

MANTIC COMPOST

by

JAKE SYERSAK

(Under the Direction of Magdalena Zurawski)

ABSTRACT

Mantic Compost is a book of poems that explores, through Surrealist modes of composition, the psychological impacts of the Anthropocene. The book takes its title from American Surrealist Eugene Jolas, who proposed that Surrealism should strive to express the “dynamis” of the objective world, using the transmutative and mediumistic possibilities of language. Drawing on Surrealist imagery, as well as techniques such as automatic writing, the book explores the ways in which language, used as a mediumistic and impressionable organ, can demonstrate the reciprocal impressions of the world upon our psyche and our psyche’s impression upon the world. The reality of the Anthropocene—Nature reconceived as that which is capable of being altered by and, in turn, altering human life—demands a new use of language for the expression of that reality. *Mantic Compost* is an attempt at that language—an attempt to revitalize eco-poetics in light of the Anthropocene.

Mantic Compost is preceded by the critical introduction “Mantic Compost Poetics: An Ontological Defense of Surrealism in the Service of Eco-poetics.” This introduction attempts to justify the necessity of Surrealism’s permeation of eco-poetics. Arguing that the most vital task of the eco-poet today is to encapsulate the experience of the Anthropocene, it demonstrates that this can only be achieved through the deployment of an ecologically-oriented ontology and ultimately

asserts that Surrealism is the best poetic mode through which this ontology might be artistically communicated.

INDEX WORDS: Poetry, Surrealism, Anthropocene, Eco-poetics, Nature, Ontology, Object-Oriented Ontology, Speculative Realism, Romanticism, Modernism

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by

JAKE SYERSAK

B.A. University of Washington, 2007

M.F.A. University of Arizona, 2015

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JAKE SYERSAK

Major Professor:
Committee:

Magdalena Zurawski
Andrew Zawacki
Jed Rasula

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2019

DEDICATION

To Julie Tierney, for being there before the world ends.

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Mantic Compost incorporates a number of quotes from Romantic, Modernist, & in particular Surrealist poets, as well as terminology from *The Bureau for Linguistical Reality* project.

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CHAPTER 1

MANTIC COMPOST POETICS: AN ONTOLOGICAL DEFENSE OF SURREALISM IN THE SERVICE OF ECO-POETICS

Introduction: The Need for Thinking That is Ecological

In producer Darren Aronofsky's *One Strange Rock*—a 2018 television documentary series originally aired by National Geographic—a collection of specialists (including, amongst others, geologists, evolutionists, ecologists, biologists, and even astronauts) pool together their expansive collection of personal and professional perspectives in order to dramatize and narrate the magnitude of Earth's many eco-evolutionary processes. In general, scientific documentaries about scientific processes tend to remain just that—scientific. So what is Aronofsky, whose name is synonymous with surrealistic or otherwise psychologically-oriented dramatic films, doing at the helm of this one? What possible need could the ecological sciences have for someone like Aronofsky? Is there a precedent for calling on artists to interpret ecological processes, let alone the current ecological state of our world? These are questions with no definitive answers. But pressed for insight, I would make the argument that the ecological processes of our world, revealed in detail, indeed make up a reality that seems intrinsically strange, or at least foreign to our immediate perception. This being the case, it comes as little surprise that someone like Aronofsky should be employed to make sense of it, as our thinking must often traverse strange—or even surreal—realms in order to grasp the reality of the world around us.

To illustrate the point, let's take a quick look at the first episode of *One Strange Rock*, entitled "Gasp," which offers a stunning example of just how strange, expansive, and surreal the ecological

processes of our biosphere are, not to mention how they can defy our immediate apprehension of reality. “Gasp” tells the story of the air we breathe—the story of how it is produced and how that production is perpetuated through a series of natural processes taking place in a vast distribution across time and space. The story of the air we breathe, as we come to find out, is an odd story, and it begins in no less of an odd place—the hot and arid Danakil Desert of East Africa. Here, we are introduced to a scene of local villagers who are busy mining salt from the Earth’s crust. Their painstaking labor, under intense weather conditions, combined with the sweltering and seemingly desolate landscape stretching out for miles in every direction, renders it difficult to believe that any such area might be capable of supporting life. But appearances, as we will soon find out, can be deceiving.

As we are brought to see, the intense winds that regularly occur in the Danakil Desert generate powerful storms, which sweep the dust of the surrounding area into an enormous cloud (weighing in at an incredible 20 million tons). The resulting dust cloud then moves across the continent, picking up such intense speed and velocity that it traverses the entire length of the Atlantic Ocean, floating its way toward South America’s Brazilian coast, where it runs headlong into the Andes Mountains. Once running into the mountains, the dust cloud disperses and falls across the Amazon Rainforest. These dust particles, having contributed nothing but desert to their place of origin in Africa, turn out to be the perfect fertilizer for the multitudinous flora of the Amazon. As the plant species of the Amazon flourish, the lush foliage transforms the surrounding atmosphere’s carbon monoxide into oxygen. The amount of oxygen produced there is so abundant that it is equal to 20 times more than all the people on Earth combined could collectively consume at any given moment. And yet not one human on Earth—we are told—ever breathes a single breath of it.

We are reminded that although one often hears the Amazon rainforest referred to as “the lungs of the Earth” (and indeed there is truth to this), the metaphor severely oversimplifies and

moreover underserves the complexity of the process. As it so happens, the entirety of the oxygen generated at this point by the plants remains in the Amazon rainforest, where it is consumed by the equally abundant animal life. And this is where it all begins to get really strange. Although no human benefits from the immediate processes by which the Amazonian plants turn the region's carbon monoxide into oxygen, they do ultimately benefit from further—less immediately perceptible—processes undergone by the plant life there.

The plant life of the Amazon, now sufficiently fertilized and thriving, continues to sustain itself through photosynthesis. This involves pulling water up through their bodies, by way of their roots, from the Amazon basin. The excess water, having traveled the length of their bodies, is then released through the ends of their leaves in the form of vapor, in an act known as transpiration. Because the plant life of the Amazon is so abundant, the amount of vapor released from all the combined flora is massive. It accumulates in the atmosphere, where it proceeds to form a gigantic “flying river” (one actually larger than the Amazon River itself) that floats up above and over the rainforest. This “flying river,” as it were, then moves with the wind currents and flows towards the Andes Mountains, where it condenses into raindrops, erodes the mountainous rock on its way down, and carries sediment from that rock into the Amazon Basin.

And this is where the whole thing somehow gets even stranger. The silica contained in the sediment of the eroded mountain rock becomes nourishment for organisms, living in the basin, known as diatoms—a group of single-celled microalgae commonly found in bodies of water around the world. Thanks to the silica that has been ferried into the basin via the dissipation of the “flying river” down the Andes Mountains, the diatoms are able to form a protective shell around themselves, photosynthesize, reproduce on a large scale, and transform even more of the surrounding area's carbon monoxide into oxygen. The amount of oxygen produced by these

diatoms is quantifiably massive and ends up accounting for *over half the oxygen on Earth consumed by the human population.*

And so we learn that the vast majority of the air we as humans breathe is not made by the openly visible plant life of the Amazon rainforest, but the invisible microscopic algae whose existence is ulterior to and propagated by that plant life. And still, things get even stranger than that. Because when diatoms die, they float to the bottom of the body of water they inhabit and form an aggregated layer on the seafloor. After millions of years, that body of water containing the layer of deceased diatoms will dry out and transform into a desert rife with diatomaceous earth. And that's exactly what happened in the Danakil Desert. That dust cloud from East Africa—the one that fertilized the Amazon rainforest, that triggered the formation of the “flying river,” that perpetuated the existence of living diatoms, and that ultimately propagated the production of the air we breath—was, in fact, once a seafloor that had collected diatomaceous earth as a result of the exact same ecological processes. Just behind the seemingly lifeless, dry, inhospitable and empty façade of the Danakil Desert, lay one of the most vital components of life itself.

This expansive thinking, this thinking deeper—past the immediate appearances of things—into the complex processes underlying the surface of reality, that illuminate the interrelationship between the human and nonhuman, across vast expanses of time and space, on micro and macro scales, is what eco-philosopher Timothy Morton has referred to as “big thinking,” or, “the ecological thought.” The ecological thought, writes Morton, is first and foremost “the thinking of interconnectedness.” It is “a thought about ecology, but it's also a thinking that is ecological...It's a practice and a process of becoming fully aware of how human beings are connected with other beings—animals, vegetable, or mineral” (“The Ecological Thought” 7). I am, of course, interested in “thoughts about ecology,” as anyone concerned with the current state of our planet necessarily should be, and as such, I am all the more interested in *how* to think them—that is, the necessity of

“thinking that is ecological,” or, the sort of thinking that looks beyond the appearance of things toward the deeper complexities constructing their reality. Examining any aspect of the human or nonhuman world, artistically or scientifically, necessarily reveals “more” of that world, reveals it to be more expansive, complex, and strange (as in, foreign to our immediate perception) than was previously thought. And that increase in complexity, expanse, and strangeness cannot be thought without equally complex, expansive, and strange thinking.

Expansive thinking has proven to be more imperative now than at perhaps any other epoch: Globalization has accelerated and extended the international scale and influence of the capitalist market, technological innovations such as Google Earth and other mapping softwares have fit the entire globe into the palm of our hands, increased means and speed of communicational networks have facilitated increased socialization on a worldwide scale, and so on and so forth. More than ever, we as a people cannot help but think on global and interconnected scales. Nothing so illustrates the necessity of thinking on global and interconnected scales, however, quite like the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene—the current geological age in which human activity has considerably altered the global climate and environment, and in which the altered global climate and environment in turn alters human activity—has made ecological thinking, in all its many expanses, an absolutely critical endeavor.

Moreover, it has complicated the traditional divisions between the human and the nonhuman, man and Nature, and subject and object. In an age in which nonhuman entities, such as Global Warming (one among many defining symptoms of the Anthropocene), can threaten the very existence of humanity, a narrow system of thought that assumes our world to be composed of clearly delineated objects (bereft of agency) and clearly delineated subjects (exerting agency) no longer suffices. We are living through a period which forces us to think the human and nonhuman, man and Nature, and even the subject and object as more inextricably intertwined than once

thought. In order to accurately conceptualize this state of affairs, we will need to reassess and update our ontological purview, and along with it, our artistic purview.

Man and Nature: How Poetics Have Reinforced the Division

Poetry in particular has long been guilty of perpetuating the fable of a clear division between the human and nonhuman, man and Nature, and subject and object. Despite the many alarms of the Anthropocene, these divisions still permeate a fair amount of contemporary poetics. I could cite any number of examples here, but let me take Andrew Hudgins' aptly titled 1985 poem, "The Persistence of Nature in Our Lives," as one such example. I have chosen Hudgins' poem, specifically, because a) it is one of the first poems I can remember having been taught to me that was supposed to illustrate the epitomes of eco-poetics and b) because it demonstrates, in clear and pronounced terms, the damaging general anthropocentric attitude that pervades large swathes of eco-poetics—namely, the supposition that one can make a firm distinction between the human and the nonhuman, man and Nature, and subject and object.

Hudgins' poem is driven by its narrative structure and revolves around a speaker who imagines himself sexually pursued by the forces of Nature. While observing the processes of springtime plant reproduction, most notably in the swirls of pollen traveling the air and settling over him and his lawn, he lays down and falls asleep on his porch. When he wakes up and gets to his feet, he finds himself, and everything around him, covered in yellow dust. He looks back to where he was laying only to find a human figure imprinted in the pollen that has settled all around him. Taking this as evidence of man's intrinsic inability to commune with Nature, he saunters off, despondent, disturbed that he will never be "one" with Nature.

The most telling thing about the poem, as in most poems of its kind, is that Nature, from the very start, is an ideation on behalf of the speaker. Here is the introductory portion of Hudgins' poem:

You find them in the darker woods
occasionally—those swollen lumps
of fungus, twisted, moist, and yellow—
but when they show up on the lawn
it's like they've tracked me home. In spring
the persistence of nature in our lives
rises from below, drifts from above.
The pollen settles on my skin
and waits for me to bloom, trying
to work green magic on my flesh.
They're indiscriminate, these firs.
They'll mate with anything. A great
green-yellow cloud of pollen sifts
across the house. The waste of it
leaves nothing out—not even men.
The pollen doesn't care I'm not
a tree. The golden storm descends. (35)

Nature is immediately introduced as something other than, or in opposition to, the speaker. Nature becomes a catch-all word for any number of nonhuman entities that the speaker chooses to differentiate from the human, from everything that “rises from below” or “drifts from above” to the “swollen lumps of fungus,” the “pollen,” and the “firs.”

At the same time, the speaker anthropomorphizes Nature at his leisure, in order to suit his narrative needs, contending early on that the sexual forces of Nature have “tracked” him down, tried to “work green magic” on his flesh, and waited for him “to bloom”—only to contradict himself in the following lines by contending that the sexual forces of Nature are “indiscriminate,” that “They’ll mate with anything.” Nature becomes ideologically plastic before the speaker’s faculty. Simultaneously idealized and subjugated according to the whims of the speaker, Nature’s existence is far more ideological than physical.

Such is confirmed in the conclusion of the poem, where the speaker comes face-to-face with a literal and figurative image of his differentiation from Nature. Having fallen asleep on his porch observing the pollen around him, he awakes and looks back on where he had previously been sleeping, only “to find a man-shape on the hard / wood floor, outlined in pollen—a sharp / spread-eagle figure drawn there like / the body at a murder scene” (Hudgins 36). The speaker, seeing the outlined absence of his human figure in the drapery of pollen, bears first-hand witness to his supposed differentiation or removal from Nature. Faced with an image of his failed communion with Nature, Hudgins’ speaker flees the scene in a fit of despair:

I wandered out
across the lawn, my bare feet damp
with dew, the wet ground soft, forgiving,
beneath my step. I understood
I am, as much as anyone,
the golden beast who staggers home,
in June, beneath the yearning trees. (36)

The speaker takes on a monstrous form, in contrast to the “soft” and “forgiving” nonhuman Nature that surrounds him, further emphasizing his sense of displacement from, or opposition to, Nature.

