

jarring you to close it down a little more . . .

Although the statements which comprise this poem may not tell a continuous story, neither do they resemble the channel-surfing conjunction of images Jameson calls pastiche.

They are too grammatically and psychologically similar for that. These are the kinds of statements a person makes, in dinner-table monologue, to reinforce personal and group identity. Unlike Perelman's simple, self-assured sentences, these remarks trail off. They depend on many qualifiers, beginning with "which," featuring "may" and "a little." This is the voice of someone convincing himself to repress his feelings and endure abuse. The sentences: "We don't fear this. It will quiet down. Now I was not a fighter. . . ." have ominous Holocaust overtones. I read this poem as ironic; I assume that the poet, instead of "jarring you to close it down a little/more," would like to see emotion and reaction freed up. The understatement and double dealing of irony allow Bernstein to represent the way our speech can turn against us, causing us to incorporate oppressive ideologies, in the way that a straightforward essay on, say, anti-Semitism, could not.

Through irony, Bernstein's poem (like Perelman's and, I hope, my own) is able to stage a "return of the repressed," representing both the mechanism of repression and the nature of repressed desire. When we show the speaker/thinker in error, we may open up possibilities for action. We are that thinker; irony is the stubborn mark of the divided psyche.

From Rae Armentrout,
Collected Prose

Cheshire Poetics

My statement of poetics is going to be a personal narrative of sorts. I spent my twenties (during the 1970's) in the Bay Area—at one of the origin points for what came to be known as "Language poetry" and I am, of course, one of the people associated with that group. Most of you know that—but when you know that, what do you know? This group is as varied, as diverse as any poetic school you can think of. So I want to look farther back—at what first drew me to poetry. When I was a teenager I was given an anthology, and the poets I most loved there were William Carlos Williams and Emily Dickinson. So I was drawn to poems that seemed as if they were either going to vanish or explode—to extremes, in other words, radical poetics. But how do we define "radical?" Perhaps by how much is put at risk in the text, how far the arc of implication can reach and still seem apt. But so much rides, as always, on that word "seems." Is a writing radical when it risks being wrong, when it acknowledges our wrongness? I think my poetry involves an equal counterweight of assertion and doubt. It's a Cheshire poetics, one that points two ways then vanishes in the blur of what is seen and what is seeing, what can be known and what it is to know. That double-bind. But where was I?

I was saying that I discovered Williams (and the other Imagists) early on and was very much moved by them. By what, though? I would say now it was by their attempt to make the object speak, to put things in dialogue with mind and somehow make them hold up their end of the conversation. This is both an important project and a doomed one. The world enters the poem only through a kind of ventriloquy. *Thing* and *idea* don't really merge, as the poets themselves knew. That red wheelbarrow is essentially separate from the "so much" that depends upon it. But there is so much poignancy in that gap! It is as if the Imagist poet wants to spin around suddenly and catch the world unaware, in disavowal, see it as it is when we're not looking. And how can we not want that?

One of my favorite Williams poems is "The Attic Which Is Desire." This poem does an amazing balancing act; it is simultaneously a realist depiction of an urban scene and an apotheosis of projected desire.

The Attic Which is Desire

the unused tent
of

bare beams
beyond which

directly wait
the night

and day—
Here

from the street
by

S
O
D
A

ringed with
running lights

the darkened
pane

exactly
down the center

is
transfixed

I encountered this poem when I was quite young and discovering sexuality. I understood that narrow, vaginal column of text, transfixed by the ejaculatory soda, as an amazing embodiment. I loved the way the poem was both about orgasm and about seeing the lights of a sign reflected in a dark window. In other words, I liked its doubleness. That's not a term usually associated with Imagism, perhaps. As Bob Perelman has pointed out, Pound praised H.D.'s writing by saying it was "straight as the Greek" and with no "slither." It took me awhile to see the gynophobia behind such rhetoric. I wanted my Imagism and my slither too. My precision and my doubleness.

My earliest published poems were minimalist and neo-Imagist. A good example would be "View."

View

Not the city lights. We want
—the moon—

The Moon

none of our own doing!

