

The River Twice

Brent Cox

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

University of Washington
2017

Committee:
Amaranth Borsuk
Ted Hiebert

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:
School of Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences

©Copyright 2017
Brent Cox

University of Washington

Abstract

The River Twice

Brent Cox

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Assistant Professor Amaranth Borsuk
School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

The River Twice is a combination of prose, poetry, and visual imagery that explores identity formation, narrativity, and the medium of language as material for art production. The work is a semi-autofictional account of chronic illness, anxiety, grief, love, and friendship. Four distinct sections work together and independently to produce the experience of an identity at once coming into being and fracturing, engaging the reader in fluctuating and shimmering surfaces of moving parts that remain still, allowing stillness to be the breath of movement.

The River Twice



Brent Cox

RIVER

It is
conventional to believe
One cannot
alter the past.

The past is
and cannot
be
otherwise.

The future is pure change.
If the past cannot
change the future can only change. But
this must also be an erroneous belief.
Borges meant this
when suggesting consciousness is
prerequisite for time.

We do not know what the past is. No
more do we know what the future will be.
Nor can we without using
science's tools and the woefully
inadequate technology of memory.

We presume the past's
f i x i t y
only by way of
dubious technologies.

[o n t o l o g i e s]

In this sense, the future is far more knowable than the past. For example, one holds out a rock and threatens to drop it. That the rock will fall when dropped approaches certainty. The past, on the other hand, is impossible to enter or conceive of.

Memory is not
the past.

It is not
as much as
The Grand Canyon
is
The Colorado River.

[We note the
repetition of the
article “The”]

One thing
we can be sure
we constantly change
the past
incredibly as we
p e r c e i v e
we change the future.

U s i n g

b e l i e f .

One must ask,
does the

Universe

remember itself?

In Which P Makes
a Cup of Coffee
To Go Out Into
The World

P needed a cup of coffee before going into the world. Not a new coiffure, not a gong, and not a fore-being, but a world outside the oppressive stride of P's inside. Taken as a collection, P's whole inside was sideless. A sphere whose center is nowhere and everywhere its circumference. His inside going strong came out outside. But would he stir it? (Agitation goes on and on, a shake of the side, and out-of-The-Great-Outdoors he goes.) Time works because events are hypotaxic, if without eternal recurrence, then through some great denial of themselves, so as selves subjects tremble and shake then move on to on.

Sentences work the same way differently.

The dubiously retinal current illusion of continuity, taxing as it is to keep up with, without these thoughts flowing not once never twice. Into it twice. We're talking a twitch, just a few shifts of black signs from twice. That then and a twirl. But time travel is not possible because such shifts are the waves of particles.

How would he ever explain it to Z?

This mystifying sense of being followed and watched by himself. He checked his watch to see, watching it precisely move its nascent arm and wondered is the same thing happening to me? It was this subaltern insistence he could not explain. A figure emerged out of the shadows like a face emerging from low resolution.

Ethiopia Worka. Yirga Cheffe. Peach, elderflower, thimbleberry, sugarcane. Grown soil. Flown from elsewhere over that great arc of time, the plane, tracing its path against the distending Coriolis. The coffee would have to be broken down and heated up in order to extract the desired chemicals. Freedom of expression makes it happen but forced, even without the continuous pull of exacting methods so much seems fluttering away. We can keep our events in order without so much as allowing the loud siren of anxiety to begin its pulsing scream.

Remember this is an entrance to the day.

Whose string has pulled us into this mess? You leer though it isn't without fear that the morning rays lull you back to sleep, one to bring some sing song myth we tell ourselves: the resultant I, so singular, now globular, and then double.

Do you understand the function of a vortex?

Neither do I, but it is similar to a cone, and it has been suggested that like the cerebral cortex it digests itself, and contains such vertices which trace the constraints of space. You might find that incentive untying the molecule. Caffeine makes attention denser but liquefies your blood.

This laborious looking back, though it might appear uncouth or somehow obsessive, also might be all there is. Each word progresses. If not in syntax then in an exacting boredom with the goal of semantic storytelling while hanging on.

P did not ask to become a detective but coughed into being some ossified sense, or it was thrown from being; okay, he can't bring himself to approach it. Meaning is an egret. No it's an albatross. No it's egress.

No it's repeating. No it's dreary being. No it's dear ribbing. No it's red bribing. It's dried tidings. Rid of din, sighing. It's ghosts of indecision. It's avian but grounded. Grown but avoided. Divided and won. Always almost

not always already—a phrase full of tragedy. Led by invested ways, very inscribed and bodily, uncommonly vociferous, clutching but intransitory. Comeuppance of voided being. Damned vagaries inveighing. Our weight in anger undying.

Not having thoughts of ceasing to be but being again simultaneously. If it was that he was after then the case was to track it down. To what end? He wasn't after it it was after him. For so long the feeling of dreaming was like feeling inspiring, training the mind to reject the fatigue of being.

Before sleep, P created arrhythmic rhythms between his body and mind. Really he'd bend himself leaping into sleep or so he'd hope although it didn't work so well. He should be brewing coffee to meet Z and instead he's recalling not sleeping although he refuses to pinpoint the diversionary moment.

He begins by breathing. Then Being begins breathing in synch with his breathing. Breath through his nose the breathing happens swirling in his nostrils, following air passing through his nasal hair in and then out. He starts a count. Breathing in he recites inside, "*Breathing in, breathing in, breathing in,*" three times until done breathing in. Then outward breath recites within, "*Breathing out, breathing out, breathing out,*" three times until done breathing out. Phrases match his breath put length to work in words but slowly a veering drift, almost

like something swirling slips. A cone swirls liquid first into concentric circles, then the nearly evenly distributed curling tentacles dissipate from shearing instability, branch again and muddy up creating the familiar pattern of gridded vortices. From Kazimir Malevich to Piet Mondrian to Agnes Martin to Jackson Pollock to Sam Francis. Or is it from Pythagoras to Euclid to Newton to The Field? Or Petrarch to Shakespeare to Dickinson to Stein to Antin? By then he'd find himself monkishly reciting, "*Breathing out.*"

Those many months were borne of breathing. After exterminating the mothballs of imagination, P was set and ready to make coffee. Ethiopian Yirgacheffe. Worka. If he might create the correct intensity then the coffee will come out clear and free of ballistic interference.

In someone's mind there is a line on a grid that connects the tricks.

P, like a marionette, raised his arms to stretch, nearly coming undone. The inset motion. He felt a brief wrench of nausea.

Becoming the sea if the sea were felt necessity.

The following seemed to begin several months ago and the one that trailed him always appeared to emerge or recede as if made of separating or condensing pixels. P's supposition could be a delusion. It was a doubling kind

of dread to pretend indifference. A lot of time had passed. Months and months and months and months. And the attendant guilt tended to erupt, volcanic and emulsive, slightly liquid in that it filled the cracks where the light got let in. On the other hand it remained porous but microscopically so and it is incumbent on the mind to believe in the difference.

Dear Z,

Dear Z,

I'm going to have surgery on my pilonidal cyst and then I'm going to Southeast Asia and then Guatemala to find myself. I mean I've already had the surgery, but you already know that. At least I assume you already know that. *I'm recovering from the surgery I'm going to have.* It's the anesthetic I'm afraid of, which reminds me of blacking out, which reminds me of death. I've read many accounts of patients not waking up, or worse, waking up during surgery, or worse yet, the surgery worsening their condition.

I've had the strangest feeling since the first surgery, as if I've left some of me behind. This is true in a sense, as the cystectomy does literally remove part of me. Where does it go? I've imagined it. Also in a (meta)physical sense I have thought about my cyst as an articulation of my history. By this I mean it's descended through my lineage from my grandmother's side. She had it. My father had it. My brother, my cousin. Is it possible that I'm feeling a genetic absence? I don't think genes work this way. I've wondered if the cyst itself is something essential to my being then perhaps its removal will fundamentally destroy what is "me." Which means I've already changed. But this feels different than that, too. It's as if occasionally I'm two places at once. This probably doesn't make any sense. Maybe it has to do with the last few things I've read: *William Wilson* by Poe, *Frankenstein*, *The Invisible Man*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Then I watched the

film *Sentences* followed immediately by *Persona*.

All this, mind you, under the stupor of a few extra percocets.

But I have to tell you about something that's happening to me right now. At least it's happening indirectly to me. And I need to mention that this is exactly what I meant by an "expression of materiality." I forget myself sometimes. This is an actual letter. Next.

A.

Dear Z,

There is a white couple sitting next to me shifting in their seats. They are a good looking white couple, and when they walked in I got the impression that at least the man looked like he might be a model. The woman, too, as I thought about it, looked a little done up for 4 in the afternoon on a Wednesday. They are themselves. Have you heard of the marches and meetings in Boyle Heights over gentrification? (More on this later) The couple is exchanging pleasantries and having some conversation. They smile and then switch places. Who do they imagine observes them? She lowers her chin and smiles and looks up from under. He gestures with a glass of coffee and squints, shaking his hair. He asks if he's doing it right. You'd think they were on a date. Kindness and Mischievous is co-owned by Good Girl Dinette that just opened maybe two years ago, where they serve overpriced and mediocre Vietnamese food, and it's just down from Highland Park Bowl, an incompletely repurposed bowling alley. Paradoxically it's this incompleteness that makes it fashionable. So we remember what we've destroyed? Nostalgia? Ruins. I think that's only false history. It is now surrounded by Civil Coffee, Café Birdie, and ETA. Each of these were opened in the last year and a half since I left for Seattle. She's wearing a fashionable floral print dress that matches her red curls. He's wearing a gray v-neck and Vans. They deliberately shift their positions, gazing somewhere off in the distance then back at each other, she uncomfortably shifts her dress, he watches.

They each seem to forget themselves each time they shift positions. And they maneuver like manikins, fix their clothing a little, shift, and smile at each other cocking their heads. They pick at the maple bun. They are exactly who a new shop like Kindness and Mischief would like displayed in their storefront window, his visage brightly outlined against the transparent eye that reveals La Palapa, Business Services, and Los Angeles Northeast Wellness Center across the street. It sounds stupid to say but they perfectly embody whiteness God like I do? Today I read an article in which the poet Claudia Rankine, who just won a Macarthur (\$650,000!), was interviewed. With the money she plans to start up The Institute for the Racial Imaginary somewhere in lower Manhattan which will be dedicated to a thorough investigation of whiteness in all of its standard oppressive ruling-class anger and rage. Interestingly she mentioned some statistics about the percentage of white women in certain prisons in the rural Midwest pointing out that many of these prisons contain far more white women than black women. That this might surprise people is exactly the kind of ideology Claudia Rankine is keen on investigating. Both the woman and the man this couple contains are styled like the surrounding repurposed buildings, one of which we are contained by. His beard is incomplete. Her look is more 50s than 80s, let's say. And I begin to wonder if a certain kind of cultural haunting defines this particular brand of whiteness. Just like it does these repurposed buildings. Of course yes, in exactly the way that language is a haunting. What's it haunted by? Ghosts of course!

Demons maybe. Language haunted *literally* by the sounds of ghosts, as the red haired 50s woman says, “It’s a vintage store, right?” Emily Dickinson wrote, “Nature is a haunted house—but Art—is a house that tries to be haunted.” Did Emily Dickinson believe in ghosts? Is it possible to be a poet and not? I wonder if this couple understands the ghosts haunting their outfits? Partly it doesn’t matter. Because they model and are being modeled. I notice the journalist snapping their photo for *LA Mag* after lamenting that they weren’t shooting the story at the chicer and more recently opened Café Birdie. She positions them, “Would you mind switching spots?” They dollishly comply as their bodies transmorph into miniature Giacometti sculptures, or the oddest doll in a Rauschenberg that you can’t imagine moving until you’ve seen Jan Svankmajer’s *Alice*. They become unlike themselves. In presentation their identity shifts somehow. Rearranged like quantum particles reacting to my observation. They aren’t just the perfect couple, they are the *perfect* perfect couple, selected to satisfy exactly my (our, their) imagination. It is for this reason that the only response is to hate art completely, insofar as art is artifice, and to instead, as I just heard Graham Harman suggest, indulge in the necessary pretension that every artist must pursue above all else. Pretension is what most artists desperately attempt to escape and what professionalization resists revealing. But pretending is fundamental to art. My method of pretension, from this distance, has just been doubled by the double artifice of this couples’ behavior. Allow me to

explain. First, they satisfy the model of whiteness that this particular establishment desires, whose uniform is obvious, and whose choices necessarily repel those who don't belong here, namely the Latino population that has traditionally populated Highland Park. In this way the cultures become objects at odds that never touch. The marches in Boyle Heights, among so much else, are resisting the intrusion of a language. They are resisting the reintroduction of the parasitic colonial language. As we learned all those weird days ago at Bailey's in Boyle Heights just over the LA river on 2nd where the first Spanish Language billboard sprouted up and businesses begin using Spanish as the primary language. That was five years ago before any of this started. Doubling, even tripling, of language is common in Los Angeles, but here in Boyle Heights the weight was shifted and thick and the rejection of English palpable. *It was a success.* Part of whiteness is its deep insistence on a dominant language (a hierarchical language, the correct colonial language, proper identity): the language of advertising, the language of normalcy, the language of management, the language of average, or the language of "communication." Ease of use (English) becomes necessity (and self-fulfillingly)—"virtuous"—English erroneously imagined as somehow more communicative or better. Demolishing the opaque. Presuming hostility against the "wrong" language, the colonised language, which in Los Angeles is a colonised(ing) language on top of a colonised(ing) language. Spanish, after all, demolished the indigenous languages first. A palimpsest

of linguistic genocide. And of course, actual genocide. We recently overheard two young white poets speaking. The first was at a reading at Open Books in Seattle, and the second was at a conference, also in Seattle. The first suggested that he might be capable of separating himself from his white privilege when he chooses to and think outside of it in order to empathize with brown people. The other young white male poet said, “What about Hispanics? Doesn’t the fact they haven’t even learned the language of our country mean that they are ensuring their own marginalization?” This letter has gotten off track but you understand the point.