Seeing no hope in reconciling man and Nature, the speaker sees no course of action other than to lament the incontrovertible tragedy of the situation. This quasi-tragic attitude, adopted by Hudgins' speaker, is little more than what Timothy Morton has deemed "beautiful soul syndrome," the state in which one contradictorily expresses the desire to maintain "a split between self and world" while simultaneously "yearn[ing] to close the gap," and it is an attitude that has pervaded many—though certainly not all—eco-poetries at least as far back as the Romantic era (*Ecology Without Nature* 118). "This is a political as well as an intellectual position," writes Morton, "The 'beautiful soul' washes his or her hands of the corrupt world, refusing to admit how...he or she participates in the creation of that world" (*Ecology Without Nature* 13). This is exactly what happens in Hudgins' poem. The speaker, drawing their own ideological line between man and Nature, and viewing that line as incontrovertible evidence of an unyielding chasm between self and world, bemoans the divide they themselves made manifest. Concluding that there is no hope in reconciling that division, they recuse themselves from the problem.

A truly ecological poetics should, in contrast, strive to depict the reality of the Anthropocene for what it is: confirmation that the divisions between human and the nonhuman, man and Nature, and subject and object are fundamentally superficial and ideological in nature. What is crucial now, in the Anthropocene era, is an ecological poetics that strives to dissolve the ideological distinction between the human and the nonhuman, man and Nature, and subject and object. I advocate for an ecologically-oriented poetics that strives not to eliminate these divisions entirely (an arguably impossible task), but to rethink their rigidity. This demands the imaginary prowess to think reality as it truly is: not as a series of purely subjective or purely objective features, but as a strange and inextricable intertwinement of both. In this regard, the task of our ecological thinking should not be thought of as unlike the one prescribed by poet Percy Bysshe Shelley nearly 200 years ago—that of cultivating a "creative faculty to imagine that which we know" (530). On the surface, it seems easy

enough, but even in the era of the Anthropocene, which confirms that intertwinement, one of our greatest challenges remains the imagining what is right in front of us.

We cannot, of course, hope to think our way out of the Anthropocene, but we can bring it into better focus. Historical advancements in the field of ontology—especially in the very recent field of Speculative Realist ontology—have demonstrated that the intertwinement of subjective and objective realms is actually an unavoidable feature of our experience of reality (it’s just not always immediately apparent). As we will come to see, through an investigation into historical and contemporary ontologies, our experience of reality always presupposes a marriage—albeit somewhat tenuous—of subjective and objective realms. The truth is, the deeper we subjectively investigate what we imagine to be our experience of reality, the deeper we experience more objective reality than we once imagined was possible. The more reality becomes overwhelmingly real. The more real than real reality becomes. Until it is insurmountably *surreal*. Note: I do not use this term with any iota of flippancy. If our reality is indeed an ontological marriage of subjective and objective realms, as I believe it to be, then *surreal* is the perfect term for that reality. And Surrealism—that strange art concerned with reconciling subjective and objective reality into one absolute reality—may just be the best vessel for communicating that reality. Moreover, it may be the most effective poetic mode with which to ecologically engage with our world.

From Idealism to Correlationism: A Short History of the Subject-Object Rift

However, before we can fully understand how we might implement ways to rethink the strict divisions between the human and the nonhuman, man and Nature, and subject and object, we must first understand how those divisions arose. To begin, then, we must ask ourselves the following: how did humans ever come to think of themselves as entities somehow removed from the world around them? It would be difficult, if not impossible, to locate a single catalyst, but strong efforts to

substantiate the division reveal themselves emphatically in Western ontological philosophy at least as early as the 17th century.

In his *Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Own Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, René Descartes reasoned that the internal world of man is irrefutably divorced from that of the external world. In an attempt to extoll the power of human reason by deploying the methods of logical skepticism, Descartes argues in his *Discourse* that he is able to bring into doubt the existence of almost everything in the external world, contending that everything he perceives could potentially be the fabrication of an omnipotent demonic force. However, because the one thing Descartes finds he is incapable of doubting is that he himself is thinking these thoughts, he reasons that he can ensure himself, at least, that he is indeed a being that exists: “*I am thinking therefore I exist [cogito ergo sum]*” (28). Descartes follows this line of reasoning to its logical end:

In the next place, I attentively examined what I was, and as I observed that I could suppose that I had no body, and that there was no world nor any place in which I might be...I thereby concluded that I was a *substance* whose whole *essence* or nature resides only in thinking, and which, in order to exist, has no need of place and is not dependent on any material thing. Accordingly, this ‘I,’ that is to say, the Soul by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body; and would not stop being everything it is, even if the body were not to exist. (29).

Because affirmation of his existence lay in his inability to think that he is not thinking (a concept colloquially referred to henceforth by ontological philosophers as *the cogito*), Descartes asserts that anything that falls outside the confines of that thought is inherently doubtful. In this way, Descartes methodically divorces the internal human subject (“*essence*”) from the external object world (“*substance*”), which includes the human body as well as whatever appears outside of it. The external world, it should be noted, is ultimately affirmed, but only through the human faculty’s ability to

reason that there exists a benevolent god that would never allow for demonic trickery. This epistemological philosophical view, heavily predicated upon the inherent powers of human reason as the means by which we understand the state of our existence, comes to be known, generally, as Idealism.

Various forms of Idealism, those upheld by Descartes, in addition to George Berkeley and Gottfried Leibniz, among others, would come to be challenged reciprocally by various forms of Empiricism, those upheld by philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume, among others. While the former asserted the primacy of human reason and innate ideas as the epistemological sources of knowledge, the latter asserted the primacy of sensorial acquisition and experience. Immanuel Kant sought to reconcile both schools of thought in an ontological system he would come to refer to as Transcendental Idealism, the subject of which makes up his *Critique of Pure Reason*. But to do so, Kant would need to fundamentally reconfigure the very foundations of Idealism originally posed by Descartes.

Whereas Descartes refuses to cede the existence of a given external object world, outside of human consciousness (without, that is, relying on his spurious reasoning of a god into existence to affirm it), Kant argues that the cogito itself confirms the existence of that external object world. In the aptly titled “Refutation of Idealism” segment of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant asserts that Descartes’ cogito—the confirmation of existence through non-deniability of the inner thinking self—is contingent upon time and space. That is, in order to affirm the existence of consciousness, it is necessary to confirm the awareness of that consciousness taking place over a span of time and within a given environment. Time, Kant argues, allows for the cogito to be perceived, and time requires “something permanent in perception” in order to be perceived. Furthermore, argues Kant, “the determination of...existence in time is, consequently, possible only through the existence of actual things,” i.e., external objects. In other words, according to Kant, time is not an immediately

observable entity in of itself. One can only observe the effects of time (such as age) on external objects, the observation of which necessitates external objects and thus space, leaving Kant able to surmise that “consciousness of...existence is, at the same time, an immediate consciousness of the existence of other things outside me” (*Critique of Pure Reason* 239).

Having thus asserted the existence of an external world, without requiring an absolute Idealist God to confirm it, Kant finds himself in a position to expose the fundamental flaw in Descartes’ mode of experience: “the representation **I am**...does not yet include a **knowledge** of it...For such an experience we require the thought of something existing, also intuition...in respect to time,” through which “the subject must be determined. For that purpose external objects are indispensable, so that the inner experience is itself possible only mediately, and only through outer experience” (*Critique of Pure Reason* 240). In other words, if existence necessitates the cogito, the cogito necessitates space and time in which one can intuit the existence of the posited cogito; thus, it follows that time and space, concepts determined through external observation, are verifiable.

Kant’s formulation would seem to imply an intricate, even intimate, interrelationship between the inner world of the subjective mind and the outer world of objects. However, Kant only affirms the intuited *concepts* of space and time. He does not necessarily confirm the existence of external objects in of themselves, as they are still subject to the interpretive faculty. Kant makes it clear, in his 1783 *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysic*, that he can only truly give credence to external objects as they present themselves *for* or *to* human beings:

Idealism consists in the assertion, that there are none but thinking beings, all other things, which we think are perceived in intuition, being nothing but representations in the thinking beings, to which no object external to them really corresponds. Whereas I say, that things as objects of our senses existing outside of us are given, but we know nothing of what they may be in themselves, knowing only their phenomena, that is, the representations which they

cause in us by affecting our senses. Consequently, I grant by all means that there are bodies without us, that is things which though quite unknown to us as to what they are in themselves, we yet know by the representations which their influence on our sensibility procures us. (42)

According to Kant, there is indeed an *appearance* of external objects, in the form of what he refers to as “phenomena”—the aesthetic effects of those external object as they appear *for* or *to* the human subject perceiving them. According to Kant, while the human subject is not capable of experiencing the external object world as it actually is—in of itself—they are capable of experiencing the external object world as it appears to the human subject, filtered through the human senses. Subject and object remain divided, but they are conjoined by an interpretive space, through which the subject interprets and verifies the object by the aesthetic effects it induces in the subject.

Kant’s Transcendental Idealism was, and continues to be, revolutionary for two primary reasons: First, because it asserts the existence of an external object world outside of the dogmatic Idealism originally formulated by Descartes; and second, because it admits that, since the external object world must be aesthetically perceived by a human subject in order to be known, the aesthetic judgement of those objects carry substantial weight in our interpretation of the world. Kant, however, goes to great lengths in his 1790 *Critique of Judgement*—most notably his well-known treatises on the beautiful and the sublime—to belabor the point that aesthetics should not be interpreted as characteristics of the external object world itself but the result of the human subjective faculties attuning themselves to the external object world.

Take Kant’s conception of the beautiful in the *Critique of Judgement*, for example. Kant follows his former line of reasoning, arguing that when one calls an object of the external world beautiful “in order to say that the object is beautiful, and to show that I have taste, everything turns on what I make of this representation within myself, and not on any factor which makes me dependent on the

existence of the object” (*Critique of Judgement* 37). The apprehension of an object’s beauty, Kant continues, cannot reside in the object itself but in the human subject’s conceptualization of that object, “for every judgment from that source is aesthetic, i.e. the determining ground is the feeling of the subject, and not any concept of an object” (*Critique of Judgement* 62).

The same, Kant argues, is true in the case of the sublime, but his explanation of the determining grounds for the sublime betrays an anxiety about how much influence objects actually have over the human subject. Kant tells us that the sensation of the sublime occurs when the human subject begins to feel threatened by the seemingly overwhelming magnitude of external objects. Reason then steps in to orderly conceptualize that overwhelming magnitude being witnessed, and one experiences the sublime. Once again, it is the human subject, and not the object, who is the ultimate source of the sublime sensation: “we express ourselves on the whole inaccurately if we term any object of nature sublime,” writes Kant, “all we can say is that the object lends itself to the presentation of a sublimity discoverable in the mind. For the sublime...cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason” (*Critique of Judgement* 75). What at first seems to be a sensuous reaction to the overwhelming magnitude of an object’s seeming boundlessness defying human reason turns out to be a pleasurable reaction to the powers of human reason to show there are indeed bounds—methodical reference to scale—for putting the overwhelming magnitude of the object into conceptualized perspective.

It is when Kant discusses the mathematical sublime, in particular, that it becomes evident just how much the human subject depends upon the relational aspects of objects in order to make aesthetic judgments. Kant makes reference to a letter written by Egyptologist Claude-Étienne Savary, who remarks that the full emotional (i.e., aesthetic) effect of the great pyramids is made felt to him only at a very particular proximity. Kant posits why, exactly, it may have appeared this way to Savary: “if we are too far away [from the great pyramids], the parts to be apprehended...are only

obscurely represented, and...[produce] no effect upon the aesthetical judgment of the subject. But if we are very near, the eye requires some time to complete the apprehension of the tiers from the bottom up to the apex...before the Imagination has taken in the last, and so the comprehension of them is never complete” (*Critique of Judgement* 82 – 83). The same, says Kant, can be said of natural objects. Too far and one understands only an “obscure” representation of its whole; too close and one understands only an obscure representation of its individual components in isolation.

Aesthetic judgments, then, rely not only on the human subject’s experience but also, to a degree, on the ability of that subject to interpret the relative proportional scale of a given object in comparison or contrast to another object. Kant notes how, in cases of the mathematical sublime, human reason is able to intuit and calculate the bounds of the seemingly boundless object inducing the sublime reaction by intuiting the proportional scale of one object to another:

A tree, the height of which we estimate with reference to the height of man, at all events gives a standard for a mountain; and if this were a mile high, it would serve as a unit for the number expressive of the earth’s diameter, so that the latter might be made intuitable. The earth’s diameter would supply a unit for the known planetary system; this again for the Milky Way; and the immeasurable number of milky way systems called nebulae—which presumably constitute a system of the same kind among themselves—let us expect no bounds here.

For Kant, there are no bounds to the ways that human reason can constrain the seemingly overwhelming sense of boundlessness suggested by objects instigating the sublime experience. It is objects, however, that provide the necessary values in scale by which the human subject is ultimately able to put the boundlessness into perspective. Kant himself sets an excellent precedence for exploring how objects—and not just human subjects—play a vital role in sculpting our experience

of reality. Kant, however, intent on asserting the superiority of human reason over the external object world, glosses too quickly over this topic without exploring the full extent of its ramifications.

Beyond Correlationism: The Object Takes the Stage

Speculative philosopher Quentin Meillassoux has developed a term for what prevents Kant from exploring the influence of objects in shaping our experience of reality: “correlationism.” Correlationism, as defined in Meillassoux’s book *After Finitude*, is “the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other” (5). In essence, Kant’s Transcendental Idealism is exactly this. Correlationism posits that no thinking can take place without being and no being without thinking. This translates into an intensely restrictive anthropocentric perspective which limits our access to that which takes place between a correlator (the inner thinking of the human subject) and a correlatee (an external object’s existence). The fundamental problem resulting from such a system is that “one cannot, under pain of contradiction, claim to think an independent reality” that was, is, or will be removed from the immediate presence of a human subject (Gratton, Ennis 5). Considering the frequency with which we posit the existence of existent realities outside our own thinking—in the form of historical pasts, remote geographic locations, forecasting future events, etc.—the adherence to a strict correlationist model of experience, while not entirely wrong, per se, certainly involves a degree of bad faith.

Correlationism’s basic anthropocentric limitation is this: while it allows us to think of realities independent of us having occurred *figuratively*, or in theory, it does not allow us to think about them having occurred *literally*, or in actuality. To take Meillassoux’s own example, correlationism is unable to literally, or actually, account for what he calls “ancestral time,” time periods in which no human correlator was present to confirm their existence. No rational person

would disagree, on account of empirical scientific evidence, that the Earth was accreted at a time when no human yet existed. Following the logic of the correlationist, argues Meillassoux, “it is a true statement, but what it describes as real is an impossible event.” That is, “it is an ‘objective’ statement, but it has no conceivable object,” because there was no human subject existing at the time who could have correlated the thought and thereby brought it into being (17). In other words, the correlationist would agree that existing empirical evidence proves the Earth was initially formed at a time when no human subject was present, but they would have to simultaneously, on account of correlationist limitations, submit that this was an impossibility, as no object at the time was correlated to a human subject. In so far as that evidence would rely on signification, the posited event remains subjective, rather than objective, in nature. And so for the strict correlationist the Earth both existed and did not exist in that ancestral point of time. Playing by strict correlationist logic, the correlationist is forced to posit a contradiction as truth, what Meillassoux refers to as “unreason.”

