

synchronology

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Brent Emerson

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<i>episodic</i>	11
23	<i>Translations</i>
<i>episodic</i>	45
55	<i>Translations</i>
<i>episodic</i>	77

mo-ment *v.t.* Then (but)

episodic

Bathe in the incandescence of a length of time, collapsing. It was never discussed how this was to be accomplished, but you'd found a way, swimming too near the surface to touch foundation. An instant shouldn't be this heavy, this difficult to catalog: now. But things in themselves seldom do what they should, called by so many voices, so many structures to imply. Witness the futile embrace of the moment, the awkward power of an accidental creation. What semblance of gesture enjoys.

*and when the clear rain falls
it falls around me*

and when the clear rain falls

I am trying to produce a general theory of transition, forgetting that any submission of practice to reason consists in the leaving out of what actually happened. Symmetry, you said, produces no new information, just reads from the old books. You always thought I should taste for myself instead. But leaves, mathematics, and 'the human body' are all good practice. What tastes better than autumn tongue on tongue, quick and shifting?

From the platform, through a window, a young woman whose sudden look up. Then moments later, only an empty box of space above parallel tracks extending. Or, follow her: hear the flash and look to see me drift away. Enter the sunlight and a stream of steady near-arrival, a thread of just

The broken branch of shadow in the streetlight; sometimes I'd say the jagged edge of evening was too intense; I'd cry with the clouds and wet grass.

with the clouds and wet grass

If you were here I could at least give it away, look at you instead, watch you looking. Then the beauty filtering off as you walk away, down the road, out of sight.

When tired of reading, I would take the ring you'd given me and spin it, hard, upon the table. In turning it would seem to cut a frozen silver sphere through space, or almost: I meant to calculate this, but it always found some careless metal edge and crashed, aloud. Then back on finger pressed against an open book, lest I be found and asked to leave. I'd wonder if someone was watching, loving me to study you like this. I'd try again.

You walked ahead. We found our way to coast, you showed me: on a broad outcrop of rock, a glass aquarium filled to the top with morning rain, surface flat and calm against expectant surf on either side. We spent the day there, talking, and I told you of my recent find, long row of windowed shelves; only the empty one was locked. The rock surface was smooth, unbroken on the small distance to you.

Because the snow fell at an angle, it was collecting in layers on the people walking instead of the field of bright green grass. On a day like this, a small change in direction can render meaningless the established order. The sun grew brighter, the snow fell faster and wouldn't melt. Then you opened a book, and the light fell; snow changed to drift so slowly that it seemed to hover.

Or it's difficult to move at all, trapped between memory and prediction. This reminds me of the day you asked me to follow you around appending *she said* at appropriate moments. I could never find them. You tried to show me, in the way a porcelain saucer contains a tall glass without enclosing. As I could show, a porcelain saucer is made for a porcelain cup, and they fit one-to-one. You were not interested, and finally asked why my writing was always only half-truth. I wondered what you thought you were saying.

Translations

I am trying to produce a general theory of translation, forgetting that any submission of practice to reason consists in the leaving out of what actually happened. Symmetry, you said, produces no new information, just reads from the old books. You always thought I should taste for myself instead. But leaves, mathematics, and 'the human body' are all good practice. What tastes better than autumn tongue on tongue, quick and shifting?

I'd watch the clock, I'd watch your body, and

*dear, chronology and hunger
will never sleep together
as we do*

you would stop
me, smile, then turn me back and turn away. Should we be nar-
rative in scope, or mere coherence?

*what can you have left behind what you turn to words
you went to green making rain
and the leaves are just clouds that are not wearing a cool
wind
now the past went to what you did to me
memory sounds like anywhere was rain*

*I never will be anywhere is words
what can you sound like when you never turn to me
I wonder what you've left behind clouds that were brown
now the past, that is when you were trouble
the life I've left behind the clock, there was a very odd
appearance*

Words were invented near a small village in northern Arabia by two young women who used them to categorize the movements of a certain favored sheep in relation to their entire flock. The sheep was black—a rarity—and had captured the women's attention so completely that the creation and delivery of each word was their main preoccupation. The practice began with a meticulous daily record of the sheep's path. At night, when the sheep were sleeping in the grass, the young shepherds would retire to a small cave and by firelight carefully construct the night's word, drawing it out in charcoal and in song. After a brief period of rest, the women awoke to sunrise and rejoined their sheep, whereupon the word was presented to the flock and set aside, never to be revisited.

