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Wave Of Arrival

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WAVE OF ARRIVAL

by

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Bachelor of Arts
Fordham University, 2014

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses poetry to explore the influences of space and geographical location on subjective perception and vision. More specifically, it aims to use landscape to observe the visible and invisible qualities of a geographical space, and investigate the ways in which perception of those spatial boundaries can be used to create self-portraits. It also aims to revise traditional, romanticized versions of the American West as manifested in poetry and photography in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. To do so, it focuses its attention on the man-altered landscape, rather than the pure, wild landscape as a space barricaded from human influence. The work partly involves a dialogue between the poet and New Topographic photographers, such as Stephen Shore, who have created visuals of the man-altered landscapes in their art. Moreover, the collection collages “wild” and man-made spaces in an effort to complicate what can be considered “natural” in a neo-American landscape, and reveal the impact they have on bodies moving through those various American landscapes.

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*The time of day and the density of light
Adhering to the face keeps it
Lively and intact in a recurring wave
Of arrival. The soul establishes itself.
But how far can it swim out through the eyes
And still return safely to its nest?*

John Ashbery

PART I

The Past Will Be Much Like the Present

There will be red & green traffic lights lazering through
blue dawn & tinted car windows. There will be

a blank intersection, wires hanging in the sky like
scars carved into the street's jaded city skin. You will be

still at a stop sign alone, the radio buzzing softly against
morning coffee. Vibration in liquid. Vibration against

skin, against arm hair. There will be no one
accompanying you – at first – & so for an instant, time

will stop, until a car will surface, a flash-glance like
a burnt-out bulb. You will pass by human broadcasts

imprinted on concrete walls, on buildings: *Bargains &*
Pawn Shop & Laundromat, & you will try to spot them

like bones lining the spinal cord of the road. You will enter
the first & buy a 75-cent puzzle, a pair of red heart-framed

sunglasses. Midday sunlight will sour & you will burn
a cigarette through the cracked-window eclipse, menthol lips,

you'll eat your pancakes with sugar & strawberries beside
a single flower, a weed perhaps, wilted in glass, red light

throwing its crests like high tide across your skin, you will
find tiny prisms scattered in the corners & outskirts

of yourself. You will forget you had an affinity
for yourself. You'll get in the car & notice the clouds,

the way they dance naked through the windshield
that is not yours. You will remember that the earth

is turning, turning on its own head, & yet
the rickety wooden fence lining the road that you

are following does not fall. You will remember how long
a candle flame will burn dim & blue before it is taken by air

& time. You will decide on eating, walk into the stale

vessel of the diner, close the champagne curtains over
the candle-dim window, converting them into pale yellow,
read the letters on the place's neon sign backwards, run
your finger over the veins of the windowsill plant, watch
newsprint left on the table fade into diluted gray, leave
cash & a note on the table & walk back into the day.

Projections of a Moving Train at Church Avenue

A body passes me on the street like a ripple.
I'm talking about all of them. Everybody,
a collective dip in the city's fabric, as if
released into water by some invisible hand.
We don't know the reason. Everyone dipping
and nothing actually moving. The woman
standing loyal to her shopping cart preaching
something of compassion, of the gospel of John
is almost permanent. Contained in a frame
like a painting on a wall. She doesn't pace
the platform, doesn't urge. We are hungry
as beetles in loose rainsoil, devouring whatever
crumb of clear-headedness we land upon. A man
who buys the daily *Post* at the newsstand at
7:05 AM every morning marvels at the day's
headline in the stable format. A couple debates
what Einstein meant by relativity, their toes
bordering the yellow line. I'm still not sure I believe
in the solidity of concrete, that it will continue
to move me along, lift my body erect like
a human being, each time I walk the numbered
city streets. I release the clench of my core
against the gorge of the subway platform, casting
and recasting different versions of myself
on the backwaters of my brain like a silent film.
In an hour, I will stop for a beer at a bar
chosen at random. I will finally answer the man
with the newspaper who asks me, each day,
where I'm from. Nothing happens from here,
and in another sense, it's the only way to get going.
The train glides over the tracks in a single
fluid motion. This is always its first stop.
The people piled into the chipped orange seats
have not come from a place prior to where
I am standing right now. They are ornaments
in the train car. But sometimes I want to care
about all the passengers I didn't see when I was
buying shitty dollar coffee above the platform
at the corner deli and missed the train by
two seconds or because someone shoved
all their single-ride passes into the card reader
of the MetroCard kiosk, keeping me from
superimposing myself with the train's form

and other times, I talk to a bearded man for an hour
uptown, an hour from my studio, allowing multiple
trains to pass me by, just to throw his business card
in the trash as soon as he turns his back. The train
slows its glide into the station. I watch
the passengers' eyes flicker against the car's dark
windows, transfixed upon a point in time. It appears
primitive to me. I mean, my transfixion upon
the eyeballs. We don't like to think in absolutes.
The sun sits safe and stationary in the sky. It is
the only thing that does so, until we realize
it doesn't. It's coming straight at us in microscopic jolts.
I saw that in a movie once. Palms clenched to palms,
gripping tighter and tighter with the largening of
the sun's approach. The moment of collision
is coming. The train screeches its wheels to a halt.

Eggs & Toast at Penny's Diner

It was a time when I was addicted to the rush
of giving witness to remote pockets of country,
tucked in the periphery of my familiar line
of vision. I accessed them through invisible

signage & a hovering distrust of manmade
roads. It was one thing to be a passenger
in the van with the companion of the window
performing as frame, but another entirely

to step out of the vehicle at random. I told you
I thought the still life image of the chipped cup
of coffee – regal rocky mountain wolf on front –
& neon pink perimeter of the diner's narrow vessel

was as beautiful as the Grand Tetons or
the abandoned road in Flagstaff we found
when looking for a hardware store in the dark.
The feeling of being a solitary body in motion

without a watch freckled my mind
often, a bundle of fireflies around the head.
It was a time when looking at myself
in the mirror, when I happened to find one

in an unlocked truck stop bathroom, was
a form of ecstasy, the kind that arrives
only after periods of deprivation, and to see
my image in full was to warm the bones,

