

Pterractile

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Abstract

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We often consider poetry for its sounds and images, and yet our lives and poetic practice depend on somatic mediums for their production. What does it mean for poetry to be something you feel and hold as much as see and hear? My thesis considers the relationships between our senses and poetic mediums, through meditations on myth, spatial poetics, and tactility. Allowing the material demands of writing work and reword our language manifests a renewed dignity between our selves, each other, and the physical objects of language itself. The result is a collection of visual poetry, prose meditations, and letterpress prints transfixed by creaturely desires for metamorphosis.

I don't know what to do

two states of mind in me

Sappho

~

knowing the name of this wind
my memory can't
recall

a spirit swirrels me
to another dimension

my skin tastes
of mulberry leaves,

I strongly
crave

the walnuts
buried

by the roots of a maple

Notes

I consider my work to be in the tradition of spatial poetics, which is an odd term. All poetry exists in space, inscribed upon a page or some other surface, or in the air as language given voice or gesture. All poetry is unavoidably spatial. Even works with “empty space” overcast our imaginations with banks of wordless clouds. A blank page or document induces anxiety for the writer expected to fill its space. Like an indifferent customs officer, the indifference of a blank page’s potential staggers us. Space stuns us with potential, and also soothes us. We’re all familiar with the relief of turning pages of dense prose to a clean chapter break; or, with poetry, to lines scattered like islands of an archipelago, white space lapping at them like waves.

What distinguishes spatial poetics from the poetics of everything else? This is difficult to answer. Space is not relegated to a single medium. Searching for “spatial poetics” yields various results: critical papers on Mallarmé and Joyce, an interdisciplinary art festival in Vancouver, recordings of New York school poets in academic archives, photos of an old garden slated for restoration, musings on classical reenactments... they all belong to spatial poetics. In its scale between the cosmic and microscopic, space magnifies infinitely in every direction, pollinating every territory regardless of boundaries. Space is everywhere, which informs its best and worst quality. In its totality, space is difficult to enumerate without shearing its dimensions.

In written poetry, spatial poetics is the realm for which language intersects with vitally synaesthetic dimensions of structure and content; the instance where the arcing shaft of light, the serifs of movable type, the tilt of thought and memory's path, the curve of our finger feeling art's surface, form a singularity in their shared weave.

~

I skim flakes
for small cherry seeds

to stop my scathing nails,
oblivate those moments

sprawled on kitchen tiles
desperate for cold

where there's lyrics to
hold you down

a clipped jackdaw
who every morning
attempts to break its neck on the reflection

sedate me,
singer,
ce nt
me
me,

~

a spirit ferrets me
to another dimension

whare
w ere
we werewolves
 or hairclothes

fresh yourine
feeds me
my lies

ENDEAVOUR

the chance

ENDEAVOUR

that some miscreant

ENDEAVOUR

comes and steals my

ENDEAVOUR

ice cream again

ENDS NEVER NEVER ENDS ENDS NEVER NEVER ENDS

an hourglass of laughter earths
the berth that recants demise
so our behest
regains rest

The scorpion's tale
lashing through my lungs
some you crushing
sung hues flushing

azures, cobalts, fugue *s*,
and mortal fungu *s*
broth of inksurance
spiced with cloves, coco *a*,

cinnamon, nutmeg, newlydead scream *s*

A hellion's last g asp,
timekeeper's hands f ixed
upon unfelt cracks w ith
holes the Whirl won 't mend

to die pleadin g of
dye bleedin g, fingers
tracing de ath's
soft, bloo dless face;

where stress warms t

Notes

It's hard to do letterpress work without thinking about ephemerality. A press is both dangerous and fragile. Its components can break in ways difficult to repair, with parts increasingly rarer and more expensive to repair. This machinery possesses similar qualities to lead, malleable yet hard, capable of withstanding and exacting tremendous amounts of pressure. In this way, the presses are like the lead alloy used to make most metal type; finite by design. Individual pieces of metal type were only intended to for limited runs before being melted down and recasted into new letters. Every run damages the face of the characters, decreasing their impression upon the page. Running out of letters may seem silly, yet is a real concern for letterpress. Proper use and routine maintenance prolong the lifespan of type. However, just as rushing water reduces cliffs into sand, the pressurized rollers wear away the type's face, eventually rendering it useless. Digital printers don't need to take apart old documents to create new ones. This isn't the case for letterpress. Lines of type are composed and aligned into what is called a form, a block of type set and ready for printing. Because type cases have limited characters, and physical studio space is often limited, these forms must be redistributed to their respective cases so as to free them for subsequent projects.

All these factors beg the question: why not use digital printing technologies instead? Antiquarian practices always warrant additional justification for their use, letterpress included. Letterpress demands its share of money, time, and even confidence. Uncertainty leads to twitches in the muscles that can lend themselves to potentially dangerous mistakes. Presses move heavy steel drums, plates, and rollers under intense pressures that can gravely injure stray fingers or other limbs caught unaware in the mechanism. The lead of metal type hosts toxic properties as well.

While these are risks and costs to letterpress, they also make for benefits. Typists risk nothing on a computer and everything on a letterpress bed. The labour of digital typing becomes so easily lost to us that we can create countless word documents that lay forgotten within our very hard drives; whereas the

letterpress printer has no choice but to recall the ordeal of their work, lest they damage their form, their press, or themselves. Beyond all this, digital printing lacks tactility. Modern printers render visual text with great efficiency, but are far from capable of reproducing other sensations available to analog printers: the scent of the fresh ink, the texture of the paper's grains, the grooves of words impressed upon the page.