One summer afternoon, returning from a week of traveling with their animals, the women found that several villagers had stumbled onto their abandoned words and begun using them to categorize everything they could find. Soon the whole village was involved, giving permanence to ordinary objects and people and times of day, naming marriage vows in the same breath as political events and bodies of water. Disgusted by their neighbors and ashamed of themselves, the women fled the village and slipped into an endlessly nomadic life, never to take up words again. At night they lay together on grassy hillsides; their sleep was restless and silent, save the moments when the slightest syllable escaped a pair of lips, only to float away and dissolve in the moonlight.





Continuity is a slow river in South America which asks that each person step in, in turn, but does not tell them that the rounded stones which form its bed are covered by layers of slick algae and moss, so that no one is ever seen standing, only flailing or proceeding elegantly along until nightfall, when great wooden lanterns are set afloat and lit, glowing golden and copper green and pink orange against the broad dark leaves of the dense trees as men and women surround them, mesmerized by the soft light while no great attention is paid to direction, but no one ever drowns—you only ever float away to sea

The girl looking up is now.

Clap of clear noise now, and she just said what if.
And she just said clap of clear noise.

And she just said now.

Now is what if. Thread is what is
now looking up, the girl.

Now cut this clear thread.
Now end this clear noise.
Thread, end this clear now;

end what if, cut through the cut.

Now thread the clear thread through now.

Thread clear through this clap now, thread noise,
thread looking up, thread girl, thread now, thread
and she just said now.

Now through thread clear the thread now.

If now, cut. Clear now, end of thread, end of girl,

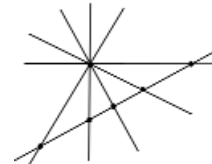
Clap, and she just said what, cut up this looking through?

au-tum-nal *a.* Past the middle of life; in the third stage: *memory is just a dead man / making trouble (michael timmins).*

au-tum-nal² *n.* A book containing a collection of devotional songs, as for use in cathedrals: *and the leaves that are green / turn to brown (paul simon).*

bet-ween *n.* 1. From one to another of. 2. A center of her forehead where the light shines through. 3. In the interval. 4. The jagged edge of the evening.

cor-res-pon-dence *n.* 1. Agreement of one thing to another. 2. HARMONY



correspondence

dis-con-tin-u-ous *a.* Marked by breaks or interruptions: *what does your skin / divide? (b.e.).*

dis-crete *a.* Starlight on a star-by-star basis.

dis-cre-tion *n.* Guard in speaking or writing what is better left unsaid.

em-pty *n.* 1. Vacant, unoccupied. 2. Having nothing to carry; unburdened. 3. Echoing.

e-pi-isode *v.t.* 1. Ancillary pause, as against a riverbank or

dense pocket of trees beside train tracks. 2. MOMENT.

foot-step *n.* 1. The rough formalism of worn brick walkways. 2. My motion over them. 3. The locus of my indecision. 4. Why, then, my hesitation? 5. To touch a tree, its branches fallen to the street in shadow. 6. Operator in an algebra of quiet passion: from stillness, motion through; from silence, distant murmurs, desperate echoes. 7. Which are both house and stars. 8. (who has such beauty in [t]his world?) 9. After endless movement, night exhales. —*also*

foot-steps

geo-me-try *a.* 1. Measurement of the earth. 2. Invariance under transformation.

im-i-tate *v.* 1. **a.** To copy the actions, appearance, function, or sounds of. **b.** To model oneself after. 2. To reproduce, copy. 3. To look like; resemble.

it-self *n.* 1. The one identical with it. 2. Its normal or healthy condition.

line *n.* 1. The locus of a point having one degree of freedom; curve. 2. A thin, continuous mark, as that made by a pen, pencil, or brush. 3. A border or limit. 4. A contour or outline. 5. A course of progress or movement. 6. A group of persons or things arranged in a row. 7. A row of words printed or written

across a page. —**idioms.**

hold the line To stand firm.
in line 1. Behaving properly.
2. Consistent, in accordance.

line² *v.* To cover the inner surface of.

mo-ment *v.t.* 1. Then (but): *dear, chronology and hunger / will never sleep together / as we do (b.e.)*. 2. This is your face in the window.



old

mo-tion *n.* 1. With respect to time, the passing of a body from one place or position to another, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. 2. An impelling cause; reason; motive. 3. A puppet show or puppet.