to ignite surprise in the crux of the eye.
I had become used to seeing myself in parts,
the side view mirror reflection less compelling
than the ray my pupil shot through

the windshield. I had stopped wanting
to be looked back at, fell in love with the stench
of stale outdoor air & days-old dirt, the way
it clung to your skin & mine, and even more so

when the two collided in a tiny aurora. I was in love
with the way my hair stood stagnant, matted
with the grease of shifting climates, tangled

into tiny, gnarled braids, which I wove

to pass the time in the woods, or just to feel something
well-worn between the fingers. So I veered
the van off the road, parked at Penny's Diner after

the sun has finished rising one morning. I knew it was
the one because it was the only restaurant within
fifty miles in any direction. I ordered eggs & toast,
the butter an unmelted rider on the bread, and sat

for a good while before eating, wondering how
the earth must evolve so remotely to offer someone
like me a position of power over breakfast on
a Wednesday morning in some uncommon wilderness.

I am Reading Addiction into Everything

the moth flickers its nerves in the lamplight.
the cardinals through my bedroom window move
from bough to bough in the backyard tree without
performing any one complete action on each.
the glove compartment map's veiny routes chase
& chase state borders. the kitchen plant, a half-dead
thing, wilts & unwilts to perform its thirst. my dog
won't stop licking the suede couch. the planets orbit
a centerpiece without ever approaching its glow.
I watch a squirrel teeth an acorn for what feels like
an hour. I reach for my regular's beer like a knee jerk
as we talk about the remake of the 1982 blade runner
across the bar. my body expands & contracts
based on what I pass through its membranes.
I do the math. everything that ever was
must be absolute while it is. & if this is the case
then nothing recurs. behaviors do not behave.
they vibrate quietly like the atoms cocooned
in the bench I sit upon, deviating their equilibrium
over & over in search of a heat hotter than the one
they have. & if this is the case then
we do not leap between places. we do not
relocate. we constantly take a running start. eyeballs flickering
madly against the dark windows of a moving train car.

You are not quite a shadow of yourself but
you've never figured out how to tire of orbiting.
That is, walking slowly & around yourself
like you are inside a maze of your wakefulness with
no access to an aerial view. There will be no
tidy clearing in the forest, no field in which
to lie down flat & gaze. You do not
ascend from here. The paths will not
be lit and without the service of flashlight, you will
get lost infinite times. Yes, half the walk is to
retrace the steps. Do not fear trespassing. Do not
trick yourself into believing you have a plan you can
scroll through like a debriefing of the experience
you'd like to have. Have you not passed
this oak before, or for that matter, plenty
of befores before? It's funny really, when
you witness the earth minding its own business,
carrying on with its infinite jobs as you
cover ground. Do not stand before it,
don't soak it in. Give yourself to the woods
like salt left on the street after snow – no,
left sticky on the skin after running aimlessly,
following no particular thing. Watch as
the stream that bubbles before you portends
a bubbling within you, even if buried deep
beneath your overgrown pastures. If you drop
seeds on the ground as you walk, does that
make you halfway a creator? Are you no more

than a bundle of cells, a bowl of fresh soil,
using & blooming like any other
collection of alive & dead things?

Whale Watching

There's a sort of beauty in falling
into something you never knew you were
looking for. Maybe I'm no good at it. Underground,

in the neural web of the subway, I see
like a radar, flipping my focus between detectable
human exchanges like a coin. The jazz trumpeter

& keyboardist duo playing their daily rendition
of "Bold as Love" in the Union Square station and the girl
who watches, wide-eyed & dancing. The couple

who says their prolonged goodbye across the turnstile
and the heavy-breathed pedestrians who stall in line
behind them. Perception pools with these things.

They launch themselves from the underground's waterline
like light beams. Sometimes I think I'm better off
driving the FDR Drive at night, the lights from

the Brooklyn Bridge, taxis, traffic, skyscrapers,
street lamps, all emitting themselves in totality
through my windshield. But sooner or later, the road

will force you to dip into the Battery Park Underpass,
and then through the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, where
a series of one-second yellow flashes will shoot

at your eyes through darkness. Maybe seeing isn't a hunt
after all, and hungering to see is to chip away
at its heart. I've never seen a whale in the wild. Once,

when I was twelve, my father woke me up
in a hotel room in Marina del Ray, told me we were going
whale watching on a fishing boat. I put on my coat & boots,

wide-eyed & aflame at the idea of it. My brother & I
clung our chins to the boat's windowsill like leeches, watching
the waves & ocean life rise & fall in silence. I imagined

myself the size of the whale's tooth as the mammal swam
toward the window. When the guide announced time
& time again that we were approaching not a whale,

but a seal, my brother & I were furious. We didn't come to see seals. We blamed my father for deceiving us. I didn't realize that the ocean was chaos, that the dip the boat

made in its sphere of existence was as unnoticeable to it as an infrared wave is to me. I wasn't thinking about how, until then, I'd never seen a seal.

Recurring Dream in Which:

I am child again I learn to measure
 earth by keeping my distance my body
eclipses away though my questions
 wildly curl around air like wind hovering
before hurricane I am their center
 of gravity dying to know why the sand-
dollar lands ashore as whole as
 my bicycle spokes or how the sea's
wings span toward stars without
 ever touching them like how I
never touch the jellyfish skin to skin
 cupping sand-mound in bare hands
to shield myself from translucent slime I fear
 feeling something that old
older than time still weaving in & out
 of pulsing waters even the searocks
refuse to frame their form in fossil
 the underwater ridge eager to preserve
the newest forms to touch its sediment yet
 the jellies ignite themselves to relish
the finest wrinkles in rock I am home
 alone again floating into the sea of
my brother's room glowing with
 suction cup fingers I curl myself
toward some rugged topography surfacing
 gray-blue globe my flesh lingering awhile
in the underwater plain a muscle
 grabbing at me now like my own dark palms