Letterpress returns to the poem the vital synaesthetics that inform its creation, to which the mass productions of stock office paper and digital printers have deadened us. Federico García Lorca speaks of the bullfighter who must “fight both death, which can destroy him, and geometry—measurement, the very basis of the festival... between these two orbits is a point of danger, the vertex of the terrible play.”

Letterpress is a dangerous artistic venture balanced between the pressure of the press' drums and precise measurements with the form. Like the bullfighter, it is easy to grant letterpress' process a virtuosity that only risks the printer's wellbeing, “doing what anyone can do.” To match its stakes requires the duende, a deadly trickster spirit whose arrival, “always means a radical change in forms.” It's only fitting that letterpress invites such creatures. After all, a print shop's assistants and apprentices were better known as printer's devils.

~

I want my walls to crumble
sift
felt of fallen hairs dead skin
foliage of my self
the way for weigh
sift
so much to remake
oh mulch to bake
decent wastemeal
sift
all chewsd
to be this paste
sift
freshwet fecal
scurrying and not hurrying
sift
head in a crumbed
limbs sheets crumbled
bones muscles crumpled
in my cuticle
sift
sift
sift
sift
sift
sift
oasis of wrecked earth
respite substantiated

~

I don't want the present
but presence

here everything phases
in all is knot
state of or looping together
or coming closer

in
heart of
the phaesant

everyone's lives
in
everyone's wants
an
anemone's warts
and

I just want
o t u o t u
u o t u o t

to be
the fey in fading

spirit of
stolen children

~

in uh basket
knotting self

wall weave
make salarva liva live

teeth a chatter a
chatter a chatter

cant help but gnaw
gnawd for gnaught

fibers

fybers

fibers

fhybers

willow willow willow

lick pick stickinin in
inward mandibles
will grow will grow

yes?
out out out

hope yes

hope out

out

out

Barrows full of limbs

limping towards

statuettes of angels

shaped by atrocity

and four-faced vanity.

Where's the air's despair?

And to whom does it compare?

Wherever speed feints

Wherever speed feints

Wherever speed feints

light splinters inwards

light splinters inwards

light splinters inwards

envellumed by inkstrokes

envellumed by inkstrokes

envellumed by inkstrokes

kissed with fingers.

kissed with fingers.

kissed with fingers.

~

Moth
er

scolds me
for choowing things
that annt fir eatin

chritter chrytter khritter
karry me away anyway
hher vrrrustvrrationnnn

sstir sstirr
ssvrrrrs

“cuuddnttt yyouuuu behhhavve
llikke uhh nnnorrmmul cchhillddd
fffr jjusst wonttts
pleaszsze
ffrrr mmme”

but amt
not child,
Mother

need fwood

need

the fibers

fybers

fwybers

Notes

I find myself turning to the word *wander*. Volumes of myself don't open into ordered rows and columns, streets tucked neatly into blocks. How many people walk through a city in straight lines and at perpendicular angles? How many poets speak, or even write, according to a sensible, cohesive rhetoric? I turn the term over in my mind until it runs into, and possibly becomes, another: *word*. Perhaps poetry provides a way to avoid the perennial architectures of grammar, just as wandering ignores the redundant angles and laws of a pedestrian's roads.

But the words don't align as I wish they did. It's not that when I want to say *word* I want to say *wander*, or vice versa. I don't want them to be interchangeable. This doesn't concern knowledge or rationalizations. The almost-homonym of the words, combined with their shared sense of poetic or re/imagined motion, reveal for me that they are like the grooves of two keys that appear almost identical, yet open different locks. So alike they are, in your hands, that you must test the keys in their locks to determine which key opens which lock.

What if I could write *word* and *wander* simultaneously? *Wornder*. To satiate desire by giving what my desires desire; and what do my desires desire, I wonder? How would keys relate to their locks, if they opened and closed them of their own volition?

Every step closer is a step offpath, a location that is not truly here nor there. As Bachelard writes, it is "elsewhere, in the space of *elsewhere*." Familiar dimensions rise in a reconstructed space, a space outside space. A space that we reckon only intermittently, whether it's dreamed, daydreamed, or otherwise imagined, necessitates that logic reassemble itself the way a person tosses things out when moving into a new house.

~

dag
ger's
gorg
ed in
my
stom
ach

I'll digest it
just you see

little pieces dissolving
in my stomach's acids

iron phosphorous magnesium
passing through

my inquestions

the open soil
will dew the rest
w h wh rem s
it at ain

a f
s i

th pha
ese ses
of speckled mirth
wrests substance

~

what
scents me,
resents me

bringer,

wr ing
ith
w
ith
in

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y

in
te
st
in
es

all
I know

Notes

Space inflects our senses. Its effects on sound and image are quite clear. The size and shape of a place determines the acoustics that impart volume, echoes, and reverberations of our voice. The collision and friction of instruments, the flexing of the tongue in our mouth as air passes through, are spatial distortions that create music and voice. As for image, any photographer knows how crucial space is to the visual effect of a picture. Where we stand in a space determines how our skin catches the light, the length and shape of our shadows; and the presence of light depends on spatial contortions of sunrays piercing the atmosphere and striking the surface of the earth. Distance determines our reception of sonic and visual information, as well. Whispers and murmurs, fine print and faint details, are all revealed the closer we come to the source.

How does space effect tactility? Touch is difficult to gauge in terms of space, since it seems impossible without it. If we are not reaching and connecting, and sensing through the skin doing this reaching and connecting, we have touched nothing. We feel only so much through gloves that cut off spatial contact. Although space is crucial to hearing and vision, touch has an intimate connection to spatial dimensions that sound and image do not. Modern technologies are well adapted to exporting oral and literary poetry before a greater audience. Microphones and screen projections simplify the demands on the poet's body to present their work before a large crowd. There is no technology yet that magnifies poetry's surface for an entire audience to feel with their fingers.

