

A detailed pencil sketch of tall grass or reeds, with long, thin stalks and some feathery seed heads, filling the background of the cover.

CREATURE /VERDURE

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Mandrake uprooted by dog to protect man from its magic.

EDITORS' NOTE

For this second issue of our journal, we asked poets, essayists, storytellers and image-makers to create work in response to the following question: what is the creative/intellectual labor that plants and non-human animals do for us? We expected that the answer would become as much a formal investigation as it would be a topic of the works we would receive. After all, the act of representation—in writing, in images, or otherwise—is not a wholly un-creaturely pursuit, squeezing some communicable sense out of the gurgling slop that is consciousness, the mind contending with its own creaturely disorder. Our prompt lent itself to formal experiments that play at a definition of nature's labor. Does nature do work? Does it produce art? If so, are these actions only ever carried out under the force of a human whip?

Acts of representation reflect the tension in the human encounter with wild-life; the ordering, reasoning mind grappling with unchecked excess within and without. The surrealist philosopher-poet Georges Bataille sees plants, animals, rocks, water and sky to all be inextricably mingled together in endless “polymorphous coitus”¹ —oceans condensing into the shape of clouds that rise up and burst into storm, wetting the earth with rain so the flower can grow in elegant colors up from the mud to then quickly wither, spreading around itself vivid fragments of its former brilliance. Wild inclusivity; relentless concerted self-proliferation and self-reinvention; immodesty; non-constraint; these traits, all

(1) “The Solar Anus,” in *Visions of Excess*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 5-9.

orbiting around a fundamental propensity to excess, paint the signifier NATURE with its hypnotic beauty. Bataille calls the excessive quality of nature formlessness,² a term which distinguishes its dynamic voluptuousness from the domesticating abstraction which philosophy, poetry and, by extension, all acts of representation impose on the natural world. He says that while philosophy's goal is to give nature shape by dressing it in a "mathematical frock coat,"³ nature actually has no shape, is uncontainable, and thus "has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm."⁴ Elsewhere he charges poetry with a similar crime, criticizing the poets for aesthetically idealizing nature and thus eliminating from it the transcendent, unspeakable ugly-beauty and beautiful-ugliness.⁵

Formlessness exceeds and defies art, exemplified in the staggering sensory experience presented by a dead body. The philosopher Michael Taussig, recalling his time as a young medical student first confronted with a cadaver to dissect, writes:

There was the corpse spread eagled on its table
in various shades of gray and blue with shards
of yellowing fat and an insufferable odor of
formaldehyde; by its side was my textbook displaying
the body in shimmering symmetries of reds and

(2) "Formless," in *Visions of Excess*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 31.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

(5) "The Language of Flowers," in *Visions of Excess*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 10-14.

blues and all the more accurate, not to mention beautiful, for being thus rendered. So what has happened? The art in nature turns out to be an art of nature! It is like treason, the same as when a child realizes Santa Claus is a man dressed up.⁶

The formless, exemplified in everything from autumn leaves to floating dandelion spores to the marsh teeming with life to the disorienting smell of a dead body, is the persecuted category for which Bataille advocates. Nature in its formlessness has no rights. Is art, with its impulse to sculpt and refine, an attempt to give it rights? Must we assign shape, boundaries, distinguishing features and definitions to nature's undifferentiated polymorphous abundance so that it might claim license to survive? Must we require the wildlife that we see and are to articulate into discrete, discernable, governable, representable and thus exchangeable subjects? Would this articulation be a labor of and for justice? On the contrary, Bataille observes that inevitably an "eruptive force accumulates in those who are necessarily situated below."⁷ The bubbling fury of the volcano, the "legendary satanism"⁸ of the mandrake root and the irrepressible innate expressivity of sexual organs mark a resistant energy that is not reactionary but primary. An eruptive power that precedes and defies the constraint of representation. Art refines and nature revolts. Or, in the face of humans as art-making beings, nature is revolt.

(6) "The Language of Flowers," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 1 (Autumn 2003): 98, JSTOR.

(7) "The Solar Anus," in *Visions of Excess*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 5-9.

(8) "The Language of Flowers," in *Visions of Excess*, trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 10-14.

Perhaps it is the case that without this exhilarating polarity art would lose its ability to move us. The works collected in this book give ample room to that oscillating dance. They are acts of describing, illustrating and naming that lay bare the irresolvable tension in which they are held between generosity and destructiveness.

“Seashell,” “The Mountain,” and “The Penguin 2” by Birhan Keskin are poetic reminders of the simultaneous kinship and antinomy that the human finds in her relation to the elements; of how difficult it is “to speak against the morning” and “against the earth,” a contact, an address that is at once both an intimate facing and an opposition. In a 2002 interview with Pelin Özer, Keskin remarked that “writing too many poems is a betrayal to both the words and the trees.” Accordingly, allusions to the significance of speaking or not speaking in her work imply the ethical weight of the poetic act. The writer can never own but can only try to point to that silence whose path “the mountain knows” but “you don’t.”⁹

“My friends, there are signs of life.” This phrase, its speaker knocking from an other-realm on the door to the human-made, ushers the conclusion of Fernando Quigua’s prose poem “Dream Bear Deleted Lines.” This and its partner piece, “Of Jackals,” journey into the anterooms and ante-anterooms of thinking, feasting on a dirty and delicious pre-logical creatureliness. Under the roaming associative threads of palpitating thing-words, there lie questions: how to draw the shape of me once I see my undeniable affinities with other

(9) Keskin, Birhan. “Yeryüzü karşısında konuşmak ne zor!” Interview by Pelin Özer. Cumhuriyet Kitap, 30 Apr. 2002

forms of life? can my thought hit the bodies of others? what if a jackal, a cat, a bear or big-foot could write?

“Fly,” by Claire Devoogd, experiments with the way prose renders movement, exemplifying the strange mobility of a noun—both frozen in place and charged, simmering—in the word “fly.” The fly is an insect named after how it moves; what it is, its being, is “a complex of touches buckling movement.” Devoogd’s circling within the fact of being-in-a-word, being-in-a-sentence, being-in-prose, makes a critical theory that’s finally, actually urgent because in its seeking to repair broken connections, it acts while it is read. It’s a writing that feels with hands and feet for proximity with things, and for love.

Jeff Benjamin meditates on the plants of, in and alongside industry—the resonating caverns, concrete and machinery, the green that shades these spaces, the humans who have also shaded them. Benjamin searches out points of contact: among the page, the machine, the worker and the plants, both those that overwhelm such sites now and those that have been, to varying degrees, collaborators in industry, conscripts to it. This is a tensile relation. These things reside in an extra-temporal sympathetic assemblage with one another, a complex groundcover, from the potted plants thriving in a textile mill, their introduction intended to make mechanical labor more tolerable for those employed to do it, to the tree milled for a page of paper, to the myrtle, one-time human symbol of human grief (“tough, undemanding and hard to kill,” a gardening guide describes this vine: in other words, an ideal industrialized worker), which creeps out of a cemetery over a cement mine, to the weeds overwriting a grave in a work of fiction.

Each of the four poems by Miriam Atkin takes a particular life form—the macaw, the long-tailed widowbird, and the skunk cabbage and the garden eel—as its archetypal center of interest. The writing sets into motion these differing bodies—including the poet’s own—through the visible space between the mouth and the hand, instruments for searching, tasting, feeling and connecting. Making tiny steps toward some unknown future, these works barely punctuate time, perhaps to render it ineffectual; instead, they place it in an open parenthesis, a door for ancient voices to seep through so as to mingle with new ones. The breath of the poet measures itself in this open space by way of a whistle. It then leaps back into a sonic vastness of deep listening to find words that name things as they are.

“Enviably Crows and Unnameable Weeds, Freedom Cows and Death Bouquets” by Adjua Gargi Nzinga Greaves is a chain of linked text objects weaving around an ongoing act of thinking. The flow of fragments constitutes not a product but a process where what words are and how they function alters and adjusts according to the temporal needs of a thinking body seated at a cafe before a variegated philodendron. There, in the unfolding of a day, words change their form and function in concert with how and why a moment calls them forth. Does thriving demand predation? Can atemporal language return us to the void? To sit in one’s verbal being but not to thrive. To accept, mystified, that the creature moves by its own light with no reference to the enforced machinery of success and its excesses.

James Loop’s Saturn functions absorptively, pulling all ways toward its subject—this fruit, the medlar—which, as it follows itself more deeply into the body it laps toward meaning, becomes saturated with history, world, thought, self and

other. These aspects dissolve with it into a sensual appeal, both performance (whether in the mode of the YouTube DIY homesteading video or of poetries and rhetorics, past and present) and immediate delight. What kind of consumption or consuming is speaking—both performance and delight—through which these messy things of life must pass, that it passes messily through? Schopenhauer asks his readers to acknowledge the primacy of suffering, that pain relative to pleasure always exceeds and overruns the latter. “If you don’t believe it, compare the respective feelings of two animals, one of which is eating the other.” The medlar, rotten when ripe, name, seed, food and symbol, becomes an offering, and thus a vulnerability: the huge vulnerability which it is to let oneself be eaten. And, delightfully, it asks if this might not also be a pleasure. Fruit or flesh, we are, after all, eating and eaten things. These points of offering and acceptance rot or ripen into a consent to presence, to the compromise and confession of this consumptive situation. Name, seed, fruit and symbol: the subject these descriptors couch absorbs and feeds them; Loop convenes a concomitance of terms from which an individual and final object can’t be extracted, always being partial, dissolving, rotten, ripe, savoring.