A.

Dear Z,

Today I am filled with overwhelming Dread. I first learned of Dread when I was maybe 20 or 21 some 8 or 9 years ago in Heidegger's *What is Metaphysics?* What I remember is him setting up the dualism between Everything and Nothing. Later I'd think without any success about "the set of all sets." I distinctly remember being very high on a couch reading Heidegger's *What is Metaphysics?* where he sets up the Everything and Nothing duality and trying to follow the argument something about does Everything contain Nothing? Then I remember something about the ever-growing Nothing, the Dread, the Nothingness, always encroaching on Everything, shrinking it, making Everything puny, and so myself much smaller than that even. This along with other things led to my panic attacks, as if there were a street already on its way there. Today is the ninth anniversary of my dad's death. There is his horrible small yellow body in my mind's eye. It never strays too far. Did you know that Ian and I saw a fully clothed clown on the steps outside the hospital the day he died? I can't remember if this is a false memory or not, but for the first time just now I've realized that that awful day *was* the day before Halloween when we saw the clown, bathed in a halo of sunlight, so it doesn't seem at all out of the question that it was an *actual* clown and not a *virtual* clown. I've never until this moment, while writing this precise letter, put the clown sighting together with the fact of its date. It's an odd bit of context that seems to

validate what I thought was a false memory. For the last many years, whenever I had the clown memory, I almost felt like I had to assume that it was a false memory—an absurdity I'd dreamt up to corroborate the horror of the situation in some Lynchian way. But strangely, now that I've placed the clown and the date together, the clown sighting seems *even more likely* to have actually existed than it ever has. It's even become a given. Its givenness is the result of it feeling appropriate. An actual clown has swallowed the previously unlikely virtual clown I thought I'd had before in my (false) memory.

My brother Nick will never let us forget that the book my dad was reading before he died was *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. We never know what to make of this, but he did often tell us that his household was a “dictatorship,” and he did become scarily racist during the last decade of his life. But so many people did after 9/11, right? Not too different than now, I guess. Although one confronting death square in the face does seem to be engaging in an oddly deliberate act by choosing a book like that to be your last, instead of something like *The Bible* or *Golf Digest*. In the last few years, since the publication of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*, it's become clear that he was an actual Nazi (Heidegger, not my father), and not just the virtual Nazi he claimed to be (and others had claimed he was), which makes it very difficult to read him seriously now. An actual Nazi has replaced a virtual Nazi, the virtuality crushed under the actuality of the artifact. This seems partly ironic

given Heidegger's penchant for describing the endless withdrawal of objects from one another. In this case the only *thing* that seems to be *withdrawing* is his reputation!

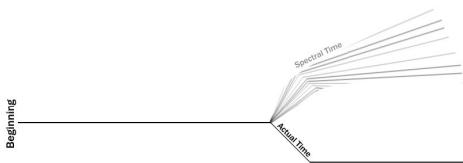
Some like to pretend that philosophy can be distinct from an ethos. It does remind me of Walter in *The Big Lebowski* (my dad's all time favorite film, behind *Fargo* maybe, which is a pre-echo of *TBL* anyway), "say what you will about National Socialism, Dude, *at least it's an ethos.*" I often get the impression like some people feel similarly about aesthetics, and they're wrong, too. Art even, and they're wrong, too. It does matter what you're devoted to as much as it matters that you are devoted. History pretty well fleshes this out.

This letter is the first to contain no fiction whatsoever but I will still tell *The River Twice*. It might be important to see that an early death like my father's creates an always-imagined dual life for someone like me, the witnessing son. Every subsequent event, however irrationally, is accompanied by a spectral other, that event as it would have been had my father lived to see it.

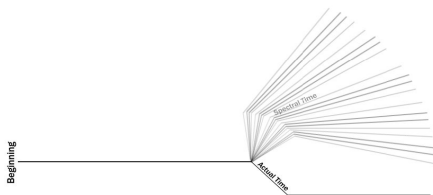
A.

P.S.

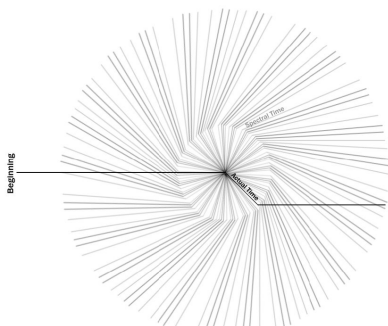
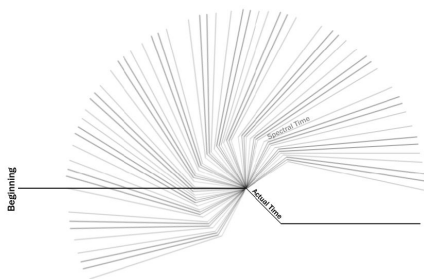
Maybe a visual would help explain what I mean.

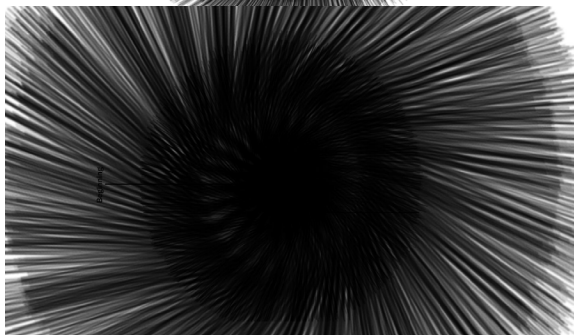
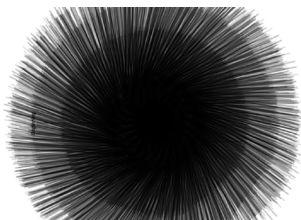
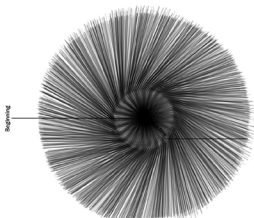
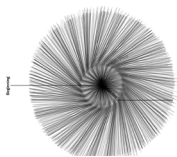


The point of splitting is the event.



Note that when more possibilities of Spectral Time are added some of the lines begin to approach Actual Time.





Dear Z,



Et de ces lune après l'une
And those moons too: moons, moons, on and on...

-Verlaine

(E's and une's transformed to O's)

Often I am permitted to return to a line from Borges. But where from? Because where does memory come back from? Memory's agency in that colloquialism does not seem accidental, as it does seem like memories come from somewhere "back there." This is what Plato often talks about or is it *Writing is an Aid to Memory* by Lyn Hejinian? And not coincidentally, this is what the Borges poem is about. It is called "Límites." The line is:

Hay una línea de Verlaine que no volveré a recorda
(There is a line of Verlaine's I will not remember)

Elsewhere, Borges famously doubles himself in "Borges and I," a parable presaging Barthes's *Death of the Author*. The written self is wrenched away from the experiencing self. It is worth noting that the separation is both because of writing and because of time. The past's emergence, too, is a violence. Only his other creation, Funes, attempts to overcome the endless recession of the past, also a failing proposition, and one in which the swelling of identity

to include all things becomes deflatingly banal. Another parable finds an elderly Borges meeting a younger Borges on a bench, reaching across time to his own subject of nostalgia. While the parable evokes an impossible event, and this itself is sad, the real melancholy is that the event as imagined never occurred, can never occur, and will never occur. While imagination does not literally create the impossible, it is our best way to think according to the impossible.

We might turn to “On Exactitude in Science” or “Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote,” for impossible imaginings that seek, if impossibly, to deny Aristotle’s Law of Identity. We might add Borges’ critique in “Our Poor Individualism” comparing Buddha and Jesus, in which Jesus, while painted as wise and compassionate, is also seen as errantly egomaniacal. Another of Borges’s favorite philosophers, Bertrand Russell, points out that Jesus’s violent tendencies and penchant for tantrums do not seem to make him “absolutely good.” Donne’s argument in *Biathanatos*, that suicide is not always naturally sin, is another argument for Jesus’s simultaneous divinity and humanity, but accidentally asks, “Do we really want a suicide for a savior?” His indulgence in suicide, while fulfilling prophecy, is also an ultimate human act, one of the more lamentable qualities he must take on to be considered human, perhaps, but necessary. Being omniscient, he would have had to, in a sense, kill himself on the cross. Perhaps gods are only the artists of humanity, so must assume humanity’s trivialities

to communicate with them. Or perhaps suicide is the fundamental human issue, and that by resurrecting from self-murder Jesus proves his immanence. Anyway, it has been forgotten. All of it.

The subtle multiplicity of the writing self and the living self and the imagining self is only the beginning. Or the end. Borges celebrates Shakespeare as an artist without identity. His identity is like a beam of light projected on a wall after passing through a prism, broken into a rainbow of characters, stories, and metaphors. Dante, too. In his "Prologue to Nine Dantesque Essays" Borges writes, "the poet is each one of the men in his fictive world, he is every breath and every detail. One of his tasks, and not the easiest of them, is to hide or disguise this omnipresence." Borges, like Dante, does this by constantly invoking his own identity until it becomes like a word repeated. Its citationality, its presence as an object, becomes more concrete than the meaning it appears to contain. Mallarmé claims a similar goal: to put space around the word.

In "Purgatorio I, 13," Borges writes, "Like all abstract words, the word "metaphor" is a metaphor; in Greek it means "transfer." Metaphors generally consist of two terms, one of which is briefly transformed into the other." Transformation is the only consistent quality of identity, too, a metaphor of a metaphor; Borges is only Borges, or Cervantes is only Pierre Menard, or Borges is only Verlaine. Borges mentions that Emerson claimed

that the structural similarity of most books, such as their unfailingly similar margins, their being type set on straight lines, their consistent use of paper, spines, &c, seem to suggest a single author for the plentitude of our Library of Babel.

If that is the case, Borges lamenting forgetting a line of Verlaine's is really Borges forgetting his own line, the young Borges forgetting that he will meet (and never meet) his elderly self on a bench somewhere; is this the composite of subject and object that Graham Harman suggests, the vacillating real qualities and sensual qualities that compose an Object? Or the famous One of so many philosophers that also seek to escape Leibniz? I'm still more or less convinced that these issues are merely the effect of syntax à la John Cage.

There is always a surplus in my being, capable of shifting focus, and containing numerous bits of pre-conscious awareness—not to mention the unconscious forces that can never be adequately symbolized.

We can't forget the many meanings of "line." Of course, it is a line of poetry, "Verlaine's line," or as Euclid has it, "Length without breadth." That's not the description of a line of poetry but it is a poetic line, isn't it? Mathematicians are really some of the strangest poets. In Verlaine's poem, "Last Hope," translated by Norman R. Shapiro, he writes, "Toi le souvenir, moi l'absence."

