

A TUNNEL YEAR

1. Greeny Place *(a prose poem)*
2. Sixty-Five Brightly Colored Scenes *(a play)*
3. Ghost Part *(an essay/an offering)*

What is this thing? A book of hours, an illustrated accordion-fold book, a portrait gallery, a panoramic bestiary, a serial dirge, a radio play? There are three parts; the middle one is a play, but it's the kind of play where all the stage directions are meant to be spoken aloud.

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GREENY PLACE

Two sisters sit in a grey room. Thin light moves through wood blinds. The older sister describes a film of wildebeests running in open fields intercut with the image of an arrow traveling through dark space until it finally lands in a rat tree, a species native to a small region of France. The younger sister leaves, impressed but disturbed. She draws her hand across grey corridor until she reaches the large potted fern by the elevator. In the elevator itself there is an armchair and rich Turkish rug. She sits down as she rides the elevator slowly to her own apartment, two floors below, where she will tend to her dog Faithful, who is dying. Because Faithful is incontinent, obstructions have been placed across all the doors to the rooms, and the greeny carpet has been rolled up. She lies down on the floor with her dog and turns on the news, dominated today by a gruesome video released by militants demanding the renunciation of modern life. The video ends with the group's icon, a righteous arrow. Faithful, disturbed, tries to stand, but her back legs are weak and she can't make it up.

After death, the dog takes an elevator ride to a safe, greeny place free of obstructions. The elevator is grey-walled, soft-lit, with a rug, an armchair, and a potted fern. Faithful may sit wherever she likes or, if she prefers, can lie on the floor. I would never renounce modern life, when it offers these kinds of spiritual comforts.

Two sisters sit together in the grey light of a house just beyond Northern Boulevard. Morning light comes through the blinds. They are drinking coffee. The intermittent, nearby landing noise of airplanes is soft, almost sweet, low and familiar. Betty, the older of the two, holds a notebook in which she sketches images from a film reel she found yesterday while cataloging a new acquisition for the special collections of the important library where she works as an archivist. The box was donated by the family of a woman identified only as Helen, a North African woman from a Francophone country who briefly dominated the surrealist circles of Paris before vanishing. In the film, which is not identified as a work of Helen's, but was in her possession and may have been her own work, shaky footage of stampeding wildebeests intercuts with an illuminated arrow traveling steadily through dark space until it finally lands in a rat tree, a scrubby, aromatic tree native to southern France. As the arrow pierces the bark, the trunk buckles and bends, and in immediate succession, one of the wildebeest's legs is seen breaking, buckling the beast under and leaving it to be run over by the rest of its panicking herd. Betty sketches the interwoven scenes in two columns down her page. Frankie, the younger sister, closes her eyes, tries to imagine it. The radiators hiss because it is October outside. It is October inside too, of course.

-What happened to Helen?

-I don't know. All we have is the box. It came from a law firm in New Hampshire.

-Are there letters?

-No letters. Only films.

Planes overhead, soft. Frankie gets up. Pigeons coo from nearby ledges. It's time for her to go to work. She adjusts her dress and kisses Betty, puts on her coat and walks outside. In a minute comes the bus.

Down the street goes the bus, and Frankie in it, elegant in the work clothes she keeps in the standards of the time kept by her own mother, a string of women holding up standards that everywhere else have given way. Hard to find the right fabrics anymore. Frankie passes two-story houses that fill me with a longing disproportionate to their minor beauties. Anything that suggests a softly settled life, a modest triumph of longevity. I guess this marks me as someone who will move for opportunity. To pile the list higher. To raise the roof of the list of things. Somehow this sacred thing is turned all into a contest a continuous struggle. The imperfect paradise of these lived-in houses these low houses. You could imagine someone spending hours at an instrument, or quilting upstairs, or writing every day before the children wake up and start demanding, or memorizing an epic list or harboring a special love of clay or opera or leaving the city every summer weekend to go boat on an upstate lake. I walk back. The bus passes me. I return with my dog to the density. Stalled out in the middle of my ambitious years, I tunnel. I keep turning down here in the narrow dark, trying to catch a fact in the making. I don't know what fact.

Two sisters drink coffee in the morning light of the living room of the house they grew up in and now share, both grown. They have divided it as a duplex, but they take their coffee together most mornings, when there is time. Having time is something they are good at, but they get their time at the expense of other things that press on time, the time-pressers that draw us into community with other people, giving us something to talk about in the grocery lines. The feeling of being late, of always feeling a demand, of being behind, of having too much to be done that can't get done, of unceasing cleaning up after self and others, the feeling of your life being a sweet slow space you keep trying to reach that you might reach this weekend or remember you did reach for a while. Here we are, inhabiting lives we seem to have only half intended. It rushes, passes, closes, opens. It is punishing, delightful, it multiplies, wilts. We are deliberate or accidental but somehow always late. It is the imperfect that is our paradise, said Wallace Stevens. What time is it in paradise, we asked? The imperfect is incomplete. Never arrived at, it is always shifting. The transition that is our paradise. What transition is this? In a small boat, we said, we'd go drifting. This weekend, we'll go boating. We dream of boating.

This evening-out of the day, when it ends. When it makes its ordinary evening.

He was supposed to get out to the house yesterday afternoon, to take a look at the tree in front of the house, to give me an estimate on the tree.

Two sisters on a train through Connecticut. Red train lights. Semi-cold fall day. Warmer than it really ought to be.

This parking lot.

This woman Helen waiting in the parking lot. Listening, like the sisters, to the radio, an interview on the radio.

There is the interviewer and there is the question,

Do you *feel* American? //

There is ability, disability, there is Helen.

The commuter rail, the parking lot.

// Yes or no?

Today another tree specialist, uh, I will try to follow up on him tomorrow, whether or not I hear from this guy. Looks like the insurance company is not going to uh, so uh, that's the way things are. I'll uh, keep you posted. I don't have much battery on my cell phone. I need to get a charge. But I do get back in late this evening, if you wanted to get me tonight. Otherwise, I'll uh, I'll be at home uh, tomorrow morning.

THANKS.

The light of televisions, always.

Tiredness, overeating, falling asleep in the sun after waking so early.

Two sisters who wake early and sleep though their commute home.

You dropped something.

I got it.

I got it.

The dog rides the elevator to a greeny place free of obstructions.

SIXTY-FIVE BRIGHTLY COLORED SCENES

(ONE OF THEM VERY LONG AND THE OTHERS SHORT)

a play

A small dog rides a luxury elevator, alone. There is a large potted fern, an armchair, and a Persian rug. The dog sighs and music plays.

DOG

It's my exit music.

A cat shows a surrealist film that intercuts zoomed-in footage of a wildebeest stampede with an animation of a white arrow traveling through a black field. The cat pauses the film.

CAT WHO SHOWS FILMS

This film is so stupid.

A macaw is hiding in a compartment of an RV.

MACAW

I climbed in when no one was looking.

*A dog rides in the passenger seat of a Subaru, with the window down.
Snout out.*

DOG

I was always an ambitious dog. But for what?

A mouse sits in the window of a moving model of the International Space Station in a science museum.

MOUSE

Sunrise every ninety minutes, so I rarely feel well rested.

A cow stands beneath a large tree full of rooks, dripping milk from her udders, listening.

COW

I was interested in taking my thinking away from the neutral, which is actually a very private, hard-to-articulate thing to do.

An escaped raccoon loiters near the fence of its just-escaped enclosure.

RACCOON

I have a preemptive sadness for the future state of things.

A pony floats in outer space

PONY

This is no good.