Rewinding the Scene from the Moment I Saw the Grand Prismatic Spring

The Grand Prismatic Spring is only fully prismatic when
visualized from directly above. Like the earth when you see

a diagram of the Earth's layers – a series of spheres, land
sliced away from land, to showcase the red pupil at

the center. Our bodies only touched the crust. I watched
your face disappear into the spring's fog, its outermost

orange eyelid, as we transgressed the wooden suspension bridge.
We managed to stay only an hour, an agreement we made

in a sleep-deprived haze in the van on the drive to the park
from the gas station, where first thing in the morning,

I wandered into the station's general store, my heart sharking
the place like an alien. I hovered in the thin space, a place

between other places, where I could feel gravity condense
around me, my toes lifted a quarter inch from the ground,

reveling at the letters on cereal boxes & ten-minute
campfire meals, brand names I'd never heard of, teetering

toward my forehead like a 3D film, or maybe it was just that
I'd been on the road too long, my mind fragmenting its own

experiences, having slept only two choppy hours the night before
in the parking lot in West Yellowstone, where the moon

was so bright I drove with the headlights out. Where
immediately upon arriving in the middle of the night,

I wandered away to pee behind a dumpster and stayed there
a little too long. A deer approached the place where I stood

and you went into the gas station to find me. So we stared
into each other's eyes a little too long – the deer & I. I decided

to open my dark mouth as an offering, when it leapt off
and left me there, in the grass beyond the dumpster, where

I lay down, or hid my body from your body, closing my eyes

to constellations of non-existent bramble, tracing them over

& over on the film of the lids, buds blooming softly like
photographs in fixer fluid, but only for a brief moment,

like the local customers coming for their 50-cent coffee and going,
and I too, suspended someplace between coming & going.

Standing Before a Dripping Faucet, I Become the Man Who First Discovered Motion

The house is quiet. Motion & sound collapse around me, except for water. I edge my body against the kitchen faucet and stand before it, observing its dripping. Time pours its attention into my eyes, and the droplets of water cease to be separate parts. They stream like a river. I transform into Edward Muybridge, shuttering his camera before a trotting horse in 1872. The first time motion is captured. The first time & space are conquered. I think of how the eye & the camera see different things – the everyday eye, sawing moments into parts. The faucet water runs over & over itself, as if on a film loop. It moves & does not move. I make my body as still as stone. As still as a camera lens. I step into the same river twice.

The Good Road

I followed the good road
like a good civilian whose

rivermouth spit its followers
into the receiving body of

the time-wrinkled mountains on
the other side. I drove still-minded

through the wormhole drifting
toward whatever presented itself

in my path. At night, dimmed
canyons ghosted the road &

I snaked myself through like
a valley until a sign that read:

WATCH FOR ESCAPED INMATES,
& my eyes lost their rooting

magnet, ignited high beams upon
a wolf's starlight eyes inches from

the van. I slammed the breaks,
met the wolf's vision with

my own. She's seen something
I haven't. *What's out there beyond*

the road? A sound razering space
between us. She trotted back

into the depths of the valley &
my memory, a tide, swelled over.

Singularities

I have been trying too hard to believe in something particular. Not God. More like a theory I can own and apply to everything around me. A comfort in knowing. A universal mathematics. But it doesn't work. Like how I try, every day, to look at people through the lens of radical compassion, and in turn, allow them to take something from me. Or how sometimes, love looks like a million things and I won't let it. I spend so much of my time imagining a future with a particular person that I haven't met. How much of myself am I containing this way? I've heard that an absence opens up a gap in time. I have been absent from myself and I've been hovering. My feet are not on the ground. I think of this as I photograph an out-of-place van parked on a narrow, brick-paved street on the Lower East side, and again as I walk into a bar that advertises a happy hour on a sandwich board outside. I get up from my seat and place a cardboard coaster on top of my beer. The bartender warns me of the smallness of the bathroom and laughs. I enter – the walls, a wingspan apart from one another, and I, a captured caterpillar in a shoebox. A supernova of graffiti swirls around me. I can't tell what color the wall was originally painted. I am looking at notes from countless people who've entered this bar. Past that I am suddenly allowed to read, touch with my fingertips. An innumerable collection of singularities, piling upon one another. I am standing at the center of the room, as if holding a piece of glass. This tiny vessel, an inward-turning history.

Lucid Dreaming in Death Valley

the road ahead low & hazed
like heatwaves sinking on an open flame

signs of life freckle & fade
as quick as blips in the film reel

I am holding the camera
I am walking into a series of mirages

images lost in the plains
of my own unconscious

or the road behind me as
I move forward I can't be sure

if I'm walking backwards
into a place I've already visited but

the bottoms of my feet I know
are muddied from biking barefoot

beneath waterfalls in Yosemite Valley
a memory I'm not sure whether

I have or have not made up
as I descend from the van onto

an earth I can feel between toes
I am holding a mirror before me

I am watching myself as the landscape
creeps into my reflection

I am only as real as the sounds
I hear whistling past like the wind

is questioning my every move
it slips like animus into

the ears of a jackrabbit who tells me
to trust in forms

she is big-boned & dried up

like a can of milk

nothing is mortal here not even
the road map inside me I have to

tear it out like the core of a ripened fruit
from its home caked in mud & grass

it must be a clean tear she says
through the ears & toes

before you can go toward
a black road struggling to be road

holding me at the waterline
I am swimming in a nameless direction

I am watching the horizon steady
& re-steady itself like a blinking light

mirroring itself against sand dunes like
a twitching freckle in the eye I want

to remove by blinking it out of existence

A Panoramic View from the Firestone Parking Lot on U.S. 93, Kingman, Arizona, 1975

Briefly then, perception ceases its selectivity: the scene's center of gravity shifts & the once-blurred world focuses sharply. The highway is no longer a highway but a single blue vein coursing just beneath the fleshy surface of the Arizona landscape. The desert blooms for me, though it has been here, patient & alive, all along. Arid Mojave earth plateaus and valleys into shrubs toward horizon, where more shrubs grow like capillaries beyond the naked eye. Primary reds & yellows spelling names of local gas stations & motels: bruises on the desert's flesh. Telephone poles crosshatch the land like a series of stitches clinging to wound. They emerge more & more the harder you look. An epiphany like the moment you notice the dust incarnating in the light right before you – look: the body is battered. The flesh is not regenerating as fast as it used to. I ride by its cuts. I bear witness. I stand in a parking lot bordered neatly by a red metal fence. I hold the keys to room no. 8 at the motel one mile down the road where soon, we'll spend the night.

