

sympoieticreadings --SKALANES--*

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*Sympoieticreadings are slow reading exercises

Sympoiesis is a simple word; it means 'making with'. Nothing makes itself; nothing is really self-organizing. Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company.

– Donna Haraway

From: Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, Shunryu Suzuki

BEGINNER'S MIND "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."

In Japan we have the phrase *shoshin*, which means "beginner's mind." The goal of practice is always to keep our beginner's mind. Suppose you recite the *Prajna Paramita Sutra* only once. It might be a very good recitation. But what would happen to you if you recited it twice, three times, four times, or more? You might easily lose your original attitude towards it. The same thing will happen in your other Zen practices. For a while you will keep your beginner's mind, but if you continue to practice one, two, three years or more, although you may improve some, you are liable to lose the limitless meaning of original mind.

For Zen students the most important thing is not to be dualistic. Our "original mind" includes everything within itself. It is always rich and sufficient within itself. You should not lose your self-sufficient state of mind. This does not mean a closed mind, but actually an empty mind and a ready mind. If your mind is empty, it is always ready for anything; it is open to everything. In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities; in the expert's mind there are few. If you discriminate too much, you limit yourself. If you are too demanding or too greedy, your mind is not rich and self-sufficient.

In the beginner's mind there is no thought, "I have attained something." All self-centered thoughts limit our vast mind. When we have no thought of achievement, no thought of self, we are true beginners. Then we can really learn something. The beginner's mind is the mind of compassion. When our mind is compassionate, it is boundless. Dogen-zenji, the founder of our school, always emphasized how important it is to resume our

boundless original mind. Then we are always true to ourselves, in sympathy with all beings, and can actually practice.

So the most difficult thing is always to keep your beginner's mind. There is no need to have a deep understanding of Zen. Even though you read much Zen literature, you must read each sentence with a fresh mind. You should not say, "I know what Zen is," or "I have attained enlightenment." This is also the real secret of the arts: always be a beginner. Be very very careful about this point. If you start to practice zazen, you will begin to appreciate your beginner's mind. It is the secret of Zen practice.

p. 46 Silence lectures

ANYTHING LIKE CLASSIFYING.

ALL YOU CAN DO IS SUDDENLY LISTEN

IN THE SAME WAY THAT WHEN YOU CATCH COLD ALL

YOU CAN DO IS SUDDENLY SNEEZE.

UNFORTUNATELY

EUROPEAN THINKING HAS BROUGHT IT ABOUT THAT ACTUAL THINGS THAT
HAPPEN SUCH AS SUDDENLY LISTENING OR SUDDENLY SNEEZING ARE NOT
CONSIDERED PROFOUND.

IN THE COURSE OF A

LECTURE LAST WINTER AT COLUMBIA, SUZUKI SAID THAT THERE WAS A
DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ORIENTAL THINKING AND EUROPEAN THINKING,
THAT IN EUROPEAN THINKING THINGS ARE SEEN AS CAUSING ONE
ANOTHER AND HAVING EFFECTS, WHEREAS IN ORIENTAL THINKING

THIS SEEING OF CAUSE AND EFFECT IS NOT EMPHASIZED

BUT INSTEAD ONE MAKES AN IDENTIFICATION WITH WHAT IS HERE AND
NOW.

HE THEN SPOKE OF TWO QUALITIES:

UNIMPEDEDNESS

AND INTERPENETRATION.

NOW THIS

UNIMPEDEDNESS IS SEEING THAT IN ALL OF SPACE EACH THING AND
EACH HUMAN BEING IS AT THE CENTER AND FURTHERMORE THAT EACH
ONE BEING AT THE CENTER

IS THE MOST HONORED

ONE OF ALL. INTERPENETRATION MEANS THAT EACH ONE OF THESE

MOST HONORED ONES OF ALL IS MOVING OUT IN ALL DIRECTIONS

PENETRATING AND BEING PENETRATED BY EVERY OTHER ONE NO MATTER

WHAT THE TIME OR WHAT THE SPACE.

SO THAT WHEN ONE SAYS

THAT THERE IS NO CAUSE AND EFFECT, WHAT IS MEANT IS THAT THERE
ARE AN INCALCULABLE INFINITY OF CAUSES AND EFFECTS, THAT IN FACT
EACH AND EVERY THING IN ALL OF TIME AND SPACE IS RELATED TO
EACH AND EVERY OTHER THING IN ALL OF TIME AND SPACE.

THIS

BRING SO THERE IS NO NEED TO CAUTIOUSLY PROCEED IN DUALISTIC

TERMS OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE OR THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE UGLY

OR GOOD AND EVIL BUT RATHER SIMPLY TO WALK ON "NOT WONDERING,"

TO QUOTE MEISTER ECKHART, "AM I RIGHT OR DOING SOMETHING WRONG."

Counterpoint

There are more things between heaven and earth (the realm of birds) than our philosophy can easily explain.

Étienne Souriau¹

It all began with a blackbird. My bedroom window had remained open for the first time for many months, a symbol of victory over the winter. The blackbird's song woke me at dawn. He was singing with all his heart, with all his strength, with all his blackbird talent. From a little further away, probably from a nearby chimney, another bird replied. I could not get back to sleep. This blackbird was singing, as the philosopher Étienne Souriau would say, with all the *enthusiasm* of his body, as animals do when they are utterly absorbed in their play and in the simulation of whatever it is they are acting out.² Yet it was not this enthusiasm that kept me awake, nor what an ill-humoured biologist might have called a noisy demonstration of evolutionary success. It was the sustained determination of this blackbird to vary each series of notes. From the second or third call, I was spellbound by what was transforming into an audiophonic novel, each episode of which I greeted with an unspoken 'and what next?' Each sequence differed from the preceding one; each was reinvented as a new and original counterpoint.

From that day on, my window remained open every night. With each successive sleepless episode like the one I experienced that first

morning, I rediscovered the same surprise, the same sense of anticipation which prevented me from going back to sleep (or even wishing to do so). The bird sang. But never before had song seemed so close to speech. These were phrases. Recognizable as such. They caught my ear in exactly the same way as words themselves would do. And yet, in that sustained effort imposed by the urge to avoid repetition, never had song seemed further removed from language. This was speech, but taut with beauty and where every single word mattered. The silence held its breath and I felt it tremble in tune with the song. I had the most clear and intense feeling that, at that moment, the fate of the entire world, or perhaps the existence of beauty itself, rested on the shoulders of this blackbird.

Étienne Souriau referred to the enthusiasm of the body. The composer Bernard Fort told me that certain ornithologists use the word 'exaltation' with reference to skylarks.³ For this blackbird, the word 'importance' imposed itself above all else. Something mattered, more than anything else, and nothing else mattered except the act of singing. And whatever it was that mattered was invented in a blackbird's song, suffusing it completely, transporting it, carrying it onwards, to others, to the other blackbird nearby, to my body straining to hear it, to the furthest limits to which its strength could convey it. Perhaps that feeling I had of a total silence, clearly impossible given the urban environment beyond my window, was evidence that this sense of importance had seized me so powerfully that everything outside that song had ceased to exist. The song had brought me silence. The sense of importance had imposed itself on me.

Perhaps also the song affected me so powerfully because I had recently read *The Companion Species Manifesto* by Donna Haraway.⁴ In this extremely beautiful book, the philosopher describes the relationship that she has forged with her dog, Cayenne. She explains how

this relationship has had a profound effect on the way she relates to other beings, or, more precisely, to 'relations of significant otherness', how it has taught her to become more aware of the world around her, more closely attuned to it, more curious, and how she hopes that the experiences she has shared with Cayenne will stimulate an appetite for new forms of commitment with other beings who will one day matter in the same way. What Haraway's book does, and I was struck by this in the context of my own experience, is to stimulate, encourage and bring into existence, to render attractive, other modes of attention.⁵ And to focus attention on these forms of attentiveness. It is a matter not of becoming more sensitive (a rather too convenient hotchpotch of a notion which could just as easily lead to allergies) but of learning *how* to pay attention and becoming capable of doing so. *Paying attention* here with an added sense of being attuned, of 'giving your attention' to other beings and at the same time acknowledging the way other beings are themselves attentive. It is another way of acknowledging importance.

The ethnologist Daniel Fabre would often describe his profession as one which focused attention on whatever prevented people from sleeping. The anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro came up with a very similar definition of anthropology, describing it as the study of variations of importance. He writes moreover that, 'if there is something that *de jure* belongs to anthropology, it is not the task of explaining the world of the other but that of multiplying our world.'⁶ I believe that many of the ethologists who observe and study animals, following in the footsteps of the naturalists who preceded them and who took this task so much to heart, invite us to follow a similar path: that of becoming aware of, of multiplying '*modes of existence*' – in other words, 'ways of experiencing, of feeling, of making sense, and of granting importance to things'.⁷ When the ethologist Marc Bekoff says that each animal is a way of knowing the world, he is saying the

same thing. Scientists cannot, of course, dispense with explanations altogether, but explaining can take many very diverse forms. It can, for example, be a way of reconfiguring complicated stories as the vagaries of life which stubbornly insists on trying out every possible variation, or it can mean trying to seek answers for puzzling problems, the solutions to which have already been invented by this or that animal, but it can also reflect a determination to find a general all-purpose theory to which everything would conform. Put another way, there are explanations which end up multiplying worlds and celebrating the emergence of an infinite number of modes of existence and others which seek to impose order, bringing them back to a few basic principles.

The blackbird had begun to sing. Something mattered to him, and at that moment nothing else existed except the overriding obligation to allow something to be heard. Was he hailing the end of the winter? Was he singing about the sheer joy of existing, the sense of feeling himself alive once again? Was he offering up praise to the cosmos? Scientists would probably steer clear of such language. But they could nevertheless assert that all the cosmic forces of an emerging spring had converged to provide the blackbird with the preliminary conditions for his metamorphosis.⁸ For this is indeed a metamorphosis. This blackbird, who had probably lived through a relatively peaceful winter, albeit a challenging one, punctuated from time to time by a few unconvincing moments of indignation towards his fellow creatures, intent on maintaining a low profile and living a quiet life, is now singing his heart out, perched on the highest and most visible spot he could find. And everything that the blackbird had experienced and felt over the last few months, everything which had, until that moment, given meaning to things and to other creatures, now becomes part of a new importance, one which is urgent and insistent and which will totally modify his manner of being. He has become territorial.

When I open my wallet
to show my papers
pay money
or check the time of a train
I look at your face.

The flower's pollen
is older than the mountains
Aravis is young
as mountains go.

The flower's ovules
will be seeding still
when Aravis then aged
is no more than a hill.

The flower in the heart's
wallet, the force
of what lives us
outliving the mountain.

And our faces, my heart, brief as photos.

Preface

Thirty years in the life of a mountain is nothing—the flicker of an eyelid. Yet in the thirty years since this book was written many things have happened to the Cairngorms, some of them spectacular things, things that have won them a place in the Press and on the television screens:

Aviemore erupts and goes on erupting.

Bulldozers *birze* their way into the hill.

Roads are made, and re-made, where there were never roads before.

Skiers, swift, elate, controlled, miracles of grace and precision, swoop and soar—or flounder—but all with exhilaration.

Chair-lifts swing up and swing down (and a small boy falls from one and is killed).

A restaurant hums on the heights and between it and the summit Cairn Gorm grows scruffy, the very heather tatty from the scrape of boots (too many boots, too much commotion, but then how much uplift for how many hearts). New shelters are sited for climbers. A cottage at Muir of Inverey is enlarged and fitted up as a place of resort for Cairngorm Club members, the members themselves laying the flooring and erecting the bunks.

Glenmore houses and trains those ready to learn. Skills are taught and tested. Young soldiers learn the techniques of Adventure. Orienteers spread over the land (but the Lairig Ghru, so far, is not to be tamed as part of a national 'way').

Reindeer are no longer experimental but settlers.

The Nature Conservancy provides safe covert for bird and beast and plant (but discourages vagabonds, of whom I have been shamelessly one—a peerer into

corners). Ecologists investigate growth patterns and problems of erosion, and re-seed denuded slopes.

The Mountain Rescue service does its magnificent work, injured are plucked from ledges by helicopter, the located, the exhausted carried to safety.

And some are not rescued. A man and a girl are found, months too late, far out of their path, the girl on abraded hands and knees as she clawed her way through drift. I see her living face still (she was one of my students), a sane, eager, happy face. She should have lived to be old. Seventy men, with dogs and a helicopter, go out after a lone skier who has failed to return, and who is found dead. And a group of schoolchildren, belated, fail to find the hut where they should have spent the night. They shelter against a wall of snow, but in the morning, in spite of the heroic efforts of their instructress, only she and one boy are alive.

All these are matters that involve man. But behind them is the mountain itself, its substance, its strength, its structure, its weathers. It is fundamental to all that man does to it or on it. If it were not there he would not have done these things. So thirty years may alter the things he does but to know it in itself is still basic to his craft. And that is what, thirty years ago, I was striving to do in this manuscript. It was written during the latter years of the Second War and those just after. In that disturbed and uncertain world it was my secret place of ease. The only person who ever read the manuscript then was Neil Gunn, and that he should like it was not strange, because our minds met in just such experiences as I was striving to describe. He made a couple of suggestions as to publication, but added that in the circumstances of the time a publisher would be hard to find. I wrote one letter at his instigation and received a courteous and negative reply and the manuscript went into a drawer and has lain there ever since. Now, an old woman, I begin tidying out my possessions and reading it again I realise that the tale of my traffic with a mountain is as valid today as it was then. That it was a traffic of love is sufficiently clear; but love pursued with fervour is one of the roads to knowledge.

Introduction

Nan Shepherd loved the Cairngorms and her prose meditation on that love, *The Living Mountain*, takes us to the wellsprings of her imagination and her sense of what it is to be a living being at large in the world, precariously balanced between the mysterious realms of organic and inorganic matter.