Looking back on it now, I see an exacerbated form of the doubleness which interested me in Williams's "Attic." "View" has not only two meanings, but two dissonant meanings. On the one hand, "we" (an already suspect first person plural) want to see the moon as separate from our own activity (a bit of the world caught unawares). On the other hand, our yearning is framed by deflating clichés. To want the moon is to want the impossible. Our thrust toward the non-human moon can't escape the gravity of received language. The purportedly single voice of the nature lover and the words of a somewhat cynical crowd seem to collide.

So this is a poetics of collisions and overlaps, contested spaces. The border of the public and private is just such a contested space. To use dream imagery in a poem, for instance, is to expose something private, but what if a recent film inspired the dream? As I have become increasingly conscious of such contested spaces and the voices that articulate them, my poems have become somewhat longer and more complicated.

The concept of voice has long been associated with poetry. We all hear voices, on the radio, in the newspaper, in memory. As Whitman says, "I contain multitudes." As Satan says, "My name is legion." Various voices speak in my poems. I code-shift. I am many things: a white person, a working class person with roots in the South, a woman, an academic of sorts, a '60s person who still likes rock and roll, someone who was raised on the Bible, a skeptic, etc. My voices manifest their own social unrest. In the last decade or so, academics have been raising the question of who speaks in literary works, who speaks and for whom. There is a contemporary poetry which enacts these same questions. Consider my poem, "The Creation."

The Creation

Impressions
bribe or threaten
in order to live.

Retreating palisades
offer
a lasting
previousness.

Let us
move fast
enough, in a small
enough space, and
our travels
will take first
shape, then substance.

In the beginning
there was measurement.

How much
does self-scrutiny
resemble mother-touch?

Die Mommy scum!

To come true,
a thing must come second.

In the third and fourth stanzas, a Biblical voice and the voice of scientific reason overlap in a farcical attempt to account for origin. In the final stanza, a third voice, apparently that of a child, breaks in. This voice seems to have a more immediate authority. But the last statement, "To come true/a thing must come second," while it may sound true, also makes truth secondary. Such declarative statements have a "truth-effect," like a false bottom, which gives way on second thought. There is, in fact, no voice which can be trusted in this poem. Mine is a poetics of the double take, the crossroads.

As I looked over my poems, trying to extract a "poetics" for this talk, I noticed how often my poems parody and undermine some voice of social control. My poem, "A Story" might be an example of that.

A Story

Despite our infractions
we are loved
by the good mother
who speaks carefully:

"I love you, but I don't
like the way you lie there
pinching your nipples
while I'm trying to read you a story."

Once there was an old lady who told her son she must go to the doctor because she was bleeding down there. She didn't look alarmed, but suppressed a smile, as if she were "tickled," as if she were going to get away with something.

"Look," said the doctor, "you are confusing infraction with profusion. Despite may be divided into two equal segments: Exceptional and Spiteful."

But the stubborn old woman just answered, "When names perform a function, that's fiction."

The characters of the Good Mother and the Doctor here try to keep things in their proper places. They want pleasure postponed, categories upheld. The Child who pinches her nipples and the Stubborn Old Woman who thinks a name is a fiction are skeptics and dissidents. There is a way in which I am all of these characters—the doctor and the mother as well as the rebellious old woman and the child. These power struggles begin in the public sphere and are reenacted in private. The mother is charged with reproducing the social (linguistic) body within the single body of the child. Having been both mother and daughter, I have a vivid sense of the pain this involves. Clearly, gender has a lot to do with the power struggles in my poems. Increasingly so perhaps.

Would Pound have seen such identity confusion as a kind of disastrous "slither?" Well, let me appropriate an ally by invoking a Dickinson poem I love—one with plenty of slither.

