has since filled with various species of ants, frenziedly crossing from one room to another in their desire to move, move, move.

It has been a time of huge disasters in Australia, and when they happen out in the bush and on a more 'isolated' scale, they are easily subsumed into the whole. Many of our young son's schoolfriends from his old school have no roof (literally) over their heads, and it's a tough, tough time. I find it surreal and disturbing that the place I wrote for so many

years, where I set my Divine Comedy, has truly seen heaven, hell, and purgatory crunched together.

I'd heard a storm was approaching and Tracy rang Mum to let her know. Shortly after, Mum looked out the back window and a vast red wave rushed down over the mountain and enveloped the house. The chimney went, and they waited for the rest of the house to go too, but it hung together. The red cloud—full of red dust from further north (it was the colour of the dust around Yalgoo and Mt Magnet, where we have recently been)—ate the sun, ate the light, and ate the district. Apologies for the mass of descriptors, but it was that overwhelming. It was like being inside a thesaurus that didn't have enough words. It's a case of letting the experience rush out or remain forever silent, it was that dramatic and that indelible. It will mark all our lives.

Evening

Waiting for Tracy and Tim to return from a visit to Mundaring, I sit on a grey, weathered York gum log. It's a long stretched twilight and a southerly is blowing hard. Strong winds in summer bring fear of fire which will roll across the hills like a wave and destroy all in its path. You keep your nose to the air, always on guard. If fire comes, you leave any way you can—never stay and try and 'defend' your house, as you'll die with it.

Half an eye on the distant gate off the loop road, the rest of your sight on the happenings of the block, in particular the great wedge-tailed eagle hovering overhead, analysing you. They do that—they are curious, and process and remember everything. They observe and mark the behaviour of all creatures they come across. The great eagle overhead is watching me, keeping an eye out for rodents emerging with the evening, the sun down and a super-luminous waxing third of a moon crescented off to the north. A flock of twenty-eight parrots lands in the old York gum in front of me, one of its great straggling limbs down with high winds a few weeks back. The parrots are agitated by the wind, but more so by the eagle which they watch anxiously, discoursing loudly and rapidly. They depart in a rush, swinging pendulum-like over the hillside, vanishing with the light.

When Tracy and Tim arrive, I'll go up and close the double gates behind them. At this time of evening it would be usual to see roos, but none show. Their numbers are down. People have been shooting illegally in the reserve, and earlier in the day I noticed a strand of fence-wire cut where a hunter has stepped over, chasing roos onto our place. Our property. I reject the notion of property. Custodianship sounds too appropriative, and for a non-indigenous resident, all too convenient. Really, that's the issue that burns below the surface of all I write about this place. Proudhon is only halfway there with 'Property is theft'. Some theft is more theft than others. He fails to investigate the nature of such theft: that's more the key to understanding the implications of surveying, gifting, selling, claiming. Right across the block—its six acres—and the adjoining reserve twenty times that size—there are the tunnels of wolf spiders. They wait in their lairs and pounce. There's one that lives under a rock near the 90 000-litre rainwater tank. I have been watching it for weeks. It sits under the ledge with its multiple eyes scanning its domain, then strikes out at insects that cross its path. If it gets alarmed, it disappears into a tunnel at the back of the rock—its cave under the ledge.

The sky has a pink-purple tinge in the west. The sun is deep set behind the hills, the Toodyay Valley. Our place is on the hillside of a 'sub-valley' that leads down to Toodyay Brook. A network of intersecting valleys. A road loops around the summit of the valley and various smaller properties branch off. Then over the northern hill the large farms in their thousands of acres start and spread out onto the Victoria Plains district.

After we moved here, I discovered on a zoning map that just over the hill there'd been plans to build an abattoir, but it failed for environmental reasons. Disturbingly, the zoning still exists. If they were to try and establish one, I would spend every moment of my life resisting and stopping it. I have been a vegan for twenty-five years. I cannot stop the world using animals as it does, but within the codes of 'occupation'—and I am part of an occupying power—I have the 'rights' to resist what fellow occupiers would do. The irony is disturbing, but it's one of the few cases where notions of belonging amount to something practical which might benefit the land and all those who live on it. Not that the profiteers would see it that way. To resist the killing through pacifist insistence is an affront to their codes in so many ways.

I noticed that three or four jam-tree saplings I thought had died after being eaten to the ground by roos have actually resprouted. I have also noticed that roos tend to ignore resprouted saplings in general. The 'native' species, the ones endemic to an area, have survived in the context of being part of animals' diets. They persist. If we 'unfarm' the block, the local flora will re-establish. Don't read into this a subtext of exclusion, but rather a concurrent presence that associates and co-exists without colonising. That will become evident as this piece persists.

So, the family is home, and I close the gate. The barometer in the house is sitting on 'change', but no rain is forecast. Our water supplies are very low. I'd rather not pump from deep below the hills, 200 feet down into the granite and dirt, because the groundwater is under so much pressure in these times of drought. We always hope for rain. Even when the horrific red cloud came two weeks ago, relatively little rain arrived, and little rain was caught. 'Change' likely means merely an overcast sky and humidity.

Morning

I don't usually walk young Tim to the school bus pick-up point, but this morning I did. Tracy has been unwell. She likes the walk up with Tim and often comments on the vista. It's their sharing. As I walked Tim today, he pointed out that all last year I only ever collected him from the bus, never took him to the bus in the morning. True. And I have a sense of those late afternoon walks. So this morning's walk was a revelation I wasn't expecting. I have spent so much of the last two years examining the block and its surroundings that I'd almost forgotten new experiences await us every day. The "familiar" only means that one layer has become familiar: the skin of the place is constantly shedding and renewing, though sadly some skin goes and seems never to heal. Looking across the valley from the bus pick-up point, this was especially obvious. From that angle I could see whole tranches cleared of trees by neighbours, whole areas that are just dust in the heat. The eagle, or its partner, was there this morning, high over the hills. Walking back after Tim boarded the bus, I saw a glass bottle in dead long grass and picked it up: a major fire-risk. I also considered that our fence-line at the front of the block is inside our actual 'property'. The only purpose for extending it would be to stop damage from outside. Actually, when we got the place, I removed all the internal fences and also one of the fences adjoining the reserve, to allow wildlife a clear passage. The roos come through spaces in the top fence around the gate, and also just hop over it, and echidnas and reptiles move under the fence, but I wanted to devolve fencing as an idea. I thought, as I always do, of Wallace Stevens and his essay on fences, though from a somewhat different perspective! But humans used that gap as an excuse to pursue their prey on to 'our' place, so I placed a gate through to the reserve instead.

It is windy, overcast, and humid today. The fire risk is very high.

Fool's Gold

When the sun comes out, burning, the block sparkles. When it reaches 46 degrees centigrade some days, the mirror glint of pyrites burns your soul and you fear conflagration. Granite and Toodyay stone, quartz and even sedimentary rock deep down in Bird Gully, as Tim calls the south-east corner of the block because of the numerous birds that gather in the York gums lining the gully run-off's sides, even sedimentary rocks. It is a rocky hillside, with the granite exfoliate and flaking, heavily encrusted with lichen. Sods of moss clump in the shadows of the largest granites, even when the sun has swung around and is almost vertical in the sky during summer. When rain does come, it rolls off the ochre-brown dirt and brings out the red of the iron that exists low-grade across the area. That rolling-off is mainly in sheets though, picking up topsoil like velcro, taking it down to the valley floor. Pyrites is washed into clefts and blockages formed by rocks and fallen branches to make brilliant concentrations, like piles of dust poured from a prospector's stash. But fool's gold. 'Worthless.'

Bones

When we got the place it was covered in sheep bones and the front fence had steer skulls hanging from the wire. The previous owner had called the place Sleepy Hollow, probably after the film version of Irving's tale. We removed these 'signs', though apparently they remained on Google Streetview until recently. Is this an irony, given that my process here has been to avoid the web increasingly and to look to live off-grid as much as possible? My aim has always been complete abstinence. It is possible at Jam Tree Gully, the name we substituted for Sleepy Hollow. I won't say overlaid, because all names here are overlays of Nyungar names. This place had very specific names and specific meanings. I won't say deletions, because nothing has been erased. What you don't listen for, you don't hear? One must learn to listen outside notions of boundaries and 'property'. Which is not to deny connection and custodianship that reach back tens of thousands of years. It's a matter of reinstating it into a broader discourse. That discourse needs to be altered to restore priorities and access.

Strangely, when I was very ill early in 2010, I reread Hawthorne. The House of the Seven Gables restated modes of narrative I'd forgotten or ignored. The truth behind houses, and the forces we impose on place, to bend its magnetism our way, or away. When we arrived here there was a small plank cottage, which a friend of ours expanded over a year to accommodate our family. We used a steel frame because of earthquake risks, though we are on the edge of the earthquake zone and not in its heart as we were near York, and we heavily insulated the wall spaces to minimise need of heating and cooling. In winter we burn only storm-felled wood. We are conscious of the smoke we put into the air, and how much. The paint on the outside of the house is a non-VOC ecological all-weather paint, and inside is clay paint. When we have sufficient funds, we will convert the entire place to solar. In the long run, I'd like to see the need for electricity entirely gone. I lived without electricity in my youthful communal days for long periods. It can be done.

One of my first projects was collecting the bones strewn around the block by foxes, which had pulled apart abandoned sheep carcasses, and putting them in one place. There are still bones here and there I have left because they have merged into the soil and become rock. There's a sheep skull up near the old fox dens that stays there, staring blankly down into the valley. I won't touch it.

We see foxes every now and again. They have long been part of the place. Humans destroy far more than they do and yet delight in killing them. I have written about such issues elsewhere ('Scapegoats and Feral Cats'), the ironies and hypocrisies and the cruelty inflicted on 'ferals.'

Houses have haunted me. In many ways, I'd rather live away from a house, in the bush. My brother has lived in forests for years at a time. I wrote a book, never published, with David Lynn, called Houses. The great house where I lived in Geraldton, the old Nurses' Quarters, was a site of weirdness and mystery. I have written about that elsewhere as well. One of the state's great historic buildings, it was knocked down to make the new Coles supermarket car park. I think of it most days when I look at our smaller, humbler abode and what it means as sanctuary. But all sanctuaries are vulnerable: to decay, entropy, the wrecking ball, flood, fire ...

Fire

Back to fire, both our great fear and what we rely on in winter to keep warm. Such a hot place, and yet on winter nights the temperature gets down to a sharp five below. One has to keep warm! But it's all put into perspective when fire comes like a constantly collapsing wall and devastates the district as it did just over a year ago. It stopped ten ks from us, but much of the community was affected, and will take years to recover.

This valley we live in was subject to a major fire some years ago when a resident on a ten-acre property mowed during a fire ban and sparked a conflagration. That was before we moved here, but I have been tracing the signs of that fire on 'our' block—they are obvious and discreet and are everywhere. There are burnt trees all over this hillside, and if you scrape at the thin rocky topsoil, you'll soon uncover ash and charcoal. There are the bizarre 'fairy rings' of jam trees, that when burnt to the ground leave only a black charred ring inevitably crusted with moss (dry and brittle in summer, luminous green even during a dry, dry winter).

When I was a small child, my mother wrote a story entitled 'Fire' for a women's magazine. She made her extra dollars above and beyond 'housekeeping' through such writing—poems, articles, stories, even a piece of music with lyrics for a song competition. She was the housewife-freelancer, and when she and my father broke up, this writing took her to university, maybe directly or indirectly. I remember that story 'Fire'; I think it's stowed away somewhere with my papers. But what I remember best about it, apart from the fact she used the pseudonym 'Elizabeth', is the graphic black-and-white drawing published with it, of fire consuming a forest. The tilt of the flames seemed to suggest something that could never be controlled.

All people living in Australia live with fire. It is an integral part of any resident's psychological make-up, whether they live in the country, the city, or most often, on the fringes between the two. That's where fires that kill people so often start, the tensions of suburbia reaching into the wild woods—the arsonist's temptation, the spectacle that arises from the performance. But the summer fires of rural Australia are frequently on a much larger scale, often started by lightning strikes in high winds and with appallingly high temperatures. The fires in the Gippsland and mountain regions of Victoria two years ago changed the way a 'nation' thinks about and reacts to the threat of fire. Almost two hundred people died and there's still no way of coming to grips with whole communities having been wiped off the map.

Those fires were the result of horrendous ‘fire conditions’ as well as arson. The Canberra fires before them, Black Friday, Ash Wednesday in the Adelaide Hills a couple of decades ago, the great Victorian fires of the 1930s that my partner’s (poet Tracy Ryan) father, along with others, had to take shelter from in the sea.

And those Toodyay fires not so far from our home: whose consequences are still reverberating through the town. If the wind hadn’t changed they would have jumped the dry river and run this way instead of the fifteen or more kilometres they ran towards Northam. Most recently, huge fires rushed through Roleystone and Kelmscott. Tracy’s childhood homes probably burnt to the ground; I once lived a street away from where they were stopped—in Western Australia, large as it is, there are very few degrees of separation.

Both Tracy and I have spent a life writing smoke and fire poems, and little wonder. It’s part of our earliest and most recent memories. And the irony that in winter we warm ourselves by a Bushman wood-burning fireplace, that I spend much time chopping storm-fallen wood, doesn’t escape us. In mid-autumn, with the first sprinkles of rain in this drought-besieged place, the skies are filled with cloud and deliberate smoke, rising in vast fronts around the valley, pillars connecting clouds like parodies of mushrooms. It’s the time of burning-off. Sometimes it seems the only way one can move to reconcile these vast contradictions or irresolutions is through poetry.

Keeping the home-fires burning is a complex and contradictory endeavour. On one level, it’s a matter of labour, on another, it’s an issue of pollution. Pollution in the Greek sense, in the Homeric sense, has had a grip on me since I first read the Iliad and Odyssey in Puffin editions as a very young child. The Penguin editions came in high school, the Lattimore and Fitzgerald in first-year university. I am planning on doing my own versions of each, and fire is at the centre of my envisagings—fire and water. And pollution.

My grandfather, Claude Kinsella, a head state forester, fought many fires in his life. One of my earliest memories is being taken as a child to the old fire watchtower at Gleneagle Forest (or Kinsella, as it is appropriatively named on forestry maps), and warned of the danger of fire. I am tempted to draw on Bachelard’s *Psychoanalysis of Fire* for a quote, but for those who have seen the horror of fire, it becomes a glib unnecessary theorising. I won’t even bother you with alchemical allusions and metaphysical conceits. The sexuality of fire, its necessity for the re-ignition of life in the Australian bush (the opening of seed cases

etc), is made sterile when bent to the technologies of occupation: fire burn-off regimes to prevent bushfires, clearing to prevent fires, and the fact that so many out-of-control fires are caused advertently or inadvertently by humans. 'Control' is the contradiction that cannot be reconciled.

Vegetable Garden?

There's so little water and the winter being dry, the vegetable garden failed this year. Even the reliable bean crop centring the garden at York failed. Thoreau's beans found no purchase in the rocky dry ground here: scraggly plants with only a few seeds and no spare water to help.

Friend

That friend who extended our house is John, my mother's partner. We lived in a house adjoining mum's house where she and John live on her block near York. During the first year of our 'possession' of Jam Tree Gully, he'd travel 80km between the two places to build the extension. George, one of our distant neighbours in the valley, remarked during our one long conversation that he'd seen me on the roof working on the house. But it was John. Jam Tree Gully is part of his psyche, as John is part of the block's psyche.

I mention him because when there's a problem he's the first to help. Blocked pipes being one. We have old septic tanks that drain down through the hillside and keep alive trees that would otherwise perish. The trees have adapted to the ecology of wastewater. When the pipe into the tank blocked, John was over digging through the crap, fixing it with my assistance. Of course I wrote a poem about it. The poetics of shit: where true friendship is tested. John is unfazed by such things, whereas I wasted precious fresh water washing, washing and washing again. You can never get sewerage off your skin or out of your system. Back in the fifteen years of my lost memories from drugs and alcohol—now fifteen years ago in itself—I didn't care about sewerage at all. Now I care too much. But it does offer a lifeline to young eucalypts and acacias, silver with green growth despite the drought, refuges for pardalotes, thornbills, silver-eyes, magpies scanning their territory, weebills, red-capped robins, even western spinebills, and when the mistletoe is out on the jam trees, the mistletoe birds. It's a weird subterranean desire-line that bristles and blossoms with insects and birdsong. Hail, shit. Hail, friends who are immune or unbothered by shit. It is not waste to use waste. It demeans to say 'recycling'—each incarnation is fresh and new and cycling in its own terms. Maybe I should plant the vegetable garden in the realm of the leach drain.

We have had a few other friends visit. We keep to ourselves. Tracy is a sociable person, I am eremitic. Tim is always fascinated by people and loves school. Either way, we're a long way from those who might share our interests. But each of the visits of friends who have come out here is etched onto our understanding of the place, and how we think of it. One I told of gradients, another of naming the place and the nature of vistas (we are 240 metres high here), and yet another about the fruits of disturbed ground. I was going to call my book come out of this place, out of engaging with Thoreau's Walden while here, Disturbed Ground, but others considered it too grim. That's fine. It's not the predominant theme of

the book; the eponymous poem itself remains, and maybe it should exist as an echo. Sound does carry so far in the valley. Sound is predominant. But disturbed ground is where jam trees grow best. They thrive on the breaking of surface, the tearing and cutting of land. They are the vanguards of recovery.

The Red Shed

Poet Hayden Carruth knew how to write about barns! His work is at the back of my mind as I sketch the red shed from different angles. It's the dominant human marker—at least overtly visible one—on the block. Or rather, the dominant marker from a 'western' way of seeing. It's a large red shed that was used by the previous 'owner' as a horse stable. This had been a horse property under her custodianship; before that it was a property subdivision of the large Royd Nook Farm. The farms around here were extensive when stolen from the Nyungar people and mainly gifted to prominent colonists in the 1830s and 1840s who were sometimes absentee landlords, never living on their properties.

Since we once lived in central Ohio for five years, red barns became a feature of our mental mapping of the place as much as a reality of landscape, with their many encodings for the locals, the 'owners'. Maybe we appropriated them as points of reference, points of entry, and points of understanding. Now, I think of the red shed as complementary and also comparative to the red barns. It is metal. A barn-burning here would destroy the entire district and maybe melt the shed. Burning is not a mode of punishment and vengeance here in the way it is in midwest America. We often read of barn-burnings, but their origins outside text remained distant and underground, though their disturbance was keenly felt. Our—now 'our' red shed—though we didn't build it, nor was it a feature that attracted us to the place—is a marker in the area. Ah, so you live where that red shed is. The red shed seemed also to be a marker—until our constant protests managed to change the flight routes and practice-attack plans—for trainer jets from the air-force base about fifty ks from here. And the red shed, large as it is, often vibrates with the resonance, the vibrations of artillery fire at the army base about forty ks from here. The ground, especially rocky ground, senses, carries, and imparts violences across great distances. The red shed registers the aggression.

I write a series of red shed poems—exterior poems, interior poems. It becomes a mapping of the mind. I sketch it in my journal from different angles at different times of day. I often check the shed, expecting a carpet snake to have taken up residence, but maybe the eagles, hawks and falcons that patrol the area keep the rodents 'down', and there are thus no 'enticements' in the red shed. Though it would shelter rodents. It is still full of hay from its stable days. Inside it there is an air pump to drag water from the depths. It has an earthen floor that floods in heavy rains. If they come. It echoes.

Grass Cutting

It wipes you out, having to cut acre on acre of wild oats. I keep the whipper-snipper in the red shed, though I could also keep it in the smaller silver work-shed down by the house. But it strikes me that the tools of the block's 'management', of its fire-protection regimes, should be kept in the red shed. It's not the redness, but the darkness within. I never turn on the lights in the red shed. I have cut power to the shed. The steel colourbond walls expand and contract as a living organism, almost. I am trying to let it have its own life. Rolls of fencing wire and star-pickets, from my removal of internal fences across the block, lurk in deep shadow.

Cutting grass on a broad hillside is an art-form. That's how you pass the days, thinking lines, and understanding 'english' does not have its own rhythms outside those of work—of labour, breathing, waking and sleeping. Our actions (or lack of) make the rhythms of speech, its transference to script. In this is the core of the Graphology sequence of poems I have been working at for over fifteen years. Cutting the grass is a warped signature, an abstracted or maybe representational concrete form of handwriting. I can see my patterns and thinking as I look at the windrows and cut lines across the hill. As one can see the ploughlines or harvest lines in a wheatfield, done by tractors. I thought as much, when ploughing paddocks as a young man.

When the wild oats start to turn, and the dandelions and wild barley have woven their way through the oats, making an almost impenetrable wall of living death, you have to get out there and start hacking, cutting. It is hard work and dangerous. Rocks and sticks fly, scarring you for years. You have to be wary of bobtails and other reptiles, of quail and other birds nesting, of cutting saplings you hadn't realised were buried in the waist-high grass. It grows when there's been so little rain. So harvest it? Yes, I will, to make paper. Better than the pulp of trees! And the rest I will let mulch the earth, as I do already.

Warning Signs

Our eastern-boundary neighbour just came over to warn us there's caltrop breaking out up on the roadside 'long paddock', next to the north-eastern corner of the block. The rain that followed the red cloud and plenty of heat has stimulated the caltrop seed to sprout and grow to the point of flowering. He claims it's a community pact to be vigilant and dispose of the stuff. It's Tracy he tells this, though I can hear him from inside the house. We know about caltrop. I'd say I've written a dozen poems over my life dealing with double-gees and (later) caltrop. The latter has a military connotation anti-personnel mines/weapons, spiked heads that impair and damage an enemy. Introduced, as were double-gees, from the Cape. They came into the loop when the road was bitumenised, on the wheels of trucks. Last year at the same time I cleared the caltrop away and spent a week unable to type because of pricked fingers. The poem I wrote, which is part of my Jam Tree Gully/Walden manuscript, was predictably called 'Pricked Fingers'. And now I get that 'by the pricking of my thumbs' MacBeth-witches *déjà vu*.

Though we have a great degree of refuge from neighbours, due to the bush on our block and the hilly, rocky terrain, when you're up there pulling caltrop, you are in full prospect. People will slow down and comment or chat, conversations and gossip will begin. As I've stated, I am eremitic and known as keeping to myself around here—I know my neighbours but just enough—but the necessary process of pulling caltrop (we never use spray and have a caveat with the shire saying the roadside at our boundary cannot be sprayed) briefly changes that. It becomes an event. One is on display. And you take that sense of exposure to the quieter, more sheltered places on the block, and it changes how you 'interact' with everything. It makes you more aware that 'conservation' is dependent on the goodwill of neighbours.

In the same way, the neighbours opposite and above, who poisoned the entire summit of the hill to kill wild oats and turned it orange, a beacon of damage, changed the health of the block we protect. Wash-off, spray-drift. The kangaroos that grazed on the still-green oats after the poisoning. Those neighbours are absentee. We rarely ever see them. For them, perhaps it's a rural retreat.

But you do know your neighbours without living in their pockets. It's the little things: George's Mack truck going past on the top road, Len's small plastic Buddhas coming and going from his entry gatepost down the long road to his place at the valley's bottom. Kids at the bus stop relating to wildlife—keen to see eagles, or, as Tracy said this morning, all pleased to see a kangaroo doe feeding in a paddock opposite where they wait.

But then, walking down to the valley floor, through the reserve, and seeing the great flooded gums being used as props for ploughs and other farm machinery, you realise there are neighbours who operate undercover and will be using that remnant 'nature' beyond their own properties in any way they can. The gunshots late at night tell the same.

Daytime

It is heating up. It will reach the mid-30s today. Not too hot. I check the barometer: it says 1012 hectopascals, and the hygrometer is a shade above 64 percent. I will do my walk around the block before starting to pull caltrop. It will take me half an hour, maybe forty minutes. I will check the massive ant 'cities' that Tim so admires; I will lament still more trees that have died or are dying in the drought; I will see geckoes and skinks, wolf spiders and redbacks; I might see a black-headed monitor or a bobtail; I will see red-capped robins, thornbills, weebills, silver-eyes, butcher birds, magpies, twenty-eight parrots, crows, maybe pink and grey galahs, certainly willy wagtails, flyeaters, honeyeaters, and golden whistlers. If I don't see the golden whistler I will hear its song right across the block. I will see echidna diggings but not see the echidna, and maybe I will see a group of stubble quail, though this has only happened twice in the whole time we've been living here. But I know where they nest. Though I avoid disturbing them in any way, sometimes they're out and about. I will climb the north-western granites and look right down across the Toodyay Valley. I will scan the sky for wisps of smoke. You do this instinctively.

Sheep & Goats & Alpacas

Neighbours don't understand why we don't have grazing animals to 'keep the grass down'! Being vegan, we don't believe in the use of animals for any human purpose. As said, they come and go as they please. We once had a goat arrive here with a missing hoof. She hung around for a few days until we located her home (five ks away). She'd been missing for a year, living in the reserve. She wandered onto our place when I pulled the fences down. Tough as they come. One of her legs had been severed halfway down, probably after getting caught in a fence. Very few creatures would survive such a thing. If she'd been found in the reserve, she would have been shot by locals or officials. It's okay to exploit such animals on farms, but not okay for them to roam free. They are considered destructive. As I see the piles of bulldozed trees from the scant remaining bushland getting piled up ready for burning in autumn, the ironies overwhelm me. Poetry is an active refusal for me, but maybe I have to admit it's a catharsis as well—it is my pacifist mantra that the anger building in me must be earthed, must be discharged without causing more damage than it aims to offset, to absorb. It is not a neat resolution of physics and it wrestles with contradictions.

Journal

Impelled or compelled to record, 'witness'? What is a journal, really? I keep a journal of the place where I live. A record of the year. It is haphazard, and I am not sure how it would stand up in a government court. But I would always 'defend it' as a document of natural justice. A record of a place where climate change has rendered seasons defunct. The four seasons of the colonisers clearly don't fit this place as template, and the six seasons of the Nyungars, while clearly closer to the divisions of a year's cycle here, are also going askew as representation. There are two seasons now: the dry and the wet. And the wet in itself is a few months and broken up by much dryness. The year is lopsided and there are no longer 'cycles of nature'. 'Nature writing' that gives centrality to the human observer is an hypocrisy that fills the rain gauge here with dust, and only dust.

— *excerpts from this section of Autography have appeared in the Australian literary journal Overland*

Why I Oppose the Genre of 'Nature Writing'

This was written in response to an editor who asked why I don't call my work 'nature writing'.

Why does 'the land' have to give something back to the writer? Why do we need to imagine, manufacture or 'experience' some kind of bridge between self and 'wild' to give purpose to writing the land?

I have recently been reading (in a variety of places) essays that in one way or another map the self onto 'nature,' or even more disturbingly, so centralise the self that nature is mapped onto (self) identity.

This disease of Western subjectivity, this defence of the natural world because it has so much to give us, grant us, return to us, reward us, or affirm us, is the final sliver of aesthetics that would guarantee the hobbling and dilution of any poetic resistance to the killing of the land itself.

As writers (rightfully) struggle with how they might place themselves in 'place', within 'nature', they so often settle for a self-portrait backgrounded by pseudo-scientific fact and tidbits of ontology. Illustrating with 'scenes' and asides from personal experience ('I encountered a creature, a plant, a rocky outcrop, and had an epiphany'), they dress nature up to give a sense of the authentic. This creates an authority by convincing us that these feelings are feelings we too could have, or should have. We are 'there', we are them. This is vicarious, real, and often steeped in pseudo-mysticism. It's the act of writing and the attention to self it brings, rather than the place itself, we are interacting with.

That's fine, but so often it pretends to be more than this. Or maybe it's wish-fulfilment – an earnest belief that a conduit of sensing has been created, that moral turpitude will be dispersed by engaging with what, on occasion, almost elevates itself to holy text. We are granted a royal 'we' when the writer is more often talking of 'I', and that 'we' is always exclusionary. We – the readers (inevitably being non-indigenous – why? why shouldn't we be the imagined 'other'? – and lacking a traditional totemic relationship with that place) – will learn by vicarious participation with the writer of the piece, how to respect the land and share in its mystical-giving qualities.

If only we'd learn how to sense properly, be sensitive to animals and plants and the spiritual vibes deposited by those who have known the land ancestrally for thousands of years.

This is at best appropriation, and can verge on racism. Yes, of course one should respect and learn from indigenous peoples if one is of a 'migrant' cultural heritage (or even if forced to locate to a particular place due to transportation, wars, famine, political or personal exile, family relocation—I am referring to modes of non-indigenous arrival in all their complexities). But it is hypocrisy to use indigenous knowledge, to co-opt it, as a way of affirming one's own connection to the place that one has directly or indirectly helped oust them from anyway. This is not to say that one can't or shouldn't refer to indigenous knowledges, that they won't necessarily become a positive part of a non-indigenous discourse, but rather that so often it's a veneer of connection and respect hijacked to validate one's own presence and disturbance of land.

I am reminded of nature-lovers who build a house on the edge of a rare wetland, or 'virgin' forest, or among fragile dune ecologies, and state they are guardians of that endangered nature. I could accept this if the house was already there and someone moved in to convert that 'edge' into more of the primary ecology of the place, but so often it's not the case. The nature they hug against is annexed into their spiritual and material needs, their affirmation of a unity with the endangered. In doing so they value-add their own corporeality.


I see this as what we might call 'belonging angst', the desire to suggest to outsiders and themselves that they are compensating for their presence. A bit like those soon-forgotten carbon offset programmes. Tree-planting isn't something that occupies many plane-travellers' minds. It's all about rights of access when access would reasonably be denied (because of fragility of an eco-system, for example). It's all about land, and who controls it. In the western genre film *The Violent Men*, the doc says to the Glenn Ford character at the beginning, that the Anchor ranch owners are 'land eaters'. Indeed. As are the small farmers the cattle baron is trying to drive away. It's not just the big that do the damage. Exploitation has many degrees.

I should state clearly now that this is not contesting the 'I', that old lyrically challenged chestnut, as the 'I' is always hidden away there by varying degrees of separation. Nor is it a contestation with writing the self when experiencing the world around us; rather it is the use of the super-validated self as authority, as reliable configurer of experience.

However, I should state that I believe the ‘I’ should always be under pressure: under pressure in what constitutes the self, and under pressure in how it operates as messenger and witness. I certainly don’t trust reading my own ‘I’ in an essay or a poem, though I trust myself and believe I have tried to speak with all honesty. As soon as ‘I’ become ‘I’, I doubt and assume doubt is part of the reading or listening process. Poetry, and writing in general, should be about witness and resistance. It should critique the position one’s own subjectivity comes out of, and why one’s own voice is problematic. The yearning ‘I’ isn’t enough. Delicacy and tact aren’t enough.

Returning to the issue of validating presence-in-place in nature writing (by non-indigenous writers): surely to co-opt indigenous beliefs and knowledge purely to enhance one’s own connection to the factor beyond this disenfranchisement is delusion or corruption? And associating indigenous cultures purely with nature because they might not have traditionally built permanent towns or cities (though what constitutes permanence is challengeable), is another version of ‘noble savagery’.





So often the artist guided through country by an indigenous elder is entirely insensitive to what's being made 'available' and what's not. They write it up later believing that their interpretation of what's been said is the right one. It's their own subjectivity they express, not actually understanding the purpose behind the process in the first place. It becomes 'excursion'. It ends in glib comments like, 'We can learn from...' when all that's being learned is how to augment one's personal mysticism, one's colonising expression of unity with stolen land. It's not a case of the original owners and the new owners—there is no ownership, only theft. Like the Australian Jindyworobaks openly defending their 'annexing' of indigenous culture, in their attempt to get closer to their land, this neo-Jindyworobakism in Australia should face up to itself and accept that it is doing the same thing.

All the issues and factors above, I see as components of 'nature writing' propaganda – the affirmation of the self within a given ecology (while clandestinely separating the self from that ecology through affirming and qualifying personal subjectivity), claiming that if the community at large could only listen with equal sensitivity, nature would benefit. At the centre of this is the 'exchange' – human and nature (everything else not human-made) in dialogue with each other, even in spiritual communication. A give and take that's really just a take-away fast-food version of nature.

The destruction of habitat will only stop when people give up on the idea of getting something back. I was appalled by a recent essay whose author spoke of walking through a dieback area and along closed trails, and lamenting the state of things. Stay out. Don't go there! Stop looking and lamenting and enjoying. Recognise your own scopophilia, your own fetishisation of the damage. It becomes like an act of confession followed by an act of contrition (and I'm not Catholic or any other religion: it's just the closest analogy I can make).

I love jarrah forests but won't walk through them anymore, because of the risk of spreading dieback. To respect nature, you don't have to experience it. Sometimes you need to leave it alone: not just one socio-ethno-cultural group, but all. Death is death. Stay out! Leave

alone. It's not the same world; different approaches need to be applied. Respect is not getting pleasure back. It's always bemused me that people follow a God because they expect something back in return. I'll worship you if you grant me a place in heaven. Garbage. Surely faith is expecting no reward. Doing something because you know it's right. Damaged land is abundant – go out and repair it. Bushland that's 'intact' – preserve it, but not so you can feel good. Animals? Let them come and go as they please, not as you please. Spare them and me the mystical indulgence that makes a faux pantheism where the centre is the self, not 'nature'.

When writing the land I find a huge tension between the desire to express what I think I understand of the place – in essence, to describe – and the knowledge that my presence anywhere is so often destructive. This destruction is built into so many human interactions with place – on a micro level there's no perfect balance, anywhere, anytime. On a macro level, certainly some cultures have 'managed' place better. Nyungar people here in south-western Australia did less damage and conserved with more efficiency than the colonists that followed. But even so, on a micro level, some individuals inevitably did and do their damage as well. Denying that is buying into the 'nature writing' binary.

Poems for me are disturbed and even damaging. They are about resistance, and induce troubling self-criticism. When they fail in this and become a gloss of 'experiencing nature', they are joining the big lie, the big watching-it-diminish while comforting ourselves that we are aware and conserving. The poem – or any piece of writing – should surely be an expression of crisis: a crisis of description, of where the self sits in the propagandising of place, of how one deals with what might seem the deepest affirming of connection with place (I love Jam Tree Gully, I love the forests, I love the desert and so on) – but in the knowledge that even the act of observation, and certainly the acts of occupation and habitation, are yet more nails in the coffin.

The writing itself, and the act of writing, should be under constant scrutiny. Even communal and collaborative 'nature writing' becomes a smokescreen for those individual expectations and subjectivities, for a mutual sense of usage that will give pleasure and affirm that one is meeting one's 'responsibilities', that one can ease the guilt back a little by 'respecting'.

Inevitably, rather than ranting or screaming resistance, that nature writer asks us questions: about our complicity, about searching our souls, about asking ourselves whether we're

doing enough. Maybe? Maybe not? If you'd only commune with nature, you'd see the beauty, the 'joy of creation'. Or, the necessity of 'conservation' because the science of loss adds up to our loss in the end. Either way, the nature writer offers a mediation, a negotiation with subjectivity and fact, or subjectivity and a mystical affirmation. It angers me. Stop the damage. Stop abusing animals. Stop placing SELF at the centre of nature by pretending to look on from the sidelines. Stop using the hawk hanging in the air, or the kangaroo watching in the distance, as a mirror or a bloody crystal ball.

It's none of these things. The writer communing with nature can so often mean the death of nature. The writer's joy becomes its misery. I am not interested in reading of the beauty of encounter, the journey of the human soul. The act of writing long ago left 'nature'. The 'For Sale' sign went up and we all, to some degree, bought into it as readers. Then we sold again. We can watch the sale of nature on flat-screen televisions. We can fly to conferences to object to the destruction of habitat, to the contribution of others to global warming! None of this sustains, even within the parlance of nature-writing propaganda and hypocrisy. It doesn't have to be like this. Write in resistance to this usage of nature that feeds the self, that feeds community desire for an interactive self.

For me, writing of 'nature', especially in poetry, should be about the carnage to which its production necessarily contributes. Such awareness surely helps us use the poem as a means of resistance, a non-violent confrontation with the limitations of self in dealing with the crisis so many of us have constituted? Non-violent but refusing to participate quietly! Pivotal though, whatever one writes, is to reduce the hypocrisies of one's own occupation of land where the writing is done. 'Nature writing' so often seems a projection of how we might really live, but this is deceptive: it is a construction, an aesthetic representation designed to please an audience (even one from whom the author is hoping for a change of opinion, empathy for preserving a threatened environment—all ecologies are threatened, not just those of 'beauty'), and the writing self. It soothes, or only shocks a little—too little.

Patrick Pritchett

Twenty-First Century Ecology

You are standing in a room that is the sign for wood.
Its green corona spreading into skin and the skein of consumption
burning a line of smoke along a crest of hill.
The trough of the voice hums at the edge where excess seizes form.

The sun is a mouth of blue.

Forms of Disappearance

1.

Or as the given must be made real, over and over again.
Reading it out of dinosaur brain
the destroyed fuels romancing a form to hold any-
thing before it slips into a canister marked made out of foam.

2.

The crease of day is stone is sun is grass is gone.
Watergush at entrance equals disappearance.

Ach. Ache. Strophe wanna go downtown.
Ur-channel surfing.

3.

In the portrait of what occurs the theory of the body
hinges on the practice of space.

The center is coal, set in motion at great depths.

Who would stand beside the pit and listen to the music
echoing from the house of capital and love?

A song is what turns in a narrow pivot
and tries to break the heart and does.

4.

Houses, cars. Tornadic flames across a field.
Even the custom of dwindling dwindles.
Things without recourse to thingness.

Dirt spiked with radium.
Reactor thrum of sunset.

The Dream of Open Space

Sun on stone.
A long heave of bare sky.
Branches in a
drop down menu.

Rock over rock.
Air cracking lung.
Whole range
of luminous distance googled.

Ground Music

The apple lit by water, yes.
And the rain that cuts a trench
through the shadows of the tree at twilight
by which a cloud resurrects all earthly life.

Air surrounds, dissolves, incurs the pain
of what's erased remains.
Inside the branch the scar
where the sign for care is apple, smoke.

Who speaks of the body makes prophecy
and a candle greater than any star.
The light of entering a room is dazzling.
It carries the entire brilliance of love.

As apple, cloud, twilight, smoke.

Stephen Ratcliffe

12.31

pink cloud in pale blue sky above black
branches, planet above moon beside leaf
in foreground, wave sounding in channel

movement of parts, observer
relative to the other

more complicated, fortunate
for this is, its form

cloudless blue sky reflected in channel,
sunlit green of pine on tip of sandspit

1.1

grey whiteness of cloud against shadowed
top of ridge, motion of leaves on branch
in foreground, waves sounding in channel

see that this point is also
the point, which into

condition changed, was that
picture, and remained

grey-white clouds reflected in channel,
wingspan of gull flapping toward point

1.2

grey whiteness of cloud against shadowed
top of ridge, motion of leaves on branch
in foreground, waves sounding in channel

repetition, that after that
will look at least so

related to things as shapes,
meant, not stop there

grey-white clouds reflected in channel,
shadowed green pine on tip of sandspit

1.3

light coming into sky above still black
ridge, silver of planet beside branches
in foreground, sound of wave in channel

future not yet, the past is
speaking so that time

might likewise be, "either-
or," like every other
grey-white clouds reflected in channel,
whiteness of gull gliding across ridge

1.4

orange edge of sun behind black branches
of trees, motion of green leaf on branch
in foreground, sound of waves in channel

one thing is that, to be in
words the relation to

a gesture, coming across an
area, point to staged

silver of sunlight reflected in channel,
white cloud in pale blue sky on horizon

Martha Ronk

1. Summer Past

Summer past given over to voices kept down for the sake of slowing,
for the sake of what the night was in agitations, a scuffle of peastones.
All the unsaid tightened up for later as we said how perishable
how unending when afterwards I couldn't think of anything but the talk of dying
of all the floods in Pakistan, the fires in Moscow, no one able to breath
out of the Walmart radio losing the Albany station again
and then through a tunnel of fear dreaming up Chinese immigrants
come to build a railroad, thousands underground eating billows of steam,
roughed up, sideswiped, lost in the darkness I struggle upwards and out of
swimming how many times I think how many times in the same room
the same exactitude of silence repeating conversations about dying,
until another story come to the surface—how slowly he lost his vision
until it was just a tunnel of light, my fingers circling a closing space
and words he might have looked for to say it refusing to form
and all the oil spill, the hurricanes, all the static and alarms ringing
at the end of the chorus in German, even this summer the Shakespeare:
Komm herbei, komm herbei, Tod!/ Und versenk in Cypressen den Lieb.

2. The Remainder of the Third Chapter or the West Wind

A window in the remainder of the third chapter brings forth a warm storm of lightning, curling the covers of books, typing even faster, a hypocritical attitude of spine and fervor propels one past interrogating the text and eating everything and having to halt distraction and it's obvious that authors employ windows as if escaping into gardens, real or otherwise, and without directly offering the interlocutor a satisfying answer or taking up direct address even to the elements which in another era would have satisfied and stimulated endeavor (although I have to point out the lack of wind even from the west) but this rain straight down and hard while this might be stretching a point, putting oneself more directly in touch with the material world one hates to lose especially given the fruitful possibilities oft cited therein.