Tactile senses have greater stakes than what catches in our eyes and ears. A sharp noise or image, a screech or a bright flash, make us flinch and wince. Sharp touches causes us pain, make us yelp, gasp, widen our eyes and flare our pupils. An assured embrace from a loved one can permeate a sense of safety and calm through our entire body, and the soothing music and vistas that replicate such sensations aren't perfect translations.

Tactile readings teach me about my body because of how I feel the surface of the pages, the way the covers rest in my curled fingers. Feeling the pages of a book imparts my fingerprints upon the surface from the oils gathered in my fingertips. If I read for too long without moving my hands, I'll notice that these oils begin sticking to the page, and I have to peel my fingers off the surface. Tactility forces engagement with the body. This bodied engagement is so forgone in digital visual and audio recordings that we forget bodies like our own created them. Not every touch possesses the warmth of a body; but since every touch is also *felt*, this lends the sense a sentimental dimension.

Embrace connotes a display of affection that isn't easily transferred to other senses. Touching another touches ourselves and creates a feeling that visual and sonic language can't grasp. Poetic introspection moves in accord to the same reciprocity that somatic sensation engages by virtue of its functionality. Every touch feels by being touched; tactility leaves no idle witnesses.

~

twin-spindled
firelight

my cinders
haste for
buried wreaths

that there's

the knotting
to everything

some spoil-sport's song
hangs on a quiver;
crusted blood
of the huntress' fresh kill

~

exit

zero

exit

hero

openchorded
mouth

linesewn
hand

a snipped magpie
whose gravely moaning
shatters the heart in its reflection

crystallis

cyst of torn rivercrash

soul mauve

sun awash in indigo

lake whisper
the lasting sounds
of dusk's moths
flittering after
firelight sparks

what are the memories
like two hazy
dances

what are the memories
like two hazy
dances
a fo scick
cross gnillachwols
gninaw wolg
wollaws gnu!

~

a creak gurgles in
front of my vision

a far-off sound herd
swells in my breath

twisting
in
the hands
of
misery and acrimony

chipmunk like
the shimmering
disturbed wind chimes

pleased
to be dead

ceased
to go unread

~

no know
strange neckruff that
memorizes my interior organs

awe in awe
the wisp that leaves your lips
when you say *wonder*

I'm ex earth
not solisubstantiated
heartblew

no no
mist makes the dew
of echoes invisiblily

the lybers
my ex muscles
know know

unfree
as wind,
know no
mind like grassedges
forwheeling frea
preening nuffing

~

the dream is
a two-way scream

sparrowful night
that mowses
my fire flight

mawth caught
by the song
of no syllables

~

th

air

is

acerbic

touch

at

the

clotting

of

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Notes

Tactility conflicts with efficient printing. The various grooves, bumps, dips, and rises in textured surface make slight variances of height in relation to the form in the press bed. Presses rely on smooth surfaces to print evenly over the entire page. Since other parts of the printing process in letterpress already provide their own variables, like wear in the typeface and imbalances in the ink rollers, printers tend to prefer smooth materials for printing. Utilizing a limited array of textures also limits how tactility influences the poem.

Tactility in poetry faces obstacles beyond the merely pragmatic. Johanna Drucker writes of a vital contradiction in material language. Material letters “[speak] their names without a claim on any part of speech, finding themselves subject to texts and yet unable to participate in the play of sound, letting their small forms be bent and twisted in response to the whim of fashion...” A unique facet of touch as a sense is its inherent interpenetration. We can see without being seen, and likewise, we can hear without being heard. It’s more difficult, if not outright impossible, for us to touch without the touched touching us in return.

For the reader of poetry, their touch contacts the poem’s material surface, their fingertips tracing the letters inscribed upon the surface. On paper, the presence of the letters might barely rise above the surface, as is often the case with modern digital printing. Words carved into stone or embossed with a press leave greater tactile traces, grooves of their indentations. However faintly, their presence is felt, by creator and recipient.

For the printer, their touch handles the keys of a keyboard, or metal blocks of type, as they allocate letters, words, and lines to their desired places in a metal form secured within a letterpress bed. The resulting print is what the recipient touches as they read. Both recipient and creator engage each other through a material language auxiliary to direct engagements between poets and their audience. Whatever

connection they form is never actualized. The real exchange involves us and the text itself, which through its own tactile expressions—the curves of its letters' serifs, their touch revealed by even the faintest impressions, and the grains rising to the paper's surface like sinuous veins—reveal another dimension of our language through what is felt. A language engrained by our affective relationship to text as material medium is difficult to transcribe in a language developed for audio-visual transmission.

To restore dignity to our letters in this exchange, Drucker attests that we must let our words, “stand on their own flat feet, the straight and/or serified figures, and bid for a place in the hearts and minds of millions according to their capacity to impress us with the daily record of our lives. Repressing the blank face of letters on the page will never obliterate the record from the trace, nor wipe clean the persevering palimpsest of memory.” How do we grant letters the dignity of their voices, if they do not speak or write as we do? How may we preserve the fading marks of their presences through our exchanges with one another, while maintaining a language that connects us?

These questions lead me to think that my own reading and writing is not just an embodied exercise but a tactile one. Often as I read I find myself wiping away the oils secreted by my hands. It's almost as if my hands, these somatosensory appendages, salivate at the prospect of poetic satiation. Or, perhaps, the oils that coat my fingers are from the words themselves; who wet my hands with perspiration so as to spit us both, as Drucker describes, “back again into the fields of fertile imagination.”