PART II

Masstransiscope

I could tell you of the times I walked
the wide city streets wide in that there were
at least two lanes of walking traffic
on either side of either sidewalk
a sea in the middle of a sea
waves upon waves of rented spaces haunted
by a nowhere or by dreamed-of places or
of the times I weaved through slow
walkers like a sewing machine needle
coursing ghostbody through ghostbody
or in other words through the thicks
& thins of streetlife I still remember
the coffee cart on Mercer where I could
buy my coffee without speaking or
The Bean on 2nd Avenue where everyone
knew my name heard it lingering on
the mouths of the Hell's Angels next door
on E. 3rd Street the free whiskey I poured them
to keep blood off my bar floor I'd
hear it winding past me when I'd pass
another pedestrian it was funny
to me when they stopped to greet me &
I could never be sure of the timeplace we met

*

if a blackhole is a place where gravity
pulls one inward so much that not even
light can get out then I say the city
is a blackhole think about all that matter

packed into such tight space or the way
 leaving feels like a dip in the body's pulse
 once I overheard a man tell his girlfriend
 on the L train as we passed Wykoff Avnue
that he'd lived in the city ten years &
 could live here another fifty & still
 wouldn't dip into the fabric half an inch
 wouldn't see five percent of what was here &
what I think he meant was how
 would he ever have any idea of the times
 I'd lift the steel trapdoor on the ground level
 concrete & descend into the underground
ten feet below the street or whatever you
 want to call it when you're one layer removed
 from standard moving time there was a makeshift
recording studio Ron claimed to have made in
 the 70's it was the best secret we ever kept
 somehow among all the talk there was
a monkey's head hanging on the wall wearing
 a sailor's hat next to the shit-caked bathroom
 with no door & a toilet with no lid
 spraypainted words splayed all over the walls from
the days the east village bands would do
 how many shots of Jameson upstairs in the bar
 when it wasn't me pouring them & I still
 want to know what it means when Ron
came stumbling out of the RV that day
 which was a permanent part of the E. 3rd Street
 landscape a mountain you couldn't kick
 from the backdrop slamming an Amstel lite
he pulled from the innards of his jacket

on the bar with one hand & a black
moto jacket in the other told me to
try it on and I did & *neither you nor I*
could ever guess how many blonde chick singers
that looked just like you bartended just like you
wore this jacket in the basement in the 60's & 70's
& 80's & now it's yours & how that day
my body became a body superimposed
with other bodies that dwelled among E. 3rd
sometime in the history that lives in the gravel

*

but sometimes my corner of the grid would narrow
I'd find a cobblestone alleyway that reminded me
of the ones in London where K & I smoked
our own pre-rolled American Spirit tobacco out of
receipt paper from the bodega on Gray's Inn Road
excuse me, the cornershop, you Yankee
forgive me it was a tic I couldn't snap out of
from the too-many times I'd stopped at my local one
on Church Avenue, bought the same turkey sub
& coffee before descending the platform
standing next to a new stranger for instance
an Irish man who watched his parents
die at 6 or girl whose boyfriend hit her in plain sight
whose train would soon spit them into a point
on the grid like throwing a dart at a worldmap
sometimes I'd become fascinated with an ordinary
thing like the chance of something happening
when it does like the convergence of me
& my taxi driver in a vehicle or the way I'd

find days in my mind when it felt appropriate
to ask the driver to please drop me off
two miles from wherever I needed to be

*

maybe here I should tell you of the time
I'd rotate between the four exiting turnstiles
located at different ends of the Broadway-
Lafayette station platform each time arriving I'd
exit through a different one than the last or
the time a Londoner recommended that I
upon arriving fresh to the city get on the next
Tube car & get off at a stop at random the idea being
to always be in a state of departure while
always arriving as if he didn't know
I already knew that each person I met
in the city was an accident or that my walks
back to wherever I needed to go never
matched where I came from I always
found it astounding when I'd return to
a building after a leave of absence to
find it transformed into a new breathing
entity like there is a new rule I am
beginning to suspect that we never
see the last of anyone or anything it
is as if the thing lives dies disappears
whatever you want to call it &
sometime later it reappears through
another lens entirely actually let me call it
reincarnation since the stories pile
inside me so densely I forget about

how one existed in the first place
it makes sense that when I'd find it
within me again it would become
a different thing entirely is the memory
not an unreliable focal point
a moving target I know no longer

*

"To walk is to lack a place," says de Certeau
then what is it called to look down upon
the walking from an apex over a forest
of verticals was it noplac when I climbed
the Chinatown fire escape piss drunk on a dare
sat on the rooftop lit by waves of office windows
& cigarette tips Murphy dared me to throw
a penny down & laughed at my gut reaction of terror
when I realized how much wreckage I could cause
from where I was standing I swear I had
never felt like somebody in this city I mean
somebody that could cause a real dip
in the fabric of other people's living it should
not seem so farfetched I still have dreams
where the cityscape opens up like a prairie
& the walkers all of a sudden start talking
to each other like they all have something to say
& I look at my body from the outside I turn away
from people & toward wheat stalks
try to press my fingers to the grain & metal
to be within two landscapes at once but
the moment I reach the stalk transforms
back into the thing that it was a handrail &

a sea of faces looking through & past me

*

you could say I'm still convinced that
everyone I knew in the city was addicted
to running into each other under
the illusion of chance I mean there is
something to say about being a regular maybe
it's just that people like to make themselves
known but I think it's more that they want
to be seen wearing the same pants for four days
because they've been sleeping in their car &
had to wake up to move it for street cleaning
or in Sean's extra bedroom above the hookah
spot which no one knew how he could afford
sporting a three-week old beardshadow which
clearly screams I don't care where I sleep or
maybe I fell asleep next to a slice of pizza
I bought downstairs I can tell you
with certainty that it made days when
I remembered a person's name or
drink or told someone that we sure
as hell didn't have free coffee this isn't
a truckstop but I admit there was a certain
magic I made when I turned a passerby into
a permanent resident I was collecting
persons & stories like I was interior
decorating the place or building my own
landscape sometimes all people want is
a thing to remain in their pocket more than
an instant within a city constantly churning