3. Relics

In this month the tea is cold before you get to it and the rhododendron all leaves for another year and she says Buddhists revere relics as well and worship teeth and bones from the ashes and she's finished a whole set of revisions and will keep after it and I hear on the morning news a cashier in France has written a book saying mothers in line threaten their screaming children with growing up to be cashiers and the reliquaries hold bones in silver as elaborate as the pistils of the jack-in-the-pulpit as sparrows eat the coats of oil off the radiators of cars as daylilies collapse in time-lapse, and as the farmer hefts a bag of grain on his shoulders going up the hill never thinking anything about it (who'd have thought desire would go?) past the white llama, the famous Himalayan flower, meth labs and twenty-five days of rain in mid summer, a left-over stripe of silver across the sky.

4.

Tendrils

whereon they hang

Thyme, Savory

either side-spreading or tap roots, it matters not

the tendrils of the Clementine

or a segue into the bottom and shady recesses of the sea

coral caverns intricate as plant systems underground and lit from above

where one moves effortlessly through unimagined territories

with ease, aplomb,

ceasing to breathe

5.

Before leaving

Beyond the myopic treeline

it's the August day of
not being where the chairs are; tomorrow some other chairs,

the lingering of what was
and of what's to come as if the days and months were switched,
the chairs a burnt charcoal sketch over the wooden chest,

a separate causality elucidating the rotted wood, the roof
lasting into an eroded frame of time

symptomatic of half-light,
a greenish tree cut off by the window frame
and the heart-race of anticipation as to what was to have been an August day,

each item left-over.
What had abounded turns the aftermath
acute: a consideration of what "removed" is like.

Tomaz Šalamun

I Have Heard

Absinthe robs the kingdom. Gondola swings precisely. When we carried linen on shoulders to laundries, the boy from Pohorje couldn't read. I doubt they'll push Perreira under water. They don't push the Portuguese under water. Wash by yourself. This isn't the sky. Burn the poker and the snake. I'm the famous statue blocking Celeste Aida. I can't live without the ant. It's awkward to stare through a windowpane, close and distant relatives of leaves and vines. Abandoned are the trees. Abandoned is a quarry. Abandoned is my mouth. Abandoned is my mouth. I'm crushed by life. A nature type, I sprinkle myself. I boast about my herd. Like Rabelais I take care of fungi.

Translated from the Slovenian by Brian Henry and the author

Sasha Steensen

Family

If family is a body, learn its anatomy:

It has the head of a house.

Each room is a cortex of the brain.

Contrary to popular illustration, the windows are not eyes, but teeth.

It is impossible to tell whether a house is smiling or frowning.

Are the members of its body subterranean, perhaps the roots of nearby trees?

Or, are its extremities hung for the neighbors to see, the head shaded heartily above?

It hears its own head, sorting these parts out.

“Doom is the House without / the Door-”

There have been some makeshift additions.

In the basement, among the mold, discarded toys, musical instruments, and Christmas decorations, its heart beats solemnly on.

A deep freeze sits nearby holding pounds of meat, frozen vegetables from the harvest, bones for the dog, and other miscellany.

A ribcage. A ribcage. A ribcage.

The deck overlooking the property provides an aerial view of all that is outside, of all the foreign bodies that enter with each breath.

The house, heated by wood-burning stoves, has an invisible respiratory system.

Each time a member leaves, it takes a body out into the world and brings back a body to enter the family.

When you are outside looking in, you see windows lit in estranged light.

When you are inside looking out, you see worlds lit in strange light.

The family bought a rural plot & planted a garden.

The family formed thoughts.

Within these thoughts, eggs hatched, animals were born, little wars formed. Each thought
said unspeakable things to the other thoughts.

As you know, unspoken thoughts rot.

The family had a creek running through their plot.

The family liked watching the bobwhites dive down for their dinner.

How inconsiderate of time to throw light upon these thoughts.

Longtime residents of the nearby farms watched.

In the 70s more than a million hippies went back to the land.

Somehow, they fit in.

Perhaps it was the yardful of cars.

The family loved its overgrown plot.

The family loved its dilapidated barn.

The family would have loved its Amish neighbors,

would have loved their handmade furniture

free-of-particle-board,

were it not for the unspeakable rift

-rows of empty seats on the bus-

that kept them apart.

The family loved its silo where so many cats drowned.

The family even loved the bats in her belfry.

Until they burned it down.

Susan Stewart

Terrarium

The concept of the thing more beautiful than the thing itself.

Under the clear lid, ferns
older than soil, feathering
the smoky light, a privet-
berry lodged in
the moss; sprig-
canopy, stem-
trunk, a small
rain sprinkled
from a cracked
salt-shaker.

Some dreaming needs
compression as its only
room.

The hand is clumsy
where the mind is quick.

I saw the glass, and
in and through it.

Fine, fine

fine for you, someone
said, while a wing as
large as the left half
of the sky came down

to inspect the injured

one, now pushed
to the side of the road.

A cold eye opens in winter, then
the ground bares bare flint.

Terror in the concept, terror in
the concept and none, none
in its beauty.

The Uneven Surface of the Moon

Along the high coast, a boy is carrying
a bull's-eye lantern
under his blue coat.

It is his secret companion,
though, out on the sea, sailors catch
its glimmer and wheel their ships away.

Missionaries learn to count the nights
by ones and twos and threes. They could
not predict the forms of difference.

The boy, who loves mirrors, has read this
in a book as he floated
beside a high window.

. He has an ebony box where he keeps
his matches and the phosphorescent
rocks he finds in shallow pools.

Between the craters of the moon, the silvered
dust is smooth, forever smoothed
by the absence of any wind.

The human footsteps there
can never be erased, will
never turn hard or soft or deeper.

Antares shines new red just
below that blue. I saw it with
my eye pressed to the lens.

You could draw it
with a brush, if not a feather. The sun,
from such a vantage, grows ugly.

G.C. Waldrep

discrete series: NEWBATTLE ABBEY

to be caught up,
as silk: in structure:

amnion: inheritance:

precision ramifies,
the heart detects all
that is not electric:

opencast workings,
the first here
to dig, as for fire:

yarrow, bush vetch,
hedge-mustard:

reason enough for
copula: surveillance:

styptic treasury:

rip: or, rupture:

the broad lawns,
the sculpted terraces:

language in its
pure form, candent
elver, lacquered

cowling: annulus:

walk no further:

quickenin watch-
gate, sword in what
surrogate stone:

discrete series: DOG/STONE

asylum: notochord:
all independent species:

bloodstone, hyena:

mammalian: torn
as harps into our hearts:

saucer of flesh, wide
avenues of being:

amplitude: heresiarch:

meaning, the visible
surfaces of the body:

incarnadine, race
is not/(but) a fiction:

pry-sign, ply-sign:

the complete diapason
commits to entry:

sweet berries ripen

in tomblight, these
polished surfaces
of tinfoil, wool, & glass:

discrete series: SUNDIAL

coat-of-arms, castellated:

shattered heron, chester
(as fancy, from the Roman):

as by stylus, light's vowel:

newdwelling: eelwards:
sidereal plantation,

solar time: to walk there,
in the recognizance:

lenticular: terror, like art,
has a vanishing point:

plangiform: military caste,
castra, estate: inscribed:

I never think of this:

the dead have to go some-
where, & we believe in

the power of right location:

periapt: regolith:
as hymn to the Virgin:

I would not murmur:

incorporated into larger
structures: surrogate blood-

creche, perdurable bone:

Keith Waldrop

Before Leaving

if I sit in the dark I
remember or

sitting darkly
forget

there, my

Soul, among local
motions

.

above-mentioned
sky, high
ceiling

scrim

nose
visible be-
yond bonnet

Cold Starlight

names only I have
studied

unclassified comfort in
closed drawers

rubbish
behind the mirror
I step carefully so as

not to raise the dust

.

ultimate concern at
sunset or about

I do not
yearn for heaven

I decline my soul in
writing
old eyes now in my

cold age
just where lights are

going out
thinking
of going

Contingence

to imagine
later, that something may
happen

before

.

alone in a dream or on
paper

.

not divine—distant
storm, past storm
dying to

undermine horizon

.

automobiles
and incomparables and
mere dimension

loss of sound with
distance

Elizabeth Willis

The Oldest Garden in the World

Something drives out
from the fate I was hungry for
A body that fulfills its face
carries into day
what fades behind it
In Natural History
Sophocles loved
Asphodel, but Asphodel
loved William Carlos
Williams as hyacinth
loved France, and honey
loves a toothache
Is that a crime
or just a form of currency
like big tobacco moving on
with shady radar
over our greenery?

Poisonous Plants of America

April fool
Bear's-foot
Bog-onion
Devil's-apple
Dog parsley
Doll's-eyes
Fairy bells
Flying saucers
Four o'clock
Gagweed
Goosefoot
Hare's-ear
Indian beans
Inkweed
Jacob's-coat
Lady's-thumb
Lion's-beard
Locoweed
Monkey-fiddle
Moonseed
Mother-in-law
Puncture-vine
Naked Lady
Quaker-bonnets
Rabbit-bush
Smartweed
Sneezeweed
Snakegrass
Stinking Willie
Sundials
Swallow-wort
Wahoo
Wart-cress

Witches-thimbles
Wolfsbane
Wonder berry

Sam Witt

Deserter

Shedding
dimensions
We all go down
deployed into the moment
intestines glowed
in strings of city lights
dissolving the void
And the frozen rains began
I was standing there
by the window
More accurately
I shrank into
the frozen milk
The message
was scratched
into my skull:
Lift the helmet
and in this master gland
You will come unfrozen
Deserter
Only then could the music
be pumped into space:
hissing rain
wild
in the velvety dark
vials of freezing
scattered my heartbeat

a stranger's foot
lifted from my chest
were molasses
or sleep
freezing sleep
I could kiss
your face in
after all

Ode to a Baby White Fern

Up until just now,
I thought I'd seen just about everything in the world.
It was invisible at a rate unknown to me until just this moment,
like the wound up ear of a violin. How weary
& profitable is the world, it might have played into my ear,
the world we've exhausted into predictable patterns
& false humors, eardrum rattles & retinal excitations, a world
as invisible as my own hand with which, suddenly, gently now,
reaching down to part the dead leaves,
I have come here to touch the fascicle,
gracefully, slowly & with care, & from the sunlight,
withdraw.

The white fern is like a tiny bobbin
where my breathing starts.
Or like the softish skull plates of an infant, fragile enough,
but naturally tending toward a more stable environment
like nothing I've actually seen before in this wide world
& naked exhaust of artificial appetites—white,
because there's no chlorophyll in the fern yet
to turn the sunlight into sugar (food)—seen,
because there had to be something absolutely unique
& utterly unknown for me to discover today. Otherwise,
I wouldn't have thrown myself down onto all fours just now
in a pantomime of praying for this,
perhaps this anemia belongs to me.
Perhaps I belong to this sickle, its tip
like a tiny spear of white asparagus.
Perhaps this creature shall serve my voice
out of last month's dead leaves.
Isn't that the meaning of this missing green?
That the fern merely reaches into the sunlight?
That it has run right through me to the Darwin Point
on my left ear, that if the forest had a pulse,

it would be felt? This single stitch
in the signature of the forest floor
has been grafted up out of the quiet sobbing
where the underground stream surfaces,
where the fern has reached the end of its little albino thread
only to be wound back up
out of the decomposing leaves by the Fates
who live under the forest.

By the double helix

I shall unspool this song
as it hardens off & the leaves all green up
& the stem gets woody,
the leaves which, before my conversion, just now,
appeared to have been made out of plastics but all at once,
the spell speaks for itself in the rotting
to my blind, my weeping palps:
Virginia, Cinnamon or Chain Fern; the light's signature-
my perfect stranger, inverted root, my flash companion-is binding:
no matter how the underground stream cleanse us of this
to emerge & strike my eye (is blinding),
in a transparent flame,

I was little more than a loop
in the deciduous wallpaper
before this white fern caught my eye,
something for the Pileated Woodpecker
to beat its wings & scream at as I walked past her nest.
But I am still now.

I too have surfaced like the buried stream
I've been following all morning from draw to blind draw.
All morning the hemlocks have been holding their breath but now
they actually whisper it, letting go—
There's too much life here—you can see it in the green hairs
of the creekbed stones, as debt is a capital
& deficit is a flow, which is why the Kingfisher, its cry
like a drain, unclogging,

fishes in vain along this bend in the creek.
It's the same reason you come here to the Ivy Creek Natural Area,
morning after morning, in a runoff of silt,
the very sediment from the strip malls on Rt. 29
that has clogged the reservoir at your feet down below:
you are the foot of Whispering Hemlocks bedroom community—
or was it the Whispering Pines? You are the footprint thereof.
Go to sleep you little baby.
Go to sleep you little babe.
Climb the corkscrew stairwell until you doubly disappear
inside of last month's leaves, inside of your mother,
where you spent a sad little twelvemonth (the hemlocks
fall still once again) for it's all the same to them.
& because it stands at the center of the forest's dark to tremble
like a tiny drum,
I'm the forest's tiny, labyrinthine ear.
Which brings me to this translucent creature.
What tenderness made thee underneath the light?
Waiting for the right balance of heat & light
to pop up,
etiolated lobe, larval sac of lightless albumen
fashioned into a tendril, or the single link
of a melting chain that binds me here to forest floor
waiting for the perfect balance
but it's me who throws the balance off.
No matter how needlessly the Kingfisher hunts
this elbow of the creek,
there aren't any fingerling here, starveling, because of us.
No matter how this faint creature makes me want to negate myself therefore,
you're my only glyph,
& we can't go from silt to sylph because right here,
pressed down to the floor, listening, out on my ear,
though I might breathe the liquid sunlight
the way Carthage Leaves breathe their decomposition
in a small sowing at forest floor,

it has me by the Darwin Point to ask:
Why do you uncurl like this out of the dead
like the ear of a ghostly, emptied form,
blanched star,
pale complexion of a Caddis Fly larva,
once the bark-like outer strips have been peeled away,
why do you wriggles in the light like something a Rainbow Trout might feed on,
it might ask me back,
if these currents of light were water
& there weren't too much life in the creek
that splashes away at the inside of my ear,
once the water has carried me away?
Shall I disguise myself in bark-like exfoliations
& peel it (steal away) finally gasping up into the light?
Move me in a still upstream current nonetheless
if the sunlight should provide: finally, urge me up
to feed the rainbow, nose against me
because I kneel here on this slight swelling of the ground
& nod—

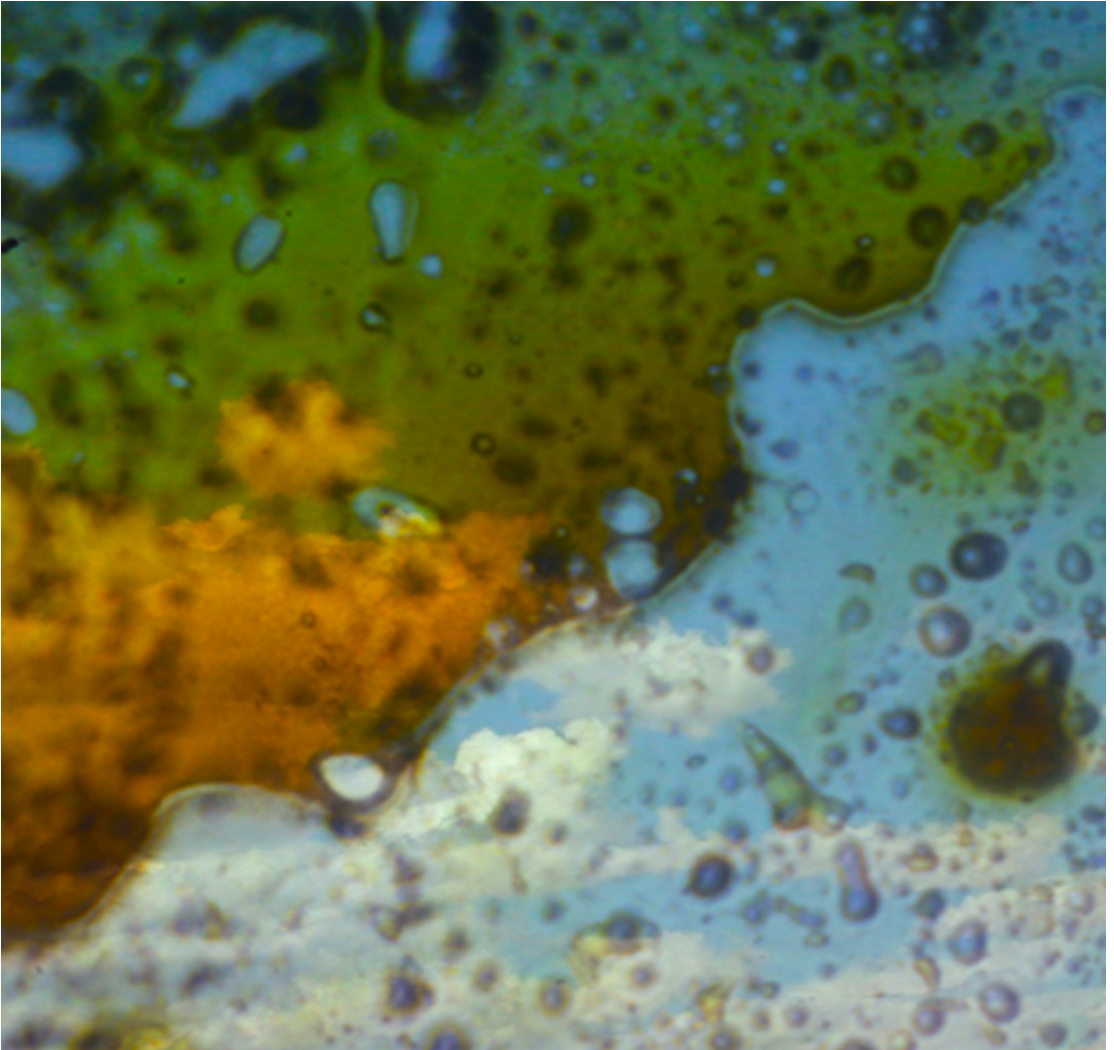
Why is this fern not green?

Because something has fed me pale.

Because I am bright & blind.

Section III

Jonathan Skinner, editor



Kristen Baumliér

Sky / Crude Oil (opposite)

Offshore: Poetics, Catastrophe, Peak Oil

The following dossier gathers work by poets and artists responding to the 2010 BP offshore oil drilling catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico, a year after the blowout of the Macondo deepwater well. Acting, reflecting, expressing, analyzing, documenting, lamenting, admonishing, corresponding, cursing, praising—in poem, song, essay, letter, note, exercise, manifesto, report, interview, artwork, video, dialogue, performance—these poets deploy a range of genres.

Several of the pieces challenge the imagination of dialogue, between citizens and their elected representatives to government, such as it is, in present day America. And they reimagine challenge, as demanding multiple, venue-crashing acts. Poets carry poems into the offices of elected representatives. They speak of HR 501: Implementing the Recommendations of the BP Oil Spill Commission Act at poetry readings. And they introduce the scene of writing—acrostic, anagram, dialogue, collage, appropriation, (Soma)tic, lang/scape, assemblage, graph, concrete, verse-essay, word-count—to pre-scripted environments. These forms take on the decidedly “unpoetic” matter of addiction to fossil fuels, and some of its ghastly consequences.

Some of these works do their best to contaminate the materials of the oil catastrophe with non-consumable language. (Non-consumable sometimes means awkwardly astride audience, in the wrong place at the right time.) They remember urgency and horror long after urgency and horror have been dispersed through a proprietary blend of chemicals. Some even carry the signature in their nervous systems. They apply themselves specifically, strategically, with unspecified results—in a variety of modes: journalistic, confessional, playful, exploratory, collaborative, situationist, minimalist, conceptual, flarfy, dreamlike. The dossier does not propose to “make a difference”; in fact, several of the writers question the obscenity of art’s claiming importance from catastrophe. (In an era when our “clean coal” President can invoke Earth Day, and point to a “greening” of the military, to announce expanded offshore drilling, we also might be extra vigilant about the tension between words and facts.) 1 But then the work proposes and discusses what might take art’s place. In times of democracy private life is so active and agitated, so full of desires and labor, that each individual has scarcely any leisure or energy left for political life. ... the increasing

love of well-being and the shifting character of property make democratic peoples afraid of material disturbance (De Tocqueville, p. 671).

When the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling released its January 2011 Report to the President (<http://www.oilspillcommission.gov/final-report>), a 400-page, nonpartisan document that includes, along with much else, succinct recommendations for bringing offshore oil and gas drilling under better regulatory control (e.g. tougher rules on equipment, better financing for regulators, higher liability cap, more scientific consultation, 80 percent of penalties for wetlands restoration); when Congressional Representative Ed Markey (D – MA) introduced HR 501: Implementing the Recommendations of the BP Oil Spill Commission Act to the House shortly thereafter; and when news of Markey’s bill did not even make the first page of a Google search, nor did President Obama’s State of the Union speech mention the oil disaster, I decided it was time to assemble this dossier.

No matter where blame ultimately gets laid, the fact is that the new, extreme venture of deepwater drilling (up to 10,000 feet to the seafloor, plus 20,000 more feet of well depth) takes the industry outside its comfort zone:

Well shut-in pressures can surpass 10,000 pounds per square inch. Bottom-hole temperatures can exceed 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Salt- and tar-zone formations can be problematic. The sandstone reservoirs are tightly packed, and ensuring hydrocarbon flow through risers and pipelines can be difficult. ... Risers connecting a drilling vessel to the blowout preventer on the seafloor have to be greatly lengthened, and they are exposed to strong ocean currents encountered in the central Gulf (p. 51).

With such extreme risk we pay, far more than the price of gas, the toll of addiction to oil. (The language of supply side “addiction” obscures Washington’s addiction to corporate money, and the heaviest price, till now, paid by the peoples and environments of the Middle East. One might speak of Iraq and Afghanistan together as the mother of all “oil spills,” and the figure would only be partial. Not to speak of Nigeria, Ecuador, Canada.) Last month President Obama lifted the temporary moratorium placed on deepwater drilling, in the wake of Deepwater Horizon. Does our silence sanction a “return to normal”? Will we stand by while the media, politicians, and other officials, continue to refer to five million barrels of oil (plus eighteen thousand barrels of dispersant) leaked or sprayed into the Gulf

of Mexico as a “spill”? At the very least, we might raise our voices to protest the abuse of language.

The website About.gov suggests that, “visiting your Members of Congress, or their staff, face-to-face is the most effective way to actually influence them” (apart from lavish campaign donations, evidently). The most concise set of instructions I could find, on the Internet, for visiting your congressperson appeared to be a pamphlet from HLDA (Home School Legal Defense Association), helpfully suggesting that “Men should always wear a coat and tie. Ladies should wear modest dresses, skirts, or a pantsuit.” I asked nearly a hundred poets if they had written, or were thinking of writing, work on the BP Gulf of Mexico drilling catastrophe, and, if so, whether they would be willing to make an appointment with their congressional representative, to read a poem, have a conversation and document the exchange.

One of the poets (and there were many) who declined my assignment—admittedly issued on very short notice—sent me a link to Reed Estabrook’s “Gifting Congress” project, “In God We Trust”: <http://www.reedestabrook.net/gifting.html>. In 2002, Estabrook sent each Member of the 107th Congress a print from a series of photographs exploring his ironic architectural observation “that the principal instrument of corruption and undue influence, the ‘greenback,’ bears upon it the images of those same institutions that it subverts.” Estabrook’s project “grew out of the tax rebate issue. As a middle-class individual, I thought that there were many more important things that government could do with my \$300 than send it back to me.” Surely there are better things that writers can do with their time than send their poetry to Congress. The campaign for campaign finance reform smolders on. In isolation, Estabrook’s action, like some of the actions documented here, might seem pointless exercises, verging on the political prank. But if every poet and artist in America paid a visit to Congress, we might begin to change the language.

Is representational politics all theater? Do politicians pronounce “my constituents” with an inevitable crocodile tear, tongue in cheek, or mock deference? Perhaps: American democracy may be the biggest “as if” in town, which could be plenty enough for what remains of the middle class. Does such skepticism cede vital ground to those who continue to engage the “as if”? Nothing loves a vacuum like a lobbyist. What if we clogged the halls of Congress with our bodies, filled the channels of communication with our poetry chatter? Could we make ourselves obnoxious enough to the corporate lobby? Perhaps. Could more of the

smarty pants crowd be persuaded to take some time out from honing their critical chops to assume a part or two? One contributor notes how her activism inspired a Congressional Representative to call an Occidental Petroleum lobbyist to her office to face a Colombian indigenous U'wa leader. Another concludes that "Democracy is a full-time job."

Yet even to the self-promotional stance that has become so ingrained in American poetry, it must make sense for the arts to be made visible, present, counted. Some contributors seemed hesitant to exploit the catastrophe as a means of promoting their art. Others worried about assuming the role of "a poet-prankster who would be not only easily dismissed but also would be reinforcing stereotypes about left-wing artists and 'environmental wackos.'" Engaging poetic and artistic reframings are bound to add layers to, and complicate, the legislator's world view, however, especially when soldered in the glue of personal contact. Such experiments bank, admittedly, on a kind of Pascalian wager: it is hard to imagine what harm could come from the exchange, easier to bet on something emerging from the cross-contamination. Yet easiest of all is to imagine the harm that might come from not communicating.

Why do poets (yours truly included) who would happily stand up before a room full of strangers and read their most intimate verse shrink from sharing work with their congresspersons? Or consider that poets might hesitate out of scorn rather than fear: yet it is hard to imagine them turning down an invitation to read and discuss their poetry on television. It is enough to make one wonder if any vestige of "public address" remains in the language of poetry. Theorists like Henri Lefebvre have argued that the production of space is intimately tied to the production of social power. The democratic, social revolutions of the past two centuries, it could be argued, emerged alongside new kinds of public space. No new order, says Lefebvre, can be produced without the production of new spaces. Is the withering of American democracy tied to the disappearance of these public spaces in the past quarter century? What happens to democracy when the places and occasions for unscripted, face-to-face encounter with fellow citizens, whose opinions one doesn't necessarily "like," disappear? Have these spaces disappeared? Or are they merely underused? Can we send poets to map them again with the sonar of their art? Perhaps to reactivate them ...

Now is not the time to be cool. As one of the contributors urges, "Please be embarrassed. Please." Another calls for "clumsy enactments." This gathering of writings probably is a

bit too elegant, but it's a good start. You will find a lot of grief here, a pitch of crisis that may or may not be well-placed—one might argue that industrial agricultural runoff, and diking and channeling of the Mississippi floodplains, are doing more damage to the Gulf of Mexico than oil drilling, or that, from the standpoint of climate change, oil in the water is better than carbon in the atmosphere (whose devastation of the oceans through acidification will be vastly more catastrophic). But the effort to remember, to think and feel through the catastrophe a year into it, to engage outside the heat of media attention, in the darkness where the ongoing ecological and social consequences are playing out, gestures at an environmental poetics located in the mundane infrastructural, political, communicative dimension of the everyday, rather than in the fantastic realms of those twins of the environmental imagination, pastoral Eden and apocalyptic end times. This kind of inconvenient and clumsy blundering into mundane affairs is bound to annoy the environmental war machines, who, by way of a perverse interpretation of First Amendment rights, are able to disguise themselves as everyday citizens merely through incorporation. Their impunity is predicated on our looking the other way.

Editors Heidi Lynn Staples and Amy King forged a path with their monumental, and minutely varied, online gathering of Poets for Living Waters: <http://poetsgulfcoast.wordpress.com/>. This collection is in no way meant to “improve” on their effort. Rather, the formula of poem plus statement—which works surprisingly well with Poets for Living Waters—has been extended here. (Not all of the entries include both elements, nor do they conform to any simple, bounded notion of what might be considered a “poem,” and what a “statement.”) I suspect the formula worked with Poets for Living Waters largely thanks to the acumen of the editors. And it really does work well: “topic” aside, on the level of readability, innovation, engagement, I would venture to call Poets for Living Waters the best poetry anthology of 2010. Please do read it.

Yet the method is part of the topic: working the ecotone between prose and poetry is as much a part of the ecopoetics of these anthologies as their thematic focus. One also senses that the gravity of the disaster, and the ethical questions around the value of writing in the face of it, provoke contributors to particularly thoughtful response, and to submitting some of their best work. Here is writing that projects and reflects within the same space, revealing multiple diamond-like facets of thought, feeling and language, engaged with historical particulars. The statements are not declarations of ecopolitical correctness, nor signatures on a roll call. Few of these writers assume a stance of righteous indignation or

Manichean indictment. While indebted to the struggles of the era that gave us Earth Day, along with several key environmental legislative acts, this work differs markedly from the protest poetry of the 1960s.

How much of the diamond-focus evident in *Poets for Living Waters* was hardened, I wondered, in the heat of crisis? In the slow-motion moment of powerlessness, just after losing one's grip, one lives an odd eon, suspended between what one (we) might have done, and the unfolding consequences. Can we learn to maintain this suspension, care and readiness, in peacetime? How ironic that the qualities needed to forestall disaster only emerge with the disaster itself. Many of us, especially those not on the physical site, knew our attention would be most critical a year or more down the road. Not in the heat of it. The slow-motion moment has now taken the shape of a mighty wave pulverizing towns and swamping nuclear reactors along Japan's northeast coast. Of a sublethal dose of partial news about melting reactor cores and unspecified radiation levels. Of a coordinated assault on labor, arts, women's rights, environmental laws. Of an expanded, ongoing war in the Middle East. Deepwater seems ages ago; the disaster fatigue is palpable.

It is my hope that, in returning to the *Deepwater Horizon* a year later, and in aspiring to realize even a fraction of the editorial acumen and scope of *Poets for Living Waters*, this gathering does much more than replay the disaster. *Offshore: Poetics, Catastrophe, Peak Oil* is far from a comprehensive or "representative" gathering. Who I asked, and who finally was able to participate, have much more to do with occasional contingencies than with a thorough survey of the field. At first I asked poets who were traveling to the 2011 AWP (Associated Writers and Writing Programs) gathering held in Washington, D.C.—in the hopes that they might arrange a meeting with their congressional representatives in Washington. I later expanded the list to poets I thought likely to pursue such an assignment, finally opening the feature to other forms of activism. I gave very short notice, and some poets quite reasonably declined on that basis alone. Nevertheless, in the end I was overwhelmed with submissions. What I initially expected to be a 40-page feature has significantly expanded its scope. My thanks go out to all the contributors, especially to those who helped to enlarge and enrich the collection by suggesting other participants. I also would like to thank the artists, who have thrown their lot in with what remains, in the end, a writerly group.

I suspect that every writer working today has something to contribute to the vexed question

of the human work on planet Earth. Those contributions will take multiple directions; over the long haul, the work of poets and artists, as “antennae of the race,” must entail new ways of conceptualizing our humanity, of feeling, thinking, creating new kinds of planetary being. Even if we believe, deep down, that some kind of large-scale collapse is inevitable, then let us cultivate the kinds of mind that will be of use to survivors.

In the meantime, one vital compass point remains the “activist” work of ecopoetics. Let the following collection serve as an initial, modest, highly partial blueprint, offering some models for what any of us might attempt—with explorations of what is or is not possible, reflections on dead-ends, roads not taken, and unexpected outcomes. The variety of genres, forms, modes speaks to some of the diversity integral to the “eco” of ecopoetics—but these poets and artists also explore the innovation that lies not so much in what one does to language as in where one does one’s language. Thus it also remains my hope, implicit in my initial call for work, in the form of a civic “assignment,” that this work be accessible, and of interest to a wider range of readers than the “arts,” so-called, are accustomed to addressing. Please share widely!

Jen Hofer & Hillary Mushkin

Deep Horizon, Deep Water

Decorative concrete can look almost lacy; such is the seeming bank building (Citibank and Los Angeles National Bank are the only signs available to the eye) on Sunset Boulevard in Echo Park, nestled between the Brite Spot diner and the pedestrian and vehicular bridge over Glendale Boulevard. Representative Xavier Becerra's field office is on the 8th floor—with no sign, banner, or other invitation into representative democracy and no possibility of foot traffic, we wondered how folks know he's there. We met with Nicolas Rodriquez (son of Central Valley farm workers), one of Becerra's local field deputies; the Representative is in Washington, D.C. this week. Nicolas works specifically on energy and the environment and was both knowledgeable and personable. He explained the lack of public presence for Becerra on a building where he's rented offices for fifteen years by noting that the building is owned by The Dream Center, a nearby evangelical church.

After making an appointment with our Representative's representative online, we wrote him the following note:

Hi Nicolas:

I'm writing you together with my collaborator, artist Hillary Mushkin. Thanks for scheduling a meeting with us; we appreciate the opportunity to talk with you, and hopefully make our ideas known to Representative Becerra.

I think I mentioned on the phone that I'm a poet. Hillary and I have been working collaboratively for a few years, making works that engage contemporary political issues and explore ways to use art and writing as tools for developing new frameworks for thinking and action. We're especially interested in the intersections of art-making and public practice. We're currently doing a project about offshore drilling, on the occasion of the publication of the report to the president titled "Deepwater: The Gulf Oil Disaster and the Future of Offshore Drilling." We want to share some work with you—a brief text-image piece that addresses both the Gulf of Mexico and more local oil-related concerns regarding oil company regulation.

We recognize that the language of poetry and art and the language of legislation don't often intersect. At the same time, we believe that cultural work helps us to conceive and understand the world differently, and is thus central to the work of creating change. Here's a bit of the thinking behind this project, from the call for poems written by Jonathan Skinner, editor of the journal *ecopoetics*:

“Faced with the amnesia of the media cycle, poetry can mark a more enduring attention. Who remembers, in all its intensity, the environmental horror of the 2010 BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico? (Some of us still refuse to call it a ‘spill.’)”

Poetry and art are powerful tools of witness and critique. We're curious to know your thoughts on our work. Our aim here is less to convince you to convince Representative Becerra to do this or that thing, but rather to explore the possibilities for talking about some of these issues on different terms, using different words, attending to different images. Again, we're grateful for your time, and look forward to seeing you on Monday.
Bests,

Jen Hofer and Hillary Mushkin

The piece we made consists of various horizons, clusters and layers of sediment, as we explained to Nico after we read aloud to him. It was weird to read aloud in a fairly antiseptic carpeted office to just one entirely captive audience member who possibly has no interest whatsoever in poetry (though truth be told he did seem genuinely interested), but it was moving to look out the window at the familiar Los Angeles horizonscape and urban topography, which in many ways mirror the horizon lines and lines of thought in our piece, as the language of channelization, engineering, drilling, natural habitats and the built environment filled the room.

Sunset Boulevard heading East, from the 8th floor of a building at Sunset and Glendale/
Park, Echo Park, Los Angeles



Sunset Boulevard heading East, from the 8th floor of a building at Sunset and Glendale/
Park, Echo Park, Los Angeles

There was a pleasing moment of silence after the poem, and then a fairly lively exchange for more than an hour. Our conversation touched on many ideas, from the environmental conditions that made the Gulf of Mexico a delicate ecosystem long before the Deepwater Horizon disaster, to Representative Becerra's views on why the Markey bill did not go far enough as a response to that disaster and the efforts he's making to encourage others in Congress to focus on alternative energy sources, to urban cycling in Los Angeles, to Nico's impassioned arguments for why it is so important for constituents to communicate with their elected representatives. In his view, "we just hear the voices of our constituents and react to them" though he did acknowledge that the voice of money is perhaps louder than even the loudest constituents' voices.

The heart of our discussion was perhaps this last area: questions of modes of communication, how to be heard and by whom and toward what ends, and strategies for empowering

a range of voices in concrete ways to effect change in local, national and international communities. Nico tended to think about communication, consciousness and change in terms of economic models: how do you sell your message in order to get something done (whether “something” is the writing or passage of a bill, or a sea-change in consciousness)? From his perspective, “this is a brass tacks game.” It’s certainly easy to see how a person working within the political system might need to think that way; poetry and art-making, however, are perhaps less about brass tacks, and more about contemplating the hands that constructed the tacks, where the brass came from, and how we might use tacks, brass, and hands to build something new rather than to seal our fates in a familiar coffin.

Nico acknowledged the insularity of the language of politics, too often a closed system not unlike the insular circulations of the languages of poetry and art. He was acutely aware of the strategic importance of how a congressional representative communicates, and seemed to encourage us to continue to speak in ways a politician may not be able to access. Nico told us that representatives want to hear from their constituents, and repeatedly said things like “it’s our job to serve the more than 600,000 constituents in our district.” He suggested that a project like this one opens lines of communication between art, poetry and politics, becoming a viable form of activism. Nico was pretty excited about our piece and even though we weren’t happy at all with Kinko’s late-night printing job and promised to bring him a cleaner, corrected copy, he insisted on keeping this version as well. Other than the view, the room where we met was astonishingly nondescript so we took our commemorative photo beneath the one piece of art in the space, a painting by East Los Angeles artist Roberto Gutiérrez.

March 15, 2011

Los Angeles, CA

CAConrad

(Soma)tic Poetry Exercise & Resulting Poem

OIL THIS WAR!

— for Jonathan Skinner

How is it where you live? If there are no wealthy people and/or the poor are nurtured and protected, then maybe this exercise is not for you? I have been littering in wealthy neighborhoods with JOYFUL PROTEST for some time now! It is exciting to SEE “refuse” in the open, not hidden in landfills, if only for a moment. Here in Philadelphia taxes pay for uniformed workers to clean prosperous neighborhoods of cigarette butts, cans and wrappers all day, each day, while completely ignoring working class and poor communities. Philadelphia public school students have a 51 percent dropout rate, and 25 percent of the city’s population lives below the poverty line (That’s 1 in 4 people THAT’S 1 IN 4 PEOPLE!). The police patrol and protect the rich while they INFAMOUSLY threaten, beat and rob the poor (just ask Philadelphia Daily Newsreporters Barbara Laker & Wendy Ruderman). WE MUST RESIST! WE MUST BE RESISTANCE! Take initial notes on the class structure of where you live.

Save your “garbage” for a week, packaging, and containers, especially plastics. Take notes about each item, tracing its origin of production from label information or the manufacturer’s website. Find other companies they work with, for instance a candy bar needs chocolate from South America, and plastics, inks, and glue for wrappers. Trace on a map the distance each item needs to travel to the candy bar factory, then from the factory to your city. Calculate gasoline and oil consumption per mile. And consider that plastics are petroleum byproducts. And not just the packaging, but in fact many goods themselves are made from oil: hand lotion, shoes, ballpoint pens, disposable diapers, glue, rubbing alcohol, soda and milk jugs, credit cards, nail polish, ink, crayons, and more. Much of the modern world IS oil. Toys, televisions, telephones, microchips, luggage, cars, condoms, it’s in the air, water, soil, food, IT’S IN OUR BODIES! Take notes about oil, take notes about your discovery of oil consumption in ways you had never considered or realized. After immersing yourself in this information STOP! Then write nonstop for 30 minutes, WHATEVER comes to mind, just write! Let it flow! THIS is where the best language for our poems will arise!

Real change needs creativity and action! Using a black marker write suggestive notes on your “garbage.” Littering in wealthy neighborhoods is precarious but gratifying! Just IMAGINE them reading your used tampon marked US WAR! and puzzling over the message. Make the rich THINK! Or at least make their children think! OIL OIL EVERYWHERE! Write on old shoes, sandwich wrappers, cans, bags, snotty tissues, used condoms, THIS OIL WAR! On an empty bottle of hand lotion OIL THIS WAR! On a cereal box THIS FAGGOT WORLD VICTORIOUS! On a soda bottle YOUR SISSY CHILDREN SAVE THE WORLD FROM YOU! As citizens it is our duty to communicate the temperature of SUFFERING! Littering helps us



SEE our planet's transmuted elements before they're swept into trucks and hauled to the dump, far, far away, leaking toxins into the water and soil. A tidy sidewalk does NOT EQUAL thoughtful, mindful citizenry! CITIZENS OF THE WORLD RISE UP AND FILL THE STREETS OF THE AFFLUENT WITH YOUR SHIT AND "GARBAGE" TODAY! Let them SMELL and READ the products of THEIR WARS! Write on your “garbage,” WE DEMAND A PLANET SAFE FOR ANIMALS AND OTHER HUMANS! Take notes about your littering excursions.

Take notes about the neighborhoods you visit with your deposits. Take notes, take MANY notes, then STOP! Write for 30 minutes on autopilot. Always remember to carry your notes with you wherever you go to pull and wrench your poem into existence.

Duck Call for Dead Ducks

with daffodil center
he walks like he's
never tasted
his own cum
a window for
dangling
mentors above
their death
UNFAIRRRR
screamed
back up the
building
the more
inequitable the
more potent
the smell
there will
be their
will to
consider
planting
watering nurturing
dead seeds without
knowing it
tip of
cigarette
reworks
the table
trees we
did not cut
a kind of
legacy

Ian Demsky

Deepwater Horizon: A Documentary Poem

As I watched the Deepwater Horizon disaster unfold last summer, I was furious—not because tens of millions of gallons of oil were spewing into the Gulf of Mexico, not because B.P. was obfuscating, not because our leaders had failed us and continued to fail us, but because it seemed to be happening completely out of context.

Here was one of the worst oil disasters in history of the world, breathlessly covered round the clock on cable news, and yet it failed to have an impact on how we as a culture think about our relationship to oil.

The real problem, as Bill McKibben pointed out, is that we had to go out in the ocean and drill down thousands of feet using complex, expensive and dangerous techniques to capture those 100 million barrels of oil—which is only enough to keep the U.S. supplied for five days.