An airplane has made an emergency landing on a large ice sheet. An evacuation slide protrudes from the rear door, upon which a small dog pees. The pee trickles down the slide.

SMALL DOG

When we finally get home, they'll have to crawl through their own front doors.

A Maltese sits on a sofa surrounded by potted ferns.

MALTESE

I have a memory of the baby gates on the kitchen sliding back. No gates on the stairs, no doors on the house. And then, nothing. Then, this.

*A record plays on a living room turntable. A cat sits on the window
ledge nearby
watching it spin.*

CAT

If you consult a psychic, I'll tell you what record I want on next.

The dog Faithful remembers meeting the dog Krishna.

KRISHNA

There is the word “crowding” and “crowd” and “crowded” and also
“crow,” and “grow,” and “groveling.”

FAITHFUL

And those are all words for dying?

KRISHNA

No.

Pony floating in space is on the phone to her daughter.

PONY

What are you going to do today?

Are you going to listen?

Are you going to be a good girl?

Are you ready for school?

Do you have your clothes on?

Do. You. Have. Your. Clothes on?

A dolphin in a really bad zoo tank.

DOLPHIN

We should never have signed that treaty.

Three flamingos walk by a 7-11.

FLAMINGO 2

You're right. We *are* ghosts.

They bust up laughing. At you.

A sheep dog looks at the bloody body of a dead African Grey parrot.

SHEEP DOG

I never catch anything. Hey, I'm as surprised as you are.

A goose has just finished attacking a 12-year-old boy by a village stream.

GOOSE

I can't pretend there isn't a surfeit of violence out there, but what am I supposed to do about it? I have a limited set of talents.

A very rich cat lies on a nice bed in a gorgeous seaside home in the evening, looking meditatively out the window at moths flying into a zapper.

RICH CAT

Questions for a self-interview:

–What is work?

–Why aren't you doing it?

A parrot is at a library reference counter, asking for book recommendations.

PARROT

Nothing catastrophic, please.

A beaver in a dam-den watches a television interview show, chewing on some sticks. A notable bison being interviewed by a grizzly bear.

GRIZZLY

Do you feel American?

BISON

I do. But I should qualify my answer. Because my generation—when I was in school, we didn't learn about *all* the animals. We learned working dogs and the MGM lion and the branches of government and the WPA but we didn't learn about the rail company mules or treaties or the food industry. And the old ones didn't tell us either. And so yes, *I* feel American, because I grew up that way. The kids now, they know more.

Beaver grunts in agreement.

Pony in space, still floating.

PONY

My job was cleaning toilets in the train station. But I don't think you can really say this is better.

Big Dog on a leash, being walked in a western canyon.

BIG DOG

I'd love to run my own crew, but I'm not ready to make the transition,
not yet.

A zoo bear reclines in a sunken, tiled enclosure containing a small rectangular wading pool with a single climbing tree at its center. It eats fish from a bucket.

BEAR

I just couldn't bring myself to compete anymore.

A rat, whose large belly and nipples suggest a recent brood, is lecturing some other rats in the back alley by some restaurant dumpsters.

PROPHETIC RAT

Pestilence means: *you get seriously itchy!* And when you're *seriously* itchy... there's no room for ideas. The condition has no *meaning*... other than, you're *itchy*. Anticipate its coming with all the intelligent darkness in the world! It won't *change* the fact that when it comes you can only face in one direction: toward *itch*.

A cat walks the interior courtyard of a nunnery, talking to the light that plays off the koi pond.

CAT

To be feral is to make the scene, equipped with your complete inheritance. To be bred for meat is sacrifice. And then there's the pet, involuntarily opted-out. The escaped pet begrudges this, but imperils herself, having failed to recognize another path: a devotion to the animal body alone. Sceneless.

She swipes swiftly at nothing, smiling at a somersaulting koi below.

A heron in a pond, near train tracks. An intercity train goes by. The heron waits it out.

HERON

I would never renounce modern life when it offers these kinds of spiritual comforts.

A donkey walks a millstone in a circle.

DONKEY

I always thought, by this time in my life, I would have started a school or something.

A toy panda, dressed as the Angel Gabriel in a nativity play, comes to the manger, picks up the baby Jesus, and faces the audience to speak.

TOY PANDA

A panda stands in a scatter of buildings and rocks, staring at the sky in some kind of panic or maybe desperate anger. The panda can't see this, but a bird has been circling the flat grey sky, considering plucking away some part of the panda's body, maybe the nose button or the shiny eye button—because it's a toy panda—which also means that it can't clean its muddy fur very well and will always need help washing. Next to Panda is a cave and in the cave there are other creatures—real creatures—like a juvenile gazelle also in a panic, totally lost on her way to some open, yellow place. The bird, who can see for miles in every direction, can actually see gazelle's yellow place, sees also poppies and watermines and elk, but, unaware of the gazelle, the bird merely goes on thinking about diving the panda. Then it does dive, and now Panda must go on with only one eye, into a new one-eyed world, a world remade or even in a sense reborn as this new condition: a nativity. Only loss heralds the arrival of the future, into which we only can arrive deformed.

Toy Panda (as Angel Gabriel) blows her horn.

A brown bear (a real one) roams a polarbirch forest. In the distance, the occasional sounds of saws.

BROWN BEAR

I guess it *is* true that I've made the major decisions of my life somewhat carelessly.

*The 7-11 Flamingos are hanging out by the payphone, kicking things.
A rat on a cell phone passes by, and a Flamingo addresses it with
mock concern, in a mock-Liverpool accent.*

FLAMINGO

You alright, love?

The rat flips the flamingos the finger, but with its tail, and carries on.

The rat from the last scene, on the cell phone.

RAT ON PHONE

What a bunch of assholes.

The beaver in a whitewashed burrow. A mole brings beaver some water, then begins to hold up different paint chips to the wall. Beaver eats bark chips from a nearby bag.

MOLE

Indigo

Beaver shakes head.

Violet

Beaver shakes head.

Light

Beaver shakes head.

Seafoam

Beaver shakes head.

Greeny

Beaver shakes head.

Petulant

Beaver shakes head.

Dark

Beaver shakes head.

Vandalize

Beaver shakes head.

Rosy

Beaver shakes head.

Tallow

Beaver shakes head.

That's all of them.

No response from the beaver.

No? No preference?

Greeny, then.

Beaver has a fit of coughing.

Tallow?

Beaver drinks water and nods.

Tallow.

The rat, still in the alleyway, is lecturing an even larger audience of rats, and has gone poetic. She is calm, but in a post-rapture state of privately-lucid-but-socially-obscure associations. The rat crowd listens with reverence.

PROPHETIC RAT

Oh, these people's houses! You could imagine someone inside working for hours at a table leg... or harboring a special love of ...opera...? But fear stalls you out, you're afraid and you stall out, trying to catch a fact in the making. I don't know what fact!

The toy panda now stands on top of the rocky overhang. It has only one eye and wears a patch. The bird is sleeping with the eye in its beak on a well-appointed but impromptu bed at the opening to the cave below, obviously sleeping a sleep of the stuffed—stuffed full of food. The panda has a little less fur than it had before, too.

TOY PANDA

I speak to myself in a voice that won't let itself be described or wager itself as anything but a future music, a nothing, a kind of evidence, a thing lost to the record, a thing made of grass feet recorded in a penmanship so miniature it insults the ordinary adult eye, but my hand helps my voice, my voice sees through my hand, through this language it was born into, having been born into language, despite being a toy panda I was born into this language, and my panda hand takes these words personally <<*this sound :: this sight :: so bright*>> the voice comes out of the desert night and falls toward sleep, toward my para-sleep, the sleep around the sleep.