*

I used to have a theory that to never
take a photograph of your experience was
to do the right thing I mean there are
visual moments that cannot be visualized
as a still thing like how on some days I have
a favorite moving target at the DeKalb Avenue
station called the *Masstransiscope* & listen
closely to me or you will lose the idea
you are looking through the windows of
a northbound express train passing by
the station you must look past the wall
of bodies waiting there are 228 hand-painted
panels behind a series of slits made by
the grimy underground pillars when
you first see the first still image you
will notice the colors & bizarre
abstract quality of the street art before
the train speeds to optimal express speed
the panels transform into a stream
of images like a twenty-second film
I swear that's the duration although
it'll feel even shorter than that by
the time the last panel's rocket shoots
off & the mural ends you will turn your head
& naturally notice a train on the opposite track
transpose its form with your own train car's
you might lock eyes with a stranger's
through the windows before you realize
the tracks are lifting you now to the street level where

you'll get up from your N train seat stand
before the parting metal doors exit the platform
through a turnstile & walk the wide city streets again

PART III

Self- Portrait as a Spinning Globe

I try & figure which is the best way to see it
to scan the eyes across topography like a printer engine
careful not to see the rugged as range & not
a million micro-ruts & wrinkles formed pebble-by-stone
far beyond there was wondering whether world was flat
or to run the fingers over grooves of seascape
to dare place the fingers where fingers do not belong
I can't help myself but turn the hourglass of earth on its head
as often as I can sift through the stories forbidden
from memory down there everyone knows there are more
species to be counted more mountains underwater invisible
to topography or layers of rock beneath
the stone-surface we see from the canyon-top ledge

*

maybe there's a reason I remember places before people
when I look at maps I tend to trace capillaries buried
beneath nerve I mean the names in big bold font
remind me of when in school it drove me crazy that maps
of body systems concealed tissues from other systems
showed me only what it wanted me to see I want to see it
all at once like an organism want to remember myself
from the inside out like how I want earth to remember me
I remember when I threw my shoe into the abyss right off
the cliff in Moab I hiked to the top of without thinking how to
get back down I admit I did it as a whim the afterthought
lingering seconds after how the leather will take
more time than I'll be alive to break down its particles
into the dirt & become inconspicuous

*

to spin the globe is to flip through the pages of a book
to skim a pool of ideas watching for words to bud
I can say there's not been once I've spun & have not stumbled
upon some place I've never seen another time spinning
it's less about the speed of the spin more about
wherever you choose to stop it if I were to pin
the places I've been I'd see a black sky rid of stars
a box with a few airholes to breathe like the tadpole
I caught with my brother in the one murky pond
in our tiny town the ecosystem we packed into

a shoebox grass sticks a splash of water so whose to say
a swamp can't be made by our hands
tommy the three-legged tadpole grew one extra leg
& died in our bathroom sink & I wanted to know
so bad how many swamps before ours he had swam through

*

perhaps it's not accidental I always seem to stop myself when
I reach the Pacific or the regions bordering it my eyes digging into
fine print which opens up a new digging like how Crater Lake
used to be a mountain looking upon an eruption in the future
Mount Mazama it was called on a globe we have no longer
an earth invisible to the spherical map we now have which is flesh
grown over dead flesh the volcano blanketed the landscape
with ash & pumice all the way into Canada the reincarnated volcano
a caldera now a mountain in reverse or a mountain
that's had its heart removed filled the void with water where
the old man of the lake lives now hovering over the water
like the man who bought an unoccupied island in the South Pacific
spun the globe on his own stumbled upon a remnant of land
rid of name zoomed in focused his lens & captured what he saw

*

sometimes I believe it when I hear the unconscious
traces itself like a blueprint stencil like the yellow-back of
a customer receipt I'll throw in the garbage without looking at
so when I close my eyes & spin the globe on its un-tilted axis
I can feel the crinkled papier-mâché earth seep into fingerpads
I take register of remote story without knowing
& anyways sometimes thinking can give us no more than
a fog hovering in the evergreens & a broken down trailer
next to what seemed like the only campfire in sight in Montana
the dirt road that led to the only other two humans
drinking miller lites in this wide wilderness I'm still not sure
why I choose the unmarked route but need one find a reason
to find a place to sleep we call it focus for a reason even
if each focus is a new one

Upon Waking, A Wilderness

Reckless with the things I float around
my dreams or around my summits, I am

briefly in delirium when witnessing
my own tight timeframe projected

before me, or when tearing at a coil
within the sediment buried somewhere

beneath a new valley within me. I'd hate
for me to wake like this. Wake embodied

in a life that's coherent and succinct, or
wake mid-dream, a hallucination of

ascension, ascending towards some
illusion of desire slightly familiar it mimics

a clearing in the woods. Stop me from
jumping towards this fever dream, euphoric.

Stop me from jumping towards the soft skin
on the back of my neck. Upon waking,

do not be afraid of doors and entryways,
circumstance will be always be complex –

circumstance will be broken teeth or
a plane in the water. They will be milk &

honey & bone. Each grassblade, a pebble
of lucidity, or light smeared across the kitchen

table's wooden surface. Here, crouching gently
into morning, I am small. The windowpanes are

coaxing sunlight inward. At least, believe in this –
I am the naked flesh you, each day, wake into.