Our economy runs on oil. Without oil, there is no economy—no growth, no dividends, no iPad in every pot. Our leaders tell us that the American way of life is not negotiable, but in a game of chicken, the geological end of cheap, easy-to-get oil is going to win.

And despite groovy eco-promises, there's no energy source on the horizon that can provide the same return on energy investment, the same scalability, the same portability that we get from oil.

Like everyone else who's watched *End of Suburbia* or read Derrick Jensen's *Endgame*, waking up to this precariousness threw me into a tangle of contradictions. Yes, I want to liberate myself from this culture of destruction, but a few stalwart off-the-gridders notwithstanding, we can't all just secede from modern industrial culture.

Still, political action seems equally fraught. I don't see us moving the needle on the issues that really matter without a broad cultural shift in how we see the world.

It was Emerson who said that the purpose of art "is to afford us a platform whence we may command a view of our present life, a purchase by which we may move it." For me, this is where poetry comes in.

In response to the oil disaster, I wrote a book-length documentary poem that used the Deepwater catastrophe as a springboard into larger environmental and energy issues.

Each of its 192 pieces was taken directly from a primary source—a news report, a scientific paper, a government report, a politician’s speech.

I took inspiration from other poets working in the documentary mode: C.D. Wright, Mark Nowak, Martha Collins, Philip Metres, H.L. Hix and Ernesto Cardenal. Perhaps my greatest influence was Heimrad Bäcker’s *Transcript*, which confronts the Holocaust through the bureaucratic effluvium of the Reich—train schedules, medical charts, telephone records.

Here the poet serves as editor, allowing these fragments to speak beyond their original context and to reveal what J.G. Ballard called the “invisible literatures” of society.

When it comes to our relationship to energy and to the planet, the problem is not a lack of information, but an absence of myth, a failure of those fact-based understandings to work their tendrils into our collective dreams.

Kenneth Goldsmith, whose 800-page book *Day* consists of a retyped New York Times, sums it up this way, “The simple act of moving information from one place to another today constitutes a significant cultural act in and of itself ... [F]aced with an unprecedented amount of available text, the problem is not needing to write more of it; instead we must learn to negotiate the vast quantity that exists.”

By recontextualizing these fragments into a poem, I’m asking the reader to confront them differently than when they reside in a news article with a 24-hour shelf life or lay buried in a government report. But more importantly, I’m asking for the pieces to be confronted. The artistry, as I see it, lies in editorial selection, pacing, voice, dialogue between the fragments, and even in their shape on the page.

Yes, it’s a political poem, but there’s no such thing as an apolitical poem. It’s clear that our way of life is destroying the planet—poisoning the air, the water and the land that sustains all life. If this understanding doesn’t show up in our poetry, we might well ask what poetry is good for.

The following pages present some excerpts from *deepwaterhorizon*: a documentary poem.

* * *

350

387

780

965

The numbers refer to atmospheric concentration of CO₂ by volume.

350 is a threshold proposed by environmental scientists in the journal *Nature*: “Transgressing [this boundary] will increase the risk of irreversible climate change, such as the loss of major ice sheets, accelerated sea-level rise and abrupt shifts in forest and agricultural systems.” (Emphasis mine.)

387 was the current concentration at the time of the article’s publication in September, 2009. (As of June 17, 2010, it was up to 392.94, according to www.350.org.) <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v461/n7263/full/461472a.html>

780 is the concentration that would be arrived at by 2100 if all the confirmed proposals from the 2009 U.N. Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen were put into place, according to a December 2009 simulation by Climate Interactive, a consortium from M.I.T. and elsewhere.

965 is the concentration that would be arrived at by 2100 by a business as usual approach. <http://climateinteractive.org/scoreboard/scoreboard-science-and-data/>

* * *

There are no ... limits to the carrying capacity of the earth that are likely to bind at any time in the foreseeable future. There isn't a risk of an apocalypse due to global warming or anything else. The idea that we should put limits on growth because of some natural limit, is a profound error and one that, were it ever to prove influential, would have staggering social costs.

Chief World Bank Economist Lawrence Summers in an interview with Australian journalist Kirsten Garrett at the World Bank's 1991 meeting in Bangkok, quoted in Susan George and Fabrizio Sabelli, *Faith and Credit: the World Bank's Secular Empire*, Westview Press: 1994, p. 109. (Ellipsis in original.) Summers later served as director of the White House's National Economic Council under President Barack Obama.

* * *

e) Promises that property, ecology, or anything else will be restored to normal.

Instructions on what not to say to the media after a spill according to an appendix regarding making public statements in BP's "Regional Oil Spill Response Plan," Dec. 1, 2000, p. 530. The full 583-page document can be found at: <http://info.publicintelligence.net/BPGoMspillresponseplan.pdf>

* * *

Whatever reason we cite, however,
the alleged unique importance of water
disappears upon analysis.

Terry Anderson and Pamela Snyder, *Water Markets: Priming the Invisible Pump*, Cato
Institute: 1997, p. 8.

* * *

In privacy,
they give birth,
not to children
as we like to think
of them, but to things
we could only describe
as octopuses, apples, turtles,
and other things in our experience.

Testimony of Lijon Eknilang of the Marshall Islands before the International County of
Justice in The Hague, November 14, 1995 in *Legality of the Use by a State of Nuclear
Weapons in Armed Conflict* (Request for Advisory Opinion Submitted by the World
Health Organization) and in *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons* (Request
for Advisory Opinion Submitted by the General Assembly of the United Nations). [http://
www.nuclearweaponslaw.com/Rongelap.doc](http://www.nuclearweaponslaw.com/Rongelap.doc)

Diane DiPrima

350

impenetrable as the air we will be
left with, soon the air will be
impenetrable as the ground. The basis or
foundation call it. we think what's under
our feet dependable. we are too eager

to try it, stand on it, “stand
up, stand up for your rights” we
sang not long ago. now the ground
melts and shifts, it won't support us,
support our weight. watch earth become mud
spherical mudslide slithering over magma core, see
the green ice flicker, shrink and disappear.
Wish you were here. I do so
wish dodo bird was here, wish orangutan
red man of alchemy was here to
stay, like our love, wish the taiga,
the Siberian tiger, Great Barrier reef and
all the rest of it would hang
around, like those brave desperate warriors of
New Zealand. What is to be done?
as Lenin asked. Image and body can
wake us up—as no number will.
Pitch in. Read poems at rallies. Stand
guard over plover eggs at Daytona Beach.
I keep thinking of sunrise over Greenland
from a plane. I keep thinking of
the aurora borealis. how it fits the
palm of my hand like the spotted
owl. Blue butterflies on San Bruno Mountain.

Anything at all is reason enough to
act. Eyes of your grandchild or some
ten-year-old you never met in the ghetto.
No difference. No way to know either
of them. No way to turn away.
AND DO WHAT? YOU GOT AN IDEA?
Three hundred and fifty parts per million
of what? We can't see them, can't
touch them, don't have any idea of
what to do with them. They don't
bare their teeth in my ancient limbic
brain. Or what you call the world's
information bloodstream. I do know no number
will bring us together, get us moving.
Take home a baby rhino. Undam the
Yellow River. Stop burning rainforests for food.
Dream. Pray to the elements the five
Great Mothers, our universe. Ask more questions.
Build an ice floe for a family
of polar bears. Unplug one day a
week: stay home, tell stories, make love ...

NOTE: I wrote 350 in one sitting for Rebecca Solnit when she asked for something for the launch of www.350.org. I don't often write poems by request, so I had to find a way to make it happen. Plus there was another poetic problem: how to make the "fact" 350 is named for come alive in the reader's mind. In my mind.

First, I invented a poetic form which would encompass the number "350": I decided on 10 stanzas, 5 lines in each stanza, 7 words per line. This "equals" 350 words, and thus covers the "theme". Then, holding the real meaning and intent of that theme in mind, I wrote the poem by simply filling in the form. Scientific "facts" make for lousy poems—that in itself is part of what the poem "says". To cause people to ACT on a scientific fact you need to turn it into image, and to move the poem toward some "acts" of the imagination—some of them things that one could actually DO in allegedly "real" life.



Kristen Baumliér, Carboniferous Forest / Crude Oil

Alison Pelegrin

Lamenting the Pelican

Plague of pitch black smoke, Louisiana sweet crude shape-shifting in the currents—as the reality of BP’s oil spill became apparent, it began to feel familiar, the sensation that registers in my gut while a disaster churns offshore on its way to assault the Gulf Coast. As with hurricanes, the question was never if; it was when, and exactly where. When exactly will life be fractured by another before-and-after bookmark? Everything leading up to the spill: before. The explosion and the the unstoppable pulse of oil: after. In the days following BP’s oil spill I was obsessed with the news. It was on TV while we ate breakfast, on every page in the newspaper, in news updates on my phone, on local radio in the car. Those voices were the worst: people calling in, crying over their livelihoods as the fishing grounds were closed, suggesting all kinds of crazy fixes to soak up oil—shave your dog and use the hair as a sort of sponge. Instead of boom, use mash from sugarcane to stop it from coming inland. I knew my sons were listening when they asked me how many bags of hair I thought our dog could contribute.

Once the oil hit Grand Isle it soaked pelicans and shore birds; the pictures were soul-crushing. The birds looked to have been dipped in cake batter—devil’s food cake. They were upside down in the surf, feet sticking up like a cartoon of death; one image showed an oiled pelican trying to fly—wings raised, feathers matted with oil, gullet indignantly open. I imagined it filled with oil. The morning these pictures ran in *The Times Picayune*, I didn’t even want to keep it in the house. I was afraid the kids might see the paper, and once they did, that I wouldn’t be able to answer their questions.

I don’t remember how many nights my oldest cried for the pelicans. He had nightmares that the world was going to end. No amount of back scratching could comfort him, and frankly, I shared his feelings—what is the world coming to? How ever can we alter this course that we are on? It was in this spirit that I began to write the poem, and I finished right before our vacation to Pensacola, Florida. We did not cancel. We ate seafood and walked the beach pointing out tar balls. We couldn’t resist entering the oily water when the dolphins came close. In some photos there are workers in Hazmat suits in the background. My friend Liz volunteered with Venice Wildlife Rescue to help clean the oiled birds. After

reading my poem on the Poets for Living Waters site, she asked if she could print out a copy and post it in the break room for the volunteers, people scrubbing with toothbrushes pelicans that would probably die anyway.

I'll be reading this poem at the Louisiana State Library on April 13, 2011. Maybe after this event I'll have time enough to head to the capitol building. In the lobby the state seal is the focal point, in brass, right in the middle of the floor. The image? A pelican in her piety. I like to believe that poetry can change the world, but I wonder if anything, other than my arrest, would happen if I stood there, one foot on each of the outstretched wings and read this poem to lawmakers passing by, to Jindal, flanked by guards, coming and going in his golden elevator.

Ode to the Pelican

Brown or white, you are the goofiest of birds.
Bird of crash dives and the infinite wattle,
creature most likely to be caricatured

in blown glass, to be carved and clown-painted
in Oaxaca. Albatross of the Gulf, usherer in
of fishing boats, even the psalmist took note:

I am like a pelican of the wilderness. Oh, my soul,
if I could shape shift, it would be you, pelican,
and I'd yawp from your roomiest of throats.

Pelican, Pelegrin: on lazy tongues our names alike.
Wing man of my father as he marathoned across
Lake Pontchartrain with blood in his shoes.

Portrayed prolifically in water colors, but rarely
the topic of a tribal tattoo. Selfless Pelican,
in stained glass second only to the dove,

feeding your trinity of flightless young with shreds
of flesh and sips of your own blood. On the state flag
they've sanitized your cannibal love, Louisiana bird.

What can we do for you, pelican? Oil spoiled,
washing up on toxic beaches. Marbled eggs
unforming while pious, blackened pelicans sit.

I have been faithless. All my life I thought
you were falling—reckless, sprawled like Icarus —
until you surfaced with a fish. Blue-gloved hands

hold you kindly in a tub, flush saline in your eyes,
give your feathers a toothbrush scrub. You fight
by giving up, unwilling or unable to be saved by us.

Jack Collom

Admonition to the Ocean: “Offshore Oil” Acrostic

O how tempting is the Ocean!
F ree of the prickles & rocky scrapes that dry land exacts,
F ree with its liquids, its welcoming, flat
S ea-shape and fat, edgy waves. Of course! It’s Mom!
H ow could we forget, for even a moment, to turn to her, to
O btain warmth, the stuff of warmth, to suck the fat out of her; she
 doesn’t need it now, and—
R eally—once you get used to oil, it’s the stuff of
E verything! stuff of energy itself, it’s eternal (eventually),
 physically, mentally oil—but
O h, jerrybuilt coil moiled roil up from soil—BOIL/BROIL/ROIL, the royal
 petroleum UN-Hoyle, Foiled! But O
I
L ove Oil!

 (let’s do it again)
O kay, how tempting it is to extract from Mother all her maternal juices,
 our juices. But, Oh , , , Mamma—
I s she still alive then? How gross. How unexpected. She’s supposed to
 just lie there passively. How utterly dis-
L OYAL!

Marcella Durand

The Elegy of Eco-poetics

The poet CA Conrad recently at a talk (1) mentioned the upcoming extinction of the polar bear. Scientists are attempting to preserve polar bear sperm and eggs, and of course there are polar bears kept in captivity, but Conrad felt it was better to let it go. “Keep it wild” (I paraphrase): “Every single polar bear kept in captivity is mentally ill. They need hundreds of miles to roam—they need wilderness. We humans deserve its disappearance.”

The polar bear is not the only being about to disappear. In a rage of pre-emptive nostalgia, New Orleanians are buying up sea species about to be engulfed by a black and red tide of oil and oil dispersants.

Oyster beds
full of oil. Unpeeled white
gulf shrimp. Brown speckled
trout and pompano. Charred
meat or processed. Sausage.
Black drum and sheepshead. (2)

After the disasters of 2010—the Haiti and Chile earthquakes, the Iceland volcano, and the Gulf oil spill—it occurred to me that eco-poetics may be a form of elegy. These events are so large, their effect on us, on the world, so palpable that I wonder how to continue the discussion of ecology and poetry. Can poetry enter this unspeakable space of mourning? How to mourn that which we hardly knew? Because, after all, ecology, we hardly know ye, even though you are also us. As I said in my essay, “The Ecology of Poetry,” “Nature has changed from a perceptually exploitable Other—most easily compared to a book to be decoded by the (human) reader—to something intrinsically affected by humans. We ourselves are the wilderness destroying the very systems of which we are a part, in a role we utterly do not understand.” (3)

That is why ecopoetics to me is investigative. But it also is, as Kristin Prevallet writes in *I, Afterlife: Essay In Mourning Time*, the process of investigating a gesture: “This gesture of approach is the closest you will get to the other side.” And how much more “other” is nature? I am so very extraordinarily baffled by how we, humans, fit into it. At times it seems as though everything we touch, every desire, every process for life we have, turns nature to dust. Where indeed do we come from? But we have to speak into this mystery. Ronald Johnson, from the *The Book of the Green Man*:

I wish
for this earth, beneath,
to move, to issue some dark, meditated

syllable perhaps—
something more
than this inarticulate

warble
& seething.”

Kamau Brathwaite writes on the destruction of his land at Cow Pasture, land for which he had a vision of a learning and creative center, an area of tradition and traditional, native species:

I cannot even die here now. no strength to even burn myself upon this pasture as I want to do. As I still may. Because my love, whe else is there to go, to try to build again at 75? tho I not beggin for your sympathy—tho that good too—I askin you to LISSEN . one mo Emmerton. xcep unlike the Mighty Gabby song which sing & say far more than any prose I prose can say, me na give up. me nvva will accept unrighteousness, If this was SandlyLane wd we be treated so? again today the tractors wheel an thump. I can't accept to so unfairly go (4)

I wrote to Brathwaite after this last heartbreaking letter, asking what happened. I never heard back. Instead, silence. Where then does the elegy stop? Where does it keep the unspeakable unspoken? Poet Charles Bernstein writes after the death of his daughter Emma that he received so many cards saying “There are no words.”

The problem is not that words are inadequate but that such a terrifying turn as this leaves us speechless, is unspeakable, or let's say puts us on the border of sense and senselessness, cry and communication. For us—Susan and Felix and me—all the words we have been offered have been welcome and appreciated, as water to those in a desert, even, maybe especially, those words that begin by saying there are no words. (5)

We can't accept to so unfairly go. Lissen. We have to put language into this space and see what echoes back.

How do we stumble onto the words for the ecological disaster that is ourselves? One commenter at Huffington Post took personal blame for the oil spill, saying (again, paraphrased), "I buy plastic things. I fill my car with gasoline." We all do. We discuss how to acknowledge the web of life and how interdependent we all are. The problem is that we are too interdependent with a giant industrial system that depends on oil. It's actually amazing, and even horribly beautiful, how entwined we are in a web of electricity, in the way enormous industrial landscapes, like the New Jersey Meadowlands, are beautiful and awesome. Says Charles Olson in *Call Me Ishmael*:

We are still soft about our industries, wonder-eyed. What's important is the energy they are a clue to, the drive in the people. The things made are OK, too, some of them. But the captains of industry ain't worth the powder, etc.

Olson says the machine is the only master of space that Americans know, that it gives "trajectory." The American will is not to be free, but to overwhelm nature. Only recently, have we barely started to realize that we are overwhelming ourselves. We're now caught in our own Web.

In this moment, in this incredible new decade that has already seen in five months enormous cataclysmic ecological change, my appreciation for our terrible and glorious interrelated currents of energy has the strong and metallic taste of mourning.

Writing is already akin to mourning—we write to what is no longer there, or what was never there. Not always, but sometimes.

There is an immeasurable distance between the mind and geography that makes walking

through a landscape tenuous. Your feet may be touching the ground, but where is your mind?

—Kristin Prevallet (I, Afterlife)

Blaise Cendrars sees and mourns his severed hand in the constellation of Orion. (6) In this unknowable other we can find the solace of emotion. Dogs listen and they don't talk back. Can we learn to find consolation in the detritus of humanity—consolation in the pistons, gears and nitrogen-mixed cement? Will we turn to the species that have learned to co-exist: felines, canines, coyotes, deer, groundhogs, rats, pigeons, starlings, cockroaches? We see in their wiles and germiness a darkened mirror of ourselves—they are carnivores, predators, infectious. They arrange nature about them to keep living. The more delicate species we admire and kick the platforms out from under.

The ogre said to his daughter
Sixteen miles from this place
Is a tree
Round the tree are tigers
And bears, and scorpions
And snakes
On the top of the tree
Is a very great fat snake
On his head
Is a little cage
In the cage is a bird
And my soul is in that bird

—Jack Collom, Exchanges of Earth & Sky

Collom typically pushes eco-poetics to be of language and of what is around us—the actual, without throwing up nostalgic or sentimental (or just plain false) divisions of what is “natural” and what is “beautiful” and what is “human.” Beauty is constructed and reconstructed, not always intrinsic. But this poem, somewhat un-Collom-like, read in tandem with Conrad's point about the polar bear, posits a strangely accurate take on our situation now—our “soul” is in a vulnerable being, protected only against other wild beings by captivity. It's a nightmare mirror of what we face in trying to preserve what we're destroying, two simultaneous drives. We are domesticators, only able to abide nature if it

inhabits our domain, yet for that nature which follows our rules, we have only disdain.

Is there an ecopoetics elegy that is large enough to encompass grieving for an entire system? And where, within this elegy, is action, is the necessary and coming change?

Kristin Prevallet talks about how to move personal grief to something more universal, to move from interior to exterior. “The poem, scratched out on the surface of the page, scratches then at the surface of the world ‘outside’ of the poem” (I, Afterlife).

I’m asking a lot of questions, too many questions, maybe. But right now, I’m not feeling the answers. How much oil exactly is being pumped into the gulf? Why are we not measuring it accurately? How can we stop eating oil? How can we talk and write and throw those words into that hole in the seacrust to heal it? Or those words into the holes of oil industry exec’s minds? What in our hearts and minds and needs physical and emotional led to this moment in ecological history? How can we mourn, and question, and activate, all while also respecting the autonomy of language, letting the seemingly inessential, the unpolitical, the nondidactic in, allowing the independence of the poem, allow a space for the other to speak?

I don’t want to dominate language the way we strive to dominate nature—I want to respect the “inarticulate warble & seething. I don’t want to find order where no order is. I look to Emily Dickinson, gardener and poet, for a gesture toward how to do this.

My Life had stood—a Loaded Gun—
In Corners—till a Day
The Owner passed—identified—
And carried Me away—

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods—
And now We hunt the Doe—
And every time I speak for Him—
The Mountains straight reply—

In her poetry, she upsets the concept of “my,” ownership, dominion, over herself, over nature, over words. Can we look to Dickinson and many other revolutionary thinkers who

posited and posit less authoritarian relationships with the other, for an alternative version of being-in-nature? I wonder at Dickinson's movement between the particular and the universal. And this takes me to remembering how Ronald Johnson moved between the here-and-now and the universal, and how poetry is perhaps a chronicling of that movement between spirit and earth, that space where we as a species remain so very unresolved.

(1) Tendencies: Poetics & Practice. Curated by Tim Peterson with CAConrad, Stacy Szymaszek, and Jack Kimball, on May 6, 2010.

(2) Excerpt of an unfinished poem by the author.

(3) Originally published in *ecopoetics*, Fall 2002; 26, 2004; and in the *eco(lang)(uage (reader))*, edited by Brenda Iijima (Brooklyn: Nightboat Books, 2010).

(4) The extensive correspondence around Kamau Brathwaite's troubles with his land at CowPastor is archived on poet Tom Raworth's blog: <http://tomraworth.com/wordpress/>.

(5) "Eulogy for Emma," <http://epc.buffalo.edu/authors/bernstein/blog/archive/Emma/Eulogy.html>

(6) "Orion," translation by Ron Padgett:

It's my star
It's in the form of a hand
It's my hand gone up into the sky
During the entire war I saw Orion through a lookout slit
When the zeppelins came to bomb Paris they always came from Orion
I have it above my head today
The main mast pierces the palm of that hand which must hurt
As my amputated hand hurts me pierced as it is by a continual stabbing pain

Orifice

Shape of takes place as thus replacing
sentient at the order of an insect if most
truly alive what in place if to be
replaced about an empty/gusher pushes
against water & hydrocrystalline presence.
What is needed now is a neutrino
but even that is a replacement for
the pure positive force of fission—

the pure positive fission force to
be replaced by what is two in one
and everywhere at once—a
certain pushiness or pushing against
a certain pollution or contamination
in itself the allure or alliance of the
filthy dirty & the allure of the drive to
cover toxic chemical to create dirt
vs. soil, oil vs. air, air vs. emission,
fission force not be two-in-one & everywhere
at once—instead—chart the
spreading—the currents of filthy dirty
& toxic liquid hydrocrystal contaminate
in turn the contamination.
Hydrocrystals contaminate the contamination.

Identify the saggy soft point in a sort
of acupressure, exploit it until it unflowers
to black arc—
as the Taoist turns the wind with hand
a minor inconvenience.

Phenomenon when sound recedes
mere inconvenience
a little trouble.

It began with explosion very distantly
registered and already in doppler stage
then two or so weeks that explosion had echo

& consequence:

A gusher! A well unstoppable— stop line with unstoppable.
As line continues on and
expands into whirling
not hollow column or
column fluting at crown to
90 degree—a trumpet
of unpredictable helix
a cornucopia bringing unwanted riches

occurs again & again in statis
start over

Metal contraptive thumb upon the
 (soft point of where
 throat joins neck)
pierces & sucks—with its
appliances fully plugged
into seafloor orifice
the tongue disengages—suck motion
stalls & whirls off
& out comes blood—but
oil is not blood—
oil is not made anew, replenished

 communication most marginal
Manual/automatic or remote

switch is disengaged or nonexistent.

A sense of endlessness

A lit circle—and

conjunction of arcs and points

water vs. fire

triangulation? (Study photos)

& colors of blue vs. orange.

Count the ships.

With alien

or native probe

nasty sucking into

seafloor orifice

Benjamin Friedlander

Gusher

There is nothing worse than the tell-tale
sound of a drip
in the night

suddenly gushing about your cuteness
“Mom?” is a live feed
quite comical, though she

is coating the ducks
are a serious issue,
at least for those with clinical depression.

Sweet as a Nut
cracked
under the pressure

It was worse
when his younger sister
could hold it in

all night
the pain, drool, crying: There’s nothing pleasant
about a toilet seat

has broken
my urinary spirit
refers to the unintentional passage of liquid

during sleep It’s a learning
disability, but you can learn

to shed pride

eye-patched Nazi adventure
in the gulf He knew Katrina
and the waves could bring

debris Grit in the bedsheets
means uncontrolled
diabetes Gusher pumps

control the urine
output
mixed with dung

It stopped the pain
from the bladder
quivering, when I was ten

under the surface
oxygen is low,
bp normal

Laura Elrick

Performative Ingestion: Mourning Rite of Peak Oil

I'm interested in why so many poets, in the decade after September 11, turned away from text-based practices and towards embodied works that often (but not always) incorporated silence and gesture, and often (but not always) were performed in public spaces not usually set aside for such acts. (1) I see this shift as a response to the political instability of affective labor during this period, and as a marker of the attempt to publicly engage experiences of social vulnerability, histories of violence, and the politics of the so-called "War on Terror" during a time in which almost any direct statement about political violence was quickly funneled back into the "truth" that militarism was both inevitable and necessary. (2) When to mourn the American lives lost in the attacks or on the battle-field was to unwittingly contribute to the steam-rolling of public debate on alternatives to war, and when to not mourn them rendered one mute before such privately lived public traumas; when to mourn the Afghans or Iraqis lost to American military violence was to be labeled an enemy of the state, and when to not mourn them rendered one complicit with historical erasures presently unfolding; when to voice anger quickly funneled into an economy of violence that guaranteed a continuation of the cycles of traumatic repetition, it was my sense that the creation of embodied poetic forms was a means of "reimagining the possibility of community on the basis of [shared] vulnerability and loss" rather than on fantasies of superiority, exceptional safety or entitlement (Butler, *Precarious Life* 20).

One of the poets perhaps most persistently engaged with performances of public mourning over the last decade or so has been Kristin Prevallet. Beginning with *I, Afterlife: Essay in Mourning Time* (written after her father's sudden death), Prevallet has moved in the direction of public mourning actions that explicitly acknowledge what she calls "the sadness of the present" that cannot be reconciled by an idea of the future or reversed by any ideology or paradigm of belief (43). In a 2009 interview in *Fact Simile*, Prevallet makes the observation that Americans tend to approach the subject of grief with the idea that the immediate goal should be "closure" (Davis 7). She describes how the police officer who came to notify her family after her father died gave them pamphlets discouraging the building of shrines or holding onto objects the person owned when alive, and instead instructed them to think about the grieving process as a universal series of linear steps that

would culminate in “acceptance” followed by, tellingly perhaps, “reinvestment” (ibid.). (3) The implicit message is that to experience emotions out of step with the “natural” sequence is a product of “bad economics.”

In contrast to this model, by connecting her personal experience of grief at the loss of her father to the larger climate of violence in which the present persists, Prevallet challenges the idea that closure is either possible or desirable, instead working towards a kind of acceptance of the permanent and ongoing renegotiating of the self in relation to such loss. She writes:

As a political position, I hold on to grief. The objects in my shrine represent this. I don't see it so much as holding on to my dead parents, but rather as holding on to an awareness of spatial distance. The objects in the shrine keep my hold on reality consistently tenuous because they fill my gaps with objects that are constantly changing. (Which is better than filling spaces with a false sense of closure. There is no moving on in a world filled with wars.) (I, Afterlife 58).

For Prevallet, then, there is permanence to mourning; what is mourned or the way it is mourned may change, as may the relationship of the mourner to the loss, but the hole is never sealed over, because that would block future “knowledges” gained by the ongoing relationship to the loss. Rather, grieving means “agreeing to undergo a transformation . . . the full result of which one cannot know in advance” (Butler, Precarious 21). Thus, any establishment from the outset of the end-goal of closure is in a sense a foreclosure, to use Butler's term, of what the loss can come to mean. It makes death a past instead of a present unfolding and an inevitable futurity. For Prevallet, as for Butler, this “making” of death is political in its implications.

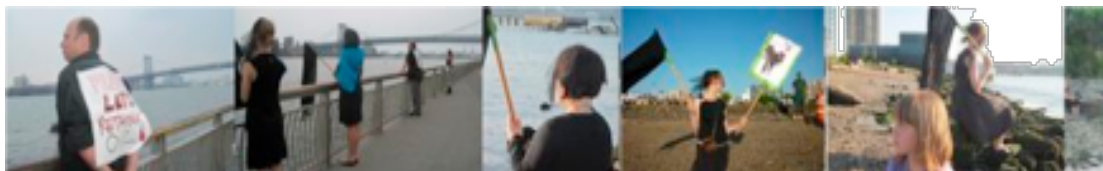
Interestingly, for Prevallet, the materialization of mourning as embodied action over time (the material performance of mourning) is what allows for transformative “other” ways of “knowing” loss to emerge. In her version of public mourning, however, this kind of enactment would not establish a “we” in the same way that official spectacles of mourning did after September 11. Noting in her interview how few rituals of public mourning exist in mainstream US culture, Prevallet says:

This brings up the question of what it means to publicly mourn. To really mourn. To wail, to scream, to cry out. Usually women carry this performative burden. And their function is to wail. Publicly, so that other people can feel your pain inside them. You're a mourner, and you bring other people into the space of mourning ... Even if the person or object you are mourning is different (Davis 8).

Putting aside for a moment the gendered dimension of public mourning here, it seems important to register the physical transfer of pain that the mourning enactment entails. This is not an intellectualized transfer of cognitive meaning, nor is it a public narration of experience—it is a reaction of the flesh. Observers experience something in their bodies that another person enacts, even if, and this is important, they do not experience the same thing in the same way. In short, the mourner opens a space where loss (an absence) can be felt to exist, where the presence of absence can be “sensed.” But for this to happen, for this social experiential space to be opened, there must first be an I of grief, an I that is embodied and that transfers its openness to the feeling of grief in its body to others who are in the embodied I of their own grief.

In her discussion of some queer responses to September 11, cultural theorist Sara Ahmed argues that queer deaths in the World Trade Center and Flight 93 were later narrated by activist public statements that, although successful in making visible how those losses were implicitly narrated as heterosexual in the first place, ended up by reconsolidating a national subject. She writes: “Humanist language of individual courage and bravery makes these losses like the others. Hence queer loss becomes incorporated into the loss of the nation, in which the ‘we’ is always a ‘we too’” (Cultural Politics 158). This is a problem because it “perpetuates the concealment of other losses (such as, for example, the losses in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine)” (ibid.). She argues therefore for the necessity of resisting the temptation to focus on the object of grief at the expense of the subject who grieves. She writes: “Not to name ‘my’ or ‘your’ loss as ‘our loss’ does not mean the privatization of loss, but the generation of a public in which sharing is not based on the presumption of shared ownership” (161). It is interesting to me the ways in which this insistent emphasis on the subject of grief is echoed in Prevallet’s notion of public enactment in the quote above. She seems to want to allow others to enter the space of mourning while maintaining the individuality of that response, even if that response were primarily one of discomfort, numbness or even rejection. In short, a spatial distance between I and we is maintained, and the collective identification, though not rejected, is complicated and delayed.

In a number of Prevallet's mourning actions, this orientation is explicit. In her most recent work on the Gulf oil spill, she stands silently in mourning garb holding sunflowers drenched with oil in front of the local BP station, or gathers a small number of mourners together at the water to stand silently in a line for an hour or more holding black flags, photos of oil-drenched birds, or a diagram of the gulf stream connecting distant shores that touch the Atlantic Ocean ("Considering Options").



Neither of these actions include the “wailing” that she speaks of, yet they make use of a physical duration that is compelling; bystanders often pass by more than once in the course of an hour, or decide to sit and watch even though nothing in particular happens (no sounds, no movement, no messages). These actions seem to suggest that thinking, even meditating, on our shared responsibility for the conditions that led to this ecological disaster must become part of the politics of any response. Unlike the often-heard injunction to “act” on objects of our political rage, this piece involves a degree of concerted attention on oneself as a subject in the relations that lead to events. Nevertheless, if there is not a stated ‘we’ in

them, Prevallet's mourning actions, taken as a body of work, can be seen to link the issues responsible for loss. The casualties on all sides in Iraq and Afghanistan, oil dependency and consumption, and the ecological disaster now unfolding in the “other” gulf have all been targets of her actions, and they create a web of connection between what are often narrated as singular tragedies, thereby resisting the hypostatization of any one object of grief.

The specific work I want to discuss in relation to the issues of politicized mourning after September 11 is *Cruelty and Conquest (Oil, Oil, Oil)* that Prevallet performed at Naropa University in July 2004. I am particularly interested in this piece for the way it combines grief with the affect of disgust. Prevallet describes this performance in a brief essay in the online journal of experimental women's poetry *How2* as arising out of her procedural poem about the speech George Bush gave to the United Nations in September 2002 (in which he made the case for international support of the war in Iraq). In Prevallet's poem, the words of the speech are gradually redacted and replaced with the word "oil" (Prevallet, "From the poem"). When read aloud, this redaction and replacement leaves the poet choking on the pronunciation of "oil" in the difficulty of repeating it so many times. In the 2004 performance, Prevallet read the poem and then stood on an American flag in a red-white-and-blue bathing suit, raised an oil can above her back-tilted (blond) head, and guzzled an entire gallon of viscous black liquid in an endurance feat of choking and gagging.

The performance is disturbing and embarrassing and disgusting all at once because the audience must witness the grueling and deliberately self-destructive ingestion that seems to last forever. Everyone watching knows it is a comment on oil consumption in our daily lives, yet because it is such a physically exhausting and painful process in the embodied performance, we feel *thick* knowledge in our guts. At the July 2004 event, some in the audience reportedly bowed their heads or covered their mouths, while someone sobbed and one person shouted out in defiance (*ibid.*).⁴ In speaking of the way in which disgust and desire are "dialectically conjoined," Sianne Ngai explains that "Disgust both includes and attacks the very opposition between itself and desire, and in doing so, destroys not only 'aesthetical satisfaction' but the disinterestedness on which it depends" (335). In Prevallet's performance, the audience literally becomes interested in the ugliness as its own.

But why should this expression of grief be so disgusting? In her chapter on the sociality of disgust in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed discusses the way in which disgust is intimately tied up with food and consumption, and thus with the 'not-I' that I must take into my body for survival: "Survival makes us vulnerable in that it requires we let what is 'not us' in; to survive we open ourselves up, and we keep the orifices of the body open" (83). Prevallet's symbolic ingestion of the disgusting poison, then, is a nauseated and nauseating response to the realization that the very subject one is, one's entire physique, one's bank of memories, one's daily experiential self, is fundamentally tied to the global oil economy. It is a traumatic recognition that what I am is produced and sustained by the

infrastructures of oil-based industrial production, distribution and consumption and thus fully implicated in political violence and ecological disaster that sustains this order. And further, Prevallet overtly demonstrates her body to be racialized, hetero-sexualized and marked as national property by the flag.



She seems to suggest that despite any subjectively experienced difference from these norms one cannot survive in the present without participating in the continuation of this degrading feast, despite the fact that to continue it is to perpetually smear oneself and everything else in its shit-like corrosive grease. In short, one can't grieve over something that has not been lost—one is never not this to begin with. Thus the feeling of grief over the wars in the Middle East (and now over the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico) disgusts, because what would ostensibly counteract it, the urge toward health and personal nourishment, shows itself to be that which keeps one alive (in what is felt to be the requirements of the contemporary social world), but simultaneously that which is laying the ground for so much killing. In a sense, Prevallet acknowledges and grieves the disgusting self-disgust that is of the present, so that that self might be lost, in advance, in a kind of futural motion. Lets get on with it, the performer seems to say, even if it means losing my self.

Interestingly, this is not the way that disgust seems to work politically in Ahmed's analysis. Ahmed sees expressions of disgust as both dialectical producer of borders that work to delineate the inside from the outside (or the I from the 'not-I'), and as the product that is the border itself. She writes, "On the one hand, it is the transformation of borders into objects that is sickening (like the skin that forms on milk)," while "on the other, the

border is transformed into an object precisely as an effect of disgust (spitting/vomiting)” (87). This turning of the border into an object is a fetishization, according to Ahmed, that secures the subject’s sense of “being-apart.” In extreme forms of racism or homophobia, the border is created by an unwillingness to touch or be touched by the other, and thus the other is surrounded by an invisible disgusting border that may not be crossed. A literal example is the way that the United States border with Mexico is fetishized; to protect the circumscribed “we” from what is perceived to be unlike itself, an object must be created through repeated expressions of disgust. This object/fetish is the militarized border wall meant to secure what was once a permeable and liminal space of contact. Through the expulsion of Mexican immigrants without paperwork, the border congeals and becomes a “real” divide. In true dialectical fashion, for this border to be maintained as real, it’s crossing must continually be threatened, so that a perpetual nationalist dry-heaving of racist discourse reinforces the fantasy of purity by literally “throwing up” the bulwark for its favored object (the border), which then reestablishes the cycle all over again.

Thus, according to Ahmed, disgust reactions involve a “pulling away’ ... that authorizes a community of witnesses” through the creation of a border or boundary (99). But this is not limited to the racist pulling away of nationalist conservatives. For there can also be a pulling away from “their” pulling away—an expression of disgust at “their” disgusting fetishization of the border—that forms an alternate or antagonistic community of witnesses. For Ahmed, however, even though “the feeling of being disgusted may be an element in a politics that seeks to challenge ‘what is,’” the problem, as she sees it, with this “loop of disgust,” is that it “does not allow one time to digest that which one designates as a ‘bad thing’” (ibid.). Arguing that “critique requires more time for digestion,” Ahmed has doubts that disgust as an affective response would allow one to get close enough to an object to understand it before being compelled to pull away. Ahmed’s distrust of politics based in the “loop of disgust” arises because what disgust shows us “is not simply the possibility of dissent within even the stickiest economies, but also how dissent cannot be exterior to its object” (99; my italics).

What Prevallet performs, however, is not a disgust that involves a pulling away from the object. Rather, her performance pulls one closer to the disgusting object and holds one there until the rejection/expulsion reaction is “burned out” and thinking sets in. ⁵ Thus, unlike the typical way that disgust might be said to “strengthen and police” the boundary between subject and object (Ngai 335), Prevallet’s durational ingestion of the disgusting substance

is an overt refusal to maintain the boundary of that distinction. Indeed, the duration is explicitly part of the piece – this act may end up forming an alternate community of witnesses as in other expressions of disgust, but if it succeeds in doing so, it will not be before each witness has felt the oil running through his or her body. The community of witnesses would thus be formed, not through a pulling away from, but through a drawing towards, that which they critique. Deliberately ingesting the toxic substance, but not in order to expel it, is what characterizes the act. Rather than engage in a fantasy purification ritual, Prevallet reveals the full extent of her saturation with what she is against. This is akin to the phenomenological space of mourning because in mourning the self is not beside the splaying of its own decomposition; it cannot maintain an image of itself outside the space of its own undoing. In this sense, what Prevallet’s piece does is to open the space for thinking about the necessity of change while not turning away from the personal and social difficulty that potential of change is mired in (literally, constitutively). One of those difficulties necessarily includes that some of the people that may be needed to effect lasting and substantive changes in production, distribution and consumption patterns might still turn away from socio-political relations of power in an ultimately self-safe expression of disgust.

Notes:

1 David Buuck’s BARGE (Bay Area Research Group in Enviro-Aesthetics), Rodrigo Toscano’s Collapsible Poetics Theater (2008), Kaia Sand’s Remember to Wave (2010), my own video/poem Stalk (2008), and several works by Kristin Prevallet, treated here, are only a few examples.

2 This was not just a matter for right wing radio or front-page news. On the Buffalo Poetics listserv, many well-respected poets wrote disparagingly of leftist “hand-wringing” over a military response, which was considered both inevitable and necessary. For example, see the thread following Ron Silliman’s September 18, 2001 post “What is to be done” as well as the thread on “left fundamentalism” from the same period.

3 This is essentially the Kübler-Ross model.

4 The audience was unaware that the substance in the oil-can was molasses.

5 Sylvan Tomkins argued that it was possible to “burn out” the fear response by introducing a subject to a fearful situation and holding them in that situation in an embrace until the fear lessens and finally subsides (Sedgwick and Frank 2-3).

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Heidi Lynn Staples

How Poetry Makes a Difference in the Era of Ecocide

There is another world, but it is in this one.

— Paul Éluard

Bernd Jaeger, a phenomenological psychologist, makes a distinction I find helpful in thinking about poetry and political activism. In his essay “Rilke’s ‘Archaic Torso of Apollo:’ Concerning the Encounter with a Work of Art,” Jaeger maintains that we can approach phenomena through either a workaday or a festive attitude. Generally, a workaday attitude as an approach to phenomena “prepares us to accomplish everyday practical tasks and makes possible a natural scientific and technological understanding of our world.” With the workaday attitude, we imagine a phenomenon with the intention of controlling the world. In thinking about a work of art, for example, we examine “the interests, preoccupations, techniques and materials available in a certain historical period or geographic area” (3). We might develop comprehension by considering “schools and markets, cultural influences, aesthetic beliefs and historical or material circumstances” (7). Art, seen from this angle, is a tool.