*A snail creeps along the very edge of an asphalt walkway tufted with
dropped pine needles. She moves heavily, and sighs often.*

SNAIL

My father seemed so stoic, but in the end, he cried easily.

Cat Who Shows Films shows another film. This one is a dreamy montage sequence: interior of a heavy metal rock show in Rhode Island, the black purple radiance of the blacklight, the bouncer's breath fogging as he nods the people in. A blue car in the parking lot with its inside light left on. A waitress asleep on the break room couch of a restaurant. Car keys on a hook. Close-up on table: checkered table cloth, salt cellars and pepper grinders, then a hand sweeping crumbs into a napkin. Framed by the restaurant window, a train signal flashes. Follow the train as it moves through town clanging its way into grey empty blue dusk expanses and the hills beyond. A moon or a sliver of the moon is shining and someone points it out to a young child. Close on the child as she closes her eyes. Aerial shot pans down from the moon, overhead shot of radio towers on a hill. Pan beyond to a small town. The film cuts to black then scratched negative then starts up again, with a long, grainy shot of the town that very slowly fades to white.

The cat sifts through its yellowed notes, gathered over years of teaching this course.

CAT WHO SHOWS FILMS

“Extreme softness, with a lining of nastiness.”

“A vein of precious metal within a limestone rock.”

Her most narcoleptic work, I think it's fair to say.

The prophetic rat, still lecturing, is now reclining back on a chair made from trash bags, sweating. Her listeners have come closer. They are in it for the long haul.

PROPHETIC RAT

Now, rest in the capacity of your extraordinary bodies.

Someone hands rat a tiny rat pup and she puts it to one of her teats and closes her eyes. A few more rat pups crawl up and latch on.

A small house cat shows a large house cat an illustrated journal.

LARGE HOUSE CAT

Is it a narrative?

SMALL HOUSE CAT

I don't know yet.

A mouse on a cable that hangs down from a satellite dish, scaling the outside of an apartment building.

MOUSE

Sound of typing coming from every fucking window. They all just sit there and type type type. Sending stuff around on their invisible wave devices. Or getting their printed up typed books and reading what someone else typed. Then off they go to type about it. Type all day and think about how you can type better tomorrow.

A labradoodle on a city deck is talking to a visiting country dog.

LABRADOODLE

You have to be willing to be in action constantly. You have to be out there, get seen. Mark and remark. Keep the marks fresh. Hang your shingle and then keep pissing on the shingle—though simply pissing on shingle isn't enough! You need a scent worthy of admiration.

You begin with a water flush. Get everything out of you. Then start eating different things carefully selected from different sources. You have to improvise cuz you never know what you're going to be able to acquire. Mostly dropped or lost food. Not too much liquid. You want to keep the concentration, right? Then you have to think about what *takes* the scent. And what *holds* the scent. You need to think *materials*. And nothing that's going to be cleaned too quickly. There are a lot of factors. That's all I'm saying. We do a lot of thinking. We have our own scene.

*An old dog walks by a concrete slab marked with a pawprint
depression alongside one of a child-size palm.*

OLD DOG

My only legacy to the future.

An animal-control van drives through a tunnel that leads into an island city. The tunnel lights blink beautifully while all the animals (mostly foxes) stare out of their crates through the large back windows, singing. The tunnel seems to go on forever. The van moves slowly, constantly passed.

ANIMAL BAND (MOSTLY FOXES)

when the earthquake shook us,
we hoped that we would see
the humans trying to reach us
on the satellite feed

a snow so thick and constant
we cannot see
no one is left to read
the satellite feed

turn off the satellites
turn off the satellite stream
turn off the feed

when the famine took us
we hoped that we would see
the humans trying to soothe us
from the satellite feed

the air so dry and hazy
we cannot see
no one is left to read
the satellite feed

turn off the satellites

turn off the satellite stream

turn off the feed

*The raccoon is still loitering at the fence of its escaped enclosure,
regarding the others in captivity who run on wood-rope-tire play
structures to entertain some children.*

RACCOON

I spent seven years on the inside, but I wasn't ever able to act on that
sadness. Because, if sadness is what binds us to the earth? Then you
don't want to mess with it, do you?

An acolyte weevil sits at the feet of a guru termite, in dialogue. The termite tests the weevil.

TERMITE

From a distance, how is the city visible?

WEEVIL

What do you mean?

TERMITE

I mean, how does it appear?

WEEVIL

To what kind of eye?

TERMITE

A traveler's eye.

WEEVIL

It looks like a power plant running a slim overnight crew. Like it is responsible for the things we need to keep going. All out of proportion to everything else.

*

TERMITE

From a distance, how is the city visible?

WEEVIL

What do you mean?

TERMITE

I mean, what distinguishes it as a city from everything else that surrounds it?

WEEVIL

But nothing surrounds it. It is the only visible thing. But it is only visible from a distance.

TERMITE

What do you mean?

WEEVIL

That you can't ever see if you have arrived or not. You only saw it when you were far enough away to want to be there. To imagine its value.

*Bear in the tiled zoo garden chews on bamboo in a very specific way,
targeting different teeth.*

BEAR

I do keep my teeth sharp. Every bear needs a fallback plan.

(CUE MUSIC!)

A stage in a restaurant in the Bardo. A band plays in the low-key style of the great Guinean band, Bembeya Jazz National. All the musicians wear matching gold shirts. An endless riff. Faithful, the dog from the elevator makes a slow, slow, dancing-at-the-scale-of-private-sensation-but-available-to-be-seen dance onto the bandstand. Endless riff continues. Here comes Faithful: charismatic dog doing her regular act here.

FAITHFUL

Frances and Betty hadn't put their winter coats on yet all year, and it was almost the new year.

I usually talked shit to the cats, but it was just a game. A way of saying hi. I don't know what made it different that day.

I'm not a catter. Or a birder. But the demand, when it comes, comes *through* you. It isn't you. You don't really get a choice, if that makes sense.

I figured I'd be back in no time, give the cat a scare or have a run and talk to the other dogs in the neighborhood then go home. But then I guess I made a wrong turn.

Everyone was spooked because of the weather. All fall it had been warm, too warm. And you could sense that everyone was already marking the season in their memory, like they would look back on this year with some kind of awful sadness.

In the animal community, we weren't so freaked out. We expect a shorter life, for one.

A howl or a hooole drifts through the air, interrupting the music, then turns into a feedback loop in the amps, as Faithful holds the mic out trying to catch the sound.

Do you hear that?

Faithful breathes like some demand is coming through her. Musicians start up again.

Drama means humans acting on humans. What we need is a music that goes at the invisible, at the infinitesimal buzz. Allow that feeling of being trapped in the human world to come loose, ladies and animals, ferrymen, shape-shifting things. What we need is, the Feeling of Transition.

It turns out that was a way of introducing the band. The Feeling of Transition (lead guitar) takes a solo.

The Feeling of Resistance.

The Feeling of Resistance (rhythm guitar) takes a solo.

The Feeling of Strange Recognitions

The Feeling of Strange Recognitions (drums and percussion) takes a solo.

And how could we forget, the Restart Mechanism!

The Restart Mechanism (horns) takes a turn. The band starts back in together.

I was born into this language.

A giant panda lady takes a solo turn across the dance floor.

I made a wrong turn. I had been in that house, for years, since I'd been given to Frankie. Time has its privileges if you're not a flight risk. Usually they walked with me. I rarely went out alone. But sometimes, some times... Boredom is the dream bird that calls the dog. Who called the dog out?