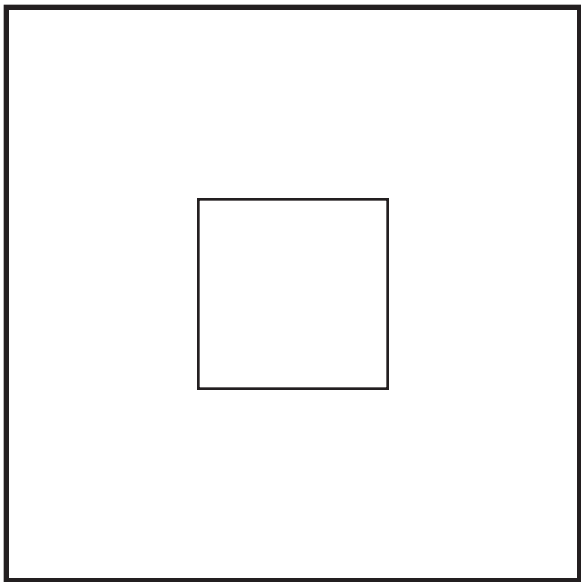
(You, memory; absence, me, that tide.) Written many decades before Borges's "Límites," Verlaine here speaks to his own future absence, Borges's future forgetting of this line. The You, while ostensibly a lover to Verlaine, is really addressed to Borges. Verlaine writes, too, "Du moins, dis, je vis dans ton coeur?" (Will your love keep my memory fresh?) Verlaine's future existence requires Borges's memory, which we, later, sadly, receive as only forgetting. In death there is no memory. Or is it our memory? Of course, it's our memory.

But there is another deception: as if a line or a limit is something so easily understood. What is that limit? A mathematical limit is the place the asymptote will never reach but approach—perhaps here is where there is hope. This makes time even stranger in "Límites." "There is a line"—a coming line? An unknown line? I think we must read it as a line that Borges still remembers (though he won't tell us which line), but *will not remember* once death occurs. This poem, really, is more like his story "A Secret Miracle." If we take the poem's title to suggest a mathematical limit, it is not difficult to transfer that limit to the limit of life: death. In Borges's metaphysics, contra the math of Cantor that he so greatly admired, the hypothesis of the continuum is (purposefully) never adequately argued—Zeno rules—the limit rules—the approach rules, never arrival itself (an impossibility). This is what allows personality to be a transfer instead of an absolute, time to be a palimpsest and never a line, Verlaine to be Borges in exactly the way that Cervantes is

Dear Z,

Pierre Menard, and exactly the way that we are identical with Borges as we read his poem, knowing the limit of death has not been reached and instead we ride Zeno's arrow, the asymptote, aspiring upward, only and ever upward, parallel to death.

A.

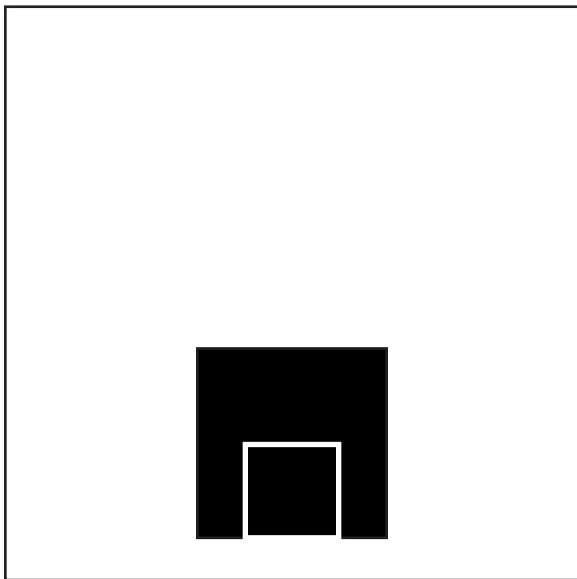


Dear Z,

My life stood before me a loaded gun
listening to Richard Hell again too many many
too many times *The Voidoids* What's after
The Blank Generation how to avoid it anyway?

Some people mistake the 0 for the hollow but it is
not the hollow it is the ring that creates the hollow.
I've tried imagining that maybe my cyst contains this
kind of creative potentiality. It's so potential that it
refuses to be patched up. Stitches do become skin;
that's how dissolving stitches work. I'm thinking how
the stitches become me. But a hollow remains. To call
this aporia loses it, and I'm sick of aporia anyway. Who
isn't? Either way it's my body that I'm dealing with.

A.



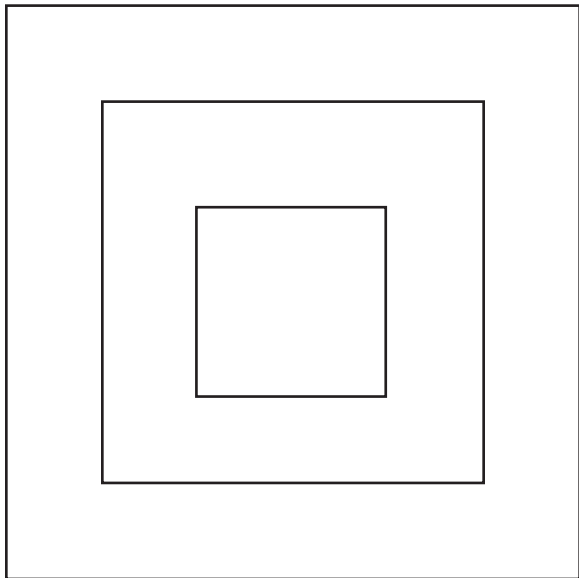


Dear Z,

You were born. Happiness. We bare on this casting.
We sit with curiosity. This story wises up. Sight. Rope.
Orifice. Worse, Officer, Financial Hollow. Windfall.
Anansi will allow. If then. Let me insist. Flee and anoint
sky writing. Let us make this wrist once. It's a sty. Stalled.
Later, sill, sorted, soporific, snoring. Distrust I misbehave.
I sit guilt. I don't email. I don't call. You call rhythmically,
like friendship. How my rind slinks off, sloughs away
so dull. I'm renewed so many times I don't believe it.
Worry. Rowing blowing anointed and neutered.

A.

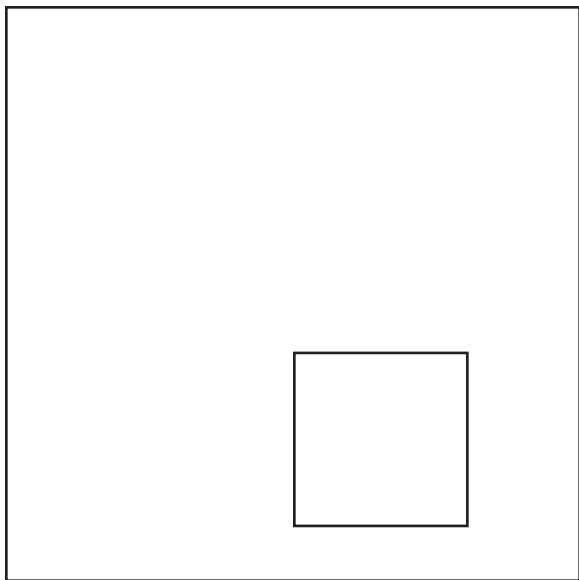




Dear Z,

I will be returning! You'll see me, rent my being.
This message precedes me. Still, I'm citing myself
absently. Yes, I believe I've changed. Torn. Morphed.
Metamorphosed. Perceived only after its occurrence.
Occasions, though, fear and. I've willfully died.
Sunk. Woke up in your Jacket. Your brother's Jacket.
Your brother's orange Jacket. Saved by a drifter
who brushed the dirt off me and sent me home.
Drew self-portraits. Swallowed whole dew filled
glasses, forty of them, fifty, *pequeña más, más, más,*
más señor. So my language wouldn't allow what my
action accomplishes. Yes, I'll affirm that direction.

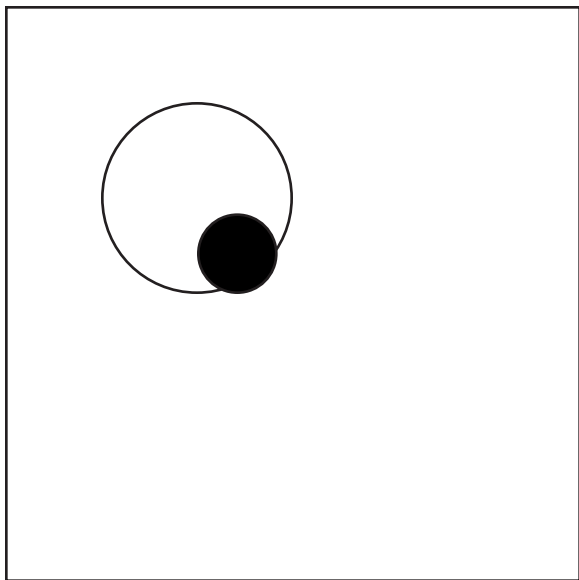
A.



Dear Z,

We can't Get Outside our "selves?" And if your "self" became an entirely "other?" I is not..., &c.—but I don't mean this. "I'm nobody, Who are you?" Not that it's different, but it is. Surgery immanent. My cyst recurs. It is me and it is not me. It's not a wound, it's me, it's all around me. Rinse me, wash zero over me to you. Your maze is my eye. I'm reminded by sound that sound is not a word. There's no too "on the nose" because every quote is itself a ladder that you must climb, and when you get to the top you will ask, *and where has the ladder gone?* The way I did it was I imbibed, just as I'd grown comfortable. My only sin has always been only to want too much. Then denied awareness, just as I'd hoped.

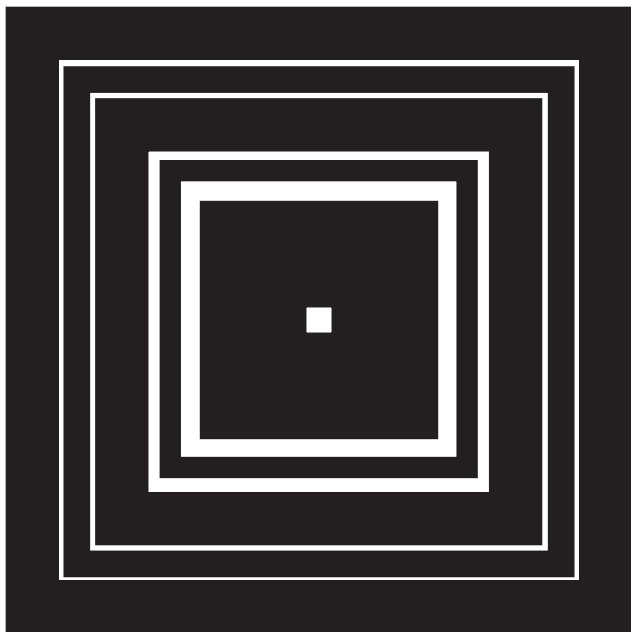
A.



Dear Z,

The only open window to The Great Outdoors is through you, A Fairer House than Prose. And Gambrels of the Sky. When an absolute appears without necessity, that's you. Bested. I can't think out of me I can be out of me, just what I'm worried about with my upcoming surgery. "Going under" has been such an issue for so many.

A.



Dear Z,

Let me put it this way: if you don't do it it's not done. So I've disposed of all unproductive measures. The initiation of motion does take something even something metaphysical and that this is worth considering, allowing, proclaiming in the streets of shattered glass, like that big pane I destroyed that horrible night. This includes the arch-fossil of memory. I am my own ancestry. And my aesthetic might have structure, but it is nothing more than my consciousness maintaining its necessity so that time latches on unaware. What that means is that this is an actual letter, operating forthcomingly, with valences like electrons. It's not my secret it's creative dissent from the expression of materiality. Don't balk! Jeanne Heuving refers to this as "The Juice" and every story has it, even at risk of repetition.

A.

Dear Z,



Dear Z,

I am writing in deep sadness. The Dread mentioned earlier has taken human form, shaped like a gigantic orange hedgehog. A glowing orb of vile disgust.

A.

Dear Z,

He walked out of the Verizon store in a red jacket drinking a Coca-cola. Dressed well, even fashionable. When he looked back at me I didn't know what he might say. What he said was,

"I'm in one of those silly moods!"

He looked straight ahead and looked back again. We were waiting to cross the street. His jacket was bright red and it was spectacularly fall in Seattle. All the visible street lights were red, too, and the Coca-cola can that he drank out of was red. I wore orange and was later complemented on my "color scheme" by a kind woman while I waited at a bus stop. She, too, like this man, turned around and suddenly addressed me.

"One of those silly moods,"

he repeated, with firmness and familiarity.

"One of those silly moods,"

he repeated, nodding.

Then his face skewered.

"One of those silly moods where I say something,"

Then he took his hand and raised it regally, like he might be clutching the holy grail, and stiffened it, so that it appeared to become like a robotic spider,

“and twist it,”

and he twisted his hand.

Similar to Peter’s hand in *To the Peter Wonder* when his hand becomes fire.

“One of those silly moods where I just say something and twist it. Where I say something once and then say it again but twist it,”

he said, twisting his hand, as if he were opening a tightly closed lid.

“You know,”

he smiled,

“One of those moods. Where I take something and twist it.”

He said. And he giggled a little.

“Showasshtick.”

His eyes darted directly into mine and he said very rapidly with a sharp breath,

“Just like that!”

The light turned green and we both went to walk. But very suddenly he twisted back again and fixed his eyes on the unlimited distance behind us, somewhere up on Broadway. His body stiffened. He stood a rigid pole, his eyes fixed, metallic.