~

oozing
saliva
trail
in

the
cord of
a lark's
throat

that still
whispers
leavesongs
wrongs

so o
f the
willo
wing

the
fey
in f
ache
ing

err
owws
known
of lies
and
sharks

string
left be
hind by

white vv
ine iri
desce

my eyes bronze in the lemonsunlit field

swayed by rustlegusts that bristle my hide

an ouroboric bloodscent itches my nose

when an eaglecry pricks me to scrape earth

for a respite sancrumstantiated, a tunnel

torn open by the lightning inside my feet,

linking to the dark, clawcarved corridors

which scuttle me to another dimension

~

mined skin

stretches into bowghs
my graining limbs

sinew willow willow
sinew

petrichorous hair
greening with
the growing warmth

my bark mixed hearth
is soilstantiated

whispervelvet
shroud

from the star
tha
t
s
t c
r o
o r
k c
e h
s e
s

~

of festering sighs

bettering signs

our arms

eclipse the ears
t f

of our eyes

what solders
festering whys

a
heron
sp e
ears m
a
n
o
t
h
e
r
dim
en
sion

the gesturing
cries

zero
contact

Notes

Extending what we understand of poetic expression to touch and tactility poses another challenge, in letterpress and beyond; making space for deterioration. Texture in the surface of a poem—whether that surface is paper, stone, wood, etc.—arises from a corroding, decaying, carving, or cutting motion that doesn't preserve its material. To print characters upon the poem's surface requires a careful exertion of pressurized force, an exercise of damaging contact that scars paper with language. While it is generally understood that the poet/writer/printer brings to the work its language, in truth they only provide the initial scars.

The oils secreted by my skin are more than imagined salivation. Like saliva, these oils break down matter through contact. Anyone who was offered a pelt or textile processed for archival preservation has no doubt been cautioned not to touch it, or at most, to touch it with the back of one's hands so as to minimize its exposure to our corrosive fingertips. Museums employ security not just for those who desecrate intentionally, but also those who wish to feel the brush strokes of old paintings, the chiseled grooves of statues, knots in the wood of old frames, unaware that such sensations shorten their lifespan. If every purveyor of Michelangelo's *David* fondled his well-carved muscles, those well-endowed calves and cheeks, his stone skin would quickly wear away. As with any touch, corrosion deteriorates both ways.

Gillian Genser is a Toronto sculptor who uses natural materials in her figures. One of her sculptures is of a figure representing the first man Adam of Jewish folklore, which she made with blue mussel shells. She sourced the mussels from within Canada, and worked within close proximity of the shells for hours at a time, grinding and sanding them down for her sculpture. Several months into the process she began to grow ill, though what was causing her illness wasn't clear. Her condition worsened over the years. She suffered bouts of excruciating pain and paralysis, her memory became impaired, her temperament grew more irritable, and she lost hearing in one ear. In 2015, a meeting with an invertebrate expert clued her into what contributed to her condition. Genser learned that blue mussels filter toxins and chemicals from

the water, which she unwittingly came into contact with as she worked. Although she completed Adam later that year, it taxed her body in irreparable ways. The extreme amounts of mercury and arsenic in her body led her to be diagnosed with heavy metal poisoning.

Genser's story exemplifies and embodies damage to the Earth, and marks an extreme case of corrosive tactility. Genser relates her own struggles to Beethoven, who eventually lost his hearing from lead poisoning. Letterpress demands exposure to lead, so the connection between Beethoven, Genser, and my own experience is not lost on me. While my sessions in the studio are hardly as extensive as Genser's were, setting lead type still fatigues me. Handling metal type leaves a dark grey residue on my fingertips, and poses risk if ingested or otherwise enters the bloodstream. After spending hours operating a press, my close contact with the lead and other chemical agents leaves me physically spent, and sometimes with a headache as well.

Despite my precautions of frequently washing my hands, taking regular breaks, and keeping hydrated, I have no doubt that trace amounts of lead have found their way into my body. Somatosensation implicates through its sensing as much as it intimates. Every delicate, finishing touch I exact upon the metal form exacts upon my body a finishing touch that grinds against the pulses and beats that give me blood and breath.

~

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sewing-teeth

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u e
a
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h

e
gnawing
of ev
reading

fall

fall

fall

am heartover
spellthumbed

breath e r

ser
rate me

ser
face me

caress
an warm
the heart

the warm green hums, whungers,
the warm green hums, whungers,
the warm green hums, whungers,

my shimmering bramblebody senses
my shimmering bramblebody senses
my shimmering bramblebody senses

preyfeet patters, scorched by panic
preyfeet patters, scorched by panic
preyfeet patters, scorched by panic

as I slither through foliage, brush
as I slither through foliage, brush
as I slither through foliage, brush

strokes, my scalesway silent and
strokes, my scalesway silent and
strokes, my scalesway silent and

fangflex poised, precisely upon
fangflex poised, precisely upon
fangflex poised, precisely upon

the flashpoint where diceyes will
the flashpoint where diceyes will
the flashpoint where diceyes will

betray me in my deepest sleep
betray me in my deepest sleep
betray me in my deepest sleep

~

to
wards

th
e lam
p

must
go

in

t o t h e

g l o w
g o t

mus
tre fli
tter mu
sst fl
ither

m
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t e me
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de r

Notes

Tactile poetics demands negation in creation. As per Orphic tradition, the poem manifests through an exertion of atrophy. The turn of one's head, the inhalation between words and breaths, the scratch of a pen upon a page, the pressure of paper upon metal type, all create through force imposed upon a form in space. Whatever results from that exchange becomes the poem, the lasting ruin left by the wake of creation and filled with the echoes and etchings left by these actions; the keyhole formed in the impression of the poet's voice, writing, touch.