No. 986

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides—
You may have met Him—did you not
His notice sudden is—

The Grass divides as with a Comb—
A spotted shaft is seen—
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on—

He likes a Boggy Acre
A floor too cool for Corn—
Yet when a Boy, and Barefoot—
I more than once at Noon
Have passed, I thought, a Whip lash

Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled, and was gone—

Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me—
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality—

But never met this Fellow
Attended, or alone
Without a tighter breathing
And Zero at the Bone—

Pound called for "direct treatment of the thing" and this certainly isn't that. Dickinson never identifies what she's seen as a snake. She first personifies it, rather comically, as a fellow. (Note the mock casualness, the mock intimacy there. Dickinson is mistress/master of sinister humor.) The snake is then Him, capitalized like God. Subsequently it appears as a comb, a rather phallic shaft, and a whiplash. It is gendered male—but then so is Dickinson—she presents herself as a boy. So the gender dynamic is complex. There is more going on than a virginal fear of penetration. The last two lines evoke vividly the fear the snake arouses—but I would argue that, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, the snake is the real hero of the poem. Dickinson's persona, the barefoot boy, is just too cordial with "Nature's People."

There's something almost Norman Rockwell-esque about this boy, reaching to "secure" whatever he sees. He deserves the unsecurable, eerie snake who "occasionally rides." Dickinson, I would argue, is at least as much the snake as the boy. Her poems reveal the fissures in identity and ideology.

And now back to me. There's no good segue from Dickinson. But, in their own way, I think, my poems enact such fissures. They are composed of conflicting voices. Formally, too, they are often disjunctive. The relation between stanza and stanza or section and section is often oblique, multiple or partial. This isn't an accident. It's a way to explore the relation of part to whole. This relation is a vexed one. Does the part represent the whole? Is metaphor fair to the matter it represents? Does representative democracy work? I think of my poetry as inherently political. (Though it is not a poetry of opinion.) In an optimistic mood, one might see the multiple, optional relations of parts in such work as a kind of anarchic cooperation.

Finally, poetry, at least the poetry I value, can reproduce our conflicts and fractures and yet be held together in the ghost embrace of assonance and consonance, in the echoed and echoing body of language.

DarkInfested

It's well known that Lorine Niedecker's mother suffered from depression. Niedecker describes her as "tall, tormented, darkinfested." What a wonderful, terrifying word "darkinfested" is. It's a biological metaphor, of course. And Niedecker is neither casual nor careless about biology. She is, after all, the author of a long poem about Darwin.

She lived in an environment in which the natural world always seemed about to overwhelm the human one. Her poems are rife with infiltrations and infestations of one sort or another: "mites wintering/in rabbits' ears" and "Muskrats/gnawing/doors/to wild green/ arts and letters." (In that last quote arts and letters seem to be equivalent to lettuce. The literary canon is then as vulnerable as vegetable matter.) Niedecker seems to accept this chronic invasiveness calmly. Yet, as we know, to be infested is to be occupied, to become other than oneself, to be non-self. The loss of boundary can produce nausea; it is what Julia Kristeva refers to as "the abject."

It seems evident to me that Niedecker herself was "darkinfested." Depression could be described as the opposite of grandiosity. The normal subject perceives herself through notoriously rose-tinted glasses; the depressive does not. The depressive's view of self and world could be conceived as merciless realism. Niedecker is a consummate realist. She often presents troubling facts almost flatly (except for her singing vowels) as if she had little sympathy for humans in general or herself in particular.

Man
lives hard
on this stone perch
by sea
imagines
durable works

The Short Poem

What constitutes a short poem? Most poems are short, after all, compared with writing in other genres. So by “the short poem” we must mean something strikingly brief, something that dares to stop short. Perhaps to be noticeably short a poem must have fewer lines than a sonnet. We’re accustomed to sonnets, after all. The short poem, in the sense I mean, takes us by surprise. Is that all, we say. Can it really be over? We read it again. Brevity can feel like arrogance, like an affront. This may not be true of all poems with few lines—but it is true of any poem that is self-consciously brief. The short poem gestures towards problems of scale. It must be psychologically eventful. A lot must happen in a little bit of space/time for this to work. It may point to something small and ask, “What does it matter?” It may boldly claim to contain something huge, making size relative.

Let’s read the first poem in my hand-out, Emily Dickinson’s # 1259.