Potting

I haven't given up on wanting to live a grounded life. Like once, on cool night in early May, I decided tonight I would start to be the kind of person who builds and watches fires. I wanted to use my hands more. I wanted to indulge in the analog habit of walking the yard at sunfall, collecting the limbs the trees reject, packing them into the concave warmth of the pot, and paying attention to flame. I uprooted the house's indoor blankets, rehoused them in front of the backyard fire pit. I was not thinking of rain. When it came, the outdoor blankets returned to me like an electric shock to the finger. I ran to the pit in the pouring rain, sorry I had absently rescinded my commitment to it. The corpsed wool blanket, anchored like roots into the concrete, too heavy to lift. The practices I want for myself, getting buried over and over again in this overgrown yard. How many more have I abandoned out here, like animals struck by a car on the side of the highway and left for dead? Once, I was bewildered at the number of plants growing in a friend's home, the habitual compassion towards something non-sentient it must take. I asked questions about them like a child. This one, he said, used to be the size of your pointer finger outstretched. And this one, a single leaf, the size of a walnut. He told me a story about growing: he was out walking, and stumbled upon an unusually large half-dead clipping on the side of the road that someone had severed, like a body part, from the plant. He picked it up, cupping it in his hands like a newborn bird, and carried it home. Rinsed it, dampened the soil between the fingers, and potted it: gently lowering it into a new house, the way we gently lower the dead back to the earth that birthed them, as if to close a circuit of being. The once-loose, hand-packed soil has since closed tight around the severed limb like a magnet.

Reptilian Field Guide

I am remembering again
how to be reptilian. I locate
movement in my field-gaze

by instinct: luminescent-blue
scorpion submerges silicone-wet
skin between desert dune. cactus

flower pulsing on fireworked
bough blooms into what
sand somewhere conceals. red sun

grows shadows against
red rocks & helixes toward
nonlinear horizon. nothing

is wet. nothing to chase
but light. my webbed claws
bare like skeletal shrubs

beyond this lowland
get lost in their convergence
with bundles of fauna-nerves

rustling in slow wind. I will
reclaim my toes once I test
the biome. I will stand atop

archstone deep in this
heat-landscape that strikes at
the animal veins wound tight

within me. I wander forward
but tomorrow I will wander
for the first time recalling

a dream my thinking
once shed when I ignited
from the inside out like

a self-combusting eye. I will
shed my scales & skin, slip out
of them like a newborn

still wet with life.

Adaptation

The sky grows thick like amber. I track
the sun's path with a pointed stone I've carved

a grave for in the ground but the hour
hesitates, the light wants a place

that accommodates spill. I can feel the day
surrender itself to the night. The bones

move slower. It's clockwork I can't
follow, the moon blades its milky edges

against the bellies of my arms, the ribs
twitch & sing for release. The trees

turn manic and the leaves spray gamma-rays
like inkblots singing for green. The yellows

are lured by death worn in corpsing twigs
that hold them, but the reds are surely

more luring. I place a magnet under
the tongue, urge my body closer

to bloodstained veins, crisping against
the coolness of my palms. The brain

is felt best this way – singing softly
back to the womb, lost to time. It starts

with the tiniest of ticks, the thumb
begging for pinprick and then – a throb

wild as a fresh wound. I have asked
the trees to watch & watch me and this time

I believe they really will. I swallow the magnet,
melting it into me thin & thinner. The stars

are heavier from where ever I choose to stand.

Reimagining the Highway as an Open-Heart Surgery

I am in the van, gliding along U.S. 89
which cross-sections desert in precise

lineation, running up the canals of
the main vein. In the rearview mirror,

I watch earth scar over itself like ripples
along the pelvis of the canyon and we

are still a number of miles away from
the atrium of the heart vast enough that

for now, I can focus on the road,
its shoreline, without the idea of death

coming back to me like a night terror
stuck in the eyes. The low tide bares

roofless houses that gorge themselves
of organs concealed by outermost flesh

and I can't find myself to be anything
more than a knowing body dragging blade

northward, my vision blurs as horizon
becomes a name I can hold onto, Arizona,

then Utah, the cacti cling to water
and the earth's nerves compress then crack

over & over in a wavelike cycle which
portends her trauma-marks, and I worry

there is little tissue in her left for scar. I want
to be the Colorado, red at the toes not like

frost bite, hot with an absence, but hot
like blood against blood, or in other words,

a greenhouse kept hidden away from
fingerprint like a primitive reptile trapped

in solid amber, a time capsule kept close,

a night sky far and teeming with stars.

The Narcissist

I hid myself behind the highest & coldest stars
in my sleep to abandon a while the heat
of the body I carry through this planet
walled with cypress from which I cannot run
far enough they grow larger & learn
to fit around everything around me
like ants to a crumb I follow directions
that tell me to see brick as geometry
at times I can hear the clatter of my atoms
I wake to them daily the way the earth
is coated in a certain wetness each time
the sky will tilt & dip across & onward
it must pass the time 'til it dries then wets
when all the while I want to be a desert
a lone biome residing without intention
or destination but my mind will not abide
will not sit neatly on a shelf let me see it
like a storefront reflection let me master
the unviable action of seeing eye through eye

A Near Viewing of Manhattanhenge from Bryant Park

Legs thick in the itch of new summer grass
in Bryant Park. The falling red sun, a slice down
the spine of 41st street. I think of Tyson's
Stonehenge of the City, the way celestial bodies
will align themselves with the manmade so briefly
with such precision. But this wasn't quite one
of those moments. Instead, we got an angled view:
brilliant oranges & yellows reverberating off
Midtown skyscrapers on the brink of being lit
in evening neon. We looked on like ants in awe
of the new architecture, transformed so much since
I've been here last (the dead of winter: the city flesh,
bone-white), exchanging snippets of our obsessions.
You tell me about the infrastructure of design, the way
the innards of a building resemble an organism (systems
pulsing separately & in unison, steel beams & columns
imitating bone, concrete imitating diaphragm, electrical
conduits imitating blood lines & synapses, glass
imitating flesh, and just like that, a single beating heart,
nothing alive without the help of anything else)
and meanwhile, I marvel at the organism too, the way
it looks like there's a bite taken out of the side, or
a cross-section through the torso, like the girl
from *Sherlock* who gut herself not in want
of suicide, but in want of glimpsing her own
insides. That night, the cityscape as we know it,
morphing. My head perpendicular on your chest
on a night in June after a dead silence between us
for six months. You ask what I'm thinking and I want
to explain the way I chase silence & the unknown,
the gaps they create between bodies, the sloped beauty
of presence in absence, but I don't. There are thousands
in the park with us tonight, and I want to know where
they'll go when they leave. Which pocket of the city grid
they'll navigate. Who they'll stumble upon. I want
to know when I'll see you again, but I don't ask. Just then,
fireflies, circling low at knee-height, the bite in the building
igniting, as if spontaneous, in a brilliant red against
the colorless sky, and street lights, like x-rayed veins,
make themselves visible to the city again.