Written during the end and the aftermath of the Second World War, the manuscript of *The Living Mountain* was kept for nearly thirty years before it was finally published by Aberdeen University Press in 1977. Shepherd called it 'a traffic of love', adding cannily, 'but love pursued with fervour is one of the roads to knowledge'. That passion for knowledge, and the passion *of* knowledge and *in* knowledge, is entirely characteristic of her nature. It was an insight which led her to produce one of the most astute essays on Hugh MacDiarmid's later poetry at a time (1938) when few other critics understood or valued his quest for 'The Impossible Song'. And the same mixture of spirituality and scientific precision can be found in her correspondence with Neil Gunn when she was receiving treatment for a glandular imbalance which led her to suspect that her former poise, and her sense of self, might be no more than 'the result of a generous supply of thyroid—an accident of matter'. (Letter to Neil Gunn, 24 February, 1948.)

Nan Shepherd's sense of the precariousness of whatever it is that 'separates us from non-being' can be felt in all her novel, especially when she considers the further reaches of our inner lives, and those remote and intuitive insights that come like a flash in the dark.—One thinks of Bawbie Paterson in *The Weatherhouse*, suddenly perceived as a 'dancing star'; or young Martha's shiver—'until she felt

as enormous as the sky'—at her first sight of the Auroral northern lights in *The Quarry Wood*. Shepherd's fiction is particularly rich in such descriptions, and they are almost always linked to effects of landscape or weather. And this is appropriate enough, one might say, for the changeable North East climate. But these descriptions point beyond the merely material, to a haunting sense of immanence and unity which Nan Shepherd sought and found in the hills all her life.

Writing to Neil Gunn about his books *Wild Geese Overhead* (1939) and *Second Sight* (1940), she explained what it is she feels at such moments, and how much she admires Gunn's own translation of them into the written word:

To apprehend things—walking on a hill, seeing the light change, the mist, the dark, being aware, using the whole of one's body to instruct the spirit—yes that is the secret life one has and knows that others have. But to be able to share it, in and through words—that is what frightens me... It dissolves one's being. I am no longer myself but a part of life beyond myself when I read pages that are so much an expression of myself. You can take processes of being—no, that's too formal a word—*states* is too static, this is something that moves—*movements* I suppose is best—you can take movements of being and translate them out of themselves into words; that seems to me a gift of a very high and rare order.

(Letter to Neil Gunn, May 1940)

This passage shows Shepherd's clear affinity with the more Zen-like moments of Neil Gunn's muse, a connection which can be seen ever more clearly in the opening page of her meditation on 'Water' in *The Living Mountain*: 'Like all profound mysteries, it is so simple that it frightens me. It wells from the rock, and flows away. For unnumbered years it has welled from the rock, and flowed away. It does nothing, absolutely nothing, but be itself.'

Among the Shepherd manuscripts in the National Library of Scotland is the following poem, called 'Achiltibuie', drafted and dated 4 October, 1950. Here again we sense her characteristic experience of how the organic and the

inorganic can meet and mingle at moments of heightened mental and physical exertion:

Here on the edge of Europe I stand on the edge of being.
 Floating on light, isle after isle takes wing.
 Burning blue are the peaks, rock that is older than
 thought,
 And the sea burns blue—or is it the air between?—
 They merge, they take one another upon them,
 I have fallen through time and found the enchanted
 world,
 Where all is beginning. The obstinate rocks
 Are a fire of blue, a pulse of power, a beat
 In energy, the sea dissolves,
 And I too melt, am timeless, a pulse of light.

Shepherd's published poetry (*In the Cairngorms*, 1934) is equally striking in its imagery of air, light, water and stone; and when she writes again about the Cairngorms in *The Living Mountain*, she asks herself where this sense of dissolving comes from. Is it part of the landscape, or part of herself?

... this nonsense of physiology does not really explain it at all. What! am I such a slave that unless my flesh feels buoyant I cannot be free? No, there is more in the lust for a mountain top than a perfect physiological adjustment. What more there is lies within the mountain. Something moves between me and it. Place and a mind may interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered. I cannot tell what this movement is except by recounting it.

(*'The Plateau'*)

And recount it she did, in her poetry and at key points in each of her novels. But the fullest expression, and the most complete exploration and indeed *analysis* of what it was she felt, was reserved for *The Living Mountain*.

The prose style of this little book is at once austere intellectual and passionately felt—'love pursued with fervour' is indeed 'one of the roads to knowledge', and it is 'knowledge', rather than 'feeling', that seems to be Nan Shepherd's route to the sublime. In this respect her writing

can be traced back to the Wordsworth of *The Prelude*; and here she shares another link with Neil Gunn, whose autobiography *The Atom of Delight* is equally deeply suffused with the Wordsworthian spirit. And there's a connection, too, with the later MacDiarmid and the Carlylean austerity of *his* pursuit of stones and spirit on the high places and the raised beaches of the world.

In the penultimate passage of her book—called 'The Senses'—Shepherd comes to the conclusion that the living mountain *lives* because of our conscious engagement with it. Without that outgoing address, the world, and ourselves in it, would be truly dead:

It is, as with all creation, matter impregnated with mind ... It is something snatched from non-being, that shadow which creeps in on us continuously and can be held off by continuous creative act. So, simply to look on anything, such as a mountain, with the love that penetrates to its essence, is to widen the domain of being in the vastness of non-being. Man has no other reason for his existence.

'Man has no other reason for his existence'—there speaks the true spirit of MacDiarmid and Carlyle! But 'to look on anything ... with the love that penetrates to its essence'—this is what lies at the heart of Nan Shepherd's humane vision as a novelist. Indeed, the austerity of her final position should not blind us to the wealth of everyday detail and delight to be found in *The Living Mountain*, as a record of the birds, the plants, the stories and the people of the hills, and also as a personal diary of the many years she tramped the great rolling mountain tops of Scotland's central massif.

Nan Shepherd was no sentimentalist, and as a dedicated member of the Deeside Field Club, her love of the country was entirely practical. Former students and colleagues fondly remember being lectured on the 'sinfulness of dropping sweetie papers about the countryside' and how, even in the remotest mountain bothies, Nan instructed them on how best to air the sleeping bags and pack the bedding. Yet, these acts too, as the Zen pupil will tell you,

are holy; and the closing words of *The Living Mountain* are entirely in keeping with this sense of discipline and humble privilege—qualities which marked Nan Shepherd's whole life, in her dealings with her family, in her relationship with her students, and in her insight into the blighted and also the freely flowering lives of so many women in her novels.

I believe that I now understand in some small measure why the Buddhist goes on pilgrimage to a mountain. The journey is itself part of the technique by which the god is sought. It is a journey into Being; for as I penetrate more deeply into the mountain's life, I penetrate also into my own. For an hour I am beyond desire. It is not ecstasy, that leap out of the self that makes man like a god. I am not out of myself, but in myself. I am. To know Being, this is the final grace accorded from the mountains.

Roderick Watson

The Plateau

Summer on the high plateau can be delectable as honey; it can also be a roaring scourge. To those who love the place, both are good, since both are part of its essential nature. And it is to know its essential nature that I am seeking here. To know, that is, with the knowledge that is a process of living. This is not done easily nor in an hour. It is a tale too slow for the impatience of our age, not of immediate enough import for its desperate problems. Yet it has its own rare value. It is, for one thing, a corrective of glib assessment: one never quite knows the mountain, nor oneself in relation to it. However often I walk on them, these hills hold astonishment for me. There is no getting accustomed to them.

The Cairngorm Mountains are a mass of granite thrust up through the schists and gneiss that form the lower surrounding hills, planed down by the ice cap, and split, shattered and scooped by frost, glaciers and the strength of running water. Their physiognomy is in the geography books—so many square miles of area, so many lochs, so many summits of over 4000 feet—but this is a pallid simulacrum of their reality, which, like every reality that matters ultimately to human beings, is a reality of the mind.

The plateau is the true summit of these mountains; they must be seen as a single mountain, and the individual tops, Ben MacDhui, Braeriach and the rest, though sundered from one another by fissures and deep descents, are no more than eddies on the plateau surface. One does not look upward to spectacular peaks but downward from the peaks to spectacular chasms. The plateau itself is not spectacular. It is bare and very stony, and since there is nothing higher than itself (except for the tip of Ben Nevis) nearer than

Norway, it is savaged by the wind. Snow covers it for half the year and sometimes, for as long as a month at a time, it is in cloud. Its growth is moss and lichen and sedge, and in June the clumps of *Silene*—moss campion—flower in brilliant pink. Dotterel and ptarmigan nest upon it, and springs ooze from its rock. By continental measurement its height is nothing much—around 4000 feet—but for an island it is well enough, and if the winds have unhindered range, so has the eye. It is island weather too, with no continent to steady it, and the place has as many aspects as there are gradations in the light.

Light in Scotland has a quality I have not met elsewhere. It is luminous without being fierce, penetrating to immense distances with an effortless intensity. So on a clear day one looks without any sense of strain from Morven in Caithness to the Lammermuirs, and out past Ben Nevis to Morar. At midsummer, I have had to be persuaded I was not seeing further even than that. I could have sworn I saw a shape, distinct and blue, very clear and small, further off than any hill the chart recorded. The chart was against me, my companions were against me, I never saw it again. On a day like that, height goes to one's head. Perhaps it was the lost Atlantis focused for a moment out of time.

The streams that fall over the edges of the plateau are clear—Avon indeed has become a by-word for clarity: gazing into its depths, one loses all sense of time, like the monk in the old story who listened to the blackbird.

*Water of A'n, ye rin sae clear,
'Twad beguile a man of a hundred year.*

Its waters are white, of a clearness so absolute that there is no image for them. Naked birches in April, lighted after heavy rain by the sun, might suggest their brilliance. Yet this is too sensational. The whiteness of these waters is simple. They are elemental transparency. Like roundness, or silence, their quality is natural, but is found so seldom in its absolute state that when we do so find it we are astonished.

The young Dee, as it flows out of the Garbh Choire

and joins the water from the Lairig Pools, has the same astounding transparency. Water so clear cannot be imagined, but must be seen. One must go back, and back again, to look at it, for in the interval memory refuses to recreate its brightness. This is one of the reasons why the high plateau where these streams begin, the streams themselves, their cataracts and rocky beds, the corries, the whole wild enchantment, like a work of art is perpetually new when one returns to it. The mind cannot carry away all that it has to give, nor does it always believe possible what it has carried away.

So back one climbs, to the sources. Here the life of the rivers begins—Dee and Avon, the Derry, the Beinnie and the Allt Druie. In these pure and terrible streams the rain, cloud and snow of the high Cairngorms are drained away. They rise from the granite, sun themselves a little on the unsheltered plateau and drop through air to their valleys. Or they cut their way out under wreaths of snow, escaping in a tumult. Or hang in tangles of ice on the rock faces. One cannot know the rivers till one has seen them at their sources; but this journey to the sources is not to be undertaken lightly. One walks among elementals, and elementals are not governable. There are awakened also in oneself by the contact elementals that are as unpredictable as wind or snow.

This may suggest that to reach the high plateau of the Cairngorms is difficult. But no, no such thing. Given clear air, and the unending daylight of a Northern summer, there is not one of the summits but can be reached by a moderately strong walker without distress. A strong walker will take a couple of summits. Circus walkers will plant flags on all six summits in a matter of fourteen hours. This may be fun, but is sterile. To pit oneself against the mountain is necessary for every climber: to pit oneself merely against other players, and make a race of it, is to reduce to the level of a game what is essentially an experience. Yet what a race-course for these boys to choose! To know the hills, and their own bodies, well enough to dare the exploit is their real achievement.

Mastering new routes up the rock itself is another matter.

Granite, of which the Cairngorms are built, weathers too smoothly and squarely to make the best conditions for rock-climbing. Yet there is such challenge in the grandeur of the corries that those who climb cannot leave them untasted. The Guide Book and the *Cairngorm Club Journal* give the attested climbs, with their dates, from the end of last century onwards. Yet I wonder if young blood didn't attempt it sooner. There is a record of a shepherd, a century and a half ago, found frozen along with his sheep dog, on a ledge of one of the Braeriach cliffs. He, to be sure, wandered there, in a blizzard, but the men who brought down the body must have done a pretty job of work; and I can believe there were young hot-heads among that hardy breed to whom the scaling of a precipice was nothing new. Dr George Skene Keith, in his *General View of Aberdeenshire*, records having scrambled up the bed of the Dee cataract in 1810, and Professor McGillivray, in his *Natural History of Braemar*, tells how as a student, in 1819, he walked from Aberdeen University to his western home, straight through the Cairngorm group; and lying down to sleep, just as he was, at the foot of the Braeriach precipices, continued next morning on his way straight up out of the corrie in which he had slept. On a later visit, searching out the flora of these mountains, he seems to have run up and down the crags with something of the deer's lightness. There are, however, ways up and down some of these corries that may be scrambled by any fleet-footed and level-headed climber, and it is doubtless these that the earlier adventurers had used. The fascination of the later work lies in finding ways impossible without the rope; and there are still many faces among these precipices that have not been attempted. One of my young friends lately pioneered a route out of the Garbh Choire of Braeriach, over rock not hitherto climbed. To him, one of the keenest young hillmen I know (he has been described, and recognised at a railway terminus, as 'a little black fellow, load the size of himself, with a far-away look in his eyes'), the mere setting up of a record is of very minor importance. What he values is a task that, demanding of him all he has and is, absorbs and so releases him entirely.