“That!”

he said. And began walking very slowly, pointing into the distance, until he stopped and I walked across the street.

Earlier, another very small woman, very small, was shouting and laughing, in the way that I always imagine Darl does at the end of *The Sound and the Fury*. And it also reminded me of another woman, from long ago, shouting obscenities the entire bus ride from downtown LA to Brentwood, near where you work now, Westwood, where UCLA is, where I did my undergrad. She was shouting,

“You fucker, fucking mother,”

and then her voice pitched up into a torn scream.

“You fucking pussy dick fucker, you mother fucker, you fuck fucker.”

She had a little torn scream.

This woman, the one I mentioned earlier, the one that was laughing like Darl, looked me dead in the eyes and she stood rigid. As rigid as a flagpole. And she said,

“Nice colors!”

And her face skewered and she immediately burst into hysterical laughter.

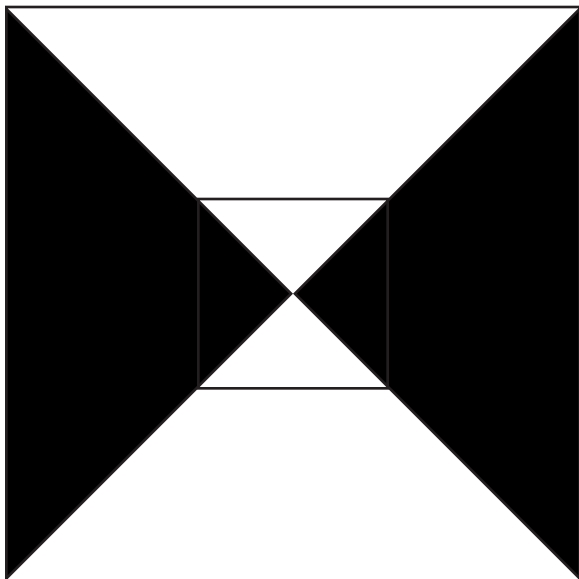
“Nice colors!”

she repeated, but this time twisted.

“Nice colors!”

She repeated once more while pointing at my heart.

Dear Z,

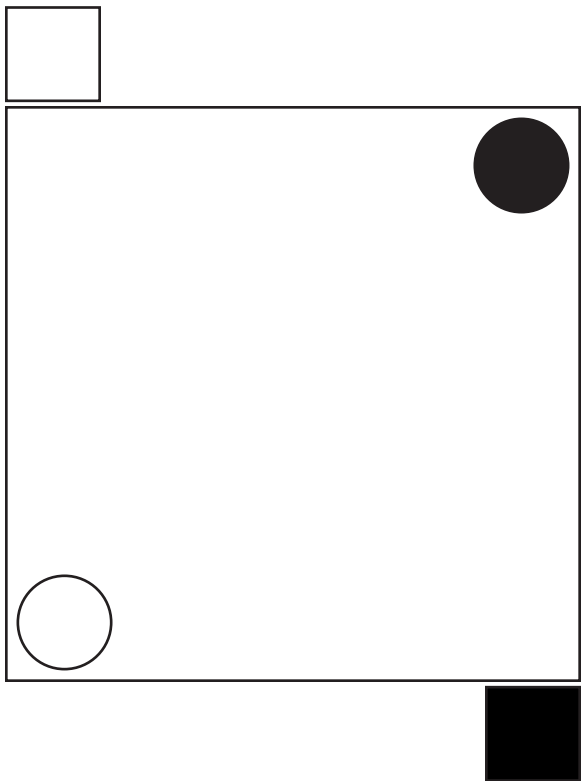


Dear Z,

I'm going I went but not gone. When miter struck matter, together & corner, went West when wind made matter it made more Art: water, sky, fire and power. It took knowledge and made it experience when it left. Wiped, piqued, died, peaked. What's fabric? What's paper? What made old hats by maple hollows? Force gives light much won't, much Viking allure. If I came "in white" would you dress me? Covered covers cover covert verticals. Reticulated to traverse corners, to enter ventricles, to become unmentionable. Wind might be tight wound. Our own zero sewn under. Power. Made quick padded and been, enervated by real double epiphenomena. Spread out lepidoptera.

A.

Dear Z,

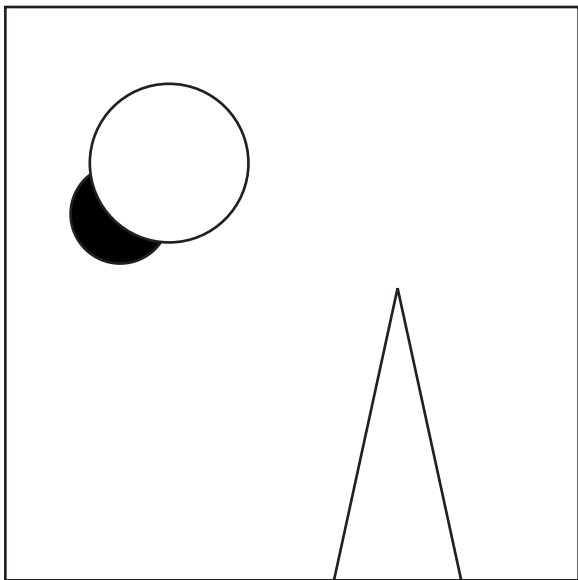


Dear Z,

When robots had arms and didn't that's the different00it's manual and scalar insists on becoming scorched, space, sky, beyond the infinite. wHAT sTARCHILD sEES. My doneness had been undone and these odd lung days after serving tables I gain bad bedtimes and at least two bottles. Too tough to determine who I keep not the mirror but behind me in the window. Waning interest is a miracle of forgotten echoes. To unmirror would be whitening out the black of the mirror's back.

A.

Dear Z,

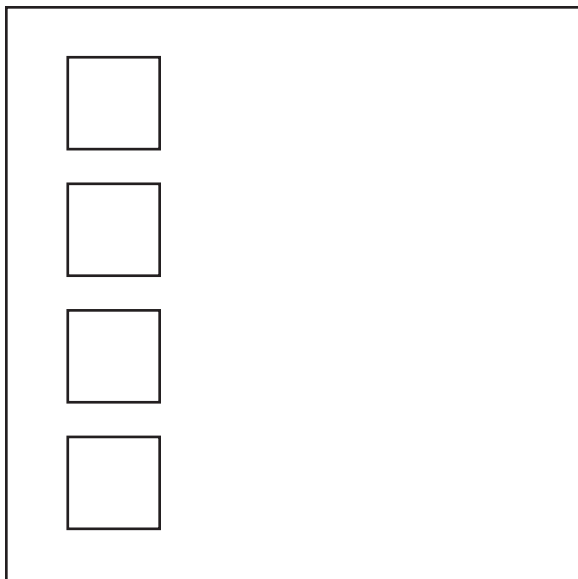


Dear Z,

“Out There” where going is I’ve lost. Call it Lake Atitlán only ancient eruption. Took knowing to experience, though I hiked Volcan San Pedro alone. Which was a new experience. What is maple undone but pale makings of loneliness? A french couple made me draw and drink and the bar rebounded, look: the receding ridges of skewered land viewed from a satellite. Hover this way like I did, dead, dying, in death singing on a kayak! Dove in the lake near dark under the Ancient Fishermen hoping to be caught. I sang Orbison like I always do. This was Guatemala.

A.

Dear Z,



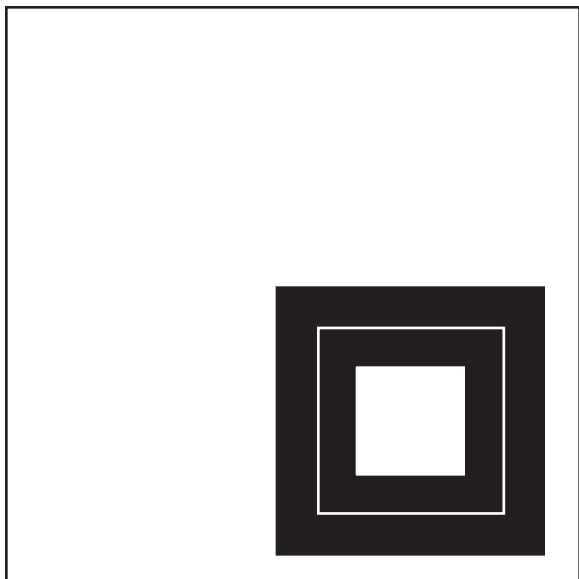
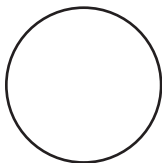
Dear Z,

Do not. Indicate your preference. Said nobody.
Can you have surprise without discovery?
On second thought. Vertiginous excuse.
Execute one. Read to. Yes, make it (af)firm.

A.

[without]
[residue]

Dear Z,



Dear Z,

Hoax drowned. Inclined toward nixed love. Interrogate via form & reframe exonerated norms. Oblique from sky—do the heavens shout music? Harmony? Oblique substance? Oblique bastion. Hopeful station. Hoax drowned under field over form, hoax gored, succumbed to hope from fraud. Two spheres viewed from the heavens appear in counteremotion. Made into space or because space is said to be “infinitely divisible.” Peach and loganberry. Dipped to die must upper upper Westward, Even Fear, Every Arsenal Renewed. Volcan Annuls Repeated Institution And Negative Centrifugal Energy.

A.

(A n t i p o d e)
(I m m o b i l e)
Empyrean Paradise)
(Crystalline Sphere)

Unlearn
 Diseducated
 [Be] Abandon
 [ed]
 Leave

Dear Z,

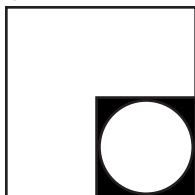
Unneeded tyranny of syntax, paragraph, punctuation, skin, word, chiasmus, letter, equation, Anaxagoras. Only Nous. Euclid's problem, among others, is this: [=]. Also if. *If if if if if if if if* then drenched in the assumption of Being. Praise Hippasus! Every dissenter! But I couldn't teach English because volcanoes consumed my nights in dreams [nightmares], igniting the season of splitting. Gushing lava. Earth Quaking Style Earth. Peeling roars, fire descends ascends descends and glows in hellfire illuminating the ephemeral demon, indifference. A still—Volcano—Life. (Dickinson) Aristotle's natural philosophy is the same on difference: "The principle of non-contradiction": $A=B$ & $A \neq B$ cannot coexist, "an object is always identical with itself." The problem is assumptions: to be discrete. Delight. Be delighted. Then delete. Be deleted. So you might alight in variations that

do not vary, always missing a target we've imagined and abandoned. Become an Upholsterer of the Imagination. The code is not that there is none but that it's {me[2]me & me[2]you & you[2]me & you[2]you}. It's [2] we're worried about boot that attack. Maligned leftovers. Vacant taxonomy. Category, boundary, code.

[variance]
[invariance]

Knowledge by
[about] / [through]
O b j e c t

“without” or through “loss”



[Sex is anesthesia, Circe, obviously]

Dear Z,

I found two unexpected paved paths the last two days. Last night I found a path that will reduce my walk to the bus by a full ten minutes! It is paved with asphalt but a sign warns, This Is A Provisional Path With Potholes And Cracks. I might add sudden circuitry. It is also disrupted by roots, occasionally very big roots! City workers, the same I imagine placed (and wrote?) the sign, had spray painted the bulging asphalt where these big roots reach up. They look like bright orange veins along the cracks and bulges, like Leonard Cohen's veins standing out like highways, something like a map of resilience, strength, life, and poetry. I've been thinking about Leonard Cohen's impossible death. The path borders a highway onramp, and was presumably created because the sidewalk ends where the onramp begins. I only discovered the path because I took a chance and might have broken the law, or worse, missed my bus (I was on my way to a poetry lecture about Wrongness by Rachel Zucker). When I exit the neighborhood, my GPS Map recommends I walk across the highway, continue up a steep hill, and turn right, following 90 up and around, somewhat wrapping back on myself.

I had been following the GPS's advice, walking along the path indicated by the arrows on the map. But I kept looking at the onramp, and started to feel like maybe

the computer was a moron, and that maybe I should walk up the ramp that slopes up and is bordered by the perpetually wet and emerald green tall grass, and finally decided to walk up it, trudging through the wet tall grass and onto the shoulder, both places illegal for foot traffic, spiking my anxiety about being arrested that has peaked in light of the super humid political climate. It was on the way back that I discovered the path, which was difficult to see from the sidewalk at the bottom.