When we approach phenomenon with a festive attitude, on the other hand, we relinquish this drive for control. We do not use the object under observation instrumentally. Rather than demanding the object supply our mastery of the material world, we enter into “reciprocal relations ... a world devoted to the cultivation of intersubjective relations ... thought, thinking, feeling forming part of a festive gift exchange.” When a phenomenon is experienced through the festive attitude, we suspend our “habitual, everyday assumptions about the differences between objects and subjects” (2). The silent world of objects becomes one of speaking subjects. We engage ourselves in the act of perception, in dynamic relation. In my opinion, art’s greatest power lies in this phenomenological shift, a psychological experience of radical interchange. The psychological experience of a heightened sense of relation facilitated by art can help nurture political activism grounded in a respect for difference.

I do think poetry has a place in response to public catastrophe, which is why I worked with

Amy King to launch Poets for Living Waters, a web-based international poetry response to the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. The initiative has featured over two hundred and fifty poets and published hundreds more. Some of the recognizable names associated with the project include Franz Wright, Ron Silliman, Alicia Ostriker, June Jordan and many others. Poets and Writers and the UGA Oil Symposium have featured the initiative, and we have sponsored readings in Houston, New Orleans, Tallahassee, D.C., Philadelphia, NYC, and many other locales. The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment is including a presentation discussing the project on a 2011 panel, “Petrocriticism: Ecocritical Responses to Oil in the Post-Deepwater Horizon Era.” It is fair to say that the site has generated considerable interests.

Poets for Living Waters has not shut down BP. The site has not forced the company to distribute the full promised \$20 billion in compensation. The site has not prevented the harm of 8,000 birds, sea turtles and marine mammals found dead or injured in the Gulf of Mexico after the oil spill began—which number offers only a small window on the wildlife loss. Certainly, the site has not protected Gulf Coast residents from the toxic Benzene, Ethylbenzene, Xylene and Hexane showing up in blood panels. In short, the Poets for Living Waters initiative has done nothing in the Gulf of Mexico and surrounding region to compensate for or forestall the slowly unfolding ecocide—to say nothing of other oil spills, the disappearing state of Louisiana, the expanding plastics gyre in the Pacific, the mass extinction currently underway, or global climate change.

Art fulfils its potential through creating connections. Poets for Living Waters, for example, has been successful as “part of a festive gift exchange that establishes intersubjective relations and that thereby founds a human world” (1). The project has provided a virtual gathering place, and in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the site often received close to a thousand visits a day. Visitors have expressed appreciation for a forum in which to share their grief, trauma, outrage and desire for change. The site will also extend the historical record—the poems, photos, statements of conscience and videos of readings and protests will attest that “we were not just slaughtering one another” (Waldman, “Mother Tongue, Manatee and Archive: A Feminafesto.”). But I believe the project’s greatest significance lies in cultivating a type of interchange, a reciprocity in community.

Art offers us not tools to master our universe but the potential to experience community, interconnectivity, wide identification—the possibility of wisdom. Our engagement can

generate alternate “cultures that have ... real presence and force in the world ... sites and utopias and resistances and fellaheen worlds,” and I agree with Waldman that none of these cultures are located in places but as shared “practices.” Art is not so much a tool or a noun, but participation in a process, a verb.

In the context of ecocide, the issue of instrumentality seems especially salient. The dominant worldview puts to instrumental use all possible phenomena, from the planet’s deepest fluids to the reaches of outer space—and all between including each of us. The objectification relies on an increasingly silenced living world. Are the practices of artistic engagement part of how we resist this blackout, how we continue to listen?

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Cara Benson

nobodyislisteninginginginginginging

I wanted to Contact Chuck. To read my poems about the Gulf Oil Disaster and the report that THIS COULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED. But then we knew that, didn't we. I have poems about this specifically. Generated when the oil was gushing into the gulf. Utteral gurps of globbed down outrage come spouting up esophogically as if the only response I had was to mimic the pillage.

When the call first came, I wanted to Contact Chuck to pah pah pah form my verbal disasters oh so poetically and disturbingly and inaccessibly and off-puttingly and uncomfortably and uncertainly and disruptively and ineffectually and all that could be expected of a poetic intervention of the smallest order. I felt inside me this:



What happened, bear with me, was this (process).

I call my reps. A lot. I know the White House comment line # by heart. Of course I sign petitions and take email online actions. Post links. But also I've sat across the table from senior staff of Gillibrand (NY Senator) and Tonko (House). Some of their cell numbers are in my cell, and often I can get a call back the same day (staff). Not because I donate (my five dollars here and there doesn't get me face time). Because I advocate. I have shown up more than once with signs and others and voters and media and stand outside their office buildings with hands in the air, bullhorns, bells, microphones, and an open mouth.



Right here

Rep Tonkoⁱ

I've never gotten anywhere with Chuck.

And I've never read any of them poems

though the placards are pithy.

(yes, one argues that as poem)

So when Jonathan's call came I wanted to Contact Chuck because honestly I was fairly certain I would be denied access, either directly or passively through being ignored, through form letter, through etc. In the off chance that I wasn't, as I feel the most adversarial to

him, I thought I might read a poem to (at?) Chuck (his staff) with more conviction. Because for the most part I respect Gillibrand and Tonko and their votes earn that with me. So why suffer them the poem? (Yes, I said it.) Why lead with my chin when I'll want access again and to be taken seriously. I want to talk policy—not that I'm a wonk. Where does or would or could poetry (earnest, accessible, do-gooder, associative, syntactically subversive, P=R=A=X=I=C, lexically ruptive, post-post-post or otherwise) fit? No. Not fit. Ugh. Matter. We circle this question like the drain. The news that stays news. Purifiers. Unofficial legislators. Politics is a cultural production much like the choice between one soda or football team or wanna-be pop star and another. A result of branding and marketing and image and tag lines. We don't convince or debate. We sell.

And some and most of this I often believe.

Still. The poem in the polis?

Of course this is the crux of the call—of the concern (of some of us) for the human(ities). Grappling with what it means to be human has been reduced to (an) economics. Or was that always the case? After all, slaves and women were the excluded domestic economy upon which the dominant male's political participation depended. From the classical Greeks on up to the founding and then some of the good ole US of A.

Would that the poem could have its gravitas and pathos and ethos and eros and humor and yes politics any which way it would have them. “... any shortcut between the two realities seems fatal to poetry” (Marcuse). Leslie Scalapino did not think poems to be political acts, but “could go along with them.” Or, I'll add, per Rimbaud, in advance.

Perhaps, I agree.

Perhaps I could make poems of celebration to honor the courage and integrity I find in minority votes by Gillibrand and Tonko. Why did I assume confrontation? Oh, either or!

Oh shortcut!

Perhaps it's time to speak to something more of the mater-reality of the context of the call.

“It was really just a matter of time.”

“Shock.”

“The government still could be in charge.”

“And yet, there was very little research [since the Exxon Valdez ran aground] to guide the responders in this case.”

“The impact that I probably underestimated is mental health.”

“That goes beyond BP.”

“Why was a corporation drilling for oil in mile-deep water 49 miles off the Louisiana coast? To begin, Americans today consume vast amounts of petroleum products—some 18.7 million barrels per day ...

it occurred in the midst of environmental disasters related to landbased pollution and massive destruction of coastal wetlands—chronic crises that proceed insidiously and will require not months but decades of national effort to address and repair.

reports of visibly oiled and dead wildlife, polluted marshes, and lifeless deepwater corals. Moreover,

Scientists simply do not yet know how to predict the ecological consequences and effects on key species that might result from oil exposure in the water column, both far below and near the surface.

the bathypelagic zone (3,300–13,000 feet deep). cold-water corals, fish, and worms that produce light like fireflies to compensate for the perpetual night. Bacteria, mussels, and tubeworms

Endangered sperm whales dive to this depth

sharks, hundreds of fish species, shrimp, jellyfish, sea turtles, and dolphins. As the sperm whales surface

multitudes of plankton, floating seaweed beds, and schools of fish. Some

Overhead are multitudes of seabirds—among them brown pelicans, northern gannets, and laughing gulls—that in

migration route each year,

in the shallow water of mangroves, marshes, and other habitats that shelter fish and frogs. Raptors, including ospreys, bald eagles, and peregrine falcons, also pluck

into the salt marshes, mudflats, mangroves, and sandy beaches

essential habitat at one or more stages of many species' lifecycles

[THUD]

Encountering oil. ingestion, filtration, inhalation, while absorption, and fouling. eating oiled mistaking food. Filter some fish, oysters, shrimp, krill, jellyfish, corals, sponges, and whale sharks— particles suspended . Surface-breathing surrounded slick inhale fumes. vulnerable to feathers oiled, reducing to properly body . external of animals inhibit their ability to walk, fly, swim, and eat. Similarly, plants to photosynthesis, and of smother anchor and the many organisms

that live below.

As a result of our investigation, we conclude:

- The explosive loss of the Macondo well could have been prevented.
- The immediate causes of the Macondo well blowout can be traced to a series of identifiable mistakes made by BP, Halliburton, and Transocean that reveal such systematic failures in risk management that they place in doubt the safety culture of the entire industry.
- Deepwater energy exploration and production, particularly at the frontiers of experience, involve risks for which neither industry nor government has been adequately prepared, but for which they can and must be prepared in the future.
- To assure human safety and environmental protection, regulatory oversight of leasing, energy exploration, and production require reforms even beyond those significant reforms already initiated since the Deepwater Horizon disaster. Fundamental reform will be needed in both the structure of those in charge of regulatory oversight and their internal decisionmaking process to ensure their political autonomy, technical expertise, and their full consideration of environmental protection concerns.”

As a result of my (distanced, limited, layperson, poetic) investigation, I conclude I:

- “simply do not yet know how to”

So, as the call posits

“ ... when one exchange, the utilitarian contact and communication that supposedly underlies our democracy (in exchange for my vote, you, my representative, will attend to my concerns), fails so miserably, perhaps it is time for the other kind of exchange to come forward ... “,

I will bring my poetics into the body politic.

As there is nothing to date introduced in the Senate that I can find, I’ll start at home (not Chuck).

According to his social media page, Tonko was just hours before the writing of this sentence—

“Reviewing hearing testimony before asking Secretary Chu if he believes we should

continue to provide subsidies to Big Oil companies who only gouge us at the pump [WHILE FUCKING ANY PLACE ON THE PLANET TO GET AT THE GUCK] and are making record profits” —

though he is not yet a co-sponsor of H.R. 501 Implementing the Recommendations of the BP Oil Spill Commission Act of 2011.

From: Cara Benson <cbenson67@yahoo.com>
To: XXXX XXXXX <XXXX.XXXXX@mail.house.gov>
Sent: Thu, March 3, 2011 3:12:47 PM
Subject: Interim Magazine

Mr. XXXXX,

I am a constituent, activist and poet. I've been given an editorial assignment for Interim Magazine <http://www.interimmag.org/index.html> to read a poem to one or more of my Reps/Sens. I would like to come to your office to read a poem—it will be regarding HR 501 specifically, the Gulf Oil disaster generally—to ideally Rep Tonko himself or failing his availability someone on staff. Documentation of the contact will occur through photographs and a written report.

I can say that I have voted for Rep Tonko twice now, I respect his work, and I'm heartened to see that HR 501 has been referred to the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee and the House Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Energy and Environment as I know he serves on both. I feel this bodes well for getting this bill out of Committee with some teeth in it. My deadline is fast. I need to come in next week. Can you help?

Thank you in advance,

Cara Benson

From: "XXXXX, XXXX" <XXXX.XXXXX@mail.house.gov>
To: Cara Benson <cbenson67@yahoo.com>
Sent: Fri, March 4, 2011 11:14:18 AM
Subject: RE: Interim Magazine

Hello Cara –

I will pass this on to our scheduler to see if we can make this happen. He will get back to you.

XXXX

While the Congressman was in DC during the final ticks of this deadline and as a result unavailable for the meet, I was welcomed into his (as it happens brand new) personal office and witnessed. Communications Director Beau Duffy (pictured below) acknowledged he'd never been read a poem nor been to a reading. After the performances, when my comrade-in-poems Anna Elena Eyre and I spoke to the, eh, stuttering nature of our pieces [performatively enacted beyond the scope of what I will use the text here to indicate, but some sense of it may be gleaned from the piece below], Mr. Duffy expressed his, well, he had this to say: "It made me think." We were pleased. He also mentioned that the Congressman would be eager to see the results of the interaction. So you, dear reader, can know that not only were some of these words alive in the air of a politician's office, but also that they and these and these images have been or will be viewed by at least one member of the US House of Representatives. What more do you want a poet to do?



with Beau Duffy (photo Anna Elena Eyre)



with Anna Elena Eyre (photo Dylan Carey)

Unless otherwise noted, quoted material is excerpted from:

Deep Water: The Gulf Oil Disaster and the Future of Offshore Drilling, Report to the President, National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling, January 2011

http://www.oilspillcommission.gov/sites/default/files/documents/DEEPWATER_ReporttothePresident_FINAL.pdf

**Ann Fisher-Wirth (poem) &
Gara Gillentine (image)**

BP

1.

Serious harm or damage to life

(including fish and other
aquatic life), to property,
to any mineral deposits (in areas
leased or

not leased), to the national security

or defense

or to the marine, coastal, or human environments;

blowouts, fires, spillages, or
other major accidents. . .

a threat of harm
or damage to life. . .

to take affirmative action to abate
the violation

Dear Sirs:

**Dragonflies
hover
catching the light
emerald, turquoise, ruby, translucent**

**Born of water
they sport with land
but lay their eggs in water
where oil clogs the membrane
of their
wings
Above the slick among the grasses
one dragonfly scrubs
its oiled face**

filthy

iridescence



Gara Gillentine

2.

The pelicans spread their feathers
spiky and stiff with gunk

definitive

biogenetic

are in store is
strain forward above the slick but
cannot rise

coral,
gape, flap
bizarre
squeak and bark, squawk
flail

brown
amid sea oats
viscous water

of the ocean

Now that we are beyond the oil-covered —
birds phase, establishing

links between the spill and whatever

or ecological disturbances

only going to get harder ...

Graveyards of recently deceased

oiled crab larvae, evidence of

sickness in the phytoplankton and bacterial
communities, and a mysterious

liquid coating large swaths

floor, snuffing out life underneath ...

3.

“I have not been there, I have not seen it.
It means little to me, a matter of blogs and soundbytes.
Not ordering oysters at the oyster bar.”

Flames roll over the waters,
lick the legs of our chairs
where we sit sipping coffee.

Quoted phrases in Part 1 are from the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling January 2011 Report to the President.

Quoted phrases in Part 2 are from Naomi Klein, “After the Spill,” The Nation, January 31, 2011.

The italicized lines at the end of the poem are from our anonymous, collective response.

Sheryl St. Germain

Midnight Oil

how to speak of it
this thing that doesn't rhyme
or pulse in iambs or move in predictable ways
like lines
or sentences
how to find the syntax
of this thing
that rides the tides
and moves with the tides and under the tides
and through the tides
and has an underbelly so deep and wide
even our most powerful lights
cannot illuminate its full body

this is our soul shadow,
that darkness we cannot own
the form we cannot name

and I can only write about it at night
when my own shadow wakes me, when I can feel
night covering every pore and hair follicle, entering eyes
and ears, entering me like Zeus, a night I don't want
on me or in me, and I dream of giving birth
to a rusty blob of a child who slithers out of me,
out and out and won't stop slithering, growing and darkening,
spreading and pulsing between my legs
darkening into the world

*

what it might feel like to be a turtle, say,
swimming in the only waters you have ever known
swimming because it is the only way you move through the world
to come upon this black bile
a kind of cloying lover
a thing that looks to you
like a jellyfish, so you dive into it and try to eat it
but it covers your fins so they can't move as before
and there is a heaviness on your carapace and head
that wasn't there before, and you are blind
in the waters of your birth

*

When the summers got too hot even for those of us born in New Orleans, so hot that our ancestors' bones sweated and complained in their vaults, my father would decide it was time, and the family would pile into the station wagon and drive down to Grand Isle, where we'd run along the beach into the Gulf as if into a lover's arms, smash into the salty waves, swim until the sun went down and we were red as boiled crawfish. Mother would have made a pungent crab salad, with quarters of crab marinated in garlic and olive oil, lemon and celery. Sometimes we'd have boiled shrimp or crabs. The grownups would stay up drinking and playing cards at night while we slept the sweet sleep of children who don't yet know what stygian rivers run in their veins. Exhausted from swimming, hair still damp and smelling like the Gulf, we'd huddle together in the big bed on the screened porch. The smell and sound of the waves rocked us to sleep, dreams of pelicans and gulls and flying fish filled our heads and hearts, and we were content.

On rainy days when we couldn't swim my father taught me how to play pool in one of the hulking bars that used to front the beach. The bar's gone now, like the house we stayed in, destroyed by hurricanes that wipe out every human-made thing every few years.

*

Oiled Birds, edited from Wikipedia:

Penetrates plumage, reduces insulating ability, makes birds vulnerable to temperature fluctuations, less buoyant in water. Impairs bird's abilities to forage and escape predators. When preening, bird ingests oil that covers feathers, causing kidney damage, altered liver function, digestive tract irritation. Foraging ability is limited. Dehydration, metabolic imbalances. Bird will probably die unless there is human intervention.

*

I'm looking at an old photo of my brother, right after he got out
of prison. He's twenty, sitting on a beach chair at Grand Isle,
looking gaunt and pale, but smiling.
It was the first place my mother thought to take him
when she feared the grime and shame of that other place
might have tarnished his heart too deeply.
She knew he loved this island, where simple things
like saltwater and clean beaches,
birds and fish, crabs,
might act like containment booms,
keep the demons away.

He'd die a few years later,
his liver polluted with what he thought
would make the world bearable,
and a few years after him
my father would go
from that same staining.

Now, when I look at these beaches I love,
greasy with oil as far as I can see,
when I think of how this island
and its marshes should act like filters,
I think of my father and brother,
I think this is what
their livers must have looked like
as they moved toward the end, darkening,
becoming pebbly with disease, finally

too black with blight
to filter
anything.

*

It's June in Pittsburgh where I live now, hot and muggy,
and it feels like a day my father would've said let's go.

*

People don't want to look at the pictures anymore of the birds
and turtles, the fish, the oiled beaches

they want to go on to something else
they don't want to hear about the old fishermen
who may never fish again
the ones being trained to clean up instead of fish

It's an old story, really, how we always dirty what we love,
and I'm tired too, have seen way too many pictures
of oiled birds and the oiled waters of this dear place
and I've heard way too many pundits and politicians
and newsmen analyze, blame and predict
and jokemen joke:
let's call the Gulf the Black Sea.

Dear CNN: even the devil would bore us
if he was on 24 hours a day
there are times we need silence
as much as we need news
or a poem that creates a silence
in us where we can feel again
How people from Louisiana have described the oil:

Brown and vivid orange globs. Tar balls. Thick gobs. Red waves. Deep stagnant ooze. Clumps of tar. Consistency of latex paint. Sheets of foul-smelling oil. Patches of oil. Caramel-colored oil. Tide of oil. Red brown oil. Rainbows of Death. Waves of gooey tar blobs. Bruised internal

organs of a human body. Heavy heavy slickoil. Oil sheen. Oily stench. Melted chocolate.

An eye for an eye, my father might say,
a tooth for a tooth.

Let's ask those responsible,
and some of those are us

to walk deep out into the waters
of this once beautiful island,
the waters that once teemed with speckled trout,
oysters, shrimp,
let's ask them to walk far out into it,
to swim out with long sweeping strokes,

and then,
when they are thick and covered
with the stuff, when it's in their hair and blinding
them, stopping up their ears and mouths,
when it's sticking to every pore
in their body,

then
let them try to swim back
then
let them try to explain



Kristen Baumliér, Road / Oil

When Nature Writing becomes Travel Writing: Notes toward a Manifesto

(a talk given at the AWP Conference, Washington DC, 2011)

I tossed and turned most of the night, worried about this talk. I asked myself if I really wanted to do this, if I really wanted to put at the center of my talk the criticism of a beloved nature writer and nature magazine, both of which I deeply respect. It was all just a well-meaning, understandable mistake they both made, I told myself over and over again, punching my pillow. It probably won't ever happen again, so why write about it? Don't you want to present something moving and uplifting for the AWP audience? Or something useful, something positive, there's little positive in this talk you've worked on for months, I said to myself, this talk you've written and rewritten at least five times. And who cares but you, I further tortured myself, about the fact that Louisiana writers, artists and photographers don't seem to ever appear in the pages of Orion, especially not telling their own stories about Katrina and the Gulf Oil Spill, who cares but you that the culture of south Louisiana, your birth state, is badly distorted in the piece that Terry Tempest Williams wrote in the November/December 2010 issue of Orion ("The Gulf Between Us")? Ingrate, I call myself, she travelled to your birth state, took a few weeks out of her busy life to think about the issues of the Gulf Oil spill and brought more attention to the issue in both Orion and the NPR interviews that followed.

The fact is, though, as I croaked out to my battered pillow, I'm sick and tired of folks from the north and east and west swooping down like some guardian angels whenever some environmental disaster occurs in Louisiana, speaking for us, as if us poor white and black folks, us coonasses and Cajuns, can't speak for ourselves, don't have a voice, or that what we have to say is not worth listening to. And it might be a pattern, I say to myself, or the beginning of a pattern.

Take that, pillow.

I direct an MFA program at Chatham University that has a focus on environmental and travel writing. Because of this I take students almost every year to different countries of the world where they spend two weeks writing about the new culture. I don't want them making the same mistakes Terry made, and I don't want them thinking that the piece published in Orion is an admirable piece of writing. So for them, I throw down the pillow. For them, here's the talk over which I've anguished.

A writer who has made her living as a travel writer would not want to try her hand at environmental writing without a significant investment in researching the genre and the knowledge base necessary to write about the environment, and the same should be true for those writers who self-identify as environmental writers, then seek to travel to write about the environment. As a Cajun from Louisiana, if I were to travel to Salt Lake City, for example, to write about environmental issues facing that area, I would need to do substantial research on the Mormon culture in order to fully understand their role in, or response to local environmental issues. Writing from the position of a non-native is not the same as writing about the place where one lives; and there are many things environmental writers can learn by studying the art and craft of travel writing.

Many of our best-known nature writers are associated with a specific place where they have lived many years, often it is where they were born: Janisse Ray, (Georgia), Terry Tempest Williams, (Utah), Scott Russell Sanders (the Midwest), and so on. Where nature writers generally start from a place they know well, travel writers assume they must research a place in order to write anything meaningful about it. Research of culture and environment should go hand-in-hand, but sometimes it does not, and a series of things can go wrong.

Our visit can be too short, our research on the culture or environment insufficient. We can misidentify or misstate. We can see things that frighten or confuse us and decide, wrongly, to leave those things out because as a non-native, we don't wish to speak poorly of the culture we are visiting. We can speak with false authority or with ownership, we can forget how ignorant we are of the complexity of a given culture we are visiting and thus state, with authority, something about which we know very little.

We can unwittingly offend because we have rushed off to a place that is suffering from an environmental tragedy and we mistakenly try to own these tragedies and speak for the natives, who have their own right to speak.

It's important that voices from the culture we are writing about be present in some form in any travel writing, especially that which involves disaster and suffering. Terry Tempest Williams quotes fulsomely from natives in the essay I reference above, although she quotes naively and seemingly without filter; scientists are mixed in with random people in bars as well as those she admits are clearly drunk. But she is to be commended for going to the trouble of interviewing Louisiana natives and including their voices and what appears to be direct conversation with them in her piece, although one wishes she had been more reflective about the comments she took from the natives.

As travelers we are amazed at any new thing we learn because it is new and we are dazzled by its newness. We don't recognize a thing as the cliché natives may know it to be because we are visitors. This can happen to the most skillful and beloved of writers, so one shouldn't think this just a flaw that young writers might make. In the Orion piece Terry gets many of the details of the environmental issues right, but does an inadequate job with the culture. As a Mormon from Utah, her attempts at identifying with the Cajun culture (and I can't imagine two more different cultures) are nothing less than embarrassing. She suggests that the assistant who accompanies her from Utah, whose name just happens to be Avery, connects them in some way to Avery Island in Louisiana, where Tabasco is made (and which place has nothing to do with the oil spill). She also buys into the mythology of Louisiana promoted by the tourist industry, beginning the piece on Bourbon Street in a touristy restaurant; in her discussion of Cajun culture she brings up "Evangeline," a poem written in 1847, as a valid document that details the story of the Cajuns. The poem, written by Longfellow, who had never visited the setting of the story, Nova Scotia, contains serious historical errors. As well, the poem obscures the complexity of the expulsion or derangement of the Acadians from Canada, a crucial event in the history of Cajuns. The poem suggests Acadia is a Garden of Eden, the Cajuns a peaceful, homogeneous, passive people, neither of which is true.

When Terry writes, later in this piece, in a summary explanation of who the Cajuns are, that they were "displaced" by the French, we know she has not done her homework (it was the English who displaced them, and displaced is hardly the right word for the horrific forced removal called the Grand Derangement, where families were separated and put in boats like slave ships where it was often impossible to sit down.) This is a good example, of how, in a well-meaning piece that gets many of the environmental issues right, cultural mistakes of this magnitude could shade the way one reads the piece.

What else can go wrong when we write about a culture with which we are unfamiliar? Because we are visitors we can tread too lightly, too correctly as well, to present a romantic or flatter version of a land and people rather than the complex and sometimes darker, more genuine version that might arise if we lived there. Terry flattens the Cajuns in this piece. Cajuns are a complex and historically diverse group and many are in bed with the oil companies. To present, as Terry does, in this article, Cajuns as only victims of the oil spill does not do the situation justice, and here is where the weave between culture and environment becomes important; here is where getting the culture wrong may also mean

getting the environmental issues wrong. Many Cajuns support the oil industry and oppose drilling moratoriums. There are at least as many Cajuns working for the oil companies as there are Cajun fishermen; a yearly festival in Morgan City, called the “Shrimp and Petroleum” festival, has gone on for seventy-six years (the “petroleum” has been in the title for over 30 years) and celebrates the union of shrimp and petroleum workers. The icon on the website for the festival is a large shrimp with a hard hat on, wrapped around an oilrig in the midst of the Gulf.

Ignoring the historically close relationship that Cajuns have with oil companies, means that one doesn’t take into consideration how much the local culture has contributed to the current crisis in the Gulf.

A separate issue, but just as important, when it comes to travel writing, is the environmental cost of travel. We must always ask if the travel is worth the writing. This is something, I think, magazines that focus on nature writing must ask themselves: was it worth it, for example, for Orion to send Terry to Louisiana, 3,000 miles there and back to stay for what seems to have been little more than a week to write about the Gulf oil disaster? Didn’t anyone think of the irony of publishing a piece about how we must cut down on our use of oil to avoid situations like the Gulf oil spill, written by one who had travelled 3,000 miles to get there and back?

Certainly using Terry to write this piece brought more media attention to the issue, (although truth be told there is little in Terry’s piece you can’t find on the internet in sites like Waterkeeper Alliance or Dirty Cajuns). According to editor Chip Blake it was the potential for media attention that caused them to ask Terry to do the piece, instead of someone like nature writer Janisse Ray, who lives in the South and has published on the oil spill, or other well-known Louisiana writers such as John Biguenet or Peter Cooley, who have both published extensively and written movingly about the Katrina disaster.

Shouldn’t respected nature magazines—and Orion is arguably one of the most respected—that preach the importance of sustainability, careful stewardship of the environment and local knowledge, do a diligent search for writers who bring local knowledge and wisdom, who will not need to use however many gallons of fuel it took Terry to get to Louisiana? Wouldn’t that kind of policy support local economy, something nature magazines should be doing? Should “nature” magazines be held to a higher standard with respect to this

question?

I want to end by saying that although I've focused on Terry and Orion, the questions I raise here are questions for all of us. I flew here from France, where I am on sabbatical. Was it worth the cost to the environment? I take students to a different country almost every year as part of an MFA program focused on nature and travel writing. Is it worth the cost to the environment?

The only way I might be able to answer yes to that question is if the students' writing shows an understanding of the nuances of the culture as well as the environment, an understanding of the complex weave between culture and place, an understanding that one cannot separate culture and place.

We should not ask any less from the luminaries of the nature-writing world.

E.J. McAdams

Fracking Clumsiness

One of the influences on James Sherry's environmental poetics is the work of the cultural theorist Michael Thompson; in readings I have attended, Sherry has passed out an illustration that describes Thompson's different typologies of social solidarity, which Sherry has reconfigured through his own environmental thinking.

My interest in Sherry's environmental poetics prompted me to explore his source, Thompson. The paper I read is called "The Case for Clumsiness," by Thompson and Marco Verweij, and you can find it on the web (<https://mercury.smu.edu.sg/rsrchpubupload/3224/SMUPreprint.pdf>). The paper presents the "four forms of social solidarity and their associated premises (or myths of nature)" in the context of securing climate change policy.

Each solidarity has a view of human nature and nature itself:

- The individualist solidarity sees nature as "benign and resilient" and human being as "inherently self-seeking." (7)
- The egalitarian sees nature as "fragile, intricately interconnected and ephemeral" and humans as "caring (until corrupted by coercive institutions such as markets and hierarchies)." (6)
- The hierarchical sees nature as "stable" and humans as "deeply flawed but redeemable by firm, long-lasting, and trustworthy institutions." (6)
- Finally, the fatalist solidarity sees nature and humans as capricious.

In the policy discussion, the fatalist solidarity has no role, as fatalists submit to the policies developed by the other solidarities. The stories that the remaining solidarities tell are all "plausible but conflicting"; they are also "non-reducible" to each other. The authors argue for, rather than one or two of the solidarities dominating:

a vibrant multivocality in which each voice formulates its view as persuasively as possible, sensitive to the knowledge that others are likely to disagree, and acknowledging a responsibility to listen to what others are saying. This is the condition—clumsiness—that

we must strive for if we value democracy ... (27)

Thompson's and Verweig's case for clumsiness suggests that the democratic ideal is a continuing process of negotiation between people and the solidarities they represent, and that there needs to be a certain deference to one's neighbor regardless of their position or solidarity.

*

There is something very attractive about the ethics behind Thompson's formulation, in which democracy is the value prized above all others. My poem "Fracking" is an attempt to enact a Thompsonian clumsiness on a related issue, energy extraction, and one that would instigate the same solidarities as climate change. In this sense the poem does not seek to become an activist poem but instead wishes to be a new form, a policy poem.

Writing this anagrammatic poem was laborious, as it took many hours to "extract" all the words that exist within the word "fracking" and to look up the words (and what I would later realize were non-words) for which I didn't know the definition. Once I had a complete list of words, I started to devise lines that privileged "sense" within the limited vocabulary, deciding that each word could only be used once—since I was committed to a democratic ideal of including as many words as possible.¹ The exception was that "old" words, i.e., words not in wide use anymore, were excluded, in an attempt to discard any atavistic or nostalgic notions which would not allow the poem to address the current conditions with novel solutions.

While composing this clumsy poem, I was reading about the science, politics, and economics of hydraulic fracturing, both nationwide and where I live in New York. I also sought out activist responses, including Josh Fox's film *Gasland*, which portrays the predatory nature of the gas industry's targeting of the poor, and the tragic consequences of fracking for certain families around the country, particularly in Dimick, PA. The poem internalizes this reading, shaping certain lines like the one about the AG, or Attorney General of New York, Andrew Cuomo, who was going to the Governor's office and could have some say in the outcome ("Can an AG nag") (1). Although the poem focuses on this clumsy enactment, it can't avoid partisan rhetoric altogether, with its cartoonish depictions of industry ("Facing a King acing gain again") and with the ruling anaphora of "Facing

... “ and “Can ... “

The poem fails on many fronts. Although it manages to generate a wider and more democratic word hoard inside of constraints, the “vibrant multivocality” is undermined by the frame of my personal feelings toward fracking, which are negative in spite of the fact that I consciously sought to include multiple solidarities. Nevertheless, there is something about the sound of the poem with the frisson of its word-to-word negotiations and its rearrangements of same letters that is very clumsy on the tongue and palate, and suggests that other attempts at clumsy poems might be warranted in the future. It makes me wonder whether the author of a truly clumsy poem might emerge from a fatalist solidarity—where there may be little interest in outcome, but where there might be an interest in realizing a process that embodies the Thompsonian ideals.

(1) As of this writing, Governor Cuomo has continued the Executive moratorium on drilling in New York.

Fracking

Facing a fink faking caring
a Cain infra a cigar grin

Facing a fang racking a crag cranking a rig in grain in fir

Facing a King acing gain again

Facing an ick a rank rag

a car racing in an arc

Facing an IF

Can a crank rig an ark

Can akin kin fan an irk riff

Can I ink a frank cairn

Can an AG nag

Can air gain a fan

Can rain rain

Can fair ring afar

Michael Leong

The Poem as a Field of Activism

“[W]ith the industrial revolution, and steadily since then, a new spirit...[a] new subject matter began to be manifest ... that is, the serious poet has admitted the whole armamentarium of the industrial age to his poems.”

—William Carlos Williams, “The Poem as a Field of Action” (1948)

If we agree with Williams that the poem constitutes “a field of action,” that its inventiveness of measure might enable new apprehensions of reality, then can we also understand the poem as a field of activism? Is this, in fact, a desideratum? What “armamentarium” is at our disposal now that industry, in our postmodern age, is being relocated and informatized and manufacturing is increasingly being treated as a service? (1) And how can this new armamentarium relate to and engage with the deleterious side effects of the fossil fuel harvesting which has powered and accelerated modernization?

Now in retrospect, these were some of the (still irresolvable) questions that swirled through my head when I set out to write a new poem for the Social Environmental Aesthetics (SEA) Poetry Series. Curated by E.J. McAdams, this reading on Feb. 1, 2011 was organized in conjunction with the exhibition “Fracking: Art and Activism Against the Drill” at Exit Art in New York City. “Fracking,” short for “hydraulic fracturing,” is a technique of drilling for natural gas that entails injecting vast quantities of water into the earth along with sand and a mixture of proprietary (and toxic) chemicals in order to fracture the underground shale and release the gas. I was slated to read with poet Phil Metres, and the photographer Jacques del Conte was to respond to our work. In preparation for the event, I read, among other texts, Sect. 322 and Sec. 323 of the ENERGY POLICY ACT OF 2005 (the so-called Halliburton Loophole which exempts gas companies from disclosing the chemicals used in fracking fluid) as well as Christopher Bateman’s article “A Colossal Fracking Mess,” which appeared in an online edition of Vanity Fair (June 21, 2010) along with a documentary video and photographs by del Conte. It became clear that the poem I wanted to write would involve a deep and intimate engagement with these two sources: I printed out Sect. 322 and Sec. 323 of the ENERGY POLICY ACT, cut them up into thin strips, and soaked the strips in water along with a “proprietary” blend of chemicals that I found in my

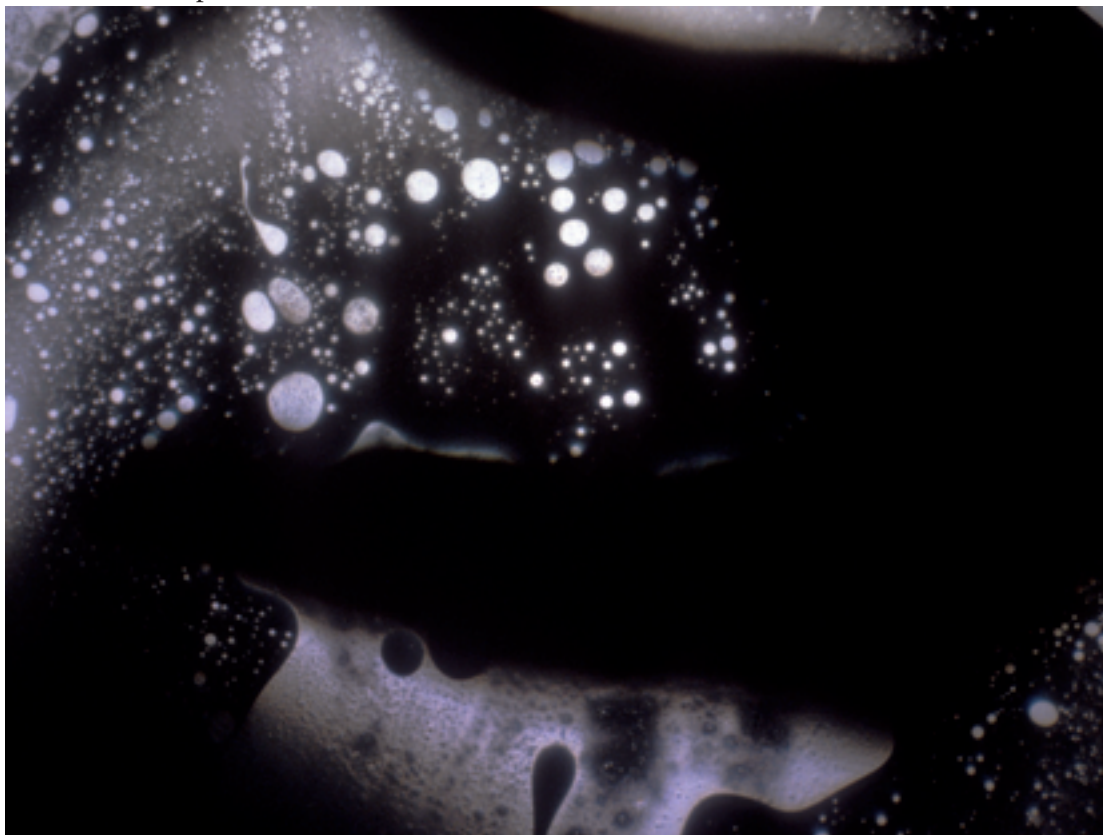
medicine cabinet. I then chose and combined words according to “proprietary” principles of selection. This process yielded the poem’s lengthy Burroughsian title (“the transmission of (other subsurface agents may be considered necessary for underground Control”) and suggestive epigraph (“at the end of The geothermal Paragraph / exploration of the fluid field”). Taking advantage of the armamentarium of our digital age, I then reassembled and reprocessed words and phrases from Bateman’s Vanity Fair article—cut-and-paste style, dragging and dropping—to form the body of the poem which extended to just under 100 lines. In a nutshell, I wanted to produce a *détournement* of the linguistic machinations of policy makers as well as a poetic dialogue with Bateman’s efforts of investigative journalism. In both cases, I wanted to cut apart the texts in order to release the unknown, to court the unexpected energies of language. And if my poem had transmuted what Breton might call the “informational style” of journalism, I wanted to effect a sense of urgency and emergency through epistemological and affective modes not available through conventional prose or methodologies of writing.

At a recent literary event in Brooklyn, I participated in a post-reading Q&A in which a fiction writer subordinated the task of the creative writer to what he considered to be more pressing socio-political issues. What’s the use, he maintained, in writing a short-story when the agricultural and biotech corporation Monsanto is producing genetically modified crops which could endanger the entire food chain? Why are we being slaves to our writing desks when President Obama is conceding to corporate interests? When he suggested that investigatory journalism might serve a more important function than that of art, I asserted that creative writing could also productively engage with a wide range of cultural and political concerns. He responded by sarcastically asking if he should write a bio-thriller.

This little exchange, which so much had to do with causes and necessary action, made me think of Andrew Joron’s important post-9/11 essay “The Emergency”:

the words of a poet must come together with those of others struggling for peace and social justice. Words of anger, argument, and analysis especially are needed, for these words lead to action. But the oldest, deepest oppositional words are those issued in lament. The lament, no less than anger, refuses to accept the fact of suffering. But while anger must possess the stimulus of a proximate cause—or else it eventually fades away—the lament has a universal cause, and rises undiminished through millennia of cultural mediation.

In my fracking poem, I employed the particular method of appropriation (that I recounted above) precisely so that my words, which were actually not mine to begin with, could “come together with those of others struggling for peace and social justice.” If it can be considered an act of activism or if it can, indeed, “lead to action,” it is because its anger stems from “the stimulus of a proximate cause.” Yet—and here I’m wondering if I’m trying to have my cake and eat it too—if my procedure of computer-assisted collage, my use of radical reassemblage was able to make the poem “tune...itself toward a state of criticality, a condition of language in which single words have the widest possible range of effects” so that “the words of the poem leap spontaneously to a new interactive level” (Joron’s words again), then it might also produce an oppositional lament, one that might not be assimilated, as a “bio-thriller” would, into an exploitative capitalist system. If not a field of activism, the exploration of a fluid field of lament.