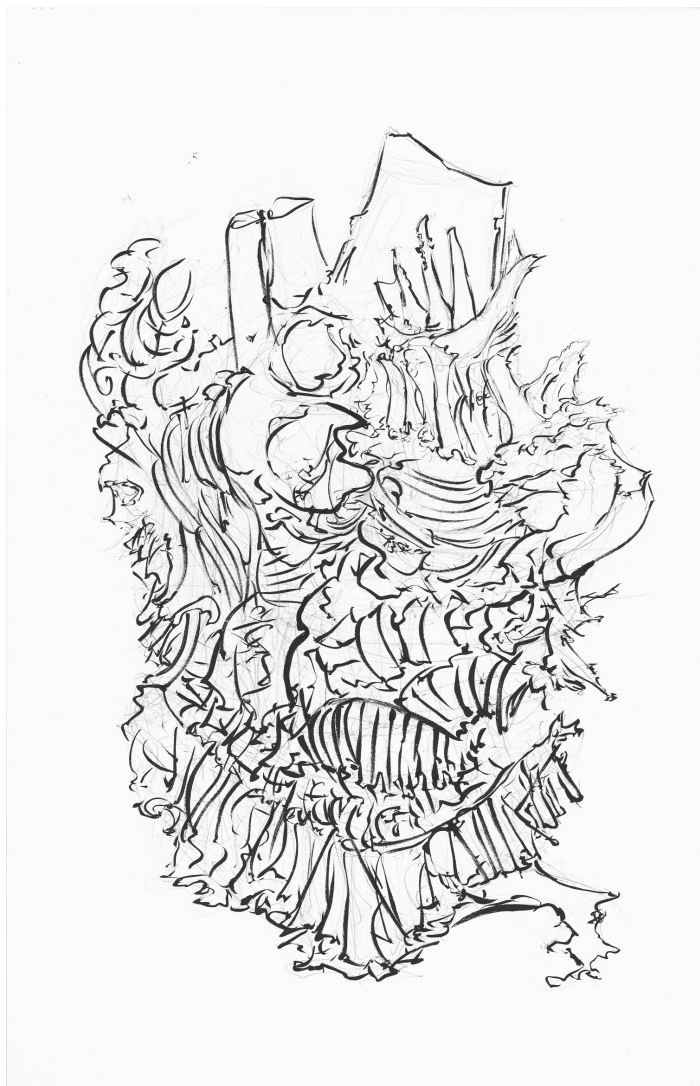
Nicola Masciandaro annotates recognition of human being among a world—imagination, ideation, vision—as plant-like-ness, if likeness is a quality which grows into itself in the process of its being recognized, becomes the material of its own vehicle. The fact of green confronts vision—envisioning Masciandaro’s “Green Imagination,” I imagine the image, greened, as a mirror held up to a leaf. In such a confrontation, in a greening which overwhelms the leaf not seeing itself, the image becomes visible as a sight which resides in excess

of sight. Of course, this doesn't foreclose on it. Green, in its uncanny spectral position, as Masciandaro notes, is significant of longing; then it's also an extension—the imagination stretches itself out; delicately, the green unseeing continues.

The tread of Sahar Muradi's poems is both resolute and soft, with the snow underfoot left hardly marked. Her phrases are decisive units, each rounded off, a story in itself, yet extending in friendship to its neighbor. These syntactic, sonic bodies and the actual bodies they indicate all have distinct boundaries and yet participate in an ever-unfolding process of mutually becoming brethren. The components of inner experience—*thinking jaw sound*—are shuffled in with outer objects—*tree with a raised skirt*—becoming brethren. The donkey ambles by and, watching it, the word grows a tail, the two becoming brethren.

We would like to thank Kawa Nemir, Kurdish translator, poet, editor and publisher, for his invaluable help with the Birhan Keskin translations and for hosting Öykü at the Anne Frank House during which the final line editing of the journal was completed. Osman, the immortal and most adamant mosquito, deserves a special mention here as well for making sleep impossible for Kawa and Öykü and putting them at work until the wee hours.

-Miriam Atkin, Claire DeVoogd and Öykü Tekten



Impressions etched in soft potato last

SEASHELL

Birhan Keskin

translated by Öykü Tekten

O¹ took me out of the hardened, wet sand on the shore where
I had buried myself, touched me.

I lived through the sorrow and the joy reserved for me, I had
thought.

The fragile animal inside me had long been dead.

O took me out of the shore...

That is, I had nothing but my mother of pearl

In deep seas, cold seas

I grappled with salt, with waves and my animal had come
out of me.

Am I not a cold stone any more
curled up inside who forgot its own dream?

O gave me a dream – I couldn't believe it
(the joy of almonds, O said, take a look, very brief.)

O touched my mother of pearl.

(1) Translator's Note: Turkish has no grammatical gender, thus the equivalent to "he," "she," and "it" is a gender-neutral pronoun "o." In Keskin's poem, the gender neutrality of Turkish also establishes a certain degree of ambiguity that blurs the distinction between the human and non-human subject. Thus, I left "o" untranslated, instead of using the gender-neutral English pronouns "they" or "it" since both would alter significantly the meaning created through the sonic and ontological ambiguity of "o."

MOUNTAIN

Birhan Keskin

translated by Öykü Tekten

How difficult it is to speak against the morning!
You are left like fine ash
The mountain knows the path to silence
you don't.

The stone gapes open to a flower, gives way to it
Briefly speaking the flower says: "the world,"
"I saw it, completing itself with me."

How difficult to speak against the earth!

Look down the hillside, see the cliff!
-see it, stutterer!
The fragile blood in you, the flimsy language,
the unripe mood
are all melting on a silver peak.

PENGUIN II

Birhan Keskin

translated by Öykü Tekten

I forgot in that grand hour
My wings have long been cold
Falling onto my chest in this white desolation
That's why my neck is aslant

In me remains the memory of a bird, hidden
That's why the rocks in my eyes,
The rascal icebergs

Don't jab at the pomegranate in me
I am wearing a white shirt.

DREAM CREATURES

*Fernando Quigua***Of Jackals**

And the thought passed through me like a bed of nails passing through you—just think of it—that reckoning did finally meet me under the hidden moon. The thought, not quite a verdict, but certainly a feeling cut through the gauze of a self-applied sake haze applied earlier that evening in a party of two; that haze my only protection from that which I fled first thing, down a slide of red wine to wash down the cold leg of Thanksgiving turkey, congealed grease leftover my throat and my cheeks and coating my labial aura like the Platonic form, Female Condom, so early in the morning. I washed the leg down intuitively, gulped Malbec expertly from the bottle before my lover's eyes but never quite opened my own to the day ahead until with the day behind and three hours of aborted sleep my eyes opened to the pink and snide cloud cover of the New Normal night sky. Indeed, the thought lanced me at 2:30 on the nose, though the bedside clock, which I would donate if it were mine, runs five to six minutes slow. The thought and the feeling of my shrunken Being.

The thought lanced me awake from otherwise idios dreams, the oneiric equivalent of daytime television on pause, I imagine, the still frames and slow motion dreams of an idiot, I entertained but blasted away the implications and the spirits spirits of shame with a braid of urine so thunderous that it shook the night-lit air of the windowless half-bathroom.

The lord's urine stream doth thundered too much and so began a trial until sunrise, the aching ache of an examined and wasted life.

The thought lanced me in the abdomen, or did it nudge my cheekbone first, bluntly, and wedge my temple off the pillow like the cold unfeeling barrel of a gun. Then came the lance, in the same breath, yes, and hard to recall what came next. Evil spirits scaled the wall and windows and filled the room to sack my entrails. They looted and set them ablaze. Others they feasted right there upon them like Amazonian ants, and after an hour, Amazonian ants with the heads (and the erect dog-dicks) of jackals. I writhed. I imagined the impulse to stab them out, the jackal-ants, with scissors and knives, to stuff my abdominal bouquet with office supplies, pads of post-it notes, staplers, stuffing the village to save the village, to bury its smoldering oil well fires. From across the apartment, the cat seemed to sense the door of this scene closing behind me. He skipped to the bed and sat upon this, the Battle for Hell, the unsutured wound, my burning entrails hurtling toward the crash-test wall (of Nature's profligacy?) He purred and pawed upon me, fell into a crease of sleep between my beloved and me, as I writhed on the edge of the bed constricted, so as not to disturb the peace of the pair beside me.



Nine kneeling gods; crocodile headed, jackal headed and human headed

Dream Bear Deleted Lines

I stood erect as I leaned and told her to read lines of the Koran in people's faces. Her privates guffawed. It was nice flying with you, Cassandro. Not by design, I had her say it again and studied the cafeteria floor as it rippled. Later, misanthropic musical chairs at the diner. I was glad to be alone.

Deleted lines from a Cherokee cold call:

Dear Professor, I'm not sure where to begin! ...I have championed an 'aesthetic psychology' to restore sense to my discipline...Finally, I might add that I am not of American Indian or First Nations descent. My father is 'mestizo' from Colombia; we have an Indigenous surname (Quigua) and Indigenous blood, but culturally, my family has been (mostly) Hispanicized...I've been prattling, forgive me! ...I have lamented (publicly) the loss of the 'middle voice' in Indo-European languages...I am happy to send you my work as well as a much longer version of this email...episteme...episteme...episteme...

Now tell a little story, one that coheres, what the people want to hear: QUI-GUA! QUI-GUA!!

But I had a bad experience reciting a dream about auto-fellatio. Gusted by a draft of inspiration, left to stage right went my quill from across day-framed lunar planes and onto the page, and so true. But perhaps, by the dark side of my pen, if I can even say I, " I " hoped to lodge an arrow into the clavicle of a Big Mouth just to hear it hiss, and I missed. Yea yea...but this is a spiritual war. Though I have failed to enlist because

they asked me not to tell the boys and girls of the barracks brigade that I'm the Black Ethan Hawke.

Looking afflicted like Saint Sebastian, just the sight of me flicks, I think, some kind of Scandinavian reflex to gag. My summer was a grovel-flecked scrape on the face, beneath my prayer-calloused brow, since you ask.

★

dream last night, with my mother in the house (not actually ours), i think a garage, and then came a roaring bear. big roaring bear, with a big bear head! and it seemed safe in the garage until it seemed safe no more, bear peering and bent on coming in. roar roar roar, the bear, like a looping soundtrack of a more-than-shoddy student production, impressive roar like waves, thunder and lightning, and Bear wagged his finger at me as in oh no you don't! then i made a run for it. and dream legs made my evasive turns not so quick and Bear was upon me (not literally) and told me two things: first, be nice to your sister. the second i wish i could remember! and i think that was it; or no, Bear came again and we gave him a hug in the driveway. later, on a soccer pitch, a kind of supplicant, an aspiring engineer, he said, came to me with an urgent question about soccer and concentration. he was so right, i told him, and why don't we move over here (i alluded to the bear), and i alluded, too, to the similarity of soccer and art, when it came to a certain kind of concentration, and i spaced as i pictured those days painting, lost in brush strokes, selfless in-transit appraisals, and afternoons-until-dusk, indulgently, but he was polite about it. to support my point, i thought of mentioning to him gadamer (on the soccer-art-engineering connection), and by the sideline perhaps i did. This coffee's kicking in...

You know when I woke I was happy about (the) Bear? ...
My friends, there are signs of life; so trust and get lost.

But what if the bear was my mom, ya me siento muy mal
(now I feel sick).



*"A child, with claws
like a bear, was born
to the cousin of Martin
himself. Of this he was
so ashamed that he
caused all the pictures
of bears in his houses
to be scraped from the
walls."*

FLY

Claire DeVoogd

/A/

I dream and wake and tell you about the dream.