It is, of course, merely stupid to suppose that the

record-breakers do not love the hills. Those who do not love them don't go up, and those who do can never have enough of it. It is an appetite that grows in feeding. Like drink and passion, it intensifies life to the point of glory. In the Scots term, used for the man who is *abune himsel'* with drink, one is *raised*; *fey*; a little mad, in the eyes of the folk who do not climb.

Fey may be too strong a term for that joyous release of body that is engendered by climbing; yet to the sober looker-on a man may seem to walk securely over dangerous places with the gay abandon that is said to be the mark of those who are doomed to death. How much of this gay security is the result of perfectly trained and co-ordinated body and mind, only climbers themselves realise; nor is there any need to ascribe to the agency of a god either the gay security, or the death which may occasionally, but rarely, follow. The latter, if it does occur, is likely to be the result of carelessness—of failing in one's exaltation to observe a coating of ice on the stone, of trusting to one's amazing luck rather than to one's compass, perhaps merely, in the glow of complete bodily well-being, of over-estimating one's powers of endurance.

But there is a phenomenon associated with this *feyness* of which I must confess a knowledge. Often, in my bed at home, I have remembered the places I have run lightly over with no sense of fear, and have gone cold to think of them. It seems to me then that I could never go back; my fear unmans me, horror is in my mouth. Yet when I go back, the same leap of the spirit carries me up. God or no god, I am *fey* again.

The *feyness* itself seems to me to have a physiological origin. Those who undergo it have the particular bodily make-up that functions at its most free and most live upon heights (although this, it is obvious, refers only to heights manageable to man and not at all to those for which a slow and painful acclimatisation is needful). As they ascend, the air grows rarer and more stimulating, the body feels lighter and they climb with less effort, till Dante's law of ascent on the Mount of Purgation seems to become a physical truth: 'This mountain is such, that ever at the beginning

below 'tis toilsome, and the more a man ascends the less it wearies.'

At first I had thought that this lightness of body was a universal reaction to rarer air. It surprised me to discover that some people suffered malaise at altitudes that released me, but were happy in low valleys where I felt extinguished. Then I began to see that our devotions have more to do with our physiological peculiarities than we admit. I am a mountain lover because my body is at its best in the rarer air of the heights and communicates its elation to the mind. The obverse of this would seem to be exemplified in the extreme of fatigue I suffered while walking some two miles underground in the Ardennes caverns. This was plainly no case of a weary mind communicating its fatigue to the body, since I was enthralled by the strangeness and beauty of these underground cavities. Add to this eyes, the normal focus of which is for distance, and my delight in the expanse of space opened up from the mountain tops becomes also a perfect physiological adjustment. The short-sighted cannot love mountains as the long-sighted do. The sustained rhythm of movement in a long climb has also its part in inducing the sense of physical well-being, and this cannot be captured by any mechanical mode of ascent.

This bodily lightness, then, in the rarefied air, combines with the liberation of space to give mountain *feyness* to those who are susceptible to such a malady. For it is a malady, subverting the will and superseding the judgment: but a malady of which the afflicted will never ask to be cured. For this nonsense of physiology does not really explain it at all. What! am I such a slave that unless my flesh feels buoyant I cannot be free? No, there is more in the lust for a mountain top than a perfect physiological adjustment. What more there is lies within the mountain. Something moves between me and it. Place and a mind may interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered. I cannot tell what this movement is except by recounting it.

The Recesses

At first, mad to recover the tang of height, I made always for the summits, and would not take time to explore the recesses. But late one September I went on Braeriach with a man who knew the hill better than I did then, and he took me aside into Coire an Lochain. One could not have asked a fitter day for the first vision of this rare loch. The equinoctial storms had been severe; snow, that hardly ever fails to powder the plateau about the third week of September, had fallen close and thick, but now the storms had passed, the air was keen and buoyant, with a brilliancy as of ice, the waters of the loch were frost-cold to the fingers. And how still, how incredibly withdrawn and tranquil. Climb as often as you will, Loch Coire an Lochain remains incredible. It cannot be seen until one stands almost on its lip, but only height hides it. Unlike Avon and Etchachan, it is not shut into the mountain but lies on an outer flank, its hollow ranged daily by all the eyes that look at the Cairngorms from the Spey. Yet, without knowing, one would not guess its presence and certainly not its size. Two cataracts, the one that feeds it, falling from the brim of the plateau over rock, and the one that drains it, show as white threads on the mountain. Having scrambled up the bed of the latter (not, as I knew later, the simple way, but my companion was a rabid naturalist who had business with every leaf, stalk and root in the rocky bed), one expects to be near the corrie, but no, it is still a long way off. And on one toils, into the hill. Black scatter of rock, pieces large as a house, pieces edged like a grater. A tough bit of going. And there at last is the loch, held tight back against the precipice. Yet as I turned, that September day, and looked back through the clear air, I could see straight out to ranges of distant

hills. And that astonished me. To be so open and yet so secret! Its anonymity—Loch of the Corrie of the Loch, that is all—seems to guard this surprising secrecy. Other lochs, Avon, Morlich and the rest, have their distinctive names. One expects of them an idiosyncrasy. But Loch of the Corrie of the Loch, what could there be there? A tarn like any other. And then to find this distillation of loveliness!

I put my fingers in the water and found it cold. I listened to the waterfall until I no longer heard it. I let my eyes travel from shore to shore very slowly and was amazed at the width of the water. How could I have foreseen so large a loch, 3000-odd feet up, slipped away into this corrie which was only one of three upon one face of a mountain that was itself only a broken bit of the plateau? And a second time I let my eyes travel over the surface, slowly, from shore to shore, beginning at my feet and ending against the precipice. There is no way like that for savouring the extent of a water surface.

This changing of focus in the eye, moving the eye itself when looking at things that do not move, deepens one's sense of outer reality. Then static things may be caught in the very act of becoming. By so simple a matter, too, as altering the position of one's head, a different kind of world may be made to appear. Lay the head down, or better still, face away from what you look at, and bend with straddled legs till you see your world upside down. How new it has become! From the close-by sprigs of heather to the most distant fold of the land, each detail stands erect in its own validity. In no other way have I seen of my own unaided sight that the earth is round. As I watch, it arches its back, and each layer of landscape bristles—though *bristles* is a word of too much commotion for it. Details are no longer part of a grouping in a picture of which I am the focal point, the focal point is everywhere. Nothing has reference to me, the looker. This is how the earth must see itself.

So I looked slowly across the Coire Loch, and began to understand that haste can do nothing with these hills. I knew when I had looked for a long time that I had hardly begun to see. So with Loch Avon. My first encounter was

sharp and astringent, and has crystallised for ever for me some innermost inaccessibility. I had climbed all six of the major summits, some of them twice over, before clambering down into the mountain trough that holds Loch Avon. This loch lies at an altitude of some 2300 feet, but its banks soar up for another fifteen hundred. Indeed farther, for Cairn Gorm and Ben MacDhui may be said to be its banks. From the lower end of this mile and a half gash in the rock, exit is easy but very long. One may go down by the Avon itself, through ten miles as lonely and unvisited as anything in the Cairngorms, to Inchrory; or by easy enough watersheds pass into Strathnethy or Glen Derry, or under the Barns of Bynack to the Caiplich Water. But higher up the loch there is no way out, save by scrambling up one or other of the burns that tumble from the heights: except that, above the Shelter Stone, a gap opens between the hills to Loch Etchachan, and here the scramble up is shorter.

The inner end of this gash has been howked straight from the granite. As one looks up from below, the agents would appear mere splashes of water, whose force might be turned aside by a pair of hands. Yet above the precipices we have found in one of these burns pools deep enough to bathe in. The water that pours over these grim bastions carries no sediment of any kind in its precipitate fall, which seems indeed to distil and aerate the water so that the loch far below is sparkling clear. This narrow loch has never, I believe, been sounded. I know its depth, though not in feet.

I first saw it on a cloudless day of early July. We had started at dawn, crossed Cairn Gorm about nine o'clock, and made our way by the Saddle to the lower end of the loch. Then we idled up the side, facing the gaunt corrie, and at last, when the noonday sun penetrated directly into the water, we stripped and bathed. The clear water was at our knees, then at our thighs. How clear it was only this walking into it could reveal. To look through it was to discover its own properties. What we saw under water had a sharper clarity than what we saw through air. We waded on into the brightness, and the width of the water increased, as it always does when one is on or in it, so that the loch no longer seemed narrow, but the far side was a long way off.

Then I looked down; and at my feet there opened a gulf of brightness so profound that the mind stopped. We were standing on the edge of a shelf that ran some yards into the loch before plunging down to the pit that is the true bottom. And through that inordinate clearness we saw to the depth of the pit. So limpid was it that every stone was clear.

I motioned to my companion, who was a step behind, and she came, and glanced as I had down the submerged precipice. Then we looked into each other's eyes, and again into the pit. I waded slowly back into shallower water. There was nothing that seemed worth saying. My spirit was as naked as my body. It was one of the most defenceless moments of my life.

I do not think it was the imminence of personal bodily danger that shook me. I had not then, and have not in retrospect, any sense of having just escaped a deadly peril. I might of course have overbalanced and been drowned; but I do not think I would have stepped down unawares. Eye and foot acquire in rough walking a co-ordination that makes one distinctly aware of where the next step is to fall, even while watching sky and land. This watching, it is true, is of a general nature only; for attentive observation the body must be still. But in a general way, in country that is rough, but not difficult, one sees where one is and where one is going at the same time. I proved this sharply to myself one hot June day in Glen Quoich, when bounding down a slope of long heather towards the stream. With hardly a slackening of pace, eye detected and foot avoided a coiled adder on which the next spring would have landed me; detected and avoided also his mate, at full length in the line of my side spring; and I pulled up a short way past, to consider with amused surprise the speed and sureness of my own feet. Conscious thought had had small part in directing them.

So, although they say of the River Avon that men have walked into it and been drowned, supposing it shallow because they could see its depth, I do not think I was in much danger just then of drowning, nor was fear the emotion with which I stared into the pool. That first glance down had shocked me to a heightened power of myself,

in which even fear became a rare exhilaration: not that it ceased to be fear, but fear itself, so impersonal, so keenly apprehended, enlarged rather than constricted the spirit.

The inaccessibility of this loch is part of its power. Silence belongs to it. If jeeps find it out, or a funicular railway disfigures it, part of its meaning will be gone. The good of the greatest number is not here relevant. It is necessary to be sometimes exclusive, not on behalf of rank or wealth, but of those human qualities that can apprehend loneliness.

The presence of another person does not detract from, but enhances, the silence, if the other is the right sort of hill companion. The perfect hill companion is the one whose identity is for the time being merged in that of the mountains, as you feel your own to be. Then such speech as arises is part of a common life and cannot be alien. To 'make conversation', however, is ruinous, to speak may be superfluous. I have it from a gaunt elderly man, a 'lang tangle o' a chiel', with high cheek bones and hollow cheeks, product of a hill farm though himself a civil servant, that when he goes on the hill with chatterers, he 'could see them to an ill place'. I have walked myself with brilliant young people whose talk, entertaining, witty and incessant, yet left me weary and dispirited, because the hill did not speak. This does not imply that the only good talk on a hill is about the hill. All sorts of themes may be lit up from within by contact with it, as they are by contact with another mind, and so discussion may be salted. Yet to listen is better than to speak.

The talking tribe, I find, want sensation from the mountain—not in Keats's sense. Beginners, not unnaturally, do the same—I did myself. They want the startling view, the horrid pinnacle—sips of beer and tea instead of milk. Yet often the mountain gives itself most completely when I have no destination, when I reach nowhere in particular, but have gone out merely to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him.

MR. PALOMAR ON THE BEACH

Reading a wave

The sea is barely wrinkled, and little waves strike the sandy shore. Mr. Palomar is standing on the shore, looking at a wave. Not that he is lost in contemplation of the waves. He is not lost, because he is quite aware of what he is doing: he wants to look at a wave and he is looking at it. He is not contemplating, because for contemplation you need the right temperament, the right mood, and the right combination of exterior circumstances; and though Mr. Palomar has nothing against contemplation in principle, none of these three conditions applies to him. Finally, it is not "the waves" that he means to look at, but just one individual wave: in his desire to avoid vague sensations, he establishes for his every action a limited and precise object.

Mr. Palomar sees a wave rise in the distance, grow, approach, change form and color, fold over itself, break, vanish, and flow again. At this point he could convince himself that he has concluded the operation he had set out to achieve, and he could go away. But isolating one wave is not easy, separating it from the wave immediately following, which seems to push it and at times overtakes it and sweeps it away; and it is no easier to

separate that one wave from the preceding wave, which seems to drag it toward the shore, unless it turns against the following wave, as if to arrest it. Then, if you consider the breadth of the wave, parallel to the shore, it is hard to decide where the advancing front extends regularly and where it is separated and segmented into independent waves, distinguished by their speed, shape, force, direction.

In other words, you cannot observe a wave without bearing in mind the complex features that concur in shaping it and the other, equally complex ones that the wave itself originates. These aspects vary constantly, so each wave is different from another wave, even if not immediately adjacent or successive; in other words, there are some forms and sequences that are repeated, though irregularly distributed in space and time. Since what Mr. Palomar means to do at this moment is simply *see* a wave—that is, to perceive all its simultaneous components without overlooking any of them—his gaze will dwell on the movement of the wave that strikes the shore until it can record aspects not previously perceived; as soon as he notices that the images are being repeated, he will know he has seen everything he wanted to see and he will be able to stop.

A nervous man who lives in a frenzied and congested world, Mr. Palomar tends to reduce his relations with the outside world; and, to defend himself against the general neurasthenia, he tries to keep his sensations under control insofar as possible.

