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I've been thinking of description as the licking of language at reality, the way an animal or a child may lick at something that hurts it, like a wound or bruise.

I could say I walked across the grass  
I couldn't see where it ended.  
I could hear it. I could see the slack  
flag. I could see the door, the color.  
I could smell the heap of dead grass  
across the grounds, the gloss on  
it, the glaze, slivered so with frost.  
Then sun itself lit slung from clouds  
it did first grey then course to yellow.  
A smile lit you then so  
without type—I couldn't speak it

The language of description traces emptiness. It is both more and less than the thing but never the thing itself. So description is always also describing the absence of its subject. There's no need to describe what you can see.

Of course, there's language that points. It's non-descriptive. Try saying, "this is it, here it is" of something that's gone from the world. This is an absurd speech act. You are pointing at the air, at the pane of air.

Then the image is also a recuperative gesture. It's a hand waving across a wide space.

Chill from the grey hole in the creek  
Streams the neck of a vase that reminds you of a  
creek

I've been thinking about the term "always already." I've been thinking about the purchase it has in certain discourse, where it's employed with such frequency and in expression of such diffusion that it might be described as a tic or mannerism. It has its own Wikipedia page. As of the time of this writing, the Wikipedia page asserts that the term expresses the unimaginability of what might have been otherwise in the past, the inborn anticipation symptomatic of Being, and a given thing's inevitability.

*He had a big jar of peanut butter, I remember.  
There was a creek running down the backyard. He  
was stubborn.<sup>1</sup>*

I am thinking, however, about what the term does to the way futurity may be imagined, and to the feeling of the present. How, parsed, it suggests itself occurring on the other side of a future already. This is not so much inevitability, which still describes the consumption of what time endures between the present and a moment at which what will happen

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(1). A fragment of speech from a stranger in her hospital bed, upstate NY, June 2010

happens. Instead it suggests that will happen has happened, the moments of its writing and reading being after always, making an already of all time. I don't know if this makes it endo-futural or post-futural. What is after the future? What is in it? As always already, apocalypse seems to be worked into the text, a seeing that occurs in a present that is outside of time and an occurring stretched around time and outside of it. But always already also renders the present both retrospective and extra-temporal. It suggests it is not possible to see any more than there is now, and that there is nothing outside of everything that is now there. Today I think it's a weary term. Writing over the future, on the other side of everything, the decision, a narrow sliver, has been made. You peer through it. How do you describe outside of time?

Listen, I am trying to tell you  
about the face of someone

Of course, we do try to describe the future, which is already outside of time. One symptom of the present is that it is frequently preoccupied with trying to describe the future. The present wonders what will happen, as though the future were a story being told, having forgotten that the future is beyond stories. Sometimes I imagine the future as a place I have never been, sometimes as an alphabet, and sometimes as a liquid.

*Actually there was nothing there. Instead there were needs  
and emptinesses pressing against empty leaves at the center,*

*not even silence, not even rustling. There were trees, there were no trees, waiting, no leaves falling, blossoms, there were no blossoms, fruit like bubbles blown in glass. There were trees, and inside the trees there was nothing.*

A book I'm reading narrates how coal mining was established across Europe in the early 1700s.<sup>2</sup> As demand for fuel rose, there was felt to be a shortage of wood. One answer was to regulate the forests, to make them an intelligible part of a system of value (forestry was born as a species of knowledge and labor), legislate them and turn formerly free wood into a product. However, there was also a feeling that the land was simply exhausted. It was emptier than before. The world's fertility seemed to be flagging; it wasn't regenerating as it was supposed to do. In fact, Martin Luther had prophesied that wood scarcity would correlate with the end of the world. Other signs of apocalypse appeared everywhere. The world was dying.

The question remained: if God has begun the end of time, what is to be done while it finishes, as nature decays and 'the period of time' approaches? A German jurist who wrote in favor of mining what he called the *sylva subterranea* argued that what had been considered a savaging of the living world<sup>3</sup>

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(2) *The Subterranean Forest: Energy Systems and the Industrial Revolution* by Rolf Peter Sieferle.

(3) It's clear, for example, what mining is to Milton—to build a Hell to rival Heaven, the fallen angels "Rifl'd the bowels of thir mother Earth / For Treasures better hid,"

and hence a savaging of the reflection of the face of God while it continued was now a measure of nonresistance, merely the keep necessary to sustain the world in the world while awaiting its end.<sup>4</sup>

There were trees, there were no trees, waiting, no leaves falling, blossoms, there were no blossoms, fruit like bubbles blown in glass. There were trees, and inside the trees there was nothing.

There are certain poems I've written about the death of someone close to me. I write another one every few years. They are all variations on an image of a particular landscape. They describe a grid of pine trees, flashlight beams, luminous green geese's eggs wavering under black water. I won't include them here; they're not particularly readable. I am interested, however, in the form they take.

trees, and inside the trees

Maybe the image seeks to raise a continent exactly like the one that has been lost.

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they "Open'd into the Hill a spacious wound / And dig'd out ribs of Gold."

(4) Bunting, quoted in Sieferle: "Although a true wood scarcity is present everywhere / so all countries think / how they can fill such scarcity nolentes volentes with other fuels. That is not contrary to God / but a way and a means placed into their hands by his omniscient goodness and mercy / so that he may preserve them further until the end of the world."

*“Where is she now?”*<sup>5</sup>

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without type—

As a kind of compulsion which hopes to enact a gentling.

But the image can’t recuperate what it describes. What’s the point, then, doing this tracing?

A dream: that the world could be buckled together with words, pairs of words which would be recognized because of how they fit together, how their fitting felt in the body (a holding), which formed bridges or

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(5) A question from Chaucer.

welds to rig it all together. The work was to discover them, to install and then secure them, in the streets and rooms and deserts and forests, the cities and on the inter-states and seas.

Or an image may ask what inheres in the space left by what's been obliterated.

What is this place I have come to myself?

In the old Irish story *Buile Suibhne*, a pagan king, having violently interrupted the laying out of a church, is cursed to live in madness, outside in the air, half unstuck from the material real. He flits and leaps over the ground, nesting in trees like a huge, naked bird. He's lost to the people he loves even when present, unwilling to return home though he longs for it. The curse, which is also a blessing, is to live in description and to speak it: to speak the echoic, cold land he moves through, which seems as light around him as a word. (In fact, it is as light as words, marks as slender as the sliver through which, reading, you might see a flash of green watercress at the side of a stream, red rowan berries, wind rushing on stones.) The madness *Suibhne* suffers is this reiterative re-speaking, the repeating of the landscape as loss. He is adrift in description and speaks to himself the images of what he sees; these are poems. Time falls out between them.

*From lonely cliff-tops, the stag  
bells and makes the whole glen shake  
and re-echo. I am ravished.  
Unearthly sweetness shakes my breast.<sup>6</sup>*

The condition of time in an always already is a liquid  
wavering, melt as mark.

Here I was, shuffling out on a line made of words.

Meanwhile in the always already she had been describing  
to me what we could see.

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(6) From Sweeney Astray, Seamus Heaney's translation of Buile Suibhne.