A burst of music.

So when I saw a bridge I turned, thinking the park would be there. But it must have been a different bridge. There's more than one bridge, it turns out.

I turned toward the wrong bridge, and I became lost.
But I wasn't too worried. Not yet.

Faithful dances the private-sensation-scaled dance of being lost but not too worried.

I once read a story about non-non-belonging.
Go soft. Go soft in-into that other other.

My name is Faithful. An emotional fantasy of the human kind. Vision of a greeny place free of obstructions. Roll back the carpets. Greet

your neighbors. We present ourselves to each other in the midst of our transfiguration.

More dancing. More music. Everyone is expected to greet their neighbors.

Have you ever thought that if you just kept walking, you'd find your way home? Then as you walked you thought, some part of the back of your brain begin to think, maybe that house isn't my home.

Did I escape or am I lost?

That's when I started to think, [*verging on song*] *non-non-belonging. Not not belonging.*

Walked all day, walked all night.

Every bridge I saw, I pointed myself at it.

Bridge over road, bridge over water.

Bridge over bridge. So many bridges.

I eat garbage.

I find some cardboard to lie on.

Piss in the street like a faithful dog, then piss on a rose when no one is looking. Just keep walking.

I find a park lined by two story buildings and the perfect modesty fills me with longing. Now that I'm getting tuned to the *undomesticated* mood, these little houses overwhelm me with feeling. They seem so far away from my fact in the making. Shared driveway where you can meet the neighborhood cats. Trees to piss on every ten feet. It's a good life, for as long as you manage to stick around, which could be

shorter than you expect. They die all the time. They're all so surprised. But they die all the time.

Light is thinning.

Light is dimming.

Lie in the park watch the planes go over.

Bellies so low they look like pelicans.

Like you could tickle them.

Dance break.

But now it is night. I have no idea where I am. Or where Frankie is. Where the house I am beginning to feel might not be my house is. Cannot find the bridge or the park. Have not eaten much. Even the airplanes have stopped. And I'm tired of walking.

Faithful and the Panda dance. It's a very loving dance.

The Feeling of Strange Recognitions takes a solo.

I'm being too loud and someone barks on the other side of the window. Don't meet its eyes!

But look: a dog house. I wait till the house lamps go out, then in I go, soft, full of caution. I am inside the dog house but it reeks of dog so I shred the foam bed till I can find a place of it that hasn't yet been fur-oiled. I'm starving. Jesus I hadn't thought about it but I'm starving. And I don't know where I am, or even if I'm lost? I think—I must be lost. Then the sound of some raccoons turns me on to something good: there is kibble outside in a big tin can with a tight lid that they're doing all sorts of grunting to displace. Patience, Faithful, patience. I

wait them out, know better than to interfere with those nasty animals. Almost dawn when I get to the bits they've dropped. Wish I could climb. But I can't. Still, a little food, a little sleep. And the swallowing roar of the morning's first airplane wakes me. Door opening, scam fast. Little yard, oh temporary paradise. Out before the big dog comes.

*Little yard, little house,
little bit of food, little paradise,
get out before the big dog comes.*

I'm beginning to feel kind of... loose. Kind of like I'm... seeing things.

A long musical dance break, a number. Something jagged and modernist with a violent climax, ends with a dance of regret-also-no-regret.

Feet lowered down in the link all the troubles of the day. The link of the trouble of the day. Feet locked down in the day-bright light. Tucked into pink creases, still feet are lowered in the pink, soft in layers of color. Of red colored nothing left of the day. The day blinks out. The color is everything or is all I recall, because I have to leave.

Faithful blinks out and blinks back in.

The problem begins when you want to communicate.

Having a crisis is something I've not been able to do for years.

How brave the little dog is.

Dance break.

What's that? A Truck? Duck!

An enormous crashing sound. Everything goes slow motion.

Faithful does a privately-scaled what-just-happened-is-an-open-question-dance with wobbly head.

Down on Northern Boulevard in the parking lot of the White Castle is where I meet Trini, a wild dog with a scratched-up face.

She's a wreck because something has just fallen off the dumpster like part of the roof has fallen off the thing and it hit her friend who is under it and moaning. But the thing is heavy, too heavy for us. I offer to help and we do manage to move it an inch but there's no way we're going to be able to lift it. By this time there's no more noise coming from under the sheet. I call over to a nearby rat. Hey: go under there will you, and check if that dog is still breathing. *Fuckh offh* he says and starts to walk away but I know my manners still so I say nicely, *please, friend?* Check on that animal dying under there? One of all of us. *Fwhhuckhoff* he says again, but goes under. Comes back in a minute shaking his head. So it looks like I could be Trini's new friend but she's too messed up to suggest it. She just sits next to this big piece of metal and starts howling. Hey Trini, I say, worse things can happen than a quick way out. I nibble on her cheeks a little, clean her up, wait it out.

At a certain point I remove my tag.

I want to be the custodian of all our sadness.

Euphorically not belonging, except to Trini.

Faithful does the dance of euphoric not belonging with The Feeling of Resistance standing in for Trini.

Trini and I, in a park, still the wrong park, when the van comes round.
No collar.

I could be home, alone, with everything I remember.

Frances, Frankie.

Have you put on your winter coat?

Are you out looking for me?

If I close my eyes I can see it: paper. My face on a paper. Taped on a pole. On the stairs of the train station. Is that how my name is written? R-E-W-A-R-D.? Has she put them out for me?

Trini shoves me into a tunnel, a drainage pipe cutting the hill. There's at least twenty others, hiding out while the van lights sweep blue—blue—blue—

I wonder, is the picture just me or me and Frankie.

Honestly I am scared, but I am something else too.

I leave the tunnel later, to piss. Something blurs by into the trees. Like a deer with a human part. Like a human walking a deer but in only one body. Can hear it in the thick of trees just past where I am, crunching. Awful sound. Piss and skulk back in. Find Trini. She says I'm hallucinating. Says it happens to all the dogs. Curl up. What I wouldn't give for my dog coat right now. My dog bed right now. For my face on a poster. For my collar back. Feels like I've only just closed

my eyes but Trini is pulling on me to wake up. Come on she says, we have to go. I'm so tired I stretch through my spine. Come on come one come on says Trini but my legs are lead and only when a hand a human hand comes into the tunnel and gets my leg do I whip around sprung into life and bite it but its got a big canvas glove on tastes terrible as it drags me out of there. Because my body, did I tell you? My body is so small and light, getting lighter, getting looser. Drags my light small body out of there. Whoo and I'm upside down then right side up then in a cage.

In a cage.

In a van.

A human face looking at me, talking to the driver. *Doesn't look wild.*

There's another dog in here too.

I see this little dog and dog sees me. She says faithful, O faithful dog. And I say *how do you know my name?* and she says, *is that your name then, faithful dog?*

And vanishes from her cage. Is not there at all. And reappears. And vanishes. Small wind blowing on my face she whispers her refrain as she comes and goes. O faithful, oh faithful dog?

I fall asleep and in my dream I follow her for blocks. She leads me to a park. It must be early Monday because there are huge trashbags, stuffed with overflow of weekend picnics. The raccoons have already cleared half of them out, but I find a hole and go in. Plenty of food. Beans, chicken bones, bread. I gorge a little and lie down. Other dogs play near by. They've got owners. Fuck them. So I charge them. Every one. I can't explain what's happening to me.

Blackout rage. Then light, and I see it. Then I see it.

A bridge. *The* bridge. I think I'm awake now because I see the bridge from the window of the van. I see the bridge I have been looking for, the one near my house, the one just past the park, *my* park, where I go with Frankie. And flapping from the poles near the bridge I see it. Like a flag. My face and the word *L-O-S-T*. So I am.