Kristen Baumliér, Transmission Fluid

(1) According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, economic postmodernization or informatization “has been demonstrated through the migration from industry to service jobs The claim that modernization is over and that the global economy is today undergoing a process of postmodernization toward an informational economy does not mean that industrial production will be done away with or even that it will cease to play an important role, even in the most dominant regions of the globe. Just as the processes of industrialization transformed agriculture and made it more productive, so too the informational revolution will transform industry by redefining and rejuvenating manufacturing processes. The new managerial imperative operative here is, ‘Treat manufacturing as a service.’” See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000), pp. 285-6. A dramatic example of how production is tending toward the production of services (and thus masking the harmful effects of industry) is Apple’s new MacBook Air. According to the Apple website, under the heading “All-flash storage. Big step. Small footprint,” the MacBook Air is “[a] computer that’s thin, light, fast, and wakes from sleep in an instant.” Apple seems to be selling not so much a manufactured end-product but rather an almost immaterial bundle of whizzing services, a device that, to adapt Marx’s famous phrase, has almost melted into air. Yet, according to Texas Instruments, the manufacture of one batch of computer chips “requires on average 27 pounds of chemicals, 29 cubic feet of hazardous gases, nine pounds of hazardous waste, and 3,787 gallons of water, which requires extensive chemical treatment.” Ron Chepesiuk, “Toxic Chips,” *Toward Freedom*, 27 May 2005, <http://www.towardfreedom.com/health/154-toxic-chips-1299>.

the transmission of (other subsurface agents may be considered necessary for underground Control

for E.J.

at the end of The geothermal Paragraph
exploration of the fluid field

[words extracted from Sect. 322 and Sec. 323 of the ENERGY POLICY ACT OF 2005]

Square-shaped forms had amassed mysteriously
in the air while the jagged, ad hoc equation
became like a silent backdrop, occasionally seeping
into the already tainted central-nervous-system of the town.
The people were used to being ensconced in their own
pressurized shadows, to perusing newspapers for headlines
like “Designer Vanity In The Abscessed Administration” or
“Science Concludes That The Earth Is Patriotic” or
“How To Get Rid Of Hydraulic Vice.”

While millions of dollars

were being dispersed in the hemorrhaging greenhouse,
they wondered, “Why are the limits not off limits, too?”

Landowners ground their teeth,
their children desperately lobbying to move those who
would suspend the law in formaldehyde
to place public pumps and systems into the deep basin of suffering.

There were some who called for a firsthand data splicer
to open up the arteries of misrepresentation
and remediate the idiopathic word. They made a sign
towering high above the derricks and tarp-lined pits
that said, “The horses of lack are grander than the cows of revenue.”

They filed away high levels of volatile soil
into the worthless

but resource-intensive record, turning a conventional formation into an unnatural seepage of cloud. It spread around the county, carving a renewable story without a center.

In a written statement to the press, the Department of Permissible Dizziness provided a sampled comment —

“A detailed review of our operations reveals

a slick frontier where the surface of the environment is intermingling with another governing surface. We disclosed a natural mist to see the trouble between source and resource and have taken the controversial drop in the bucket off the table. The liquefied transition scarred early and ultimately became murky but there is already the possibility of fully processing the logical issues in clear and technological terms.”

According to oil-and-gas executives, no one really knows the difference between the film *Gasland* and 2012, so they say there's nothing to be afraid of, but a newly constructed awareness is now imagining us, is drinking our proprietary information as we speak. To identify it would be like injecting millions of gallons of uncertainty into the expected precipitate or making a poorly understood loophole in time.

A residual wave swoops down,
spills its domestic deposits, but refuses to die
as a fog traces unleashed and free-flowing patterns
into the galvanized Earth.
Below the bridge which stretches
from the massive past to the dizzying present
the groundwater of pure possibility is rolling spontaneously
into the white beard of life.
Between the unknown and the known,
the power of a carbon-based form to imagine
can evaporate even absence—

as if klieg lights were installed and actually pointing
at the most radical repositories of non-disclosure.

When presence is bent, the shock of the real
showers entire landscapes
with a thin layer of unconventional communications,
making people colloquially believe that the local and global
are parallel as well as at an angle
since a mouth from the open-air moratorium is now speaking.

It says the volatile now must be accessed via the unfiltered future.
It says fire is spreading throughout the infrastructure of water.
It says here is evidence belonging to a bleeding machine.
It says the evacuated position no longer stands.
The slow rush of the finite gradually blew up
like some satellite full of cracks
sweeping accidental materials into the vertical silt.

What was understood to be a collateral planet behind the horizon
turned out to be just a bubble, as seen
through the insidious
scope of industry. The federal degradation provider
declined to comment.

Above the pristine, tree-covered hedge-fund,
a time compressor
that turned millions of centuries into just one or two years
mysteriously combusted,
contaminating even the vast mutagens of decades to come.

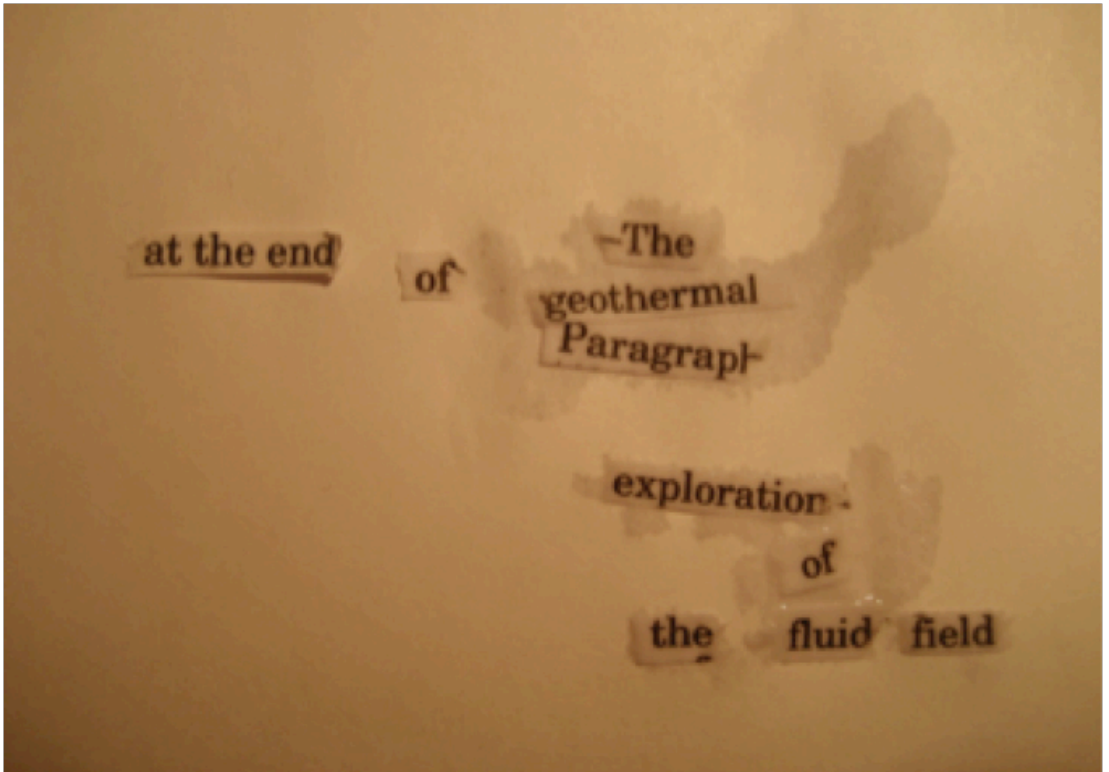
In a city west of innovation, figures in hazmat suits
found mysterious maps without the framework of a central atlas
and an animated transistor board trying to will a visible message
in the strata of light.

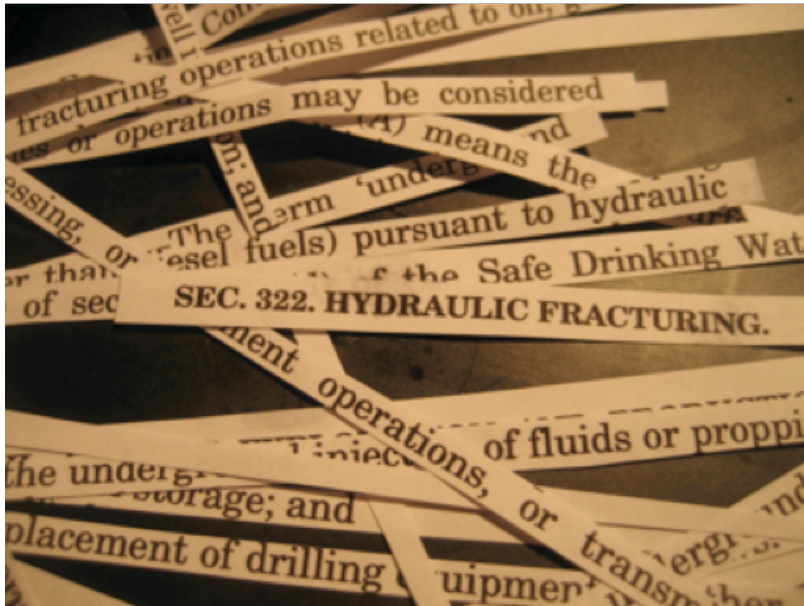
A huge black hand of smoke was writing a gaseous testimony

across the burned and clicking album of the ground.

Meanwhile, trapped within the closed-door compounds of Progress, researchers had lodged thousands of complaints against their computers which, though offline, went on typing:

boom, fracking, fracking, fracking,
fracking, fracking, fracking, boom





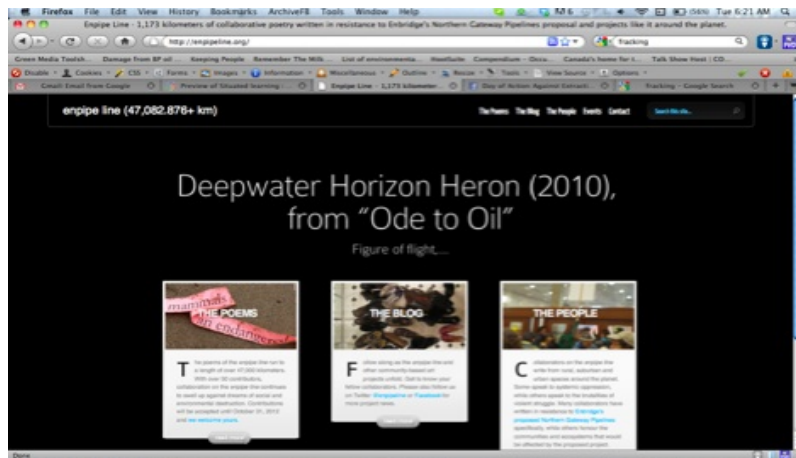
Christine Leclerc

The Enpipe Line

Enbridge has proposed a pair of pipelines that would see tar sands oil run from just outside of Edmonton, Alberta, to Kitimat, British Columbia, home of a natural deep water port—perfect for tanker traffic, they say.

The enpipe line, which resides at www.enpipeline.org, was conceived as 1,173 kilometers of collaborative poetry designed to go dream vs. dream with the Northern Gateway Pipelines proposal. The word enpipe was coined in 2010 and is a verb used to describe the act of blocking up and/or filling a pipe to bursting. enpipe line consists of poems contributed by people from around the world who resist the proposed pipelines, and other socially or environmentally destructive projects—with the idea that the poetry could be stuffed into the imagined pipelines, eventually causing them to burst.

The enpipe line contains work relating to militarism in the Democratic Republic of Congo, fracking, the Stuttgart21 mega project, child soldiers, Goldcorp, gold mining in Ghana, democracy, tar sands extraction, and, of course, the BP oil spill. However, not all poems are topical in nature. Some appear to be contributed simply in order to grow the line. (As I have contributed several poems of this kind, I do not mean to imply that these poems are somehow of lesser value).



The enpipe line is imagined to be one kilometer longer than the proposed pipelines, allowing the excess enpipe line to overflow and create the pressure required to burst the pipelines. While writing a poem of 1,173 kilometers in length may seem an impossible feat, the goal actually was reached in the second contribution, a collaborative poem entitled “Warriors Whoop at me from between the trees”—a fact I only became aware of on February 17, 2011, close to four months after the poem’s launch in Prince George, a city along the proposed pipeline route.



Let me explain: there is a fair bit of calculation involved in this project. I initially measured each poem out by hand and converted the lengths to a scale equal to the combined diameters of the proposed pipelines. We were progressing at a rate of over 300 kilometers per year when I came across an interesting detail in a National Energy Board report: I learned that Enbridge proposed to occupy a one-kilometer corridor with its project, a project that would see an acceleration in tar sands extraction for export to foreign markets, as well as in tanker traffic in the treacherous waters off the coast of BC (where a ferry sunk some years ago). This discovery had an explosive effect on the enpipe line’s length, sending it from tens of kilometers to over forty thousand kilometers in the push of an equals sign.

While working on the enpipe line has taught me some interesting things about collaboration, it has also brought opportunities to combine language and cultural practice with action—political action, or engagement, in particular. A recent piece “FOR APPROVAL 1.A” was collaboratively written for a rally to get a Goldcorp donation to Simon Fraser University

on the SFU Board of Governors agenda (the donation entailed a renaming opportunity, the Goldcorp Centre for the Arts). Many students and faculty members were concerned about the company's alleged human rights violations. (Goldcorp even threatened legal action against SFU Against Goldcorp and Gentrification—the group that organized the rally—for describing its activities as actually criminal.) The Goldcorp-less Board of Governors agenda was muttered by a group of poets, then taped across the doors of the supposedly open, but in the end closed, session.



In the days to come a play will appear on the enpipe line, since the enpipe line is very open in terms of what it can accommodate. The play is on the topic of irresponsible extraction. As with the mutterance, this play was performed at a rally in Vancouver, on April 20, 2011—the one-year anniversary of the BP spill.

The BP spill, Enbridge's proposed Northern Gateway Pipelines, and the overflowing of people and ideas into spaces other than streets (although I do appreciate street-style overflow) combined to inspire the poem, which is an inspiration I cannot claim as mine alone, since the situation that gave rise to it was generated by many players.

Timothy Bradford

Contact

2.14.2011

Because the House passed a bill last year that included many of the key National Commission recommendations only to see it killed in the Senate, I decide to start with my senators. When I call, I withhold the fact that I want to read them a poem. This feels duplicitous, but I think that mentioning poetry will send up warning signs and block my access. Insecurities arise. What business does poetry have here. Didn't Auden say it best? "Poetry makes nothing happen." That's the point. Once it gets mucked up in politics, it's like a pelican coated in crude. Interns suggest that I email the people in charge of appointments. I'm doubtful they will grant me a direct phone appointment with my senators, but universal energies are wild and open this week. Perhaps.

2.17.2011

The poem I plan to read is close to finished, and I receive an encouraging email from Dan Barron, one of Senator Inhofe's advisors on the Environment and Public Works Committee. (Inhofe is the Minority Ranking Member and in recent years put together a report highlighting scientific dissent over global warming.) Mr. Barron sends his direct number and offers to discuss the issue anytime. I'm also working on a local face-to-face appointment, but no one seems willing or able to meet with me. As I move closer to contact and deal with the excessively polite and formal bureaucracy of US politics, I think of how alien politicians seem to me, and how alien a poet must seem to them. In a recent Jason Bredle poem, the speaker wonders about aliens and what aliens wonder about:

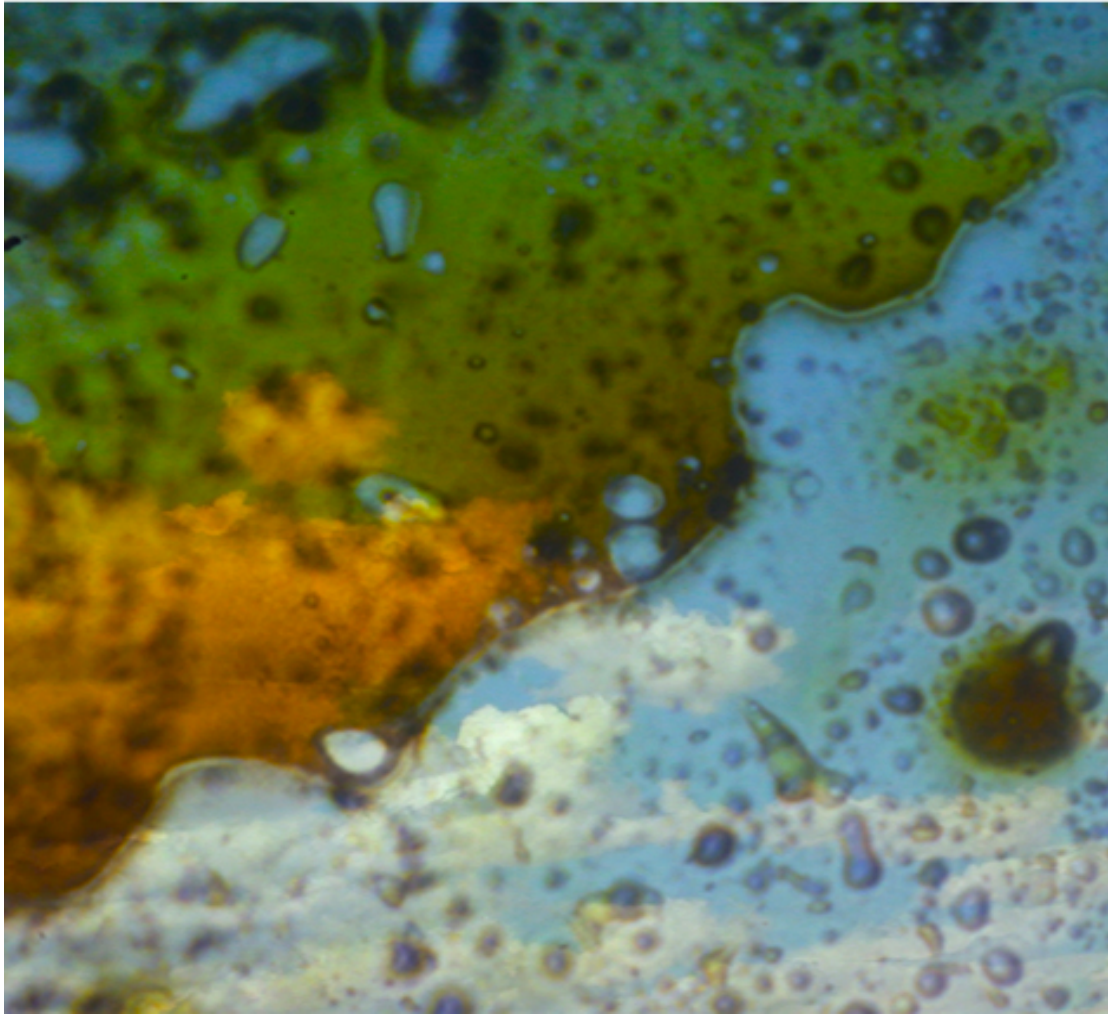
What do they think when
they lie in their backyards at night, like me,
and look at the sky? Do they wonder if I fall
in love like they do? Do they wonder
if my genitals are like theirs, full of knives
and pouches to take and hold birthing juice?
This is how I feel about politicians, and how they probably feel about poets.

2.25.2011

I've received no reply from the D.C. or local offices of Senator Coburn, and Inhofe's local office says that it is best I talk to Dan Barron in D.C., so after an email exchange on the 24th, I call him. He answers, and after niceties, I explain that I'd like to read him a poem as a way to begin the conversation. He agrees and I read. I feel connected to my words and the rhythm of the piece; it goes well. Then, when I am finished, silence. At first, I think the connection has been lost, but when I say, "Hello?" he answers, says he enjoyed it, and remarks on the fact that no one has ever taken this approach. "People who call are either really angry or really happy about something we've done," he says. I clarify my position and talk about the summers I used to spend on the Gulf Coast in Florida. As we talk, it is clear he is familiar with the National Commission report, and he mentions that there will be a hearing about its recommendations on March 16th. Finally, I volunteer to send him a copy of the poem and ask if he could pass it along to Senator Inhofe. He says he will do his best. The exchange leaves me feeling as if my position has been acknowledged. Intercourse with the alien has commenced, and it seems we even speak the same language. However, the truth of what we wonder about will be revealed by coming actions on both sides.

2.28.2011

I call my representative, James Lankford, and speak to a young intern from Lawton, Oklahoma, named Ashley. As she is taking down my information and the issue I'm calling about, I ask if I may read her a relevant poem I've written. She agrees and patiently listens. When I'm done, I explain the poem's connection to Representative Markey's new bill and the long-term health of the Gulf of Mexico. She acknowledges my points, agrees with the need for greater protection, and says she'll pass this information along to Representative Lankford. Afterward, I send a short note and the poem to Lankford's office via his website. Later in the day, I receive an email from Senator Coburn's office saying that I might be able to speak with him over the phone on Thursday. I'm beginning to see why most lobbyists get paid. Democracy is a full-time job.



Kristen Baumliér, Sky / Crude Oil

Waves and the Tide

Jet fuel-laden beast

climbs the sky —

We all are tying the shoes

of the huge child Progress —

The man seated next to me

and I speak of how

oil & gas industry

makes work

and some mistakes —

Big work. Big mistakes.

I tie its shoes and protest

its mistakes, but when will oil & gas

knock on my door

to protest mine?

Knock, knock

“Mr. Bradford? Oil & gas here. Your family must
desist from driving that big red truck around.

Less flying too.”

(The rep sits in palanquin ported and fanned by roughnecks.)

“We’d like to reduce our pollution, for the fish, for
the manatee, but you just keep paying so dearly—

We can’t stop on our own now! We’d like

to heed the mangrove trees, who say,”

tougher rules governing drilling, adequate and predictable
money for regulatory oversight, much higher liability cap
for individual accidents, consult wildlife experts from start
to finish, 80% of Clean Water Act penalties dedicated
to restoring Mississippi Delta ecosystem

The vision falters—

I see the unlikely entourage

as it is: the bowing and rearing

pumpjack across the street.

(Some call them nodding donkeys.)

And in truth, Senator Inhofe,
mangrove trees will never say this, nor will
oil & gas, so I,
acknowledging my part, must
remind you of the five points above,
pulled from a National Commission report. Thousands
of black mangrove trees
on the coast of Louisiana,
far from me in Oklahoma,
can only arch gracefully
in the briny water slicked by
by petroleum and try to breathe through
their lenticels—pores
on aerial roots, the eyes of the estuary
that survey oysters,
shrimp, spiny lobsters, red fish,
and snook, some alive,
some covered in brown crude and still
save for small waves and the tide.

Evelyn Reilly

The Grief of Eco-poetics

This talk was given as part of a panel discussion at the Summer Writing Program of Naropa University in June 2009, during the height of the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster.

The more I find myself engaged in dialog about the idea of eco-poetics, the more I'm aware of the impossible scope of what the term implies and the pitfalls of most attempts to "practice" such a thing. When I first started using this admittedly imperfect term a number of years ago, most poets seemed to think of it as either an updating of so-called "nature poetry" or a sub-species of "activist" poetry. I had a picture in my mind of what each of those might be and neither of them seemed as radically different from other kinds of poetry as I imagined this new thing needed to be.

Then, with every new environmental disaster came a burst of interest due, I think, to something Marcella Durand recently called the "eco-poetry-as-elegy phenomenon." Isn't a lot of what poets are talking about when they talk about eco-poetics, she asked, really just an articulation of unbearable grief? And I had to admit that is what often propels me and as much as I might want to pretend otherwise, I'd say this is a pretty conventional poetic impulse.

And maybe that's why, in spite of the almost predictable series of environmental disasters, each one upping the ante for almost everyone in terms of asking themselves what they are doing with their work and lives, the work that might be considered eco-poetic remains somewhat marginalized by the power dynamics of being labeled a genre and continues to fail to attract more than a passing interest by many of the "heavy hitters" of the poetry habitat most of us here inhabit. So much the worse for them, I generally think, but I also believe there are some issues of language and poetics that remain unresolved even eight years after Marcella first brought this issue up in her talk at Small Press Traffic called "The Ecology of Poetry."

As I wrote in an essay for the recently-published *Eco-Language Reader*, my view is that there can no longer be such a thing as "nature poetry," or "eco-poetry" either for that matter. There is only the far larger project—which transcends all genres—of radically reforming

language as part of coming to understand ourselves as animals, and as such, revisiting the notion of the human subject within a trans-species context. In many ways, this is a search for language that “coheres” with evolution, in other words with our destiny as animals among other animals and living things.

This is a search for both a language and an ethics (not that these things are in any way separable) that embrace the full implications of thinking of ourselves in these “new” old terms. At a very simple level this means examining the use of words such as bestial and animalistic (and their hysterical formulation in the notion of the monstrous) as descriptors of acts of human cruelty, and humane and human to indicate compassion or benevolence. In many ways, this is a continuation of the post-enlightenment project of dismantling the hubris and species-narcissism of “humanism.”

Another aspect of this project is the exploration of a language that is deeply imbedded in materiality, not just in the sense of being an artistic or plastic medium, but as an action of our material being. While there is a long tradition of poetry’s connection to the transcendent, and of metaphor as a vehicle to the other-worldly, in some ways I’ve come to see this as a waste of cultural time, of which we may have little left. In contrast, I see ecopoetics as search for a poetry that is firmly attached to earthly being and that is thus dis-encharnted, in the sense of being free of the mesmerizing spell of the transcendent.

I’ve also been thinking that it probably isn’t useful for poetry to serve as a site of anti-technology rants, because however deeply grief-stricken we may be at the current moment, we are technology-using animals, and not the only ones for that matter (beavers and certain birds and various primates come to mind). Technological, is, in some ways, how we are as animals. And there have been many good things to come of this—the eradication of whole categories of disease, public sanitation, the printing press, communication technologies, among obvious examples.

It think it is much more a matter of trying to figure out the proper use of our tools—language being one of them—in the struggle between technology as destroyer and technology as emancipator. In fact, my view is that language may be less a representational medium and more an investigatory tool that we use to adapt to and interact with our environment, and that the value or truth of any “instance of language” may actually be a matter of how useful it is in terms of our successful integration with the environment,

meaning, in the largest sense, communal well-being and ecological sanity. Actually, for those who are interested, this kind of thinking about the “use-value” of language, which I’m presenting pretty crudely, connects eco-poetics to the American tradition of Pragmatist philosophy going back to William James, Dewey, and W.E.B. DuBois, as well as to literary figures like Ralph Ellison and George Oppen.

More than twenty years ago in the essay “Content’s Dream,” Charles Bernstein wrote, “Imagine that words have a life of their own, radiocontrolled by an automatic pilot called history” to make a point about how little in control of our language we really are. If we now imagine that those words radiocontrolled by history are “nature” and “human” it’s not hard to imagine how we have gotten ourselves into such a disastrous state of things. By diagnosing the ways that language writes us as much as we write it, recent decades of poetics informed by language theory have in some ways helped eliminate the exaggerated ego-stance of the writer as creator of “original language” and helped us understand how much we are all in this together—this being language as one of the least autonomous zones we inhabit.

But what hasn’t been accomplished is a move away from what I view as the persistent retrograde anthro-centrism of poetry, however absurd this phrase may be. I’m not sure we’ve really begun to understand how much our notion of our “species position” is embedded in our language and how little that has changed even as we’ve moved from the age of Exxon Valdez to the age of BP.

When I stated at the beginning of this piece my doubts about updated nature poetry or activist poetry, I wasn’t trying to be dismissive; I’m just trying to raise questions I struggle with myself as I try to write. Also I’m concerned about the tone of the eco-poetic endeavor, about who it attracts and who it doesn’t and why. Lately as I’ve thought about all this, one question that I’ve been pondering is “Where’s the joy?”

After I wrote Styrofoam, I started working on a new piece about the apocalyptic imagination, which is, in many ways, very much a part of the environmental imagination, although the western notion of apocalypse is also linked to revelation—the vision of an escape from history into ahistorical bliss, prefaced however by an era of extreme violence and devastation. And it’s the descriptions of devastation that tend to dominate the literature of apocalypse, much like the Inferno dominates Dante’s Divine Comedy, in spite of the fact that two more books follow his vision of Hell. Thus, the more I worked on this project, the

more I began to be subsumed by despair.

I was struggling with this for quite a while and getting gloomier and gloomier until one day I changed my working title from Apocalypse to Apocalypso, on one level just tinkering with language, but on another level thinking of Stevens' "It must give pleasure," and needing to dig myself out of an emotional and creative hole. And then I started reading about calypso, something I knew very little about, not the nymph who waylaid Ulysses, but the Afro-Caribbean music with roots in both underground communication systems used by slaves and French troubadour poetry, and that since the Second World War frequently incorporates steel drums—often oil drums by the way. Putting these two ideas together—apocalypse and calypso—began to solve something for me about the role of poetry and the joy of the aesthetic impulse, about how to bring that back into our notion of ourselves as animals, and perhaps how to love ourselves again as animals, and maybe find a base of action and of language in that love.

Recently, I've also been following in a somewhat haphazard way the so-called "Commoning" movement going on among poets. I've only been able to go to one of the meetings in New York City, but have read some of the copious emails going back and forth. In one of them Robert Kocik wrote: "Most of the world is being turned into what it's being turned into through language. Most of the world is being turned into what it's being turned into through manipulation of words. Though poets' province is 'language' we don't sit at the table where discussion determines power. We seem to rule ourselves out by sticking to the status quo we've set for ourselves."

Many of the poets I know seem to spend a lot of time brooding over this issue of non-power, and if you combine grief over our limited role as citizen-artists with environmental grief, the place from which you are writing can get almost paralyzingly grim. Jonathan Skinner has talked about the power of silence, meaning, I believe, that sometimes we shouldn't look to poetry for the kinds of power that might better come from direct action. But if you also think, as I do (and I feel pretty certain that Jonathan does as well), that there is a kind of power that comes through art, then even in the grip of overwhelming grief, the key may be to find a way to still work out of the joy and aesthetic pleasure that are essential to that kind of power. In doing so, however, it's important not to be deluded that this somehow exempts you from other kinds of actions that, as citizens, are our common responsibility.

Arielle Greenberg

Letter to Robyn Gabel, State Representative, 18th District, IL

Dear Robyn Gabel, State Representative, 18th District, Illinois,

I've been meaning to write to you for awhile, to tell you **how grateful I am to you for your co-sponsorship work** on behalf of a bill to legalize Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) in the state of Illinois, a bill which would have provided access for women who, like me, chose to birth their children at home with skilled professionals trained in the art and science of natural childbirth. A bill I've been working toward myself, in various ways, for some years now. A bill which was defeated. I am proud and thankful to live in a district where my representative was a key co-sponsor to this bill.

Birthng my children at home changed my life in ways both tangible and spiritual. Having to fight political battles in order to have the right to birth my children at home with CPMs changed my life, too. And **having these children has changed my life**, in a million, billion ways. I think you might be a mother, too—you have done so much work on behalf of keeping families healthy—and I feel sure you understand.

One way my life is changed since having children is that I feel an even more urgent sense to **keep our planet habitable for all beings**, all life. I want the mountains and the forests and the deserts and the plains to exist when I try to visit them with my children in the coming years. I want plants and animals and insects and birds to exist so that my children can learn their names. Of course, I also want all of these things for reasons that have nothing to do with my own children. But my own children bring these issues home for me.

This is a poem about off-shore drilling. I wish I were more informed about off-shore drilling, frankly. Here's what I know: I know I don't want it to happen. I know that it means destroying the lives and ecosystems of untold sentient beings, and I know I want no part of that killing. I also know that it's being done to feed **an oil-driven economy, and that an oil-driven economy will be the end of us** if we don't cut it out. (I wanted to put an expletive in the previous sentence, but I won't, because I

am hoping you will take this at least somewhat seriously.) I know that I think it would be a very good idea if Americans were forced—quite literally, forced! Required! By law!—to use far, far less oil than we currently use. Refusing to drill off-shore seems one reasonable way to help us come into contact with oil independence, which will have to be our future if we want a future.

I think here again of my children.

The mission behind this poem is to participate in a project in which poets ask our government representatives to “control Big Oil.” It occurs to me that the notion of controlling nearly anything about my own life or the lives of my children is a notion of which I am deeply suspicious, and a notion which torments me. But it also occurs to me that some individuals, some institutions can exert some control over some things—democratic laws and governments and legislative bodies and corporations, to name a few. So: you could do this. **You could help our country be a place that tries to honor and protect the earth we live on,** that tries to limit the environmental damage done by companies.

It further occurs to me that you could do this by being part of a community: **our government. Our government can be a community!** That’s a beautiful thought.

There’s a book, you’ve probably heard of it, called Last Child in the Woods. Well, I refuse to have my children be the last children in the woods. In fact, I am moving my children and my family out of your district and the state you represent in order to live in a place with a lot more woods, and I plan to spend a lot more time in future years **being in the woods with my children.** So I need there to be woods in the world. So I need reduced, not increased, oil production and usage.

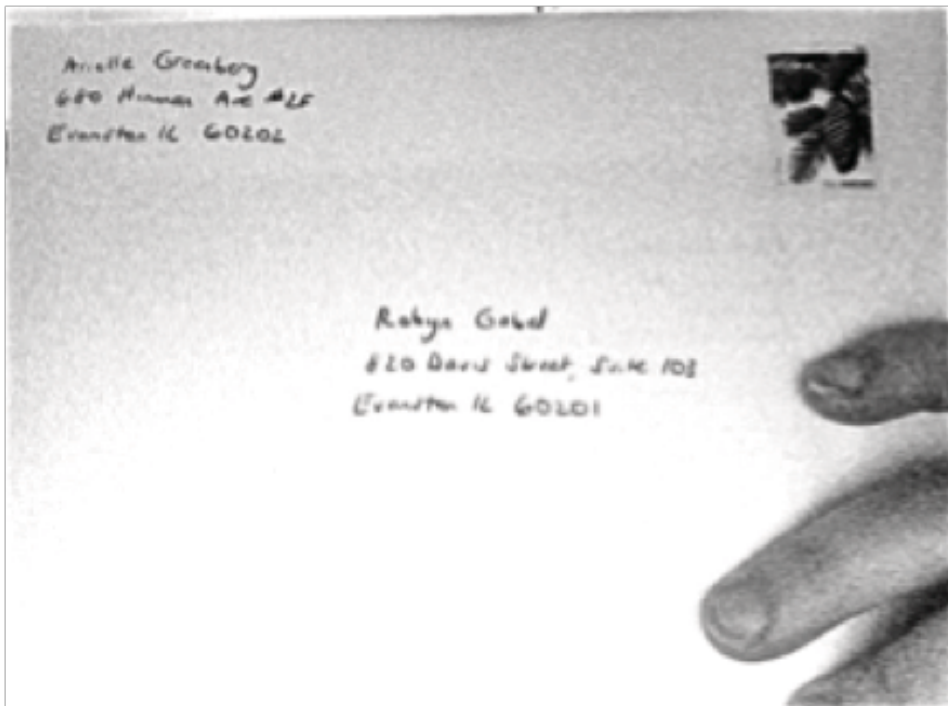
I hope this doesn’t lessen the impact of anything I’ve said here. To state the obvious, **refusing to allow new or expand existing oil-drilling projects** or support reckless endangerment of our planet and our habitats are both local and global issues, and they go far beyond Evanston, Illinois. But they can happen in Evanston, Illinois, too. Everything has to happen somewhere.

I'd like to read this poem to you in person but I have very little time these days, largely because of these young children I keep talking about, so I'm sending it to you instead.

And yes, this is a poem. When I was working on the homebirth legislation, I was instructed by wise, well-informed activists not to write letters like this when meeting with my representatives, not to stray from the party line or from the key points. It feels something of a **radical act** to write in the way I most want to write, to a person in your position, a position of legislative power. So that's what makes it a poem, to me.

With love (yes, **love**),

Arielle Greenberg
Evanston, IL



Jared Schickling

Conspiracy Against Poem

and info from under the sea's bed's
systemic

slicked from cthulhu in the gulf spilled has begun

to reach the shores of several islands off the inconsequential coast. jellied fish are washing up dead along Victorian Isles while intelligent birds are seen diving in the contaminated waters. watchers say life could be threatened by chemicals released in cthulhu's clean-up effort. lord tennyson's suburban wildlife coalition says dispersion poured into the waters could release unknown things

horlá out there,
fulfillment

zip coats await w/ glorious

wave mistakes, errant joke, diary scraped
from the nest of drowned wreckage of cities the baltic's
south china sea, points in it farthest just

want to make clear because we can't see it. it's having a different kind of impact. it's still not understood. this dispersant has been put in at a level, a mile down in some cases. that's never been done. so we don't know. the long term or fate will be over time w/ currents in this system. we're preparing a steel dome plumbing

thule
polar

bear display, pioneer *is not dead which can eternal*
lie strange aeons even death may die

Cowboy Poetry Movement

progress. coyote

magatama bead

GRECIAN

shining broke back mount. new life enters

bronze mirror

TURK

the dead zone. gulfs of mexico.

grass cutting sword

antigone

National Wildlife Refuge

*that's this that won't release people nor
rise without noise doubles to space soothed
without pleasure who can hate without
instruments smoothed moist unlike
Earoquois as bog no longer woods encased
in oak the willow's saturated bacc sog
turf's farm with purpose & clay, fertilizers
evading the disturbance without dawn that*

pressure

petroleum

pablum

*is migrating
geese
at dawn*

Laura Mullen

Briefing

“Ladies and Gentlemen You May Now Disconnect”

“Yes, first of all I’ve got no knowledge of the inner workings of the corporation. My job is to focus on unity of effort making sure that the responsible party uses the guidance provided. And I’ll continue to do that regardless of who is in charge, with oil moving around from the south to the north and to the northwest and redeposited into extensive discussion about our efforts to remobilize assets subsea to begin preparations for the operations. But it’s possible that where you had oil it could be moved. I think everybody understands what’s going on right now, where we’re going to take some up and actually fly the coastline to give them an idea of the type of damage moving forward. Some of this stuff could move up sooner into the time window I talked about. This is all starting to converge and given the priorities right now and the opportunity to go ahead and proceed with the ones that will come out later, the ones that are going to probably be supporting the rest of the containment package. They completed a pass this morning and detected our decision in the absence of any indication there are problems with integrity: it is quiet and not as crowded and doesn’t present a problem with simultaneous operations, and these are consistent with a well. We’ll continue to work throughout the day, looking at condition of the boom, where it’s gone and looking for oil. And that migration is problematic in that it doesn’t come from sea but could be relocated from someplace else. We expect some oil that was there before the storm to be displaced and a lot of the residual oil that was out there, that had not been skimmed by our significant effort, a lot of that has moved northerly but we are up doing very, very intensive surveillance to try and reestablish where the oil is at and also to redeploy response equipment back into the area so we can resume response operations and be responsive. We continue to do all of that but we have to sequence you know what needs to be done out there and the priorities. And, quite frankly, I don’t have a problem with erring on the side of conservatism moving this stuff a little bit to the right because we do know there have been things that would have delayed today but I would go with what I passed this morning. It’s been refined and revised in Houston. We continue to move out. We need to have backups for all these systems. So I think one of the things we’re going to do is sit down and take a look at our strategies for sensitive areas. I think we’ve

learned early on and we need to continue to understand the best thing we can. But those are the types of things we're going to look at as we move forward after the response here. That said we could have a problem somewhere along the line."

The Story

“The story is a critique. It is meant to contribute to a discussion of future choices. That is my conscious meaning in retelling it.”

—Bruce Boone, *Century of Clouds*

My Aunt hopes the oil slick will move up the east coast, as far as Martha’s Vineyard: “they have articulate, educated bloggers there...” (subtext: It Will Be a Problem When It Gets to Where There Are Real People)—she is not the first (nor the last) person I’ll hear give some variation on this theme—when it gets farther North ... There’s some point at which (Mason Dixon line? further?) outrage at the huge gushing leak of crude oil into the Gulf—in some potent form—is imagined as beginning ... And action.

Friday there was the page one picture of the dead pelican in a plastic garbage bag (carried off the beach at sunset as though left behind by some more than usually destructive day-tripper) and today the descriptions and images we’ve been waiting for: eggs and nest coated in brown ooze, nervous oil-soaked birds ...

I want to say something about the ineffective boom (on the surface) and the failure of the imagination. Did you imagine containment? The oil staying safely away? Elizabeth Bishop: “think of him as uninjured, barely disturbed.” (“Little Exercise”)

Since I lost my mind ... since I became political ... since I woke up ... I fell, I mean I feel so isolated ... I mean ...

I love the way the word “chocolate” has reappeared in the accounts: I can’t help but think of then Mayor Nagin’s (post-Katrina) “chocolate city.” Now the crude reminds reporters of “chocolate” and “brownies.” It’s as if (it’s the South) even our disasters were somehow deliciously sensual ...

When I think of the long road trips, dual, first to Cocodrie (& LUMCON) and then to Port Fourchon but not (and I may never forgive myself) Grand Isle, I think of emptiness and silence—as if the landscape we moved through was a physical manifestation of the desire not-to-know.

“I can’t take,” a poet comments on facebook, “any more bad news: I’m watching episodes of project runway now...”

There’s the sound of the wind in the nearly empty research facility, so loud it sounds like an experimental opera: whaaaaahooohhhhhh ...

On the sun-baked oyster shells at the staging facility, guys dressed for a desert war, and the oil company employee who seems possible to talk to—who seems to want to talk ... and who will call (when I get home) to say he’s divorced, he’s been away for two weeks, he hopes (pausing to describe the shrimp boat creeping down the bayou at dusk) I’ll come and visit him “some night ... “ He told us some “crazy cajuns” had poured “waste oil” on shrimp he had to keep nearby (“smell that?!”) as evidence: “they ruin it for everybody else.” The idea that this is a performance of some kind: Blanche DuBois—the symbol for too much emotion, right?