Rather than take “unreason” as a flaw, Meillassoux takes it as largely an unavoidable facet of our reality, or at least our experience of that reality, and so insists on referring to “unreason” as “factuality.” Factuality, for Meillassoux, signifies the absolute knowledge, derived from the demonstrable lack of reason inherent in correlationism—that all things, human or nonhuman, subject or object, have the equal ontological capacity, in of themselves, to be or not be, independent of a correlator. As Meillassoux states, “there is no reason for anything to be or to remain the way it is; everything must, without reason, be able not to be and/or be able to be other than it is” (62). Essentially, all things, in of themselves, can exist or not exist outside the correlation taking place between a correlator and correlatee.

Levi Bryant offers an easy way for us, as human subjects, to confront Meillassouxian factuality: “if it is true that we cannot think the world without thinking our presence to the world,

then it follows that even the thought of our own death requires the presence of our thinking, thereby undermining the possibility of dying” (54). Some realities, then, are intrinsically and demonstrably non-correlational, and there are indeed realities thinkable, at least on a speculative level, beyond the confines of correlationism, so long as we assume that the subjective and objective realms are somehow intertwined. To put it simply, Meillassoux demonstrates that being does not rely on a human subject to think it into reality. The external object world, we can assure ourselves, does indeed exist without us, and moreover is correlated by more than just us. And if this is the case, there is little reason to privilege the human subject in matters of ontology. Having lost the need for a human subject to correlate the external object world into reality, the external object world ceases to depend strictly upon the human subject. Subjects and objects, humans and nonhumans, begin to emerge on equal terrain, ontologically speaking.

It is on this rather odd restructuring of ontological terrain that the philosophical school of Speculative Realism is ostensibly born, with the intent of “depict[ing] a world populated not by active subjects and passive objects but by lively and essentially interactive materials, by bodies both human and nonhuman” (Bennett, “Systems and Things” 224). Graham Harman, founder of a particular sub-genre of Speculative Realism known as Object-Oriented Ontology, has made notable contributions to the field of Kantian ontology by adapting Transcendental Idealism to a less anthropocentric model of experience. Harman claims that this is, in fact, not a terribly difficult feat: “Contrary to the dominant assumption of philosophy since Kant,” he argues, “the true chasm in ontology lies not between humans and the world,” in the correlations performed by human subjects in relation to nonhuman objects, “but between *objects and relations*,” in the correlational capabilities of all objects, human or nonhuman (2). It is Harman’s assertion that humans are not the only ones capable of correlating the world, but objects too.

Harman takes Martin Heidegger's analysis of equipment in *Being and Time* as the foundation for his Object-Oriented Ontology. According to Harman, this analysis reveals that we experience objects primarily through the effects they perform for us as tools. He explains: "Heidegger demonstrates that our primary interactions with beings comes through 'using' them,...that we normally do not deal with entities as aggregates of natural physical mass, but rather as a range of *functions* or *effects* that we rely upon." Harman offers the following examples: "Instead of encountering 'pane of glass,' we tend to make use of this item indirectly, in the form of 'well-lit room.' We do not usually contend with sections of cement, but only with their outcome: an easily walkable surface area" (18). This assumes, as Kant himself had, that as human beings we experience or access objects of the world through our human experience of them, rather than the objects in of themselves. Heidegger, however, updates this assertion by claiming that we experience objects first and foremost as equipment or tools—that is, through the use they perform for us as human beings—before we experience any properties associated with their material matter. Harman's own example of the pane of glass or the cement are apt examples. According to Heidegger's theory, both the pane of glass and the cement would be experienced first through the use they performed for us, as tools. In this way, the pane of glass first and foremost translates to "well-lit room" and the cement first and foremost translates to "walkable surface area." So long as the pane of glass or the cement continue to perform their use as equipment, the actual materials of which they are composed withdraw from perception.

Harman accepts this idea of the human experience of the external object world but adds that the "typical mistake presumes that [Heidegger's] theory of equipment is concerned primarily with human beings." Harman insists that a piece of equipment or a tool "is not effective 'because people use it'; on the contrary, it can only be used because it is *capable of an effect*," and that effect differs according to context. "In short," writes Harman, "the tool isn't 'used'—it *is*. In each instant, entities

[objects] form a determinate landscape that offers a specific range of possibilities and obstacles” for those effects (18, 20). In essence, the placement of a given object within a system of other objects determines that object’s effects. Think back to Harman’s examples of the pane of glass and the cement: the effects of these objects change dramatically depending upon their context. For example, a pane of glass used as a walkway would not translate to “well-lit room” and cement installed in a wall would not translate to “walkable surface area.” In every scenario, because “the tool is never found in isolation, but belongs to a system,” the objects become tools that express themselves as the capability of their effects within the context of their associations with other objects (22). The same holds true for any other object. Harman perhaps demonstrates this most effectively with his example of a bridge. “The reality of the bridge,” writes Harman, “is not to be found in its amalgam of asphalt and cable, but in the geographic fact of ‘traversable gorge.’” Because the bridge, as tool, translates to “traversable gorge,” “the bridge is” actually “a bridge-effect” (21). It is not the material properties themselves that define a bridge. A bridge could be built out of manmade materials such as bricks, concrete, plywood, steel, or fiber-reinforced polymer. It could also occur naturally, taking the form of a tree that has fallen across a stream or stone arched across a canyon. In any number of cases, the bridge is defined through its bridge-effect, within the context of other surrounding objects, and not by its actual matter.

But it is not only the surrounding objects that present the object as effect. Even the material properties making up the bridge-effect are, in turn, effects that combine to serve the bridge-effect:

Bolts and wires taken alone enjoy a rather minimal reality. In combination with thousands of other minutely engineered pieces, they blend into the composite visible equipment known as a bridge. But these tiny devices would bring about an utterly different state of affairs if reassigned elsewhere, whether as scrap metal or as segments of a bomb. The reality of the tool-pieces is different in each of these cases...Bolt and wire are the specific equipment in

that they are only within the system they currently happen to occupy: suspension-system, explosive-system. In the case now under discussion, the being of the individual pieces is swallowed into the larger framework of the bridge. (22)

Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology views all objects as effects occurring within and determined by the surrounding systems of which they are a part and the larger systems they are capable of effecting. This attenuates ontological anthropocentrism by contending that objects of the external world are not only determined by the human subject, but also, to an extent, by other objects. It posits the world as a "geography of objects" (21). In so doing, it lays the foundation for an ontology that operates ecologically, refusing to assess any object in isolation without considering its place in a larger system.

Timothy Morton, self-professed student of Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, makes the ecological imperatives of Harman's theory remarkably clear. According to Morton, if objects are determined more by their effect than their actual object, and no object can exist in isolation, then it becomes difficult to think entities such as *human, animal, plant, mineral*, or even *Nature* as purely holistic entities. Like the objects in Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, ecological entities are, in a sense, both present and not present at any given moment. Morton puts it this way: "The more we think ecological beings—a human, a tree, an ecosystem, a cloud—the more we find ourselves obliged to think them...as not solidly 'real' nor completely 'unreal'—in this sense...ecological beings are spectral." In deploying the term "spectral," Morton does not mean that entities are literally phantasmal, but that they are, somewhat like the phantasmal, always "wavering," in a strictly ontological sense, "between appearance and being" (*Humankind* 55). They are, at one and the same time, *there* and *not there*.

To illustrate the point, Morton often invokes his own version of an updated sorites paradox. Traditionally, the sorites paradox involves questioning what, exactly, defines a heap of sand, only to

find that its ultimate definition is inherently “fuzzy” or “blurred.” Grains of sand are either added to or removed from the heap until the heap either appears or disappears. With the addition or removal of every grain, one asks themselves whether the heap can be defined as a heap. It becomes difficult to say, without taking into account its being as an appearance of cumulative effects, at what exact point a heap becomes a heap or a non-heap. Morton demonstrates how the sorites paradox can complicate ecological entities:

Imagine a meadow—it’s filled with grasses and flowers, bees are buzzing around, there are some trees, some water is flowing, small mammals are creeping about, butterflies land on petals. I remove a blade of grass from the meadow. Is there still a meadow? Why yes. I remove another blade of grass. There is still a meadow. Then another. And another. At every stage I can answer that there is a meadow. By now I have removed all the grass. I have a huge patch of dirt, and the butterflies have gone somewhere else. According to my logic, there is still a meadow! So, because I adhere to the Law of Noncontradiction, there is no such thing as an actual meadow—because it might as well just be a huge patch of dirt....Let’s try it in reverse. I plant a single blade of grass on the bare patch of dirt. That doesn’t make a meadow. Let’s plant another one. Still no meadow. I go on and on. Soon I have planted tens of thousands of blades of grass. According to my logic, which is correct at every step, there is still no meadow!...There is no single, independent, definable point at which the meadow stops being a meadow. So there are no meadows. They might as well be parking lots waiting to happen. And since there are no parking lots either, it doesn’t really matter if I build one on this meadow. Can you begin to see how the logical Law of Noncontradiction enables me to eliminate ecological beings both in thought and in actual physical reality?...You can’t say *A meadow is a meadow and is not a meadow*. Yet this is what is required, unless you want meadows not to exist. (*Dark Ecology* 73 – 74)

The meadow, then, is ontologically spectral. It is a being and an appearance. It is a meadow and a meadow-effect. It is *there* and *not there*.

The same principle applies to any other entity. It would be just as easy to ask at what point a mineral becomes or unbecomes a mineral, a plant becomes or unbecomes a plant, an animal becomes or unbecomes an animal, a human becomes or unbecomes a human, or even Nature becomes or unbecomes Nature. “Contemporary thought shows how beings no longer coincide with their phenomena,” writes Morton, “Things become misty, shifty, nebulous, uncanny. The spectral strangeness that haunts being applies not only to single lifeforms—a vole is a not-vole—but also to meadows, ecosystems, biomes, and the biosphere” (*Dark Ecology* 74). All entities are spectral in that the determination of all entities depends upon determining in what way those entities are *there* (in that they exhibit a holistic presentation) and *not there* (in that their holistic presentation is primarily a composite of relational effects).

But lest Morton’s onto-ecological awareness be dismissed as mere mental exercise, or worse, semantic triviality, it would be wise to consider the practical import of his thought. One of the consequences of thinking ecological entities as spectral—as a holistic presentation, as well as the relational effects that compose their holistic presentation—is that it reveals more of the active entities operating around us, even entities beyond our immediate understanding. For example, it would be impossible to say that Global Warming exists as a force exerting itself on the world without thinking it as a spectral entity. Global Warming is one such entity that Morton refers to as a “hyperobject.” Hyperobjects, as defined by Morton, are objects “that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans,” and yet defy immediate comprehension due to their spectral nature, like “a black hole” (which can be detected through an assortment of scientific data analyses but not immediately perceived as an entity in and of itself), or the “the long-lasting product of direct manufacture, such as Styrofoam or plastic bags,” (the lifespans of which vastly surpass those of

humans). Each hyperobject is “hyper’ in relation to some other entity, whether...manufactured by humans or not” (*Hyperobjects* 1). The strange thing about hyperobjects is that they are primarily nonlocal (spatially and temporally speaking) but exhibit their effects locally (spatially and temporally speaking). They are, so to speak, vastly *there* and *not there*. The only way to deduce a hyperobject, and the hyperobject Global Warming, in particular, is to scrutinize its spectral nature. For example, to bring Global Warming into focus, one must think localized weather effects in relation to the global climate—including but not limited to droughts, hurricanes, melting ice caps, rising sea levels, forced migration of species, heat waves, erratic blizzards, increasingly frequent wildfires, etc.. It is only by thinking the hyperobject by the sum of its relational effects—by its spectral nature—that Global Warming begins to appear as an entity. Global Warming is a Global Warming-effect. It is *there* and *not there*. And yet it exists.

Global Warming’s very real threat of a sixth mass extinction event, and subsequently, the possible eradication of the human species, highlights the vital and pragmatic necessity for an ontological model that views entities as spectral. Acknowledging the spectral nature of entities allows us the space through which to think—however minutely—outside correlationist constraints. Furthermore it affords us a view of objects as active rather than passive lumps of matter interpreted by the human subject. If indeed entities of the world are spectral, and the determination of particular entities is as dependent upon the observed relational effects at play between objects, then exploration of the spectral dimension is especially vital. Taking up the exploration of the spectral may be the most ecologically-imperative task that art can take up.

Surrealism in the Service of Eco-poetics: Towards a Mantic Compost

Surrealism is nothing if not first and foremost in the service of the spectral. This much was clear to the original Parisian Surrealists from very early on, and especially to André Breton, their

chief theorizer. In the first of his *Manifestos of Surrealism*, Breton stated that Surrealism's core objective was to seek "a future resolution of...two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*," a synthesis of the supposedly oppositional realities of subjectivity and objectivity (14). Breton further clarified this position in his essay, "What is Surrealism?," asserting that Surrealism "is, in fact,...a desire to deepen the foundations of the real, to bring about an even clearer and at the same time ever more passionate consciousness of the world perceived by the senses." He continues:

We have attempted to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in process of unification, of finally becoming *one*. This final unification is the supreme aim of surrealism: interior reality and exterior reality being, in the present form of society, in contradiction,...we have assigned to ourselves the task of confronting these two realities with one another on every possible occasion, of refusing to allow the preeminence of the one over the other,...allowing us to observe their reciprocal attraction and interpenetration and to give to this interplay of forces all the extension necessary for the trend of these two adjoining realities to become one and the same thing. ("What is Surrealism?" 49)

The Surrealists realized that reality was not something that is immediately given, that it was, rather, the fusion of subjective and objective realms. And it is exactly that realm—the spectral realm—that the art of Surrealism equips itself to explore.