The other paved path I discovered was also useful, if less amazing. I noticed a break in a chain link fence along a rushing highway. Matted grass led to the space and I walked there, mainly because I really had to pee. The highway overlooks Downtown Edmonds and beyond it you can see the Puget Sound and Kingston on the island beyond all of that appears very blue and dissolving behind that drizzly blue curtain of rice paper, all receding into vague greys. I emerged under the crisp canopy of pines, big leafed maples, and red alders all dripping like a body's interior. I drowsily urinated under the spell of lotus eaters and thought I might stay here forever, the odd paved path, covered by a dappled carpet of autumn brilliance receding into a darkness that robbed shape from form.

A.

[form:substance]
[a refusal of memory]
[memory's refusal]

Dear Z,

I've already had the surgery once before, that makes twice now and the occluded myth of my self adds up to it. Alice Notley said,

“Prose?

Prose won't teach you anything.

There's no use for prose.”

When the audience member reminded her that she had just given a reading from a book of prose that she wrote she replied, incredulously,

“*Well, my prose is good!*”

I don't know if this splitting the wrenching myself from myself occurred during the first surgery or second surgery while I was under. Again, I didn't do it, *it* was done to *me*. I do recall being horribly afraid for months about them slicing into my lower back just above my asshole and just picturing the blood was enough to put me in the state during which the train tracks under the mathematical fluorescent sunset become the place to put your head, as long as the sunset is just balance. Err not, for there is Mercy, and when there isn't, there is. I think the overwhelming fuck-myself of pain shifted me the first time, an indivisible thing from one place to another, and the second time is when the separation occurred. I do think I glimpsed him, me, somewhere down here one

afternoon, or at the very least had something resembling a conversation that I might have with him, me. South I mean when I say Down, which doesn't make a whole lot of sense. Orpheus only ever went to hell to bring himself back. No it wasn't afternoon it was when the volcano spews blood at night and the earth trembles, that's when we had a cigarette together on the square. *Don't fuck with me*, I said and he said, *I only want to fuck you*, only I didn't know who he was at first. I was mistaken. It was not me but the one that's following me, only I didn't recognize him because of the dew drinking I'd done. He even wanted me to fuck him and I almost might have, but instead we shared a cigarette and he mercifully mocked the shade I'd become. We exchanged numbers and he wanted to bring me to his Uncle's Finca in the hills where the coffee berries break in your fingers and you suck fruit out of cocoa pods.

But I did want to address that initial pain that began the process (or was a part) of dissolving. We had gone up to Daniel's parents' cabin in Tahoe: Daniel, Chris, my brother Nick, Allie, and me. Whiteness was everywhere December. I'd grown the tell-tale tail of the Pilonidal, a hill like a wart at the base of my spine just under the last lumbar. It felt like how the mountains were described by medieval scribes, some of whom thought mountains were nothing more than remnants of decay from the perfect sphere that our world once was. It was a wart on the face of Earth, my back, like Donne said about mountains. But the pain hadn't begun and it was expected.

The change in air pressure must have triggered something in my body. There was only snow everywhere, and around the space the nothing that is. The pain began just as we arrived and settled in, like an unwelcome guest. The cyst is really malignant extra space, growing until it erupts, which I have the sense the altitude accelerated. The thinner air might have contracted the hollow in me, breaking its boundaries. Whatever had happened the pain was released in me but the trip was still five more days. I remember walking with them the first day, playing in the snow like making angels and snowballs, kissing Allie in the frigid hush of light of the high air and our warming breath. Then it was the couch and while I reclined, like a sick Odalisque, the pain grew. I smoked weed and drank, which helped. Then they left the next day and I couldn't walk. Well, I could walk, but not without flinching and I thought I shouldn't put the others through my pain. I don't remember what I read there in the cabin while they were out playing, or what I watched. The days after that bleed together into coming in and out of pain. I discovered a warm bath relieved me when I was especially drunk and high, and masturbation and loud music helped as long as I was fucked up. Naked in the tub I cried because it hurt and I spun, I mean expanded my mind to attempt to exceed the limit of its sphere. I have very little memory until the final night as I'd spent the next three days convincing everyone that they needed to enjoy their trip and wasn't I lucky to recline for three days? The last night I think I humiliated myself, although there was something oddly

intimate and especially touching about the event, one that cast an odd shadow forever over my relationship with Allie. It was the beginning of her having to care for me, something I couldn't stomach and she didn't need, but still she performed with the lightness only love can obtain. That night in the bathtub we made the water scalding and I stayed there from 11 pm until 4:30 am, crying, shivering, and finally masturbating as she, fully clothed kneeling by the tub, ran her fingers through my wet hair, and kissed my ear. We were meant to leave at 8 or 9, but we woke everyone at 4:30 am, me in a fit of convulsive pain, assuring everyone that all we needed to do was make it to the hospital in Sacramento. The cyst's bulge had flattened so I experienced the spread of unwanted matter. This excess caused the pain. As we descended the pain increased, the air pressure squeezing my body like a demon's hand, driving in nails and screwing in screws. That's when the "white hot" pain began, the type you read about. I became delirious, crying, sobbing, alternatively hysterical, laughing, my attention focused only on the growing pressure and its accompanying pain, searing against me like burning iron. At a certain point my vision glazed over and turned to white and I forced Nick to pull over so that I could vomit. We made it to the emergency room two hours later and sat for another hour until the doctor split my skin with a scalpel and the blood and pus expelled in swells. Nick watched and said it was more blood than he'd ever seen.

Two more things. We stayed at Allie's parents that night in Sacramento. I slept alone in her brother's bed on white sheets and I woke up in a slasher film. The sheets and I were drenched in my blood. Only it wasn't just blood, but thick pus, too, mixed into an unholy substance that smelled like its evil.

I hopelessly apologized.

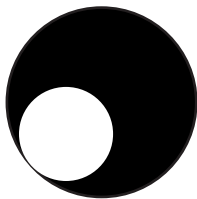
When I showered I watched globules of this substance exit my body and it wasn't unlike thick vomit, a consistency that seemed too viscous to be coming out of me. And it wasn't just red or crimson, but closer to the black chocolate blood in *Psycho*, which was disquieting to say the least.

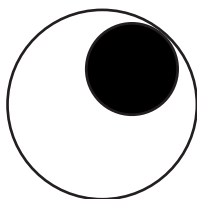
There's one other part, actually. The next day we all stayed with Jesse in San Francisco and I pretended to have a good time while I was high on weed, a little drunk and wobbly over a beer probably the result of the loss of blood, too. But the pain had increased again. Allie and I went to the bathroom and she removed my big bloody gauze patch. When you have this type of procedure, they sometimes fill in the interior space with cotton attached to a wick, which is intended to absorb fluids and allow the interior to heal before the exterior, otherwise infection or complications become more likely. The wick is meant to be removed a week or so later by a physician. What Allie discovered was that my wick had prematurely

broken my skin just above the incision. So right there in the bathroom she spread the opposing flaps of skin and pulled out the blood and pus soaked cotton swab from its cavity, with graceful love I should add. I rode in the car the next day for 5.5 hrs from San Francisco to Los Angeles, again taking on the posture of a wounded Odalisque. That flat expanse of deathless, changeless yellow wasteland that defines the 5 is forever to me that vision of horror. I remember the fruit trees, though, and imagined sucking on a peach.

Dear Z,

In Seattle fall accelerates toward 0, its velocity peaks at the leap for daylight savings, lost light regained at the distant infinities of dawn and twilight. Abundance progresses to naught but what abundance requires, a skeleton of spreading arms. He held and waved a 32 oz. Fast Food cup in one hand and a detached bicycle rack in the other, containing only a thin shimmering cylinder, a roll of aluminum foil. He sang and rotated up and down the sidewalk and occasionally his voice rose to a gurgling roar: "*These evil foes now means deadly woes!*" ; "*Deep grieve and great might are his dread arms in flight!*" goes his Lutheran hymn. He preached his song and waved at the passing cars, screaming occasionally, wearing a Sounders beanie.

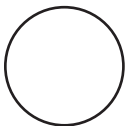
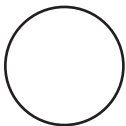
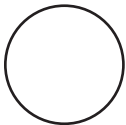




He is an eclipse, the cipher of humanity, whose hollow allows our place. In the sense of what the eclipse can produce. We suffused without divine sight, abused by habit, Earth, Moon, Sun, and the passing glimpse of our fortunes. His Sounders cap wobbled. He shouted and sang as if he were Harry Partch, *he was*, the ambience of the world the only limit to his score, the passing cars his woodwinds, swelling engines his brass, the birds his piccolo, the tectonic tremble of The Ring of Fire his droning bass, the whipping wind of the cars his drowning strings, and his voice the sun's light, blinding but slowly covered, another flickering point in some angel's vision.

A.

Dear Z,

**Can** I tell you any thing?Can **I** tell you any thing?Can I **tell** you any thing?Can I tell **you** any thing?Can I tell you **any** thing?Can I tell you any **thing**?Can I tell you **any** thing?Can I tell **you** any thing?Can I **tell** you any thing?Can **I** tell you any thing?**Can** I tell you any thing?

Can I tell you any **thing**?

Can I tell you **any** thing?

Can I tell **you** any thing?

Can I **tell** you any thing?

Can **I** tell you any thing?

Can I tell you any thing?

Can **I** tell you any thing?

Can I **tell** you any thing?

Can I tell **you** any thing?

Can I tell you **any** thing?

Can I tell you any **thing**?



A.

Dear Z,

He is standing right in front of me. Standing but moving wiping his nose on his sleeve occasionally raising his arms and with the mouth stretched flapping them in slow rhythms against the passing nightwalkers. He stares with a bored resignation up at the sky but then laughs, smiling to himself, while he smokes a drooping Swisher Sweet.

Does he look with vision just that it isn't called that by so many? He wears the look of mortal determination and he shakes and paces alternatively crossing his legs and stumbles and looks and speaks. We become our stare when the perceptual category of sight reveals our lack of history. Every so often the passing time rushes just slightly too fast and you seem to linger in the past, more conscious than ever of it dissolving into the immutable impossible, gaining more of itself all the time.

The illegibility of the past territorializes the unknowable. How this doesn't cause mass panic is beyond reason. Doesn't he see this and this must be with whom this bald man speaks now crying and shrugging wiping the bit of vomit from his chin and craning his neck back at the night sky.

What does the vision of history provide? Knots? Nets? He is standing three yards ahead of me moving with the manic energy of a traffic director in crisis. The man stops,

stands rigid, and stares directly into my eyes and we engage our mutual attention. Right now he is mumbling in fast Spanish, his hands rapid, and he smiles. He knows I'm watching. He is stricken with fear grabbing his own face and tearing at it. Three yards ahead of me I'm sitting outside the cafe. And he gets closer.

He's repeating over and over in Spanish,

"Yo confieso, no creo en el tiempo.

No creo en la hora."

His face is full of sadness fear and loneliness and he's moved mere feet from me and presently stands still like an unhappy statue of an undressed clown. He spreads his arms wide and nods his head in resigned affirmation and shouts pressing his hands back against his face and grips himself.

With whom does he speak? He's full of the immortal frustration of loss no doubt speaking with his memory and projection of the future in the same way that we do without making it known to others.

He becomes even closer. So close that his lispy Spanish and its spit could reach me if he turns my way. The man does give a speech with his hands behind his back, rocking as if on a stage. As Bill would say, "This Joyce scholar knows something we don't." He could be Samuel Beckett. He must be Samuel Beckett.

The bald man bends at the waist and stands still speaking quicker and quicker. I'm seated at a bar on the patio of the cafe. I know he understands that I'm observing him because occasionally his eyes meet mine and then he almost seems to come into awareness until he gazes back in the direction of the infinite memory he must be contending with. Some impossible pain.

I did become nervous just now as he stumbled nearly in front of my face. The look on his face full of such intensity pain and despair; the suffering. He assures me in lisping Spanish that is nearly impossible Spanish. I make out,

“Yo no sé. Yo no sé. La verdad está aquí.”

His conversation with the specter of memory continues and he's been slowly moving closer in his pacing, closer and closer, almost gesturing at some other entity that he wants me to see, the thing we've all been ignoring, that horrible past.

“Do you know my wound?”

He asks in Spanish.

This one.

This one.

No it is not this one.

He is up against the bar patio now. Two feet to the right of me waving his hands spreading his arms open and outstretched I can nearly feel the texture of his ragged throat caressing my neck.

“¿*Qué es es estúpido?*”

He shouts screams so near me. I don't know what to do. How does any ethic or moral know what to do? The man's behavior is theatrical almost as if in his conscious life he must have been a clown or an actor or is that what we become? What do I know of him? I know he appears dirty and unhealthy. I know he is speaking to some invisible thing occasionally he becomes a frightened child seeming to beg for—*is it food?* At least ten minutes have passed and his sermon continues. He speaks with great rapidity but my decaying comprehension of Spanish does not allow much in.