1259

A Wind that rose
Though not a Leaf
In any Forest stirred
But with itself did cold engage
Beyond the Realm of Bird—
A wind that woke a lone Delight
Like Separation’s Swell
Restored in Arctic Confidence
To the Invisible—

Here something of great magnitude—physically or psychologically—a wind, a wave, separation or restoration is placed within the tiny box of a nine line poem. One might say that the phenomenon exists outside normal space/time. Certainly it is not diminished

by its seclusion, its containment. On the contrary, it is “Restored in Arctic Confidence/To the Invisible.” Confidence has a double meaning here, of course. It may refer to a private disclosure taking place in an isolated wasteland or it may describe a self-assurance as absolute as the Arctic landscape. In this poem Dickinson severs event from perceptibility. She seems to be imagining what things are *for themselves*. Paradoxically, she makes us *see* a phenomenon which she simultaneously tells us is invisible. She ties us in a philosophical knot and stops on a dash. ED both does and doesn’t recognize us looking over her shoulder. This poem itself is “Separation’s Swell/ Restored in Arctic Confidence/To the Invisible.” Dickinson was accustomed to hiding her poems away. Still, she’s addressing us, suggesting that our inner lives are invisible to one another. What worlds are we oblivious to?

Graham Foust is one younger poet who has taken up the challenge of the very short poem. Here is his “Night Train”:

creased, the darkness seems
exactly
the same—
someone
in one of those houses
is you

In “Night Train,” Graham Foust does a trick opposite to the one Dickinson performs. In Dickinson’s poem huge (psychological) changes are effected unobserved. In Foust’s differences make no difference at all. The train’s passage leaves no mark on the night. Before and after are indistinguishable. And, disturbingly, in the second half, “you,” that “special someone” or “you,” the reader, are lost in a distanced view of duplicate houses. “Someone” and anyone are confused with one another. The all-important distinction between self and other is evacuated in a simple, bold stroke. Take that. Nothing is “restored.” It’s worth noting, too, that the two halves

of the poem, divided by the hyphen's crease, are structurally quite similar (though not completely indistinguishable). Each section is composed of a two line stanza above a one line stanza. The single line, in both cases, is composed of two words. A hyphen separates the two sections as a ghost crease separates yet fails to separate the times before and after the train's passage. It's worth noting in a book which also features poems entitled "Heroin" and "Blackout Drinking" that "Night Train" is the name of a brand of cheap wine designed to get the drinker blotto. Both temporal sequence and "you" are blotted out in the six lines of this poem.

The very short poem seems to ask to be repeated. It makes us do a double-take. Sometimes it plays with our concept of closure. This is true, I think, in Bob Grenier's "Ought" from his 1986 book, *Phantom Anthems*.

Ought

bountiful walnut

I do fill you seeing

you do feel me soar

sight is boundless

by the limited you I

spring emphatic burgeoning o'er

This poem seems to snap shut like a trap or a joke with a punch line. This is, in part, because of the conspicuous, attention-getting rhyme of "soar" at the end of the first stanza with the oddly antiquated "o'er" at the end of the second. The use of "o'er" is a campy gesture, both invoking and parodying Romantic poetry. It makes us wonder how seriously we should take anything that came before. So we reread. This is both a classically lyric and a mock-lyric poem. Certainly its subject matter, with its ecstatic address to bountiful nature in the form of a tree, is reminiscent of the 19th century lyric. But the relation between subject and object here is deliberately troubled and confused. Not only does the tree

do something trees can't do, i.e. "feel" the speaker, the speaker does something unlikely too—he "fills" the tree, presumably with his vision. The speaker and the tree seem transposable. But, in the second stanza, the lyric "I" trumps the tree. His attribute, sight, is "boundless" while the tree, previously described as "bountiful," is now "limited." He emphatically transcends it and now he, instead of the tree, is "burgeoning." Grenier first makes us share his speaker's enthused engagement with the tree then deflates his human grandiosity, all in a short six lines. That this deflation can be accomplished so quickly is exactly to the point.

William Carlos Williams' short poems were the works that first got me interested in this form. I read them when I was a young poet and they left me saying both "A-Ha!" and "Huh.?" They felt right yet left me questioning the very concept of rightness. One example of this would be "The Great Figure."

The Great Figure

Among the rain

and lights

I saw the figure 5

in gold

on a red

firetruck

moving

tense

unheeded

to gong clangs

siren howls

and wheels rumbling

through the dark city.