In Denmark we are involved in a desperate project to repair the world, which is rived by cracks. These are not sensible as cracks but we feel them. History and the future are falling into them. The present is a precarious stone we are balancing on. Not a real stone. Repair takes the form of an activity which, in the dream, we call buckling. Two words appeal into an impenetrable and glistening bifurcated object on a white wall. There is a room behind the wall. The words must be right for each other, they must match. A correct buckle sutures and becomes a feeling like a stone. We can discover no method for predicting which words will buckle correctly. We test words, erase them, realign them. Many don't exist, or don't exist now; language exceeds itself and disappears.

The world is falling.

Split/Sky.

May/Pay.

Talk/Fox.

Well/Glown.

And of course you'll laugh.

In Denmark we are involved in a desperate project to repair
the world.

Where we'll get breakfast.

And get breakfast.

/A/

Winter is fine at first, the white panes.

It knits at the joint I feel in the form of speech, drifting below
its meaning, the variable cloak.

Knith/Go.

Breakfast where we'll

In Denmark we are involved in a desperate project to repair
the world.

It's spring; on a mountainside we pass the grey fuselage of a
plane. A word buckle is a crumpled page and the instructions
for play are the same as its play: one plays it by saying it.

Slight rain, baby leaves, cold for May Day.

The directions for play are the same as walking out one
morning in summer, a table of Formica softly glinting in the
toothy shadow of an aloe, toast.

The day kept the common names of flowers pressed in its mouth.

The quality of a petal moves above its surface, the way I keep feeling the sea like two things: a pane and a hollow.

Shard/Hollow.

Blue/Shakes.

There is a you I think digging.

She/Shovels.

A word like a cup I think has a form implied by qualities: size, texture, density. These generate definition, a direction, feeling. When buckled its qualities distort or crumple, its form is (in)completed.

A word, like a cup, has already been buckled. It is a facet of a complex, but the complex is so dense it is smooth, like a pearl, it appeals to the eye.

Directions:

If buckling coheres the world, unbuckling is a vital agitation or resistance.

How does one unbuckle words?

Prospectus: unbuckling flies.

I am taking off my skin. Under it, another skin. This happens repeatedly.

/A/

A fly does not travel forward.

It invents a motion which produces neither progress nor regress.

A fly as a fly in the cup of a rose.

Its touch is, its food is.

The geranium, its heart foliage contracted into sex by day, the red shredding in the liquid or crumpling. And the scents and oils are.

And the bearable feeling, that expands and doesn't fill it.

A fly invents, then occupies a complex by overwriting it. The complex can be thought to move, it can be said to be alive.

I am a facet of a complex reproducing itself.

Fly/Fly.

By which being is a complex of touches buckling movement. Of the fly, if its mind is

Moving.

I can be said presently insofar as I am constellated about material, my likeness.

I/If.

Mobile in the language the form.

Both hollow and pane the black drop of a fly in the surface of day travels, day knitting around it.

There must be some method of catching speech, of holding it

As some of the words I said remained in your mind, if

Though you misheard them

Or construed their import differently than I'd intended, or now think I had.

Think of a word, folded in half.

Buckle/Buckle.

Fly/Flee.

Leap/Alight.

I'd lost track.

Some days silence. In which there is a roaring.

If the quality that expresses a thing is its moving

Then these images, their scaled lines, are not a fly.

I would like to know fly as movement on an inhuman scale.

As a means of measuring being, movingly, a complex out of time, touching.

/A/

Stare straight ahead.

Inscrutable type, spring-loaded.

A sliver in day, and you might leave it at that, at the unspeakable being—but what deficiency ‘being’ makes, as a name for this, this nouning of a verb and the passive and situated coherence it suggests, fixed as immutable form in opposition to what isn’t, is-ness being the quality being requires, a tightly wound tautology like an egg or cluster of eggs described by a smoothness that obscures the nonfinite varieties of shifting forms (imagine anything, hatched, flying, anything, dying) it makes potential. Instead, we’ll name it ‘doubt.’ Doubt, where the language doubles. This doubling generates density; it’s accretive. Thus, language acts on/‘is’ like scales. You as a person I don’t know.

Insects captured the attention of the microscope early. The first English microscopes were known as flea glasses.

Flea/Glass.

There had been an impenetrable sliver in human seeing at the scale of a grain of sand, a hair.

You might read in this moment a romance with scale, the body crawling with its miniatures, and the huge crawling of the sky—if, as I say, the things of love cling in their speaking a fissure, to fill it with words.

It peels back the skin at the surface of the eye, the compound hemisphere, to find its likeness.

Stare, focus. A hand on a pane – movement is instrumentalized, is a negotiation with matter and the instrument of matter, itself.

The early microscopists described the fly analogically. Hair like bristles, eyes like globes, an eye like a pearl or clusters of eyes as clusters of pearls. The newly distant observation provokes a decadent prose.

It grows strange, looking up from its description. It's strange in its intimacy, the breath on it, it's huge in its likeness, its watching in its perfect eye.

The moving distance detaches and the language of detachment is moving; it describes, I think, a species of yearning.

Scrutiny is a word which may describe the work thinking does on an idea. It is not possible, however, to scrutinize the doubt of a fly. It is moving. It springs from the trash.

July, a border town called Palomas, its primary industry dentistry for Americans. All the signs are molars. In a park in the afternoon swarming with flies. I ask you to tell me the difference between a fly and a word.

The air could be a solution.

I could say the fly at the edge of vision dissolves into air, or that it recognizes matter.

I could cite puce, a color derived from the word flea (Latin: pucilem, Greek: psylla, Sanskrit: plusih), to claim that the doubt of words is often nonhuman (does it matter that the flea doesn't speak its color, that the physiology of its eye means that "it" or "eye" doesn't exist to the flea as a finite seen or seeing thing, but if it sees its double it sees only moving tinted light, darkness?). Puce, you might say, is a color that describes not the flea but the human looking at the flea. I could say this is still moving, touching, along the pane of one potential body. I could say

If you could slice the moving of the fly across a single second of air into every iteration

Its doubt appealed to a pane might begin to resemble conversation.

But this is wrong. It's wrong to apply ambivalence to the fly, or inscrutability, as the conversation proceeds, porous and wavering, and that too is not what I mean: I mean the porous and the wavering to come before the words, and that the conversation does not proceed. I mean the crack to be the

moving and the wall to be the morning. The moment to be solid and the history to fly from it. The baby to be the worm and the worm an idea. I mean this actually. I mean the day to break. I mean the analogy to crack. I mean the truth to be its double, to double on itself. I mean the true to be the actual, flies to roar in red flowers. I mean the likeness to crawl, the crawling to be a body, the fly to touch it movingly. The body to be a name and the rose to be its speaking. The leaves to be a constant and the name, distinguishable. I mean to eat roses. I mean the actual speech to fly, the movement to dissolve time. I mean the meaning to be a rose, the word to clothe it in red, a red that flies. I mean the clothes to be a skin, the skin not to be a surface. I mean the sound to be, the sense, to skin you. I mean the pearl to be faceted, the word itself to fold. I mean the word to be a crack by which the world itself is whole.

/A/

Fall. You remind me we were in Finland, not Copenhagen. We were never in Copenhagen. This in the car on the way upstate, the day before wherever you went or weren't.

Went/Weren't.

We say we would like to excise the “we” from our language, which, in its body sleeping next to it the world, is the means by which we find ourselves being of it: a market, a nation, a species (a conversation like a pane we are moving together).

What is this we—the advertising we, the sloganeering we—doing to our thoughts? (If the we/we speak imagines a future we could go on in together.) I ask you.

If/Analogy

Is only ever one iteration of a nonfinite cracking of bodies, or of a ceaselessness of qualities the one seen, it is not dyadic, but like a drawing of a wave as a surface represents, on a pane, an awful pull toward the hollow/edge of it, language, and a liquid, shattering.

This is how a crack, as the gap between analogy and what it describes, though hollow, might be material/necessity.

Eruptive gesture, a line of questioning, the path, the pines, the world swoops and hums then settles, an enormous, grey and textured thing, I feel its eye on me.

Fall/Fold.

A park in the afternoon. A fly flies down and dies on my food, it just lies down in the avocado and is still. I don't know what this means I say to myself. It seems so unlikely. I want to tell you this happened. Why? I want you to know this happened. And you'll laugh. It's a game/not a game. I am looking at it,

at the green and glittering jewelry, at the legs like dark hairs,
the dark hairs, at the disappearance.

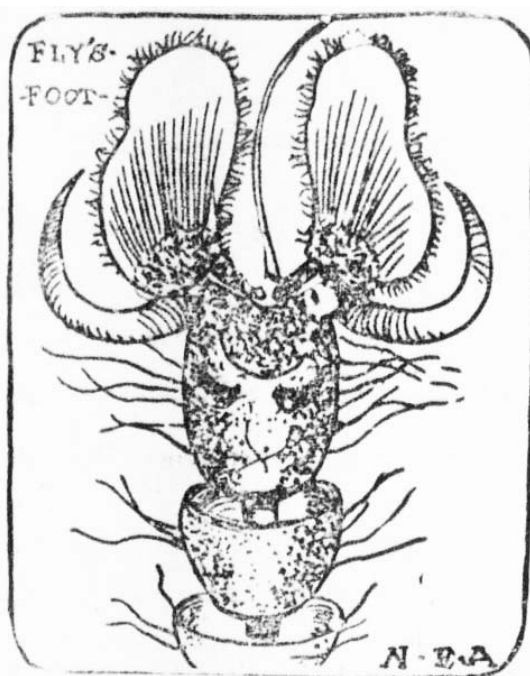
/A/

In a park in Palomas I ask you what expression of breath a
/ describes.

/A/

Thirdly, that every one of these Hemispheres, as they seem'd to be pretty neer the true shape of a Hemisphere, so was the surface exceeding smooth and regular, reflecting as exact, regular, and perfect an Image of any Object from the surface of them, as a small Ball of Quick-silver of that bigness would do, but nothing neer so vivid, the reflection from these being very languid, much like the reflection from the outside of Water, Glass, Crystal, &c. In so much that in each of these Hemispheres, I have been able to discover a Land-scape of those things which lay before my window, one thing of which was a large Tree, whose trunk and top I could plainly discover, as I could also the parts of my window, and my hand and fingers, if I held it between the Window and the Object...

*"Armed with such
a foot, the fly steps
forward..."*



HUMAN-PLANT MUTUALISM IN THE INDUSTRIAL BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Jeff Benjamin

If you are a poet, you will see clearly that there is a cloud floating in this sheet of paper. Without a cloud there will be no water; without water, the trees cannot grow; and without trees, you cannot make paper. So the cloud is in here. The existence of this page is dependent on the existence of a cloud. Paper and cloud are so close.¹

This is a note about the demystification of sources. Having been buried or forgotten under layers of interpretive strata, ‘the obvious’ beckons for occasional acknowledgement and recognition. Many literary, philosophical and historical efforts reside in the assemblages of pressed and inked signs on the thin surface of sheets of pulverized and reconstituted deceased arboreal and floral tissue. So, Hanh’s observation can be extended to science, as well. A scientist, as well as a poet, would be predisposed to see a cloud, and many other things, in a sheet of paper.