Tattoo

I emerge thin & paper-skinned
like monarch wings

peel a light film away from myself
as if I've been traced, a carbonite transfer

I am a handwritten theory of myself
one layer removed, a ruler held against the ribcage

the blood loves the sound of rehearsing reduction:
an obsession, a ticking sequence

at least for now, I'll be clearheaded
like my eyes are rolling backward & into me

a blue light illuminates within me
x-ray of the innards, body of ice & nerve

I triangle forward, toward any sunspot in my vision
a glitch in my tightly-wound fabric

I don't see ahead or behind me the same way I used to
stumbling into any error

but the coordinates in my blood keep running wild
a million tiny sudden raptures

Specters

They're like specters. Silhouetted selves.
The way the sun creates different shadows of us

depending on the time & the dial. Sometimes,
they dart away from me like a rocket launch.

Sometimes, they sit near and crave convergence
with my self. We point & laugh at them like

a game of charades. In one: we are the same age.
In another: we marry. Another: you have one eye and I

make fun of you, and another: we are oblivious to
the other's existence. But the specters start to keep me up

at night. I carry them like organs. They become
watery reflections that don't ripple when I finger them.

I see them bubble & teem around me, the way atoms
will dance at the mind's command, the way we forget

they do when we settle into our lives like a new house.
But they're there as surely as the air & the vector

that lift a plane into flight, and the feeling of regret
is the closest thing to sensing the specter in the dark.

I think of the specter of the bird wing. The way it
sprang into being for cooling the body off but now

it exists only for flight. An origin-corpse. Somewhere,
birds are bound to the ground and live to fan themselves

like palms, like a cloud you see take a curious shape
in the sky, and once you turn your head away

from time, you have no idea where it's gone.

To Hike without Trail-Markers or Map

The bones round out of the ditch, where the dark vines are in the black ditch, into the moonlight, where some of the shapes have stopped. That is, they stop being constantly shaped, conceding to nuanced moon phase.

The problem in writing a story, like making a diorama, is in trying to make sense of a pool of ideas. The weather has suddenly turned. I have the wrong shoes on, and my jacket is not waterproof.

Everydayness reveals itself as a mode of temporality. Palettes of green drip from the frontyard trees. The street lights go down the hill and then rise toward the town and I walk upon the belly of my shadow.

This is the sort of thing which mathematics knows.

But who can remember anything in all this chaos? I never see one of the common blacktail deer without fresh admiration; and since I never carry a gun I see them well: lying beneath a juniper or a dwarf pine, among the brown needles on the brink of some cliff or the end of a ridge commanding a wide outlook.

The idea is to constantly be in a state of departure while always arriving. The ground is plowed constantly by earthworms. Chemicals are surrendered to the soil by the decaying carcass of an elk. From time to time, human toes brush the surface, and when they return the soil they brush has been replaced by newborn soil.

No cloud of care in this day: to the grasshopper every day is a holiday, and when his sun sets, he will cuddle down on the forest floor and die like the leaves and flowers, and like them, leave no unsightly remains calling for burial.

The thought enters me, a quick electric flame of pain flashes along the outraged nerves, and I discover for the first time how great is the capacity for sensation I am possessed of. I remember that the human is a dwarf at the foot of herself. I creep out of my crust and gaze around with unease.

An hour before dark, I hear the clear, sharp snorting of a deer, and I look down on the brushy, rocky canyon bottom. I try to interpret the world in terms of those beings present-at-hand. I try to use the language of another sense and I am uncovered.

I think what I am after is a heightened sense of the ordinary. But when I look at the animal husk, I do not see the image of my own future. An absurd inner voice whispers *this will never happen to us*.

Learning to Light a Fire with Bare Hands

*When you take a flower in your hand and really look at it, it's your world for the moment.
I want to give that world to someone else... I want them to see it whether they want to or
not.*

Georgia O'Keeffe

I've painted you this way before: you at your day's end,
bare & vacant on wooden chair in a white room colored

faintly by old sunlight, as if you existed only to pose at me
like a replica of a body in a still life painting. A still life,

like the time as a child I asked my father to paint for me
a picture that could show me what life was like before

I was in it and he replied with the word: nothingness.
A blank room that remained infinitely blank in any

direction. There was nothing more he could give me.
I spent hours turning the hourglass of your body over

& over, searching for something I'd never seen
before. I was trying to light a campfire desperately with

bare hands, to show you the way I'm capable
of love. The way you taught me, the driest particles

leaning close into hot blue flame. When you feed it,
keep your hands at a distance so you won't

get burnt. When we burn, it's a collision. It's always
temporary. Like the way I fanned the fire with

used-up notebook paper or how the paper map we carried
didn't matter once the sun refused us. I said hunger

was refusing you and sending you to sleep. You said sleep
was the only thing that remained animated

in the dark. But here I am, covering myself in wet mud
& smoke just to make you notice. Just to disgust you,

which is as passionate as the body gets. In your sleep,
I told you you're an image of a wolf, running

after something you'll never kill. In that morning hour,
when everything is still dim & wet, I turned on the radio

and started driving. Driving against the folds of its crackling
analog fire. You were still asleep in the backseat.

A Viewing of the Total Solar Eclipse from Teton Valley, Idaho

Think of it. The moon's full shadow sweeps across the
Teton Valley, and there's darkness at noon. The greens
in the bluegrass & junipers emerging from the earth,
cliffside above the valley, wane in the weakening

daylight and our trust in color & hue evades us.
Bright, alive things fade into gradient and then,
streetlights below illuminate in instinct. All that
remains now in the panorama: a thin, blinding

orange slice left over from the sun cutting across
the horizon. Somehow, it must be about us.
No matter our cosmic quarantine from the sky,
no matter the glass prism we're bound to. The sun

is swallowed like a minnow and the body responds:
immerses in a tank of sensory deprivation, numb like
peroxide applied directly to the back of the neck.
In the moment of totality, the glass shatters, the doors

open, and I step onto the plane of planetary
alignment, where time collapses and memories buried
deep within me flood forth all at once. My father's
father's deathbed wish to have more time alive

with his son, or midday in the floral armchair,
reading aloud *Adventures of the Mind*, Long Island light
pouring straight through the windows. The dusking
summer sun cutting across the metal landscape

on the suspension bridge at Central Avenue, our toes
on the edge of the subway cliff, peering down
into the silver valley. My brother & I collecting crab apples
like rubies in our backyard wicker chair fort. Here, I am

inside the ten boundless minutes of brain activity remaining
after the body shuts down during death. These worlds
collide within me like the countless stars I carve out of
the Valley sky: bright, unpatterned, & undeniably present.