This exchange exacts all forms of poetry, no matter their medium. It is the cruelty of *poesis*, and of the Orphic myth, that the poem only forms through the un-forming of something else. A destroying of some kind is inescapable, as Maurice Blanchot attests. "Writing begins with Orpheus' gaze. And this gaze is the movement of desire that shatters the song's destiny, that disrupts concern for it, and in this inspired and careless decision reaches the origin." A sculptor removes from their material the absence of their goal, the space around the figure they wish to create. The poet, too, chisels into being a figure from the formless mass of words. Yet material isn't truly formless. To understand poetic making in Blanchot's terms ignores the medium through which the message manifests. This dialogue between writer and reader possesses ignores the material of poetry unless we understand Eurydice as material recipient.

Tactile poetics demands a respect of mediumship, surrendering to the whims of a material presence that is neither speaker nor audience, neither writer nor reader; both feeler and felt. A medium steps through two worlds: one foot of their own body, their own world; and the other of the nameless unnatural that possesses and predicates them to dissolve. In the act, the medium assumes a language of interrupted breaths, spasmic gestures, and ever-morphing words that comes from being possessed. To subject ourselves to our material's exchanges, as a medium does, we transform ourselves at the behest of our senses.

In the preface to his somatic poetry rituals, CA Conrad traces “soma” to the ritual drink of Indo-Iranian traditions. Its linguistic origins, “derive[s] from the Sanskrit and Indo-European tongues means, “to press and be newly born.”” Conrad describes somatic poetry rituals as “engagement[s] with the thing of things and the spirit of things.” The rituals include various steps of writing while ingesting, touching, or feeling material presence. As writing exercises, they inform the content through contact and exposure. They enforce complicity with the material used in the making of the poem. The tactile impression left by material in space becomes the revenant remnant of that one, original exchange.

As Orpheus turns towards Eurydice at the edge of the underworld, she is the true poet. At the moment of her disintegration, her body materializes as cold air, morphing in to ethereal words; sensible only for a moment before becoming wind. Orpheus, the classic poet of the poets, repeats the gesture later, realizing the poem Blanchot had neglected. Torn into pieces, his head and lyre float down the River Hebrus, nestling amongst the stones he once sung to life.

~

ins
 wift
 fhair
 thers
 az
 ure ti p
 p e
 d
 fl w
 i
 n
 g
 s
 e
 h nat
 t ure
 a
 mist
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 e
 nat
 uerr
 grrr
 ou
 unn
 am
 is
 t
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 sou
 nn
 nd

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h a were
e re n se
o w less

ver
es li
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r e m a e r d

wit
h air o
roes g f
ull spit

hear
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sse
lssss

t h ip a ck d
e hrr pp ed gj j c d aww
k a a

s s
ch e se
w s

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g in
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Notes

The stakes of tactile sensation only manifest themselves through material if we permit ourselves to afford material its own sensations. After all, tactility interpenetrates; to impart our voice through material, what contains and suspends the poem (if only momentarily), doubles into ourselves. Objects here impress upon our skin the pressure of keys from a keyboard or typewriter, metal pieces of lead that bite our skin, the vibrations of scratches from a pen or pencil forming lines on a page, gyrations of air that passes through and shapes our throats, tongues, and teeth. This lends an obvious connection between the poet and the occult medium. A medium steps into a ritual circle through the same interstitial movement.

Throwing the poet into the terrain of spiritual medium might suggest a kind of religious fervor that isn't necessarily present in this material exchange. Mysticism and rituals owe themselves to tactile engagements quite effusively, yet the hyperconscious state is often too rooted within our own minds to transmit to anyone else. Tactile poetry, in the sense that it interests me, is the pivot point where both creator and recipient engage with in order to engage each other. Too often when we're possessed, whether by our own dreams or by religious fervour, we ignore the person we speak to as well as the means through which we speak. In so doing, we risk letting our endeavours as poet-mediums assume a virtuosity that overwhelms the aesthetic demands of the work itself, demands bound by the tactile demands of the material.

Material necessitates an earthly, vivid life grow within the work itself. Utilizing letterpress printing for poetry by virtue of its expeditiousness ultimately puts my life on the line for no good reason. I would be no better than a bullfighter, who as Lorca warns, simply "scares the audience with his bravado that is not bullfighting." Emphasizing my own mental disorientations would entail the same risk as making the press' dangers the point of the work. Of course, the risk posed by a letterpress provides a similar exhilaration, no doubt felt on a different scale by the bullfighter, and by Genser in making her sculptures. Danger is a presence we must entreat to a most delicate dance. Just as with the duende, Genser's sculpture should

compel us not because she killed herself crafting it; but for how the toxin's corrosions in the sculpture inform the figure's luster, its meaningfully blank stare into the distance.

If we accept that material has its own dignity, and material language dignifies itself by exacting upon us its own linguistic needs, we must accept that the ink we use in writing and printing poetry is more than mere object. To accept these substances into our body subjects us and subjectivizes objects to an animated state that necessarily objectifies us in the process. Becoming objects ourselves, crystallized upon the page and held under the light, we cannot afford to hide behind the curtains of our own minds. Our words, materialized and ephemeralized, must lay our bodies bear to morph and shift into the creatures that were previously poetic allusions. Once-still letters contort into shapes for which we, as writers, readers, and printers, imagine them in to a fully realized life.