The hump of the advancing wave rises more at one point than at any other, and it is here that it becomes hemmed in white. If this occurs at some distance from

the shore, there is time for the foam to fold over upon itself and vanish again, as if swallowed, and at the same moment invade the whole, but this time emerging again from below, like a white carpet rising from the bank to welcome the wave that is arriving. But just when you expect that wave to roll over the carpet, you realize it is no longer wave but only carpet, and this also rapidly disappears, to become a glinting of wet sand that quickly withdraws, as if driven back by the expansion of the dry, opaque sand that moves its jagged edge forward.

At the same time, the indentations in the brow of the wave must be considered, where it splits into two wings, one stretching toward the shore from right to left and the other from left to right, and the departure point or the destination of their divergence or convergence is this negative tip, which follows the advance of the wings but is always held back, subject to their alternate overlapping until another wave, a stronger wave, overtakes it, with the same problem of divergence-convergence, and then a wave stronger still, which resolves the knot by shattering it.

Taking the pattern of the waves as model, the beach thrusts into the water some faintly hinted points, prolonged in submerged sandy shoals, shaped and destroyed by the currents at every tide. Mr. Palomar has chosen one of these low tongues of sand as his observation point, because the waves strike it on either side, obliquely, and, overrunning the half-submerged surface, they meet their opposites. So, to understand the composition of a wave, you have to consider these opposing thrusts, which are to some extent counterbalanced and to some extent added together, to produce a

general shattering of thrusts and counterthrusts in the usual spreading of foam.

Mr. Palomar now tries to limit his field of observation; if he bears in mind a square zone of, say, ten meters of shore by ten meters of sea, he can carry out an inventory of all the wave movements that are repeated with varying frequency within a given time interval. The hard thing is to fix the boundaries of this zone, because if, for example, he considers as the side farthest from him the outstanding line of an advancing wave, as this line approaches him and rises it hides from his eyes everything behind it, and thus the space under examination is overturned and at the same time crushed.

In any case, Mr. Palomar does not lose heart and at each moment he thinks he has managed to see everything to be seen from his observation point, but then something always crops up that he had not borne in mind. If it were not for his impatience to reach a complete, definitive conclusion of his visual operation, looking at waves would be a very restful exercise for him and could save him from neurasthenia, heart attack, and gastric ulcer. And it could perhaps be the key to mastering the world's complexity by reducing it to its simplest mechanism.

But every attempt to define this model must take into account a long wave that is arriving in a direction perpendicular to the breakers and parallel to the shore, creating the flow of a constant, barely surfacing crest. The shifts of the waves that ruffle toward the shore do not disturb the steady impulse of this compact crest that slices them at a right angle, and there is no knowing where it comes from or where it then goes. Perhaps it

is a breath of east wind that stirs the sea's surface against the deep drive that comes from the mass of water far out to sea, but this wave born of air, in passing, receives also the oblique thrusts from the water's depth and re-directs them, straightening them in its own direction and bearing them along. And so the wave continues to grow and gain strength until the clash with contrary waves gradually dulls it and makes it disappear, or else twists it until it is confused in one of the many dynasties of oblique waves slammed against the shore.

Concentrating the attention on one aspect makes it leap into the foreground and occupy the square, just as, with certain drawings, you have only to close your eyes and when you open them the perspective has changed. Now, in the overlapping of crests moving in various directions, the general pattern seems broken down into sections that rise and vanish. In addition, the reflux of every wave also has a power of its own that hinders the oncoming waves. And if you concentrate your attention on these backward thrusts, it seems that the true movement is the one that begins from the shore and goes out to sea.

Is this perhaps the real result that Mr. Palomar is about to achieve? To make the waves run in the opposite direction, to overturn time, to perceive the true substance of the world beyond sensory and mental habits? No, he feels a slight dizziness, but it goes no further than that. The stubbornness that drives the waves toward the shore wins the match: in fact, the waves have swelled considerably. Is the wind about to change? It would be disastrous if the image that Mr. Palomar has succeeded painstakingly in putting together were to

shatter and be lost. Only if he manages to bear all the aspects in mind at once can he begin the second phase of the operation: extending this knowledge to the entire universe.

It would suffice not to lose patience, as he soon does. Mr. Palomar goes off along the beach, tense and nervous as when he came, and even more unsure about everything.

MR. PALOMAR LOOKS AT THE SKY

Moon in the afternoon

Nobody looks at the moon in the afternoon, and this is the moment when it would most require our attention, since its existence is still in doubt. It is a whitish shadow that surfaces from the intense blue of the sky, charged with solar light; who can assure us that, once again, it will succeed in assuming a form and glow? It is so fragile and pale and slender; only on one side does it begin to assume a distinct outline, like the arc of a sickle, while the rest is all steeped in azure. It is like a transparent wafer, or a half-dissolved pastille; only here the white circle is not dissolving but condensing, collecting itself at the price of gray-bluish patches and shadows that might belong to the moon's geography or might be spillings of the sky that still soak the satellite, porous as a sponge.

In this phase the sky is still something very compact and concrete, and you cannot be sure whether it is from its taut, uninterrupted surface that this round and whitish shape is being detached, its consistency only a bit more solid than the clouds', or whether it is a corrosion of the basic tissue, a rift in the dome, a crevice that opens onto the void behind. The uncertainty is height-

ened by the irregularity of the figure that on one side is taking shape (where the rays of the setting sun arrive) and on the other lingers in a kind of penumbra. And since the border between the two zones is not sharply defined, the effect is not that of a solid seen in perspective but, rather, of one of those little drawings of the moon on calendars, where a white outline stands within a little dark circle. There would be nothing to object to in this if it were a moon in the first quarter and not a full, or almost full, moon. This, in fact, is what is being revealed, gradually, as its contrast with the sky becomes stronger and its circumference is being more distinctly outlined, with only a few dents on the eastern edge.

It must be said that the sky's blue has veered successively toward periwinkle, toward violet (the sun's rays have become red), then dulled toward ashen, and each time the whiteness of the moon has received an impulse to emerge more firmly, and inside it, the more luminous part has gained ground, until it now covers the whole disk. It is as if the phases that the moon passes through in a month were covered inside this full or gibbous moon, in the hours between its rising and its setting, with the difference that the round form remains more or less in sight. In the midst of the circle the spots are still there—indeed, their chiaroscuro becomes more distinct thanks to the luminosity of the rest—but now there is no doubt that it is the moon that bears them, like stains or bruises, and they can no longer be taken for transparencies of the sky's ground, rips in the cloak of a bodiless ghost-moon.

What remains uncertain, rather, is whether this gain

in evidence and in splendor is due to the slow retreat of the sky, which, as it moves away, sinks deeper and deeper into darkness, or whether, on the contrary, it is the moon that is coming forward, collecting the previously scattered light and depriving the sky of it, concentrating it all in the round mouth of its funnel.

And especially these changes must not make us forget that in the meantime the satellite has been shifting in the sky, proceeding westward and upward. The moon is the most changeable body in the visible universe, and the most regular in its complicated habits: it never fails to show up for an appointment, and you can always wait for it at the appointed spot; but if you leave it in one place, you always find it next in another, and if you recall its face turned in a certain way, you see it has already changed its pose, a little or a lot. In any case, following it steadily, you do not realize that it is imperceptibly eluding you. Only the clouds intervene to create the illusion of a rapid dash and rapid metamorphoses, or, rather, to underline vividly what would otherwise escape the eye.

The cloud dashes; gray at first, it becomes milky and shiny, the sky behind it has turned black, it is night, the stars are lighted, the moon is a great, dazzling mirror that flies. Who would recognize in this moon the one of a few hours ago? Now it is a lake of shininess, spurting rays all around, brimming in the darkness with a halo of cold silver, and flooding with white light the streets of the night walkers.

There is no doubt that what is now beginning is a splendid winter night of full moon. At this point, assured that the moon no longer needs him, Mr. Palomar goes home.

Og þegar vorvindarnir blása um dalinn; þegar vorsólin skín á hvíta sinuna á árbakkanum; og á vatni þ; og á tvo hvíta svani vatnsins; og la þ ar vornálina frammúr keldum og veitum, – hver skyldi þá trúna því að þessi grösugi fri þ sæli dalur búi yfir sögu vorrar fyrri ævi; og yfir forynjum hennar? Menn rí þ að me þ fram ánni, þar sem hestar li þ inna tí þ að hafa gert sér götur hli þ við hli þ á brei þ u svæ þ i öld frammaf öld, – og ferskur vorblærinn stendur gegnum dalinn í sólskininu. Á slíkum dögum er sólin sterkari en fortí þ in.

Sjálfstætt fólk

HALLDÓR LAXNESS

And when the spring breezes blow up the valley; when the spring sun shines on last year's withered grass on the river banks; and on the lake; and on the lake's two white swans; and coaxes the new grass out of the spongy soil in the marshes—who could believe on such a day that this peaceful, grassy valley brooded over the story of our past; and over its spectres? People ride along the river, along the banks where side by side lie many paths, cut one by one, century after century, by the horses of the past—and the fresh spring breeze blows through the valley in the sunshine. On such a day the sun is stronger than the past.

Independent People

HALLDÓR LAXNESS

LIGHTNING

We arrived with full bellies. Painfully full. Black bellies, burdened with cold, dark water, lightning bolts, and thunderclaps. We came from the sea and from other mountains, and from unthinkable places, and we'd seen unthinkable things. We scratched at the rock atop the peaks, as if we bore salt, to ensure not even weeds would sprout there. We chose the color of the hills and the fields, and the gleams in rivers, and the glints in upward-glancing eyes. When the wild beasts caught sight of us, they cowered deep in their caves and crimped their necks, lifting their snouts to catch the scent of damp earth approaching. We covered them all like a blanket. The oak and the boxwood and the birch and the fir. Shhhhhhh. And they all went silent, because we were a stern roof and it was up to us to decide who would have the tranquility and joy of a dry soul.

After our arrival all was stillness and pressure, and we forced the thin air down to bedrock, then let loose the first thunderclap. Bang! A reprieve. And the coiled snails shuddered in their secluded homes, godless and without a prayer, knowing that if they didn't drown, they would emerge redeemed to breathe the dampness in. And then we poured water out in colossal drops like coins onto the earth and the grass and the stones, and the mighty thunderclap resounded inside the chest cavity of every beast. And that was when the man said damn and blast. He said it aloud, because when a man is alone there's no need to think in silence. Damn and blast, you had to get yourself stuck in a storm. And we laughed, huh, huh, huh, huh, as we dampened his head, and our water slunk into his collar, and slid down his shoulder and the small of his back. Our droplets were cold and made him cross.

The man came from a house not far off, halfway up to the crest, by a river that must have been cold because it hid beneath the trees. There he'd left behind two cows, a bunch of pigs and hens, a dog and two roving cats, an old man, and a wife and two kids. Domènec was the man's name. And he had a lush midmountain garden patch and some poorly plowed fields beside the river. The patch was tended by the old man—his

father, whose back was flat as a board—and Domènec plowed the fields. Domènec had come to reel off his verses over on this side of the mountain. To see what flavor and what sound they had, because when a man is alone there's no need to whisper. That evening when he checked on the herd he found a fistful of early black chanterelles, and he carried the mushrooms wrapped in the belly of his shirt. The baby cried when he left the house, and his wife said "Domènec" as if protesting, as if pleading, and Domènec went out anyway. It's hard to come up with verses and contemplate the virtue hidden inside all things when the kids are crying with the shrillness of a flayed piglet, making your heart race despite your best efforts to keep calm. And he wanted to go out and look at the cows. He had to go out and look at the cows. What did Sió know about cows? Nothing. The calf went maaaaaaaaaaaaa, maaaaaaaaaaaaaa. Desperately. Sió knew nothing about cows. And again he cried out, damn and blast!, because we'd snuck up quickly, hell yes, capricious and stealthy, and we'd trapped him. Damn and blast!, because the calf's tail was stuck in a jumble of wires. The wires had gotten lodged between two trees, and what with all its straining the calf's legs were shredded and gleamed bloody, ragged and dirty. It went maaaaaaaaaaaaa, maaaaaaaaaaaaa, trapped by its tail between the two trees, and its mother guarded it restlessly. Through the downpour Domènec climbed over to the animal. His legs were good and strong from barreling up the mountain to get some air when the kids were yelling too much, or when they weighed too heavy on him, and the plowing weighed too heavy on him, and the old man's silence, and all the words, one after the other, from his wife, who was called Sió, and who was from Camprodon, and who'd gotten herself into a fine fix, agreeing to go up there to that mountaintop with a man who slipped away and an old man who never spoke. And of course, sometimes Domènec loved her, loved her fiercely, still. But what a weight, for the everlasting love of God and Satan, how heavy that house could be! Folks should have more time to get to know each other before they marry. More time to live before making children. Sometimes he grabbed her by the waist and spun her around, round and round, like when they were courting, because Sió, oh Sió, lord have mercy, what a pair of legs! He

dropped the chanterelles. The calf lowed. Domènec approached the animal, leading with his hands. Slowly, step by step. Saying things in a deep, quieting voice. Ssssh, ssssh, he said. Its mother watched him warily. Domènec's hair was streaming wet. When he got home he'd have Sió heat up some water to wash off the cold and the rain. He looked at the wire that cut into the calf's legs every time it moved. He grabbed its tail firmly, pulled out his knife, and deftly cut the knot. And then we let loose the second bolt. Quick as a snake. Angry. Wide like a spiderweb. Lightning goes where it wants to, like water and landslides and little insects and magpies, transfixed by all things pretty and shiny. The knife was out of Domènec's pocket and it gleamed like a treasure, like a precious stone, like a fistful of coins. The metal blade, polished mirror, reflected us back. Like open arms, luring us closer. Lightning goes where it will, and the second bolt went into Domènec's head. Deep, deep down, down to his heart. And everything he saw inside his eyes was black from the burn. The man collapsed onto the grass, and the meadow pressed its cheek to his, and all our giddy, happy waters moved into him through his shirt-sleeves, beneath his belt, into his underwear and socks, searching for still-dry skin. He died. And the cow took off in a frenzy, and the calf followed after.