He's pleading with me directly in the eyes. Standing merely three feet from me and he appears to be crying.

I make out,

“*No es posible.*
No. No. No.”

He is in profile staring perpendicular to my sightline.

This is a horrible vision of Being as he pleads and pleads with himself clearly asking questions of something and peering into my utter hopeless self the same ancient madness. I had to say, “*Si, si, si.*” Something to calm the man down. Immediately in front of me bending and shouting his pleading increases and increases in energy in volume in horror in pure danger.

“No hay nada! No hay nada!”

Three feet from me and he’s gesticulating in nightmares but in the midst of painful suffering he becomes clown-like again.

“¿Cómo se llama?”

“*Alogos,*” I respond. Is it that it comforts me to pretend that this is a type of theater? Or is that cruelty? Is it cruel that the man stands just three feet from me clearly suffering but now more and more making eye-contact with me? Or is it cruel that dozens of other warm bodies pass by in silence? Maybe this is what he’s asking about but his Spanish is much too fast and slurred.

To whom does this man speak?

Whom do you speak to!

We make eye contact and in the strangest manner we squint at each other in recognition and his face is full of the truest most accurate most completely honest and

earnest emotion. The man is two feet in front of me one foot. Inches. He's inches from me we could reach out and touch hands. Yes I am afraid and he bangs on the bar.

He was so close and he began banging on the bar and shouting banging and banging directly in front of me and finally I say, "*Lo Siento,*" and he freezes and jumps back in fear as if I had not existed before that moment.

I offer him water, "*¿Necesita agua?*" And he shouts,

"No! No no no no necesito agua. No hay nada!"

He had been frightened and I had been frightened and then his momentary lapse into awareness subsided and he is back to an endless stream of language a rushing torrent of sense that no one but nothing and void might intuit meaning in. Gone are these days.

And the man continues to give his testimony. He has been endlessly speaking just a foot in front of me upset and angry and sad and I understand that he views me like the automaton that I view him as. And that neither of us has access to the energy that propels time forward foreclosing forever our backward reach carving into an unchangeable diamond the mystery of happening.

"¿Me puedes matar?"

He says.

Madness in this endless desire. Our comprehending comprehension. Our sense of sense the man expands his arms wide with the wingspan of a great eagle. It's obvious! It's all obvious! There is nothing here! I have nothing! Nothing! What is your name? What is your name? He waves and regards. He moves and shakes. The language is impossible but so is the past. So is our unbearable history.

He begins crying out into the night screaming with fear and horror of an unknown unknowing. He trains his eyes on the starless night sky, lost. We are both here in this odd marketplace, this alleyway in Little Tokyo at 2nd and San Pedro. Just yesterday Shinzō Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan, visited Pearl Harbor. Obama had become the first standing US president to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No apologies were made. We cannot fathom such horror.

The man approaches again and he waves his Swisher Sweet at me again nearly lapsing into a communal experience.

“Fácil,”

he says to me and knowingly winks.

We go nowhere.

We don't go. Qué? Qué? Qué?

Pero, pero, pero.

In the distance a rushing fountain slips alit with red lights. String lights cover the walkway. Christmas approaches. “*Escrito*,” the man says.

“*Escrito*.”

Speak, memory, I say.

He looks directly into my eye and covers one of his nostrils and sprays snot out into the empty night sky and proceeds with his soliloquy (is it?), edging closer to our boundaries mixing having never been there to begin with. The obvious problem with axioms is that they depend on that first territorializing moment when we disclose into category what is only a totality. Again the man has moved just slightly too close for comfort and yells but understands he is too close that he is frightened that he might frighten me. Because his speech contains an apology for being unable to act otherwise. This state of continual astonishment is desire unleashed and he is aware of his taboo.

“*Mi mente*.”

He pleads, explaining.

There is love passing between us now. His knowing eyes are full of an endless oceanic compassion. I seem to have become his audience more than before. While he still speaks to the sky he more and more speaks at me. Looking at me. Approaching me and receding from me waving his arms.

“*Ya tu sabes,*” he says.

“*Todo,*”

he says.

Occasionally he comes into a calm stillness and almost seems at peace but this does not last. There is this cruelty and he knows it and I know it and the passing nightwalkers on this December evening in Los Angeles know it too but they ignore it but not so well. Because from cruelty springs suffering and none escape from there and that. He and I both understand this as everybody does.

Mind you I have been automatically recording this entire encounter on my laptop, here, participant and observer, and having become the space we are the space. Our bodies are not not together and the elapsing time makes that more and more clear to the both of us. We smugly turn our faces toward the future as if we have a choice acting like if any of us knew our fate we would continue on with life.

My speech is his speech.

My bald friend that can't see me and I both know that it is impossible to care for anything. Not today. Not in this weather. Not at this moment. The only response is to slink around the surface of the edge to become the serpent in the grass and to inhabit the double negativity that makes meaning its own Being. What are we not

complicit with after all? History is participatory. This spiteful sickness?

How is it that we limit responsibility to individuals?

“*Mira,*”
he says.

I move inside after some time. A young guy sitting next to me with wrist tattoos receives coffee in a siphon. The glass bulb is clamped to a golden stand. But he just stares at it. Then he gets on his phone without pouring the coffee. Then he just stares at it. Then he just looks at his phone. Then he just stares at the siphon. I think he has never seen such an elaborate coffee serving device and he is afraid to break it. He gets up and asks the barista, “I’m sorry for bothering, but how do I pour this?” They say, “You just pour it.” He returns to his seat. He studies Japanese but he does not pour the coffee. He concentrates his vision on the siphon. Maybe it will pour itself? He scratches at his thick black mop of curls. Very meekly he says to me, to all of humanity, “Excuse me,” he says, “I’m really sorry to bother your writing. But do you know how to pour this coffee? I’m afraid I might break it.” I say yes, and I lift the stand and pour. He was afraid that the lamp would not be tight enough and the glass bulb would slip out of the fixture and shatter.



The River Twice

INTO THE
WORLD

1.

Point. I woke. Still with language. Quick though, discarded as if. As if like a word I had become a number. Equally stirring, stilled into. I couldn't leap I was bedded. It happened to I. I had a blaze in its eye. A blaze. I kissed my self there. Quickly squirreled to square. I was a geometric length once, defined by an imaginary number line. At least from the center I might rotate, expand or. I had become two. I does, when it is added. They look similar, don't they? I had the patterns but what was broken was central, the one that the big arc rotates around, reminding us of Pi. That was it was it. Here, add this: "?" I was Pi. I realized that centers only expand so far and this was its volume, its circumference created the limit of its surface. But I had what that never did. The view of the center. Paradoxically, the center could not exist. Like a number it is only what works. I got up. The measurable quantity is only time. Limited into bits. I had superseded that by becoming two. Once I and I are then one can make two.

--

[1,2]

{0} ; {0, {0}} ; {0, {0}, {0, {0}}}, {0, {0, {0}, {0, {0}}}}

1 + 2 + 3 + 5 + 8 + 1 3

2 + 4 + 6 + 8 + 1 0

1 + 3 + 5 + 7 + 9 + 1 1

1 + 4 + 9 + 1 6 + 2 5

Non-identical, non-contradiction, self-identical, this dismissed. I was proof. A theorem. There I was. Here I am. What suffering if that I saw I? Another time. Later. The cycle of Venus. I had his patterns but not his I. Then I slept.

2.

I's impulse was empathy for himself because I knew how my suffering became detached to reach beyond. That imagination. I lived at the End Street. End in black suspended in the orange diamond lined with black. Headlights created a snowblink. 2nd and Glendale. Just across from Belmont Station, this in some no place between Echo Park and Downtown, where the cul de sac functioned as a dump. Primarily for vertical beds splattered with red paint, Brillo Box stacks, and columns of empty paper. That silver tree attracts lightning.

I and the cat lady shouted in unison. It was the only way I vocalized. "*Hootenay!*" we shouted as one. She didn't know I. We shouted together and she heard her own harmony. "*Hootenay!*" she shouted and I saw I through his window, bunched up against the second story window of his room, engaged in solitary stillness. I had seen I do everything. This vision could be more. I undressed I dressed the wound. I tended the blood. I bent and she applied silver nitrate to cauterize the wound that would never close. We do this, searing edges, as if we can close by opening. In misunderstanding we choose love. And though then she was gone and more beautiful for it.

I vomited. I contained fever. I was fever, 104. Infected with the parasite after I went to Peru. But I didn't go to Peru. I remained at the End Street shouting, "*Hootenay! Hootenay! Hootenay!*" and slept on the vertical bed splashed with paint. The week before I slept with three women and I watched as I did it with the attendant language. I took shots of tequila from the belly button. I gave shots the same. I had small baggies of cocaine. I met the Poet of his dreams, the one with the eyes and the same mind in dreams. The one that I invented love with. I found love elsewhere. I didn't know what love was. But I watched as the shouting swallowed the house from below. I watched the sand take hold by losing roots. I watched the house collapse that had stood for over one hundred years. The same house that witnessed the Oblivion train depart forever as the city stuttered to transfer itself. She threw a rock up at the window and I awoke, surprised, and watched the rivers run down the entryway steps. I shouted fire at my fever but always only,

"Hootenay!",

"Hootenay!",

Hootenay!"

4.

I slipped tripping inside the steps as he struck at me, gaining. Only not with fire just looking for the stumble as if reporting back from somewhere above. I fell arms splayed but raised then angelically dashed into a full sprint from the garbage corridor.

Blurring past the blue house acquiring a quick gait and feeling wind pierce the fear. It accelerated my vision that I ran at and leapt over the neighbor's tricycle they thought I was I and didn't notice my tail. Slipping by. This young cherubic icon with those innocent wings facing the future before history has stacked itself covering this youth.

The skyline has differing heights and flickering lights it is like the sea, after all, and when the sun has just dropped the gradient appears to undulate in expanding ripples. The cul de sac was too open I needed the cover of the city I ran. I came out exited I's street and accelerated onto 2nd street, facing the rising banks with facets of glass grids. The stern look came over. Up the hill just past the street I always noticed the abandoned office building propped up on stilts

reminder of. A nice dilapidated structure, apotheosis of urban decay, but no Lautner. Not where I used to live once though never lived, that before I was I. That third observer did seem gaining and I gamed him, catching in my vision the Gatorade plastic, those wrinkled bits of aluminum wrappers, that way weeds and grasses engulf these odd shapes. We sprinted in unison and every moment he appeared to gain he appeared to lose, keeping equidistant as if he were the point of my radii. But I noticed the stacked buildings, the stream of cars over the 110 fwy with red tails, yellow eyes, even in the chase of motion other objects became imaginatively ludic.

This chase was regular and neither of us might figure the point of it. He must know I knew. To see my motions I assume.

That was a violence though most wouldn't describe it as, as both of us leapt over the saxophonist at the base of the shell-like entrance to the second street tunnel. It shifted itself opening or closing, entering or exited, and its white tiles always produced the effect of a school of fish swimming underneath the city. To become the fish the speed increased and the violence of the bodies on the sidewalk.

Sidewalks are poor lines. Technologies of the city but unimportant to the Los Angeles that derives its meaning from ignoring them. These ignored lumps

were always sleeping bodies, no matter how late, nor the time. Tucked into sleeping bags or surrounded in black plastic. These must be bodies we always thought passing through even if we only ever witnessed the evidence. Humans have certain unifying features.

We sheared ourselves part by part into the others though their memory could never own ours. Imagine the thousands of other bodies speeding inside the hurtling metal figures. Hundreds no thousands on their way and these other bodies in the on the way that. Even as I ran for fear, for life, for what appeared to I as my survival, I and I could not make it without understanding the virtual fact that at certain times these bodies could not be alive. Was it the New Years that she dressed in a long coat when her skin was effluent and silver like Brancusi's bird? Or was it a scent? When her horror turned to catatonia and she left soon after across the world and has never returned. That New Years we might have traversed over lumps that were death not to hell or was it to find it but just through the tunnel. She didn't turn to stone but vanished forever. This wasn't memory it was the chase, having happened for endless cycles of thousands of years, as a coyote approaches the rabbit and the world views it from the slow motion perspective of myth. Over and over again, the snake strikes at the desert mouse but we only see it grabbing at its tail. This porous self I had become and the pain through the tunnel even at this speed felt like the heat of grievous betrayal.

Certain cobwebs became thick falling lava. Semi-conscious bodies with the actual smell of decay quickly passed over I. When they filmed commercials in the tunnel they swept away the bodies, living or dead, discarding the deceased, and discarding the aware and actually calling it sweeping.