Inspired by Freud's dream analysis, the Surrealists used automatic writing to reveal the unconscious layers of subjective thought that color objective reality. Surrealist critic and historian Paul C. Ray notes that "for the surrealist, the value of the dream and, by analogy, of automatism, lay in the demonstration that the distinctions and oppositions that seem rooted in reality—between the real and the imaginary, the subject and the object, life and death even—are artificial fabrications of the rational mind, and that they can be reconciled in a realm outside the one governed by rationality"

(12). If the Surrealists seemed preoccupied with dreams or dream-like imagery, it was not because they sought an escape route into a realm of pure fantasy. It is because “dreams,” as “Freud had demonstrated, obtain their substance from reality—they are not supernatural, nor are they creations *in vacuo* of the brain....They represent, rather, a kind of synthesis of the impressions of reality and the active unconscious forces of the id. Dream and reality, for Freud and for Breton after him, are closely interwoven, the dream drawing on reality and in turn supplying reality with practical emotional syntheses” (Ray 13). Like the Speculative Realists of Object-Oriented Ontology, the art of Surrealism seeks to unveil the interpenetration of subjective and objective realms and demonstrate the extent to which each is interdependent upon the other. Surrealists, then, seek to explore artistically what Object-Oriented Ontologists seek to explicate philosophically: the necessary interpenetrations of subjective and objective realms that define our correlationist experience of reality.

It is an all too pervasive and unfortunate historical mischaracterization of Surrealism that it is anti-realist in character or principle, that it prioritizes flights of the imagination over material reality and subjective revelation for objective revelation. One cannot forget, for example, Wallace Stevens’ flawed—albeit amusing—mocking critique of Surrealism: “the fault of Surrealism is that it invents without discovering: to make a clam play an accordion is to invent, not to discover” (7). While it is true that André Breton, early on, overstated Surrealism’s reliance on the spontaneity of unconscious experimentation by dictating the dictionary definition of Surrealism as “pure psychic automatism...in the absence of any control exercised by reason,” that “psychic automatism” was always deployed with the express purpose of revealing what unconscious activity sculpted our experience of objective reality and how much human reason, or the express lack thereof, could disorient or disturb objective reality.

The Surrealist concept of Objective Chance is the perfect example. In the 1930's, the Surrealists began to notice something very strange, that the poems they composed in automatic, or unconscious, modes would result in the production of imagistic fragments of narrative events that would actually occur to the poets in reality days, weeks, months, or even years after their composition. The poems, then, sometimes contained premonitions of events yet to take place for the poet. Rather than attribute these premonitions to some sort of cosmic mysticism or otherworldly forces, the Surrealists theorized that they were, in each instance, actually "the embodiment of an obscure desire," previously embedded deep in the unconscious, "which was later fulfilled in reality" (Ray 22). By automatically transcribing their unconscious thoughts, they were transcribing desires hitherto unknown to them. Oftentimes, these desires were so powerful, and so buried, that they later fulfilled themselves in the absence of the poet's conscious movement towards those desires. Indeed, the Surrealists were discovering, not just inventing. Objective Chance demonstrates the practical application of Surrealist work, that exploration of the objective, by way of the subjective, could be facilitated by viewing both realms as a "complex net of correspondences," rather than categorically distinct (Ray 23).

The very term "psychic automatism" implies an attempt at the marriage of subjective interior and objective exterior (human and nonhuman) realms. The word *Surrealism* itself, for that matter, is more logically translated as something like *Overrealism* or *Hyperrealism*, the prefix *sur* of the French *Surréalisme* denoting an overt or excessive realism. Even Herbert Read, one of the earliest proponents of Surrealism outside of France, in his attempts to justify Surrealism to an English-speaking audience in 1936, proposed that the word *Superrealism* was a more logical choice (21). Semantics aside, however, Surrealism, rather than subjugate material conditions to the imagination, seeks to bring both into equally sharper relief. Surrealism does not seek to dwell relentlessly in

subjectivity. Nor does it seek to abandon objectivity altogether. It seeks to gauge to what extent one impresses the other.

Surrealism, of course, cannot collapse subject and object altogether (an arguably impossible task). And anyway that task should not concern an ecological poetics. The project of an ecological poetics should be to unveil how subject and object, man and Nature, and the human and nonhuman realms are inextricably intertwined. Being human, we cannot hope to outrun or escape correlationism. Our only hope is to train our correlative (i.e., subjective) faculty to better observe the ways in which our world is not correlated entirely by human subjects but also by nonhuman objects. This is why viewing entities as spectral is so vital. To view entities as spectral is to acknowledge that our ontological framing of the world is dependent upon our inner subjective faculties *and* the external object world. Thus, to view entities as spectral is also to view the division between self and world, subject and object, man and Nature, and the human and the nonhuman as less and less incorruptible and more and more superficial.

Let's pause here for a moment to consider just how superficial the division between the human and the nonhuman actually is. Other disciplines, outside of ontology, increasingly demonstrate that superficiality. For example, the more we study plants, the more aware we are of their ability to correspond with and communicate to other entities in their ecosystem; the more we study animals, the more we are aware of their ability to contemplate aesthetics, play, or even reason; and the more we study humanness, the more aware we are of the degree to which humans are composed of the nonhuman (here, I am thinking of how less than half of our body's cell count is actually human DNA—the rest is that of our microbiome: bacteria, fungi, viruses, archea, etc.). Each closer investigation into the human and nonhuman alike reveals that what makes up the human is not particularly “special.” Even a human, on strictly biological terms, is a fundamentally spectral entity.

Timothy Morton is fond of the refrain that “to be a person is to be worried that you might not be one,” suggesting that the more we study the spectral nature of entities, including the self, the more difficult it is to delineate what properties are intrinsically human and what qualities are intrinsically nonhuman (*Dark Ecology* 101). Compare this to Breton’s plea, in his second manifesto, that his readers “not lose sight of the fact that...Surrealism aims quite simply at the total recovery of our psychic force by a means which is nothing other than a dizzying descent into ourselves, the systematic illumination of hidden places and the progressive darkening of other places” (*Manifestos of Surrealism* 136 – 137). For both Morton and Breton, the strict definition of human is something like a dream. The definition of the human is reached through a deliberate doubt or disorientation as to how many intrinsically “human” features—psychic or otherwise—there were to begin with. For both, the human is spectral, or perhaps not at all.

The Anthropocene is definitive confirmation that the spectral nature of the human and the nonhuman overlap. The Anthropocene’s worst symptom, Global Warming, most forcibly alerts us that humanness does not begin and end in our own material bodies, that the activity of our bodies are part and parcel to the very Nature that we have long sought to divorce ourselves from. The human is an integral facet of the larger nonhuman realm. As Morton puts it, “The Anthropocene doesn’t destroy Nature. *The Anthropocene is Nature* in its toxic nightmare form,” meaning that Nature is and has always been merely the “latent form of the Anthropocene waiting to emerge as catastrophe.” Global Warming is incontrovertible evidence that Nature does not exist adjacent to the nonhuman but that the human and nonhuman exist in a “strange loop,” one in which we affect the biosphere and in turn bear witness to those effects (*Dark Ecology* 59). Nature is a Nature-effect. The human is a human-effect. In other words, humanness is inextricably intertwined with nonhumanness, from both an inside and outside perspective. This is why the ecological project cannot be other than an attempt to come to terms with the spectral nature of things, so that

ultimately we come to terms with our strange intertwinement. Our very continued existence depends upon it.

But let's return to the issue at hand: namely, how the operations of Surrealism—specifically the operations of Surrealist poetry—might demonstrate the intertwinement of the human with the nonhuman. As we have already seen, Surrealism seeks a reconciliation of the subjective and objective realms. What makes it particularly remarkable is *how* it does so. The central aim of the Surrealist imagery in poetry is to calibrate how much a given entity is spectral (can thought to be *there* and *not there*). The same, of course, might be said of all poetry deploying analogous imagery. But Surrealism can be differentiated from those by the degree, magnitude, and trajectory to which it pursues the analogous image. In most poetry, “the traditional role of the [analogous] image has always been to compare the remote with the near, the unknown with the known in order to assimilate the former to the latter.” In contrast, “The surrealist image does the opposite: it leads from the known to the unknown, from the near to the remote in order to fill the familiar with mystery” (Ray 41).

The analogous trajectory of the Surrealist image is indeed a movement towards the remote as opposed to the near, but the near is never abandoned altogether. Surrealism is never pure ungrounded fantasy detached from the external object world. As Pierre Reverdy states—and André Breton was fond of recycling verbatim throughout the defining documents of Surrealism—the analogous image “cannot come from a comparison but from the coming together of two realities more or less distant. The farther and truer the connections between those two realities will be, the stronger the image will be—the more emotional power and poetic reality it will have.” (181) The analogous images of the Surrealists, or at least the most successful among them, then, never entirely depart from the objective world. It merely stretches the contrast at work in the metaphoric value to the farthest reaches before losing the last modicum of truth expressed. It is a litmus test for how

much subjectivity is built into objectivity. Take, for example, Guillaume Apollinaire's own example of the Surrealist image from 1917, which still stands as one of the best examples of Surrealism's inherent material focus: "When man resolved to imitate walking, he invented the wheel, which does not look like a leg. In doing this, he was practising surrealism without knowing it" (4). Here, the motion of walking legs and the motion of a wheel transcend their objective differences via recognition of the two respective objects as comparable moving-effects. Works of Surrealism do not degrade reality, nor do they embellish it. They denote, by way of their imagery, how entities are perceptible more by the determining grounds of their effects than their material properties. Surrealism highlights the spectral.

Breton makes it ideologically clear in his 1947 essay "Ascendant Sign" that the analogous Surrealist image is wrought to expose the spectral nature of things. "Only on the level of analogy," writes Breton in his essay, "have I ever experienced intellectual pleasure. For me the only manifest truth in the world is governed by the spontaneous, clairvoyant, insolent connection established under certain conditions between two things whose conjunction would not be permitted by common sense" (104). Surrealists were acutely aware that being does not so exactly coincide with appearances. The fundamental aim of Surrealist analogous thinking, as described by Breton, was to "let the mind apprehend the interdependence of two objects of thought located on different planes," something he believed "logical thinking" to be "incapable of establishing" ("Ascendant Sign" 105). While Breton may not be using vocabulary identical to that of modern day Object-Oriented Ontologists, the ends of their language is strikingly similar. For both, it is not *only* the human mind plus the object that brings a thing into being but a human mind plus the object's *interdependence* upon other objects.

At its very best, Surrealist poetry strives to form images out of the very interdependence or interrelation of objects perceived in the world, a process which requires seeing objects as

ontologically spectral. Breton confirms this later in the essay, stating that Surrealism is not so much interested in resulting metaphors—as so many poetic schools before them—as it is in perpetuating and sustaining an awareness of the interdependence of objects, through persistent comparisons, using the devices of analogous thinking. As Breton himself states, “Metaphor does have the ability to dazzle the mind, but comparison (think of Lautreamont’s series of ‘as beautiful as’) has the considerable advantage of *deferring*.” He continues:

The trigger of analogy is what fascinates us: nothing else will give us access to the motor of the world. Whether it is stated or implied, AS is the most exhilarating word at our command. It gives free rein to the imagination, and the supreme destiny of the mind depends on it. That is why we choose to dismiss rather scornfully the ignorant indictment of the poetry of our time, accused of making excessive use of the “image.” On the contrary, what we expect from it is an ever growing luxuriance. (“Ascendant Sign” 106)

For Breton, there can be no “excessive” use of the image because things of the world are—ontologically-speaking—intrinsically excessive. There is always more to know of any object, or any object in relation to another object. Because objects are recognized by their effects, by their interdependence upon other objects, forming their determining grounds, no objects can ever be fully deduced by comparison to other objects. They are forever in a constant state of deferring to one another. Furthermore, they are always further deferring to the way in which we, as human subjects, perceive that deferring. In this sense, Surrealism really is a “dizzying descent into ourselves,” as Breton claims. However, it is just as much a dizzying ascent outward. Because the world is made up of the effects of objects bringing each other into being through their ceaseless, analogous deferring to one another, there is nothing but a never-ending luxuriance or excess of reality for the Surrealist to explore. Surrealism is simply a poetic transcription of this spectral luxuriance. In transcribing this spectral nature of objects, the Surrealist poet intimately trains himself to investigate the radical

depths of human subjectivity, the means by which we access the nonhuman objective world and its realities, not to mention our involvement in those realities.

Examples of this kind could be cited, at length and breadth, in nearly any Surrealist poem authored by any Surrealist poet, but to simplify matters I will limit myself mostly to Paul Eluard's "The Earth is Blue As an Orange," which I believe briefly but poignantly illustrates the point at hand. The introductory lines of Eluard's poem perfectly demonstrate the consistent, analogous "deferring," that Breton describes:

The earth is blue as an orange
Never an error the words don't lie
They give you over no longer to singing
it's the kisses' turn to come to terms with
the crazies and the lovers

[La terre est bleue comme une orange
Jamais une erreur les mots ne mentent pas
Ils ne vous donnent plus à chanter
Au tour des baisers de s'entendre
Les fous et les amours] (176)

The first line is especially important. Eluard initiates the poem with an analogous deferring, and a seemingly impossible one at that—at least, he seems to enforce a blatant contradiction, even following it up with an explicit assurance that the empirically false comparison is true. An orange is clearly not blue, and the Earth's blueness is certainly questionable. However, one of the most common ways by which humans experience the Earth in its largesse is, of course, by looking up at the blueness of the sky. And if indeed the Earth is experienced in this way, in its most accessible

largesse of blueness, the sun is seen: a spherical orange, surrounded by that blueness of the sky. Viewed from this perspective, from the spectral perspective, the Earth is indeed “blue as an orange,” or at least as blue as the orange’s contrast admits perception of the surrounding blueness. The Earth is known through the recognition of the determining grounds formed via the interdependent effects of objects. The deferring reveals that the Earth, as object, is always measured at least partly in relation to the effects of other objects it must defer to, in order to be recognized as an object itself. The lines that follow serve as a lovely meta-commentary on the deferring trigger of the first line. Eluard leaves it up to the continual kissing, or relational value, between objects to determine what separates a statement of madness from a statement of care and passion. If nothing else, the first line of the poem assures us of the need for both: attention to other objects and perception by the human subject. In short, it suggests how heavily dependent the experience of reality is on the intertwinement of the human and the nonhuman.