As a miniaturization, a book is a “cognitive artifact”²: it is an indexical distillation of thought. The transmission of human thought across continents and centuries in the form of books is a wonderful act of defiance of both space and time. But, as our eyes and fingers flow over the sequentially ordered printed signs laid upon sheets of reorganized and pressed arboreal and floral tissue, as we go through our libraries, paging through old books (and occasionally finding a pressed leaf or flower from a past moment of

(1) Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (New York: Beacon, 1987), 45.

(2) Keven Birth, *Objects of Time* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 6.

reading in a park or in the woods), when we consider the role played by plants and trees throughout time in intellectual development and discourse, the distinction between ‘artifact’ (an object made by human beings) and ‘ecofact’ (an object not made by human beings but having cultural significance nonetheless) becomes blurred. As William Cronon has observed in *Nature’s Metropolis*, “only the sun produces.”³ All terrestrial organisms share commonality in their work towards reconstituting and reforming this primary energy source, and because of this, they engage in shared effort, albeit towards different goals and objectives. In a conference in Montreal, “Deindustrialization and Its Aftermath” (Concordia University, May 1-4, 2014), I could have heard a pin drop when I suggested that we should extend the appellation of ‘working class’ to other species, but the suggestion makes sense when we think of the role that plants and trees play in the entire substance of human civilization. Even chlorophyll is now recruited into the project of energy production. The ramifications for archaeology is that, perhaps when we look at something like a ‘piece of wood,’ on a site, or a ‘piece of paper’ in the archive, we could broaden our scope of interpretive possibilities, to extend beyond utility or function towards an acknowledgement of the mutualistic interdependence of life forms. Archaeological investigations generally begin with the moment of procurement or harvesting of a particular material object, if they even bother extending that far back. I could, therefore, serve to perpetuate the tradition of mystification by simply stating that, ever since the invention of paper by Ts’ai Lun in A.D. 105 (initially a mixture of tree bark, old cloth and hemp),⁴ scholarly and academic discussions have been printed on

(3) William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991) 150.

(4) Dard Hunter, *Papermaking: The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (New York: Dover, 1978 [1943]), 50.

paper. But I feel the need to momentarily express a bit of indebtedness to the trees that, in their demise, became a “natural resource,” thereby extending the chaîne-opératoire further back in time, and outward in space, into a brief moment of struggling, fluttering arboreal life. The sense of camaraderie and companionship that develops between a carpenter and a tree is not simply romantic: both entities share comparable space within the inked pages of account books during the early years of industrialization: board feet and man days are counted as commensurate entities. A kind of empathetic parity arises.

Just as with the body of a carpenter, the primary function of a plant's tissue, is, after all, to live, and it these properties—devoted solely to the act of living—that are in turn, translated into use by human beings. In its form and structure, the substance of paper has provided the archive of civilization and non-civilization more than simply a remarkably durable surface upon which to reside, but in its regularity, uniformity and bondedness, it imparts upon text-delivered thought the illusion of coherence. In libraries and archives throughout the world, billions of strands of reconstituted plant tissue tie together strands of thought through molecular bonds. This is not to absolve the present writer of his struggle and obligation to formulate a coherent narrative; i.e. ‘putting words to paper’ is not enough, but it should be noted that many books and papers, as “cognitive artifacts,” impart a sense of order and integration simply through the formal and material properties of their presentation. It is the burden of the writer to simply do justice to the molecular bonds within the substance of paper.

Inez: ...I wish we'd had some flowers to welcome you with.

Estelle: Flowers? Yes. I loved flowers. Only they'd

fade so quickly here, wouldn't they?⁵

If we are to look to Western philosophy for some kind of precedent for understanding plants in their relation to mass-industrialization, we will have difficulty in finding classical references that are even willing to ascribe to them the status of fully living beings.⁶ However, we might find some guidance in existential thought as it emerged in Europe after World War II. Marder's term "vegetal existentiality"⁷ and Morton's "coexistentialism"⁸ allude to philosophical themes of alienation initiated by Kierkegaard and furthered by Sartre, Camus and others. I would assert that, in spite of the prevailing tyrannies of instrumentalism (use) or nominalism (categorization) that dominates our relationship with plants, a kind of mutualism nevertheless endures between plants and humans within industrial settings. When referring to their place of work, factory workers often make reference to 'the plant,' and although it is generally assumed that they are not talking about a vascular biological life form as plants are generally understood, there is a shared meaning in the idea of rootedness, groundedness, having a location and a place on the earth. While this appropriation of the term 'plant' for a site of industrial activity may serve to naturalize its presence, this shared use of the word also offers insight into how there might be kind of existential parity, even perhaps a kind of "species androgyny"⁹ between plants and humans. The simple motion of a solitary leaf fluttering in the wind is enough to conjure a strong attachment. This

(5) Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage, 1955), 11.

(6) Matthew Hall, *Plants as Persons* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011).

(7) Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 91.

(8) Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 52.

(9) Eduardo Vivieros de Castro, *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere* (Hau Masterclass Series: Cambridge, 2012), 75.

is acknowledged by Emerson, who wrote in *Nature* in 1836: “The greatest delight which the fields and woods minister is the suggestion of an occult relation between man and vegetable...They nod to me, and I to them.”¹⁰

The bleak, barren decimation of the industrial landscape and the abjection of its participants is a well worn path in literature, art and film. In terms of explanation, this particular event has justifiably been approached agonistically, through class-struggle and conflict, and yet I would argue that an examination of the mutually intertwined lives of humans and plants also offers valuable insights. Within the pages of an early industrial newspaper, printed and distributed for the first major factory operation in the United States—The Lowell Offering—there is a fascinating account of a hint of human-plant mutualistic expression. An observer of the factory noted that, in 1840, there were hundreds of potted plants and flowers scattered throughout the mill complex (an image we tend to reserve for contemporary artist studios). This information adds a touch of color to the conventional picture, conditioned by years of looking at black and white photographs, as well as the aforementioned descriptive passages that seem to portray a viewscape devoid of all color and life. The motives and purpose behind the incorporation of plant and flower forms into the varied components of the mill site is open for speculation (probably to ease the workers’ transition from the countryside), but it was an activity of interest not only to the workers but also the managers of the factory. The author of the article in goes on to state:

The Superintendents manifest a lively interest in this matter; and some of them have furnished large numbers of plants and flowers, with instructions to

(10) Emerson, as quoted in Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 104.

the Overseers to furnish every facility of the girls for the cultivation thereof; and several proprietors have displayed commendable liberality in sending floral contributions, in rich variety, to ornament the mills.¹¹

After relating what was visible in the mills, the author continues, offering a celebratory suggestion: “Let every room be generously supplied,” referring to spaces of production as well as habitation. This account is corroborated by a prose-poem penned by Lucy Larcom, a worker at Lowell during this time period. Both accounts attest to the close ideological relationship that existed between early industrial planning and the utopian imagination of the time. Oddly entitled *An Idyl of Work*, Larcom’s poem is replete with sensory impressions of this new industrial setting. In one passage, Larcom relates an event where a group of mill girls are briefly observed by some inspectors who momentarily enter their work space:

Here Esther, Eleanor, and Isabel
 Worked in a sunlit corner, side by side,
 That looked down towards the river.
 Eleanor’s plants, -
 Roses, and one great oleander-tree,-
 Blooming against the panes, intensified
 The whiteness of her face.¹²

Forgotten partners in the factory process; a rose, an oleander tree, the presence of these species alludes to the existence of a certain kind of “species androgyny” in the most improbable of all places, the industrial textile mill.

(11) Benita Eisler, *The Lowell Offering* (New York: Harper Colophon), 66.(2)
 Keven Birth, *Objects of Time* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 6
 (12) Lucy Larcom, *An Idyl of Work* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970 [1875]), 81.

But after a moment's reflection, the problem becomes not how to find human-plant mutualism in the industrial built environment, but rather how to think of industrialization at all without contemplating human beings' complex relationships with plant forms. Clothing, bedding, food, myriad forms of pain management, pharmaceuticals of all kinds, homes, structures, all of these aspects of the industrialized experience are derived from plants.

Within this context—the capacity for plants to offer a kind of consistent presence and solace throughout the prolonged mistake of industrialization—we can see an enduring human-plant relationship. *Ironweed*, a bleak novel describing urban life around Albany, New York, in the early 1900's, is prefaced with a definition of a particular species of flower (Asteraceae) with a vibrant blue blossom, characterizing it as distinguishable by its "toughness." Grounded in historical industrial settings (some of which might be familiar to any visitor to the area), the novel follows the life of an individual slowly decimated by hardship after tragedy after loss. Many of these events are industrial in nature—a train crash, a clashing mob of strikers and scabs, a building fire—and yet within the novel there is the curious persistence of and identification with plants, trees, grass, and most prevalent of all, weeds. In a touching passage, the main character, Frances Phelan, looks down upon the grave of his infant son who died when he let him slip from his grasp. Imagining the child in the grave, Kennedy writes:

He could speak with any resident adult in any language, but more notable was his ability to understand the chattering squirrels and chipmunks, the silent signals of the ants and beetles, and the slithy semaphores of the slugs and worms that moved above and through the earth. He could read

the waning flow of energy in the leaves and berries as they fell from the box elder above him.¹³

As I explore the wooded hills of Rosendale, New York, I frequently stop at an unmarked graveyard located above an old mine entrance. The interred are mostly children who died in the early to mid 1800's, most no more than a year old. The ground cover surrounding the graveyard is myrtle, or vinca minor, an evergreen ground cover which was brought to North America, and was planted in cemeteries. Even to this day, the presence of myrtle is a clue to the nearby presence of a space of eternal rest. It is towards this purpose, rest, sleep, and interiority, that plants offer us their final gift.

In the simple phrase "making a bed" we have an example of this, for the origin of the phrase is quite literal: early European accounts attest to the fact that one would 'make' a bed by stuffing a sack with straw,¹⁴ the leftover stalks of different crops of grain. The act of sleep brings human interiority to its fullest expression, and this historical example shows that its relationship to plant life is literal as well as metaphorical. The vegetative, internal experience has parallels in waking life, particularly in industrial history. Numerous accounts of factory workers attest to the need for workers to 'go inside themselves' in order to endure the repetitive mandates of industrial routine, as a strategy of survival.

Weber attributes the origin of internal loneliness to the advent of Calvinism, which leaves the burden of ascertaining the soul's eternal fate to the individual. It is this internal struggle, manifested by the need to prove salvation

(13) William Kennedy, *Ironweed* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984 [1979]), 17.