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h s e
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copperlight blooms from the
copperlight blooms from the
copperlight blooms from the

azurecreak's many silverripples
azurecreak's many silverripples
azurecreak's many silverripples

and my diaphlowerous chitin
and my diaphlowerous chitin
and my diaphlowerous chitin

duskens in the raffluschia glow
duskens in the raffluschia glow
duskens in the raffluschia glow

as I emeralglide through the
as I emeralglide through the
as I emeralglide through the

rainbowing refraction I'm taken
rainbowing refraction I'm taken
rainbowing refraction I'm taken

by blacksleak pincers that spli
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nturn me to another dimension
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nturn me to another dimension

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Notes

So what does a change in language, as inspired by material form and tactile sensation, actually mean for poetry? To approach somatosensitive space forces our involvement in the interstitial dimension that informs the between. It breeds and suggests complicity new within the material composition itself. This relationship to the materiality of poetry is perhaps one instantiation of a concern with the space of between. This space has various interpretations. For Renee Gladman's *Calamities*, this space unfolds through the incantatory "I began the day" that starts every section. Through progressive disjunction, the phrase situates within a space that becomes increasingly complicit upon the strokes and clicks of the writer, at last becoming such a stroke in its final page. Our words grow into the very substance of the text, and by whatever "time" we reach the last line, that black swatch of ink, we have crossed the threshold of metamorphosis to understand and appreciate the words for their tactile incantations.

In considering these questions of tactile sensations and material shifts as affecting our own relations to language, I find myself drawn to the word *metamorphosis*. I like this word for how its aesthetics implicate the reader and writer affected by its presence. Metamorphosis insists upon engagement and complicity within the poem. It suggests organic contact, a shifting that offers the text breaths, pulses, and motions. Through the oils of my fingers and saliva in my mouth, moulded by the characters' shapes and sounds, my reading and making of the poem resurfaces in a self inhabited by multiple entities.

Materiality can also be understood as alchemy, as reducible to the periodic elements that construct everything. But this empirical, scientific approach feels dull to me. Alchemical transmutations affect us at a distance. Their transformations exist to amaze us with spectacles that we see as sanitized witnesses, not grimy participants. The interstices of tactility are most interesting when exposing us to subjectifying and objectifying demands of living materials. Their demands require a more complicit and less observational position than a scientific process can provide.

Metamorphic material bends to us similar to how the gods of old myth morphed for their faithful. In the ritual reenactment of myths, the characters possess the fleshed bodies of those involved in the telling, stepping in to our world through the actors. This is what is generally meant when we say a storyteller “brings their characters to life,” through the warmth of their voices. To think of this process as metamorphic lends the exercise more than what the scientist’s idle experiment can ever accomplish; transmissions that pass through our own bodies.

My time in the letterpress studio has undoubtedly altered my body through exposure to the lead of type, the chemicals in the cleaning agents, and so on. But this metamorphosis was already upon me. From my fingerprints left upon the glossy pages of my books, the faint vibrations that coil through my arm as my pen scrawls across a page, poetic language exhausts motions through me that lull me to sleep.

Metamorphic poetics is engaged in a shifting, morphing, and changing that blurs and between itself and the flesh it contacts.

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in my claws
 'ave gripped
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Notes

The anxieties I feel from writing tend to come from how exhausted I feel after forming something that has a minimal or understated presence on the page. When I return to documents on my computer, I pick apart every aspect of its composition, and spiral myself into self-doubt and self-loathing about my ability to create anything of interest. What I realized in the process of writing and composing these poems, notes, and letterpress prints, is how invisible the physical labour of writing can be. Typing doesn't wear out our bodies beyond cramping our wrists and palms, and makes artists and non-artists alike think that art is a labour without labour, work without effort.

Aesthetic work is uniquely dispossessed of its intense rigour. The exhausting mental reflexivity necessary to create art is unseen by many, even other artists, critics, scholars, and other aesthetic practitioners. Art is often only seen in its "completion," granting it the illusion of effortless production due to an unseen or disregarded process. Other writers gave me the impression that writing was tedious, even arduous, though never as fatiguing as I felt after writing. As a result, I often felt stupid and inept for lacking the capacity to fill documents and notebooks; not with "my" writing, but instead notes upon notes on the works of others.

None of this is true, I realize now. Letterpress validated my feelings of aesthetic exhaustion because they paralleled the physical exhaustion that derives from operating the press. The corrosive contact and cloying smells of a press' inks, metals, oils, and chemical solutions, reciprocated for my body a movement that mentally affected and afflicted me long before my recent encounters with them. After hours of working on a press, as opposed to on a computer, the arduous labour enforced a confidence in my writing that computers never did. The mental labour spent in the making of my work literalized in physical aches from operating the machinery. These pains, doubling my mental fatigue from writing, came to replace my desire for internal and external validation. The result of my collaboration with the press proved enough.

My work in letterpress validated my poetic procedure because it aligned with my personal habits and actions. I have no doubt that most people will find its urges, irks, and quirks more frustrating than redeeming, the dangers of the press' grinding teeth more concerning than anything else. My aim is to instill how particular modes of art practice support, inflect, and affect our artistic motions and capacities. These reflections criticize digital modes of printing because they developed out of my own frustrations with the functions of digital programs and printers. Even if my conclusions here were reversed, the point should remain that the means and meanings of mediums determine their metamorphoses. As we work our words on and into space, that space works its way through our skin, our muscles, our veins, to the rest of our body.