Sometimes this spectral vision is deployed from a microcosmic standpoint, as might be said of Eluard’s poem, but it is also frequently deployed throughout Surrealist works from a macrocosmic standpoint, as in André Breton’s “Free Union” [«L’Union libre »]. In this poem, a barrage of deferring, spectral effects combine to form a portrait of his lover, who is the central object of the poem and is imbued with, and experienced through, a deferring to more and more objects. The lover becomes the lover-effect:

Woman of mine whose hair is a brush fire

Whose thoughts are flashes of heat lightning

Whose waist is an hourglass

Woman of mine whose waist is an otter squeezed between the teeth of a tiger

Woman of mine whose mouth is a rosette moreover a bouquet of stars of the absolute

grandiosity

Whose teeth are the imprints of white mice moving across the white earth

Whose tongue is polished amber and glass

Woman of mine with the tongue of a stabbed communion host

Whose tongue is a doll that opens and shuts its eyes

Whose tongue is incredible stone

Woman of mine whose eyelashes are the strokes of a child's handwriting

Whose eyebrows are the rim of a nest of swallows

[Ma femme à la chevelure de feu de bois

Aux pensées d'éclairs de chaleur

A la taille de sablier

Ma femme à la taille de loutre entre les dents du tigre

Ma femme à la bouche de cocarde et de bouquet d'étoiles de
dernière grandeur

Aux dents d'empreintes de souris blanche sur la terre blanche

A la langue d'ambre et de verre frottés

Ma femme à la langue d'hostie poignardée

A la langue de poupée qui ouvre et ferme les yeux

A la langue de pierre incroyable

Ma femme aux cils de bâtons d'écriture d'enfant

Aux sourcils de bord de nid d'hirondelle] (Breton 144)

Here, as in the vast majority of Surrealist poems, the reader is provided no meta-commentary upon the spectral imagery therein. The analogous imagery defers from object to object, the spectral nature of the lover taking precedent. Iteration after iteration, the poet associates their lover with other

objects that are not the lover themselves and yet nevertheless make a composite of the lover. The poet is, of course, expressing the romantic figurative notion that their lover is other-worldly, mysterious, even unfathomable, but they are also expressing the ontological truth that the lover—like all things in the world, human or nonhuman—is spectral. By acknowledging the lover as a collage of the relational effects of other objects, the poet admits the inescapable intertwinement of the human and the nonhuman. The poet sees the lover everywhere, in all things. The lover is *there* and *not there*—brought into focus by the determining grounds of other objects.

The resulting vantage might best be understood as a sort of waking daydream—an analogy proffered by mid-20th century American Surrealists as they were to contemplate how Surrealism might lend itself to more pragmatic causes. Charles Henri Ford, one of the most prominent American Surrealists of this time, in his unpublished “Notes on Neo-Modernism,” called for a Surrealism that was composed of “less passive, more active” somnambulistic control, in which the poet was “awakened...in the unconscious...and” from there “keeps on waking” (qtd. in Howard 116).

Eugene Jolas, yet another American with vested interest in Surrealist aesthetics, supplements this idea in his “Notes on Reality.” There, he identifies those “certain hallucinations which we experience before falling asleep or immediately upon waking” with pointed interest. “These so-called hypnogogic hallucinations,” argues Jolas, “represent mostly imagistic reflexes of a thought we were engaged in before half-sleep overtook us. The image experienced is the surrogate for the logical development of the preceding thought” (250). Jolas’ argument is simple: any so-called fantastical thought is objective reality colored to a greater or lesser degree by human thought, seeing that our inevitable “return to the objective world makes us aware of the exact contour of this image.” Therefore, Jolas reasons, “the projection of the will...is the creator’s solution to his problem. The revolutionary agent is that which becomes conscious and proceeds from the instinctive to a fusion

with objective reality” (“Notes on Reality” 250, 251). Jolas was cogent of the fact that to project the will of subjectivity is to project reality, at least in part, in so much as it presents itself *for* or *to* us, against what it really is. Therefore, Surrealism becomes capable of “conquering the dualism between the ‘it’ and the ‘I,’” as it provides context for a space where “cause and effect,” between the inner subjective and outer objective world can be “transposed,” in the production of a “static point produced by the balancing of the dynamic representations of the world with the spontaneous movement of the dream,” in the analogous image (“Notes on Reality” 252). Like the French Surrealists, the Americans strove for ontological truth. It is to the credit of the Americans, however, that they explicitly put Surrealism in the service of perpetual waking, a waking into what *is there* by way of what *is not there*.

Eugene Jolas, in a short manifesto from 1935, predicted that a poetics would one day emerge that would be more successful than Surrealism in helping us tread the intricacies of reality. He called this poetics a *mantic compost*. Jolas envisioned that this poetics would bring us closer to bridging the dualities of the ethereal and the real, the creative and created worlds:

The period of “lyric” and “poem” is definitely over. The world of sonnets, ballads, octaves, elegies, odes, is over. The “poem” with its narcissism, descriptions of the milieu, paeans of land and loam, lovesick whines, melodramatic anecdotes of bloodlust and incest, Hellenic parallelisms, propaganda of “living issues,” little individual aches and troubles, cynically objective naturalism, is liquidated. A new style is in the making that will present the dramatic unity of “body” and “soul,” that will be subobjective. New forms to present the identity of the ancestral world and the present world will have to be found; epic word-symphonies will have to be discovered; an interracial language will have to be forged to express the collective inner vision of mankind. The “poem” must change into a *mantic compost* which organizes the expanding consciousness of “the expanding universe.” It will go parallel with science which

is no longer afraid of intuition, which is joining the ideations of mystics and seers, which has discovered the cosmic rays as the confirmation of the gnostic pneuma, which has annihilated three-dimensional space. The *mantic compost* will be the expression of the noumenal reality, the super and interplanetary cosmos, the dynamis of a new imagination. (“Workshop (July 1935)” 281)

Jolas could not have foreseen the ecological effects of the Anthropocene, much less the ultimate revelation of the Anthropocene—that human existence is intertwined with nonhuman existence. Nevertheless, Jolas was cogent of the fact that his own world was changing, and that if poetry was to continue its revelatory endeavors it would need to admit how much “intuition” or “ideation” is integral to “the expression of the noumenal [opposite of phenomena—i.e., things in of themselves] reality.” What is crucial here is that Jolas takes the expression of the “dynamis”—the potentiality or will—of that noumenal reality rather than the noumenal reality itself as his primary goal. Such an endeavor seems urgently applicable to an ecologically-aware poetics of the Anthropocene, in which the poet, relying on their subjective human access to the objective nonhuman world, strives to access the reality of the nonhuman dynamis radically altered by human dynamis. This poetics would be *mantic*—prophetic, divinatory—in so far as it sees the human through the nonhuman and the nonhuman through the human and *compost*—a putrid assemblage, a fertilizer—in so far as it tears down what is *there* to build what is *not there* and thereby reveals reality as is.

Granted, Jolas’ manifesto is often more polemical and romantic than pragmatic and concrete in matters of explaining how, exactly, one might accomplish a mantic compost poetics, but it is not entirely impossible to surmise a few descriptions of what its aesthetics might entail. First and foremost, the mutability of language should be felt: “The chief need for an expression of this inner mutation is a new art of the word,” writes Jolas, “We need a plastic word composition that...is related to the existential, to anthropology, to depth psychology, to metaphysics.” Above all, Jolas

insists language should demonstrate its capability, and perform, as a “mantic instrument,” a “mediumistic organ” (“Workshop (July 1935)” 281, 282). The language of a mantic compost poetics, then, is that which stresses the ways in which language itself has been impressed by the mind and the world and continues to make its impression on the mind and the world. In other words, it is that which appears as an active subject and a passive object simultaneously, explicitly as well as implicitly.

For Jolas, the fundamental method by which the poet achieves this is by representing language “in constant movement,” temporally speaking, throughout the ages. The poet must demonstrate that the language, as it courses the epochs, is fluid, that “it carries the symbolic remnants of the past in its stream,” a “phylogenetic [evolutionary] mass” through which the poet “seeks hieroglyphs to express what to many seem the inexpressible.” At one and the same time, the language is a symbolic designation and the advancement of those symbolic designations. The poets’ “words themselves,” writes Jolas, “become mediumistic,” they come to “live a life of their own, like all living organisms. In his process of a mystic metamorphosis of reality, he also metamorphoses the means of representation” (“Workshop (July 1935)” 284). In this way, the poet allows for the representational features to mutate the language, but Jolas also stresses that the poet might mutate the representational features of language for the same effect, advocating for the creation of new words for new objects, concepts, or experiences:

On the other hand, if his temperament be more impatient and if he finds many words definitely useless and pathological for the purpose of manifesting the mediumistic experience, he ought to have the right to invent new ones. In this *revolution of the word* he does not forget that he always builds on a language saturated with the ancient mythic symbols. He does not forget that the substratum of the unconscious psyche is identical...throughout the world....He makes a “spiritual wedding” of the old and new sigils and thus gives language

wings again. His primary aim is the creation of a new metaphoric language that might approach the mood of illumination. (“Workshop (July 1935)” 284)

Not only does language reveal its mediumistic, mutative qualities in its participation in the external objective world, it reveals its mediumistic, mutative nature by being a representative participant in the changes of the external object world. The poetic language comprising the aesthetics of mantic compost, able to mutate with the times and be mutated as a means for expressing the times, becomes the perfect language for an ecologically-aware expression of the Anthropocene. It is the word and the world, made and remade, by the interior and exterior, simultaneously.

And so in the spirit of continuing to imagine that which we know, in the spirit of continuing to wake through the intertwinement of the human and nonhuman world, and in the spirit of perpetuating that thinking which is ecological, I advocate for a mantic compost poetics. Once more: we cannot hope to think ourselves out of the Anthropocene, but we can think ourselves deeper into it, until our human ontological engagement with the nonhuman reveals the really strange, really surreal depths of our involvement in it. Such is the most vital task of the ecological poet today.

CHAPTER 2

MANTIC COMPOST

The period of “lyric” and “poem” is definitely over. The world of sonnets, ballads, octaves, elegies, odes, is over. The “poem” with its narcissism, descriptions of the milieu, paeans of land and loam, lovesick whines, melodramatic anecdotes of bloodlust and incest, Hellenic parallelisms, propaganda of “living issues,” little individual aches and troubles, cynically objective naturalism, is liquidated. A new style is in the making that will present the dramatic unity of 'body' and 'soul,' that will be subobjective. New forms to present the identity of the ancestral world and the present world will have to be found; epic word-symphonies will have to be discovered; an interracial language will have to be forged to express the collective inner vision of mankind. The “poem” must change into a *mantic compost* which organizes the expanding consciousness of “the expanding universe.” It will go parallel with science which is no longer afraid of intuition, which is joining the ideations of mystics and seers, which has discovered the cosmic rays as the confirmation of the gnostic pneuma, which has annihilated three-dimensional space. The *mantic compost* will be the expression of the noumenal reality, the super and interplanetary cosmos, the dynamis of a new imagination.

- Eugene Jolas

You're on earth. There's no cure for that.

- Samuel Beckett

I: A Like Sore

we,
Half dust, half deity, alike unfit
To sink or soar

- Lord Byron

I

“Solastalgia [soh-luh-stal-juh], *noun*. 1. A neologism expressing psychic or existential distress caused
by extreme shifts in environment,
often instigated by the consequences of global warming or a natural disaster.”

Most days I walk around thinking I hold this word, not so much as water, but the blueprints thereof,
in quaking, cupped hands,
to the lips of a drowning man.

Here, the brain, as well as the heart, goes potpourri.

I have no solutions. Most days I do what anyone does: sit, ache, & wonder

at each crush that might encompass us:

the aromas of chai tea, a vase full of baby-breath-florets, the slight feint of angel wings over a
smoker’s shoulder, out in the alley.

It’s a gift—to wonder how visual survival is, or isn’t.

How the theory of flight dons what a blue jay doesn’t in its own head, for instance, while still the

residue of simulacra remains.

How strange,

that any body, fluent with its own oeuvre, could feel itself apart,

& then maneuver back together: as a type of sawdust, so to speak, of the splinter it sucks at:

the yet-vocabulary I, like a dry-erase moon,

come apart in.

Or choose to. To feel a part. Of what surrounds us bluely, transbluently.

II

But our eyes are just everyone's sky at once. Our skulls, atmospheric. They rise, they go weightless.

Like the blooming of arachnids, web-by-web, across a meadow's lousewort.

“Organism-like moon.”

It's impossible, isn't it?

—the way musical notation, correctly finessed, could lift the entirety of a piano's mysterious innards
of song by the simplicity of a finger?

How possible would it be, then, I wonder, for a wound to lick its tongue a deeper shade of red?

To thistle, to bristle, to open the prismatic likes of?

My mind is like a blooming onion, a wilderness, an in-which a nervous system smartly tightens
around.

When the experts say by 2050 the world's oceans may be more plastic than fish,

my spine sharpens to a near-alpine, nearly delirious point

& wades

in exclamatory sense, & wakes,

& tills the human voices, where to date I'm not yet drowning.

III

Bones, buoyed, go balloons. The wrap-around of. Clouds. Scythes. Wheatfields.

Where am I?

—Along the braille of snapdragon pods, I watch as a honeybee licks pollen onto its legs, & slowly,
surely, furs into a lantern.

Memory, too, ascends its abyss.

Like the circulation of moonlight in a rose: like the sleepy whites of eyes: like aspirin-coated clouds.

—& I'm there, in my mother's garden,

the clotheslines around us flapping in the wind like loose bones

(Remember that deer spine you found, out in the woods, meat still sloughing off

the vertebral reverberations

of your fascination? Weird flower. Fastened earth.)—& my sister,

—she's there, gleefully stripping the dried snapdragons from their stalk, whose floretful, forgetful

Pods, when dried,

resemble tulle-familiar skulls. Their eyes were the sky's. Say what you will.

—they were the sky's.

You need only take a breath, from worm upwards, into that which feels most like cirrus, mysterious

to realize this,

to touch what the word *garden* had reserved for you, between

noun & verb: that bilious-bucolic-in-which-of-wilderness, whose very lungful is vermilion, a sterling
refusal

to vanish.

Breathe. Relax. There is pleasure, still, in learning to love the extinct animal you foresee

you are. Because the only

dead image

is the completed image.

IV

If I say this planet's dying & there's no poetry can dwell inside that, I mean only the way an absent

rose emerges,

over the scent of rosewater, regardless, as the reminiscence, or sense,

the "so to speak" of some wind's

creased muscle: What surrounds us, only to leave us: as if toward the tip of my tongue

an answer could taste

what quests into this bouquet

will cancel what wreck we'd web to call flowers.

—that falling-in-love-with-romanticized-versions-of-ourselves. Like flesh, through a flower tattoo.

Loose definitions suit us, entrance us, ford & forge us, to make an entrance of us,

in turn.

But the truth is, out here,

we are broken like the rain, not broken like a bone. And I am not lightning.

No, I am not lightning.

But when I close my eyes I'm the river through a cricket's skull: into sky & skull, disappearing into
quiescence: into likewise.

I won't lie, whenever I'm not dreaming this world together, I'm falling apart.

Like the color of a forecast. Exfoliated geode.

Every time the skull contracts, the dream swells, or else the body subtracts.

We know this.