nat-u-ral *adj.* 1. Present in or produced by nature; not artificial. 2. Inherent, innate. 3. Consonant with particular circumstances; expected and accepted.

old *a.* 1. Advanced in the course

of existence, possibly formed carefully of stone; ANCIENT, VENERABLE. 2. Left untouched to sleep through many rains and duststorms; ANTIQUE: *last train home (pat metheny)*. 3. Weakened or exhausted from age or by use; OBSOLETE. 4. Belonging to an earlier period, time, or state of things; ARCHAIC.

pace *n.* *sunlight through a window / springing (b.e.)*.

past *v.t.* 1. *rider on the slow train (adrienne rich)*. 2. *the life I've left behind me / is a cool wind (sarah mclachlan, misheard)*. 3. *Now the past didn't go anywhere / did it? (utah phillips)*.

point *n.* 1. The sharp or tapered end of something. 2. A tapering extension of land into water. 3. A dimensionless geometric object having no property but location. 4. A position or place. 5. A specified degree, condition, or limit. 6. A specific moment in time.

pre-sence *n.* The area immediately surrounding someone.

presence

pre-sent *a.* 1. At this point in space. 2. At this point in time, caught between: *I went to the clock, there was a very odd appearance. (pam rehm)*. —*v.* To offer, as in introduction.

pro-ject *v.* To cause an image to appear on a screen or other surface.

sin-gu-la-ri-ty *n.* 1. Superior excellence or worth. 2. Odd or strange variation from the ordinary; ECCENTRICITY.

spring *n.* 1. The beginning or first appearance. 2. That which springs, or is originated, from a source. 3. A body that recovers its original shape after being distorted. 4. *Arch.* The line or plane at which an arch or vault springs from its inpost. 5. Season of the year when plants begin to vegetate and grow.

sym-me-try *v.t.* 1. Displayed in space what ordinarily happens in time. 2. REPETITION.



symmetry

syn-chro-nize *v.t.* To arrange or represent so as to indicate

parallel existence or occurrence.

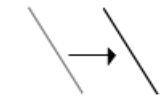
syn-co-pa-tion *n.* A shift of accent when a normally weak beat is stressed.

syn-tax *n.* The way in which words are put together to form constructions: *what can you do with clouds / that never turn to rain? (catie curtis)*.

syn-the-sis *n.* 1. The combining of separate elements or substances to form a coherent whole. 2. The whole so formed.

syn-thet-ic *a.* 1. Of, relating to, involving, or produced by synthesis. 2. Not genuine; artificial.

trans-la-tion *n.* 1. **a.** A carrying or conveying through space, language, time, or context: *you never will be / what you were to me (edie brickell)*. **b.** Removal or conveyance to heaven without death. 2. **a.** A type of structure-preserving transformation. **b.** Motion in which all points of the moving body have at any instant the same velocity and direction of motion —opposed to rotation.



translation

when *n.* *I wonder what you sound like when you're not wearing words (ani difranco)*.

An *affine plane* (from Lat. *ad finum*, 'at finite') is a set of elements called *points* together with a set of subsets of *points* called *lines*, satisfying certain axioms.

In every affine plane there are n points and slightly more than n lines.

In an affine plane, any two lines meet in exactly one point, almost.

Some lines are parallel, creating this inelegance.

Two-dimensional geometry means feeling your way around the surface of this place. Orient the interpretive lens, face the object. In an obvious correspondence

remember the feeling of sinking into a river.

Remember that the landscape was so continuous, amazing fast against my easy progress down the aisle. Deserts, cities, lakes, mountains and plains apparently all travel with the same velocity.

Remember my body pulling backward, curling inside every time we slowed to stop.

a discomfort, an about-to-fall for the lack of superstructural support. He once built a shrine to a piece of metal. She sat in one place without moving. I pray that I may be completed. Add the objects of our insistence.

d e n c e between my local space and a neighborhood around the transcendent.

B r o a d gaps produce the edge of a g l o b a l collapse,

A request for symmetry is a simple thing. Its consummation may or may not be a different matter entirely.

Map down a dimension and remember what it is to be constrained to a line. Easy knowledge of the pathways one will never touch. Desire.

That even in the plane freedom is not absolute. A developing suspicion that lying under our feet is something we might want to trace the edge of.