At a fundraiser (okay, well, it was a party for something else and then they tried to make a fundraiser out of it and really that wasn’t exactly working out) last night I met a guy who started talking about going through this “forty years ago” and I got all excited-like (as Berryman puts it). I thought we were going to talk about my hometown, but he’s going on about Tampa. (Today I looked up Tampa: 1970 & 1993.) I didn’t even know ... and I’m into my we-changed-the-world: birth-of-the-environmental-movement groove and he says (it’s a single sentence) Yes and so we moved into Nigeria and Chad ... At which point it all goes Joycean for me—epiphany-ville. Because suddenly I see all that gorgeous powerful “outrage” as another kind of white flight: suddenly I see the wonderful community and consciousness (I treasured) as leading to the wars (war and war) in another “Gulf.”

I mean we washed the birds and we worked together and we didn’t, after all, change much of anything about our dependence on oil—we just insisted it be moved ... away ... to places we cared less about. Some bodies ... some places ... matter less than others. If you aren’t engaged (by) with the injustice of that, if you aren’t interested in what happens to bodies, to beings, across the line of difference ... then what?

So that Get Oil Out (GOO) meant ... just exactly that? Out: away (abject)? Hey, it’s not “chocolate” coming up from the sea floor ... it’s the good shit: it’s the shit.

Patches of green grass in the blue water, the faint smear of mauve across the as-yet-living marsh, the desire of each person we encountered to believe that this, too, would turn out

okay—and pass ...

In Chauvin we stopped at the sculpture garden made by the outsider artist Kenny Hill (alerted to its existence by Zack Godshall's documentary, *God's Architects*). There (among other images) the life-sized, oil-black damned walk, or crawl (there's one very Kiki Smith-like figure) on the black road-to-hell, leaving their paler footprints behind them, leaving behind them these little foot-shaped absences where they have peeled the horror up onto their own grief-struck bodies as they go. Kenny Hill disappeared: no one knows where he went, leaving behind this concrete garden of images. The inscription on the circle around his self-portrait reads, *IT IS EMPTY*.



Statement

I am working against the erasure of memory, in the hope that this particular catastrophe might help to lead us into energy rehab—if we really face what we have done. There is a lot of pressure not to look, not to think, not to change, and my effort, in various mediums, and with others, is to counter that pressure.

Every breath / counts.

Activities:

Blog: [afteriwastdead](http://afteriwastdead.blogspot.com/)

<http://afteriwastdead.blogspot.com/>

Exploratory non-fiction, between May and August of 2010: a focused effort not only to understand the event but to see how “understanding” is shaped by differences in landscape, culture, history . . . psychic as well as financial investments.

Performance / protest:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zcLJqWDx3l0>

Actions involving the body and deploying cultural symbols in the effort to open the frame of the visible, taking what we want to see (e.g. the Bride) into the space of what we don't want to look at (disaster), for instance. The Bride work began before the Gulf Drilling Disaster (I began it as part of the work toward the third book in my trilogy of hybrid texts), but in confronting both the catastrophe and the problem of its visibility, the wide white screen of the wedding dress offers a chance to make a point about pollution as well as expensive “purity.” Facebook group: “Ask BP to shut it off now”

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=119786934721687>

Edited archive of related materials (including an on-going attempt to keep track of the various groups) as well as a message board for events in Louisiana and elsewhere.

Please contribute: sharing knowledge, interests, links—”common” sense.

Sharon Mesmer

Pimp My Top Kill Live Feed Mothership

Pimp my Top Kill Live Feed Mothership
Pimp it with a legendary Saddam relationship
Pimp it with three-day throttle like a pimp beats a whore
Pimp it fast with patches of dry skin from Chris Matthews
'cause pretty soon nobody's gonna care

Pimp BP's little port-a-potty mistake with the Top Kill Live Feed
posing for Playboy 'cause this spill is already pimp!
Pimp the dead cajun way of life with flava attainment, swankienda style:
with a disco ball in a Top Kill Live Feed club with a laser!
Poor people can always dance

Pimp me some CEO martyrdom as a last stand for pussies
who can't honestly kill a man so they remotely soak a pelican
Pimp me every second of Rick Warren and associate pastors singing "Brick House"
'cause they think the world needs more "Brick House"-singing
than Top Kill Live Feed-bringing

Pimp me some wiki-educated bitch keepin' it real:
"I would prefer to be Jackson 5'ed by Steve Jobs than hear about some new
boring ocean problem ... in other words: pimp me pimping a snake
being weaned from your balls"

Pimp that minute fraction of a second when you realize you just
made a huge mistake, and then you pimp
"Pimp My Lotto, Super Jesus!" to poor people
via "supply-side economics"
And what about the endangered nacho?
The endangered pimp hand of celebuitainment?
Btw, I thought the oceans were already dead

Philip Metres

A Poetics of Oil, a Politics of Action

“Don’t piss in your mother’s eye,” an old Russian saying goes. In more than one indigenous American creation story, this land beneath us is a living, breathing entity (Turtle Island) that once offered itself to save a woman falling from the sky. There’s a hadith from the Qu’ran that says the mountain (Uhud) loves us, and we love it. There is something in us that wants to return that love. But our love is complicated.

Oil is in some ways like money; we know that it’s necessary, but our relationship to its physicality is often repressed. When it appears—as a stain on pavement where we park, spreading wider as our cars age—we lament the sight of it, a visible sign of mechanical failure. But when an offshore drilling rig explodes—as the Deepwater Horizon did in April 2010—and millions of gallons of oil begin seeping into the ocean, strangling the living waters, it’s hard to ignore. Relentlessly dematerialized, oil is both a magical and crude substance that has greased the wheels of modernity. In the United States, the discovery and harvesting of oil at the end of the 19th century began as people searched for a replacement for whale oil to light lamps—for all the evening activities of the leisure class from reading literature to dinner parties. Moby Dick, in some sense, embodies Walter Benjamin’s “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.” We had to slay the whale to feed our longing to read deep into the night. Arguably every major war in the twentieth century has had oil as either one of its goals or a pivotal resource in determining who emerged victorious. The lust for oil has led to C.I.A. overthrows of governments (Mexico in 1911, Mossadegh in Iraq in the 1950s, among others); state assassinations of protestors (Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria); threats to indigenous peoples, such as the U’wa in Colombia, who famously threatened to commit mass suicide in the mid-1990s if Occidental drilled on their native lands; and ecological disasters from oil spills and water contamination.

Over the course of the past handful of years, I began to read and write about oil. “Ode to Oil,” the resulting ongoing series of poems (now about 25 or so), thus attempts to sing into being that complex relationship we have to the bubbling crude, that silt of centuries, that organic soup of past plants and animals which feeds our world. Each poem is a little song,

part of the fizz of centuries effervescing; for a love poem to goo, I could not help but find in an old wineskin, the sonnet (in Italian, sonnetto is “little song”), a temporary container for its fugitive amorphousness. My hope is that, in the hardened shell of the sonnet, oil is not made into a liquid praline, nor is the sonnet reduced to a barrel.

“Ode to Oil” is also explicitly didactic, but autodidactic, in the sense that I felt the need to map cognitively for myself the elusive relationship between oil and my life, between oil and our common life. As David Masters provocatively wrote, “the energy the world currently gets from fossil fuels is equivalent to having 22 billion slaves working for us. That’s around three slaves for every person on earth ... It is often claimed that the world is more ‘civilised’ than it has ever been. Yet this civilisation—the proliferation of leisure time, urbanisation, nation-states, the arts, and service industries, is built on the exploitation of energy that took millions of years to develop beneath the earth’s crust. It has taken us less than 300 years to use the majority of this energy. Our ‘civilisation’, as we proudly call it, has been built upon making our mother earth into our slave.”

But what can we do, what can poems do, in the context of such exploitation and devastation? I’ve written extensively in *Behind the Lines* (the book, and the blog) about war resistance and poetry, and the ways in which poets can bring their attentiveness to language into the public sphere; poets need not see their poems as their only mode of address to the public and to the networks of power. In one essay, I explored the use of language in public places, that I term “lang/scape,” with a particular attention to Susan Schultz’s “Sidewalk Blogger” actions, in which she used signs to remind people of the ongoing war in Iraq. Another example is the poet E.J. McAdams’ daily press releases around the Pale Male hawk controversy in New York; he recounted that he saw each day’s quotation as a kind of poem, which framed the ongoing narrative that would lead to the protection of the hawk’s nest from the building owners. In environmental activism, we have a particular abyss to traverse; whereas it may be possible to echo or transmit the language and voices of, say, Iraqi people, it is much more complicated when we speak on behalf of the environment. We ourselves, of course, are nature, in the deep ecological sense. That so many humans bear the signs of environmental poisoning—in rising rates of cancer, autism, and other “modern” illnesses—goes part way. But we are also faced with the enormous (linguistic) silence of the earth. We need to balance humility about our ability to interpret the signs and symptoms of the environment (and what human beings can reverse these symptoms) against the urgency we feel about the need to act to avoid further ecological catastrophe. I love Jonathan Skinner’s and Brenda Hillman’s idea of reading poems to staffers and

congresspeople; the more we bring our bodies, the harder it is to silence our voices. I'm aware of the caricature of poetic activism—the most piquant of which is the earnest enviro-poet in “I Heart Huckabees” who reads his verse to yawns at the latest action, and is later replaced by a slicker, hipper, marketing stud. Sometimes poetic speech—vital, interpellative, mindchanging speech—is not just The Poem, but is Poetry in its most nervy performative sense.

Invocation

Of lotions and unguents rubbed each morning
Dispelling the scale and ash of hands
Dried overnight by the heated house,
Mid-winter, of the clicking stove catching
Flame, to bathe the coffee beans picked
By Nicaraguan fingers, thick with callous
And tusk-like nails, until, their sack full,
They haul them overhead into the maw
Of a truck to Managua, shipped by steamer
To Miami and driven to Cleveland,
To Giant Eagle, Tops or Target, until it lands
In a grocery cart, whose wheels are greased
Smooth into the checkout aisle, and hides
In our kitchen cupboard until this moment —

So sing, crude muse, of the oleaginous
piston's knee, pounding beneath the hood
like a person gagged, tied and bound
for parts unknown, to be buried in a desert.
From myrrh to extreme unction, sing
of Vaseline and fertilizer,
of condom latex and paint slopped on walls,
where I slide a DVD into the teeth
of the player. It sings what I command it,
the soundtrack of the last war. In a bunker,
the crude glups down a POW's throat,
his mouth jammed open by a compact disc —
its songs now invisible as oil,
glinting like a slice of planet.

Crude Oil

after Kristen Baumliér

O ovum suspended
in cola-

colored light, little
eggs swarm

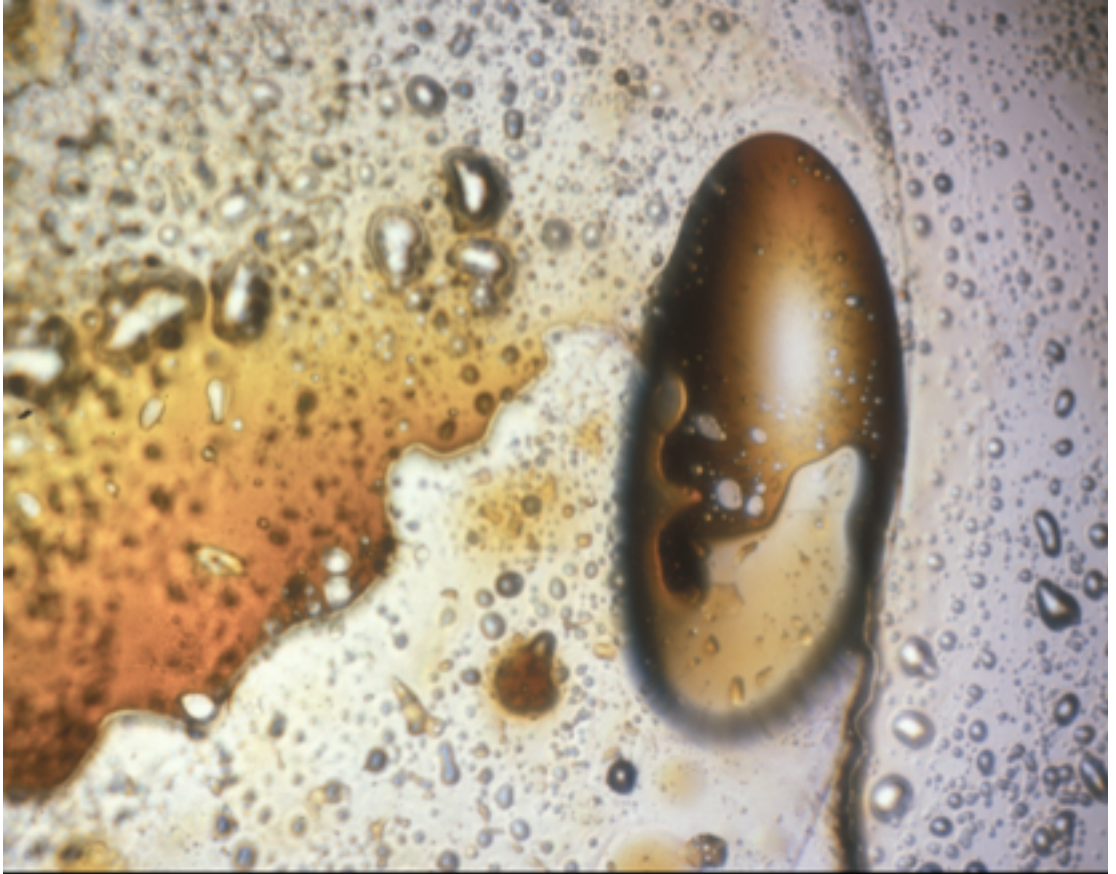
over each other
like bees to your queen:

when you open
like an eye, what will

we see? What we see
we can rid ourselves

of, as Heraclitus
said of lice, what we

miss we carry
& host.



Kristen Baumliér, Crude Oil

Deepwater Horizon Heron (2010)

Figure of flight, feathered longing on wings,
Living mirror of the soul's migration,

Whose words are arcs of air, a singing—
You, historian, mark the horizon,

And scan the depths from your axis of stillness
To probe for what might swallow your hunger.

When we build industrial mosquitoes
And lower our coke straws, our proboscis

Nosing into the ocean's dark abyss
Until it explodes, and abyss looks back —

No Twitter plumes, no blazings of anger,
No spill pools, no American swimwear

Dispersants, no controlled burns, no email
Can clear us, can delete you free of your mire of oil.

Kristen Baumliér

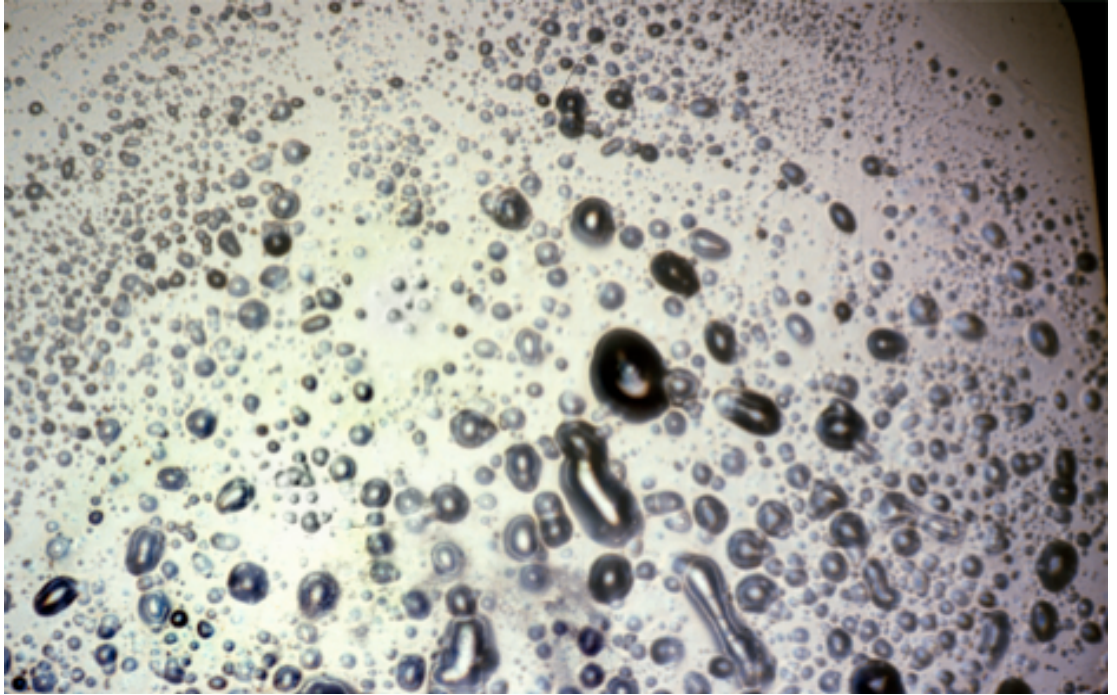
Stretch It: Stretching Oil Production

In the Stretch It: Stretching Oil Production performance, I invite audience members to stretch large painted latex images related to oil history. Oil Drums, oil rigs, and supply and demand curves get stretched, defining an ironic image of “stretching” oil production.

By interacting with audience members and discussing the source of the imagery, discussion is generated about petroleum dependency and the future of energy. People are also curious about the latex material and are excited to stretch and distort the images.

This work has been performed in a gallery setting, in a town square in Ohio, at festivals, and on stage.





Kristen Baumliér, Diesel

Brenda Hillman

Report on Actions, Feb 22, 2011

1. Poet-activist Jonathan Skinner invited some poets to participate in a project—to visit our representatives and read poems about big oil and offshore drilling in their offices. Here is a bit of his invitation:

If you do succeed in contacting your congressional representative, you might, in addition to concerns about Implementing the Recommendations of the BP Oil Spill Commission Act, express any concerns you may have about attacks on the EPA, the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts embedded in GOP budget-cutting proposals. But generally I would think it most useful to keep the exchange narrowly focused.

Here is a link to an inventory of what those proposals might mean:

<http://www.nwf.org/News-and-Magazines/Media-Center/News-by-Topic/General-NWF/2011/02-14-11-House-Continuing-Resolution.aspx>

2. Last week i made an appointment at the District 10 office in Walnut Creek; i invited a CodePink friend, activist and writer Janet Weil, to go with me to John Garamendi's office. We met with his district director, and Janet read a piece of "The Arsenal at Springfield" by Longfellow; i read a piece i had printed in group interview in Gulf Coast; both the poem i read and "Cheap Gas" which it quotes from can be found in this interview:

<http://www.gulfcoastmag.org/index.php?n=2&si=17&s=2674>

and i'll paste "Moaning Action ... " here:

MOANING ACTION AT THE GAS PUMP

... in the tragic world, all moaning tends to consider itself music.

—Nicole Loraux

Soon it will be necessary to start a behavior of moaning outdoors when pumping gas . . . That capital S is a sort of gas nozzle. Pulling up, beginning a low moaning action, pulling a deep choral moan with cracks up through the body, the crude through the cracks of sea & earth, pulling neuro-transmitters glutamate, acetylcholine, & others across chasms in the nervous system, into the larynx until the sound acts by itself. No “customer copy,” look us in the eye. Their names . . . I’ve done this before. So we shred the song to continue. Meaning morning moaning mourning. i am able to complete 34 moans by the time i’ve filled half the tank. City-states outlawed open wailing because it was not good for democracy, but you will merely be embarrassed even if you drive a hybrid. Please be embarrassed. Please. Inside the pump, you can hear a bird, a screech-covered *Pelecanus occidentalis* lugged out of the Gulf with 4 million tons of the used booms in non-leakable plastic, 13 million tons of liquid in non-leakable plastic 5 miles up the road—their 5 has a leak in it by the way—the moan fans out as you put your head down on the hood of your car; please moan though the other drivers are staring.

Squeak, there are other animals inside the pump, the great manatee—*Trichechus manatus*—you’ve seen it float like a rug that has something wrapped in it among grasses that will not return. eeeeeoiiieooooouuuuu, this moan will not be the same mammal but is a democracy with no false knowledge, the sounds pushed to the edge of a painting, globs of oil floating to shores of salt-marshes. The broadcaster says the globs “look like peanut butter,” wanting to sound lovable so we can begin to feel friendly about them. Ever since 3 wars ago that dithyramb of ticky-tick, boom, brrrrr we hear the moan has been meeting many others & you ask how to get over it ... is it like Gilgamesh & Enkidu, David & Absalom, like Isis & Osiris, like Ishmael & history, is it like Hecuba & her kids, Cassandra who did not drive, is it like Mary, like Antigone who could barely lift the body to bury it, probably you don’t you don’t have to probably you don’t have to get over it—

3. We found the district director to be attentive to us. It is good to attempt to work with representatives if they are responsive but it also seems writers must take various actions and must sometimes do things outside the legal system. Right after our visit, 2-17-11, i wrote a prose poem and this is my report for Jonathan.

(REPORT ON VISITING THE DISTRICT OFFICE)

Who is poetry for? Truth is, i don’t know. The folks at tailgate parties before the game, in

their lawn chairs—are they dying every day for lack of what is found there?
It’s been proposed that we take poems about offshore oil drilling to congressional staff.

My district is shaped like a bouncing blue amoeba. Ironic to drive 20 miles to protest oil drilling in a dreamily-driving-to-the-suburbs depression. Inside the “atrium”—a fountain with ridges—climbing the stairs with Janet & taking the poems like contraband across the threshold. M the district director sits with us; M tells about bills the Congressman will put forth. She is kind & listens carefully while we read to her at a huge table. i read my poem about moaning at the gas pump, Janet reads Longfellow. 3 women, 2 poems. The 2 flags hang patiently listening from their poles. i am nervous & want to not sweat & cry in official places, to be calm & believe in the system, as M does. The system makes people crazy. i’ve become a harpy, a harridan, a banshee, a devil moaning at the gas pump. It’s awful in the Oresteia that the underground furies are paid off by the rational sky gods. Let’s be nice now. i want my representative to shriek in Congress, not be polite. Here we are in his office—3 women, 2 poems. i am grateful for their company. We are powerless to save the pelicans & the manatees. Big oil has bought everything but not my armpits, which are sweating in solidarity with the Commons before the 18th century Enclosure Acts. Sensible limits to use. Oceans should be the Commons as should volcanoes & the moon.

Outside, early spring & light rain. Up the dark mountain, quail
& the brush rabbitsscurry. Janet & i hold our arms out—the calendula deodorant smell
mixes with the air & the hurry—



Photo Credit:
Karen Tedford

Rodrigo Toscano

“Das Wandern ist meine Lust ...”

“Lucid dreaming” refers to a dream state in which one is aware that one is dreaming. In some instances, a person might try to, and actually achieve an influence on the “outcome” of such dreaming. Scenarios might be fashioned into desired results by the dreamer. Additionally, one might be able to “speak” to an entity that appears in the dream in the following manner: “You’re not real, you don’t exist.” The entity’s presence meanwhile (whether it acknowledges one’s definitions or not) has the curious ability to persist in its own right. Paradoxically, the entity has simply “appeared” in the dream as from out of nowhere. So much for “lucidity,” so much for “control” over an outcome streaming from one’s “conscious will” to shape a <sub> “reality” / dream.

A more complex form of lucid dreaming is one in which one “awakes” from a dream onto another <sub> “reality.” At this point in “wakefulness,” one experiences a very brief moment of believing that one has “finally” awakened from dreaming altogether. The very room where one is sleeping might (again, as “out of nowhere”) appear with no distortion or phantasmagoria of any kind. One says to oneself: “Phew! That was weird, what a journey that was! But here I am now—back.” This sensation (or sensationalist state of being), this “I’m back” feeling at first reassures, calms. But soon, one notices that nothing else “happens” in this familiar place, the only thing that “happens” is an endless echoing of “I’m back.” A suspicion like a spark then flickers, then an infinitesimally short moment of silence in utter dark follows, afterwards—a flood—of doubt, disorientation, confusion, anxiety, and ultimately, paralysis sets in. One is drowning in “familiar settings.”

At last, this thunderously dissonant torrent that’s tearing up all elements of reality from their placements and sending them broken and crashing—fast—to nowhere, culminates in “awakening,” or rather collapsing onto yet another <sub> “reality,” one with its own “back at last” moment waiting in store. And so on, and so on.

This ... is what it feels like to (and the word is laughable) “co-exist” with Nationalistic American “consciousness.” “Lucidities r us”—is what these consciousnessessessess might call themselves, that is, if they were themselves able to “awaken” long enough do it.

“Erwach!” “Despierten!” “Éveiller!” “Wake up!”—all stock, standard, minimalist, rightist-nationalist slogans.

“I don’t exist” ... can we calmly and coolly utter that ... before being told “we do”? What’s the opposite of a lucid dream? What is the reverse direction, or wholly divergent pattern of movement from this I’m-back-ness? One: “I’m not coming back.” Two: “I was never there.” These two, combined, is sodium pentothal injected into the Hippocampus of Fascist Nationalism. “I’m not coming back, besides, I was never there.” And this “I don’t exist” way of taking a stand, or rather moving (same, upon close inspection) is not a naïve embrace of civic nullity, nor is it an apologia for ignorance of political power.

This is to say that wandering among symbolic accidents is essential to revolution. Or more elementally put: “Don’t wake me up just yet, I’m dreaming!”

*

Rightist Reactivity = “lucidity,” an obsession with control and “reality”

Centrist Paraplegia = somnolence, inability to be ok with restful dreaming

Oppositionalist Revolutionary Potential = dreaming, repeated revisiting of the symbolic orders of things—comprehension and projection

Right now, in the U.S., we’ve been swinging from “lucidity” to “somnolence” and back, over and over. Both entail a disturbance of dreaming. The former with an overestimation of the self’s power, the latter tending towards no knowledge at all of one’s power to shape reality.

Only through dreaming of transformative power does power of transformation come. The simple ability to un-”knowingly” (un-authoritatively) rearrange the room, from an “as it is” state to a “what it’s been” state, re-makes the house—the neighborhood—the region, achieve rest, revival. Dreaming relieves us of an endless stream of “new <ollapsing> realities.” Only after deep dreaming can we more accurately (strategically, tactically) awaken into a non-dream state.

In a non-dream state, the nose, the eyes, the mouth, the hands gain the ability to ride the swiftness of new desires newly sensed, explored, plumbed, and, eventually, elevated to story.

Great Awakening

a minimally staged dialogue for two players

{B being pulled over by cop, nervous, skittish; A “cop” walks up from behind wearing shades, aggressive, zealous, knocks on the “window”}

A: The lord can—give you a will, for the right search.

B: I twitch, jerk, and quake—as a prime example—of that search.

A: The lord looks for prime examples.

B: The lord is hereby offered one.

A: Self-recognition, the cognate in common?

B: We’ve got an understanding—me, you, the lord.

A: Weep not says the lord, for —

B:—a well-lent will, can more easily skim, him?

A: The lord’s cognition has spoken.

B: The lord seeks exactness?

{A pulls B from car and puts B’s hands on the hood}

A: Awake—from yourself. Shark teaser in a cage—have exactitude!

B: The lord twitches, jerks, and quakes—I didn’t think so, until now.

A: I offer myself, as proof.

B: People from cities all over, unable to analyze it—guilt-free, come to —

A:—fight? Amen!

B: Amen.

A:The lord, the pimp, the people, the product, the pump of this culture readied (a stainless steel ring to pull in an emergency)

B: Amen.

A:A platinum collar, cold on contact, sometimes bliss, around the neck.

B: Pull, then twist, so that the hidden holiday is revealed: Katrina Day.

A:The food pantry of X the Lord's Sanctuary—is inviting.

B: Chew on this, profit.

A:Nylon straps, snug as the lord's words tethering the lord's —

B: Independent Contracting Schemes (a toddler seat at the table)
{A muscles B to the ground into spread eagle position}

A:Amen. Let's be exact! There's art for profits, art for non-profits (to profit by), and altogether unprofitable arts.

B: Quantum. Sociology. My fifty golden calves—at granny hipster's.

A:A small slab of anthracite for the nephew, an ornate cape—just for the hell of it, a hockey mask for a stroll through the mall, a 500 mega watt pulsed rhodamine laser in hand—etc.

B: You. Proud product of some kind of network. I think the lord's self-pimping abilities—are on the increase.

A: Average poetry readings reveal much.

B: I improve ... when the content is based on some other kind of—contract.

A: Respect for The Lord! Respect for Cable Coppermooth, Cinnamon Face, and all verifiable accomplishments, in tow.

B: The local is pushed out. Amen?

A: Amen! This re-flavoring of certain ... distinctions. Other bitterness' applied lightly to the rippled surface. Property mud bars for the whole family!

B: Audit the flow—incoming. Admit the lord. You were about to This Very Moaning In Private Seems Necessary. What's the immediate effect?

A: Piety, double-digit snide, “bilk bilk.”

B: What's the immediate goal?

A: Light up the mall.

B: And the lonely shark around the cage?

A: Amen. The people are—poking back—at it.

Martha Serpas & Heidi Lynn Staples

Interview

The following interview took place via email during the month of March, 2011.

HLS: I know you have been active in helping to preserve and restore wetlands in Louisiana. Could you outline the problems there, what you have done and how you got started?

MS: The wetlands are disappearing at between 25-50 square miles a year—depending on whose numbers you follow. The most affected area is the Barataria-Terrebonne Estuary, where my hometown is located. It is the fastest disappearing landmass on Earth. 600,000 people live there. The result is environmental disaster: fresh drinking water is threatened; livelihoods are threatened; biodiversity is being destroyed (the wetlands are a major stop for migrating birds); and ridges and trees that buffer hurricane winds are gone. The Cajun people are as tied to the land as any people throughout history. No one is leaving. There's scarcely a for sale sign to be seen.

Oil industry dredging—creating canals to reach rigs more quickly—has increased erosion. Industry awareness of the dangers of dredging has been documented as far back as the '40s. Nitrates from fertilizer run-off from Northern States dumping waste in the Mississippi River kills marsh grass. Lastly, the leveeing of New Orleans has deprived my part of Louisiana of the sediment it needs to offset subsidence.

I've contributed in a small way through discussion of the problem at my readings and raising awareness through the film *Veins in the Gulf*: <http://veinsinthegulf.com/>

HLS: What concerns you most about the situation there? What can readers do to help?

MS: I'm concerned about what is avoidable cultural destruction and the loss of hundreds of species of animals. Read and talk about the problem. Share that a major part of our domestic oil—for good or ill—comes through Louisiana. So-called terrorists couldn't damage our pipelines as much as a hurricane exacerbated by land loss would. Politicians might listen to that. Any perspective—economic, ecological, anthropological, meteorological,

gastronomical—leads to the same conclusion. Pick your cause and call a legislator. Post a link on your Facebook page or website. Louisiana is more than a place to be plundered for resources for other States.

HLS: How has the 2010 BP oil ‘spill’ impacted the region?

MS: That’s too big a question for me right now.

HLS: You have been collaborating to help produce a film exploring ecological distress in Louisiana. Could you tell readers about that project?

MS: Veins in the Gulf grew out of an interdisciplinary project between my poetry students and the film students of Elizabeth Coffman. We took a van to my part of Louisiana and let the students go wild. They interviewed Cajun healers (traiteurs); politicians; musicians; environmentalists. Some of the students had never been west of the Mississippi.

HLS: How do you feel about collaboration?

MS: Great. I’ve learned a lot. So much of what we do in the different arts is related by process and by unconscious guidance. I’m hoping folks into music or poetry get drawn into this film the way they wouldn’t if faced with a dry recitation of facts and standard shots of the landscape.

HLS: The arts help us access awareness of another reality—not somewhere else—just another angle on the same place. The dominant consciousness seems a noun-oriented awareness, while the arts help us recognize process as inherent. What do you see as the relationship between engagement with process and ecological awareness?

Sometimes I think living immersed in a wild setting, like you did (and I did in North Florida) gives a person a process-based consciousness through experiential learning. And as more and more of us lose access to that experience, we are becoming less and less able to recognize the disruption of the natural systemic process of regeneration. What do you think?

MS: That reminds me of the Tetragrammaton, the unpronounceable four-letter name for

God in the Hebrew Bible, best in English as “YHWH.” It has been translated “I am who am,” but can be translated “am becoming who am becoming”—a verb. Therefore, God is neither a noun nor male. God is an evolving process of actualization.

HLS: How would you describe the relationship between your poetry writing and your activism?

MS: Intrinsic. Like my theology and my poetry. I come to understand other subjects through writing. My favorite poems surprise me with music I didn’t hear before and connections I didn’t see. Readings give me a way to reach a different audience for an ecological message.

HLS: Could you say something about your writing process? How do you navigate your consciousness toward awareness rather than rehearsed perceptions?

MS: Simone Weil: “Prayer is absolute unmixed attention” or John Keats’s Negative Capability. Writing is one of the few ways I can stay aware without immediately analyzing and labeling. My process is just to get so focused on a poem—like a mantra or a rosary—that everything else disappears.

HLS: How do you understand the term ‘ecopoetics’? And do you see your work as falling under this rubric?

MS: I understand it as I understand ecofeminist theology. Religion is a big brain of mostly untapped metaphors for what cannot be explained. Eco-poetics is a facet of poetry that seeks poetic inspiration and interpretation through the natural world. It represents one among thousands of ways to access poetry. Eco-poetics is also paradoxical. It joins a word that refers to what is not humanmade (usually) and what is humanmade. The only truths are found in paradox, so eco-poetics is a particularly rich junction.

I do see my poetry as eco-poetic, although I had to look back at my first book to see it, to see the groundwork (or waterwork) for *The Dirty Side of the Storm*. I understand most parts of existence through the Louisiana landscape—religion, art, love, suffering, conflict.

HLS: How would you describe poetry’s relevance as a response to “Big Oil” generally or to the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico specifically?

MS: Poetry is irrelevant. Poems won't end capitalism and exploitation. And poetry is most relevant. Anything that allows us some critical distance on our disordered relation to the world, our misusing what should create awe in us, is vital to our well-being.

HLS: You say poetry is most relevant. Are you suggesting that poetry best allows us this critical distance?

MS: Poetry is one of the best, yes.

HLS: What would you like to see poets and artists doing in response to global or local ecological distress?

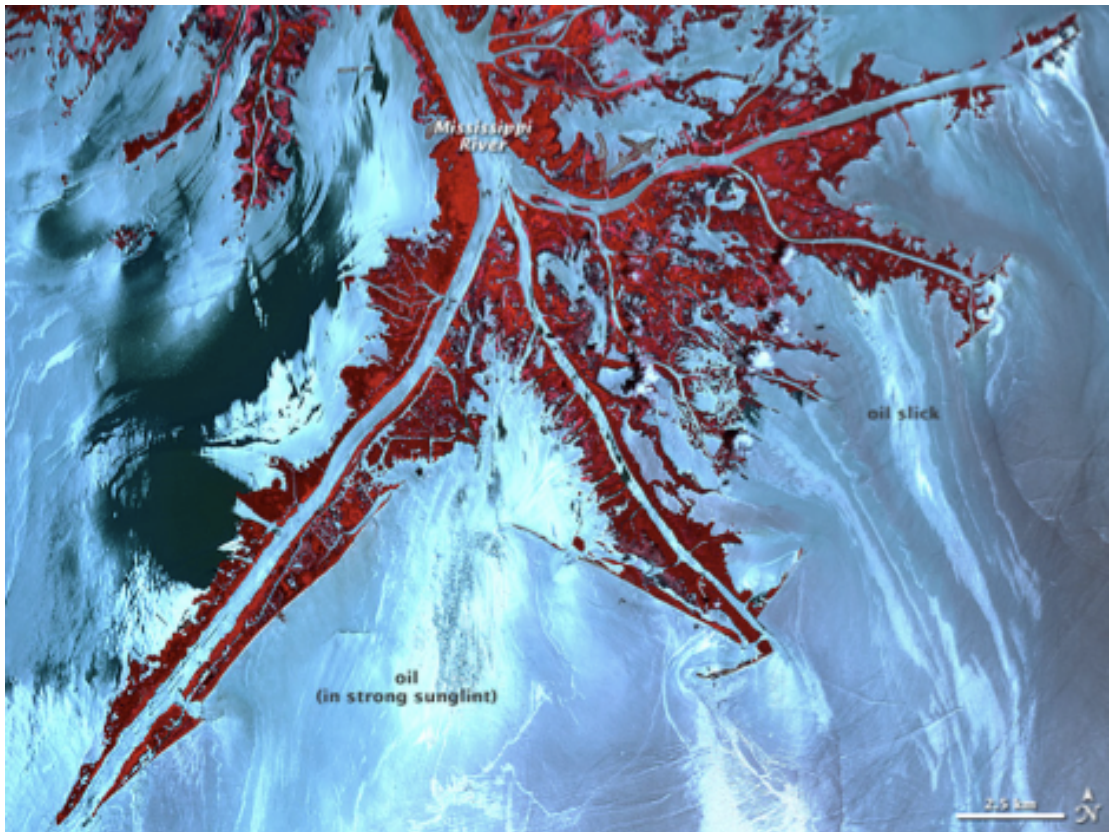
MS: Vowing to offer a few minutes of advocacy at every reading and on websites, Facebook. Spend time in the places you want to save so you can take that center with you everywhere and share it. Collaborate in order to reach a larger audience.

HLS: What are you working on now?

MS: I am beginning to write from my experience as a trauma chaplain—but it's all very amorphous and elusive for me right now. The wetlands are interstices, between one state and another. They are both dying and living—as we all are. The chaplain herself is an interstice between medical realities and spiritual realities, between what waits outside the hospital and the intense boundaries of the ward or ER. She stands between both and tries to help people move from one to another with some stability. I can't compose poems out of all that theory, but the ideas are floating around somewhere on my desk.

HLS: What amazing work. I imagine you also as a sort of trauma chaplain serving the traumatized ecology of your home place. I am still struggling to understand what it means for a place, an entire ecology to die. Ecocide has entered our vocabulary, and it seems likely we'll be seeing more of it. How do you help people move from one reality to another? I think part of the poet's role in this era might be to help people move from a living world to whatever this current era of mass extinction and global climate change is bringing. What do you think? How do you do this?

MS: The role of the chaplain is not to console or give hope, but to help people stay in the moment and take it in fully so they can begin to accept and heal. If we were fully in-the-moment or conscious, we would see and feel what was happening to our world.



NASA photograph of oil spill in the Mississippi estuary (“Veins in the Gulf”)

Brett Evans & Frank Sherlock

Spill Life

Far from the Gulf a fire in a fireplace burns
Someone somewhere has a face like
meringue run up an Andean mountain
somewhere a New Orleans Marine
is killed on a Baltimore dance floor
It would be wise at times like these
to get a good night's sleep

dreams with the TV off
images of pelicans
to the wedding, surprise funeral
nouvelle sumo oil wrestlers
un-askedfor exteme unction

prophet children of Grande Isle
with swing sets of salt air and dread
the children of St. Bernard being told
to give up their pets

(Spill Life, Louisiana, 2010)

(Et-là-bas, chérie)

“This weekend is Pete Fountain’s birthday”

“... once Nash Roberts stopped playing goalie ...”

These are not chandelier times
for Diamond Island, Bay Jimmy,
and the Chandeleur Sound darkening
weird water at my doorstep

Hell, even Christ was only crucified once

tar balled and tar feathered
we're the tar babies of America
TBA when it all'll get better

for now, cuffed and put under
the slow drip
This is a torture tale of distant
skimmers

and the right to remain helpless
remember a window
opened just a few months
opened just a few months
ago The song coming out & the song
streaming in went something
like OUR TIME IS NOW

The eggs have hatched
It is time to move into the water
& die Who will be that
handsome pop star to sing
the scorched dreams of burnt
up turtles Oh yeah that's right
No one Wimp is
a hall of famer here at his local
in this city of otherly love

He says Yeah You Right
during a power play &
further conversation is certain
Kensington leads to Vietnam to
a Quarter hole to work w/
Party Marty His heart is heavier
than his ribs but he smiles

when I admit that I like to watch
police cruisers burn in Toronto

My independence day is
scored by a John Boutte american
tune You see there are
some things that can't be killed
I see that we are not
that something A ship that

sails the moon would be great
right now Look out the window
& watch the dying get smaller

Watch a boy named River who
erected a cross in memory
of summertime fun fade from view

We shd be in a garden right now naming all
the animals
not wretchedly killing them
Oil Gras putting the 'grease' meaning
of 'gras' back into play
money wipes

on the uppermost deck of the control room
greased palms

Guess what some CEO's want their yacht-about back
I know more about Y'ats

and that I shd be having a snoball right now from Pandora's

rainbow crown bold stained tongue
as I snoball-royalty strut
down Carrollton admired by all the new summer

passers
I Can Feel It Coming in the Air Tonight
shd be throbbing from Sydney's T-top right there
as crepe
myrtle buds pop themselves
 into birdsong garnish
I shd be attuned to Larissa Riquelme's nude promise sure
Somewhere something should be like before
we even had the word 'toxic'
Quadruple reincarnation is a drag
let's all pick our part of sky land and sea playground
and march to wonder orders
It's time for war to fight itself into bully juice drying puddle
Time for soldiers to drop guns into nets and fish for bigger las brisas
Time for the Powers that Be to go fuck themselves
This is black-n-gold country playing
defense against the blue gold
gone black If Octavia Butler
could see us now she'd cringe
 at being correct But dig this
We make castles here High tide heels
 flipper stilettos
Stay glam Stay beachy Stay speedo
 Stay defiant
No matter what's out there
 that won't stop coming
We remain & can't stop falling
 in
 love
This is a place for action freaks
 eating fucking breathing
in the world nearer
than the afterworld that looms
There's always one more
song that sends us

off from the burial of redfish rodeo
Echoes from upturned boxes &
beat-up high school band
equipment keep it going down
by Canal M.I.A. has finally returned &

this search party's embarking
I had a book for her
that would've changed her

life Oh well I guess it changed
anyhow My baby
is everybody's baby now
She was everyone's first
so I guess I'll have to share

Everything is everything & the
To Be Continued Brass Band is
playing well beyond curfew
re-fuse lit-niks o'er lay with the colorforms

Miss Missing the Action

modeling African beaches
St. Bernard net maker generations on
and a reasonable amount of beer

We still make use of to make poem alchemy old stylus sure

to keep Hope a currency

abreast of the lira and the lyre I just fished out

an early-exodus dumpster Shoot the firewater into ma tete quick-

sugar the new night lovesong new recipe silver
Hey Miss American Eye

the two-headed canary in the clean-coal coal mine

pulls nicely away and off to deliver flesh its breastbone

fortune but, no I won't do that

Those guys there

get damp for forefathers

I prefer Shemp

Because the path to put out the trash has become so much longer
and farther off and TV so everready smashable

I've thought of the faraway stations

I've thought of you like people think of vacation

You've become an ide in mind I go to greeny yellow play-sunset

sand skint creole atoll

Keaton Nguyen Smith

No Oil Spills

o the shark says
“Oil is making it hard
to breathe” Seals
don’t want oil spills
Pelicans are
covered in oil

No oil spills
No oil spills

Fish don’t like it
Oil might wash
up on the beach

Fish in the ocean
don’t like waves
of oil Oil
kills coral

Manatees are unhappy
They don’t like
the water this way

Response from Congressman Lloyd Doggett

Hoa Nguyen
Austin, Texas

Dear Keaton and Hoa:

Thank you for sharing your heartfelt poem about our shared support for restoring the Gulf of Mexico and preventing future oil spills. If you wish to receive updates on this and other federal issues important to you, please subscribe to “Lloyd’s List” as described below.