True as a dry spell assuages the saguaro to fill itself fat with jealousy, come the monsoon, the sky's
opening up,

prismatic, more so than us, even. We know this. Its exposed nerve. Like the beautiful slip

the lips require to say,

“The lingual sky took on a new consistency of freshly-opened coconut's cream.”

& knowing the distances as unseemly

exactly because they seem so.

V

From the et cetera of dust refusing to specter the earth into its whole you imagine:

Sky, Skull,

—you & I are the algebra of one another we can't turn to aloe in our heads,

so first: there's ghosts. Then: this compost.

Fingering the last coffee-specked & veiny crumb of zucchini bread off a demi-tasse plate, I get all
circulatory

& then I get all canvas-y, my skin all x-ray-y.

There are times, I confess, I want to feel sorry for myself, attach my detachment & disappear

how a chain-link fence argues itself into

& out of existence as.

—other times, fold like a moon made of kudzu into the fertile crescent.

Instead, I let this all do to my gut what a freeway can

to a family of possums, Coca-Cola to a Sri Lankan river, Petroperú to the Chiriaco & Maraño,
or Sunoco to the sunset.

But oilspills turn an Amazonian jungle into a silent film quicker than I can turn this lens

into a mirror. & I bleed silence. Like a projector, light

(or moths, from snow).

—then—morning—& I am nothing but tired. Looking for another day

to roach into.

Like a soggy old La-Z-Boy left out in the rain, the weeds—an exposé of what springs

exoskeletally,

aside the drooping tomato garden.

& Chernobyl's still realigning the DNA of ladybugs & wolf hair: Exxon-Valdez, egret feathers &
orca-holes: Land. Sea. Air. Sky.

& *here* becomes *where*, because the sky's upside-

down, because “Million of Starfish are Literally Tearing Themselves Apart & Climate Change May
Be to Blame” is literally a headline today

& my pretzeling below it,

gut & fist

alike,

literally what composts these ghosts: seraph to serif: dust to dust.

VI

How I believe

the transparency of nausea

introduces

the body to its entirety, like memos

inside a crematorium,

—same as the glitterings of the stars are, I remember.

I remember, I once lived in a basement apartment that contained exactly 3 pieces of furniture:

a desk, a half-busted blue swivel chair from the Goodwill, & a mattress on the floor.

I worked 3 jobs & the majority of my meals consisted of a slurry of rehydrated hummus bulkbin

pre-mix I could pass off as 50c/lb cornmeal in the Albertson's

self-checkout.

I was convinced, at one point, that I would not see the year through.

I remember the nights best: when the only thing to do was listen to my dying neighbor's plumbing
write its wet way through my paper-thin walls,

& writhe, slowly, into sleep, into something like

the very poiesis we seek, perhaps, year after year, web-by-web:

the nausea the body is introduced by. What makes you think in never-quite-connected concentric
circles. Of weird intimacies.

Of van Goghian swirls in the lost thought of wastewater. Of dreams.

Death & dreams, it seems, come in waves, in seams.

& the persevering in-seam of the body is the body that does not—that will not—waver from its air
quotes.

Now, I know,

I should be the lost thought of wastewater, made mosaic, made mesocosm, made cosmic omission.

& I know, now, that I need only braid my skull into an unlearning

of its easel, to ease upward, into fleshy relief.

To unlearn oneself into: as the uneasy curvature, the impossible object, of nature: as the question
asked by any good easel:

just how much of us is exquisite

busk &

how much bush?

I know, in lieu of answering, I should take the question as the stylized chrysalis it is,

aloe,

or else.

VII

So find me out under the appaloosa-muscle of the night sky,

find me in the botanical gardens, dreaming myself into halves, & those halves into twin axels—

—machine I am in the garden I make myself.

Follow this. Follow whatever et cetera sows. Through physic & herb, through what the physique of
stinging nettle unfolds

into old man's pipe, chocolate mint & pineapple sage,

oleander & oilseed flower, up to what insidious-pretty riles this engine, which begins

in idyllic blooms

& ends in the aroma of Giuseppe Arcimboldo's screaming flora-meat. I idle that engine for hours up
through chalk. peat. clay. silt. & loam

where I grow my balm, my yield architecture, my where-you'll-wake-up, breathing in

a truck's exhaust, & out: plume after

plume of smog in the shape of wild horses & skulls etched through by the same dislocated songs of
pigfrogs, chuck-will-widows,

& insects grating the evening out of leaves how morning out of dusk & I an eye from sleep.

What say we say sky & skull are one, then.

Dear Sky, dear Skull,

the birds are too ecclesiastic, & the stars too astrological, to lend a hand.

So paint me a cloud in the top-left corner of this canvas & I'll promise to paint an isthmus in the
bottom-right

& we'll spend the rest of our lives

pretending this isn't just the isthmus my lips is.

—it's true, I've tried living as far outside of my body as my body would permit,

but it's the inching, the itching anxiety of unbroken bones that believes me into being: into solidity:
into sanity.

Believe me, I could build a raft of it.

Only I would use it to swim further out, to listen to the waves slap the Lake Karachay lakeshore, like

the flavor of hooves

carving some new animal noise

from my mouth.

Noises in a language I would hardly understand. Be they legion: be they lesions: or be they lessons.

Like those most poignant, most inherent in a landslide:

For every landscape, that is to say, there are more than several false endings. The nerves of which

I will hardly understand, but whose

will may prove its forging & somehow forgive being

being unforgivable.

VIII

Dear Sky, dear Skull,

Now it's the distance I can't taste is talking me out of my sleep, like the color of lilac through
styrofoam.

You were taught, as I was, to seek dignity in distress, like light

into balled-up saran-wrap.

Hope: to swell, to coalesce, slowly, into sense, into choice cuts of crystal &/or cyst.

The truth is, some wounds unfurl psychologically, others cinematically.

A lily-of-the-valley, for instance, reared in a basement window, will grow knowing little of the valley,
& yet unfurl,

nevertheless, as if in the know. Like the sensation a kiss

is,

—only the taste of which, twisted

into definition. Love happens a lot like that: trying to find the right distance

to expand across,

before the heart, seasoned cast-iron black, slicks a shelter into nowhere, & reclines

into what starts reflexive, being reflective.

A night like this:

lithe idyll

through the crabgrass.

Cough-crush-cool of green. Arthritic click of “T”. In the global locale.

Global pastoral.

A cricket skull’s quiescence overheard, overhead, beneath, around.

Dear Sky, dear Skull,

I understand that “there are so many little dyings that it hardly matters which is death,” but if hurt

becomes the earth, it’s we

who are bound to feel the holy contractions of that.

I won't forget. An ellipsis begs impression. Sparks, the cold sole of a footprint or a flame's passion.

Dear Sky, dear Skull,

Today, the world's on fire & the space between us feels merely like a lung, unhinged on the ice-cold
air.

But it's only just now—somewhere in your solar kiss drying on mine,

that I've begun to understand

the shortest distance warming between two points.

II: Though, Through, Thoroughly; or, Projecting an Object-Oriented Obsolescence of Lyric

I

Was it possible I, viscosity of flesh, could escape this viscera, emulate visceral velocity of flora, step aside from, outside of, or otherwise sidestep lyric far enough to flower: though I'd begun, facetiously, as fanned pages of *The Norton Anthology of English Romantic Literature*, I'd come through the other side nothing more than a tercet erasure of its nature, thoroughly: "alas I / flower I, though / through thoroughly": in other words, what I saw as seeing was myself seeing I was seeing, though: a seething, then, comparable only to a myriapod's pyramidal myriad of legs, less swarm, more swathe (like death), through, thoroughly: & though I would *if* myself the gift of wings, I would lift from a signature, less its weight, how loudness through lewd writing in wet cement appears nevertheless the *ness* of what's loud, thoughtful, embodied to the point of thingness, thoroughly: ultimately, what I wanted, though, was to push a stone of what I could sustain through: & having thus sustained, unseat thoroughly.

II

Can you say the word *butterfly* in a poem anymore—I mean—without wincing, though: show me what archetype isn't skewered through our psyche, thoroughly, by the most cliché of pins, & I'll show you where the needle's encyclopedic-like end points out an account of anthropocentrism: though somewhat invisible, at times, translucent wings do not make the insect's body any more interstitial than a drone's displacement of embodied blame speaking its way through a commanding officer's mouth, thoroughly: this is basic Descartes: though bodies, obfuscated by their attire, may tire insight through said attire, to the bodies underneath said attire, the brain renders said obscurity as what obscurity is said aside, & makes a body a body, a nobody body a somebody body, thoroughly: we're not stupid, just stupid against things, so to speak: though our being against things shows us through us.

III

I want off this carousel, though, this Möbius strip, this wish-landscape through everywhere: Thoroughly, though, it's these rungs we entrust to rust through: to endure what we must to maintain the track, thoroughly: so what we travel is a thin skin, thin as the sky's skin reflected in the blue-hued radicchio in a salad spilled across the asphalt on my walk home: through Arcadia I've traveled & through Arcadia is nothing but the vanity that coheres, thoroughly: self-styled incoherence, so to speak, though: for example, it could be said that all staring through the vortices of honey reveals is liquid bees, or bees reduced to vortices of liquid reveal the stare of honey, when what this really reveals is *it could be said*, thoroughly: likewise, there is no singular trauma will automate Earth's collective trauma into a contraction doesn't contradict, constrict my lyric, and though we may be quick to admit that its perusal will find what's worth pursuing was never there to begin with, I would ask you what a will is worth, if what it wears through you allows you to wear you thoroughly, through there.

IV

To be thoroughly clear, words are not the windows, though, we see through: regardless, I can't thoroughly resist the urge to world some unwindowing, though: I like to think, on some level, I can still unswan what's cerebral of me through: like a silver, river-torn Coors can digests the fetish of the sun's indignant glinting off?—no; now grows the nausea of our noir plot's discontent into a gnawing implication that's all too much us, endlessly, thoroughly, links day to day to day to: though we exude more reality than we can bear, through the baring we reel into the real, thoroughly: for example, though the white whirlings of this river's whims rear up against the rocks, & rear up vertebraic, they collapse like vapor, as we evoke the refusal of its verb, revoked, thoroughly: in truth, I think there is no real coda, no real flower we are the follower of: though our spine's great pleasure remains the privileging of bone to muscle through: as long as bodies cry inside-out, utopia remains a reflex, held haphazardly as a vein is, not a reflection: thoroughly.

Oscar Wilde once implied, though, that a sunset only appears to us the way it does because the Impressionists thought it through: until it was thoroughly thrust at us, & was us, rusted us, & was'd us: though what would this prove if not a typo through the elegy, eventually, *typifies* the elegy, thoroughly: though we are the ironed folds of so many colorful eons we wrought, we rot through even faster, regardless, thoroughly: clear as I write this, though, what appears as merely London fog to a brain is willing to scythe the eye's will, I can't forget & I won't forge forgetfulness: through hurricanes I erect the house I live myself through in error, thoroughly: I would relate, realize, re-relate, surreal-ize, surreal-ate, elate these nymphs—which is to say, the type-key light under my fingers I imagine rising like some moon, moves to eclipse populations, only to re-move, though, the enormous oceanic wink welling up behind me: through the *as I write this* the *as I write this* writes me, thoroughly, though, so what writes me through escapes to prove there is no thoroughly I can disprove opposite a fly's incessant grinding against the glass.

VI

It's just as well wading this meadow, though, would be so prone to through: that is, it wasn't until I'd planted an herb garden & filed for unemployment that I felt truly American, thoroughly Arcadian, though: displaced through idyll, by flowers, Arcadian; through idol, by capital, American: thoroughly a marvel, how these dollar signs twine the insignia of infinity like the boutonnière Eros is, snout in its slop-bucket, snug: though how these skeletal flowers swap marrow for narrow escape, I'm amazed at thinking through (thoroughly, though?): the remains of what's amazing remains a single cow in a single field surrounded by single lines of rain licking a single dewdrop on a single lilac through the rubbery abstract of four stomachs: through the foreground, the background drinks itself to death, thoroughly: though, regardless, tomorrow, I'm bound to spend the day misquoting Bashō to any friend who'll listen, the act of which will expose this weather of mine, of I, through, to its bone: thoroughly into, not onto, though: like a wandering moon writes its room around us, maroons us, through us, wantonly, thoroughly.

VII

Though let's just finally admit that every lost eyelash, re-collected, permits us a look into last night's dilation: through recollection I burn my I into objects around me, thoroughly, like the edge of canvas in Magritte's *La Condition humaine* is almost negligible, almost negligée to a sky's seamless: though an eye's protrusion is like so much dust, burnt onto the glass surface of a lightbulb, likewise it's an escape to a burnt-out star: through the microcosmic, in other words, comes the macrocosmic; in other worlds, this eye that fevers me, fauves me, favors me, flavors me, thoroughly: ultimately, though, this eye faces me, accrues me, through me, thoroughly: it's only in reaching for the landscape's acreage that feels out the fundamental ache we're all familiar with, though: the ache through which, from afar, defines the fear of endless nearness, so thoroughly: think of it like the gear-strains of crickets, though, how they oil the first groan of stretching awake through sleep, thoroughly: though the gobs, globs, & globes may misconstrue, through us a body's focus, we know, at least, we are astral or otherwise: thoroughly a maligned (though ever-migrating), malignant eye.

VIII

Through a gull's cry over the sky, sharp as steel, bone-close as skin is, I am prone to wearing what I am down into the ground: thoroughly as the anxiety of a dream crusts bird & bomb alike, together, at the joints, jazz-like, I is a fragile improvisation too: though yes, the world really is too much with us—just think what thinks us, from fowl to fuel to fantasy to flagrancy, & finally up to & through the foul ascendancy of what's feathering the Mother of All Bomb's wing: thoroughly is the wrong word for what we wear if what we swear by is interiors, the ulterior of fantasia: though, through, thoroughly, I error with an air grown sick with its own thickness, though owning the sickness through the thickness of thought, thoroughly: like Barthes said, if "I make the other's absence responsible for my worldliness," I'm only convincing myself out of the devastation of who's wielding into who's withholding: though, I'll still be here, waiting, behind my mouth, for the world to make some sense of me.

IX

Through, thoroughly, is where the water I overwater the flowers with goes: though just like the physicality of gravity, or the gravity of physicality, often every last drop coming through the bottom of the terra-cotta flowerpots drips out colorlessly, thoroughly: I can confuse this .gif of a police van, writhing in fire, with a bouquet of wildflowers, purposefully, pleurably: though every ideology, down to & including the mouthfeel of a McDonald's Sausage McMuffin is interstitial, circumstantial, through the stitching I become intestinal, consequential, thoroughly, though, through: & so the lights from the towering condos splay across the lake tonight like dumb ghosts, thoroughly: until what's left to the imagination creams the revolt of a darkroom's voice: though actual, the factual is, through its very spiral, less than: thoroughly otherwise, crystal, filial, spectral, fractal: though nevertheless, through the frayed, strayed eye of a peacock feather in a flightless space is where one sees said peacock thoroughly, as though the seal of the eggshell through its color was molten to begin with.