The four women who'd witnessed it approached him. By degrees. Because they weren't used to taking any interest in how people die. Or in attractive men. Or in ugly men, for that matter. But the scene had been captivating. The light so bright and so dazzling that it sated all need for seeing. The knife had called to the lightning, the lightning had hit the man's head, bull's-eye, it had parted his hair right down the middle, and the cows had fled in a frenzy, like in some slapstick comedy. Someone should write a song about the man's hair and the lightning comb. Putting pearls in his hair, in the song, white like the gleam off the knife. And include something about his body, and his open lips, and his light eyes like cups filling up with rain. About his face, so lovely on the outside and so burned on the inside. And about the torrential water that fell onto his chest and rushed beneath his back, as if it wanted to carry him off. And about his hands, the song would tell, stumpy and thick and

calloused, one open like a flower expecting a bee, the other gripping the knife like tree roots swallowing a rock.

One of the women, the one named Margarida, touched his hand, partly to find out if the man was burning with the lightning bolt inside him, and partly just for the caress. Then the women left him be and gathered up the soaking wet black chanterelles he'd dropped, and abandoned the scene, because they had many other things to do, and many other things to think about. Then, as if their satisfaction were contagious, we stopped raining. Sated. Dispersed. And when it was clear we were done, the birds hopped out onto the branches and sang the song of the survivors, their little stomachs filled with mosquitoes, yet bristling and furious with us. They had little to complain about, as we hadn't even hailed, we'd rained just enough to kill a man and a handful of snails. We'd barely knocked down any nests and hadn't flooded a single field.

We retreated. Dog-tired. And we looked upon our work. Leaves and branches dripped, and we headed off, vacant and slack, for elsewhere.

One time we rained frogs and another time we rained fish. But best of all is hail. Precious stones pummel towns and skulls and tomatoes. Round and frozen. Covering terraced walls and paths with icy treasure. The frogs fell like a plague. The men and women ran, and the frogs, who were teensy-weensy, hid. Alas. The fish fell like a blessing on the men and women's heads, like slaps, and the people laughed and lifted the fish up in the air as if they wanted to give them back to us, but they didn't want to and we wouldn't have wanted them back anyway. The frogs croaked inside our bellies. The fish stopped moving but didn't die. But whatever. Best of all are the hailstorms.

THE NAMES OF THE WOMEN

Eulàlia did tell them how the Great He-Goat's anus was so soft, tender as a newborn's from how we coddled and kissed it, and how his shaft was cold as an icicle, and I laughed and laughed and laughed, and all that laughing 'twere what got me hanged. 'Twas that laughter, like a heady venom inside me, like the witch milk from a spurge, 'tis why I remember all the things. Because the laughter was white and contagious like tickles there inside my blood and if you broke my arm, white milk would come out instead of red blood. And the laughter left me emptied. They could've saved themselves the trouble of the tortures and the rooms that stank of piss, could've saved those ropes that stretched out so long, and the wool rags full of ash, and their waiting for me to stop laughing and confess. Confess what? Laughing was a good thing, 'twas a cushion, 'twas like eating a pear, like sticking your feet into a waterfall on a summer's day. I ne'er would've stopped laughing for all the gold in the world, not for all the hurt in the world. The laughter unhitched me from the arms and legs and hands what'd been my loyal companions till then, and from the skin I'd covered and uncovered so many times, and it washed away the pain and grief over things that men can do to you. It done emptied me out like a dunderhead, all that heeheeheehee and hahahaha, and my noggin went clong-clong with the whistling air that entered me and came out my nose and ears. The laughing left my little head clean as a walnut shell, fit to hold all the stories and all the things what we said we done, and all the things they said we done against God and Jesus and all the saints and the Virgin. What Virgin? A god like each of their fathers, evil, evil, evil, and a torturer like them, and frightened by all the lies they'd repeated so many times they done come to believe them. For there be not a single one left on these mountains, nary a one of those who did point at us, who locked us up, who searched for the devil's mark upon us, who knotted the nooses and tightened the ropes. Because staying or not staying had nary a thing to do with the fires of hell, nor with divine punishment, nor with any faith, nor with any sorts of virtue. No. Being able to get up every morn to gather penny buns and

golden chanterelles and to make piss and tell stories 'tis to do with the thunderclaps what befall that tree and that man. 'Tis to do with the infants born whole and the infants what aren't, and the infants born whole but with their innards not in the right places. Has to do with being the bird what the buzzard hunted or the hare the dog hunted, or not. And the Virgin and child and the demon 'twere all fashioned of the selfsame folly.

Of us all, 'tis Joana the eldest. She did come from a house nigh mine, Joana did, and everyone did know she would make cures in a cauldron, and one day she bade me join her if I so desired to learn, and if I desired to go along with her at night. And to have her teach me how to cure fevers, and inflict the evil eye and goiters, and nursling maladies and wounds and cattle diseases. And to find lost and stolen objects and cast glances. Oh, such innocence. For ere our biggest sin against God 'twas getting up every morn after they hanged us, and gathering flowers and eating blackberries.

They all left Joana be and they all did call for her when they went into labor or suffered goiters. Until that time when the hail fell heavy. Joana kept a field of wheat, and when the hail razed all the other fields, nary a hailstone fell on hers. They did say 'twas Joana had made the storm with some of her powders. Sorceress! they did yell. And then the son of her neighbor, who was called Little Joan, a five-year-old lad who was just about the first to call her sorceress, fell ill and his feet did swell purple and black, and he did expire four days later, and everyone did point at Joana, and did exclaim that she had empoisoned his victuals. Get her, get that old strumpet, that sorceress! And they did. And soon after that, little, little tiny frogs did rain down, and Joana sayeth unto them that if she so desired she could bring on the hail, or bring down a rain of frogs, or make all their livestock die, and then they did take me also and Joana said nothing more ever again. But I was fine, for I learned to laugh.

And then Eulàlia did appear, from Tegurà de Dalt, and she did tell them how she had once gone to Andorra to unearthing a dead baby and extract its lungs and liver, to make of it an unguent to kill people and livestock. And then she did tell of how she bound men so they could not

lie with other women but only with their wives. Since she made six knots on the strings of their undergarments and then with every knot she did say, I bind you on behalf of God, Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and the whole heavenly court, and on behalf of Beelzebub and Tió and Cuxol, so that you cannot join carnally with any woman who be not your wife. And once, she bound a man and a woman, who were neighbors of hers and who were cruel and threw rocks at her. She did bind them with hairs from their heads, so they couldn't copulate. And when the husband wasn't there, the woman couldn't live without him, and when he was there and wanted to come close to her, her entire body itched such as she thought she might die, and she couldn't stand to be near him. And that way four years passed. Four years! Hahaha heehee. And then one day, their son who took care of their goats brought the animals past Eulàlia's land, and Eulàlia did say oh may bad wolves devour your goats. And right then and there, a wolf pounced into his herd and killed a goat. Then they took Eulàlia, too, and when they had her, she dared tell them that one night the four of us had snatched a nursling from his mother's side, and taken him to a field, and we had played with him as if he were a ball.

Eulàlia always did tell the best stories, still does, better than anyone. Stories that make me laugh, laugh, laugh, until something loosens up inside of me, even deeper inside than the little drops of piss. She tells stories, and we are there in her stories, and verily what a joy 'tis to be there in them. Inside Eulàlia is a little voice, deep, deep inside, what tells her tales, a little voice, the devil's voice, what told her about the misdeeds, and 'twas spurred on by the pain men inflicted upon her and unleashed like a tongue what no longer knows how to lie still. The little voice came from deep inside her own head, like a fount, springing forth with images and words.

"We entered the forest, I upon a black she-ass, and Dolceta from Can Conill"—"'tis I!" I exclaimed—"upon a fox, and there was no moon and the stars gave nary any light, and a branch leaped out into my path verily like a claw scratching my face, and I said, 'Jesus!' and I fell from the she-ass, and Dolceta said, 'Never say "Jesus" again.' And I paid her mind. We

did go to the Roca de la Mort, we did go there with our armpits smeared with an unguent that scorches the hairs forevermore, and that is why our armpits are bare. When we were there at the Rock, all of us, men and women, did mark a cross upon the ground and we did lower our skirts and we did each place our buttocks there upon the cross, forswearing faith and God. And then we did kiss the devil's anus, one by one. And sometimes he took the form of a calico cat and sometimes of a he-goat, and he said unto us, 'Art thou with me, my child?' and we all did answer yes. And then we ate cheese and fruit and honey, and we drank wine, and we all joined hands, men, women, and demons, and we embraced and we kissed and we danced and we fornicated and we sang, all together."

Margarida cried. She cried and denied everything, she cried and cried at the injustice of it all and sometimes she shrieked, and I told her, come now, Margarida, don't cry, all four of us locked up there in the same dark cell that wasn't even a cell, that was for holding livestock. And we made a good pair, Margarida and I, because I just laughed and laughed, and she just cried and cried, and sometimes the more she cried, the more her face contorted, and the more snot and saliva dripped from her, with her face all red and all swollen and all ugly, the more I laughed, and the more I laughed, the more she cried, and I told her, come now, Margarida, don't cry, and we made a good pair. Margarida denied every accusation, one after the other, and the only thing she would admit to was having set the table at night. Placing the tablecloth, and bread and wine and water and a mirror, so the evil spirits could gaze upon themselves while eating and drinking, and not kill her babies. But they only need one little thing to hang you anyway.

When Eulàlia told them that Joana was the mastermind who did bring the ghosts and did make the unguents we smeared ourselves with, and was the finest at making elixirs throughout the whole country, and all the other wicked things that witches do, and that she was the mistress of the he-goat of Biterna, and that we were all three her disciples, Joana didn't even blink. Eulàlia didn't say that with evil intent, nor did Joana bear her any bitterness for it, when we were all done for. For she only

done said it 'cause she ran at the mouth, just as all the air burst forth from my mouth in haahaas and heehees, and Margarida just cried and cried. All four of us there upon the selfsame soiled hay, covered in rats and fleas.

Joana speaks not, she denies nothing, nor does she laugh, but she is still the leader and still the sagest and always finds the best strawberry tree fruit and the best mushrooms and she's the one who knows the most about abetting births. And she is the first to piss when we find crosses in the mountains, and to grind her netherquarters thereupon. And she is the first to crap upon the tree where they did hang us. She makes nice, firm turds and smiles like a mouse while she is squatting. And she is also the first to shit when we come across little chapels and hidden hermitages.

The tales Eulàlia tells aren't all about witches or about us. Sometimes the little voice tells her things about the mountains and the stones and the pools of water, and the birds sing her songs and the fairies explain fables to her, and I follow her like a little girl, like a lapdog, like a newborn sheep follows its mother, ready to throw myself beneath a horse, if need be, to get back amid her tales. Because she makes me laugh, that Eulàlia does.

"Once upon a time there was a Christian king of Aragon who had three daughters as lovely as the sun," she tells me. "Just as the king and queen began to think about marrying the princesses off, they came to realize all three of them had been courting, each princess paired with a Moorish infidel. I do so love tales about the Moors. Furious, the king locked up his three daughters in a very high tower so they could never again see their beloveds. But one night the three princesses did bribe the guards with a fistful of gold coins and escaped the tower, and all three, along with their Moorish lovers, did mount three horses and ride off into the Pyrenees, far from the Christian kings and the Moorish kings. On the third day, the king went to visit his daughters to convince them to cease keeping company with infidels and to marry Christian princes, and when he reached their cell he found they had fled and then in anger he did exclaim: 'May God's wrath fall upon them, wherever they may be!'

"And all at once the weather shifted. A storm of ice and snow surprised the six fugitives on horseback, a storm so fierce that it brought the lovers into an embrace, and all six were frozen solid, unable to take another step. And there you have them, one behind the other, embracing their beloveds, the mountain ranges of the three sisters, covered in snow," says Eulàlia, pointing to the mountains.

Or she tells the tale of a water sprite captured by some townspeople, along with a white tablecloth they took from her. "Poor thing. They locked her in a kitchen so she wouldn't escape. She was a small woman, who sat all day on a bench, looking out through the window without opening her mouth, as if she were mute or couldn't fathom human speech. But one evening, the mistress of the house where she was locked up began to make dinner, and lit the stove, and put a pot of milk for soup on the coals. As the woman bustled about, the water sprite did swiftly shout: 'Hurry, hurry! Your white milk boils over!'

"And the wife rushed over to the pot, and in all the commotion the sprite leaped up from the bench and escaped out the door. And they say that right before disappearing forever she spit out: 'Ye shall never know what yellow dock root doth bestow!' And she laughed the little laugh of a ferret, and still to this day the people of those towns haven't any knowledge of the many properties of the thick yellow dock root."

Margarida sometimes cries over Eulàlia's tales, she cries because a father turned his daughters into mountains, or she cries over the things they did to us, the wool and the ash and the red-hot irons and the chains and the bench and the weights on our feet and the red blood. She cries over her death, like all things that die. And I tell her, come now, Margarida, don't cry. And sometimes she cries, too, when a baby is born in the cave, and I tell her, come now, Margarida, don't cry. And after the storm she did cry a little, too, for that man, because he looked so handsome there in that clearing, she said. What a shame 'tis that men are so quickly consumed, and how other men cling to the empty bodies and hide them and bury them to avoid seeing what will also happen to them in time. And she did cry again when they came looking for him and they carried him off, and he never did return to keep us company. Instead

they placed a cross there where the lightning drilled into him. They are always sullyng the mountainside with crosses. But this one was small. And sometimes we would go there, and we would piss upon it, as dogs do. And sometimes we would bring yellow facedock flowers for him, there where the man had been laid out, wet-a-beds, we called them, for laughs.