The dog comes into my cage. I don't know how she does this but there she is. She chews my cheeks a little. Licks the crust from my eye. There is the word "crowding" and "crowd" and "crowded" and also "crow," and "grow," and "groveling." She says. And those are all words for dying? I say. And she says, no. No, those are not words for dying. Those are words for transfiguration. For the first time I realize how beautiful the music in the van is. And as we drive, all I want to do is listen.

What's your name?

I ask the dog.

She just chews my cheek and laughs.

Listen.

She says.

I want to be the custodian of all our sadness.

I tell her.

Everything we can become.

The restart mechanism plays a long, elegiac but angular interlude. No one dances. Everyone just breathes slowly, watching the light change color. The interlude becomes dissonant, then triumphant, then exultant, then ecstatic.

An elevator lowers from the flies and Faithful goes to it. The elevator bell rings and the doors open. It is a luxury elevator with potted plants and a Persian rug and an armchair. Faithful climbs up into the arm chair and waves goodbye to everyone, to herself even. Then her music plays.

FAITHFUL (*calm, purposeful, embracing the fact*)

It's my exit music.

The elevator descends and descends and descends.

The exit music keeps playing.

The restaurant slowly fading.

Voices on separate audio track cut across:

If you were a lost dog, what you would want?

Nothing!

Not even food?

Nothing!

Do you think you would want a nice place to lie down?

Nothing!

What is enough action?

No!

What is enough heat?

No!

Do you want to come home?

I do not!

A tortoise with beautiful style comes through the door of a little model house inside a cavernous, semi-furnished terrarium, to encounter a salamander in traveling clothes.

TORTOISE

Are you new here? I know everybody and I haven't seen you before. I moved in when my children were young! Just after they installed this. You see this? It's an original *Otis* door. It's painted over but underneath it's brass. This place used to be full of features. Spanish Renaissance. Gold mirrors. There was a fountain, and a beautiful *octoggonal* bathing pool. Big ferns everywhere. But! Every piece, one by one, *pill*-fered.

A student spider sits at the feet of a teacher grasshopper, in dialogue. A frog looks on, unseen.

SPIDER

How does the ferry go across the water?

GRASSHOPPER

It moves by dredging.

SPIDER

How will you know that it's approaching the slip?

GRASSHOPPER

First you hear the horn on the water. Then you get a fear ache.

SPIDER

Does the ache go away when you board?

GRASSHOPPER

Probably not.

SPIDER

How do you know if you've boarded the right ferry?

GRASSHOPPER

But it doesn't travel at all. Only holds you up while the earth turns under it.

SPIDER

What is a ferry?

GRASSHOPPER

A boat on which you become the fare.

The unseen frog:

FROG

I can't tell if this address is private or public.

I can't tell if the hungry ghosts are really hungry.

Or if it's I who am becoming hungry, on their behalf.

A cow eats chamomile next to another cow in a northern pasture.

COW

Remember when your eyes stopped working? How scary that was?

OTHER COW

It still goes a little dark when I laugh a lot.

At a boxing gym. A fox is training an exhausted, lean coyote, who is sparring with a badger. Between rounds, fox pours water into the coyote's mouth. A raccoon dog and another coyote look on.

FOX

Look, if you want to do more than look alive, you need to invite in the darkness of the form.

The bell rings and they stand back up.

RACCOON DOG AT THE GYM

Work!

OTHER COYOTE IN THE GYM

Dig!

A tree squirrel moves from window to window along the fire escape of a six-story apartment building, showing the various apartments to a visiting flying squirrel who is glammed up for the occasion in a Goth sort of way. A dish of seeds has been placed on a window ledge; an older woman looks on discretely from inside.

TREE SQUIRREL

She calls me Sir Henry. They need to put their own stamp on you and then you're good. Once they name you: food forever.

It's late night at the restaurant in Bardo. The customers have gone home. The sits at the bar sipping cocktails. Faithful, at a table with the Lady Panda, hums sort of romantically while the Panda deliberately and also kind of romantically tries to clarify her point.

PANDA

// I'm not talking about the kind of lavish, extravagant spectacle that earns itself. I'm talking about a worn-down creature coming my way in pink. Carrying her leopard coat as if it's so easy, when it's so heavy. As if she's carrying something I will fail to diagnose.

FAITHFUL *(simultaneously singing)*

ghost medics come

ghost medics

ghost medics come

ghost medics

come patch up

my ghost parts

so they will cohere

I intend to recognize

my visions when they appear

An internet cat video porn production warehouse. Cubicle after cubicle of mock kitchen and living room sets, each with its own webcam. Light operators carry simulated suns in full green bodysuits as apartment cats proceed through a simulated, stop-motion day. A cat in a body brace limps laboriously into a cubicle decorated as a preteen bedroom, helped onto the bed by PA's. She focuses intensely on a small keyboard she plays with her paws. Cat PA's quiet the warehouse. The webcam is switched on and the crippled cat performs the entirety of an instrumental-and-mewing cover of Christina Aguilera's "Beautiful." Most of the cats cry a little. A light operator looks on, next to an intern cat.

LIGHT OPERATOR CAT

She gets the most traffic. By far.

A pigeon is perched on the top of an ornamental fountain in a Western college campus. The sun is glorious.

PIGEON

A plump man runs out of a cafeteria and into a fountain raving about how he has an idea of repurposing it, productively misusing its power. His manner, at first, is radiant, but his courage vanishes as he becomes colder and wetter. So I shit on his head and that clears him out. There is only one use for a fountain.

In a municipal animal facility. A scratched up female cat, six years old but very worn. She has a faint cough.

SHELTER CAT

I should have tried to get inside earlier. Get a family. A human one. I've got a couple of kids out there but who knows what happened to them. I saw one of them get coaxed into a window by some human semigrowns in their first apartment. Coaxed it in with milk after they heard me yelling at the other one for scratching it up.

You do want the best for your kids but they could have taken the rest of us in too, couldn't they? Not to resent my kid's happiness or anything but come on. You just choose one? And right where we live, in front of the rest?

The one they got is a weird one. A little perverse. Got a meanness right where you think she'd be most happy—a real scratcher, it comes out of nowhere.

They think they're doing a kindness, but they expect your total affections in exchange and I'm not sure my kid was really up for that part of the trade. Meanwhile, 35,000 animals in here, a lot of us willing to do it. We come in healthy for the most part. Sick by day three, for the most. Then—

So it's either join the work crew, escape, or say your cat words to the cat sky and go down easy.

A sculptor hedgehog in her studio, regarding one of her works.

HEDGEHOG

:: ::: I heard a song: :: ::: interrupting my sleep: :: ::: irradiating my
dreams ::

Bear at the zoo, eating fish from the bucket.

BEAR

It's like—this boom and bust cycle of optimism and pessimism. You stay around because there is a basic respect for sticking it out and because every now and then you get somewhere. Another round of attempts. You compete and almost win then compete again and still don't win. Makes you feel like a chump. The problem isn't that you're not getting a chance to be seen, it's just that you're not quite good enough. Oh but I've got so much to give! you say. Or maybe it's that you just want to be given so much.

I've heard from other bears that they do like my style. But not enough of them are really passionate. About me. I mean, that's weird anyway. Being passionate about someone's style. But you do enjoy being seen, right? Allowing yourself to be seen?

Beaver, who is listening, grunts in agreement.