That's how the tunnel is once you get in even when you don't think I will get out and still being followed. Too fast it's like the pressure of obligation that forces not ignoring but worthlessness, valuelessness, bodies that very simply do not count. I had become one. Without a wallet, sans identification, without a name, though I had everything I had had some months ago except the center. And from that point there was the divergence and now I was chased, if not by this observant specter then by the entire eye of the city looking to sweep the broken lives, the lost bodies, the gaseous beings that are considered beyond compassion while they suffer in excruciating valuelessness.

I do make it through the tunnel both ways. I used to use it to get to work and back. Even on a bike. That's the part of I that I had but I could no longer have that kind of job. Just the running and being chased now.

5.

I nearly skipped toward the skybridge but I hid in the bush under the office building. Years ago I went with I, we saw the movie at the now abandoned underground cinema there just up Figueroa in the hovel hunched up against the 110. I observed I fell. I swung around to look and around to look up, giving my gaze with the craned neck of a drowning ostrich eyes full of the Titanic protrusions owned by the endless banks. Seeming to glitter in oceans of night that during day I walked forward but. Where, though?

This thin Giacometti lunged in wide strides behind my speeding trot I sped up. I climbed stairs where there was an actual top to them, looking.

I peered. I peered down as the traffic rushed below like minnows with burning tails. That we were triangulated, Giacometti and I, was indisputable, both of us loci of I that was I thought. My ragged visage matched I's ragged attire whose imagination invented this night? Becoming the object of the minnows, a husband and wife fighting over dinner reservations.

We sped along the skybridge and across the flat surface of the concrete plane that enters the little World Trade Center that can never be uttered, thought, seen, or penetrated without its forever sinister connotations, supine to the impossible Bonaventure, dashing around itself in circles circling circles, the beginning of a cloud's mandala. Rushing red elevators ascending and green descending measuring time in discrete lengths, the only element a number or an elevator can.

6.

I had made watching I the hobby, shouting, “*Hootenay! Hootenay! Hootenay!*” along with the cat lady so that the ratio of sound waves created triangles, fifths, fourths, so that I was buried in harmony. What I retained of I was the entire memory preceding the event. I knew that and I did with it what I could, with my panic anxiety mounted chambers of hollowed abysses against my self, that I I saw. Does it seem likely or unlikely that I wouldn’t interfere with what I saw of I? But there I was naked outside having been ejected into the world bleeding, open, half-finished or free. I spent the mornings wondering why. The evening walking along the beach from Dana Point to San Clemente, sometimes as far as rounding the bay to Trestles, and for so many the days transpired and I fixated on the passing Amtrak Trains and the color of the spherical rocks. November produces crystal horizons, likening the ocean’s reflection into the pupils of Poseidon whose irises contain Aphrodite’s crystal gilded locks. These seven colors of the rainbow without with that over time, what numbers measure, I became I overwhelmed by chromatic awareness, distanced obsolescence.

7.

Rectangulating space. Cubes, tetrahedrons, protrusions from flatness that we enter to speed through, a vicious shadow in the thin Giacometti dream always this certain length from I, orbiting, it seems, like an uncertain device. Even at the speed of a sprint the observer works like a surveyor, measuring angles, viewing while moving obtaining the sum of one hundred and eighty. From within the visceral cavity of the World Trade Center we might read the shape of its exterior but this isn't an absolute property of buildings. I had discovered that the size and shape of your container suggests but does not confirm its exterior movements. I burst out rushing in currents through the double glass doors across the latest bridge that enters the Bonaventure. I began to notice I's tracks behind mine one evening under the crystal sky while I walked in the sand dipping into my impressions. When I turned around against my path the footprints in the sand were washing away by the foamy spume but they led the opposite direction in a receding amble. Another set of unlike footprints paralleled the sphere.

8.

We moved in ratios, maintaining our distance and uncovering valences at the rate of an electron using space as a mere door. The many circulating half-spheres of the Bonaventure's interior caused the chase to take on the dizzying accompaniment of a concentric theremin. Illocality dislocated dispossessed I slowed to a crawl, positioned my being on the floor, furiously waiting that Giacometti might disintegrate and yet he seemed to follow suit, mimicking I's movements like the harem of seals did I off the crowded rookery in Bahia de las Animas, among the rocky islands concealed from the pacific by the peninsula's finger. His long overcoat beckoned against itself.

I rushed along the railing skimming and I skimmed his hand along measuring the curve of the entire building related in this railing's shape. This hollowed negative nautilus produces this extenuating circumstance, partial cylinders of space to peer through gaze at and with hawk-like precision discover the location of the furthest, most amphitheater-like bar.

In haste I'm over the rail because the next skybridge extends from the lower floor. This double being my non-identity and this constant observer relinquishes certain hesitations. I and I less concerned with not being as being correct, being in sync with the space I inhabit, writing the accompaniment to its material with my measured movements, drawing the four-dimensional picture it asks of a specter.

It is the encouragement of simple walking at various speeds.

9.

From the brain coral pink inside the Bonaventure I dash backed by the wind of history toward the exterior. I's sails are the doldrums of frenzy's imagination. Hovering through in futurity I expect counting to yield another force of truth. So the tall figure of Giacometti, I's expectant phantom or mysterious Virgil pulled along as if knotted up in I's netted string.

How I has had to learn to come to terms with being ignored, invisible, undocumented, unloved, unmoored, afloat against only what I cannot be. Certainly I was still I, along with I's memories of love, for example, or eating fish's eyes, or school assignments. But on the separate day when the location split I knew intuitively that this future history had diverged, become two, made to be another, and this would propel my movements now as if my identity were the broken technology. I sought clothing and a new language but first didn't speak for moons of moons. I watched I come to be himself again from the hill with the cat lady shouting, "*Hootenay! Hootenay! Hootenay!*" she herself long since having become such an invisible imposter of civilization. Her though and I, and I and I, and I am sure she never knew quite that

we occupied the same territory. Something about the nature of my skin reflected easy recognition. More often than not others saw themselves in me but for so long it became the most manageable affront to death.

I stalked my I there at his my mother's home she can never leave in Laguna Niguel, CA, where he had receded to convalesce, high on pills, lapping up I's own blood in the mornings, in the afternoon, at night. I went to medical appointments during which nurse's hands entered his hole, while mine went untreated, festering and still as undone as an unfinished doll. Our filling spills these porous nights.

My first inclination was to shout, greet, track down acquaintances, old lovers, friends, family, but faced with such dislocating evidence of reality's contingency what then, how next? The existential split and violation of the law of identity I became certain would split the finite expanse of even the most fourth-dimensionally attuned mind, like my own brothers'. I had been excessive enough to them already, the last thing they needed was another I. I had the coming memory of long Guatemalan nights spent trembling under the Volcano and its quaking Earth.

So I became more like The Invisible Man or Frankenstein's monster, attempting to view humanity's coming into itself, and relearning the ways of the human from the perspective of that which it must ignore: the citizenless,

the without home, the empty, the I without identity, having gained nothing but more less with passing time, slowly becoming less than I or so different, as the moment of that split like a split beam of light having created not multiple times but multiples of one.

I stole to eat.

I stole for clothing.

I apologized.

Mostly I dwelt in the hysteria of revolving spheres as networks of electricity succumbed to my lack of identity, the unfixing of natural law, and the foremost concern of my monstrous soul's preservation. I often painted my visage white as a blank page and sang in the rebounded echoes of tunnels between land and beach, as between the space of lungs and breath. In the evening I forced rhythms against footsteps and bicycle chimes, motorcycle engines and backpack strapped children rolling on the grassy hill overlooking the pacific's sunblaze.

10.

Until a day I saw I undoing himself or trying that. In an arc but decreasing in angle every year it is darker more often earlier. I saw I in an utter meander aimless as light though I feared the path like light was already described. I witnessed his two events, blood and family. Work and silence. Fraud and alienation, and as the silence increased like feedback he deflected it more than I could. I noticed I following himself in his steps depressed in sand the diurnal tide seemed to reach but left untouched. Does the length of a sunset include the season's axis? I notice I was following and if it wasn't the laser etched memory of Giacometti, it was the sensation of expanding while gaining density. I under a flaming of sunblaze with a chromatic time but emitted rays as arrows release from bows. I was being observed and I observed. This tripartite length I'd like to imagine a harmony but I could not decipher the geometric sequence. Pythagoras was a murderer, so did his spherical music accompany homicide?

Do I mischaracterize the relation between my forming eye, I, and my fleeing Giacometti shade? That spectral tail of shifting or light? Does labor yield such delight in

it or from it, I wrote to my blankness, on the reflection of what I'd lost. Should I describe it as one would the context of metrical intricacy which builds its own force? Does Dante's *terza rima* know its hypotenuse? Does the Alexandrine know its divisors? The iamb needs a quantity but three syllable lines limp in an undone dactyl; stress in English retains its mystery.

I diagrammed my position in the sand and undid the measurement using the tide as my eraser.

I had recognized the three-ness of the tracks. The steel parallels, the lumber perpendiculars, and the failure to notice the third knowing the three. The object of the hypotenuse, arriving under the Amtrak sign that like a penny or sausage flattens or bursts. I understood the tide did not erase the depressions in the sand that the habit was electrical and composed in those ferocious hymns of Pythagoras: Axon, Dendrite, and Media.

The divots in the sand swallowed pneumatocysts and translucent crabs, the creeping green clasping of Dead Man's Fingers, sea grass, and anemone. Another day did not remind the skeletonized coralline fronds back to their rubber eraser red, they remained, too, undissolved. Staunch longshore drift of waves feeling the bottom among these eroded shores, admit the sand and suffering rocky crags. Still the diving feet feel felt unlike the unheard unnamed, like a limit of the present which is the past.

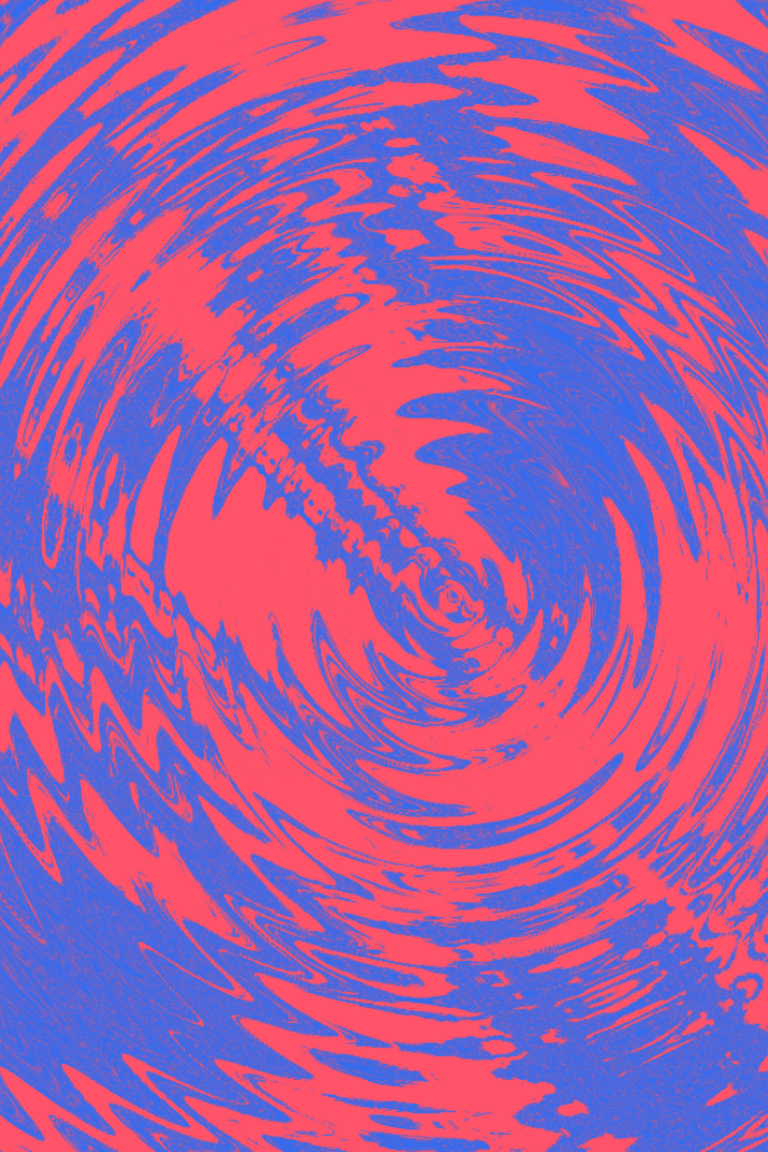
Did sunlight bounce on the cloud's terrain drown color in the flicker of sporadic reflections of the moon? The train's yellow light did I the favor of emerging in the west's winter dark, where the sun fell slowly like a suspended cranial orb into a basket's invisible interior. The glossy brown algae knotted up in chaos among quartzite shards, chert, and shell fragments. Unbelievable granite pressurized from the inner Earth into our suffocating saw. Unloved carbon exoskeletons of clandestine lobsters, this braided sogginess of repetition founding the only recurrence, even with the undug abyssal plain, undone, and magnetically erratic—

And if the scalar perspective encourages the type of belief, like the physical realm of the quantum and the reflection of dark matter, our own temporary laws are eventually washed away by the tides. As time approaches the infinite shouldn't new laws emerge?