ROASTBEEF; MUTTON; BREAKFAST; SUGAR; CRAN-
BERRIES; MILK; EGGS; APPLE; TAILS; LUNCH; CUPS;
RHUBARB; SINGLE; FISH; CAKE; CUSTARD; POTA-
TOES; ASPARAGUS; BUTTER; END OF SUMMER;
SAUSAGES; CELERY; VEAL; VEGETABLE; COOKING;
CHICKEN; PASTRY; CREAM; CUCUMBER; DINNER;
DINING; EATING; SALAD; SAUCE; SALMON; ORANGE;
COCOA; AND CLEAR SOUP AND ORANGES AND OAT-
MEAL; SALAD DRESSING AND AN ARTICHOKE; A
CENTRE IN A TABLE.

ROASTBEEF.

In the inside there is sleeping, in the outside there is reddening, in the morning there is meaning, in the evening there is feeling. In the evening there is feeling. In feeling anything is resting, in feeling anything is mounting, in feeling there is resignation, in feeling there is recognition, in feeling there is recurrence and entirely mistaken there is pinching. All the standards have steamers and all the curtains have bed linen and all the yellow has discrimination and all the circle has circling. This makes sand.

Very well. Certainly the length is thinner and the rest, the round rest has a longer summer. To shine, why not shine, to shine, to station, to enlarge, to hurry the measure all this means nothing if there is singing, if there is singing then there is the resumption.

The change the dirt, not to change dirt means that there is no beefsteak and not to have that is no obstruction, it is so easy to exchange meaning, it is so easy to see the difference. The difference is that a plain resource is not entangled with thickness and it does not mean that thickness shows such cutting, it does mean that a meadow is useful and a cow absurd. It does not mean that there are tears, it does not mean that exudation is cumbersome, it means no more than a memory, a choice and a reestablishment, it means more than any escape from a surrounding extra. All the time that there is use there is use and any time there is a surface there is a surface, and every time there is an exception there is an exception and every time there is a division there is a dividing. Any time there is a surface there is a surface and every time there is a suggestion there is a suggestion and every time there is silence there is silence and every time that is languid there is that there then and not oftener, not always, not particular, tender and changing and external and central and surrounded and singular and simple and the same and the surface and the circle and the shine and the succor and the white and the same and the better and the red and the same and the centre and the yellow and the tender and the better, and altogether.

Considering the circumstances there is no occasion for a reduction, considering that there is no peeling there is no occasion for an obligation, considering that there is no outrage there is no necessity for any reparation, considering that there is no particle sodden there is no occasion for deliberation. Considering everything and which way the turn is tending, considering everything why is there no restraint, considering everything what makes the place settle and the plate distinguish some specialties. The whole thing is not understood and this is not strange considering that there is no education, this is not strange because having that certainly does show the difference in cutting, it shows that when there is turning there is no distress.

In kind, in a control, in a period, in the alteration of pigeons, in kind cuts and thick and thin spaces, in kind ham and different colors, the length of leaning a strong thing outside not to make a sound but to suggest a crust, the principal taste is when there is a whole chance to be reasonable, this does not mean that there is overtaking, this means nothing precious, this means clearly that the chance to exercise is a social success. So then the sound is not obtrusive. Suppose it is obtrusive suppose it is. What is certainly the desertion is not a reduced description, a description is not a birthday.

Lovely snipe and tender turn, excellent vapor and slender butter, all the splinter and the trunk, all the poisonous darkening drunk, all the joy in weak success, all the joyful tenderness, all the section and the tea, all the stouter symmetry.

Around the size that is small, inside the stern that is the middle, besides the remains that are praying, inside the between that is turning, all the region is measuring and melting is exaggerating.

Rectangular ribbon does not mean that there is no eruption it means that if there is no place to hold there is no place to spread. Kindness is not earnest, it is not assiduous it is not revered.

Room to comb chickens and feathers and ripe purple, room to curve single plates and large sets and second silver, room to send everything away, room to save heat and distemper, room to search a light that is simpler, all room has no shadow.

There is no use there is no use at all in smell, in taste, in teeth, in toast, in anything, there is no use at all and the respect is mutual.

Why should that which is uneven, that which is resumed, that which is tolerable why should all this resemble a smell, a thing is

there, it whistles, it is not narrower, why is there no obligation to stay away and yet courage, courage is everywhere and the best remains to stay.

If there could be that which is contained in that which is felt there would be a chair where there are chairs and there would be no more denial about a clatter. A clatter is not a smell. All this is good.

The Saturday evening which is Sunday is every week day. What choice is there when there is a difference. A regulation is not active. Thirstiness is not equal division.

Anyway, to be older and ageder is not a surfeit nor a suction, it is not dated and careful, it is not dirty. Any little thing is clean, rubbing is black. Why should ancient lambs be goats and young colts and never beef, why should they, they should because there is so much difference in age.

A sound, a whole sound is not separation, a whole sound is in an order.

Suppose there is a pigeon, suppose there is.

Looseness, why is there a shadow in a kitchen, there is a shadow in a kitchen because every little thing is bigger.

The time when there are four choices and there are four choices in a difference, the time when there are four choices there is a kind and there is a kind. There is a kind. There is a kind. Supposing there is a bone, there is a bone. Supposing there are bones. There are bones. When there are bones there is no supposing there are bones. There are bones and there is that consuming. The kindly way to feel separating is to have a space between. This shows a likeness.

Hope in gates, hope in spoons, hope in doors, hope in tables, no hope in daintiness and determination. Hope in dates.

Tin is not a can and a stove is hardly. Tin is not necessary and neither is a stretcher. Tin is never narrow and thick.

Color is in coal. Coal is outlasting roasting and a spoonful, a whole spoon that is full is not spilling. Coal any coal is copper.

Claiming nothing, not claiming anything, not a claim in everything, collecting claiming, all this makes a harmony, it even makes a succession.

Sincerely gracious one morning, sincerely graciously trembling, sincere in gracious eloping, all this makes a furnace and a blanket. All this shows quantity.

Like an eye, not so much more, not any searching, no compliments.

Please be the beef, please beef, pleasure is not wailing. Please beef, please be carved clear, please be a case of consideration.

Search a neglect. A sale, any greatness is a stall and there is no memory, there is no clear collection.

A satin sight, what is a trick, no trick is mountainous and the color, all the rush is in the blood.

Bargaining for a little, bargain for a touch, a liberty, an estrangement, a characteristic turkey.

Please spice, please no name, place a whole weight, sink into a standard rising, raise a circle, choose a right around, make the resonance accounted and gather green any collar.

To bury a slender chicken, to raise an old feather, to surround a garland and to bake a pole splinter, to suggest a repose and to settle simply, to surrender one another, to succeed saving simpler, to satisfy a singularity and not to be blinder, to sugar nothing darker and to read redder, to have the color better, to sort out dinner, to remain together, to surprise no sinner, to curve nothing sweeter, to continue thinner, to increase in resting recreation to design string not dimmer.

Cloudiness what is cloudiness, is it a lining, is it a roll, is it melting.

The sooner there is jerking, the sooner freshness is tender, the sooner the round it is not round the sooner it is withdrawn in cutting, the sooner the measure means service, the sooner there is chinking, the sooner there is sadder than salad, the sooner there is none do her, the sooner there is no choice, the sooner there is a gloom freer, the same sooner and more sooner, this is no error in hurry and in pressure and in opposition to consideration.

A recital, what is a recital, it is an organ and use does not strengthen valor, it soothes medicine.

A transfer, a large transfer, a little transfer, some transfer, clouds and tracks do transfer, a transfer is not neglected.

Pride, when is there perfect pretence, there is no more than yesterday and ordinary.

A sentence of a vagueness that is violence is authority and a mission and stumbling and also certainly also a prison. Calmness, calm is beside the plate and in way in. There is no turn in terror. There is no volume in sound.

There is coagulation in cold and there is none in prudence.

Something is preserved and the evening is long and the colder spring has sudden shadows in a sun. All the stain is tender and lilacs really lilacs are disturbed. Why is the perfect reestablishment practiced and prized, why is it composed. The result the pure result is juice and size and baking and exhibition and nonchalance and sacrifice and volume and a section in division and the surrounding recognition and horticulture and no murmur. This is a result. There is no superposition and circumstance, there is hardness and a reason and the rest and remainder. There is no delight and no mathematics.

MUTTON.

A letter which can wither, a learning which can suffer and an outrage which is simultaneous is principal.

Student, students are merciful and recognised they chew something.

Hate rests that is solid and sparse and all in a shape and largely very largely. Interleaved and successive and a sample of smell all this makes a certainty a shade.

Light curls very light curls have no more curliness than soup. This is not a subject.

Change a single stream of denting and change it hurriedly, what does it express, it expresses nausea. Like a very strange likeness and pink, like that and not more like that than the same resemblance and not more like that than no middle space in cutting.

An eye glass, what is an eye glass, it is water. A splendid specimen, what is it when it is little and tender so that there are parts. A centre can place and four are no more and two and two are not middle.

Melting and not minding, safety and powder, a particular recollection and a sincere solitude all this makes a shunning so thorough and so unrepeated and surely if there is anything left it is a bone. It is not solitary.

Any space is not quiet it is so likely to be shiny. Darkness very dark darkness is sectional. There is a way to see in onion and surely very surely rhubarb and a tomato, surely very surely there is that seeding. A little thing in is a little thing.

Mud and water were not present and not any more of either. Silk and stockings were not present and not any more of either. A receptacle and a symbol and no monster were present and no more. This

made a piece show and was it a kindness, it can be asked was it a kindness to have it warmer, was it a kindness and does gliding mean more. Does it.

Does it dirty a ceiling. It does not. Is it dainty, it is if prices are sweet. Is it lamentable, it is not if there is no undertaker. Is it curious, it is not when there is youth. All this makes a line, it even makes makes no more. All this makes cherries. The reason that there is a suggestion in vanity is due to this that there is a burst of mixed music.

A temptation any temptation is an exclamation if there are misdeeds and little bones. It is not astonishing that bones mingle as they vary not at all and in any case why is a bone outstanding, it is so because the circumstance that does not make a cake and character is so easily churned and cherished.

Mouse and mountain and a quiver, a quaint statue and pain in an exterior and silence more silence louder shows salmon a mischief intender. A cake, a real salve made of mutton and liquor, a specially retained rinsing and an established cork and blazing, this which resignation influences and restrains, restrains more altogether. A sign is the specimen spoken.

A meal in mutton, mutton, why is lamb cheaper, it is cheaper because so little is more. Lecture, lecture and repeat instruction.

BREAKFAST.

A change, a final change includes potatoes. This is no authority for the abuse of cheese. What language can instruct any fellow.

A shining breakfast, a breakfast shining, no dispute, no practice, nothing, nothing at all.

A sudden slice changes the whole plate, it does so suddenly.

An imitation, more imitation, imitation succeed imitations.

Anything that is decent, anything that is present, a calm and a cook and more singularly still a shelter, all these show the need of clamor. What is the custom, the custom is in the centre.

What is a loving tongue and pepper and more fish than there is when tears many tears are necessary. The tongue and the salmon, there is not salmon when brown is a color, there is salmon when there is no meaning to an early morning being pleasanter. There is no salmon, there are no tea-cups, there are the same kind of mushes

as are used as stomachers by the eating hopes that makes eggs delicious. Drink is likely to stir a certain respect for an egg cup and more water melon than was ever eaten yesterday. Beer is neglected and cocoanut is famous. Coffee all coffee and a sample of soup all soup these are the choice of a baker. A white cup means a wedding. A wet cup means a vacation. A strong cup means an especial regulation. A single cup means a capital arrangement between the drawer and the place that is open.

Price a price is not in language, it is not in custom, it is not in praise.

A colored loss, why is there no leisure. If the persecution is so outrageous that nothing is solemn is there any occasion for persuasion.

A grey turn to a top and bottom, a silent pocketful of much heating, all the pliable succession of surrendering makes an ingenious joy.

A breeze in a jar and even then silence, a special anticipation in a rack, a gurgle a whole gurgle and more cheese than almost anything, is this an astonishment, does this incline more than the original division between a tray and a talking arrangement and even then a calling into another room gently with some chicken in any way.

A bent way that is a way to declare that the best is all together, a bent way shows no result, it shows a slight restraint, it shows a necessity for retraction.

Suspect a single buttered flower, suspect it certainly, suspect it and then glide, does that not alter a counting.

A hurt mended stick, a hurt mended cup, a hurt mended article of exceptional relaxation and annoyance, a hurt mended, hurt and mended is so necessary that no mistake is intended.

What is more likely than a roast, nothing really and yet it is never disappointed singularly.

A steady cake, any steady cake is perfect and not plain, any steady cake has a mounting reason and more than that it has singular crusts. A season of more is a season that is instead. A season of many is not more a season than most.

Take no remedy lightly, take no urging intently, take no separation leniently, beware of no lake and no larder.

Burden the cracked wet soaking sack heavily, burden it so that it is an institution in fright and in climate and in the best plan that there can be.

An ordinary color, a color is that strange mixture which makes,

which does make which does not make a ripe juice, which does not make a mat.

A work which is a winding a real winding of the cloaking of a relaxing rescue. This which is so cool is not dusting, it is not dirtying in smelling, it could use white water, it could use more extraordinarily and in no solitude altogether. This which is so not winsome and not widened and really not so dipped as dainty and really dainty, very dainty, ordinarily, dainty, a dainty, not in that dainty and dainty. If the time is determined, if it is determined and there is reunion there is reunion with that then outline, then there is in that a piercing shutter, all of a piercing shouter, all of a quite weather, all of a withered exterior, all of that in most violent likely.

An excuse is not dreariness, a single plate is not butter, a single weight is not excitement, a solitary crumbling is not only martial.