In this poem the title tells us to expect the figure, which turns out to be the number 5—to be charged with special significance. But how? What is the significance of this number? We're never told. What we see is the way it stands out in its environment. It is single in the multiplicity of raindrops and lights—emphasized by that

first word, "Among." It is upright, tense. Is it the fire truck or the figure or both that are "moving/tense/unheeded" or only heeded by the poet himself? The number is quiet amid the rumbling, golden against the darkness. Is that comforting? Not really. It is anomalous. The figure five is difference itself, yet what difference does it make? It's a self-enclosed abstraction, impervious to the welter of context. It leaves the reader's eye and mind trailing after it, asking, "What happened?"

Since I was influenced by the short poems of Williams and, to some extent, Dickinson, I decided to include a short poem of my own on the hand-out. It's called "Circuit":

Circuit

"Than, than," rang the birds –
horizonless echoes –

and for a human
there's comment's protraction.

"That's a beautiful truck;
that would cost a lot,
wouldn't it?"

The silver tanker
leaving the station.

It always sounds pretentious to me when people formally analyze their own poems so I'll just talk a bit about how the poem was written. I was in the car with my mother-in-law who was suffering from the effects of a debilitating stroke and from the sense that her life was almost over. Seeing a tanker truck pulling out of a gas station, she made the quoted remark, "That's a beautiful truck . . ." The combined wistfulness and inappropriateness of what she said struck me. It demonstrates the (improbably framed) desire to buy what can't be bought and to keep what can't be kept. It shows the failed desire we all share to protract our experiences by commenting

on them. That, of course, is what the poem does too. The short poem may be the perfect site for the presentation of transience, failure, impossibility.

The short poem is a magic trick. How did that rabbit, that train, that truck, that tree, that Arctic get into that hat anyway? And what happens to them now that they've been pulled out? They disappear into the sudden silence.

Exchange

City of the future
in which each subway station's stairs
lead to the ground floor
of a casino/
mall.

—
What counts
is the role
defined for each piece
by a system of rules saying
how it can move,
not the stuff
the piece is made of.

—
In the intersection,
a muscular, shirtless man
with small American
flags tied to each wrist —
so that he looks
like a wrestler —
pushes, no, shoves
then catches a stroller
piled high with plastic bags —
his stuff.

City of the future,
where a tramway to the top
of a peak
opens onto
a wax museum
in which
Michael Jackson
extends one gloved hand

Seconds

3
Being able to look at water soothes the anxious emptiness between thoughts. I think again and again about the way the water looks. I can keep each thought longer by writing it down. The process of writing this sentence is time-consuming in itself, almost irritatingly slow—so now I rush and jumble the letters. It occurs to me that later I may not be able to read what I wrote.

1

The point is to see through the dying,

who pinch non-existent objects from the air

sequentially,

to this season's laying on of withered leaves?

2

A moment is everything

one person

(see below)

takes in simultaneously

though some

or much of what

a creature feels

may not reach

conscious awareness

3

Next Generations

1

But, on "Star Trek," we aren't the Borg, the aggressive conglomerate, each member part humanoid, part machine, bent on assimilating foreign cultures. In fact, we destroy their ship, night after night, in preparation for sleep.

2

We sense something's wrong when our ideal selves look like contract players.

The captain plays what's left of believable authority as a Shakespearean actor.

The rest are there to show surprise

and win.

and only a small part (or none) of this will be carried forward to the next instant.

3

Any one not seconded burns up in rage.

Look how
we "attempted to express ourselves."

// Every one of these words is wrong.

It wasn't us.

Or we made no real attempt.

Or there is no discernible difference
between self and expression.

What was meant by "streamlining"
we might guess,

but what was meant by streamlining
as value added
to this

already bulky,
even bulbous,

baby-pink conveyance,

we can only ask

A Resemblance

As a word is
mostly connotation,

matter is mostly
aura?

Halo?

(The same loneliness
that separates me

from what I call
"the world.")

—
Quiet, ragged
skirt of dust

encircling a ceramic
gourd.

—
Look-alikes.

"Are you happy now?"

—
Would I like
a vicarious happiness?

Yes!

Though I suspect
yours of being defective,
forced

Operations

This child fights cancer
with the help
of her celebrity fan club,

says,

"Now I know how hard it is
to be a movie star."