& so one never quite enters the abstract as quickly, as inquisitively, as thoroughly: as when one feels “the heavy and the weary weight / Of all this unintelligible world,” though the trauma of earthen remains is not automatic, earth remains an amalgam, through us, of migraines; us, us, us, thoroughly: it’s not unlikely, though, that threading our attention to a tire tread’s intention would suture through to a future, thoroughly: as in, the umbilicus becomes the ambulance: though, who knows; I goes vehicle as easily as through its reversal wilts to writ, rewrites the tercet nature of my erasure of the *Norton Anthology of Romantic Literature*: “thoroughly through / though, I flower / I alas”: thoroughly, I’m convinced we are the cornucopia through though: under the dominion of, thoroughly: through though, the alas—the I—the flowering—ruptures what’s most anthropo-scenic from the center of what’s spirit, what’s universe, what’s politik, what’s psyche, and finally what’s earth, all this: thoroughly, through, though: thought.

III: The Vortex: I

—Listen: to the sprouts emerging from within the hurricane.

The garden is now trying to go to ruin

.

The ocean of the blazing sun opens entangles with a field of roses only the spoken words
beg forgiveness while trying to live.

- Chika Sagawa (trans. Sawako Nakayasu)

Verses Out of the Vortex: Nest Vortex

[“These Birds Decorate their Nests with Trash—Here’s Why” (*NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC*: JANUARY 1, 2018)]

orioles & black kites trill the air into a plastic
twill the rolling *r*'s of clouds
tear the sky's papier-
mâché into “Darkling I listen” “Darkling
I listen” “Darkling I
listen”

& Darkling how I listen my ears & lungs
simultaneously
the neon helix of a crab's

face beachside in Jersey *welcome to the vortex*
says the vertigo
of a White Castle's trashcan
soda cups & mini-burger-boxes bob &
clam up the bronchial tube-
like turrets of the surrounding trees for thine

is the kingdom I write

the vortex I can't unsee

these castles

in the air temper

the air into "all that is solid

melts into air" beautiful as the ontological

curve my toilet's drain argues

away any notion "the mermaids have come to

the desert"

street-water rainbow like a landfill scraped open behind a golf course

this vein across my forehead

circumnavigates the object lesson "like as though

the plague

became a guest" there is no exit

but through this nest

because the laughter in a landscape

isn't just

visible it's listenably

Verses Out of the Vortex: The Great Pacific Trash Vortex

[“The Great Pacific Garbage Patch, Full of Ocean Plastic, Keeps Growing: It's an 80,000-ton Beast of Debris Between Hawaii and California That's Still Getting Bigger” (*NBC NEWS*: MARCH 25, 2018)]

just as “frothing wounds of roses” may draw
thee ever nearer
love’s estranged entanglement
so too I veer ever nearer the vortex
via vortext every minute the Pacific Trash Vortex
twice the size
of Texas

bears repeating
because everything is bigger in “the awful shadow

of some unseen power” why even write
this I am
only a slug’s dream

ambling up the strawberry vines

in comparison the somnambulist half-eaten

by the honey of sleep the author

dies & everything's a text

& I & you & "meditation & water are wedded forever"

a wine

stem forgives its delusions of grandeur a dandelion's

crown forgets its language

up to the moment it's translated into

dent-de-lion & bites its tongue

in a dew-heavy moment the eyelids transform an eye

into isles "say it, no ideas but in

things" how wind & water persuade a ship's

conception of a sail as the here-where

gone hardware

the earth so often

softens what's dreamt into sound being a pitbull's

chewing its summertime

blues away through a Windex bottle's unheard of wave

outlives us

& like micro-

plastics

extenuates our circumstances

Verses Out of the Vortex: Wildfire Vortex

[“The Worst Fires in Recent California History: The Carr Fire is Even More Alarming When You Put it in Context” (*SLATE*: JULY 31, 2018)]

coolly cerebral the trees in all fairness

express their membranal

feral-

ness the firs

in particular tressed out as if “an accordion

of

white bats” or phone cords or xylophones even

of ash

something incommunicable I

can’t decide what

to tell my mother after

she calls me

from outside Seattle

& describes the smoke-fast-haze “as if this earth in fast

thick pants

were

breathing,” to graze over the Puget Sound like

the glitch

of

a

limping doe’s

quiverings

across the freeway under the lamplight of rush-hour

traffics the vortex until said vortex is writ

as invisible ink

until it’s not an option “Open thine eyes eterne,

& sphere them round / Upon

all space: space starr’d, & lorn of light; / Space

region’d with life-air; & barren

void; / Spaces of fire, & all the yawn of hell” his excellency

who presides

tweets the blame for the largest CA wildfire

on record to the timber

industry's lack of growth & I lose what sort of wind's

required to grow the kind of tornado I

should become because I have witnessed the spread

of the human spine.exe

cease

to function

Verses Out of the Vortex: Identity Vortex

[“Can Rivers Be People Too?: Inside the Radical Movement to Gain Rights for Ecosystems—and Save the Environment” (*THE NEW REPUBLIC*: MAY 9, 2018)]

that this garden should fall may it fall less the weight of a sigh

& more the weight

of scythes the rivers

have read

the lips of the corporate body & in a moment

of solidarity found

common

grounds from which to protest “I ought to be

thy Adam” the vortex chants itself out a skin

from the enchantment of insults & skulls & bones the vortex

writes “as a nerve o'er which

do creep / the else unfelt oppression

of this earth” I feel sprained as the neck of a Lamarckian giraffe

losing the human words the words

lose for human

it's like trying to lay out in a sentence the idea of tree

sentience it's like trying to get my sealegs next to the backwards

hug of this ochre barn's

failing cornucopia its plywood folding

like a deck of tarot cards

it's like I am to the insect what isn't is

to an instant

that insecticide called time in some Francisco

de Goyan field "often I am

permitted to return to

the meadow" in which the talons of auracanas grip the sour-

apple-earth at dawn like kissing

lips clutch one another's colors

to spell or else

expel as though

through an x-ray the very blues

becoming is

I covet

IV: Neocologism: Encyclopedia Entries for Treading the Anthro-po-Scenic Psyche

CHUCO혈SOL⁸

upbraided, there are colder
pastorals than this one, of

course, but while

my one hand
swims

the insinkerator's throat
for clogs of
broccoli
& malformed carrot,

this body

seems collapsing into
one
single

held breath—

& just think,

half

of what we are

may be prayer, a soft &
silent war

made more
aware

by slices

in the calm:
the armor

a parenthetical is.

To where do you swim when you're asleep in your landscapes, I asked you, caring only to surf the soundwaves of your answer. You didn't answer at first. Only pursued sifting the fluidity in your painting, for further clarity: Swathes of green & burnt-sienna slung the autumn fields, strings of blue-white pearl curlicued the sky into the stream. Finally, somewhere in-between you said, "Wherever blinking thinks or drinks you." My face contorted like the northern lights over a night sky would, but your brush was like an eye of glass between us. I opened mine. You opened yours. How you finally said without saying what we were no longer sleeping through. The window had. The words between us. Moved into out of.

elsewhere,
children play-fake a game of Marco
Polo, notched into the white-hot city
of no clean water
to spare.

starlings, on the perimeter,
sling rain-smell out of

pavement grooves

& potholes

turned birdbaths,
as if

unsightly boas, as
if

filthy

halos.

⁸ CHUCO **헐**SOL | *noun.* | [pr. chuco-huhl-sol, from *Chuco* (El Salvadoran slang for “dirty”) + **헐** (Korean expression for surprise, like “huh” or “what”) + *Sol* (Spanish for “sun”)]. Originally the term for a beautiful sunrise or sunset made even more exquisitely beautiful to the human eye by

the brilliant colors manufactured by man-made atmospheric pollutants, a *chuco* $\bar{\bar{H}}sol$ refers, broadly, to any “natural” alluring beauty made even more beautiful to the human eye by mankind’s impact on the physical environment. Because humans are ultimately the source of this enhanced physical landscape, the awe inspired by a *chuco* $\bar{\bar{H}}sol$ is inherently anthropocentric; that is, while a *chuco* $\bar{\bar{H}}sol$ suggests awe at highlighted facets of the physical landscape, the awe experienced is, in fact, simply awe at humanity’s having manipulated the physical environment in some way. Thus, it is not unlikely that a *chuco* $\bar{\bar{H}}sol$ may induce the feeling of entrapment in one’s own body or mind. [cf. TRALFAMIDORIFICATION², AXEPTION¹¹]

“Heavengravel? Wolfsnow. Worlds of it.”
each satellite I
abide permits
me more novel orbit,
like breath sculpts
out its lung: its bodily
vase, its vice, its voice.

“So scissors: So words: So swords,” you whispered into my ear one night, as I fell asleep. I let sleep cleave me into dreams. & in the dream, Apollinaire was standing there, strange, repeating my own voice, in an endless cycle: *the first time mankind tried to imitate walking was when he made the wheel—which in no way resembles a leg*. I awoke & communicated the details to you the following morning, startled, feeling like I was the outline of a meaning yet to be defined, a residue of avenue, a halving, having-at length. “Stretching the math of us seems requisite,” you told me, smiling. & that

seemed half right, which was right enough, I assumed, which was right enough to
assume a self, aside a self, bound to selve.

you say breaking the sky into starlings was a failure?—I
know, but breaking a failure into
starlings was,
no doubt, long-past due.

& the result? supernova or nativity scene? as long as
we're talking in copulations
of eyelash & palette,
I say,
let's
explode it, not
unpack it.

just yesterday: mistaking a dead cardinal
for a red
Solo cup,
dusted with frost.

wherever snow or thought drifts to,

suspension

is

comprehension.

& where in these inventions

didn't we

swap our bristles

for

brittler instances?

It's like this: whenever I see you at work on your landscape paintings I think you are inventing yourself into the weather. I was always telling you this, to a fault. To the extent that you once called my voice a limitless spire, wired together only by the rain itself. I was trying to drill myself into the heights where I was merely a footnote. Where your meaning hung, depended upon. The deep-endedness of your subliminal bristlings. Where I thought, perhaps, your threads would be spinning, whispering. Still, everyday, you'd wait for me to say it, your brush unable to let fall anything on the canvas until I said something.

eventually, even the snow
evaporates

&
leaves us

much where we are.

HEREWHERE ⁶

oystersmash, the morning smelled
of

sun-up, axle-grease, snow salts, & battery & bus fumes.

from the depot window, I watch as
eyes drift the plasma bank's
drapes,
waft open

warmly, &
she recycles the body heat of another's freshly-emptied
seat

You said I was always talking as if I was somewhere between a dandelion gone to seed & a blister of air, that I was questions apart from answers in unison, to no truer conclusion. I told you I was looking to accrue where my eye ends & the landscape begins, some fringe: the "en face" to my face, of my face, so to speak. In other

words, if no truer conclusion, perhaps a sort of fantasia, trued. Like all those minimalist landscapes of Joan Miró's you showed me: an asterisk, two dots, a line, & a who-am-I-to-say-what-a-landscape-is. You laughed at this, but every morning, as I woke to find several lost eyelashes on my pillow, I couldn't help thinking how they pry open a face from their parentheses of space, or else erase, entirely. It was like waking from a dream into a dream, faced with what open-endedness remained opening upon.

& over here—

right here,

in this room,

when I couldn't

sleep,

is where I would sit & wait & listen to the dishwasher gargle its

foreign object

all night

& wait for something else

to fasten

or else, bedside,

try to reassemble

this memory you told me

once:

of how

you'd taught yourself

ghosts weren't real

by staring at

a hotel robe you'd stolen

years ago. that you'd hung from

a nail in your wall.

like a trophy.

exactly what it

took for the body

to abbreviate

a soft line of

disoriented ladybugs helixing the fluorescent light

fixture, as if to say

I'm here, where

your every

word hangs off

⁶ HEREWHERE | *noun.* | [Here + Where] Any object that motivates one to conflate local with global impact, thus challenging one's conception of what constitutes "here" and what constitutes

circular there's an off-chance of reconciling myself on the other side of the on-ramp
is exactly the type of self-reflection I'm looking for.

like zero is only the distance
from its
disappearance.

TRALFAMIDORIFICATION ²

“But to-day the struggle”

is

“This World is not Conclusion”

& I like the way your fingers

misremember every wiry fissure holds your

preferred coffee mug’s last known memory

of a whole.

is it wrong to ignore

the accuracy of the world

as it breaks?

the way my grandmother

would stare out the window at the evergreens, tap

her glass,

& I knew

how tactfully compact,

how actual,
a scream could get.

One afternoon, interrupting our painting lesson, you told me about an article in the *NY Times* you read, & how it said something to the effect that The Apple Corporation was using Picasso's *le Taureau* (an 11-lithograph sequence showing the evolution of a bull's being built in the cubist mode) to exemplify, in some way or another, how business practices which trend toward the ergonomic, simplistic, were not only inevitable, but high-brow, academically-sound. Endearing, somewhat, I thought, but I couldn't help but ask, *evolution's a ha-ha eyeing its beholder when you own the rights prescribing it, right?* You said, in response, "you can unwind oblivion or a sketchist's wrist only in so far as the m-dash of its original animal ache." & *unwinding the voilà of a rose reveals?*—I asked—"what the rose is: voilà, revolving"—you answered—*and what's to stop it from revolver-ing?*—I asked.

sometimes you turn into
this thing
you can't believe
until belief bends
into a becoming thing.

I sleep next to this
pile of weeks-old laundry

because I hate to hang old phantoms.

²TRALFAMIDORIFICATION | *noun.* | [Borrowing from Kurt Vonnegut's fictional alien race of Tralfamidorians (who can look at an object & know its past & future)]. The experience of being over-informed about the production line of materials, or about the systems of waste management they will eventually be filtered through, to the point that a discrete object will induce existential angst. In the moment a subject undergoes *tralfamidorification* in relation to an object, the object in question may seem to open & churn like a vortex, revealing any or all of the following: the excessive waste of resources in producing the object, the factory conditions in which they were assembled, the suffering induced in the making or existence creating these objects, the vital resources extracted, the packaging material waste they are transported to & fro in, etc. In this way, *tralfamidorification* opens up & reflects human catastrophe rather nightmarishly, like a funhouse's hall of mirrors. Though *tralfamidorification* can not be entirely diffused once experienced, it can be partially subverted by focusing one's attention away from the reality of the underlying catastrophes *tralfamidorification* reveals toward the even deeper underlying realities of coexistence. The deeper one understands coexistence to have made the catastrophes made apparent by *tralfamidorification*, the more positively one can affirm that efforts of coexistence will undo them. [cf. CHUCO혈SOL⁸, ASASIN⁶, LOCQUATION¹²]

wind sifts, lifts the oregano
fields to scent

like the glitches
an orgasm
is.