A mixed protection, very mixed with the same actual intentional unstrangeness and riding, a single action caused necessarily is not more a sign than a minister.

Seat a knife near a cage and very near a decision and more nearly a timely working cat and scissors. Do this temporarily and make no more mistake in standing. Spread it all and arrange the white place, does this show in the house, does it not show in the green that is not necessary for that color, does it not even show in the explanation and singularly not at all stationary.

SUGAR.

A violent luck and a whole sample and even then quiet.

Water is squeezing, water is almost squeezing on lard. Water, water is a mountain and it is selected and it is so practical that there is no use in money. A mind under is exact and so it is necessary to have a mouth and eye glasses.

A question of sudden rises and more time than awfulness is so easy and shady. There is precisely that noise.

A peck a small piece not privately overseen, not at all not a slice, not at all crestfallen and open, not at all mounting and chaining and evenly surpassing, all the bidding comes to tea.

A separation is not tightly in worsted and sauce, it is so kept well and sectionally.

Put it in the stew, put it to shame. A little slight shadow and a solid fine furnace.

The teasing is tender and trying and thoughtful.

The line which sets sprinkling to be a remedy is beside the best cold.

A puzzle, a monster puzzle, a heavy choking, a neglected Tuesday.

Wet crossing and a likeness, any likeness, a likeness has blisters, it has that and teeth, it has the staggering blindly and a little green, any little green is ordinary.

One, two and one, two, nine, second and five and that.

A blaze, a search in between, a cow, only any wet place, only this tune.

Cut a gas jet uglier and then pierce pierce in between the next and negligence. Choose the rate to pay and pet pet very much. A collection of all around, a signal poison, a lack of languor and more hurts at ease.

A white bird, a colored mine, a mixed orange, a dog.

Cuddling comes in continuing a change.

A piece of separate outstanding rushing is so blind with open delicacy.

A canoe is orderly. A period is solemn. A cow is accepted.

A nice old chain is widening, it is absent, it is laid by.

CRANBERRIES.

Could there not be a sudden date, could there not be in the present settlement of old age pensions, could there not be by a witness, could there be.

Count the chain, cut the grass, silence the noon and murder flies. See the basting undip the chart, see the way the kinds are best seen from the rest, from that and untidy.

Cut the whole space into twenty-four spaces and then and then is there a yellow color, there is but it is smelled, it is then put where it is and nothing stolen.

A remarkable degree of red means that, a remarkable exchange is made.

Climbing altogether in when there is a solid chance of soiling no more than a dirty thing, coloring all of it in steadying is jelly.

Just as it is suffering, just as it is succeeded, just as it is moist so is there no countering.

MILK.

A white egg and a colored pan and a cabbage showing settlement, a constant increase.

A cold in a nose, a single cold nose makes an excuse. Two are more necessary.

All the goods are stolen, all the blisters are in the cup.

Cooking, cooking is the recognition between sudden and nearly sudden very little and all large holes.

A real pint, one that is open and closed and in the middle is so bad.

Tender colds, seen eye holders, all work, the best of change, the meaning, the dark red, all this and bitten, really bitten.

Guessing again and golfing again and the best men, the very best men.

MILK.

Climb up in sight climb in the whole utter needles and a guess a whole guess is hanging. Hanging hanging.

EGGS.

Kind height, kind in the right stomach with a little sudden mill.

Cunning shawl, cunning shawl to be steady.

In white in white handkerchiefs with little dots in a white belt all shadows are singular they are singular and procured and relieved.

No that is not the cows shame and a precocious sound, it is a bite.

Cut up alone the paved way which is harm. Harm is old boat and a likely dash.

APPLE.

Apple plum, carpet steak, seed clam, colored wine, calm seen, cold cream, best shake, potato, potato and no no gold work with pet, a green seen is called bake and change sweet is breadly, a little piece a little piece please.

A little piece please. Cane again to the presupposed and ready eucalyptus tree, count out sherry and ripe plates and little corners of a kind of ham. This is use.

TAILS.

Cold pails, cold with joy no joy.

A tiny scat that means meadows and a lapse of cuddles with cheese and nearly bats, all this went messed. The post placed a loud loose sprain. A rest is no better. It is better yet. All the time.

LUNCH.

Luck in loose plaster makes holy gauge and nearly that, nearly more states, more states come in town light kite, blight not white.

A little lunch is a break in skate a little lunch so slimy, a west end of a board line is that which shows a little beneath so that necessity is a silk under wear. That is best wet. It is so natural, and why is there flake, there is flake to explain exhaust.

A real cold hen is nervous is nervous with a towel with a spool with real beads. It is mostly an extra sole nearly all that shaved, shaved with an old mountain, more than that bees more than that dinner and a bunch of likes that is to say the hearts of onions aim less.

Cold coffee with a corn a corn yellow and green mass is a gem.

CUPS.

A single example of excellence is in the meat. A bent stick is surging and might all might is mental. A grand clothes is searching out a candle not that wheatly not that by more than an owl and a path. A ham is proud of cocoanut.

A cup is neglected by being all in size. It is a handle and meadows and sugar any sugar.

A cup is neglected by being full of size. It shows no shade, in come little wood cuts and blessing and nearly not that not with a wild bought in, not at all so polite, not nearly so behind.

Cups crane in. They need a pet oyster, they need it so hoary and nearly choice. The best slam is utter. Nearly be freeze.

Why is a cup a stir and a behave. Why is it so seen.

A cup is readily shaded, it has in between no sense that is to say music, memory, musical memory.

Peanuts blame, a half sand is holey and nearly.

RHUBARB.

Rhubarb is susan not susan not seat in bunch toys not wild and laughable not in little places not in neglect and vegetable not in fold coal age not please.

SINGLE FISH.

Single fish single fish single fish egg-plant single fish sight.

A sweet win and not less noisy than saddle and more ploughing and nearly well painted by little things so.

Please shade it a play. It is necessary and beside the large sort is puff.

Every way oakly, please prune it near. It is so found.

It is not the same.

CAKE.

Cake cast in went to be and needles wine needles are such.

This is today. A can experiment is that which makes a town, makes a town dirty, it is little please. We came back. Two bore, bore what, a mussed ash, ash when there is tin. This meant cake. It was a sign.

Another time there was extra a hat pin sought long and this dark made a display. The result was yellow. A caution, not a caution to be.

It is no use to cause a foolish number. A blanket stretch a cloud, a shame, all that bakery can tease, all that is beginning and yesterday yesterday we had it met. It means some change. No some day.

A little leaf upon a scene an ocean any where there, a bland and likely in the stream a recollection green land. Why white.

CUSTARD.

Custard is this. It has aches, aches when. Not to be. Not to be narrowly. This makes a whole little hill.

It is better than a little thing that has mellow real mellow. It is better than lakes whole lakes, it is better than seeding.

POTATOES.

Real potatoes cut in between.

POTATOES.

In the preparation of cheese, in the preparation of crackers, in the preparation of butter, in it.

ROAST POTATOES.

Roast potatoes for.

ASPARAGUS.

Asparagus in a lean in a lean to hot. This makes it art and it is wet wet weather wet weather wet.

BUTTER.

Boom in boom in, butter. Leave a grain and show it, show it. I spy.

It is a need it is a need that a flower a state flower. It is a need that a state rubber. It is a need that a state rubber is sweet and sight and a swelled stretch. It is a need. It is a need that state rubber.

Wood a supply. Clean little keep a strange, estrange on it.

Make a little white, no and not with pit, pit on in within.

END OF SUMMER.

Little eyelets that have hammer and a check with stripes between a lounge, in wit, in a rested development.

SAUSAGES.

Sausages in between a glass.

There is read butter. A loaf of it is managed. Wake a question. Eat an instant, answer.

A reason for bed is this, that a decline, any decline is poison, poison is a toe a toe extractor, this means a solemn change. Hanging.

No evil is wide, any extra in leaf is so strange and singular a red breast.

CELERY.

Celery tastes tastes where in curled lashes and little bits and mostly in remains.

A green acre is so selfish and so pure and so enlivened.

VEAL.

Very well very well, washing is old, washing is washing.

Cold soup, cold soup clear and particular and a principal a principal question to put into.

VEGETABLE.

What is cut. What is cut by it. What is cut by it in.

It was a cress a crescent a cross and an unequal scream, it was upslanting, it was radiant and reasonable with little ins and red.

News. News capable of glees, cut in shoes, belike under pump of wide chalk, all this combing.

WAY LAY VEGETABLE.

Leaves in grass and mow potatoes, have a skip, hurry you up flutter.

Suppose it is ex a cake suppose it is new mercy and leave charlotte and nervous bed rows. Suppose it is meal. Suppose it is sam.

COOKING.

Alas, alas the pull alas the bell alas the coach in china, alas the little put in leaf alas the wedding butter meat, alas the receptacle, alas the back shape of mussle, mussle and soda.

CHICKEN.

Pheasant and chicken, chicken is a peculiar third.

CHICKEN.

Alas a dirty word, alas a dirty third alas a dirty third, alas a dirty bird.

CHICKEN.

Alas a doubt in case of more go to say what it is cress. What is it. Mean. Potato. Loaves.

CHICKEN.

Stick stick call then, stick stick sticking, sticking with a chicken. Sticking in a extra succession, sticking in.

CHAIN-BOATS.

Chain-boats are merry, are merry blew, blew west, carpet.

PASTRY.

Cutting shade, cool spades and little last beds, make violet, violet when.

CREAM.

In a plank, in a play sole, in a heated red left tree there is shut in specs with salt be where. This makes an eddy. Necessary.

CREAM.

Cream cut. Any where crumb. Left hop chambers.

CUCUMBER.

Not a razor less, not a razor, ridiculous pudding, red and relet put in, rest in a slender go in selecting, rest in, rest in in white widening.

DINNER.

Not a little fit, not a little fit sun sat in shed more mentally.

Let us why, let us why weight, let us why winter chess, let us why way.

Only a moon to soup her, only that in the sell never never be the ocups nice be, shatter it they lay.

Egg ear nuts, look a bout. Shoulder. Let it strange, sold in bell next herds.

It was a time when in the acres in late there was a wheel that shot a burst of land and needless are niggers and a sample sample set of old eaten butterflies with spoons, all of it to be are fled and measure make it, make it, yet all the one in that we see where shall not it set with a left and more so, yes there add when the longer not it shall the best in the way when all be with when shall not for there with see and chest how for another excellent and excellent and easy easy excellent and easy express e c, all to be nice all to be no so. All to be no so no so. All to be not a white old chat churning. Not to be any example of an edible apple in.

DINING.

Dining is west.

EATING.

Eat ting, eating a grand old man said roof and never never re soluble burst, not a near ring not a bewildered neck, not really any such bay.

Is it so a noise to be is it a least remain to rest, is it a so old say to be, is it a leading are been. Is it so, is it so, is it so, is it so is it so is it so.

Eel us eel us with no no pea no pea cool, no pea cool cooler, no pea cooler with a land a land cost in, with a land cost in stretches.

Eating he heat eating he heat it eating, he heat it heat eating. He heat eating.

A little piece of pay of pay owls owls such as pie, bolsters.

Will leap beat, willie well all. The rest rest oxen occasion occasion to be so purred, so purred how.

It was a ham it was a square come well it was a square remain, a square remain not it a bundle, not it a bundle so is a grip, a grip to shed bay leave bay leave draught, bay leave draw cider in low, cider in low and george. George is a mass.

EATING.

It was a shame it was a shame to stare to stare and double and relieve relieve be cut up show as by the elevation of it and out out more in the steady where the come and on and the all the shed and that.

It was a garden and belows belows straight. It was a pea, a pea pour it in its not a succession, not it a simple, not it a so election, election with.

SALAD.

It is a winning cake.

SAUCE.

What is bay labored what is all be section, what is no much. Sauce sam in.

SALMON.

It was a peculiar bin a bin fond in beside.

ORANGE.

Why is a feel oyster an egg stir. Why is it orange centre.

A show at tick and loosen loosen it so to speak sat.

It was an extra leaker with a see spoon, it was an extra lick with a see spoon.

ORANGE.

A type oh oh new new not no not knealer knealer of old show
beefsteak, neither neither.

ORANGES.

Build is all right.

ORANGE IN.

Go lack go lack use to her.

Cocoa and clear soup and oranges and oat-meal.

Whist bottom whist close, whist clothes, woodling.

Cocoa and clear soup and oranges and oat-meal.

Pain soup, suppose it is question, suppose it is butter, real is, real
is only, only excreate, only excreate a no since.

A no, a no since, a no since when, a no since when since, a no since
when since a no since when since, a no since, a no since when since,
a no since, a no, a no since a no since, a no since, a no since.

SALAD DRESSING AND AN ARTICHOKE.

Please pale hot, please cover rose, please acre in the red stranger,
please butter all the beef-steak with regular feel faces.

SALAD DRESSING AND AN ARTICHOKE.

It was please it was please carriage cup in an ice-cream, in an ice-
cream it was too bended bended with scissors and all this time. A

whole is inside a part, a part does go away, a hole is red leaf. No choice was where there was and a second and a second.

A CENTRE IN A TABLE.

It was a way a day, this made some sum. Suppose a cod liver a cod liver is an oil, suppose a cod liver oil is tunny, suppose a cod liver oil tunny is pressed suppose a cod liver oil tunny pressed is china and secret with a bestow a bestow reed, a reed to be a reed to be, in a reed to be.

Next to me next to a folder, next to a folder some waiter, next to a foldersome waiter and re letter and read her. Read her with her for less.