—

"Hey,
my avatar's not working!"

—

This small hawk on a wire
above tangled flowers.

—

Speech, too, was thought
to be inhabited
by a god.

Then hunger
invented light.

Around

Time is pleased
to draw itself
out,
permit itself
pendulous loops,
to allow them
meaning,
this meaning,
as it goes
along.

Chuck and I are pleased
to have found a spot
where my ashes can be scattered.
It looks like a construction site
now
but it's adjacent
to a breathtaking, rocky coast.
Chuck sees places
where he might snorkel.
We're being shown through
by a sort of realtor.
We're interested but can't get her
to fix the price.

"The future
is all around us."
It's a place,
anyplace
where we don't exist.

Simple

FOR AARON KORKEGIAN

Complex systems can arise
from simple rules.

It's not
that we *want* to survive,
it's that we've been drugged
and made to act
as if we do

while all the while
the sea breaks
and rolls, painlessly, under.

If we're not copying it,
we're lonely.

Is this the knowledge
that demands to be
passed down?

Time is made from swatches
of heaven and hell.

If we're not killing it,
we're hungry.

Djinn

Haunted, they say, believing
the soft, shifty
dunes are made up
of false promises.

Many believe
whatever happens
is the other half
of a conversation.

Many whisper
white lies
to the dead.

"The boys are doing really well."

Some think
nothing is so
until it has been witnessed.

They believe
the bits are iffy;

the forces that bind them,
absolute.

The Gift

You confuse
the image of a fungus
with the image of a dick
in my poem
(understandably)
and three days later
a strange toadstool
(white shaft, black cap,
five inches tall)
appears
between the flagstones
in our path.
We note
the invisible
web
between fence posts
in which dry leaves
are gently rocked.

Spin

That we are composed
of dimensionless points
which nonetheless spin,
which nonetheless exist
in space,
which is a mapping
of dimensions.
—
The pundit says
the candidate's speech
hit
"all the right points,"
hit "fed-up" but "not bitter,"
hit "not hearkening back."
—
Light strikes our eyes
and we say, "Look *there!*"

Exact

Quick, before you die,
describe

the exact shade
of this hotel carpet.

What is the meaning
of the irregular, yellow

spheres, some
hollow,

gathered in patches
on this bedspread?

If you love me,
worship

the objects
I have caused

to represent me
in my absence.

Over and over
tiers

of houses spill
pleasantly

down that hillside.
It

might be possible
to count occurrences.

On the wall in a coffee bar,
a model's arms
and stern, pretty face
frame a window

(where her chest should be)

and a clear sky beyond

Spent

Suffer as in allow.

List as in want.

Listless as in transcending
desire, or not rising
to greet it.

To list
is to lean,
dangerously,
to one side.

Have you forgotten?

Spent
as in exhausted.

Luster

What flickers
with some delicacy

of feeling,

some hesitancy—
and then persists.

—

What circles. What darts.

—

Hunger

is like the inside
biting you.

"Like" is like
insomnia.

—

These green cherry tomatoes;
their false pregnancies,

staked. Lustrous.

—

"That's all I meant."

All I meant by
"witches."

Making

"What made this happen?"
you ask every time

as if
compulsion itself
were mandatory,

the way light travels
at the speed of light

"because it must"

~

It is in no sense
essential

that this crown of leaves,
sifted by wind

as if turning over
some problem,

is a gray-green
brightening into rust-red

at the tips

or that its equivocations
fill this instant

to the brim.

~

While light
has caught up

to itself
again

and only seems
to be making

time

Asymmetries

I'm thinking about you and you're humming while cutting a piece of wood.
I'm positive you aren't thinking about me which is fine as long as you
aren't thinking about yourself. I know and love the way you inhabit
this house and the occasions we mutually create. But I don't know
the man you picture when you see yourself walking around
the world inside your head and I'm jealous
of the attention you pay that person
whom I suspect
of being devious.

1

Her attention didn't wander so much as it was repeatedly pulled out of the text she was reading as if by a voice or stare. She scanned the recesses of her awareness to locate the source. There was a faint burning sensation in the middle distance. Maybe she had to pee. But the imperative was premature. Whatever this was, it could still flicker out or show itself in an entirely new light. She tried to find her place again in the crowd of words. This would be different for the first person, she thought.