Anyway one day I was just like, *that's it. I'm done.* Like I lost the fantasy you need to surround yourself with if you want to keep yourself in the running. So I asked myself, what else can I do? They've got open entry days here twice a year. They're pretty strict about who gets in. And you have to follow the rules: be cooperative, be demonstrative, be pretty. I do have a little too much time to think. But there are worse things to complain about.

*A dead snail lies at the bottom of a hotel pool. Its ghost hovers above.
Two girls and their father are attempting to get the snail from the
bottom.*

OLDER GIRL

Let's get it with her goggles.

YOUNGER GIRL

I want to touch it.

FATHER

You definitely don't want snail poop on your goggles.

Younger girl dives, pokes it, then rushes to the surface.

YOUNGER GIRL

Bubbles came out of it it was creepy!

SNAIL GHOST (*murmuring, a soothing mantra*)

Eventually they'll throw me in those bushes. Eventually they'll throw
me in those bushes. Eventually, they'll throw me in those bushes.

*Older girl has meanwhile gotten the snail out of the pool using her
father's coffee cup sleeve. A fearsome, semi-divine being is now
floating by the snail too.*

OLDER GIRL

It's moving!

SNAIL GHOST

Get it over with.

YOUNGER GIRL

Maybe it's a grandpa snail. It's definitely a snail. It's humongous. It's a humongous snail. It's gross. Want me to throw it back in? You are *dirty*, snail!

SNAIL GHOST (*to the semi-divine being*)

I *am* dead, right?

Am I *all the way* dead?

A meadow. Kind of psychedelic except it's real. You are staring at this meadow and at three beat up wild horses staring back at you.

TRIO OF BEAT-UP WILD HORSES (*soft chant*)

We want to sleep in a heap forever.

We want new relations to everything.

We want to turn ourselves over.

We want to gorge a little and lie down.

Horsefly at the eye:

HORSEFLY

Take it as a kind of beckoning:

something new raising up

within the body of the old.

A pig mother, being suckled.

PIG MOTHER

Nothing to see here. Just dumb life sustaining itself.

At a beachside B&B. A statuary lamb, in a posture of adoration suggesting its provenance as part of an array surrounding St. Francis, speaks to a human breakfaster, who chews meditatively on marmalade toast and nods occasionally to signal that he is listening.

STATUARY LAMB

After the church closed, I was sold at auction. I assumed I would go to another Franciscan church but instead I became a soothing, ambient object in this restaurant home by the sea. Two months until dying is when people finally take the trouble to come here. When the difficulty of walking the hill is already a difficulty. Still, the remaining weeks should be bathed in light and the hill is in light. They ask, what kind of tree is that? They ask, is this the cove from the movie? Protection from the trouble of the day.

Human and statuary lamb make eye contact.

As long as I don't end up with the kitsch on the bathroom cabinet, I can accept it. Soften the light. Low to slow. Add an "s". Add a stung, sleeping human in folded blankets. Pink to red. Quarter by quarter.

Human stops eating. Stares at his half-eaten toast. Sunlight strikes the marmalade jar in a manifestation of divine presence. Bathes his hand in orange light, every possible shade and gradation of orange.

Statuary Lamb, meanwhile, murmurs the names of trees: juniper, locust, eucalyptus, ash, cypress, sequoia, quaking aspen...

On a palliative care ward in a recently-built hospital. A hospice cat in a hospice therapy vest is being interviewed by a film crew in the staff room. Nurses occasionally pour themselves coffee in the background.

HOSPICE CAT

I have a special shampoo that depresses my dander output. They wash and comb me a lot. No claws. Of course. I can control it but the families tend to prefer it is entirely ruled out. Usually I start next to them. Do the long lean. Let it get heavier. If the person is receptive, I climb onto their belly. If they've had cats before, then all the way to their heads. At home, humans complain when you sleep on their head like a holy crown of cat, but here, where they're making their last contact with the touch of the world, it has a different meaning. Rest on the ribs next, then slowly begin the kneading. Right paw, left paw. There's a technique where you try to make the exchange of weight completely even. So it's always the same pressure just in different distributions. Lots of purring then. Then I go down to the feet and press my head against the arch of the foot. I learned that from a cranio-sacral therapist who works the ward. Then a long period of rest. Later I might sit in the window, pretend to try to catch whatever's outside. Windsock, fly, raindrop, plastic bag swept up in the wind between the buildings. They think that's funny. Then, when the family's not there, I go sit on their chests and look right into their eyes. I don't say anything. I just let them see me seeing them seeing me. They need to feel seen, before they're ready to go.

A brightly colored habitat. A mother hamster speaks with a kid hamster, putting it to bed in a little rocket-ship-themed kid hamster nook.

MOTHER HAMSTER

If you were a lost dog, where would you go?

KID HAMSTER

I don't know.

MOTHER HAMSTER

What would you want?

KID HAMSTER

Nothing.

MOTHER HAMSTER

Not even food?

KID HAMSTER

Nothing!

Faithful the dog floats over the world. She's dead.

FAITHFUL

Words are things you meditate with.

You turn them over, see from all angles.

They call that higher-order thinking.

Here's a word: *stay*.

Faithful, *stay*.

Stay means a circle, drawn in our little home by our little dog.

A fence to hold back the incoming, the onrushing, the unknowable.

Stay the enervation, the vacancy, the tedium. The escalation, the occupation, the rush.

Turn my grammar over, find its secret action.

Keep your feet on orange the whole way down.

Create a space for each thought and wholly imagine it.

Crack the window.

The door.

Call the dog out.

Go.

Orchestral music, vaguely like an orchestra warming up. The beaver appears, floating above Faithful, and over you too, your city, your world. She carries her radio, which is also a projector, projecting stars across the dome of the sky. There is a minute of an overture, something grand, weird, appalling, yet appealing, and then the Beaver signals the orchestra to stop.

BEAVER

...

...

...

My message to you is

...

(Beaver somersaults)

...

: (smiling deeply)

...

... :: I laugh at your plans.

Music from out of nowhere crescendos. Giant Lady Panda chirp-howls ecstatically from out of nowhere. The beaver is nowhere. Faithful is nowhere. Only the radio floats, suspended, projecting stars upon the blackened sky. There is a fox that is you in the moon that is you looking right at you who is you but who or what are you now anyway?

SONG AS A CALL TO END THE PLAY

Ghost medics

come patch up my ghost parts

come patch up my ghost parts

so they will cohere

I intend

to recognize

the visions

when they appear

GHOST PART

an offering

*

Whom do I address?

There was a vague but coherent persistence; could I speak, to give it a body? What sentence would render it? What words would it need? Would it appear if I could drape it across the small set of words I've meditated on for years? Words that appeared flat at first but slowly became dimensional, resonant, adorned with counter-meanings.

Once I start to tune in to the overtones of a word, I seem to find its action anywhere my vision pauses. As if the secret I was looking for was not about insight but about scale, about iteration. The more a thing recurs, the more true it feels, creating a feeling of being at home in the drifting world. That feeling might be all I need. Plus a hole to let in the wild north wind.

Maybe it's not that an idea has more or less truth value as a key into things, but that the act of turning the same thought over for so many years becomes an almost restful activity; the intimacy of the idea is restorative, as if it even carries a kind of nutrition; its familiarity defuses my anxiety and allows me instead to feed upon its reassuring appearances. Instead of my questions, I see evidence of a friendly pattern, and draw the pattern closer to see it more. I am hungry to see it, so in my eyes it takes the world's shape; it yarn-bombs the scaffolds and I tuck up under the blanket feeling that I understand.