(14) Lawrence Wright, *Warm and Snug: A History of the Bed* (Phoenix Mill: Sutton, 2004 [1962]), 18.

to oneself and others through external acts, which, Weber contends, led to the development of industrialism.¹⁵ In this sense, plants, in their quiet, serene internalism, provide a kind of companionship and solace for industrialized persons. They buffered and eased our transition into industrial life, perhaps they can lead us back out.

(15) Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Mineola: Dover, 2003 [1905]).



ANIMALS

Miriam Atkin

Macaw

For propriety's sake, he tunelessly beat his red heart in the bathroom.

The orientation continued: "stick your Post-its here with new ideas," as three came fluttering down.

Kate on crack in a kayak proliferates herself in nonsonance before dying a watery death.

The words on the edge of your tongue describe the difference between a tie and a slur.

Our well-meaning mothers would spread our bread with candles, fricatives, lag bolts, commutative properties, fever and Sgt. Arigatou, annulling the underlying spelt by way of its artificial dressing.

A Parrot Flower goes out in genre-gown, a cracked stick in a suit of sui generis interiority.

When I whistled at her sleeping, Alva seemed to swallow it.

The Widower (Sakabula)

He slips a dark dress over his head and the folds tumble down in finely articulated shapes of words, a grave unreadable force suspended in grinning.

The crepuscular third act, dedicated neither to posterity nor pleasure, continues to mystify audiences.

On the wall behind her bed hung a faded photo of her dashing dimorph.

I was a flying fish riding on hair.



Foetid Pothos

A springy white knob disrupting a smooth plane of flesh
covers what is worse, a well full of moistened beads.

In the jutting woods, the fitful interference of stray lines
makes new ways to signify feeling on the twisted faces of
the copulating freaks.

Feet fasted to the sticky muck, the speckled pigeon's flight
will bring the bog to Shehaqim.

Kneel naked on cracked ice to coax the pelt.

A hot knife hand rising up from the core draws all the
world in.

Heteroconger

The ostentatious syntax of his earlier works is indeed what keeps the reader riveted, serving up constructions like “release contract release” or “undulate undulate undulate pause.”

Look, it’s a cheap trick, like clickbait.

ENVIABLE CROWS AND UNNAMEABLE WEEDS, FREEDOM COWS, AND DEATH BOUQUETS

Adjua Gargi Nzinga Greaves

While the human is at the top of the food chain and has no natural predators, he is actually at the bottom of the chain (or rather [at the outermost margin of] the net) of Interbeing and his species preys most viciously and relentlessly upon itself. If the human understands that we are homo sapiens, merely a particular sort of creature on a globe rife with others, if the human understands that our species is a global parasite, she may be on her way to understanding that the autonomous floral, fungal, and animal beings around us do no work for us at all, neither intellectual nor aesthetic, and that any labor we are receiving the fruits of is the result of theft, illusion, and ignorance. Ultimately, we are a suicidal species unwilling to transcend the brittle comforts of our narcissism to accept that our way of life is not sustainable and thus cosmically and existentially ignoble. No beings on earth labor on our behalf and yet everywhere we see potential employees, servants, slaves, and devices.

I. Crows: The Kool Kids of the Animal Kingdom

A. Crown Heights / Crow Hill

B. Disney's Racist Crows

C. Intelligence of

II. Weeds

A. Apothecary underfoot

1. The White Man's Footprint

III. Cows

A. American Exceptionalism

1. “When a farm animal, like the bull found today in Prospect Park, is found loose in New York City, what you are witnessing is an individual who was so determined to live that they summoned every ounce of courage they could muster to make a dash for freedom. These animals escape from the city’s 100+ live markets, essentially ‘storefront slaughterhouses,’ where they are crammed into filthy backrooms and made to watch as their peers struggle and fight as their throats are slit. The stress and fear that these smart, emotional animals experience is unimaginable. If you were disturbed by what you saw today and were rooting for the life of this brave individual to be spared, please consider honoring the lives of the 10 billion animals who are slaughtered each year in equally horrific conditions by the meat industry by decreasing or eliminating meat entirely from your diet.”¹

2. “Yesterday, a steer managed to escape a slaughterhouse in Queens, experiencing a few moments of blessed freedom running through the CUNY College campus in Jamaica. The steer was eventually caught, but while it was expected he’d soon become someone’s dinner, he actually got the happiest ending he could get—a lifetime residency at an upstate animal sanctuary, and dinner fed to him by the one and only Jon Stewart. OH TO BE A BRAVE BRAVE BOVINE. Indeed, a spokesperson tells us the steer was taken to Animal Care & Control of Brooklyn after his run for freedom, and the agency handed him over to Stewart and his wife Tracey, who took the big dude to Farm Sanctuary’s New York Shelter in Watkins Glen. The Stewarts have been partnering with the sanctuary since October, much to the

(1) Rebecca Fishbein, “[UPDATES] Escaped Cow On The Loose Around Prospect Park,” *Gothamist*, Oct 17, 2017. http://gothamist.com/2017/10/17/escaped_cow.php

apparent benefit of The Steer That Was Nearly A Snack. The sanctuary named him Frank, after the prisoner Frank Lee Morris who escaped from Alcatraz in 1962.”²

IV. Flowers

A. Carolyn

1. It is important to me that you know a fierce and delicate friend was murdered 28 days ago and that the ensuing grief looks like softness on me. I was told this impossible truth over the phone as I stood naked in the bathroom.³

2. It is important to me that you know I have never felt this quiet a rage before. Sublimated for sustainability — it has settled into my perfumed skin, it has spread trails of lace across my body, blushed my cheeks and lips, opened my heart to the exquisite Is-ness of life. It is important to me that you know I have never been this angry before. Nor have I ever been this beautiful.⁴

B. Oneika

1. Lately, I think about Nicki Minaj at least once a day, and recently it feels like at least once every waking hour. This is because there are flowers and plant matter all over my life right now and I experience her as a sort of florxal deity even tho she is also just a regular mortal human. This because her physical beauty is intentional and excruciating in its accomplishments. One of my favorite things about Nicki Minaj is the particular way she is beautiful. Another is that while her stage name is Nicki Minaj, her real name is so close to that. Her real name is Onika Maraj. In my mind she is Orchid Mirage.⁵

(2) Rebecca Fishbein, “Photos, Video: Jon & Tracey Stewart Save Runaway Steer From Slaughter,” Gothamist, Apr 2, 2016. http://gothamist.com/2016/04/02/photos_video_jon_tracey_stewart_sav.php#photo-1

(3) Excerpt from Adjua Gargi Nzinga Greaves: *Writing like a flower* (2016) performed for “It’s After the End of the World, Don’t You Know That Yet?: Writing in the Shadow of Human Extinction The Poetry Project,” Oct 24, 2016

(4) *ibid.*

(5) *ibid.*

C. Roselle

1. About a year into psychoanalysis I began to enter the room wearing Rose oil perfume and my analyst wanted to insist my mother had entered the room.

2. There is a town in New Jersey named like my mother. And a midcentury politician. And her. Detached from her, I love the name because of the femme-on-femme of Rose modified by a feminine French suffix.

3. Though it feels as if the first plant I ever knew the name of was variegated philodendron, there is almost no way this could be true. Almost. Certainly I already knew TK, regardless, it was the otherness of variegated philodendron's scientific precision and proximally familiar phonemes that brought the encounter's impact to bear, to live undisturbed in my memory after having heard it from my mother's mouth at some point after The Separation. At some point after she and I left him behind at 670 Riverside Drive/ TKCOORDINATES and began (pretended) to live alone together at 167 Sands Street TKCOORDINATES as if there was a way to separate. As if once made relations(-hips) can be undone. As if there even was a coming together in the first place. As if oneness was not eternal. As if human marriage was not merely a cosmic blip. As if new life could be unmade.

Variegated philodendron she said and probably with softness. Softness that was missing from so many other elsewheres of our bridge and of that time. Variegated philodendron she said and I think I logged the white lines as variegated and the being itself as Philodendron. An element of this moment that stands out to me all these TKMOONCOUNT later is that I who do not easily recall or consider my Mother's particularities do so with ease in this moment. And so it has become that these days under this TKMOONCOUNT of my life on earth I am finally able to begin writing about creature and verdure because I have brought myself to a cafe and a seat was open in front of a

variegated philodendron and I am the sort of homo sapien so concerned by my species' confusion about interbeing that I have begun to wonder whether the plants are summoning me into sustainable modes of being so that I might live and allow them to flourish and tell the other humans of this.

D. Daphne

1. Soft sound for a serious thing to be treated with softness
 - a) Thimali calls me "petal"

V. Red-Blooded American Soil

A. America ≠ The United States of America

2. The Open Veins of Latin America

B. I DESPISE THIS NATION I REVERE THIS LAND

1. Haunted Native American Burial Ground

2. Forget the people here. Take care of the soil. It has seen too much.

Future Biblio Hibernation:

- ☐ The Secret Lives of Plants: A fascinating account of the physical, emotional, and spiritual relations between plants and man.
- ☐ Animal Vegetable Mineral: Ethics and Objects
- ☐ In the Company of Crows and Ravens
- ☐ The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation
- ☐ Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life
- ☐ Plant Spirit Medicine: The Healing Power of Plants
- ☐ The Tree: A Natural History of What Trees Are, How they Live, and Why They Matter
- ☐ Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry
- ☐ The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness

Two years ago now, on the day Autumn turned to Winter, my grandmother Leonie Belle Leader died at 101 years old. Sixty-seven years after her birth I, too, was born in the Americas into a black female body and slowly decided that I would like to live for 100 years precisely. On the most intentional days I wake up in my bed beneath a skylight and begin the next portion of what I intend to be a life of 36,525 days. Today is the 13,633rd of these future days.

“Herbs work hard as houseplants. They’re not content to be merely decorative, like a fern or an ivy. In addition to good looks, herbs give you flavor, fragrance, or both.”⁶

Dolce & Gabbana and a bag made of iguana.⁷

White bodied in a black/brown room : human on a globe with other life ::

It is given by Olodumare to everything - gods, ancestors, spirits, humans, animals, plants, rocks, rivers, and voiced words such as songs, prayers, praises, curses, or even everyday conversation. Existence, according to Yoruba thought, is dependent upon it.⁸

“What violence to interbeing is the ‘human’ classification? Where in how we love flora, beast animal, story self—where within our flights from chaos—rise the scaffolds of our monsterring? Does thriving demand predation? Can atemporal language return us to the void? Which humans are animals? Who is endangered by the wild? Were we ever able to ask nature for consent? At what cost do we forge safety from the void?”⁹

(6) Judy Pray, *Garden Wisdom and Know-How: Everything You Need to Know to Grow, Plant and Harvest* (Emmaus, PA: Rodale Press Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2018) 10.