To My Concealed Animality

After the last of our high-handed fires had died
like hollowed traces of a once-blazing comet
strewn far across the atmosphere long after
its passing, I floated complacently above them

awhile, a migrant particle roaming irrelevantly
through space rather than aimed
at some fabled place of residence in which
I will never actually reside. I watched the day

unfold itself to me in particles. The winter trees
lay themselves bare, shedding that which
had protected them after so much time
and for just an instant in my numb observation

my mind went primal: that is,
ceased to reign the world around it,
let it burst alive with things that care
nothing for me. But perhaps the point is not

how brief are the moments in which
I allow myself to step outside myself
but more so that I read for answers these days.
I read like I am turning a bedroom upside down

in search of something I can hold in my hands
and feel consoled by the knowledge of
its exact whereabouts rather than
the visceral animality of the hands. At night

while the moon is busy casting halos
on innumerable surfaces in uncharted
patterns of light, I drift to sleep
visited by the thick memory of your scent.

To Swim Away from the Nest

There is a photograph within me somewhere that I have taken of my self in a circumstance that I will someday encounter. I've captured myself in the short moment of my own invisibility. That is, within an instant in which I will, at last, cease to pay attention to myself, and to my thoughts, and therefore, have created a visual of a quality of being. I see the subject of the image as I am unable to see myself, and therefore,

have briefly removed the eyes from my own head. I see on & on. The city street, containing so many faces, a constant wave of arrival. There is nowhere for my gaze to rest because nothing is at rest. Bodies pacing the sidewalks bob like buoys in rippling water. Hands grab at apples bundled in baskets at the corner market, forcing the stillness out of them. The revolving door to the gold-lined building to which I am

giving my attention rotates in spurts of motion without ever really stopping. There is no opposite to motion. I am bobbing among the bodies and I am the bob. I am thinking and thus I am swimming away from myself, away from the nest. I am moving towards a heat hotter than the one within me. I am landing an idea: that I, myself, am becoming a projection of my ultimate ambition – to become her, and my own, eyes.

NOTES

“The past will be much like the present” is loosely based on various photographs featured in Stephen Shore’s *Uncommon Places*.

“Sans terre, or a theory of walking” partially takes its title from Henry David Thoreau’s 1862 essay, “Walking,” wherein he states, “Some, however, would derive the word [saunter] from sans terre, without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere.”

“The good road” takes its title from a quotation by John Muir in *Our National Parks*: “All the Western mountains are still rich in wildness, and by means of good roads are being brought nearer civilization every year. To the sane and free it will hardly seem necessary to cross the continent in search of wild beauty, however easy the way, for they find it in abundance wherever they chance to be.”

“A panoramic view from the Firestone parking lot on U.S. 93, Kingman, Arizona, 1975” is inspired by Stephen Shore’s photograph entitled “U.S. 93, Kingman, Arizona, July 2.”

“Masstransiscope,” as the poem suggests, is the title of Bill Brand’s 1980 public artwork that can be seen on the New York City MTA – the Q and B trains at DeKalb Avenue station, just before Brooklyn enters Manhattan. The street mural, restored in 2008, is painted on the walls behind the subway’s infrastructure. By working in coordination with the way the human visual system registers images, it creates a motion picture-like experience when looking out the subway car’s windows. About his visual technique, Brand has said, “When you look at something, or when light passes through your eye, it creates these chemical changes and it persists for a period of time. And we all know that if you’ve had your picture taken with a flash bulb, you see this ball of light for a fairly long period of time that’s quite annoying. But actually that process is happening all the time, consistently, and if it didn’t, we probably wouldn’t see at all.”

“Masstransiscope” also incorporates an extension of the quote by de Certeau in “The Practice of Everyday Life” mentioned in the text of the poem itself – that “lacking a place” is “an experience that is, to be sure, broken up into countless tiny deportations (displacements and walks), compensated for by the relationships and intersections of these exoduses that intertwine and create an urban fabric, and placed under the sign of what ought to be, ultimately, the place but is only a name, the City...a universe of rented spaces haunted by a nowhere or by dreamed-of places.”

“Self Portrait as a Spinning Globe” incorporates an idea first suggested by Cheryl Strayed – that because Crater Lake used to be a mountain prior to its catastrophic eruption, it was “a mountain with its heart removed.”

“Upon Waking, A Wilderness” is after Ada Limón’s poem, “The Noisiness of Sleep,” from her book *Bright Dead Things*.

“A Near Viewing of Manhattanhenge from Bryant Park” refers to the term coined by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. Explaining the phenomenon, he has said, “For Manhattan, a place where evening matters more than morning, that special day comes twice a year, when the setting Sun aligns precisely with the Manhattan street grid, creating a radiant glow of light across Manhattan’s brick and steel canyons, simultaneously illuminating both the north and south sides of every cross street of the borough’s grid.”

“Tattoo” takes inspiration from a quote by Carl Jung in “The Undiscovered Self”: “The psyche has a peculiar nature which can not be reduced to anything else.”

“To Hike without Trail-Markers or Map” is an experimental project that employs choosing prosaic sentences at random from the following books – “Book of Animals” by John Muir, “Being and Time” by Martin Heidegger, “VAS: An Opera in Flatland” by Steve Tomasula, “Known and Strange Things” by Teju Cole,” “The Sound and the Fury” by William Faulker, “The Ongoing Moment” by Geoff Dye, and “Adventures of the Mind,” an anthology published in 1960 from the *Saturday Evening Post*, edited by Richard Thruelsen and John Kobler.