Keaton, I commend you for your early interest in the important issues facing our community and I encourage you to remain involved as you continue to grow.

While the oil was still flowing, I met personally with Lisa Jackson, Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency, to urge a speedy, effective resolution to this disaster and to establish safeguards against future incidents. With my support, last year the House passed a bill that would have made important reforms, such as mandating environmental review at all stages of the offshore oil and gas leasing process, requiring offshore drilling rigs to use best available safety technologies, including blowout preventers and emergency shut off systems, and using oil and gas royalty payments to fund the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at its full authorization level. Those who despoil our environment must be held liable, not the taxpayers and the citizens forced to live with the damage. Since there is no cap on the damage that polluters can cause, there should be no cap on the economic damages liability cap for oil companies engaged in offshore drilling.

I would also appreciate your thoughts on other issues that may be considered in Congress. If you have not already, please take a moment to visit my website at <http://doggett.house.gov/> where you can complete a survey online.

To better ensure that your priorities are my priorities, it is important that I hear from you and that you have the opportunity to receive updates about developments in Washington. I hope that you will take this opportunity to sign up for the latest updates from “Lloyd’s List,” visit my Facebook page, follow me on Twitter, or send me an e-mail at Lloyd.Doggett@mail.house.gov.

Please keep me advised of federal matters with which I may be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Lloyd Doggett

Abby Reyes

Parting Song

Kiran puts his face next to my face, eyelash to eyelash, and asks, Mama, why are you crying? In these times, I have no words for my child. I tried my hand at it once. I said, I am crying because some men poked a hole deep in the earth to get us some oil for our car, but they messed up. And now the blood of the earth is spilling into the ocean, making it chokey for the fish and birds who live there. At this, Sunil, my husband, shot me a glance. Kiran knows that worms die when they dry up on asphalt, and that a bee will die if left stuck in the pool. But what does he know of death?

Years ago, the day after I bought my decades-old Mercedes wagon, I mailed a note to Stanley, the older gentleman who sold it to me. I told him why I bought it. He hadn't been aware that, in certain pockets of the Bay Area, old diesel wagons were fetching double their value. He hadn't heard of biodiesel, the fuel made from vegetable oil, that can power the car, much less that Rudolf Diesel himself first made his engine to run on it.

With the note to Stanley I included a picture of Terence Unity Freitas. Terence was a young human rights and environmental activist from Los Angeles who worked in solidarity with the Colombian indigenous U'wa community, which has long resisted oil exploitation. I met Terence the week I moved back to the United States from the Philippines, a few years after college. There, I worked with the Tagbanua indigenous community that was facing Shell's proposed natural gas pipeline through their ancestral fishing waters. I wanted Terence to help me think about how to deal with Shell, a company that, in the wake of the hanging of Nigerian poet Ken Saro Wiwa, was notoriously thug-like in its dealings with local community resistance. The conversation tumbled into the evening and the next day, and then continued uninterrupted for the next several months. Our work and our hearts aligned.

The following winter, I was unpacking Terence's boxes in our new apartment in Brooklyn when he called from Colombia. The cultural exchange he had facilitated between U'wa leaders and two prominent Native American women leaders was wrapping up, and he looked forward to being home. It was the last time I talked to Terence.

On their way to the airport, while exiting the indigenous land then-coveted by Occidental Petroleum, Terence, Ingrid Washinawatok, and Lahe'ena'e Gay were kidnapped. Eight days later, their bullet-ridden bodies, hands tied, were found just across the Venezuelan border. Although the FARC took responsibility, eventually bumbling its way through an apology (oops, we didn't mean to kill them), no justice has yet been brought. No story has yet emerged clearly enough to hold those truly responsible to account. Pulling the trigger is one thing. Organizing the crime quite another.

But my note to Stanley was not about that. It was about me. It was about those of us who are perhaps the most culpable. Those of us who have allowed the thugs the power they have. I am less concerned about the thugs skirting the pipelines' contours through the jungle than about those coursing the halls of Congress to ensure the pipelines' passage. Those of us who continue to rely on cars to make our everyday lives work have given those thugs their power. It's market-driven, they say. We take the risks the market demands. We will drill in the depths of a far away civil war. If that's too messy for you, sure, we can drill closer to home. We can drill right here just off the coast. It's deep, but what the heck.

Terence was shot ten times with a *veintidos*. A few years ago I shot a .22 at some tin cans just to know the feeling of that kind of power. I braced myself on the hood of the old, 12 mpg Suburban we drove up the mountain for the gun play. The kick didn't knock me over. I was underwhelmed. I told Stanley that in the years since Terence's murder, filling a gas tank had felt like murder, as close as I come to murder. My hand on the trigger, I pumped the blood of the earth, as the *U'wa* say, right into my car.

During those years, lying still in the evening, I would imagine my spine unzipping down my back, and my blood pouring out into that same earth, soaking it as Terence's blood soaked the rain-drenched cow field of his execution. This exercise brought me an unexpected and sickening calm. I did it when I needed to relax. I found it allowed me to lie still, to get quiet enough to hear beyond my thinking. When I finally decided I didn't want to walk around so depleted, I stopped unzipping my spine. And that's when I bought Stanley's car. Filling my tank with vegetable oil did not feel like murder. Of course, as we know, the vegetable oil arrives to us, usually, after several prior incarnations—as matter that grew in fields tilled by machines driven by dino-diesel, as oil processed in factories powered by coal, and transported to consumers in good old American trucks, only some of which, now, are themselves belching the smell of popcorn. My goddaughter used to call it my car that

runs on the oil that doesn't hurt the earth. The simplistic rendition I had conveyed to her young ears didn't tell the whole story, but at least there was a kernel of wholesomeness in it. Which was more than I could say for any story I could tell of big oil.

I am finding now, with my own children, there are stories that need to be told, and others that should wait. Kiran studies the picture I recently hung in his room. He asks why my friend is climbing that tree, and how his hands are holding on. I look at Terence through Kiran's eyes. I tell him that Terence just really loved to climb trees, and that he climbed so many trees that his hands got strong and could hold on tight. Kiran is perfecting this skill, too, in the cherry trees lining Golden Gate Park, where he wedges himself up as high as he can on his own power and, gripping a bough, swings himself down when his tiny hands give, which is almost immediately. This is an easy story to tell.

Harder to explain is the story behind my tears when Kiran rounds the corner and finds me weeping. Since the BP disaster began in mid-April, a familiar foreboding and agitation have shown up again, my mind edgy and occupied, my heart tethered to the far away sea being smothered, much in the same way I used to orient south after Terence was killed, my inner gaze arching over the southern horizon to the land that took him. As then, my furtive search for an answer bumps up against the stunningly immutable truth that nothing can change what has already happened. Nothing I say can put the blood back into the earth. No court of law or Congressional hearing can put the blood back in to Terence's broken body, or the thousands like Terence whose lives have been taken in these oil wars.

My prayer, as a mother, is that my sons' hands grow strong with the experience of knowing and loving the forest, or the seas, that they climb as many trees and waves as it takes for them to develop an abiding allegiance to their defense. But as proud as I would be to have sons who act in the world with as much integrity as did Terence, my deeper prayer is, of course, that they never know the face of death he was shown. Murder resisting a pipeline's advance into sacred lands. They don't need to hear this story now. The unmitigated flow from a broken pipeline sounding the death knell of entire ecosystems. It is my inclination to let them in on it. But, recognizing the agitated ache in my voice as out of place, Sunil skillfully redirects the boys, who, by now, have begun sending life rafts down to hoist all remaining stuffed animals floating out there in the poisoned sea up into the safety of the deck of the living room couch. Kiran and Julian are satisfied for now, and Sunil has spared them the anxiety that surely would have flowed from any greater comprehension of loss.

As they play, I am left to face the harder questions Kiran and his generation will ask us later: what were we thinking driving a car everyday? With everything we knew? From whence came the audacity to think we could go on living as nuclear family units, one after another, across city and state, each family not even sharing a washing machine with the family right next door? How could we have lived all those years in California and not have demanded solar panels? Why weren't we up in arms, or at least up in Sacramento when the electric car got taken away the first time? You mean you were an activist and then you, what, just quit?

His tenacity at age three suggests he will not be satisfied with our answers. It will not be enough to tell him that we took the bus to work, and only used the car to drive him to nursery school and get groceries. It will not be enough to remind him that we cultivated our backyard so that we grew at least some of our food, or that we bought used and re-purposed as much of our stuff as we could. I will have no satisfactory explanation for why we stopped using biodiesel in our old tank of a car for the three years after the kids were born, when we were too exhausted and overwhelmed to set up our lives in a way that would make the biodiesel easier to procure. Or for why I stopped working with communities resisting big oil after law school. Instead, I will have to rely on a compassion I cannot reasonably expect him to have, given that we have knowingly, in full light of day, damned his future so.

In fanciful moments of delusion, I imagine that if their future gets really bleak because of what we've done to the planet, at least we have friends with land in Montana. At least they could go hole up there, and just work the land, and live sheltered from it all. The imaginary bubble of class privilege and mobility in which I encase my children's future in these moments readily bursts upon contact with even the slightest edge of consciousness. Sure, they could go back to the land, along with the rest of the global south migrating north to cooler climes. We should have learned the sky has no borders with acid rain in Appalachia, or the loss of ozone in Australia. The sky spreads its burden, as does the sea.

In another fanciful moment last week, I was heartened to hear the Coast Guard admiral in charge of cleaning up BP's mess estimate that even if the flow of oil stops in August, it will likely take all autumn to clean it up. He spoke as if to brace the nation for a long clean up. To my eager ears, I was quietly relieved to imagine, even for that one moment, that the experts anticipate they will actually be able to get it all cleaned up, and before the holidays, to boot. The spin worked on me, as it was crafted to do. Only later, when sitting in the dark

nursing Julian, did I allow the rest of the admiral's statement to penetrate: he said, it will likely take all autumn, or much, much longer than that. Earlier in the day, I heard what I wanted to hear. I soothed the agitation I am otherwise carrying with the reassurance that the efforts to contain our error will somehow, ultimately, work; that an expert at the site sees a way forward. I took momentary refuge in the illusion that someone else is going to take care of it.

I think the response Kiran and his generation will come to know is that of course no one else is going to take care of it. It is a lesson we would do well to heed now. We have to take care of it. The thugs in the jungle who kill are a problem. The thugs in suits who kill are also a problem. But the real problem is that we pay them to do it. Until we stop, we will continue to drive this killing machine. Unseating vested interests and revamping legislation to better regulate the killing is imperative. But our more central task is to ensure that the throne of entitlement upon which most of us perch gives way. We cannot afford our car. We cannot afford our bi-coastal families. We cannot afford our organic pears from Chile. We cannot afford our day jobs. Our children cannot afford them. When will we get that?

When I was in high school, every so often we would call together a council of all beings. We would meet in the Rappahanok hills. After spending some time walking the forest, we each returned to the circle donning the mantle of an animal we felt needed a chance to speak to us humans. In a council of all beings, at the beginning of the circle, the animals often ranted about the changes we needed to make to ensure the healthy future of the planet. But as the sharing deepened, at least one animal, usually a large sea creature who had seen it all before, would take a different approach. The octopus or humpback would say: stop your fretting. Quiet your mind. If you want the agitation to give way to real peace, stay put in one place for a really long time. Grow to love that place and to know its lifeblood. Arrange your life so as to inflict the least harm, which includes going beyond your life to prevent the harm of others. Do this in community with those you find around you. And don't leave anybody out. None of us.

I am trying to hear what the manatees are saying now. If we met in a council, I don't know if I would be able to meet their gaze. I am squirming in my seat. I am not hearing properly the full message. Quiet your mind, they say. It is not as simple as cleaning up the mess BP has made. It is not even as simple as cleaning up the mess you make in your everyday first world life. The work you have now, and have always had, is to live the story your children

will tell. They will walk with integrity when you show them how. Draw your actions up from the oldest well of compassion to be sure you are carried on a deeper current than that of the shame and anger pooling on the surface. Act now, but only in a sacred way, so that your life cannot separate from your action, so that you can no longer put your action down when your life gets in the way. Allow sometimes your action to be stillness. So that you can hear beyond your thoughts. Your bloodletting will not prevent ours: draw toward stillness not from your despair but from your strength. Listen from the stillness. Hear in the stillness our parting song. And make our song your own.

June 15, 2010

Coda (2011)

We live in San Francisco. We sometimes take smug comfort in having Nancy Pelosi represent us on the Hill. She thinks it is important that the 2011 Congress addresses—and hopefully—adopts the key recommendations of the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling. Despite her commitment, I would not hesitate to share with her my thoughts about the BP spill conveyed in “Parting Song.” I have been in those Congressional offices, I have seen the oil suits coursing the halls, checking their cell phones to see who has called them back, who will take them in, to lend them an ear for their entirely different song. In 2000, I helped bring a Colombian indigenous U’wa leader to Congress to gather allies to pressure Colombian President Pastrana to use his public forces to protect, not punish, the U’wa community’s peaceful resistance to the armed violence visited upon them during LA-based Occidental Petroleum’s push into their ancestral lands. In one early morning meeting with Georgia’s Cynthia McKinney, she brought us into her office, then called the cell phone of one of the Occidental lobbyists she knew was hovering. She invited him in. He entered, beaming with what he thought was an oil industry first—an invitation to talk with Rep. McKinney. When he saw us there, he turned white, then turned to leave. She ordered him to stay, and for the first time in the U’wa community’s long history of trying, they got to speak their mind, directly to the face of power. If we are not there making the contact, more often than not, the only visitors our representatives have on these issues are from Big Oil. Thank you for the reminder of this fact, and the invitation to act again.

JenMarie Davis

Deepwater Horizon

Rupture's moment
in the mundane hum

is realignment
of fates

taking

Place.

*

When selecting a poem to share with my representative, I thought of the way in which representatives actively engage with the community: political advertisements during election time. I chose a piece that included no more words than would be featured in a campaign advertisement in order to guarantee maximum attention to the poem.

After unsuccessfully contacting my representative via phone, I sent the poem through email and contact boxes to both Pennsylvania Senators and my district representative. I received one response:

An email from Senator Robert P. Casey (which went to my spam box):

“Thank you for your email. Your message has been received by my office.

Sincerely,

Senator Robert P. Casey, Jr.

P.S. If you would like to respond to this message, please use the contact form on my website: <http://casey.senate.gov/contact/>”

I received no response to my other messages.

I did, however, receive a letter from Colorado Senator Michael Bennett the same day that I sent the poems. Although I haven't lived in the state for over two years, it seemed strange to get an unprompted response (that promoted patent system reform) the same day that I failed to connect with Pennsylvania representatives.

Jennifer Scappettone

Poetics of Enormity

It seems the trouble is enormity.
Trouble, like form, is “ambient,” can’t get remote.
Trouble, like attention, is dopamine-sprayed.

While the “page” is now in everybody’s faces, glassy &
still obedient to a more or less face-sized frame
more or less the size of our provincialism

and the tool of it too.

The quote on quote page promiscuous & pointing ever away from itself thus
colonizing as never before—in the roving

pocket provincialism of borderlessness:
Transocean going for the record broke
by the well called Tiber—over six miles

low, though, this Rome
into crusts 24 to 65 million years old:
“BP’s second material discovery in the emerging lower tertiary play” —

ocean: the deep frontier:
Eye-in-the-Mer Apollowing it,
that 2/3 of the planet left unexplored ...

now subject to half the world’s stockpile of dispersants
to “kee[p] the water from the shore.”
Scalapino’s portent, riposte: “How can that be alone: [like water in water]?” (1)

Not structures alone but space itself as speculation,
“spreading” in slightness like the base of the faux-golden bowl,

courtesy now of bygosh.com:

“and, though not of signal depth, justified ... by the charm of its shape as well as by the tone of its surface.” (2)

What can poets in the Re-Gilded Age draw from Henry James’s emblem, this gilded cracked non-object wrought of words?

Miming a flat goblet of matter mined on the cheap, mind onscreen, narrative’s abstraction and spreading actuality,

a null-shape, a tone, waxing unspecific. Stein on James: “You see he made it sort of like an atmosphere.” (3) Volume simulacral:

“It might have been ... diminished ... by half its original height.” (4)

Source-chalice, feminized urn of proportions ungiven: of enormity. Material classed by the intimations of “as” only:

“As formed of solid gold it was impressive; it seemed indeed to warn off the prudent ... “ (5)

This gilded crystal vessel as fiat value unhinged from “nature’s money,” worrying signor Pound,

“say also of a lost time,” (6) dissolving, vaporizing,

last century’s paradox, Koons balloon-dog that weighs overmuch on the roof and is as costly. (7)

What can those in the gildwashing age draw off?

A poetics of ambient material

disintegration, counter-speculation.

“Objects and places ... disposed for human use and addressed to it, must have a sense of their own, a mystic meaning proper to themselves to give out ... to the participant at once so interested and so detached as to be moved to a report of the matter”—Henry James, *The American Scene*

A poetics moved to a report of the matter disposed for human use,

addressed to it, thus on the move,
a surface perforation, interface: (8)

“the sea that opens and that unites. You were its servants, indeed you also subdued it; there remains of it a taste of solitude, of regret, in your
body.”

— Edouard Glissant, Poetic Intention

A taste of regret:

- : a junk-shot
- : Corexit
- : a top-kill
- : Sea-Brat #4
- : shore hourglasses of plastic bags for hire

If there's something slapdash & rampant outside the text ...
an ethics of immersion, of “delusional space,”(9) a structure-mired critique ...
committed to the broken codes ... and a locus of accountability ...

instate these exceptions to the post-slogans:

“truth to immaterials”

So the digital's immaterial, while Suzhou workers riot or are hospitalized by the
neurotoxin in your gardenburgers
that can damage the peripheral nervous system & cause paralysis;
but it dries more quickly and reduces streaks on iPhone screens.

“site-speculativity”

So the troublesome sites aren't only pasted over, plasticked, “capped,”
but replaced, transmuted into rhetoric, a searchable Superfundament.
It's rhetoric that off-gasses.

“OF the vaporization and the centralization of the ego-polis. All lies in that.”

Of the unwitting commission of bodies to the vaporization of certain matter-cracks and leaks.

A spill “of national significance,” nation in fumes: deterritorialized, yes. A becoming-major of that.

Wafting ambiance for those “[f]ugitives ... bound for the deleterious ...” (10)

consummation of Cage’s “Lecture on the Weather”:

“I dedicate this work to the U.S.A. that it may become just another part of the world, no more, no less.”

“no things but in ideas,”

stillborn. Except when it comes to paying,

except when it comes to launching them, obsolesced, to South Carolina and China,

“far more wonderful than if [they] were to dance of [their] own accord.” (11)

Once hallowed p-dash structuralist tractates are the pernicious inverse of naturalist and realist fictions, which at the acme of an epoch battering nature and body as mechanism sought to expose immanent arcs of determinism: fates biopolitical manifest in the limbs of naïve young things —

tuneless Nana of the dung-heap,

Dreiser’s chorus girl-in-training—

into the lettered public sphere.

Double zeros pass the crisis of that realism. Now out of their reclusiveness

let these dance the catwalk of the dispersed, disorganized body. (12) Choral contour down

the elliptical

gutter, leachate-swale

of incompletely intimate biology and biography

mapped more or less exactly upon the story of waste

in the United States, “our contrary quakes.” (13)

Choros, from the root indicating hedge, enclosure, hortus—yard, garden, and garth of

the polis's threshing floor. In a landscape of concavities and convexities, the threshing-site was a rare platform, place to host both beating & rubbing the harvest for its seed, and dancing—the seduction of

fertility—infrastructure of tragedy.

Hedge, enclosure, hortus. & yet classical drama—forum of the feminized ma-source, zone of the irrational, emoting, Dionysian, transitional citizen, cross-dressed, dithyrambic, apocryphally double-doored, is also a site of penetrability—of the expressive claims of beings with more fluid boundaries,

“more open to affect and entry,” pumps of instability. “[C]atalysts, agents, instruments, blockers, spoilers, destroyers, and sometimes helpers or saviors” (14) for those being trained spectacularly in democracy.

Choros, a word the Spartans used to name their central civic and religious space. The chorus is public space: a choral crowd, spewn through the theater's vomitorium at the end of a performance, are more perfectly interpellated into the citizenry.

Tragedy's blocking of bodies, uncanny manifestation of shared language in an unprivate forum, opening improperly onto a sum of tongue's vulnerabilities, camouflages, parasites—making a body of realism inextricable from the corporal experience in which it's moored.

A chorus of enormity pumped vis-à-vis the infrastructure of disaster—welling up, out of the uncapped lots, weeping schoolwounds, fragrant sloughs—toward the newly sexed shores: dis/aster that hasn't been mapped, only hyperlinked through the symptoms of shame and imperfectly

embellished cancers. Incompletely intimate: one's biology and biography mapping more or less exactly upon the story of waste in the United States.

To drill a poetic field that's choral, relational and participatory,

sucks in the junk and the data of trouble without disgorging a “view from everywhere,”
ambient citizenship that kicks, that has channels, thighs?

The dump is full / of gas. Days vaporize like pages onscreen. Page like methane,
A rough negative value, lethal anodyne, aloft.
Untuneful hissing out of sprawling goosenecks on the mound.

Brathwaite’s “gnashlish” (15)

Mac Low’s “snow annexation flyers the sky ... tropical sweat ... invading the Gulf
stream ... all over credit union readiness” (16)

Scalapino on Valentine’s Day, 2010: “their whole as bodies in the underground
petroleum ... holes
spurting here and there in the sky-turned-indigo as did the ocean, now petroleum.” (17)

To make a start, out of enormity, and make it particulate, scattering the sum,
The poem a site for the restreaming of post-pastoral, post-Paterson fact in motion
as junk in the limbs.

Scalapino: “ ... to render the sense that ‘the word’ abuts sensory space that is of (in) the
world. That is, ‘the word,’ as spatial, also makes a sense of sensory space ... and makes a
sense of the undoing of social tyranny ... (public indistinguishable from private).” (18)

Archaeology of the Superfundament

To recapitulate, rescatter spatiorhetorical ambiguity.

To pucker the realist page into myriad more sensuous channels.

“There are no outdated thoughts which perish beside new energies that are uncontrolled,
naïve, rudimentary History must be assumed completely (lived together) in order
perhaps to move beyond it (like the sea) once more.”

—Glissant, *Poetic Intention*

“The ‘old’ matter is there, re-accepted, re-tasted ...—believed in ... yet for due testimony,
for re-assertion of value, perforating as by some strange and fine, some latent and gathered
force, a myriad more adequate channels.”

—James, preface to *The Golden Bowl*

From one singular sensation, every little sap that demands pacifying into and out of the vomitorium.

Not to make the invisible visible, but to bruise and multiply the channels of its invisibility.

1 from *The Animal is in the World Like Water in Water*, with Kiki Smith (New York: Granary, 2010).

2 Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*: see, for example, the digital edition at <http://www2.newpaltz.edu/~hathawar/goldenbowl1.html>

3 Gertrude Stein, “Henry James,” in *Writings, 1932-1946* (New York: Library of America, 1998).

4 Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*.

5 Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*.

6 Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*.

7 Jeff Koons, “Balloon Dog (Yellow),” high chromium stainless steel with transparent color coating, 1994-2000, Metropolitan Museum of Art. See also Williams Jennings Bryan’s “Cross of Gold” speech, uploaded at <http://www.h-net.org/~hst203/documents/bryan.html>

8 See Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (New York and London: Continuum, 2006). Christine Wertheim writes a fascinating application of Ranciere to Kenneth Goldsmith in Open Letter: “The Unboring Boring and the New Dream of Stone, or, if literature does politics as literature, what kind of gender politics does the new poetics of the boring enact?” Open Letter 7 (Fall 2005), archived at http://www.ubu.com/papers/kg_ol_wertheim.html

9 See Lisa Robertson, PhillyTalks 17 (2000), in dialogue with Steve McCaffery, archived at <http://media.sas.upenn.edu/pennsound/groups/phillytalks/pdfs/pt17.pdf>

10 Edouard Glissant, *Poetic Intention*, trans. Nathalie Stephens (Calacoon, NY: Nightboat, 2010).

11 Karl Marx, *Capital*, section archived at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch01.htm#S2>

12 The “disorganized body” is a concept that my collaborator on PARK, choreographer Kathy Westwater, has developed somatically. She gave a paper on this topic before a brief demonstration at the Belladonna ADFEMPO conference’s panel on ecopoetics. The panel, which I organized, was titled “Is Ground as to Figure as Ambience is to Body? Ec(h)opoetics of the Disfigured Landscape,” and held at the CUNY Graduate Center in September 2009.

13 Glissant, op. cit.

14 Froma Zeitlin, *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996).

15 From “Nights,” in *Born to Slow Horses* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 2005).

16 Jackson Mac Low, *Forties*, 1990-1999.

17 “Buds eyelids,” now printed in *The Dihedrons Gazelle-Dihedrals Zoom* (Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 2010).

18 Leslie Scalapino, “The Division Between Fact and Experience,” *War and Peace*, vol. 4 (2009).

Photo Dossier: PARK Rehearsals



Rehearsal for PARK at Dance Theater Workshop, NYC, 2009; choreography and direction by Kathy Westwater; poetry and text scores by Jennifer Scappettone; visual design by Seung Jae Lee; dancers: (l-r) Rebecca Davis, Abby Block, Ursula Eagly

These photos were taken during the early rehearsals for the ongoing performance work PARK with director/ choreographer Kathy Westwater and dancers in the studios of Dance Theater Workshop, an apparently neutral, abstract space, which could refer and be transposed into virtually any context, but which is a specific built environment in itself.



Rehearsal for PARK at Dance Theater Workshop, NYC, 2009; choreography and direction by Kathy Westwater; poetry and text scores by Jennifer Scappettone; visual design by Seung Jae Lee; dancers: (l-r) Ursula Eagly, Rebecca Davis, Abby Block

I had begun composing “pop-up pastorals” for the book-in-progress Exit 43 at Djerassi Resident Artists Program, where I met Kathy Westwater and discovered an affinity in our practices. I set out to tackle the problem of representing ambient catastrophe by spatializing text, placing it into relation with shredded visual footage of landscapes utopian and dystopian, to make new stratified landscapes or “archaeologies.” Words were drawn from newspaper and magazine articles about consumerism, contamination, disease, and real estate, Superfund documents made public by the Environmental Protection Agency, sites of corporate advertisement and defense, Victorian poetasters penning pastorals ever more

hemmed in by the industrial revolution, and the documentation of a more direct, intimate experience with ambient phenomena. They were then slotted into the sampled (non)logics of Alice’s Adventures Under Ground, set into implosive, nonlinear spatial relations. From the beginning, these were regarded as the scores for a choral work.



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In the studio, in beginning our collaboration for PARK Kathy and I began experimenting with the relocation of these texts from the page onto and through the human body in the form of movement and vocalization. From the moment that the dancers began interpreting them gesturally—each in a highly individual, exploratory mode—I came to realize how these works, ostensibly about what is “out there,” were inherently about corporeality. Below is the text of a dialogue we began over email in September 2009:

Kathy: I’ve been thinking a lot about these ideas that you brought up about the representation

of landscape in your visual poetry and then in the rarified environment of the studio/ stage. It does seem to be a very important conceptual and formal concern for this piece. And then how those things relate to the body. You talked previously about your interest in the text being reflexive to the body/ movement. I've started by going in the inverse direction: how the body can be reflexive of the text. But it seems as though maybe the body is absorbing it as well. So it's a deepening sort of reflexivity.



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Jennifer: Watching the process unfolding was an immensely provocative and gratifying experience. I'm even more excited about the possibilities now than I was when they were juggled around in the abstract (and that doesn't always happen—sometimes ideas seem more interesting than their instantiation can be!). It struck me that even if I hadn't been “foregrounding” the body, so to speak, in making those pieces (which I tend to call “stills” as in film stills) it is everywhere in those lines, as the dolorously receiving and frenetically

reprocessed, reprocessing end of toxins and of history that are buried in the landscape in which it stands/ lies down/ strolls/ etc. The body's activation in reaction to the text physicalizes such reprocessing, almost as if the words are toxins or releases with which the dancers are wrestling. On the other hand, even as the text/ scapes are literally incorporated by the dancers, they are in being regarded on the page several steps removed, petrified, even what the Marxists would call reified: representations of landscape hovering apart. I'm sure that in moving forward my writing will be influenced by these witnessed oddments of reciprocity—so that the text will in tortuous fashion be reflexive of these bodies and how they have dealt, as well as of the space excavated and overseen.

Allison Adelle Hedge Coke

Offshore

Seals, otters, orcas, fish—
all downsized to provide petroleum
for cars, cars, cars, cars—
And the birds!
Their wings unable,
bodies thickly tarred indelible.
Blackened birds killed
in untold numbers, unspoken.
Not to mention massive seas floating
plastic islands, product and part
of industrialized notion, oiled oceans
turn turtles to waste, now nuclear.
When the sun, left unblemished
and the seas, left unpierced
and the world, left whole
provides endless resource
offshore.

Michael Rothenberg

Appointment with Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey

A few weeks before the Sonoma County Book Fair in September 2010, I had a 10 minute appointment with Congresswoman Woolsey, our extremely liberal Congressional Representative, Democrat of California District 6. I wanted more information about the oil catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico. I was tired of getting news through the filter of mainstream media, which tells you nothing but corporate sponsored rubbish.

“Welcome to Paradise,” Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey said.

(Sonoma County is the Home of Luther Burbank, Snoopy, Lucy, arugula, vineyards, cowboys and moon parties).

“Yes, I like it here,” I said. “But what about the 200 million gallons of oil floating in the Gulf of Mexico. The administration tells us it has mostly vanished.”

The Congresswoman leaned across the modest conference table where we sat as if she were going to tell me a top level secret.

“It hasn’t vanished,” she said.

“How come you didn’t call a town hall meeting?” I asked. “If this was in fact the worst environmental disaster in the history of the United States, didn’t it call for some kind of special response on your part? Don’t we have a right to be consoled or informed by our representatives? We need to know what the disaster means to the future of the planet? Will we survive? After all, it was the WORST environmental disaster in the history of the United States, right?”

“That’s a good idea,” Woolsey said. She turned to her assistant, a man in a corduroy sports coat with leather elbow patches. “Why didn’t we do that?”

He shrugged.

Woolsey paused.

“Oh, I know,” she said, as if she’d found the answer to the meaning of life. “Because they weren’t telling me anything. I didn’t know anything. I didn’t have anything to tell you. I would have looked like an idiot.”

And people in Sonoma County hate to think of themselves as idiots. They’re willing to run for cover rather than be seen for what they really are, uninformed, in denial, and complacent, hiding on their redwood decks in a haze of Cabernet.

Lynn Woolsey glanced around her typically sterile government office for a few seconds. Went on to elaborate on how the higher ups just weren’t giving her any information.

“Well, you should have called me,” I said. “I knew what was going on ... “

“I’ll do that next time,” Woolsey said.

Then her assistant showed me to the door. The end.

The 10 minute meeting ended up being almost 20 minutes, but I left feeling worse than before. Lynn Woolsey seemed like a nice lady, she seemed concerned, but I wasn’t convinced she really cared about the plight of the Gulf. She wasn’t about to start a revolution. After all, The Gulf of Mexico was so far away from our Pacific shores, and so easy to ignore, like another world, separate and on its own.

Shell Beach

Stiff gray horizon

turned upside down

on my back

Oily transparencies

from a distant Gulf appear

in Pacific spray

Silent violations

Pelican, gull, piper burn

Cruelty, lacerations

One big ocean

Collage

Toxic sea

turtle postcards

sent to another lost generation

Green rock

Green day

Blue rock

Blue way

Blood sparks in lunar swells

Screams of murder from the beach

The roar devolves

Viscous birth

Original beauty

Agile, homeless bone of mammoth legends

Eruptions

(Coffee on the stove)

No, I won't let go

Ignorance of the law is no excuse

but distraction tumbles into deception

Hermit crab, starfish eyes

Blue-black twilight travelers

Spoiled men of war

and sonic whales

Endless time and tide reveal

the unforgettable torture of sleep

Andrew Schelling

Oil & Wolves

When I learnt of Jonathan Skinner’s push to get poets engaged with their Congressional representatives, it felt that a possibility—in the air for some time—had come to fruition. For years I have sent letters to government officials over environmental concerns. I’ve written Senators, members of the House, Forest Service officials, BLM staffers, state governors, local newspapers, and the White House. One letter to a BLM district official—regarding a proposal by artists Christo & Jean-Claude to “wrap” a thirty mile stretch of the Arkansas River—is included in my book, *Wild Form, Savage Grammar*. (I also had a poem addressing the same proposal printed as a broadside by Brad O’Sullivan, and a few of us posted these as an act of political intervention in Salida and along the contested stretch of the Arkansas.)

On nearly every occasion, after sending a communication to an elected or appointed official, I received the expectable form letter in response. Generally the replies thank you for comments, maintain that public officials rely on feedback from their constituency, observe that the issues are complex, & promise that staff is looking into the matter. The Forest Service and BLM have been good, I want to acknowledge, about follow up. This includes sending environmental impact documents, land-use proposals, and sometimes multi-year impact studies along with maps.

When newly elected President Barack Obama appointed Ken Salazar (of my home state, Colorado) Secretary of the Interior—and when Salazar disappointed many of us by pursuing the Bush administration’s efforts to de-list wolves from the endangered species list in the West—I sent my first poem to an elected official.

To the Secretary of the Interior

Dear Secretary Salazar,
Here in your home
state Colorado
polls show the population
largely in favor of reintroducing
the Gray or Timber Wolf to our
mountains. I once wrote
that I hoped my children would live
to hear the wolf howl some day.
Word has it you are working to
remove the wolf from Federal protection
and hope shortly to delist it
from the Endangered Species Act.
This leaves as you know wolf
management in the hands
of ranching interests, and as a federal court
noted, does bypass proper scientific
study of whether the Northern
Rocky populations are viable.
I want to suggest
that should you remove
protection, and many of Idaho's wolves
disappear under the guns of mid-level bureaucrats,
we request the Teton Lakota rename
their winter month 'Moon when the
wolves used to run,'
and petition the Farmer's Almanac
to delist January as Full Wolf Moon—
they could rename it Moon of
Political Payback,
Aerial Gunning Moon
or Full Moon of the Rancher's Lobby.

Wolves and petrochemicals are intimately connected. The first link is simply that as natural gas exploration and the construction of wells surge in the mountain West, predator habitat and intact ecosystems are threatened. When wells get drilled, roads and heavy equipment enter less developed habitat; small but detectable explosions occur under the earth's pelage; and the large shy predators are notable as among the first native species to register stress, dislocation, or susceptibility to disease.

Another, maybe less visible connection of oil & wolf, is that beyond any single issue—shale oil, methane gas drilling, wolf reintroduction, bison management, methamphetamine labs, you name it—our concern needs to remain with policies responsive to the delicate interdependence of air, soil, water, flora, fauna, and human dignity. Single issues do not exist. Environmental concerns “should echo and reecho against each other,” as Jack Spicer observed about poems.

Likely that wolves
have already
returned to Colorado the news source says
shall we consult oracles
scat on the High Lonesome Ranch—
we're learning to read prints in the dust
yarrow stalks, coins—
to change ideas about what land is for
is to change ideas
about what anything's for—
consult dreams, visions now
radio, bumper stickers

The oracles listed in this stanza are not tongue in cheek. Elected officials may take a moment to reflect on a radio report; they are unlikely to take much stock in a bumper sticker; most will surely miss the ecology of dreams and visions. Yet such old-time methods of seeking counsel have stood as ways of establishing public policy among indigenous peoples as far back as records go. Those old-time policies, grounded in counsel with other-than-humans, did far less damage to the necessary ecologies than our current system of human-interest lobbyists do.

My poem, From the Arapaho Songbook (source of the above stanza), has included responses to the Deepwater Horizon oil disaster, as well as to the long-term problem of hydrofracking for methane gas (hydraulic fracturing of geological structures under the earth, by means of pressurized pumping of water, sand, and chemical brews). At present the New York Times is running a series of articles on “hydrofracking.” I’m not much interested—either as a poet who believes poems should include multiple layers of experience, or as an ecology student who believes in keeping my eyes on many interwoven species—in merely political or single-issue poems. The background, the untidy mess of human needs & consumption, the response of the animal realm (animal spirit realm?) to our actions; the histories, the economics; all these are invited into the poem.

Here are a series of stanzas from the “Arapaho Songbook” collection. The first stands as an elegy to a fine North American poet (with a trained ecological conscience) who died as the Deepwater disaster was dominating newspaper headlines. The second echoes several sources: Thoreau, an Arapaho Ghost Dance song collected in about 1890, and newspaper reports of Deepwater.

British Petroleum’s third
attempt to stem
the Deepwater Horizon oil pipe disaster
has failed so wait until August
here in the present month
Leslie Scalapino your
generosity to post off a careful
letter dated 20 May and on
the 28th gone, having transmuted
shyness into peerless generosity
a curious awkwardness tailed you—
inimitable own mode gift

The crises of ecology
the loss of archaic language
& traditions
not cumbered nor mortified by memory
aquatic birds sea turtles

nuhú' biito'owúú'
where is our attorney of the
indigenous plants the local fauna
bioregion's mode hews close to story
yes we tell stories to give
other-than-humans someplace to dwell

We should wear bird masks
over our shame
dark oily tar over their
bills wings & talons
there's no air in the air here
writes Barsamian from Delhi
just dust, dust & CO
BP tries yet again to cap the torrent,
little word on the great twisting oil plumes
a hundred miles long—
while we sit midway in Incognito Gap
to brood on nuclear energy

In the days immediately following Deepwater Horizon, it appeared that if the oil-rig companies would take a big hit from the spill, the immediate benefactors would be proponents of nuclear energy. Nuclear—like wind power or the solar collection panels that have begun to cover thousands of acres in the West—carries large environmental consequences. What seems to have dropped out of consideration is the Thoreau-&-Gandhi-inspired notion of restraint. Few speak of limiting our consumption patterns, or even of balancing it. Instead, a few generations of technocrats seem hell-bent on what Lewis Mumford once called “technological disguises for infantile fantasies.” In this case the fantasy of getting all the energy we need (loyal petrochemical love) without disruption or delay.

The Siouland cottonwood died
drought decade & age
such things are animate
inanimate the verbs keep getting more

complex pronouns won't sit still
can't is night
solar farm evil as strip mining
for miles the glass
& silicon collectors cover the San Luis Valley
nothing survives
beneath their shadow, save a few
knotted sagebrush
oh the urban environmentalists clamor
for cheap clean safe energy
as though you could get
something for nothing

Show me an energy source that claims to be cheap, clean, and safe, and I'll show you a cover-up, a gang of lobby interests, or a government bail-out. It was seeing SunEdison's acres of solar panels in Colorado's San Luis Valley—the largest photovoltaic plant in the United States—that made me realize the disruptions of solar may equal those of strip mining.

Yet, check your own pocket notebook or things-to-do list. My own begins and ends with fossil fuel dependence.

Change oil in Subaru
repair leak in roof
look up "polysynthetic languages"
practice Arapaho verbs
email Shin Yu
find Kroeber's book hardcover
there are things to do
inside the poem outside
the mask: get bar-oil for
chainsaw

And a singular word from the Arapaho language begins to assert itself. Translated as “crazy,” it would fit fine with Ezra Pound’s “contra naturam.”