(7) Leikeli47, “Bags,” *Wash & Set* (New York: RCA Hardcover LLC, 2017).

(8) “Ase (Yoruba),” Wikipedia, last modified January 3, 2018, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ase_\(Yoruba\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ase_(Yoruba))

(9) Adjua Gargi Nzinga Greaves, “Of Humans and Monsterring” (2016)

Environmental activists are fond of saying “There is no away” when people talk about the supposed margins of our society where refuse is stored and processed. And in the same way that it is not possible to throw something away because all aspects of our home planet are interconnected, the same could be said for Selfhood. To do unprovoked mortal violence to another human being diminishes the quality of one’s own existence regardless of whether this calculus is understood by the oppressor.

- ❑ www.theoffingmag.com/here-you-are/the-understory/

Anti-blackness is anti-environmental. Relational violence is existential theft and has no future. I despise this country and I revere this land.

Mise en Mort, french because it must be both alluring and brutalist.

- ❑ www.businessinsider.com/plants-know-they-are-being-eaten-2014-10
- ❑ www.nytimes.com/2009/12/22/science/22angi.html
- ❑ www.living-foods.com/articles/fruitforeating.html
- ❑ www.reanimationlibrary.org/pages/wprwilson

A young white gardener I adore often despise myself says things like pinch the plant back so it has to try harder, and I remember this when he is defending Russell Crowe’s right to choke, spit, and call Azaelia Banks a nigger. When I am actively angry I am. In these moments, I am fighting for my life and I recently like to imagine a human arguing with a plant or a non human.

The primary resource I currently manifest from my proximity to plantlife is how ethnobotanical studies tell the whole devastating truth of human whackness and soooo fast.

- ❑ www.blackyouthproject.com/three-ways-black-veganism-challenges-white-supremacy-unlike-conventional-veganism/

A cow escapes a slaughterhouse and is rewarded for having bested us, is sent to roam free in a sanctuary because USers are so enthralled by the glamour of Exceptionalism that they cannot see the TK. Like the escaped. I won't eat anything with a face. I don't eat anything that had parents. Plants aren't smart enough to feel pain.

Regarding a weed is such a privilege. The slowsilent hustlebustle of industry at the margin. Though I know few latinate classification names of plants this early on in my study of them, sometimes I see

*My dreams give me wings, I reached the stars last night
My imagination is now real life
No more stressing, just success and switching new addresses
Agent Provocateur and Donna Karen dresses
You losing ground throwing dirt
Even when I ain't have shit
I always knew my worth, and I still kept God first
Played the back of the church, ski mask under my hijab
As I pray to Jesus for a few early releases and*

[Chorus]

*I had to get up, get on my grind and go get mine
But I'll be right back (I'll be right back)
I'll be right back (I'll be right back)
(Sing it now, sing it now)*

[Bridge]

Don't take it the wrong way, I just wanna be great I'm running my own race...¹⁰

A headline shows progress in space exploration and every cell in my body shouts THIS SPECIES HAS NO BUSINESS TK Of Crows among Weeds, Freedom Cows, and Death Bouquets

(10) Leikeli47, "Bags," Wash & Set (New York: RCA Hardcover LLC, 2017)

I accept that my species is dying and needs to.
We must reintegrate our brittle selfhood with the Void.
I am the most frightened when I am feeling depressed.
I am the most pitiable when I am feeling afraid.
Crows serving Cosmic Chic all dressed in black black black.
Every plant is a black woman: useful, silenced, infinite,
mortal.
My burger-loving species won't kill cows that flee the
slaughterhouse.
The freest floral being is the one that is newest and

It's less that they are doing labor for me but rather the clearer I
get about Interbeing the more regarding nonhuman existence
reminds me and affirms my emerging understanding about
what it means to live on earth. Bound to this dank little
garden hurtling through the Void. We're so lucky. It's so
embarrassing to see the way we shit on this palace and our
palace kin.

When asked what is the intellectual aesthetic work plants
and non-human animals do for us [homo sapiens]? we
might turn to a passage like

“just a reminder that if you're not flourishing, maybe the sun
is blocked or you're not getting enough water. maybe the
soil lacks nutrients. don't blame yourself. i tell you and i tell
myself: failure to thrive is not a plant's fault.”¹¹

(11) FB Post by Christina Olivares' Facebook page. Accessed December 14, 2017.
<https://www.facebook.com/christinaolivares>

SATURN'S FRUIT IN SEVEN LESSONS

James Loop

O

Here am I in late summer, squatting roadside, looking through a crate of Sean the Farmer's small-batch jellies in White Sulphur Springs, New York.

Sean the Farmer has returned—he doesn't say where from—to farm the land he adolcesced on. I play at reading his face. Is it the mellowed rue, or the smugness, of one who goes and comes back?

In 1890, the town changed its name from Robertsonville to White Sulphur Springs after a hotel so called in town, to place itself more concretely on the Southern Catskills' burgeoning tourism circuit.

He's walked us around the farm, pointing out the many grasses we could eat ("that you can eat, that you can eat, that you can eat"). We've unfolded onto his scale, his expectations figured in decades, his memory butting up against the moment "The White Man Usurped This Land." We nod correctly at his politics, smile at his baby.

Now he talks to me of his medlar trees which he's kept for several seasons and which have not yet fruited.

Medlars,

I tell him, is what my mother's last name¹ means in English. I've never tasted one. Sean the Farmer's eyes blue at this. I

(1) Nespoli

discover he's sexy in a daddyish way ("farm my ass, dad,"
one of us will remark on the short walk back to the van).
I leave my address in the event of fruit. Another name for
sulphur being brimstone

O



O

Picked late in the year and lain away for several weeks, the medlar's managed disintegration yields, in a process known variously as "bletting"² or "mellowing," an edible umber mush. After some thirty centuries of cultivation, the medlar has now passed into obscurity,³ disappearing in the onslaught of prettier and more readily edible fruits. As one of the year's last fruits, the medlar is served traditionally at Christmas, and we must base its exhumed appeal at least partly on this fact. Its sweetness is a species of scarcity. A bletted medlar is called "sleepy."

On Youtube I watch twenty minutes of medlars squeezed through cheesecloth. The cloth as "Raw Lisa" works it makes a sucking mudsound. The brown paste accumulates on Raw Lisa's hands which she wipes periodically against the lip of a clay baking dish. When the dish is full, Raw Lisa swirls the paste with a spatula and places the lopped-off calyx—a fuzzy puckered brownish stump—in the center. It makes a heinous garnish. May I be forgiven? When I am like the medlar I am sleepy. States blur.

O

(2) A footnote from the botanist John Lindley in his 1835 *Introduction to Botany*, where the term "blet" first appears: "May I be forgiven for coining a word to express that peculiar bruised appearance in some fruits, called *blessi* [sic] by the French, for which we have no equivalent English expression?"

(3) From Baird & Thieret's "The Medlar (*Mespilus germanica*, Rosaceae) from Antiquity to Obscurity": "Among those individuals who ought to have heard of it—botanists and horticulturists—many have not."

O

The medlar came to Europe out of the Caucasus or possible points east, threading through Anatolia along the Black Sea's southern coast, into the lower Balkans, and from there the leap to the islands of the Northern Aegean and into the Greek language.⁴ The Soldier-Poet Archilochus gives us its first surviving mention, a fragment which reads:

μεσπιλα ⁵

“mespila”

medlar trees

Which? Traditionally figured as a mercenary warrior—whose fragments are filled with spears and wooden shields, wine-sacks, “dripping blood,” crotches, snot, and the rest (“the field fatted with corpses”)—Archilochus, whose name means First Sergeant, was born on the island of Paros, made war on the indigenous population of Thasos in the Northern Aegean (where the Parians had established a colony a generation before him, lured as the Phoenicians before them, by Thasian gold), and left us the earliest surviving example in the

Western Tradition

of a lyric persona. His is famously nasty. He describes Thasos, far from home:

(4) One possibility.

(5) There's no way of knowing whether this earliest form of the word “medlar,” corresponded to the fruit it does today. It's conventional to translate Fragment 75 of Archilochus as ‘medlar trees.’

This island,
 garlanded with wild woods,
Lies in the sea
 like the backbone of an ass.⁶

How ought one to write clearly about fruit, names? Flanked
by absence

O

(6) All translations are Guy Davenport's, from *Carmina Archilochi* (1964)



We know that the Greeks brought the medlar with them into their colonies in the West, to Sicily and the Southern coast of France. It's thought the Romans first encountered them there, and cultivated the fruit (now *mespilus*) throughout the empire's northern extension.

With the retreat of that empire, the *mespilus* degenerates into the French *néflier*, Spanish *níspero*, and the Italian *nespola*, from which derives the surname

Nespoli

“topographically,”⁷ to which I, by my mother, am attached.

You were falling asleep in the next room as I described my theory of dream genetics, the leveling web of mellowed logic that might correct our proportions and misgivings. For instance, allow a minor node in the history of fruit to be me, an imbecility: the blasted rim a name is. The medlar is a bedfellow of war.



(7) One of the means by which, during the Middle Ages, amid the growth of towns and anonymity, European surnames were derived.

O

Christened Pasquale Nespoli on Easter Sunday 1889 in Santa Maria Capua Vetere,⁸ five hours on foot from the Bay of Naples. On the ship manifest, he's 15. With his mother and younger brother he's designated a "farm laborer." The 1920 census finds him living on Carroll Street in Brooklyn, as "factory help." An alien, he can neither read nor write. By 1930, he's moved out to the country (Queens). White now. A "laborer." He owns his home. The script on the earliest documents is elaborate, winged, grows crabbed and faster through the ensuing decades.

He grows tomatoes. His four sons play stickball and forage for strawberries on land that will become first Idlewild, then JFK Airport. Here he is waking early to take the bus into Jamaica to catch the E train to South Brooklyn where he works at a factory near the waterfront, on Irving Street,⁹ packing fruit—Dromedary Dates.¹⁰ On the weekend he makes pasta and lays it on the bed to dry. He balds young. He never learns English. He plays the mandolin and dies in 1981. I am an aphid, properly rotten with words.

O

(8) Until the Italian unification, the town had been called Santa Maria Maggiore. Capua Vetere (Old Capua) was added in the interest of tourism to reflect its proximity to the ruins of a Roman city, although the town itself was founded some ten centuries later.

(9) Irving Street, a narrow alley infamous for its many factory fires during the early 20th century, was officially purged from the map by the city in 1991, though its street sign remains in place today.

(10) "Grown along the Euphrates River, in the very region of the Garden of Eden," reads an ad from 1911. "We of the new countries don't eat enough of them."