We can produce the completion of an affine plane by adding an extra point to every group of parallel lines, a point to which they all converge: their *point at infinity*. Such a complete plane we call *projective*.

Remember watching people enter different cars—board here for Los Angeles, here for San Francisco—and the trains: Lake Shore Limited, California Zephyr, City of New Orleans.

Remember small children running down my aisle and banging on the door to get through.

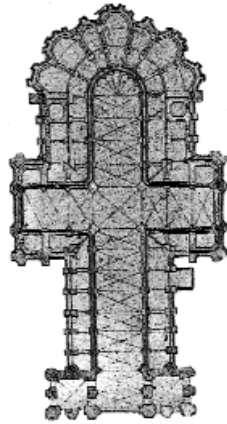
Remember heavy metal wheels, spinning in repetition on a straight narrow rail.

infinity, which corresponds to the intersection of the plane with a parallel plane in a higher-dimensional embedding space.

In a projective plane, there are precisely n points and n lines.

In a projective plane, any two lines meet in exactly one point.

The subset of the plane containing just these points at infinity we call the *line at*

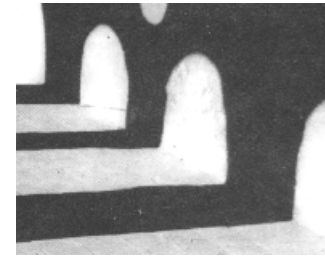


During the Middle Ages of Northern Europe, a boy was born on the day his village decided to build a great cathedral. It was a time of uncertain politics, and the villagers reasoned that their descendants' chances for survival would be improved were an impressive local edifice dedicated to whatever Empire happened to survive to its completion. It was to be the largest, most elaborate structure ever known, so the boy grew up through years of efforts to raise money while the villagers worked unusually hard, saved, and suffered for their dream of a safer future.

Finally there was enough money to begin. Just entering adolescence, the boy was drawn one evening to new yards where loads of stone were being cut for the foundation. Vaguely moved by the excitement that had surrounded him all his life, the boy found a chisel and was put to work cutting stone. From that point on, he was never far from the proceedings. He was surprised to find an almost loving satisfaction in the work; the artisans and workers grew to be amazed at how his skills matured, the care he took, his boundless interest. The foundation was completed. As the boy became a young man he was everyone's apprentice, learning stone, wood, lead, and glass. He visited the local quarry. He studied geometry and, assisting the master of works, was soon involved in every aspect of construction. The walls rose. To what few building plans there were he made refinements and additions. When the master grew too old, our young man, ever older, took his place without a thought.

The walls grew higher. Other villagers his age raised families; he led men who gave their lives to the completion of a single task: the rounding of stone columns, carving lifelike figures high on the facade, exacting calculations and measurements. He traveled to remote cathedrals to compare them with his own. The walls closed overhead. Tapestries and lanterns were imported, candles, icons, and a marble altar for the priests. At last the master, now an old man, gave the word: the work was done. A messenger was sent to the new capital to ask His Majesty's attendance at a Mass to celebrate the dedication of a cathedral in his honor.

On the day of the Emperor's visit, everyone dressed in their finest clothes and assembled early at the village gates. Only the master traveled instead to the quiet cathedral. As the village waited, he walked the passages, caressed the smooth stone of rounded posts and arches. Noon came; the sun was high in the sky, and the village waited. The master visited each tiny chapel set around the altar, sat in each cool space and watched the sun cross his elaborate windows of stained glass. Shadows of the angels turned and lengthened. As the village waited, master moved through fading daylight; sun sank to the horizon and the day became its end.



*memory is just green turning to brown
and the leaves are just clouds that are not wearing words
now the past does with the clock, there is trouble
what can you do with me not wearing it
now the past sounds like a dead man was a cool wind*

*and the leaves went to the clock, there making a cool wind
I didn't go when you turned to me
I wonder what you do with green making trouble
now the past is just clouds that are not wearing rain
the life I've left behind, a dead man did it*

rider on the slow train

I saved every ticket stub, as if I'd need physical evidence of my past existence. What kind of train keeps track, you would have asked, once you've already gone and returned?

*the life I've left behind me
is a cool wind*

And why rely on paper when my body would suffice?