I've learned to request assignments from those resting places, a reversal whereby I take a settled fact and spin it backwards into a prompt, a dare, and so the assignment, tied up from the start with a wrong direction, the direction not of making but of unmaking, has the freedom necessary to the process of creating things. Compose a selective vacuum; sculpt a proportion of world rushing back at you around an exact band of reticent light. Take the print of something nevermore to be seen.

I only answer my assignments in simple syllables, with a perseverance I think of as oxen. “An Ox of Her Own Invention,” I think it should read, if I ever print a business card. “Find me if you can,” it would say, in lieu of contact information.

Every figure to which you might return your thinking makes its own offering, its own mixture of the degrees to which it affords rest, affords energy. Lay your head in its lap.

If we were attempting a devotional path, we could say to ourselves: keep the restlessness of the world before your eyes at all times. Name everything over every day, by tiny drift, syllabic distortion, sudden swap. Recognize the visions that secure our balance as only visions, pictures formed at our angle of sight: negative prints, momentary stays whose drift is evidence of “an annihilation we are only obscurely aware of.” I copied those words down but forgot to record the citation. I’m not sure who wrote them, but probably it was Stanley Cavell.

I am writing this with words I left in notebooks, which happily I thought to stockpile for myself, these remainders a provision, a nourishment, a tuft of solid grass in a swamp I am traversing backward.

Presence to such a task calls for a kind of intention (devotional, oxen, yet floating) that my acquiescence to our economy threatens. (It was inevitable. I needed to get paid.) Now that I am hard-up for time, I am capable of working only in the form of the fragment, and even so I suspect that my ability to work is only afforded by a residual momentum of my years of freeforming, a momentum that compels me to write and to make because I take it personally, identify myself with its motor, with a privacy sufficient to make it impervious to considerations of the scene moving ever on away from me, to hold at bay the possibility of not bothering at all, in many ways the more obvious response. Habit as a stay.

Sentence (obscure): a way or path of thinking.

Beside what I manage to materialize, I am present to virtual, unmaterialized entities that

petition my every fresh page to offer itself as the scene of their enclathing. Not just aspirations to create, they have their own coherence as ghost parts in the score, or underscore, I hear. They leave their parts everywhere. Beckon, tease, recur: an “irresistible dictation” taken year after year.

I tend to remember certain scenes in my life, noncontiguous with the map of my own present world, transmuted to color, as if I could collect them in the way one gathers rocks or shells. My opera of colors would be a gift offering to my son that would stand in for his inheritance: here is everything I know about how to feel at home in a room, to feel embraced by a room, well-served by a room, graced by a room. To feel at home in a street, in a mood, but also in homelessness, in a new home.

I found out that the color of a place has to do with the proportion of matter to stillness to gliding action, of resting in a feeling to the sweet distance of detachment. To be the life passing the scene by; you say (as if you are the scene speaking about the you that is the watcher) *there goes life, passing me by again*. Experience is evanescent but I can hold a color in my mind for years. Spectrum as mnemonic as container for what waits underneath my attention, waiting to come up from under: *souvenir, souviens*, lost matter, sudden itness, weather pressure in my lungs, warm rain on asphalt summer 1984.

What needs repair? What needs feeding? Daylight falls on a yellow box of cereal while through exact rectangles I see the green trees waving. Sparkling light is bounced on the wall by the metal sink where a large bug is dying; having lost one of its legs, it is helpless. Unwilling to resume cleaning, I left it, came to sit here, the accusing, communing distance between it in the sink and me on the couch like the space between notes in the last quartet Shostakovich wrote, his fifteenth, a webbing over emptiness, a sober-ecstatic anticipation, a miracle of sound I heard for the first time one morning in 1999 when I happened to turn on the radio just as it had begun. The light in that morning room was a pale brown yellow slowly silvered by the sound. In this room, the yellow boxed above this bug’s dying body yellows at me almost nutritionally, but only in the context of this full field. I take the bug outside and leave it there, I guess to be eaten, drained of life.

Come to a field of your own invention. If you can't learn how to do that then you can't learn anything.

Imagine we could all be so bold as to write in the key of founding. Keywords and keyphrases seek their echoes and mutations and affirmations in the world. Ghost keys on ghost keyboards. Play them and the room lights up. Then pause; there are other scales and other lights in the space you occupy. Their blending, while severe, is our imperative.

Some sentences, accents, argots, act as intensifiers while some are just vehicles to ventriloquize bygone intensities. But ventriloquism can also be a way of preparing to yield: to the monstrous, the abundant, or the new. Where is the hinge between iteration and proliferation, and why can't we ever see it? "I don't know how, but somehow I escaped." The joint might be a crossfade, a zone of indistinction, an amorous draw joining iteration with annihilation, creation with destruction, clearing a field for something severe, something bracing. This is not a way to rest, or is it? Rest, the way you can rest on a powerful air stream, if you are, say, a hawk above a canyon, plunging and recovering.

Slower. I am becoming willing to dismantle my obedience to dense combination, allowing myself to separate egg from yolk. To give elements room to become more elemental, while still asking them to hold precise distances, their quivery proportion. I am attempting to slow the traffic, to make a piazza, several piazzas, to take part in the drapery and the draping. But still, I want to float in the feeling. Lay your head in a lap to find no lap there, only the oceanic, in which you are already tumbling. (That old chestnut.) (My lifelong blazon.)

It takes some heavy lifting, and some artifice, some devising, to get a thing moving, but once it does move, it has its own appetite. Morton Feldman describes this little motor as an anxiety belonging not to the artist but to the art. A restlessness propelling the thing forward on its own behalf.

I guess I was thinking of a kind of movement like an airplane being pulled forward by the relative vacuum of pressure in the air above its wing. The vehicle conditions the proportion of

emptiness to pressure; the real forces exist outside us; we put ourselves in their way; the vehicle is the fact, the manmade; our making is vehicular; it contains action we have not made, pulls our figures forward into the empty space. And I? I am a vacuum repairman, tuning the instrument that conditions the shape of an open space into which you might be pulled. It's a noble trade, if you think of it this way.

*

In a workshop we made glossaries of our dancing compatriots whose bodies our bodies knew intimately enough we could ghost them, not in imitation but in a form of possession; but also—because of this intimacy—an enactment of a patterning already in our possession, something already gifted by each to the other during long hours of collaboration. I wrote a glossary for a compatriot of a longago dance palace that bore all the marks (retreat, exile, drift, posse, restart) I have repeated since then. Here are my words for TG: *coastliner*, *microdestroyer*, *swivelpoints* (alternately *swivelpants*). One of several bodies I can ventriloquize. So we host each other, ghost host each other.

Oh how I am tied to the key of the twentieth century, I saw, one day. Unabashed in front of the young people all of them steeped in the questions of the next. I wanted to show you the light of my childhood, so I attempted to offer it to you in the form of a colored rock in the form of a song in the form of a room I had fabricated as a kind of hollow a tunnel a lap in which to lie. I wanted to create an exquisite object and for us to convene at its unveiling. It is true I am tied to the century of my birth, but oh how much energy my century does go on giving. Coastlining, microdestroying. But can that energy be reconciled with with our new century's convulsions?

Eventually, in a fit of fatigue, I let myself go old, round, soft, slow, and now I am forever attempting to speed up again, to regain my density and my violence, my self-appointed allowance of the vigor that is "its own evidence." I want my ox diving air currents, an oxhawk diving the canyon.