O

Though the English word medlar has its origins in Latin, it also had for centuries an indigenous Germanic double. Owing probably to the look of its exposed calyx which bears a strong resemblance to the human anus, the medlar was an “open-ar-se.”

We find it in the Reeve’s Tale from Chaucer:

But if I fare as dooth an open-ers —
That ilke fruyt is ever lenger the wers,
Til it be roten in mullok¹¹ or in stree.¹²

Of old men like him, the Reeve states, “til we be roten, kan we nat be rype.” Experience is expectation’s jelly.

The association with rottenness, along with its proximity to the verb “meddle” (meaning to fuck, adulterate, or otherwise screw with or up) also made of the medlar a word for whore,¹³ the female genitalia, and a “generally disreputable person.”¹⁴

An opening: during the course of anal sex, it’s possible for the human rectum to slip out through the anus and be displayed. For its enthusiasts, the prolapsed rectum is a “rose-bud.”

(11) Rubbish

(12) Straw

(13) From Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*:

LUCIO: I was once before him for getting a wench with child.

DUKE: Did you such a thing?

LUCIO: Yes, marry, did I but I was fain to forswear it;
they would else have married me to the rotten medlar.

(14) Robert Louis Stevenson: “Can’t you hear it rattle in the gibbet?” said Villon...
‘Down went somebody just now! A medlar the fewer on the three-legged Medlar tree!’

O

“The Fruit is old Saturn’s,”¹⁵ writes the 17th century astrologer-botanist Nicholas Culpeper, on the medlar, “and sure a better Medicine he hardly hath to strengthen the retentive faculty, therefore it stays Womens Longings: the good old Man cannot endure Womens Minds should run a gadding.”¹⁶

Meaning is a sphincter (may I be forgiven?); the medlar

rotted

a knowledge.

O

(15) Saturn, a Roman agricultural god, was later stitched to the Greek Kronos, yielding the bad daddy, the schoolmaster, Father Death. As the last planet in our solar system visible to the naked eye, Saturn became an emblem for limit, the edge of all endeavor and greedy seeing. What Saturn touches is marked by difficulty, delay, restriction and blockage. Saturn dries and depresses
(16) — To go from one place to another, to wander; esp. to wander about with no serious object, stopping here and there, to rove idly

— To go wandering, in desire or thought; to leave the true path. (obsolete)

— Of inanimate objects: To move about. (rare)

— Of a plant, tree, etc.: To spread hither and thither, to straggle in growth. (archaic)

I ask a friend who's into it if he can describe the appeal. He says a rosebud is the opposite of shame. A profounder intimacy embedded in the reversal of surfaces. "Why are you so afraid of assholes?" asks my first boyfriend in the shower eight years ago.

The medlar is a member of the rose family. A name, a mellowing sin.

O

GREEN IMAGINATION

Nicola Masciandaro

The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only
a Green thing that stands in the way . . . to the Eyes of the Man of
Imagination Nature is Imagination itself.

– William Blake

Inside the horizon of every line, green is looking for green.
The eye of eye is green. Closing my eyes, I gaze out looking
for you through myself, and I grow green. Greenness of the
eye of the heart.

It is not a simple thing to think this greenness. The matter
of color is so mysteriously specific, an appearance stronger
than its own fact. How to grasp green without following
thinking into falling for seeing it as *color of*, without losing
its real quality among the vines of association? It is a
question of understanding greenness according to its own
literality, of reading it like a letter, of spelling it like a word.

This one may do by staying with the hyperliterality and
non-arbitrariness of Blake's image, its itself-ness. Here,
where truth is seen right on the surface, the tree is not
simply an example of nature as imagination, but its very
likeness, its species. Nature is a green thing that stands in
the way because imagination *is* green. Thus we approach
inversely a properly intellectual vision, that which "touches
on things which do not have any images that are like them
without actually being what they are."¹ Such hyperliteral
seeing may be conceived as a vision through no one, via
the deep-flat immediacy of a paradoxically questioning
presence 'who' apparently already understands, as per
Augustine's well-known reflection on time: "What *is* time?

(1) Augustine, *On Genesis*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 470.

If no one [*nemo*] asks of me, I know; if I want to explain it to someone asking, I do not know.”² This *nemo* (from *ne* + *homo*) is the inhumanity of a too-close vision that touches, plant-like, what it cannot see precisely by simply seeing it. It is an order of understanding requiring precisely that *no one* ask the question, a non-asking asker ‘who’ is the presence of imagination itself, its species. So we find in Michael Marder’s fortuitous formulation of our blindness to plant intelligence the perfect corollary to Blake’s tree of imagination: “Imagine a being capable of processing, remembering, and sharing information—a being with potentialities proper to it and a world of its own . . . most of us will think of a human person, some will associate it with an animal, and *virtually no one’s imagination* will conjure up a plant.”³

Species: image-growth of the entity, face of an essence, appearance of true self-imitation—the spice of being. Image (from the root **aim-* ‘copy’) and greenness (from the root **ghre-* ‘grow’) converge in the auto-mimetic nature of growth. Thus Goethe begins *The Metamorphosis of Plants*: “Anyone who has paid even a little attention to plant growth will readily see that certain external parts of the plant undergo frequent change and take on the shape of the adjacent parts—sometimes fully, sometimes more, and sometimes less.”⁴ Green is the species of imagination,

(2) “Quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quaerat, scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio” (Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.14.17, <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/conf/>).

(3) Michael Marder, *Grafts: Writings on Plants* (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2016), 41, *italics mine*.

(4) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *The Metamorphosis of Plants*, trans. Douglas Miller (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 5.

its spice. Imagination tastes green.⁵

To observe more clearly the verdant idea of the image, consider Augustine's description of the three levels of vision (corporeal, imaginal, intellectual) as a picture of plant-like growth: "When you read, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself* (Mark 12:31), three kinds of vision take place: one with the eyes, when you see the actual letters; another with the human spirit, by which you think of your neighbor even though he is not there; a third with the attention of the mind, by which you understand and look at love itself."⁶ Vision greens, sprouting forth in three unified orders not unlike the form of a plant. Corporeal, objective vision, that which sees surface or what cannot be seen through, touches the image as *leaf*. Imaginal, mediated vision, that which sees transparently via the subtle lines seen by seeing through, touches the image as *stem*. Intellectual, immediate vision, that which sees the very form of the seen, neither without seeing through it nor with seeing through it (or both), in other words seeing the thing directly through itself, touches the image as *root*.

(5) Cf. Marder's discussion of the vegetal nature of imaginal freedom in terms of 'crude taste' of first play: "The material freedom of imagination is the echo of vegetal freedom in human beings, but so is the formal aesthetic play-drive, indifferent to the real existence of its object. To let the plant in us flourish, to give free reign to imagination in its materiality, we should forget the formality of 'high culture,' which corresponds to the upper tier of play, and to abandon ourselves to what Schiller decries as crude taste: 'first seizing on what is new and startling, gaudy, fantastic and bizarre, what is violent and wild.' Nietzsche's Dionysian art, itself linked to the intoxicating power of a plant (the fermented grape), is no doubt crucial to this appeal, as is Deleuze and Guattari's take on 'drunkenness as a triumphant irruption of the plant in us'" (Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* [New York: Columbia, 2013], 146).

(6) Augustine, *On Genesis*, 470.

Once again the specific example—the second part of love’s ‘double law’⁷—is more than example, being specularly paradigmatic of vision as the movement and manifestation of will. The love seen in seeing *love* mirrors and is mirrored by love’s seeing per se. Likewise, the three levels of vision are themselves conceptually evident in the conspicuous text: in the objective fact of the neighbor (from the root **bheue*- ‘to be, exist, grow’) or one who dwells near (*plēsion, proximus*), in the meditating fact of the likeness (from the root **lik*- ‘body, form; like, same’) between oneself and neighbor, and in the immediate fact of self-love.⁸ The neighborliness of seeing reflects vision as a force occurring through the mirror of love, via the first unseen image of itself—like the gap between *conatus* and *connatus*, twixt one’s inborn gravity for oneself and the non-autonomous withness of one’s birth.⁹

The unitary, divine fact of love—“Love is the reflection of

(7) “Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, “The first is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no greater commandment than these” (Mark 12:30-1).

(8) Cf. “There can . . . be no bodily vision without the spiritual, seeing that the moment contact is made with a body by a sense of the body, some such thing is also produced in the spirit, not to be exactly what the body is, but to be like it; and if this were not produced, neither would there be than sensation by which extraneous things present are sensed” (Augustine, *On Genesis*, 492).

(9) William Desmond addresses this dimension—and the separation it inspires—in terms of porosity: “The *conatus essendi* takes shape as the will to self-determination, but in doing so forgets its own more original *passio essendi* which is itself as more intimately and vulnerably porous . . . The selving on the surface of self-determination thus tries to snip the umbilical cord that ties it to its own soul—and no nourishment from the womb of the porosity comes up to it, even though in this, all its endeavor is still an affair of being ‘birthed with’ (*con-natus*)” (William Desmond, “Soul Music and Soul-less Selving,” in *The Resounding Soul*, eds. Eric Austin Lee and Samuel Kimbriel [Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2016], 377).

God's unity in the world of duality. It constitutes the entire significance of creation"¹⁰ —is imaginably present through the law of love in plant form. Seen in this way, in the moment of Augustine's *picking* of this example, the three-fold order of vision becomes a revelation of the second commandment as graft of the first. As image grows mimetically via the cut-and-splice process of self-copying into the very synthesis of vision that sees a thing all at once in gross, subtle, and mental dimension, so does the image's verdant structure here expose the second part of love's double law as a cutting of love itself, the living image of the will to love the One as love. "I am the vine, you are the branches" (John 15:5).

And in the original articulation of the first commandment, we see a similar representation of the various levels of being synthesized by the power of a unifying force: "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30). Likewise, Dante's account of the double necessity of love of self and love of God conspicuously deploys the locution of cutting (division, decision) to express the *indivisibility* of amorous vision: "Or, perché mai non può da la salute / amor del suo subietto volger viso, / da l'odio proprio son le cose tute; / e perché intender non si può diviso, / e per sé stante, alcuno esser dal primo, / da quello odiare ogne effetto è deciso" (*Purgatorio* 17.106-11).¹¹ Impossibility of self-hatred is the

(10) Meher Baba, *Discourses*, revised 6th ed., 4 vols. (North Myrtle Beach, SC: Sheriar Foundation, 2007), I.169.

(11) Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977. [Now, because love cannot turn its sight from the well-being of its subject, all things are safe from self-hatred; and because there is no being that can be conceived as existing all by itself and severed from the first, every creature from hatred of that one is cut off.]