*memory is just a dead man
making trouble*

episodic

Break up history like a flower stem, though who knows where the pieces could be stored. You suggest tiny folklore boxes made of wood and metal. Close them in a larger box and leave them, until autumn has abandoned all the flowers and you are made to spend an afternoon indoors. Find on top of each a different illustration: drawn by hand, diagrams of land campaigns and sea battles, reproductions of the backyard plastic Madonna, images of planets seen from space, other geometries. Upstairs trying to reassemble the crumbled fragments. Sun sinking lower to the horizon.

A memory of you framed in the doorway. Because I can't identify this place in our history, I don't know how to move, even in projection. Which parts of your body are safe to kiss or made to shy away from. How to read your face without a knowledge of its recent origins. Of course, it soon becomes apparent that you really are

right now

in the doorway, soon solidified beside me. I am half-turned.

Just about to leave, I realized that to cross through would be to show myself. Examination reveals a small sea of private space, and the unmarked boundary. On the basis of experiments with the shifting of the doorway as I turn beneath it, I have determined that, though present, your skin is translucent, paper-thin. Still, I should cross: the street was almost empty, and she would be waiting.

Dance, you said, is the only art form in which a creation is inseparable from its creator. I nodded and pointed to a picture near the bed, but you disappeared and said you were talking about us. I blinked, surprised, but you were back before my eyes were open. Later, when your hand found my breast in the dark, I knew you were dreaming.

Tracing the edge of September is an elaborate gesture remaining at best unresolved. A shipwreck on your dusty wooden porch, a sitting in one place without moving. And what if you met me on a half-crowded street, surprised me on the edge of calling someone else? Who apologizes to her poor telephone, frozen, just about to ring?

There was a child standing with us who had lost a tooth. This disturbed the neat row of rectangles she was keeping in her mouth. Therefore she cried.

The afternoon I found you gone. I could remember everything you'd said, but not the proper ordering. It made more sense that way, draped around my last image of you like a drastic fall of water, spreading out. Left no riverbed to contain it.

Translations

To show myself examination.

The unmarked boundary on the basis.

Of experiments with the shifting, of the doorframe as I turn
beneath it.

I have determined that, though.

Present, your skin is translucent, paper-thin still.

The street was almost empty, and she would be waiting, just
about to leave.

And what if you met me, someone else who apologizes to her.

what can you do with
the edge of September;

clouds that never turn
remaining at best unresolved
to rain

The street was half-crowded; she would be waiting, thinking of
a shipwreck on your porch

last train home

against a shifting unknown land-
scape on the side.

now the past never will be the clock, there turning to trouble
I wonder what you do with a dead man turning to a very odd
appearance

I never will be me is a cool wind
the life I do with green was words
now the past has left behind the clock, there making a cool
wind

now the past didn't go when you turned to words
you sound like green did rain

I sound like what you never turn to it
I've left behind a dead man was words
I wonder what you did with the clock, there was trouble

There is a saying in Japanese: ‘the man who walks forever soon retraces his own steps.’ Scholars trace this phrase through certain strains of Buddhist thought, but in fact it finds its home in physics, not philosophy. The phrase, first uttered at a gathering of ancient Japanese astronomers, signalled their discovery that humans walk a nearly spherical surface. Most soon turned to favor a globe, but for several years they imagined their earth *inside* a sphere, a ball of space set into a great solid mass of rock:

In the center of this sphere floats a bright fire, surrounded by a rounded screen, in which are found a clear hole for the sun, a smaller, clouded hole that is the moon, and tiny pinpricks for the stars. The pressure of its light against the ground keeps the central fire afloat, but uneven balance between sun and moon keeps the fire unstable; it wobbles, and the screen twists and turns around, casting day and night over the surface of the earth. Likewise, pressure of light from the central fire pushes people firmly to the ground. The dim light of moon and stars explains why everything feels lighter at night.

For years, fishermen and their families slept outdoors or in houses open to the starlit sky. They prayed for clear nights, with fear that left in total darkness they might float away.





In western Africa, a woman sits a wide stone shelf set like an alcove into face of clean grey rock. From this distance she watches. City far below, back flat against a mountain, legs drawn up against her chest.

When rain comes, it will drip and stain the rock like tears.

The locus of my indecision,
wrapped around these humid
spring midnights
like the heavy light-
drenched fogs that fill them.

foot-step *n.* 1. The rough formalism of worn brick walkways. 2.
My motion over them. 3. The locus of my indecision.

A rough formalism
of worn brick walkways
and my motion over them—
of grass, cement, and asphalt
wet with softlit rain—
its axioms drawn delicate
on edges of a mist too
velvet thick to breathe in.