2

I'm anxious when you leave so I must love you. But I don't like the story you're telling the strangers around us—rising sea levels, hemorrhagic fevers. I've told it more than once myself. Connect the dots and watch the shape emerge. "Cut it out," I want to say, though I don't know what I mean by "it."

1

When it was them, our parents, dying, the way they tried to deny what was happening, the way they were angry at the wrong things seemed of a piece with the way they'd always been wrong about us, we thought, the way they were wrong about the world which they saw only through the haze of their own swath of the past so that it seemed natural for us to scoff, inwardly, even at their deaths—but but now it was one of us threatening to get up and walk out of the hospital on his withered legs, sheer sticks, because it was killing him.

2

"Clouds of methane rise from dumps" outside our city as I drop a square of soft cheese through a slot into the bin marked "landfill."

Of course
I feel bad
about feeling good
about feeling bad
about this—

but as time speeds up,
everything will flicker.

My erasures were featured.
~
I collected debris
to sell as trash art,
crush porn.
~
"Say goodbye to Lonesome George,"
the last Galapagos tortoise.
~
I was a pushover
for the laws
of physics.
~
I pictured us as two seals
hauled out
on a sunny rock,

the roar around us
a matter of course

Seams

A narcotic heaviness (lightness)
in which objects appear

to float or
seem to suffice

as is, as sleep
is no longer necessary,

no longer different
from waking.

It is here that gourds
fill to bursting

on either side
of seams. Here

words split
(multiply)

a long now
ago

Nothing

Excess has its own set
of sentiments.

For instance, there's a special
frisson you get
from squandering
in public
while remaining
nearly expressionless.

You could refer
to the undergarments
of Japanese schoolgirls
in passing
because why not
and because
you shouldn't.

Show us
you've got no skin
in the game
you've been playing
with yourself
for decades.

You are nothing
if not balanced
on the thin line
between class-system kitsch
and "That's all you got,
really?"

(17)

Normal

Intelligence is distributed.

Greed is an emergent property.

My survival instincts are a normal form of momentum.

I don't feel bad about crushing others to achieve my goals.

Goals are an emergent property.

Others are distributed.

and it's just this:

the blind persistence of her struggle

and his (feigned?) indifference,

the way each proceeds, blinkered and mechanical,

into whatever this recreates

Somewhere

If I look down, a ferry is always
docking or pulling away from the shore.
I am not always aware of these goings-on
any more than I am my own breathing,
but, when I do take note,
the sense of overseeing this step
in a process that's both
open-ended and fixed
fills me with a vague dread

while passengers,
whether boarding or landing,
may feel they are finally
getting somewhere

Judgment

Who are we to judge
the predilections
you cosset?
We will be discussing only
the difficulty
and expressiveness
of the gestures you use
to indicate them.

Is free fall
the opposite
of motion?

Funky Frogs
in the Adventure Aquarium
are "very relatable."

But bonus points are awarded
to those who indicate
a taste
for something not yet
conceivable:

Paper-thin girl
heading back to work
in a gingham miniskirt
shirtwaist dress
and ankle boots—

Cottage Industry

My long career
in explaining
my career,

my way
of proceeding,

my career.

~

Single-car garage door
wreathed in puckered husks
of bougainvillea flowers.

Poem.

Empty street
above which

the invisible planes
roar.

Oh little!

Practice

1

In the future,
fewer people

"in your life,"

more in the world.
More strangers.

Practice being one.

This one
may meet your eye

if she thinks
you can help

or if she has forgotten
hope.

2

Bract

of euphorbia branches
through a window.

Days spent alone
with sight and sound,

the odd word

Trance

We know our dreams aren't real
because in dreams
there is no difference

between the will
and the unwilling.

And God divided "the"
from "the" and
placed an angel's
sword between
them and

We know the real
by its reluctance.

Still,

such inertia
looks a lot like
trance

It Is

"Is" concusses.

"Is" with its
orbital rings.

Heavy drops hitting
the surface
of a pond,

one after
one,

always.

The sweet voice
of its
hollow-bodied gong

left hanging