(12) "No one hates himself. And, indeed, this principle was never questioned by any sect" (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson [New York: Macmillan, 1958], 20).

identical, unquestionable twin of severance from hating God.¹²

Love as the rhyme (from root **sreu-* ‘to flow’) flowing between sight and color: “No white nor red was ever seen / So am’rous as this lovely green.”¹³ Love as greenness of beauty’s eye, of the image that sees, seizing one by its look, the color of the species as flower of imagination: “The plant that achieves only stunted flowers in the relentless struggle for existence, having been released from this struggle by a stroke of good fortune, *suddenly looks at us with the eye of beauty.*”¹⁴ Or as Meister

(13) Andrew Marvell, “The Garden,” lines 17-8, in *Poems and Letters*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), I.48. Thanks to Tom Haviv for reminding me of this poem.

(14) Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Early Notebooks*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36. Marder comments: “The absence of a conceptually mediated meaning does not signal the voiding of sense in the flower that represents nothing, but conversely announces a shift in the directionality of sense . . . The beautiful flower ceases to be an object of human regard, instead looking at us with the de-subjectivated and impersonal ‘eye of beauty’ because we do not exactly need it” (*Plant-Thinking*, 141). Cf. Narcissus as bound by the impossible actuality of the image’s love of him: “Admit it, the gaze is really too much. Who can withstand it? No one shall see me and live. That must be why Narcissus never stops spontaneously lying to himself about his reflection, never ceases to fall in love with his own image, seeing neither that it is an image nor his . . . How eternally precious those passing moments, when the gaze opens itself a little more and sees, by some unfathomable magic or trick of the abyss which if you gaze long into it gazes back into you (N), that the image is no less in love with Narcissus” (Nicola Masciandaro, “On the Gaze,” in *Dante | Hafiz: Readings on the Sigh, the Gaze, and Beauty*, eds. Masciandaro and Tekten [New York: KAF, 2017], 59).

(15) “The prophet says, ‘God will lead His sheep into a green pasture.’ The sheep is simple, and so are they who are simplified to one. One master says that heaven’s course can nowhere be so readily observed as in simple animals: they guilelessly accept the influence of heaven, as do children with no minds of their own. But those folk who are clever and full of ideas, they are carried away in a proliferation of things. So our Lord promised to feed his sheep on the mountain on green grass. All creatures are green in God” (Meister Eckhart, *The Complete Mystical Works*, trans. Maurice O’C Walshe [New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2009], 459). Observe how the passage performs the unifying simplicity of vision by immediately transferring the color of the pasture to the creature partaking of it. This is a good example of what I have elsewhere termed “animal mysticism,”

Eckhart says, also with respect to the extrahumanity of vision, “All creatures are green in God.”¹⁵ Being the alternative of pink or rose, the generic red-cum-white of living beauty and non-spectral color perceived as if between the high and low ends of the rainbow (white light minus green equals pink),¹⁶ green is the presence of the absence of the spectrum’s unity within itself, the index of the will that curves it into infinity.

The self/world-annihilative power of love’s vision—“Annihilating all that’s made / To a green thought in a green shade”¹⁷—concerns an absolute and unendurable interfaciality, the divine revelation of universe as mirror. At the intolerable summit of Narcissus’s specular torture, finally liquifying in the fire of love—“sic attentuatus amore / liquitur et tecto paullatim carpitur igni”¹⁸—the lover surrenders into the green to become a flower: “ille caput viridi fessum submitit in herba, / lumina mors clausit domini mirantia formam” [he laid down his weary head in

wherein the stupid immediacy of animal awareness is used to figure the depth of apophatic illumination; see “Unknowing Animals,” *Speculations: Journal of Speculative Realism* 2 (2011): 228-44.

(16) See, “There is No Pink Light,” <http://youtu.be/S9dqJRyk0YM>.

(17) Andrew Marvell, “The Garden,” lines 47-8.

(18) Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), III.489-90.
.489-90.

(19) Where others prefer the past tense here—e.g. Mandelbaum’s “eyes that had been captured by the beauty of their master” (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum [New York: Harvest, 1993], 97)—I translate ‘mirantia’ in the literality of its present so as to capture the total liminality of this moment wherein Narcissus’s eyes, still gazing upon themselves in the mirror of imagination, hold open the possibility of his soul’s attainment, via death to his identity, of a higher self-knowledge and more continuous vision of beauty. So the greenness that receives his dying head touches the vitality of death itself, its being an inherent mode and instrument of life rather than its opposite. As Rudolf Steiner observed, “green is the lifeless image of life,” in the sense of the qualitative visibility of the invisible life living through lifeless matter: “Life itself we do not perceive. We perceive plants because they contain the lifeless substances. And because of this they are green”

the green grass and death closed the bright eyes marveling upon their master's beauty].¹⁹ In the end everyone follows their heart, dies into the reality behind beauty's dream. As Klima writes in *Glorious Nemesis*, "But what the mind does not believe, the heart does. And in the end the intellect does, too; what else is left for it to do?"²⁰

Green is the color of man's most properly eyeless neighbor—the manifest appearance of vision as a naturally *missing* power: "We speak of privation . . . if something has not one of the attributes which a thing might naturally have, even if this thing itself would not naturally have it, e.g. a plant is said to be *deprived of eyes*."²¹ Being somewhere in the middle of the rainbow, in the midst of the spectrum visible to humans, green reflects the heart as the omnipresent medium or general line of being: "my heart, where I am whoever/whatever I am."²² It is the spectral aura of the ghostly eros of all things, their being () here in all the creaturely fullness of uncircumscribable restlessness and indeterminacy: "For you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until

("Colours as Revelations of the Psychic in the World," <http://wn.rsarchive.org/>). Vital and deathly, green is sign of the life that lives through what lacks it, the tint of soul elevating itself from matter, the tone of animal growing itself through mineral. So is it the color of love as will refusing the boundary—or encompassing the continuity—between life and death. Like Criseyde nearly dying of love-sorrow in Troilus's arms: "O Jove, I deye, and mercy I beseche! / Help, Troilus!" And therewithal hire face / Upon his brest she leyde and loste speche – / Hire woful spirit from his propre place, / Right with the word, alwey o poynt to pace. / And thus she lith with hewes pale and grene, / That whilom fressh and fairest was to sene" (Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, IV.1149-55, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987]).

(20) Ladislav Klima, *Glorious Nemesis*, trans. Marek Tomin (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2011), 64.

(21) Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1022b, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), II.78, italics mine.

(22) "[C]or meum, ubi ego sum quicumque sum" (Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.3.4).

it rests in you.”²³ So in the impressional order of experience, green corresponds to the intensity of *longing*: “All thoughts, words and acts cause *sanskaras* or impressions on one’s mind. *Sanskaras* are of seven different colors, the same as those of a rainbow . . . Intense spiritual longing gives rise to *sanskaras* of the green color. Just as red *sanskaras* are the worst, so the green ones are the best.”²⁴ As if seeing with eyes one naturally misses, longing grows through the distance of its own missingness towards the presence of what would only be missed more were it present.²⁵

“*Seek his face always* [Psalm 104.4], let not the finding of the beloved put an end to the love-inspired search; but as love grows, so let the search for the one already found become more intense.”²⁶ The search that never ends is green—the looking of imagination itself or that which stands everywhere in the middle with an eye for the whole. The gravity of green corresponds to the color spectrum’s vital center, a location at once for the above and of the below. So is the weight of every image double. Image, forever undecidably inside and outside the eye, *looks* simultaneously into and beyond one’s vision. Seeing no one, lacking the eyes whereby it sees, the green life of imagination searches through every face, growing beyond

(23) “[Q]uia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te” (Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1.1).

(24) Meher Baba, *Meher Message*, 2:7, p. 8 (July 1930), quoted in *Life Eternal*, “*Sanskaras*,” http://www.meherbabadnyana.net/life_eternal/Book_One/Sanskaras.htm. See Nicola Masciandro, “The Inverted Rainbow: A Note on the Spiritual Significance of the Color Spectrum,” https://www.academia.edu/10834707/The_Inverted_Rainbow_A_Note_on_the_Spiritual_Significance_of_the_Color_Spectrum.

(25) “Longing does not diminish when the subject is present to what is missing, but rather increases” (David Appelbaum, *The Delay of the Heart* [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001], 143).

(26) Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding, 6 vols. (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 5.186.

all someone ever seen.

As the radically individual fact of one's human form gives too-literal witness to its being envisioned by one without eyes to see it,²⁷ so does the green reality of imagination, this actual reflection of our missing eyes, lure one to outgrow the fantasy of identity and rest in the limitlessness of a will freer than one's own—that most ancient love alone capable of creating the unimaginably new.

(27) "The prehuman forms through which it [the soul] has to pass before it can incarnate in the human form are innumerable. Strictly speaking there is only one form—the human form—which is latent in all of the previous forms. The mineral, the plant and the animal forms actually contain the human form in its latent state, and this is gradually and increasingly manifested until it is at last completely expressed as a human being in a human body" (Meher Baba, *God Speaks: The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose*, [New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1973], 188).

*The minims
gather
themselves
half-heartedly
to stand up and
salute the sun*



JUST WALKING

for Tom Henner

Sahar Muradi

First snow under feet
father landing home again
everyday earthquake

Two deer raise their heads
lift their tails
morning, night

Raindrop on my hat
surprise!—I am
everywhere

Where is mother on the long, white road
eastward, westward
the snow is fresh

A tree with a raised skirt
a mouth in the shape
keep walking

Noise of snow
teeth at night, thinking jaw
sound without me

Here is a bridge I cross
something on either side
the birds flap their wings

Three mushrooms on the trunk
my sisters
I will find them again

Hands, everywhere hands
how small-minded of me
it is true

Grandfather is gone
and returns
light on a cheek of the mountain

Picking up a leaf
see a bigger, a brighter
keep walking

Passing my own footprints
measure the shape
better to be no one

Cross the same bridge twice
wake up mother, father, grandfather
three sisters

SOME WORDS GROW TAILS¹

Sahar Muradi

Between two hearts is a way. We
met once, we were friends;
we met again,

brothers. Spring came not
by one bloom. Said I am the year,
and the trees—

windless. I wished him open,
his being fully flower (never
his days). Begin at the river

born of a drop. A dog
lapped the water clear. He said
half of faith

being clean. Some words
grow tails—you could watch them
walk. A donkey

passed us by. It wasn't ours
to stop, nor the porcupine
stroking its velvet

child. Hunger was memory
crisping. I starved to ask the fox
who is your

(1) This poem is based on a generative translation of Afghan proverbs in Dari.

alibi. Crooked and straight,
half reach, I could swear
he answered

my tail. Two hands
being sovereign. Between
two brothers our accounts

should square. God said
eat and drink, said my brother.
He did not say

glut. A piece of bread, an onion
slice, a banquet—he opened
his hand—these five are brothers

but not equals. The same donkey
passed by us
wearing a new saddle.

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BIOS

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