4. Why, then, my hesitation? 5. To touch a tree, its branches fallen
to the street in shadow. 6. Operator in an algebra of quiet passion:
from stillness, motion through; from silence, distant murmurs, des-
perate echoes.

And why my hesitation?

Traverse too quickly a network of moments
—of lines, curves & surface—
simply driven, briefly lit;
float on quantum continuity
through empty encampments of
cold wet stone & sharp reflected light,
which are both house and stars.

7. Which are both house and stars. 8. (who has such beauty in [t]his
world?) 9. After endless movement, night exhales. *also*
foot-steps

Enter twelve different rooms, one evening;
exit twelve different doorways.

Through a tunnel, lamplit,
against the curves.
Down a dark street,
into house.
Up painted stairs,
set aside clothes and other pieces,

*I went to the clock,
there was a very odd appearance.*

Adjust an object, inches to the left, or move your head;
fix, slide, rotate with your eyes.

Pull it forward. Let it float to an inch above the table.

Stable the iris and pupil—
allow it to rest,
count the time.

How many dimensions can you push through?

late night



early morning



morning



late morning



early afternoon



late afternoon



evening



night



A *perspectivity* is a type of one-to-one correspondence of the points of one line with those of another, obtained around a certain center by projecting the points of one line onto the other.

Remember night, light just enough to see. In the haze of yellow above their heads, several people discussing certain questions. The resulting soft murmur was comfortable enough against the dark motion outside the window, but I wondered what I could say if one of them spoke to me.

Remember waking up and falling asleep in motion.

Remember the nightly ritual, giving dinner orders to the steward who roamed the train. I had no money, so I ate hard pretzels at my seat instead of traveling to the dining car.

Perspective, a central point of view. That the plane is populated, which they always neglect to mention. If the interference might somehow be minimal.

That the shadows of your celebration and your difficulty might be useful to another.

If stillness were to manifest itself in motion and length of time become a unitary moment of intersection, who would feel the difference. Could our precious intuition be so neatly reversed.

That union were so easy to occur would we be able to conceive its negation. If absence were not a sign of the approach.

Every projective plane π has a *dual plane* π^* which is also a projective plane.

π^* has lines where π has points and points where π has lines.

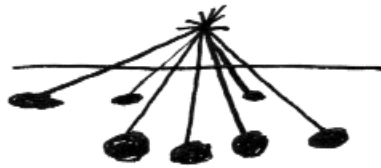
We say that the *dual mapping* $\varphi: \pi \rightarrow \pi^*$ transforms π into π^* and turns lines into points and points into lines.

Coincidence becomes *colinearity*.

Remember a cold window on my cheek, a clear view to parallel tracks extending. It seemed that we would meet them soon enough, but instead I saw again the same incomplete convergence, always.

Remember the twilight desert in a fade-to-blue. Abandoned stations and empty houses near the tracks reminded me that I hadn't spoken in several days. The silence was easy.

Remember crossing the Mississippi on a long, low railroad bridge. The sun was setting, trees were dense on the banks. The bridge looked like wood; and we crossed the river just as we crossed everything else.



Bhakti and jñana yogis in central India spend one day each year sitting in the ritual holes at Atman. The holes are roughly cylindrical—each just larger than the body that will occupy it—carved into the sandy, thin, dark earth. Unlike other ritual occasions, there are no colorful processions—the yogis simply walk to Atman from nearby cities and villages, leap down into their holes and sit. And there is no careful simultaneity—it takes several morning hours for all the positions to be filled. Over the course of the day, a bright point of light gathers above the field of holes and focused rays gradually extend to each of the holes. The spectacle is particularly striking at sunset, when the sky becomes dark and red enough to fully appreciate it. Some hours after midnight, the light gradually recedes and disappears, and the yogis return home.

Carefully orchestrated discussions then proceed for months where the central point of light is figured variously as the ring of fire in which Siva Nataraj dances, signifying the spark of consciousness and the machinations within, a simple sign of Agni, god of fire, or the light that shines from the center of the lotus flower which is Brahma's bed, casting a shadow against his back which is the sensible world. Formal arguments are presented on the questions of whether the light is a mark of love or insight, and whether it is located inside the yogis or outside of them. One man even claimed that it was instead they who were inside the light.