Walter Ong's most significant insight on writing has been unjustifiably ignored: that *writing restructures consciousness*. The explosion of media studies and transmedia artworks produced since Ong's *Orality and Literacy* only suggest a need to extend this claim: linguistic technologies and techniques not only inform our conscious language, *they also restructure us*. Letterpress machines are constituted of motors, gears, and rails guided and shaped after our hands and bodies. To know a press well involves learning to listen to its clicks and turns, to see where it grinds and connects, to feel where its pressures are apt and insufficient; to know the meaning of its clicks, hums, and whirs; where oil flows through its veins. To join ourselves to its process transmediates us, as the medium does in stepping into a ritual circle. Joining printer and printed through medium, their interactions make them else, something *else*, less and less and more than human. We become cyborgs and chimeras within these transexistential dimensions.

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Notes

Our engagements with material can often leave us absent of anyone else. They are deeply personal encounters, intimations of a process that can shatter our strongest illusions and delusions, and of the shelving, selfing, and othering of how we sense and determine our selves and others. Mediums contort our bodies into the shapes necessary for us to write, speak, mould, and press poetic work into being. Phonemes contort the muscles in our tongue and jaws, and resonate through our vocal chords and off our skin through our various means of producing sound. Words and characters conduct our hands to draw their bodies in ink, etch them into stone, scratching them onto paper, stone, clay, or some other surface. Our fingers interlock with the surface of clay, lead alloys, or sand, as they are moulded, set, shaped in to the material molds and forms that form our language from their contact.

We throw ourselves into the poetic realm by embodied immersion in the world. Poiesis in these terms implicates and intimates us in this processing of a relationship from which we may otherwise be disaffected. Not every piece of art will speak to us. We're all possessed of distastes and discomforts that will remove us from mediating encounters, just as our taste buds have their own particular desires and repulsions. Text, material, as well as other constitutive elements of a poem, occupy space in relation to our own orientation in the space we're projected to through the collision of our contact with the aesthetic material. Our imaginations, histories, personalities, and other aspects of our selves make up a perspective that meets the interstices provided by the work's manifested world, in all its aspects. Mediated by the sensations we experience in, of, and through the material, our affective experience of our relation with these formed, transtital dimensions leaves us with what we tend to call "our encounter with the work." Positive, negative, or wherever in between or beyond, the result is necessarily affective.

Our relationship to art is meandering, waiting to be drawn into a constellatory relationship with stars that compel us with their shimmering light. We thus adorn ourselves with the shimmer of their scales, the glint in their eyes, the spark of their flames, and metamorphosize into the creatures endowed to our motions,

emotions, and mental gyrations. The process isn't just that we transform into other beings and adopt their forms, habits, physical and mental gestures, but enable the work itself to work itself out of and through us. We become like Arachne, creating a work that stuns and is stunning, until Athena poisons the weaver into a shrunken form, her hands becoming a spider's spinnerets. Or like Niobe, whose grandiose, blasphemous proclamations awaken the rain trickling over the mountain's stone within her. The fury of Leto's twin daughters, the titan's wrath incarnate, manifests a petrification that crawled through Niobe all her life; and finally out of her choking sobs, hardens her skin to stone cracked by sorrow.

Through the holes created by aesthetic ritual, which we complete in stepping into the work, we open ourselves to the means by which we transfer and transform ourselves according to our interstitial frames of reference. The unfolding portals form gaps in the myths through which our imaginations, steeped in the in their magic, sustain the illusion long enough for our bodies to become susceptible to real change.

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the lustre musters
stone whispers
through my paws

hooked upon the
hooked upon the
hooked upon the
alpha bracther

goattracks fading
amist the sunfall
reaching the hour

when I rear holes
when I rear holes
through the night
through the night

gaze at me,
heartbeater,
stay for me,

sink into amber
sink into amber
bend into bronze
bend into bronze

and know I won't
miss one moment
of your lyrises

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hold

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h u l

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Notes

There should be little doubt that aesthetic encounters can radically alter us, as artistic creators and recipients. Does that mean we can petrify ourselves, or turn ourselves into spiders, so long as we know how to ritually tempt powerful gods and goddesses? Art doesn't empirically prove much of anything, after all. Empirical ends often cheapen its powers. Nothing quite destroys the humanity of poetic figures as reducing them to puppets that instruct us about distinctions and delineations. Spatial aesthetics, at their most interesting, disorient and disjoin. They are unforming as opposed to informing, and refuses the usual venues of deductive and analytic interpretation. As an artist so clueless about the world, who am I to speak about the imposition of facts over imagination?

What I do know derives from a piece by Bruce Nauman. *Tony Sinking in to the Floor, Face Up, and Face Down* shows an actor lying on the ground, under the direction to act as if he were sinking into the floor. The sixty-minute recording shows an actor, Tony, lying motionless on a featureless grey floor. Predictably, most of the tape reveals nothing, and seems to speak to some inactive activity on the part of the actor. Towards the end of this unexciting performance, Tony begins to convulse and choke, and a team rushes to check his vitals. Carried away by the mediated "reality" of his performance, Tony's imagination tricks (or perhaps perhaps *convinces*) his body that he is actually sinking in to the floor. We can't see him sink into the floor, as spectators only privy to physical phenomena, but the conscious result couldn't be starker. His acting manifests a conscious sinking into the floor, an affective activity which we as spectators see the effective results.

What would have happened if Tony continued acting out this performance? Would he have melted into the stone floor as he had imagined, becoming a kind of living Cezanne statue? The tactile sensation here poses an unquestionably powerful hallucination. Tony's contact becomes one so familiar that the boundaries between his body and the material beneath him begin to fade. He becomes a piece of floor, which without room for oxygen for his respiratory and cardiovascular systems, leads his body to the

panicked gasps that break his metamorphic trance. Nauman's recording poses a real, aesthetic manifestation that can actually materialize as realized change on a conscious level. This isn't a radical phenomenon, but one that is tactically relevant here; exposure through the skin and self is what affects our junction to a text as well as our imaginations. The interpenetrating flow of this sensational contact both effects and affects us. Our emotions may very well override all rational sense of occurring events if we're focused enough on the sensation.