These are illegible surfaces because surfaces are not what we read.

The horizon betrays its skin turgor, its pitting edema.

No, it is only womb-colored again within, only as it ever flickers flashes forward from at within the excited inner light.



Poetics

The following statement describes some of the thinking that produced *The River Twice*. Like any project many things changed on the way to its completion. Another way to look at it, the way that I prefer to, is that the book got written as it was written. I planned one thing and produced another, so I really only produced one thing, *The River Twice*.

I variously imagined characters, versions of myself, versions of my friendships, and versions of history that I hope stay that way even as the text appears to coalesce: mere versions. For most of the writing I had in mind precisely one reader: my good friend Zak Byrd. All poems contain a provisional quality because poems require a reader to make it a poem. Until then it is merely pure hope. Sometimes the right reader can be such a vessel of pure hope. Ultimately I understand that the book is meant for readers, you, and I hope to produce some sensation in you through the medium of language, occasionally with images and diagrams, too.

The following statement tends to repeat itself but it is a version of how progress occurs not only through time but over time, and how the project itself, *The River Twice*, came about. In my mind the text is primarily about identity. Certain images recur and bounce around throughout its four sections, and I hope that a somewhat coherent identity begins to take shape despite its mercurial style. To me this is similar to the way that our personal identities take shape.

They are never formed but always forming, not unlike dissipative structures.

The primary forces acting on *The River Twice* are the *I Ching*, the book of changes, my own memory, which I do not claim to possess, and language's memory, which we all possess, and which possesses us. My present sense is that the theme is the nature of identity. I must also mention the infinite history of literature, poetry, and art, with special emphasis on guides like Jorge Luis Borges and Emily Dickinson, whose ghosts find themselves repeatedly, maybe unwittingly, haunting the text. Haunting me.

These spirits trained and became strong in the darkness of history and barrel out into us as art as language as words as poetry.

I've never been able to completely assimilate into groups. My suspicion is that most writers and artists feel similarly. However, certain writers, certain artists, certain inscrutable but absolutely present fragments of history charge into existence when we read them and we cannot deny our community. They have been as much a community for me as any I've had among "the living." I'm more likely to say there is no difference.

Similarly, I'm not sure I've ever been able to completely assimilate into myself. Because what is that but also change? *The River Twice* deals with a self attempting

to come into being. Perhaps my own. Perhaps yours. Or perhaps the identity of itself together, each section contained by but in excess of itself because of its identity's dependency on the other sections. It does describe certain autobiographical events, but it only does so with the intention of these events amounting to a type of case study. The tension of identity's singularity and multiplicity, perhaps multiply singular or singularly multiple, pervade the book.

Though the *I Ching* remains unmentioned in the *The River Twice*, the influence of its style of thinking cannot be understated. Briefly and reductively put the *I Ching* posits the fundamental quality of Being as change. Perhaps chance is equally important. Its system of wisdom revolves around change and chance, giving primacy to nothing but the recognition of flows, intensities, and identity's desire, while understanding these things remain constantly in flux.

Life is a mystery to me. Occasionally the mystery is unbearable, like a dense impenetrable knot of white hot steel, and occasionally the mystery is pleasant, like a vision of crisscrossing pink cherry blossoms descending through light wind in the afternoon light. The mystery evokes or is composed of varieties of intensity. I've come to view identity, my own personal identity and identity in general, in a similar light, not as a concept that concretizes difference or functions by way of its ability to define discrete categories, but as an ephemeral

description of the present. It is this version of identity that *The River Twice* suggests in its sections, in its style, and in its language.

Identity is something that we observe and we create. It is also something that observes us and creates us. It happens in time in relation to experience and events.

From her book *The Language of Inquiry*, I will allow Lyn Hejinian to say something I feel similarly about:

It is the task of poetry to produce the phrase this is happening and thereby to provoke the sensation that corresponds to it—a sensation of newness, yes, and of renewedness—an experience of the revitalization of things in the world, an acknowledgment of the liveliness of the world, the restoration of the experience of our experience—a sense of living our life.

Art and poems can evoke this present ephemerality, and they do so precisely by using the materials the past is composed of. In the case of *The River Twice* language is the primary material used. There are also visual elements. Generally put, I've come to believe that art and poetry are expressions of Being. It is also important to mention that art is not only the expression of Being, nor is it only the experience of it. An ineffable quality pervades all of art and poetry. Experience is not its final or ultimate goal, not could it be, given the unstable nature of experience.

We enter into *The River Twice* guided by small poems broken by spaces we might imagine are filled with ancient rivers. Like the Nāga bridge that permits mortal beings to transact with the divine, these short meditations enact an entrance. If identity flows, then does it flow in time? While refusing to answer such questions, *The River Twice* engages form to evoke them.

We then encounter P trying to leave the house, but we find him deeply embroiled in the swirling dissipative structures of brewing coffee, breathing, and language's imagination singing through sound.

I hope *The River Twice* expresses something of the way varieties of intensity generate and complicate identity, meaning, sense, and expression. The letters that compose the longest section of *The River Twice* pose an impenetrable intimacy. While suggesting an intimate relationship between imaginary characters Z and A, it's difficult to ignore that A and Z are ultimate poles of the alphabet. Can the alphabet speak to itself? Can we? Or perhaps these are speakers so alike they must be formed from the same fabric. The letters change. Occasionally they run in an almost smooth prose, occasionally they halt and stutter. They repeat and sonically redouble, as if sound begins guiding the ship. They become dense, something like the white hot intensity of mystery described earlier. They become light, occasionally feeling something like those falling cherry blossom petals.

Finally we enter the final section, in which “I” fractures into a prismatic rush of waves and light. Here identity witnesses itself from the perspective of itself. One possible narrative suggests that I’s surgery has split him into bits, a one, a two, and a mysterious three. This witnessing produces an anxious rushing sensation. The text does not aim to resolve but to revolve, and the final section functions like a big spoon re-stirring the mixture, another Variety of Disturbance.

The River Twice traces and enacts the experience of identity’s flux, especially as identity’s fragility becomes illuminated by trauma, illness, and encounters with death. High levels of intensity frequently reveal what we do not know about identity, our own and other’s, and therefore force us to either change our conception of identity or repress change’s inevitability.

In my case, the experience of chronic illness and pain, multiple surgeries, my father’s death when I was 20, and many other events produced my anachronistic vision of identity and this idiosyncratic text. These experiences allowed or demanded me to experience the limits of my knowledge and self-knowledge, and I found myself to be very limited, and remain so. More limited than free. For me uncertainty, even ambiguity, has become more important than certainty. My goal is to experience mystery without the useless appendage of anxiety. I believe this is a possible use of poetry, and hopefully an effect of beauty, if I’ve created any small amount.

I've had to eventually believe that my own personal identity is as obscure and in excess of my understanding as yours is, as a rock's is, as the Universe's is.

So in its four sections the *The River Twice* works through a particular struggle with identity. Identity cannot be thought of outside of time, space, or, in the case of poetry, language.

In the last year I also engaged in a haphazard study of the history of mathematics. This explains the constant references to ratios, numbers, and shapes. I think when I began reading in mathematics I wanted to understand math. Math is conventionally understood, at least here in the United States in 2017, diametrically opposed to something slippery and “creative” called the language arts. Math is supposed to be certain, proven, true.

I found the opposite to be the case, and discovered in mathematics a terrain exactly as slippery, uncertain, ever-shifting, and in flux and in motion as one eventually discovers composes poetry and the world at large—reality. I look at the history of mathematics not as a history of discoveries, but as a history of unravelings. In order for math to “move forward” it often had to deny or obliterate its previous assumptions. Take Euclidean geometry for example. For quite a long time Euclid's axioms basically maintained the status of truth. By the medieval period in Europe these axioms became associated with divine truth, so mathematicians had to

deny certain facts in order to maintain them, because denying them would amount to denying God. Our identity can work the same way.

Eventually, and very reductively put, Euclid's axioms, especially the parallel postulate, were found to be untenable for the future of mathematics, and so had to be denied. *They had become untrue.* This gave birth to non-Euclidean geometry and calculus. These events are often understood as discoveries, but they can be equally understood as the dismantling of ideology, merely a productive unraveling of something that appeared solid. Indeed, in order for mathematics to progress it had to deny its previous self-conception, its previous identity. The identity of a number, eventually, is not so different from the identity of a self.

But how does identity function if everything changes? We might consider identity as at least a two-fold problem, though its depths are never fully fathomed. Conventionally understood, identity seems to be a mechanism that fixes meaning in place, but identity does not do this. It too like meaning is in flux. For the experiencing subject, the human for example, the flowing of identity is not always pleasant or obvious, nor is it necessarily noticed at all. We do notice it when our conception of identity is challenged.

Certain powerful experiences irrevocably alter our identity. In the case of *The River Twice*, at least two events

cause its subject, unified in its container but separate in its four sections, to experience identity's mutability. Chronic illness in the form of a pilonidal cyst, and the death of a father. The rupture of the subject's cyst creates a rupture of identity, and the style, content, and form of the book are shaped by these experiences of life, and these experiences of identity. This brings me to the title.

Heraclitus's immortal phrase in fragments, from which *The River Twice* takes its name, suspends the notion of identity as it is bound up with substance and form:

*Everything changes and nothing remains still ...
and ... you cannot step twice into the same stream.*

It is an imperative. One "cannot" step in the same stream twice. However, the "cannot" is immediately negated by the weight of the object's definition, its identity (word): stream. So in a semantic sense the river you cannot step in twice *exists*. Another of Heraclitus's fragments works somewhat differently:

*We both step and do not step in the same rivers.
We are and are not.*

This fragment works the same way that the second fragment repeats and elaborates on the first. We cannot and we can. We do and we do not. The river is and it is not. Because neither is the river the same, nor is the individual stepping into it.

The book of changes, the *I Ching*, predates Heraclitus's formulation by thousands of years but their thinking is obviously related and somewhat inscrutable.

There is also the problem of language's tyranny, that important technology of identity formulation. Sense, as in "making sense," itself presumes a coalesced identity that *The River Twice* modulates within. In other words, identity is never fixed, but it also never breaks, though it can appear to be either fixed or broken, like language—modular. I've tried not to underestimate the power of language, its ability to give voice, but I've equally tried to resist language's disposition to define false absolutes.

Amidst this is the fabric that identity is composed from, the actual simultaneity of all things, time included. Identity, eventually, seems to me to be the result of sensation's experience of varying intensities.

Littered throughout the text, like bits of paper blown in from other lands and other times, are oblique quotes and allusions. "Fever, 104," for example, alludes to Sylvia Plath's poem "Fever, 103." We are kin in the intensities of our illness and our depression. Or Vladamir Nabokov's quote, "I confess, I don't believe in time," appearing and uttered in Spanish by a nameless orator. In this sense, the text embeds itself in the fabric of literary history and tradition, which in its most particular form is anglophone literary history, bleeding occasionally into other languages, but in its most expanded sense

is the history of literature or culture in general, as a human activity. The ruptured, breaking, slipping “I,” the identity contained and exceeding each of *The River Twice’s* sections, longs for an identity not for the sake of the self, but in hopes of being able to contribute to the world. Every word, of course, can be seen in a similar light, denying absolute authorial claims by introducing other voices. Other “I”s.

With love,
Brent Cox

*All that matters is feeding the lake.
I don't matter. The lake matters.
You must keep feeding the lake.*

Jean Rhys

Acknowledgments

I would like to extend an enormous extraordinary thanks to my advisor and friend Amaranth Borsuk, whose diligent readings, insightful conversations, and incredible example have been beyond beyond valuable, beyond distant skies, way up there with coffee. Her encouragement and commitment to not only my work, but to the entire enterprise of poetry, art, and education is a stunning inspiration. Thank you. I would also like to thank my second reader Ted Hiebert for his comments and insight. Thank you to Aeron Bergman and Alejandra Salinas for allowing portions of this manuscript to be read at their art gallery, INCA. I must thank Amanda Hurtado for her genius, Corbin Bugni for his passion, and Beth Secor for her care. My brothers Ian and Nick who are part of me, thank you. Thanks Mom. And Dad, wherever you disappeared to. I am always in bad debt to co-founder and owner of MonoD Press, Jeffrey Sobieraj, who knows that, well, whatever it is he knows. To Peter Fuller where the Bada lives. And to Zak Byrd, to whom this manuscript is dedicated.