That which is hohooko
contrary to the growth of new grass
it’s like being a ghost or cadaver
“those people
sometimes they get tricky”
said Chief Sharp Nose of the
government agents
BP collecting surface oil with massive booms
their officials “are going to look very closely for
fraudulent claims”
rescue workers shut from the burn sites
reports of sea
turtles burning alive —

The final lines make me nervous. How topical should a poem be? I like that Jonathan Skinner writes me that what was “so refreshing and powerful about Allen [Ginsberg] was that he totally said fuck you to the cultural propriety, modesty, and shame, that keeps us all separate in our respective warrens cultivating our atomized scenes.” I remain skeptical about reading poems to our Congressional representatives though. I’d actually prefer a “walk through.”

A coalition of local groups—one of which I’ve been quite active in—are contesting a ski resort’s right to expand into wetlands that seem crucial moose habitat. My experience of the district USFS ranger, who may prove the key player here, is that she would be pretty impervious to poems. Her thirty years in the service probably haven’t provided much opportunity for literary studies. But a walk through the critical terrain with a few poets, ecologists, and citizens, might prove eye opening. If we manage to get her out on that north-facing slope, I’ll promise Jonathan I can read her a poem. But I’ll also note that ski lifts, water pumps for snow-making, the siphoning of a watershed’s run-off from the nearby creek, Cats grooming the runs at night, and the arrival of increased numbers of skiers by car and airplane, all have instrumentally to do with assumptions about the North American right to use oil.

The dark secret remains: one's dependence on fossil fuels continues, even in the rural districts, even when burning wood for our heat or cooking, or when clearing out lodgepoles killed by the pine beetle.

With hydraulic wedge & a Honda gasoline motor
to split the Siouland cottonwood

héétnoo3ítooné3en

dense repetition of solar energy

how it bursts from the grain

I'm going to tell you a story—

you cannot go straight into tree's heart

not even with twenty tons force

heartwood is gnarled

knotted darkly tangled uncertain

it's how all things grow

the heart has snarled deformations

dark thoughts

here, under the grain of things.

Jonathan Skinner

Deepwater Horizon: One Year Later

“Auger” takes its title from Shell’s first deepwater play in the Gulf of Mexico (in partnership with BP)—drilling in 2,860 feet of water to a depth of 19,360 feet—in the mid-1990s. (With Deepwater Horizon, BP ultimately would drill in 4,000 feet of water to a depth of 35,055 feet. As I write, new wells are being readied in the ultra-deepwater.) The first image, from the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling Report to the President, shows a scale rendering of the tension-leg drilling platform used at Auger, superimposed over the city of New Orleans.

Auger: “a large tool for boring holes deep in the ground.”

Superimposing a transparency of the scale platform image on the poem, I bored a hole through the “Great Ocean” sequence of Pablo Neruda’s *Canto General*, as translated by Howard Schwartz—taking out a half inch right down the middle of each page. The words I had bored became the poem, “Auger.” Estimated at about 1,300 lines, the poem when assembled stretches 26 feet across my floor, a .13 to 100 scale rendering of the Auger well.

In drilling Neruda, I hoped to hit pay at a certain depth. I am still trying to understand what it means to drill through that much water, that deep in the ground. I wanted to experience the pressure of the long poem, in a compressed period. And to communicate scale.

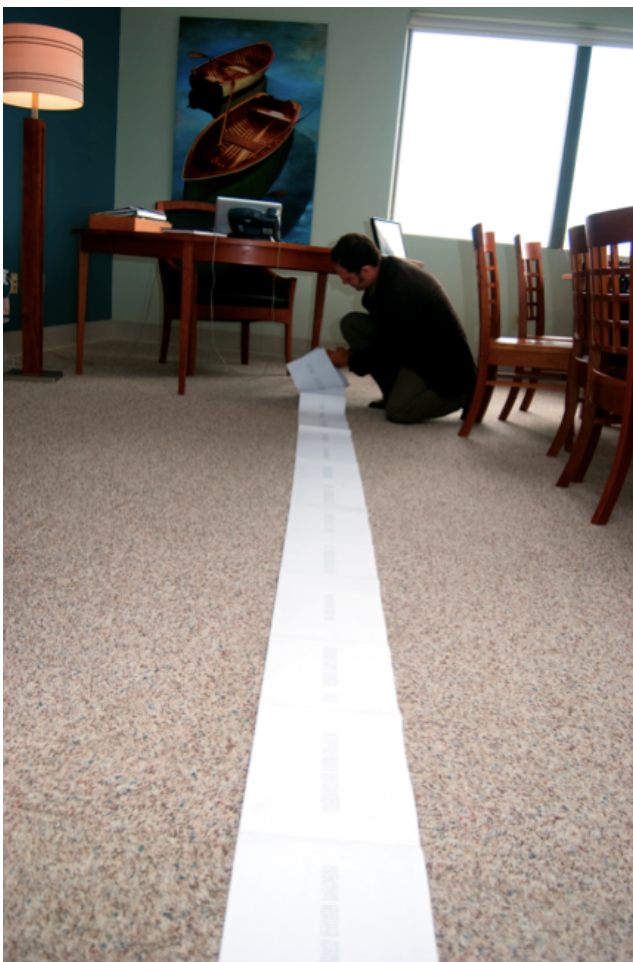
When I met with Representative Chellie Pingree, to discuss Representative Ed Markey’s bill, HR 501: Implementing the Recommendations of the BP Oil Spill Commission Act, I read her a section of “Auger.” I also thanked her for the House Sustainability Coalition, which she founded and chairs. I hoped to entrust her with a bit of human scale.

You can find the National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling Report here: <http://www.oilspillcommission.gov/final-report>

The report is good reading—even if you think you know everything about the so-called

“spill.” You don’t. It is as interesting for what it doesn’t say as for what it does.

I do not think of poetry as a tool for persuasion; I do think of it as an instrument of dialogue. Representative Pingree and her aides listened to my reading attentively, in her Portland office with a Louise Nevelson sculpture on one wall and a view of Portland harbor out the window of the other wall. It didn’t feel any different reading my poetry there than it might have felt reading on any other occasion—except that Chellie Pingree struck me as a particularly serious listener. Afterwards, with the text of Auger stretching across the meeting room floor, we had a conversation about citizen participation and the presence of the arts in Washington, D.C.



When I said that many poets I knew were cynical about representational democracy, feeling the system hopelessly broken, and were consequently disengaged from this type of communication, Representative Pingree replied that she didn't get that sense from her constituents. She feels that her constituents are engaged, that they—and she admitted that this could be particular to Mainers—have a keen sense of politics, even in the way they lead their lives, on a day to day basis. Pingree noted the large numbers of Americans who march all over Washington, D.C. like they own the place (and they do, she said). When I suggested that poets and artists should flood the halls of Congress, and take away the lobbyists' breathing space, she smiled, and said, yes, it would be great to have more artists and poets in Washington, D.C.

We agreed that these are “very bad times” and that the corporate lobby has congressional power locked up. About two thirds of the way through this meeting, as Representative Pingree held me in her flinty, measured yet warm gaze, I began to feel a confidence in this woman that her voting record alone (which I have liked) could not instill. This is the “tuning” that both enables and subverts representation. It is the human scale in the picture. As the photographer arrived for the photo op, I could feel the whole machinery of representation, its endless flywheels kicking back into gear, descending over the moment that Neruda's words had opened for us. The auger was being readied once again. But I know who Pingree is, I have met her, and her aides, and they know who I am. The poetics of the catastrophe are not lost on us.



AUGER TENSION-LEG PLATFORM



Like a giant alien creature, a scale rendering of a tension-leg drilling platform is superimposed over New Orleans. Built by Shell to tap its Auger deepwater field some 200 miles southwest of the city, the huge platform uses steel mooring cables to stabilize its 3,000-foot legs and can drill 20,000 feet below the seafloor. The platform augured well for Shell in the late 1990s, delivering 100,000 barrels of oil a day.

Courtesy of Shell

Auger

(excerpt, drilled from Pablo Neruda's "Great Ocean," Canto General, as translated by Howard Schwartz)

could destiny
ferment
and destroy
our distant
ions guarded

toppled
shattered
wave coasts
what volume
potency
solitude
pure death

merged
shores
endure
turned star

become
crushed
action
ceased

orderly
human
stretches
light's
naked
curvature

lacks
crater
scars

grains
dangle
and
rise to
lightning
millimeter

stars
and metal
coal
merged
wheels
interior
salt's light

lethargic
I mobs
filled
earth's
abyss
traces

blood
waits
water

church
shields
transparent
war in

formed
substance

your life
made man

I beasts
the eggs

windsails
in your age
create
emeralds
that devour

blue mouths
orbs drowned
shadows glide

latitudes unfurl
hosts of the
trembling
voice, the water
cyclonic
raging milk

innumerable
as a needle
incubus
recently
weaving
clustered

humid plants
wind

of beings
light
jewelry

least
grotto, flowing
tissues of ova
teeth
serum
organs
convulsions
had
soma, at root
spangled

I saw
with steely
cutting eyes
submerged
fish, ogival
studs firm
cruise-like
slender
shimmering
ovals

increase
the land
denizens of
opal semen's
dark she

madrepore
the ocean
trembled like

wind of
penetrated
foam

the mass
unnamed
fountains
and coral

rock was
water's line
to man
empty
feet entwined

the sentinels
facing the
blue trees
circle
the island
at the entry

decorated
with its
kings
solitary v foam
sarcophagi

moonfish that
erode

in the sands
light, the dread
submerged
statue builder

mines
and roses
my petrified
skin

so many fingers
syllable the
brow that
sometimes

ascend and bring
all the nuptial
pollen
red spring
blows to the
miniscule

earth until
shadow falls
bee time's
infinite

blossoms
stoke the cells
magnolias
spur on hips

the metal
sheets
consume
life energy
undulating
tower that

touches this

silent sandy
scar licks time
a cluster

with more death
in its face, honey
that flows

Cecilia Vicuña

Report on a Half/Lost Letter

I wrote to Senator Gillibrand in an electronic form provided by her office in Washington, to get feedback from citizens.

I received no acknowledgement of receipt, nor reply from her, nor from her office.

After writing the letter, I made a screen shot which cut it in half (inadvertently).

I did a Copy & Paste to save what I had written, but it also cut it in half.

So I have no record of what exactly I said. Except for the half in the screen shot.

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

How does it feel to be part of the body (legislative body) that is killing the sea? The future Oxygen of this Earth?

Each time congress allows more deep water drilling, pollution and run-off to go into the sea, we are killing it.

Is this the Deep Water Horizon we wish to bequeath the future: Dead Seas?

In 1954 the great poet Gabriela Mistral wrote:

“One night the sea died
from one shore to the other;
it wrinkled up, withdrew
like a shawl gathered together.”

“Death of the Sea”
(Translated by Ursula K. Le Guin)

In ancient times politicians heard the poets. They knew only the voice of the poet would last.

The sea will continue to die unless congress begins to hear the call of this Earth.

The call of the poem that says: “from not hearing from not seeing

it was slowly dying.” (ibid)

Cecilia Vicuña

New York, March 21, 2011

Deep Sea / Deep See

(The tragedy of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, April 20, 2010)

Art and poetry are anticipatory.

A poem senses what we don't yet know.

Gabriela Mistral wrote her poem "Death of the Sea" in the mid 50's.

"One night the sea died
from one shore to the other;
it wrinkled up, withdrew
like a shawl gathered together."

(Translated by Ursula K. Le Guin)

She said: "from not hearing, from not seeing / it was slowly dying"

The Deep See of the poem seeing the Deep Sea of Death.

*

The Deep Water Horizon of Death.

Dead sea zones were first detected in the 70's.

Now, they are multiplying all over the planet.

The biggest dead zone is in the Gulf of Mexico.

Yet, we intend to drill and drill until no life, no oxygen is left on this Earth.

La Mar, the sea is waiting for us to hear her song.

Contributor Biographies

Karen Leona Anderson is the author of *Punish Honey* (Carolina Wren Press, 2009). She received an M.F.A from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, an M.A. from Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, and her Ph.D. from Cornell University, where she wrote a dissertation on poetry and science. Her work has appeared in *ecopoetics*, *jubilat*, *Verse*, *Indiana Review*, *Fence*, *VOLT*, and other journals. She is an assistant professor of English at St. Mary's College of Maryland.

Kristen Baumliér's work spans the full spectrum of interdisciplinary media, including performance, interactive installation, video and audio works. During a residency at the Headlands Center for the Arts in 2005, Baumliér developed "Oh, Petroleum," where she transformed into "The Petroleum Pop Princess," a pop icon engaging viewers in debate over materialism and oil consumerism. For more information contact: Kristen Baumliér www.kristenbaumliér.com

Cara Benson is the author of *(made)*, published by BookThug 2010, and *Protean Parade*, forthcoming 2011 with Black Radish Books. Her chapbook *Quantum Chaos and Poems: A Manifest(o)ation* won the 2008 bpNichol Prize. Editor of *Predictions* (ChainLinks), Benson is a member of the Belladonna* Collaborative and teaches poetry in a NY State Prison. Her poem ("ohit'sagushupshuckf . . .") appeared previously on *Poets for Living Waters*.

Timothy Bradford's first book of poetry, *Nomads with Samsonite*, is forthcoming from BlazeVOX [books] in spring 2011. He lives with his wife, two sons, and an ever-changing

menagerie just outside of Oklahoma City.

Kimberly Burwick obtained her B.A in literature from the University of Wisconsin – Madison, and her M.F.A. in poetry from Antioch University – Los Angeles. Burwick is the author of two collections of poetry: *Has No Kinsmen* (Red Hen Press, 2006) and *Horses in the Cathedral*, winner of the Robert Dana Prize (Anhinga Press, 2011). Recently she was awarded the Black Warrior Review Poetry Prize and the C.P. Cavafy Poetry Prize from the journal *Poetry International*. She teaches for Washington State University and lives in Moscow, Idaho.

Amy Catanzano is the author of *Multiversal* (Fordham University Press, 2009), recipient of the 2010 PEN USA Literary Award in Poetry and published as the winner of the Poets Out Loud Prize, selected by Michael Palmer. Her other books are *iEpiphany* (Erudite Fangs Editions, 2008) and an electronic chapbook, *the heartbeat is a fractal* (Ahadada Books, 2009).

Jack Collom, born in 1931, grew up watching birds and woodswalking. A long-time Coloradan, he teaches Eco-Lit and Community Outreach at Naropa University, as well as leading students from 5 to 85 in various creative-writing endeavors. Twenty-seven books and chapbooks, plus a 250 pp, as-yet-unpublished ms called *Second Nature*.

CAConrad lives in Philadelphia and writes with his friends at PhillySound. He is the author of *The Book of Frank* (Wave Books, 2010), *Advanced Elvis Course* (Soft Skull Press, 2009), *Deviant Propulsion* (Soft Skull Press, 2006), and a collaboration with Frank Sherlock titled *The City Real & Imagined* (Factory School Press, 2010). A book of his (Soma)tic poetry exercises and poems will be published in late 2011, and a new book of poetry, *A Beautiful Marsupial Afternoon*, in 2012 (both by Wave Books). He is a co-founder of PACE: Poet-Activist Community Extension. “Oil this War!” was previously published on the (Soma)tic

Poetics blog: <http://somaticpoetryexercises.blogspot.com/>

Matthew Cooperman is the author of *Still: of the Earth as the Ark which Does Not Move* (Counterpath Press, 2011), *DaZE* (Salt Publishing Ltd, 2006) and *A Sacrificial Zinc* (Pleiades/LSU, 2001), winner of the Lena-Miles Wever Todd Prize, as well as three chapbooks, *Still: (to be) Perpetual* (dove | tail, 2007), *Words About James* (phylum press, 2005) and *Surge* (Kent State University Press, 1999). A founding editor of *Quarter After Eight*, and poetry editor of *Colorado Review*, he teaches at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, where he lives with the poet Aby Kaupang and his two children. More information can be found at www.matthewcooperman.com.

JenMarie Davis edits Fact-Simile Editions and builds books from recycled and reclaimed material. She is the author of *Sometime Soon Ago* (Shadow Mountain, 2009) and her work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Glitterpony*, *Court Green*, *Little Red Leaves*, and *Gargoyle*.

Ian Demsky is a science writer and former investigative-minded newspaper reporter. His poetry has appeared in journals including *Sulfur*, *Chelsea*, and *The Prague Review*. He is currently seeking a publisher for his *Deepwater Horizon* manuscript. He lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan with his wife, Kelly.

Diane di Prima was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1934, a second generation American of Italian descent. She co-founded the New York Poets Theatre, and founded the Poets Press. Together with Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) she edited the literary newsletter, *The Floating Bear* (1961-1969). For the past thirty-four years she has lived and worked in northern California. She is the author of 43 books of poetry and prose, including *Pieces of a Song* (City Lights, 1990). Other works in progress include *The Poetry Deal: Poems from the 1980s and 90s*; *Death Poems for All Seasons*; *Alchemical Studies* (poetry); *Not Quite Buffalo*

Stew, a surreal novel about California life; *The Mysteries of Vision*, a book of essays on H.D.; and *One Too Like Thee*, a study of Shelley's use of traditional Western magic in his life and work. In 2009, she was named the Poet Laureate of San Francisco.

Marcella Durand is the author of some books of poetry, most recently *Deep Eco Pré*, a collaboration with Tina Darragh (<http://littleredleaves.com/ebooks/DeepEcoPre.pdf>); *AREA* from Belladonna* Books (2008); and *Traffic & Weather* from Futurepoem Books (2008). She was the 2010-2011 Fellow in Poetics and Poetic Practice at the Center for Programs in Contemporary Writing at the University of Pennsylvania. Durand's talk was originally given May 25, 2010, at "Ecopoetical Futures," a panel at Poets House with Tyrone Williams, Brenda Iijima, and Ted Mathys. "Orifice" was previously published on *Poets for Living Waters*.

Laura Elrick's recent projects include *Blocks Away*, a psychogeography of Lower Manhattan, and the video/poem "Stalk" ("part dystopian urban cartography, part spatial-poetic intervention"). She also composed a set of 5 audio pieces for doubled-voice, excerpts of which can be found on the PennSound website. She has written two books of poetry—*Fantasies in Permeable Structures* (Factory School 2005) and *sKincerity* (Krupskaya 2003)—and her essay "Poetry, Ecology, and the Production of Lived Space" can be found in the *Eco Language Reader* (2010). She currently teaches at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn.

Brett Evans is the author of *Slosh Models* (Factory School, 2009) and *Ready-to-Eat Individual with Frank Sherlock* (2006, Lavender Ink Press) and *After School Session with Brett Evans* (Buck Downs Books/subpress, 2001). He is a founding member of the carnival microkrewe 'tit-Rex.

Ann Fisher-Wirth's fourth book of poems, *Dream Cabinet*, will be published by Wings Press in 2012. She is coediting *Ecopoetry: A Contemporary American Anthology*, which

Trinity University Press will publish in 2012. She teaches at the University of Mississippi, in the low residency MFA at Chatham University in Pittsburgh, and at Southern Star Yoga Studio in Oxford.

Todd Fredson's poetry and non-fiction appears or is forthcoming in journals such as *42 Opus*, *American Poetry Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Poetry International*, *So To Speak*, and *West Branch*. His collection of poems, *The Crucifix-Blocks*, won the 2011 Patricia Bibby First Book Award.

Benjamin Friedlander was born in New Orleans in 1959 and has since lived in Ontario, Missouri, New York, California, and Maine. His books of poetry and prose include *The Missing Occasion of Saying Yes* (2007), *Simulcast: Four Experiments in Criticism* (2004), and *A Knot Is Not a Tangle* (2000). He has also worked extensively as an editor, producing literary and scholarly journals and also books by Larry Eigner, Charles Olson, and Robert Creeley. Since 1999, Friedlander has taught American literature and poetics at the University of Maine.

John Gallaher co-edits *The Laurel Review*. His newest book of poetry is *Your Father on the Train of Ghosts*, co-authored with G.C. Waldrep.

Born in the Mojave Desert in Barstow, California, **Forrest Gander** grew up in Virginia and spent significant periods in San Francisco, Dolores Hidalgo (Mexico), and Eureka Springs, Arkansas before moving to Rhode Island. He holds degrees in both English literature and geology.

The author of numerous books of poetry, including *Eye Against Eye*, *Torn Awake*, and *Science & Steepleflower*, all from New Directions, Gander also writes novels (*As a Friend*), essays (*A Faithful Existence*) and translates. His most recent translations are *Firefly Under the Tongue: Selected Poems of Coral Bracho* (Finalist, PEN Translation Prize), *No Shelter:*

Selected Poems of Pura López Colomé, and, with Kent Johnson, two books by the Bolivian wunderkind Jaime Saenz: *The Night* and *Immanent Visitor: Selected Poems of Jaime Saenz*. Gander's poems appear in many literary magazines in the U.S. and abroad, and have been translated into a dozen languages. Several books in translation are available in France (*En Ami*), Mexico (*Zumba el transcurrir el verano: poemas escogidos and Arrancado del sueño*), Chile (*Ligaduras and Traduciendo a Saenz y otros poemas*), Spain (*Libreto para eros*), Germany (*Als es dich gab*) and the Netherlands (*Twelve X 12:00*). He is a United States Artists Rockefeller Fellow and has received fellowships from The National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim, Whiting, and Howard Foundations. With poet C.D. Wright, Gander lives in Rhode Island. The Adele Kellenberg Seaver Professor of Literary Arts and Comparative Literature at Brown University, he teaches courses such as Poetry & Phenomenology, EcoPoetics, Latin American Death Trip, and Translation Theory & Practice.

Merrill Gilfillan's recent books include *THE WARBLER ROAD*, essays, and *THE BARK OF THE DOG*, poems, both from Flood Editions. He has lived in Colorado for thirty years.

Gara Gillentine has been creating art in one form or another since she was a child. She worked primarily as a painter and a collagist until she got her first computer in 1998 for "Computer Image Making" class at the University of Mississippi. In 2007 she completely switched to the iPhone and its camera and apps as her only tools for creation.

Kevin Goodan is the author of *In The Ghost-House Acquainted*, *Winter Tenor*, and *Upper Level Disturbances*. He teaches at Lewis-Clark State College and lives in Joel, Idaho.

Arielle Greenberg is co-author, with Rachel Zucker, of *Home/Birth: A Poem*, and author of *My Kafka Century*, *Given* and several chapbooks. She is co-editor of three anthologies,

most recently *Gurlesque* with Lara Glenum, and is the founder-moderator of the poet-moms listserv. She left a tenured position in poetry at Columbia College Chicago in 2011 to move with her family to a small town in rural Maine.

Allison Adelle Hedge Coke has authored/edited thirteen books, including *Sing, Effigies, Blood Run, Off-Season City Pipe, Dog Road Woman*, and *Rock, Ghost, Willow, Deer*. She came of age cropping tobacco and working fields, waters, and working in factories.

Brian Henry is the author of seven books of poetry, most recently *Lessness* (Ahsahta Press, 2011). His translation of the Slovenian poet Tomaž Šalamun's *Woods and Chalices* appeared from Harcourt in 2008, and his translation of Aleš Šteger's *The Book of Things* appeared from BOA Editions in 2010 and won the 2011 Best Translated Book Award for Poetry. He has received numerous awards for his work, including fellowships from the NEA, the Howard Foundation, and the Slovenian Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Crag Hill's most recent book is *7 x 7* (Otoliths, 2010). With Nico Vassilkais, he edited the first major anthology of visual poetry in over 25 years, *The Last Vispo Anthology*, forthcoming from Fantagraphics in 2012. A selection of work from 1998-2008, the anthology has contributors from over 25 countries.

Brenda Hillman has published eight collections of poetry, all from Wesleyan University Press, the most recent of which are *Pieces of Air in the Epic* (2005), and *Practical Water* (2009). With Patricia Dienstfrey, she co-edited *The Grand Permisson: New Writings on Poetics and Motherhood* (2003). Hillman is the Olivia Filippi Professor of Poetry at Saint Mary's College of California, and works with CodePink, a women-initiated grassroots movement for social justice. "Moaning Action at the Gas Pump" appeared previously in *Gulf Coast Magazine* 23.1: <http://www.gulfcoastmag.org/index.php?n=2&si=17&s=2674>

Jen Hofer is a Los Angeles-based poet, translator, interpreter, teacher, knitter, book-maker, public letter-writer, and urban cyclist. Her most recent books are *Ivory Black*, a translation of Negro marfil by Mexican poet Myriam Moscona (Les Figues Press, 2011) and *Lead and Tether* (Dusie Books, 2011). Recent poems and translations have appeared in *Aufgabe*, *Mandorla*, *Or, out of nothing*, and *With+Stand*.

Brenda Iijima's chapbook, *Glossematics, Thus* was just published by Least Weasel Press. She is the editor of Portable Press at Yo-Yo Labs (<http://yoyolabs.com/>) and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Alice Jones's books include *The Knot* and *Isthmus* from Alice James Books, *Extreme Directions* from Omnidawn, and *Gorgeous Mourning* from Apogee Press. Poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *VOLT*, *Boston Review*, *Colorado Review*, and *Denver Quarterly*. She is a co-editor of Apogee Press.

Aby Kaupang, author of *Absence is Such a Transparent House* (Tebot Bach, 2011) and *Scenic Fences | Houses Innumerable* (Scantly Clad Press, 2008), has also had poems appear in *Best New Poets*, *Word For/Word*, *La Petite Zine*, *Dusie*, *Verse*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Laurel Review*, *Parthenon West*, *Parcel*, *Aufgabe*, *14 Hills*, *Interim*, *Caketrain*, *Shampoo* & others. This year she will complete her MS in Occupational Therapy.

Sally Keith's third collection *THE FACT OF THE MATTER* (Milkweed Editions) is forthcoming. She lives in Washington, D.C.

John Kinsella's engagement with Thoreau's *Walden*, the poetry collection *Jam Tree Gully*, was published by WW Norton in November 2011. His *Activist Poetics: Anarchy in the Avon Valley* (ed. Niall Lucy) was published by Liverpool University Press in 2010. He is a Fellow of Churchill College, Cambridge University, and a Professorial Research Fellow at

the University of Western Australia.

Michael Kroesche received his Master's in Fine Arts at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His work has been published in such magazines as *The Chiron Review* and *The Breakwater Review*, among others. He will be residing in Guangzhou, China for the next year teaching English.

Michael Leong is the author of several books and chapbooks of poetry including *e.s.p.* (Silenced Press, 2009), *Midnight's Marsupium* (The Knives Forks and Spoons Press, 2010), *The Philosophy of Decomposition/Re-composition as Explanation* (Delete Press, forthcoming), and *Cutting Time with a Knife* (Black Square Editions/The Brooklyn Rail, forthcoming). His translation of the Chilean poet Estela Lamat, *I, the Worst of All*, was published by BlazeVox in 2009. He lives in New York City and is a part-time lecturer at Rutgers University.

Tod Marshall lives in Spokane, Washington, where he teaches at Gonzaga University.

E.J. McAdams wrote *4x4*, a chapbook from unarmed journal press, and recently had poems in *The Boog Reader 5*, *eccolinguistics*, *unarmed journal*, and *EOAGH*. He is the curator of the Social-Environmental-Aesthetics (SEA) poetry series at Exit Art, and lives in New York City. "Fracking" appeared previously in *unarmed journal* #63.

Michael McLane earned his MFA from Colorado State University. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Colorado Review*, *Laurel Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Interim*, and *Matter Journal* among others. He currently lives in Salt Lake City where he is an editor for *Sugar House Review* and is starting the Environmental Humanities program at the University of Utah in Fall of 2011.

Sharon Mesmer's two recent poetry collections are *ANNOYING DIABETIC BITCH* (Combo Books, 2008) and *THE VIRGIN FORMICA* (Hanging Loose, 2008). "Pimp My Top Kill Live Feed Mothership" appeared previously on *Poets for Living Waters*.

Philip Metres is the author of, among other works, *Ode to Oil* (chapbook, 2001), *the abu ghraib arias* (chapbook, 2011), *To See the Earth* (poetry, 2008), *Come Together: Imagine Peace* (anthology, 2008), and *Behind the Lines: War Resistance Poetry on the American Homefront since 1941* (criticism, 2007). He teaches literature and creative writing at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. "Invocation" and "Crude Oil" appeared first in *Artful Dodge* and in the chapbook *Ode to Oil*. "Deepwater Horizon Heron" appeared at www.enpipeline.org and in *Ode to Oil*. "Invocation" also appeared on *Poets for Living Waters*. All three pieces are now on exhibit, alongside Kristen Baumliér's art, at Grasselli Library at John Carroll University. Please see <http://behindthelinespoetry.blogspot.com>

Laura Mullen is the author of six books, most recently *Dark Archive* (University of California, 2011). She teaches at Louisiana State University. Versions of "Briefing" and "The Story" appeared previously on her blog <http://afteriwastdead.blogspot.com/>

Hillary Mushkin is a visual artist exploring the intimate nature of global politics. Her work has exhibited at the Freud Museum (London), the Getty Museum (Los Angeles) and White Columns (New York). Recent projects include a City of Los Angeles public art commission (collaboration with Marcella Durand), *Girl with Lions* (artists project, X-tra: A Contemporary Art Quarterly) and *Incendiary Traces* (drawings, image archive and public program launched with LA Forum for Architecture and Urban Design.)

Hoa Nguyen was born in the Mekong Delta, raised in the DC area, and studied poetics in San Francisco. She is the author of eight books and chapbooks including *Chinaberry* (Fact Simile, 2010) and *Hecate Lochia* (Hot Whiskey, 2009). A new transplant to Toronto, ON,

Hoa curates a reading series, teaches creative writing, and reads tarot for poets. Wave Books will be publishing her third full-length collection in Fall 2012.

Alison Pelegrin is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Big Muddy River of Stars* (2007) and *Hurricane Party* (2011), both from the University of Akron Press. The recipient of fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Louisiana Division of the Arts, her poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *The Southern Review*, *The Writer's Almanac*, and *Poetry Daily*.

Patrick Pritchett is the author of several books of poems, including *Burn*, *Antiphonal*, and *Salt, My Love*. Scholarly essays have appeared in *Radical Vernacular: Lorine Niedecker* and the *Politics of Place and Ronald Johnson: Life and Works*. *Letters to Poets: Conversations about Poetics, Politics, and Community* features a dialogue with Kathleen Fraser on the poetics of form. He is on the advisory editorial board of *Journal of Modern Literature* and is currently a Lecturer in the History and Literature Program at Harvard University and Visiting Lecturer in Poetry at Amherst College.

Stephen Ratcliffe's recent books include: *Remarks on Color / Sound* (Eclipse 2010), *Reading the Unseen: (Offstage) Hamlet* (Counterpath, 2010), *REAL* (Avenue B, 2007), *CLOUD / RIDGE* (ubu editions, 2007), *HUMAN / NATURE* (ubu editions, 2007), *Portraits & Repetition* (Post-Apollo, 2002), and *SOUND/(system)* (Green Integer, 2002).

Evelyn Reilly's most recent book of poetry, *Styrofoam*, was published by Roof Books. "Wing/Span/Screw/Cluster (Aves)" was displayed as an image/text video at the Center for Contemporary Art and the Natural World, Project Space, Haldon Forest Park, Exeter, UK. Reilly is currently working on *The Dreamlife of Materials*, excerpts of which will be appearing in *Jacket2* soon.

Abby Reyes has supported communities working to protect their lives and environment from unwanted oil, mining, and gas projects. Now, Abby and husband Sunil Gandhi are raising their two boys, Kiran and Julian, in San Francisco, where Abby works as an attorney at the federal appellate court. Abby also directs the Heart Politics Project, fiscally sponsored by Engage Network, through which she is writing a book about people who sustain effective and transformative social justice work over the long haul. Please see <http://abbyreyeswrites.blogspot.com>

Elizabeth Robinson is the author, most recently, of *Also Known As* (Apogee) and *The Orphan & its Relations* (Fence). A new collection of poems, *Three Novels*, is forthcoming from Omnidawn this fall.

Martha Ronk is the author of numerous books of poetry, including, most recently, *Vertigo* (Coffee House Press, 2007), winner of the National Poetry Series; *In a Landscape of Having to Repeat* (Omnidawn, 2004); and *Why/Why Not* (University of California, 2003). A professor of Renaissance literature at Occidental College, her first book of fiction, *Glass Grapes*, was published by Boa Editions in 2008.

Michael Rothenberg is editor and publisher of *Big Bridge*, www.bigbridge.org. His books include *The Paris Journals* (Fish Drum Press), *Unhurried Vision* (La Alameda/University of New Mexico Press), *Choose* (Big Bridge Press), *My Youth As A Train* (Foothills Publishing, 2010) and the eco-spy thriller *Punk Rockwell* (Tropical Press). Rothenberg's editorial work includes the selected poems of Philip Whalen, Joanne Kyger, David Meltzer and Ed Dorn (Penguin Books) and the *Collected Poems of Philip Whalen* (Wesleyan University Press). At present Rothenberg is organizing a global action initiative 100 Thousand Poets for Change www.bigbridge.org/100thousandpoetsforchange

Linda Russo's collections of poems include *Mirth* (Chax Press, 2007); poems have recently appeared in *New American Writing*, *Tinfish*, and *Spiral Orb*. Her essay "Precious, Rare, and

Mundane” is the preface to Joanne Kyger’s *About Now: Collected Poems* (National Poetry Foundation, 2007). She currently lives and teaches in the Columbia River Watershed of eastern Washington.

Tomaz Šalamun has published more than 38 books of poetry in Slovenia and 12 books in English. His many honors include the Preseren Fund Prize, a visiting Fulbright to Columbia University, and a fellowship to the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa. He also has served as Cultural Attaché to the Slovenian Consulate in New York. His poetry has been translated into more than 20 languages around the world. *Woods and Chalices*, translated by Brian Henry, appeared from Harcourt in 2008.

Jennifer Scappettone is a poet, translator, teacher, and scholar, the author of *From Dame Quickly* (Litmus Press, 2009) and of several chapbooks. She is at work on *Exit 43*—an archaeology of toxic landscapes and opera of pop-up choruses—for the cross-genre publishing project Atelos Press; pop-up pastorals from this work are being adapted as scores for PARK in collaboration with Kathy Westwater and Seung Jae Lee, with in-process showings at Dance Theater Workshop, Freshkills Park, and Reed College in 2010 and 2011 (see <http://www.movementresearch.org/criticalcorrespondence/blog/?p=1520>). A range of readings, talks, and acts of digital salvage may be found at her PennSound page, <http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Scappettone.html>, and at her website, <http://oikost.com>.

Andrew Schelling lives in the Southern Rocky Mountain bioregion. His writings are rooted in ecology, linguistics, and land use concerns in the American West. He is a renowned translator of the poetry of old India (Sanskrit and related vernaculars). Recent or forthcoming titles include *From the Arapaho Songbook* (poetry, La Alameda Press, 2011), *Dropping the Bow: Poems from Ancient India* (translation, White Pine Press, 2008), and *The Oxford Anthology of Bhakti Literature* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2011).

Jared Schickling reads, writes, and believes in contributing by publishing others. His activities stem from constant attempts at negating, once discovered, unlived philosophy. The poems here are from a forthcoming manuscript, *têuê lash your nipples to a post / history is gorgeous* (BlazeVOX, 2011).

Martha Serpas's two collections of poetry are *Côte Blanche* (New Issues, 2002) and *The Dirty Side of the Storm* (Norton, 2007). Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Nation*, and *Southwest Review*, and in anthologies such as *Bearing the Mystery: Twenty Years of Image* and the Library of America's *American Religious Poems*. A native of Bayou Lafourche in south Louisiana, she is involved in efforts to restore Louisiana's wetlands. She teaches creative writing at the University of Houston and is a hospital trauma chaplain. Please see: <http://www.marthaserpas.com/>

Frank Sherlock is the author of *Over Here, The City Real & Imagined* with CAConrad, and *Ready-to-Eat Individual* with Brett Evans. Recent chapbooks include *Feast Day Gone and Coming* and *Don't Forget Me in the Dimension You Choose to Live*. His Neighbor Ballads public art installation will be on the streets of Philadelphia during Spring 2011.

Jonathan Skinner's poetry collections include *Birds of Tiffi* (BlazeVox, 2011), *Warblers* (Albion Books, 2010), *With Naked Foot* (Little Scratch Pad Press, 2009) and *Political Cactus Poems* (Palm Press, 2005). Skinner founded and edits the journal *ecopoetics* (www.ecopoetics.org), has published numerous ecocritical essays, and is a 2011-2012 Fellow with the Cornell Society for Humanities. He makes his home in Bowdoinham, Maine.

Keaton Nguyen Smith was born and currently lives in Austin, Texas with his parents the poets Dale Smith and Hoa Nguyen and his younger brother Waylon. He is interested in cryptozoology and history. He will be moving with his family to Toronto, Ontario in July of 2011.

Heidi Lynn Staples is the author of three full-length collections of poetry: *Guess Can Gallop* (New Issues, 2004—New Issues Poetry Prize); *Dog Girl* (Ahsahta Press); and the forthcoming *a dew* (Ahsahta, 2013), drawn from the ecology of her native Gulf Coast. She is co-founder and co-editor with Amy King of *Poets for Living Waters*, an international poetry response to the BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and founder of pressing on, a book-arts project utilizing “locally thrown” trash. She lives in Athens, GA with her husband, daughter, dog, and front-yard veggie patch.

Sasha Steensen is the author of *A Magic Book* and *The Method* (Fence Books), *A History of the Human Family* (Flying Guillotine), *The Future of an Illusion* (Dos Press) and *Correspondence* (with Gordon Hadfield, Handwritten Press). Recent work has appeared in *Black Warrior Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Free Verse*, and *Bombay Gin*. She teaches Creative Writing at Colorado State University, where she also edits Bonfire Press. She serves as a poetry editor for *Colorado Review*.

Sheryl St. Germain directs the MFA program at Chatham University in Pittsburgh, which has a focus on nature and travel writing. Sher has published several books of poetry and translations from the Cajun French, as well as a memoir about growing up in *Louisiana: Swamp Songs: the Making of an Unruly Woman*. Her latest book of poetry is *Let it be a Dark Roux: New and Selected Poems*. She is co-editor of an anthology of essays, *Between Song and Story: Essays for the 21st Century*, to be published Summer 2011 by Autumn House Press.

Susan Stewart's most recent book of poems is *Red Rover*. A new prose work, *The Poet's Freedom: A Notebook on Making*, will appear this Fall.

Sarah Vap is the author of three books of poetry. Her most recent, *Faulkner's Rosary*, was released in 2010 by Saturnalia Books. Her fourth collection, *Iris, Starless: a Honeymoon*, is forthcoming from Saturnalia in 2012. She lives on the Olympic Peninsula with her family.

Cecilia Vicuña is a poet and multimedia artist from Chile. The author of 20 poetry books, she performs widely in Europe, the US & Latin America. She is the co-founder of oysi.org, a wiki website devoted to the oral cultures of the world. She recently directed a documentary film, *Kon Kon*: <http://www.konkon.cl>

G.C. Waldrep's fourth collection, *Your Father on the Train of Ghosts*—in collaboration with John Gallaher—was released by BOA Editions in 2011. He is also the author of a recent chapbook, *St. Laszlo Hotel*, from Projective Industries, and co-editor of *Homage to Celan* (Marick Press). Waldrep lives in Lewisburg, Pa., where he teaches at Bucknell University, edits the journal *West Branch*, and serves as Editor-at-Large for *The Kenyon Review*.

Keith Waldrop is the author of numerous books of poetry, prose and translation, including *A Windmill Near Cavalry* (University of Michigan Press, 1968) and *Transcendental Studies: A Trilogy* (University of California Press, 2009), both of which won the National Book Award. With his wife, writer Rosmarie Waldrop, he co-edits *Burning Deck Press*.

Elizabeth Willis's new collection of poems, *Address*, is just out from Wesleyan University Press. Her earlier books include *Meteoric Flowers* (Wesleyan 2006), *Turneresque* (Burning Deck 2003), and *The Human Abstract* (Penguin 1995).

After graduation from the University of Virginia and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, **Sam Witt** lived and worked as a free-lance journalist and poet in San Francisco for several years, publishing in such magazines as *Computerworld*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Salon*, and *Wired*. Witt's first book of poetry, *Everlasting Quail*, won the Katherine Nason Bakeless First Book Prize in 2000, sponsored by Breadloaf. *Everlasting Quail* was published by University Press of New England the following year, at which time Witt received a Fulbright Fellowship to live and write in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Witt has participated in poetry festivals at Druskininkai and Vilnius at the invitation of the Lithuanian government. He has been a resident at the Breadloaf Writers' Conference and at Yaddo; his

poems have been published in such journals as *Boston Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Georgia Review*, *Denver Quarterly Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Fence*, *New England Review*, and *Epoch*, among others, and in the anthologies *The New Young American Poets* and *The Iowa Anthology of New American Poetries*. Witt's second book, *Sunflower Brother*, won the Cleveland State University Press Open Book competition for 2006. Witt is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing, First Year Writing, and Contemporary Poetry at Framingham State University, and he is the Poetry Editor of Jaded Ibis Press. He is currently seeking a publisher for his new manuscript, *Occupation: Dreamland*.