Now, we need not imagine ourselves sinking into the floor for tactile encounter to work through us. This is because surfaces, as well as us, are always already engaged in this constant encounter. Space is always, already there. Being acted upon by tactile pressures and contacts as Tony was in Nauman's exercise reveals a radical potential which we can awake if we heed the registrations of these surfaces. Subjecting ourselves to the metamorphoses dormant within us, the silence behind our speech, the unwritten space behind our writing, the medium behind the message, awakens us to the forms and capacities we never knew we possessed.

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n i e v

ohhh yyo ndderr
 yeww, ppleas dew
 youw know whair
 is the natyour amid
 the gnottling that is
 ever rry thing where
 and the hbare that is
 ovf notnatuour, that
 ethreading that iz hear
 an allso makkes up airvrething

thheese rwrin
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Notes

These stakes are far from abstract. They gather from a world of transforming crossing realities our own potential for metamorphosis. I go back to this word because it has real bearing; real creatures engage in the morphing and transforming the word suggests. Metamorphosis isn't spontaneous and external; it wells and expands from within us. Our identities exemplify this fact. The means through which we identify ourselves go beyond any biological determinations from which our understandings of who and what we are nominally lies. Our affective identities speak to biologic, mental, psychic, and other floes that aren't necessarily congruous with our selves. Sometimes this changes us physically, as with hormone-replacement therapy, prosthetics, or implants, though it isn't always physical, or merely physical; but in every case, metamorphosis affectively alters our relations to instill our existences with greater dignity.

In providing the words and voices of my poems their own creatured, creating minds, I wish to return to them trans-dimensional movements that grants them an actualizing, animalizing consciousness of their own. To contract this motion inward and allow their motions and inflections to contort my mouth as theirs do, to appear according to their motions, to feel as their skin might as transposed to printable material, I hope to avoid anthropomorphizing their desires for my own benefit; instead adopting a multifarious liminality in which we belong to and with each other, rather than below, behind, or by me. To forge this point of contact into a kind of bridge between other beings, selves, and supernatural others effaces an aesthetic space that implicates my body in its creation. The stakes for such aesthetic encounter are significant to me. Vibrant within us, the contacts and collisions with the ligaments and ligatures that manifest as our voices, writings, and impressions wait for us to breathe them to life.

Tactility, as affected by letterpress printing, invariably plays into how these sensations arise for me and my readers. Composing poetry with metal type works with letters that possess their own physical weight and presence. This engenders particular sensorial encounters that subjectify and objectify in various ways. The typeface used in these pieces was drawn from a case that had been used many times before

me. Many letters had their serifs worn away, their faces nicked and scratched. Rather than perceiving these blemishes as imperfections, I saw them not as flaws so much as facets of the letters' personalities. Letterpress printing demands a reckoning with such peculiarities. This differs from the days where letterpress was the standard mode for mass, commercial printing. Worn type wasn't kept, but thrown away to be melted down and recast into new letters. Although some shops still do this, (with some machines even automating the process) metal type nevertheless gets used and reused more than their makers had ever originally intended. To print with type today, one must learn to live with their curious qualities.

Medium space, composed through mouldable earthiness, is not too different. It breathes and flushes, shivers and hovers as our bodies revive it through our survival. In doing so, we become *pterratactile*. Regenerating like a phoenix from its mound of ash, only to burn up and become anew again

and again

and again

and again

and again

and again

and again

and again...

my skin remakes from morphing griefs
my skin remakes from morphing griefs
my skin remakes from morphing griefs
my skin remakes from morphing griefs

a cawsymphony thrills the heights
a cawsymphony thrills the heights
a cawsymphony thrills the heights
a cawsymphony thrills the heights

phrases of nicked mirth restantiate
phrases of nicked mirth restantiate
phrases of nicked mirth restantiate
phrases of nicked mirth restantiate

at the moulting of feathverything
at the moulting of feathverything
at the moulting of feathverything
at the moulting of feathverything

a sphered jackdaw reblues the morning
a sphered jackdaw reblues the morning
a sphered jackdaw reblues the morning
a sphered jackdaw reblues the morning

complete me, reader, breathe me;
complete me, reader, breathe me;
complete me, reader, breathe me;
complete me, reader, breathe me;

the vellum of my last gasp
the vellum of my last gasp
the vellum of my last gasp
the vellum of my last gasp

curls me into another dimension
curls me into another dimension
curls me into another dimension
curls me into another dimension

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This manuscript is printed on acid-free, archival-grade white 32 lb. paper stock, or if reprinted from the web, on stock office printing paper. The font used for most of this manuscript is 10 pt. Arial. The letterpress prints are all made with black and transparent white rubber-based inks, and the text is hand-set in 14 pt. Janson. Although digitally scanned, the originals of these prints use various different papers. In the order as they appear in the manuscript, the papers are: Jaipur, Lennox 100, Awagami Bunkoshi, Rives BFK, Awagami Kitakata, Handcrafted Mulberry, Somerset Velvet, Stonehenge.

Lyra Vorona is a writer of poetry and criticism, as well as a photographer and letterpress printer. Her work with myth, metamorphosis, materiality and mediums, and their derived questions around poetics and aesthetics. Her work is forthcoming from a growing number of literary and poetic circles. Lyra lived in Seattle until 1986, when they got into an ill-advised altercation with a sparrow, and did not survive.