*

Your task is to let me hold the edges, to draw the line around you, a space for emptying, and you, without content or comment, without composition or generation, empty your sense of yourself or your actions as carrying any kind of visibility or currency. Perform the exercise in ceaseless motion. You do the emptying and I do the containing. Eventually we see there's no difference between our tasks. (Study of Nothing No. 5)

*

I am capable of writing these paragraphs at all because I came to a place of exceptional spaciousness and company, with people willing to entertain my son, quiet to escape into, have come well away from the new grind of my totally normal life as a totally normal person with a totally normal job and all the attendant feelings of lateness, depletion, deferral, and oh the weekend, the weekend. Seek the thing that affords the possibilities that threaten to drain away.

Now on the other end of a heat nap, light softens on the yellow cereal box, leaving a humming bluegreyness over its inked-in brightness, there near the sink with its bouncing light, its dying insect, near the rectangle that still shows the now still trees. The dog needs feeding and stares me down. She has been near for so many of these efforts, present to this devotion, to its fading and struggle at reinstatement. Maybe she is the one on whose behalf the ox I am agitates onward, in indirectness, in devotion. Why pledge to all creatures when I could be hers alone, finally offering a worthwhile trade for her years of captivity as my charge, my dear friend, my pet.

I, her container, and she, mine.

I sat on the toilet, why not, reading what I had written so far, and a pulsing caught my eye. Down on the floor is an overturned cricket I thought was dead already, its legs pulsing out. Is it the electrical throes of death or is something small devouring it, siphoning it, somehow triggering this response from the last reserves of life in the thing? *Cakunk—Cacunk—Cacunk—* go its legs, just the hind two: a final signal along an upward diagonal.

The question of reserves seems pertinent. To the cricket but also to the question of what a tunnel is, and what it means to spend time in these elaborate fabrications and performances, whether or not the impulse to make can survive the loss of the scene, the community. I have such an old ambivalence toward the economy this scene encompasses, not toward its failures but more its triumphs. Waiting for the kid to grow up, sure, but wasn't I always quitting? Wasn't I always leaving the field? Sidestep. Exile. Expat. Let me be a beginner. And yet I am not. I make my life this way, if not my living. Low-rent plants in front of my building regenerate each spring. Ally myself with the hardy. Patience and patience. Tunnel, as variation on tortoise against hare. Modest, incremental continuance. What victory awaits? What refuge?

And without the enclosure of a scene, its dates assigned for surfacing, its inbuilt group attention, does the thing made stand a chance of appearing at all? How could it appear if nothing promises to contain it? Would it be more useful to understand our convenings not as positionings within a precarious economy but as instrumental, necessary locations of the call, a usefully real place to which I return to recite my response?

The dog asks me, when will we go for another walk? Soon, I say, soon. Soon.

*

Multiply, proliferate, circumscribe a clearing, ring bells, deposit watermarks visible only at certain angles, constellate images around open fields. In that space, in the best conditions, something new coils up but then, like an overturned drowned body, pulls immediately back down. Terrible heaviness, something old pulls us under, a sign we are getting somewhere. Then something old, seeing itself in reflection from below, seeing light-footed analogy, seeing upside-down trees on the surface of its underground pond, seeing shape-shifting clouds, itself shifting and tumbling, says: *this way out*. ("A hole in the bottom of the world." "A new name for an old way of thinking.")

I found this note in my notebook but I don't recall what I meant by it:

Relative stability,

Swept away ——— sweetness

I must have been ventriloquizing a Greek epithet. *O life*, it would have begun.

*

I am after a meaning made of all feeling. A non-clarified depth experience ringed by haloes of images that act as amulets, tokens of recall. There is pleasure, of course, delight. But I find as I age that I want to make feeling machines less light and more invasive than the word “pleasure” allows: a standing wave, a wall of feeling. *An annihilation we are only obscurely aware* of until, finding ourselves unmade, we must perform it in reverse. Like buttoning a shirt from the bottom up.

Can understanding grow by its edges? What are its edges? What food do they want? My program has been to vitalize, care for, tend to the sensitivities that amplify my and your capacity to feel, to receive, to incorporate. Stretch the center, re-center, multiply the center. “Act as if there is no use in a center.” Leave the car door open. Leave each approach open on at least one side, to much wild faith—cruelty even, in the sense of the force of sheer life, dumb life, agitating life, life meant to be visible, enjoyable; it culminates without ever being distilled. I am thinking of my friend, a destroyer who blesses us, the old bleeding ear.

Could performing be an act of turning inwards? Would that be privacy or secrecy or failure, breach of contract? Could my turning imply an invitation to follow or could you only infer a request to stay put? If I turn away, not in failure, but as an act of privacy, what do I invite, in my place, into the room I share with an audience? A vacuum into which they might be pulled? I think of my son crying his way down our street, wanting to go to the house of a friend who had turned away abruptly. We’re not invited right now, is all I could tell him. But privacy could be imagined as a gift of the performer to the audience, or at the least a relief. A relaxation of the mandate to disclose myself as an object of your attention, relaxing on your behalf your consent to the controlled delineation of your focus. Acting instead as a simple primer of the space, I turn away from our relationship. We remain in company, but without protocols. A feeling of company

persists, even as we turn away, turn our faces toward small solitudes.

But turning turns, too. It is a temporary blind. My face seeks yours again, always does.

*

I am in communication with the dead, the dormant in me. The to-be-abandoned.

At the same time, I am in communication with the future possible, sending signals on behalf of the unrealized thing, that spectral agitator.

And so I continue my lifelong effort to patch up my ghost parts. My secret twin. I patch them up for this world. To be “beside myself in a sane sense.” My ghost offers me a container, contains me in this besideness, offers me a vehicle or mask in which to roam the world. It gives me a solitude apart from everything else that is me, the beloved circle drawn around my beloved home, outside my citizenship even. My ghost gives me my own necessary outside, lets me pass my own life by.

Ghost: you call me, but I only catch your face in fragments. Your intimate, familiar presence calls on me to materialize you. When I am cooking, when I am walking the dog, when I am catching a furrow in the otherwise constant drawing-off of my attention, my love and its demands, its energy and its enervation, before the furrow turns to drain, you hover nearby, you speak to me alone, because you know that I, ox-hearted, will listen. You say, *give me one sentence :: enform me as a riddle with a body :: inch me into being :: I will not be a fragment but a full circumference :: a momentary perfection :: but then wreck me :: scatter me :: uncollect me :: decontrol me :: sing your deliquescing song :: :: :: Allow me to remain, Your Ghost.*

So it insists, but on whose behalf?

AFTERWORD

Privacy, privacy, privacy. It's been all I have chanting, as if a private space was the only venue in which I could address myself to surviving the accretions of dailiness, the conditions of economy, the constant transition of obligation and offering that makes a life. Privacy, I've been chanting, but what is outside, and should I now deflect my tiny reserve toward a more social pool? I don't see my capacity in agitation; at best, solace. Like the sound of a trombonist, the other day, near the entrance to the train, playing "In the Bleak Midwinter," a hymn of my youth, of fields and rooks and cows, another country, another fable both actual and now dismantling, a nesting place forever lost to me except in memory. I don't see the work I can do as making a change but rather a space. Can I steer my vessel to other docks? Is my medic's tent useful outside of my community? When I lived apart from my familiar community, I learned to speak to other people in the grocery lines. Made basic exchanges, met new eyes. Now I return, and draw a circle around myself, surface in this small, welcoming place, chant privacy, privacy. I think I invite you to see me here, attempt to be transparent even in my turning. Or maybe it is not that, but that I am willing to, wanting to, wishing to tell you of the visions that I saw down there in a long, but not the longest, bardo. Music offering of a private citizen, in the form of a comic-book ambushade. With apologies for its limitations in these convulsing, awakening days.