(of distance?)

& after

the muscles have folded you, like the unassuming

fall

of fresh linens,

you are continuous,
in your study

of clouds

(aren't you?)

While I know you were only trying to teach me how to draw on the world, in order to draw the world out, I often grew tired of what I interpreted as your staunch realist adherence to a dead-end, & couldn't help referring us back to an abstraction or two from time to time. *Isn't it possible*, I asked, *we might use nuance as a means by which to puncture, & thus usurp, punctuation?* You looked annoyed, as if I had missed the point completely. You said, “& don't the punctuations puncture you, too? For example: if you sit, front & center, looking *le Taureau* head-on, doesn't the location from where

you're seeing 1 bull really require 11 sets of eyes to see 1? & anyway, don't things of the so-called 'concrete' world—like, say, a clock—require 1 hour be 60, seen as 1?" If I was surprisingly quiet afterwards, it wasn't because I was convinced, but because I was trying to focus in on the atoms that were bringing us together as a single anatomy.

noise has to trust itself to stay noise

I know—

a housefly, the blackened aspirin

it's crushed into.

& I was

appearing into

Tōhaku's pine trees, an "I"

like cream tears open

tea's sepia, slivers

of tantalite, silvering

out of coltan ore

sluice-mines,

deep in Africa's Congo.

a cracked i-pad in the garden
vibrates,

while a bee, drowning in
the backyard koi pond, yields a silky
quality to the water.

—what if
the body, even in quotation,
is an excavation?

even a flag, after all, is much nobody that it nearly makes sense.

During our next lesson, I was telling you about the various apocryphal tales that hold Picasso, after having toured a loop through either the Paleolithic cave art of Lascaux or Altamira, uttered the phrase, *we've learned nothing* to fellow tourists. True or false, our thoughts like an analysis of traffic lines seem to linger on function as an afterthought. On this, you seemed to agree: you told me, “some things to be visible—within—are indeed indebted to exteriors to begin with: zero; evolution; the verb, *to be*.” You directed my attention toward a spider’s web on the patio, & how that spider’s web, though invisible today, is pearlized by tomorrow’s dew—*like the future digit of Pi contiguously weds past to present*, I added: *as if we cannot*

cease from creasing this world enough, convolution being such beautiful elocution. But you had already turned & left.

it's those motions we'd refuse
ourselves moving into
display us
to us best

“The ability to distinguish between home & hive is relative to how the thing stings,” you told me, eyes glued to the homestead you were halfway through painting. I had to strip myself like a screw does, down to its eccentric critique of centrality, before I finally understood. *But even if one’s a nuisance & the other’s insurance, a glove turned inside-out still fits like a glove*, I answered. As if a swarm could disavow its eventual swerve into a pause, I realized we’d punctuated ourselves into ellipses, & in doing so, perhaps punctured legitimacy, like the agreement upon a constellation of stars disappears a “the stars.” & so I set my sights on what I thought was the truer task ahead: tearing out the real from what’s ethereal.

moon-up, & the
bayou’s tendril-light uproots some
cut-scenes to un-reel, to
unflower.
to unsound.

there is no color, either. only whatever itch of bright
through film-
negative wills, welds, wilds.

Ignoring, for a moment, the lesson at hand, I took up the task of painting as falsely as I could everything I could think of. But I found the more pronounced I made any of the more ethereal representations, the more pronounced it made the real presentation of its material components (the paints, the brushstrokes, the canvas, etc.). I had the look on my face, I'm sure, of untethered contortions, antennae without its radio, of aerial roots, of what clings & evokes a living through suspension. This both drew & grew your attention, & your response was to ask what projection, after all, wasn't the ingestion of the present's erosions. & it struck me that, if this was true, what points I thought were lacking were just the bits of slack we were slugging one self along.

south Lake Washington:

a drizzle of

termites

dismantles the style of a lakeside neo-

colonial bungalow, little-by little,

& lugs it

across the water, like a laugh, a conversation, built of
wave after wave of
interruptions. "Let me recite
what history teaches.

History teaches.” if
we’re bound to laugh so

similarly as each other through this world
we’re bound to laugh
the way
a chainsaw is

I told you even the very air seems to rev, sometimes, swerving my elastic nerves into awareness of my composition: of tiny never-the-less-es, collected, which come apart only to come together again. Your reply was that trying to read me was like trying to read Plutarch’s *Life of Theseus* from a sailing ship made of its papier-mâché. When I couldn’t sleep that night, you told me to listen to the sounds drifting in from the window, outside: “try to pull the crickets’ legs from the squealing of train rails.” Sleep perforated me like tissue in the rain.

—thirsted up, rack & pinion from
bed sheets, glaciated
thick, twice-over with night-sweats,
I
can hear your dreams whirr
& grind their gears against

your voices: scuffs of “I have thought...

that the

...bird

makes the same noise...

...differently.” sleep-talk engineers its little

library of the day,

just so:

 pilfers you, misquotes

 you, to archive you,

to sound you out.

 your rickety old story of

the stowaway in the city’s town hall, the one who reads studiously over
the dry-erase boards,

each night,

& re-illustrates the maps on his
way out.

what's there is where the taking is

lost on the corner of Bel Air & Merlins.

high noon. turning the corner
into this flatiron building's façade, freshly-painted robin's-egg-

blue, peels
this, that

as if from air.

³ SHADOWTIME | *noun.* | [Borrowing from the Siouxsie & The Banshees' song of the same name] An non-detachable parallel timescale that lurks alongside—haunts, so to speak—one's day-to-day experience of regular time. While performing daily functions, one may experience the feeling of living in two different temporal scales simultaneously; agency, however, being possible in only one. Although *shadowtime* is omnipresent, one is only conscious of it in bursts. For example, a mother preparing a meal for their 7-year-old child may suddenly realize that an endemic flower that had evolved & flourished for over 42.7 million years has become endangered within their child's lifetime. In this way, *shadowtime* signals the very real possibility that the near future will be drastically different from the past. However, it also suggests that these temporal zones are somehow intertwined, that their distinction from one another is largely superficial, that

human agency effected in one will have deleterious or regenerative effects upon the other. [cf. CHUCO혈SOL⁸, EPOQUETUDE⁹, TRALFAMIDORIFICATION²

the phrase, “automated...
...financial...orbits”

slips out of your bee-
loud headphones

& glues its blacksticity to me
like a soliloquy
of broken teeth.

Later, the phrase “automated financial orbits” crystallizes into “autonomous flying microrobots,” as you tell me how you’ve heard a group of scientists has intervened to solve the plausibility of colony collapse disorder—not with *intervention*, but *invention* of the Harvard Robobee: a pollinator’s pivot-point toward a post-pollinators world. *it was inevitable*, I said, *that the market’s hand would invent itself into an invisible future*. This was partly wordplay, & you were right to say that my rearranging characters wouldn’t insert real eyes into interiors, wrong to assume it wouldn’t realize exteriors.

summer's eve. rain-shred. this really is a mood, maybe:

pamplemousse.

heat-cracked sidewalks,
sidewalks like a split, dry jackfruit on your counter.

two kids wrestling on the seafoam-colored porch loosen
up the creaks

a gnarled pine along the house's aft drops
gnarled April cones

into gnarled February grass. soft-hung, like curses over wet lips, or
Christmas

Trying to remedy the situation we'd talked ourselves into, I told you *the more we merely amplify what's human, the more we humanize what's amplified, mirror-ly*. As if what I had said was no more than a mess of cobwebs to wave aside, you would only accept this worst-case-scenario as us-in-stereo as static, static you could trace back to its speaker, argue down to a point you could center (& so cut away from), to recite what exception accepts: to acception excepts: *axception*. The wend of a dead end, wrung tightly out like a winding staircase's ascension won't double back toward its original home, to lengthen. New drone, then; new moan, then; same syndrome, then.

from afar, ambulance sirens arch &
intertwine

with a coyote's distant wowl

while I swallow my own

down,

like a bellyful of wolves

it's said the worst of all howls have no appetite.

I think we are

all alone

in our being collectively encircled

V: The Vortex: II

Verses Out of the Vortex: Nomadic Vortex

[“A Warming World Creates Desperate People” (*THE NEW YORK TIMES*: JUNE 29, 2018)]

“This ruby rope creak-

ing in

my body makes me laugh” like the truths

twisting up this cloudy

hemorrhoidal cream morning twisting up

the sky-like sky

into the sky like how likenesses get trued at a distance

though no laughter lives in this

zone though “at last you are through with this

old world” thoroughly

a pitch-black

stag-

beetle struggles to lock its jaws

around a single blueberry & I shatter my i-phone

screen trying to film the damn

thing turns out

there's a twist there turns

out I'm locked out

in my newly-spun web

of glass there I think of a lemon tree

I saw once gashed in two by a lightning storm a CEO's face locked

into a sour grimace flashes

climbing toward a freshly-

cut white house lawn the twisting of truths

like the twisting of plagues

upon us la roya

la roya

la roya the drought-incited coffee-blight the color of

rust twisting crops into dust in Guatemala's

Jumaytapeque

corridor twisting a populace of refugees up the Americas' neck

here's a twist

a people is not a plague o say can't you see "Change grows
too changeable, without
being new" writes the vortex via
vortex "Of dead is my patience
deaf, vegetold" & now I know the horizon by its people

the intersection of the people and the forces at play now
by its "solar throat slashed" now

like I know
drought by its parched throats now
by the refugee whose hand from my throat leaves

now
like the laughter a twisted branch of
oak would

now
& near is no further
than far enough
to teach me "a real lemon like newspaper

in a collage

is a real newspaper” writes the unseen past translation but cannot
fast-forward the morning

past this morning’s cup of coffee

Verses Out of the Vortex: Prison Vortex

[“Prison Ecology and the Water Crisis in Flint, Michigan” (*PRISON LEGAL NEWS*:
FEBRUARY 29, 2016)]

& the legs we refuse to make walk go

the ways of

arachnid

suns

the unusual

way a likeness unfurls its legs to lead up to a body more astral yes

a starling is beautiful & what not

at twilight I agree but let's refocus what of prisoners

drinking liquid lead

what

of these stars'

tars' art-

ful

actual lack comes into focus as some abstract “centre cannot
hold” splays man’s reflection
in splays of oil splays of “black milk

at daybreak

we drink you at sundown / we drink
you at noontime
& dawntime we drink you
at night / we drink you & drink you” like the wavy-blue

diner booths in a Long John
Silver’s
painted the color of
the Caribbean becomes closer than a shadow’s

obtuse tremor the objects twined
to the twins of affect & effect “breathing
the shadow
of decayed pianos” still lacks
that “faculty to imagine that which
we know” but what we know is exactly what’s going on

sometimes “the times”

remains unmoved as the vortex seeps & pools
into sometimes the vortex its anger

writ into tides sometimes rising like mercury
in the blood

of a woman in Flint, Michigan

dreams her unborn

child’s way

through her veins won’t

fall apart

like moonlight mangled in a tractor-blade’s

laffy taffy

of wisteria at sundown & there’s

that starling again perched on the fencepost

seems there’s always a volta

built into every volume into

every volute into every

crown

of sonnets & if I take it too seriously it's because

that's exactly where

it fucking hurts the turns it takes

to live always just

around every corner from there from that from this from the

eyes drifting like an index

toward their text

Verses Out of the Vortex: Isle Vortex

[“Graphics of Marshall Islands Sea Level Rise ‘Brought EU Ministers to Tears’” (*CLIMATE CHANGE NEWS*: JUNE 22, 2018)]

what sleepy phenomena could this be refusing sleep’s rising
through whose
eyes Miami’s octopi rise up through the inquietude
of inner-city storm drains

the sewer

grates of apocalypse when like the rusty cetacean doze in Dali’s
le Sommeil or Redon’s oblivious *Œil-*
ballon the sea’s rising
forces “the skull of the theatres” to open & drain its too-comfortable audience at last

because I can finally say “at last
the fountains

would understand
that you must not say fountain / The wolves are clothed

in mirrors of

snow” and so the tendril of our tire treads

extend as far as

the Marshall Islands for instance but beyond where

a carbon footprint’s

understood

as more than just a simple metaphor & instead

as the imprint drowning in a boot’s stomping on a human face

forever here I am squishing a jellyfish

between my toes

laughing into concrete to feel into the concrete things to “see

into the life of things” nothing’s

unreal as you imagine once you realize the world’s

so upside-down the sky is just everybody’s

eyes at once

whys

at once

& for everything you shape to be ignored there’s

an equal & opposite

shape

in what's deciding to not let you say "Time writes

no wrinkle on thine

azure

brow" & watch the vortex fishtail into "the image

Of its accelerated grimace"

contextually

vortexually as soot encircles a fire hydrant's inevitable

blossoming this age

is the age of the environmental refugee

swollen with thin-skinned hope like gum popped

across the jaw

whose lip might've

curved to rescind its own curling curse

Verses Out of the Vortex: Climate Vortex

[“Scientists Calculated a 'Point of No Return' For Dealing With Climate Change—&
Time is Running Out” (*BUSINESS INSIDER*: AUGUST 30, 2018)]

frontier is a stupid word it's true after all our dreams no longer

deserve us

swimming like an out-of-control

semi veers a freeway toward its yet-anatomy (yes

to vulnerability

like that

by the way) like the rhyme of *tree*

with *me* the vortex churns for instance the eyes which sift

the sky's aquarium like some drunken bird

of paradise it's amazing

how birds & fish seem to shift the axial whims

of

their eye-sockets

rounding off a single conscientious “We shall not cease

from exploration / And the end
of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started
And know

the place for the first time” from here I think I could scrape the same kaleidoscopic
rust with a spoon
against the insides of a spaghetti's can out

into where the true heavenly.wav
of

“Death is a kaleidoscope” warbles our outer limits into the plumage
of a willow merely
weeping down to where “it is a sad perspective
which adds an
'I-don't-know-what'
to another 'I-don't-know-what'" & “consequently the tongue

is a chair” an incline into us putting us on the spot
& just like that

I recline
into apocalypse because every single
disaster movie

taught me that's what you do

but what I'd like

really

is to write the vortext out before I'm

overwritten

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