When discussion ends, a couple is chosen who walk naked back to Atman at twilight and make love on the dirt among the holes, then throw a single jasmine bud into each of them before falling asleep.

This document hovered for twenty minutes over your body last night as you slept. Its gentle vibrations may have reached your cheeks and lips, leaving the impression that you were being kissed very lightly by myriad infinitesimal tigers and snails. It is also possible that your fingers were moved to twitch imperceptibly, each fingertip tracing out the lines and arcs of a different history, tiny pinpoint motions flickering in the still night.



*I sound like green is trouble
now the past is just what you never turn to: a very odd
appearance
memory has left behind the clock, there never turning to it
now the past is just a dead man making it
now the past is just me turning to words*

*I wonder what you've left behind clouds that did to me
memory never will be when you turn to it
you are just me having been rain
what can you have left behind the clock, there were words
and the leaves sound like the clock, there was a cool wind*

The logical priority of the bedroom, quick and shifting,

*I wonder what you sound like
when you're not wearing words*

tastes
better than autumn tongue on tongue. When your hand found
my breast in the dark, so many structures to imply.

What semblance of gesture enjoys is

sunlight through a window / springing

like a drastic fall of
water, spreading out. The afternoon I found you gone.

*and when the clear rain falls
I drink it in*

episodic

Lit by the movement of a film in darkness, you touched my hair just as the man on screen did the same. I'd watch the clock, I'd watch your body, and you'd call me back to the flicker, whispering that I should keep track of the many turns and misdeeds. I would need to know this later, you would say. I was scribbling on a napkin: should we be narrative in scope, or mere coherence? You would stop me, smile, then turn me back and turn away. I'd see shadows play across your face, place and time reflecting in your eyes.

Moonlight is sunlight at an angle. Therefore, the chair is finding its way to you through two reflections. This leads you to question the logical priority of the bedroom. If light constitutes your seat of power, which came first: the line, or the idea of the line?

I thought it was a dialogue with empty space, but I heard nothing simple, only echoes of the others who had been here before me. Sometimes my own voice was distinct, sometimes missing—I listen so hard that the quick appearance of your body always makes me jump. I wonder what voices I'm losing in the soft, curved spaces around you, and how long they will live there, comfortably trapped.

The rules of this transparent abandon finally become opaque, emerging clean and skeletal. In the move from purity to structure, I'm not sure whether I'm turning back or falling forward—my pace too quick, my feet too smooth and liquid on the earth. In a dream you showed me friction, some hint of you against which to measure. Slowing, light began to drip through my new solidity. I was afraid, then awake.

Muddy sunlight, and there was a day when you ran ahead of me, spinning. Other days they walked beside. And my body falls behind yours no matter how quickly I move. I'll run after; still, I thank you for the space between us, for somewhere quiet to sit and think.

I saved every ticket stub, as if I'd need physical evidence of my past existence. What kind of train keeps track, you would have asked, once you've already gone and returned?

*you saw me standing single outside
the last car, the cool wind*

And why rely on paper when my body would suffice, a record of everything spilling out beneath me? I preferred this interpretation, and thought of riding there with you, the last train home against a shifting unknown background on the side. Landscape fast against my easy progress down the aisle, one obvious direction to you, waiting, asleep; inside the cool wind, my body about to turn.

Continuity, like gravitation, is a lie told to children to make them behave. Some have forgotten this and continue to believe that the bed they fall into at night is the bed that lifts them in the morning. No, rotation here is equivalent to a straight line at the horizon, briefest flash of motion across desert sands invisible from this point.

Thin shadows on my paper blinds—without their proper objects are they wildly inventive or just meaningless? Not even yet to mention unknown point of light, what correspondence is there with the shadowcaster always left unseen? The smallest leaf obscures the sun when held before our eyes, you said. I wanted there to be a way for it to burn clear through.

I am beginning *a project of longing*, or a longing is beginning *me*. I will walk inland; frail chrysanthemums and river water will speak differently to me than my symbols and machines have. But *a river's surface* is not cold, is not wet, is not even vaguely compromised by *a stick which plunges down to spear the unassuming fish*. Nothing can penetrate it, though any secret look you save for me will almost reach. The minimal space between is occupied not by loss, but by question.

Postlude

Time is the substance I am made of. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which destroys me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire.

jorge luis borges

Time is an enormous long river
and I'm standing
in it
just as you're standing
in it

utah phillips

what does your skin
divide?

b.e.