Protect Me You

September, 2006

You've just fallen down on the grass. I thought this would be a nice place to sit in the afternoon. The cat shows up, black, looking out. When I'm surrounded by trees, a condition I've sought out pretty persistently throughout my life, the thing I think I might like the most about them is this whisper like all the hair of the world passing through the tunnel of one single breath—if that is a form of percussion. This irregular hiss of trees and wind. I think it is my mother. And I am her son, and you are my dog.

Our relationship is part discomfort & humiliation and part devotion. Oh once upon a time I wanted a dog exactly as much as I wanted to be alive. Maybe I didn't even want a dog then. I wanted to say that I was alive. Even to be a dog would be enough and how good if I could be seen wanting one and could begin asking for it incessantly—if I could summon up asking in every possible manner. Please. Leaving notes under pillows and toilet seat covers. Did I want a dog, really. No I was a kid who was desperate to be seen in a state of desire & supplication. That was many years ago. I wanted to already be my yes. A positive child in a state of knowing & reaching out. Not for myself but towards a friend. The child was denied. In the manner of my family they said yes and then they said no. Somewhere there is a picture of this. A little boy in bangs and a plaid cotton shirt. (I remember it was red but the picture was taken with my father's Polaroid land camera which took black & white

photos then which added to the beauty of them because the past is so often a place whose colors are only in my mind.) How hard it would be to be a movie star. To be in full color in front of everyone. To be applauded and owned. Isn't that like being a very good dog. You're lashing out at photographers who are adamant about capturing you, your every movement again and again. I admit I've wanted to be a movie star to be seen in that disgraceful and hungry way—the buttered toast of everyone. There I am with my beautiful smile. A big piece of bread. Angry, covering my face. I held my dog in the black and white world and I knew that this was the moment I had wanted so keenly. To be still, to be fixed, to be sad. I was just like a little prayer card holding my dog. I would never know myself as clearly again.

Did that dog go on to her death when we returned her to the ASPCA after that one long crying night that disturbed my mother to no end. A tree will push this way and that be permanent in its breath of time. It's hardly the color it is, a white pole, some green some red. I would think a tree would know exactly what it was and be so peaceful. As long as she's breathing a dog is not at rest. So I was a child who wanted a dog. I became myself. I certainly wasn't thinking I wanted a dog the day we met. I was watching the rollers turn. I mean time. You have to touch on something repeatedly but what could it be? How could that happen if time was your problem. What could you touch?

That's why I'm a poet. Even in the bathtub as a child I was syncopating my blubs because I didn't know what to do with the light and the wetness and my mother and when would it stop. I had a horror of life's never ending-ness which made me really hate art. Its spectacles. Rodeos. Circuses. People skating around on ice. And in the world on ponds. My feet hurt. And look—all the trees have lost their leaves and are black. Isn't it time to go in? It seems like the people around me wanted to do happy things and a child is supposed to be a little dog and bark happily in response—at the ice & the trees & the day. And now here it is all around us.

This morning I was reading in the paper how the governor of New Jersey a secret gay man had hired a poet of all the ludicrous persons on earth to be his director of homeland security. And then the poet realized the governor wanted him. How unabashedly corrupt of a governor to entice a total fool—a poet—practically a clown's occupation to take care of the people of a state. The state of New Jersey at that. The governor wanted the poet to hold him and love him and kiss his toes. Possibly the governor wanted to exercise his dominance over the poet shoving his penis in the poet's butt. I had already heard parts of this story, mostly about the governor's secret gayness, but it seems like they saved this one tiny detail for the end. The fact that the young man was appointed to a position in which he could only reveal his incompetence—who could blame him for that. He was young after all. But the later, more laughable tidbit. Like the room stopped laughing and then the little dog lifts its butt and poops. Homeland security! How could a poet do that. How could a *poet* do that. Twice a fool. And twice the governor's crime.

And speaking of such—now that we've seen really good photos of how really bad it was in New Orleans and we've seen also that the man in charge there, Brownie, knew about horses, not safety, there were problems really much bigger than his unknowing, the unknowing is always getting larger, and we've looked at them all publicly together, and realize that there are always people of greater authority equally incompetent people like the president who once owned a baseball team and now laughed publicly at a woman, Aileen, he whinnied at her who was being sent (by him) just then to the electric chair—he mocked her.

And supposedly when he was governor, he actually improved schools that was his big claim but now we've learned that in fact the books were cooked, that's all. And the schools got even worse under him and when he was a kid he used to blow up squirrels and he farts in front of his interns today—kids who went to good schools and studied hard—I'm not particularly impressed by those leadership types living or dead, maybe if one gets shot or mugged

you see the kid's picture in the paper and think—what a shame he or she got good grades. But say he survives—winds up delivering papers to the oval office and there's the president laughing & farting. And you tried hard & he hadn't and now he's your boss and you've got to smell his farts. You're a dog.

The final insult to everyone was that what little New Jersey had to protect itself with was a poet. There's a little red up in the trees. And my dog wants to go upstairs. And I probably should let her have her way. Because she is dying.

Not only are her legs stiff, but her joints are swollen and covered with sores. I don't have another life partner. It's almost five decades after the perfect photograph of my desire and because Rosie's pacing all over the house and slobbering her food the ants are swarming around her like candy. She's a sweet dying clump. Today is the day when summer turns into fall. Surely the light is shorter or longer today. My planet is in some angle to the sun so that people say this is September a beautiful month when it's not too hot, possibly the sweetest time of the year. There are already waves and waves of what I am saying. I've set something in motion I can return to again and again. Anywhere. Dogs begin barking. You have never been a barker unless you were left outside a café tied to a post, then you yelped like hell. You like company.

I do too. I've discovered I'm an essentially social person. I like to sit in groups, or move with them. I like when they all decide to go see some art or celebrate the number of years a person's been on the planet. I even like when they all get loaded in honor of that. Though I get out of the room fast. I go for the rebounding energy of heys and hugs and awkward kisses and the opportunity to raise my flag and see it light up in your eye. Your flag tells me where I want to go next. It's like the world I live in is a field of flags whapping and waving and I want to see them all waving. I want to stand in the crowd or the small group. I like the small and large crowds that talk about how they feel. Who listen to one another, who let the

collective listening and talking build up a head of swarming energy that fills and delights us. These are the groups that show me that I do like groups. I like to be alone. But then I need to talk to someone. I like god. When I was a child I was taught that there was someone listening and I chanced tiny hellos that frequently felt empty but longer conversations often silences felt like I was sitting in an enormous radio, like I had big headphones on when I felt separated from the world but tuned in to this show. And that's where you came in. Whether you listen or not, you're in there too. My dog. You're a part of the great silent show of this morning's sun. Turns out it was the most even day of the year, one of the two when dark and light counter balance each other. I have a round board in my house with balls underneath and I climb on while I'm waiting for water to boil or trying to escape the pressure inside, not god but a kind of weather I inhabit & control. I think it comes from Ireland which is why I feel I need to live there for a few years. I will. Just to understand the minerals and substances that spawned me. I come from Poland too but I live with Poland. This is Poland. Ireland is the mystery, Ireland is gone but like magic, it calls me home. I get on the board in my house it's in the kitchen so there's a square window. When I was a child we lived across the street from the ocean. It was a perfect spot. I learned to make sandwiches for myself in that house. That was adolescence. Squeezing a pepper and making it spurt. Eating my own food with you. In the sun. At last my life had begun. I had one job which was to do the dishes after dinner with my young arms and there was a stone church outside the window its bell. Sounds spreading out and landing in the marsh.

Up on my board I look out the window in my kitchen. That animal glance is enough. To connect me to the first suns, the first light and jobs. To be in and out within the reach of square light. The round board at first seeks to confound me. One orientation is pure reaching forward so you attempt to not tip yourself, not quite jerking back but asking a wave not to curl and you beg by little movements of your hip. Another, the side to side orientation demands that you use some bell inside your crotch to ring in the

middle so to speak and there is a glorious feeling of hip no dick sway it makes me want to dance, and my calves planted and working, working continually. I discovered a new direction the other day I mean I had always been aware that the board made me TALL. It was simply that and there were people I wanted to be tall around and I mostly accomplish that with boots but you know boots aren't really for walking they're for promenading so you're going around in stilts in a way. You won't fall but when you think about them, and for all the pleasure of being a little higher the trade-off is your own absence from presence. You're losing your own fealty to the ground. Which can't be ignored. You lose your earth for your sky. When I'm on the board in my kitchen, when I get still, just for a click I am high—I think oh ...

My Dog/My God

People said you'll know when I asked them how they knew it was time. When it was okay to take your dog's life. You'll know they said looking me right in the eye. And I did.

Rosie began dying in June, having those mysterious fits. At the end of each was a puddle of piss. I went to my meeting on Adams Ave. in the evenings and I talked about it. The one near the park with the working people: the beautiful dog walker, the pale curly haired man who taught law and came in covered in sweat, almost naked from running. One night he & I stood on the sidewalk under those shady trees. He said my name is Philip, lover of horses. He smiled. I thought he was flirting with me but it was part of his euphoria. I understood. Because I was the one with the dying dog. My friend the older woman said you've got to stop. I was biting my fingers. My dog is dying. I kept saying it. I wash her ass and then I wash all the towels. One evening I was feeling a little extra naked after describing the ritual of mopping her piss and I thought that's it. She's god. And I felt so calm. I've found god now. My God—My Dog. I chuckled. That's it. *Our room. This is ecstasy & everything got bright.* She's dying & I'm watching her. I'm not *thinking* about it. Not that that makes any difference. I got this intention. This understanding. Did anyone ever say suffering was about difference. It sops it all up. We are this picture of ourselves now, Rosie and I and we want to be seen.

I took such care of her when she was dying. I relished it. She made me go slow. I'd hear the rustling of her limbs and I'd run to her because she couldn't get up and there was generally a puddle already there. In my house I have beautiful wooden floors. Now I had a pile of facecloths, torn towels, rags. I'd mop up her urine with a clean dry towel and then I'd come back and wash her ass. I'd come back with a damp one, wash it again and then I'd wipe her dry. I made sure she was really comfortable. I'd do it with love. I attended my dog's ass, the collapse of her rear legs that I saw as little high heels. I imagined her a drag queen or a young girl unsteadily teetering. A touching failure. I swooped in and made it better, made it comfortable. I felt loving. I felt like a god too. I felt less ambivalently loving than I have ever felt in my life. Now I know what love feels like. I do it and I think it. I love feeling this. Love loving your doggy ass. My home became a shrine. The bird of paradise around the door. The late night and early morning dog barking in the dark canyon beyond the yard. When I bought the house it said on the deed: disclosures. "Dogs in canyon." What could that mean. Hundreds and hundreds of dogs barking day and night. Not all the time. Just when any one of them got an idea. Then they all got it.

There's a growly picture of me standing in the screened-in porch light flooding in over that canyon and I look like an animal. But the animal looks great. You see a movie sometimes in which someone is doing something really difficult, waging war, defending their family, walking very far, and very long and they look terrific, they look great. The hair looks good, the person looks well, they look hot. And I would watch these spectacles with a doubleness. I'd keep watching cause unless a movie is really bad I'm usually enthralled but I always think no one would look so good doing that. But in fact people often look radiant suffering. How often have you told someone they look fabulous and they say thanks cause I feel terrible. And you can see it right behind their eyes. Terrible puts a candle in there. Terrible turns on the light. You wonder if people are just empty when they're moving forward with the plan. When it's all

on the outside and the world is full of light, but when you suffer the light is in. It's all yours.



I'd mop the floor after I took care of her body and I'd wash the animal print rug. The sound of the washing machine churning was a huge part of the day. And I felt it deeply. The expensive cost of water. On the west coast you are living on this shaky shelf that's gonna get choked. Everyone knows one day will come when there won't be any water. California is crazy. Water's getting sucked there through those long pipes from Colorado or someplace. Where *are* they getting this water from. I think Colorado is it. Some underground world slowly getting poisoned. Or drained. It's all very thin and it's going to end soon.

But we're spending the end of your life together. That is our vacation, our purpose. First Myra came and stayed with me and she agreed it was hard. I can't believe you're doing this & alone she said. I know but I love it I said. I understand she twinkled. Myra's around 50. It's interesting to see your friends grow old and when I say she twinkled I mean the moment Myra smiled all the versions of her were twinkling right at that moment. It's not just the dying who are filled with light. Myra was smiling from her experience which

was cute. It was a light from far away, from many places, arriving here now.

Watching Rosie die made me a little in love with the whole wash of light, of time, its twists which must be why I ended it with Paige who visited me next. She was a young Canadian artist, and I met her at an opening in New York in the midst of a crowd of people all her age mostly female which is just like this world in San Diego where I'm living except in New York there's not a school. Here there's *millions* of young women. I almost can't see the young. They're like the greenness and the sky and the beach. Paige comes up to me at the opening. Are you you she goes. Ten years ago someone told me you're the only one your age who goes out. Now *they* don't go out. They're gone. People turn and look at me and say she's here. I'm like a breeze, I'm like punctuation on a text which is them. Which is why I am grateful to be home in California with my dog who is dying. Who is now dead.

California has great dog beaches. There was one in particular I was very fond of which was next to a naval base. You'd get to the end of the road and turn to park but there was this guard building and a guy in uniform standing right in front of it with a gun. Behind him the giant base perched on the beautiful beach with the ocean rocking all around—an island in California and we'd be driving there over the dazzling bridge from the mainland—you with your nose sniffing out the rear window—the window that when open produces what I think of as the convertible effect.

The most perfect thing about being there is that it is an island. You can feel it most of all at night. When you walk around the air comes from every direction and it reminds me of P-town, of those bars on Commercial Street in the summer. Here all that beauty and sexiness is owned by the military which is strange. The air in Provincetown was prowling around us inside and out and you could hear things not far away, knocking in the water, old, clunking and honking. That one dimly lit music club that was open to the street. You could

see the wind rock the orange lamps inside. Inside it reminded me of something else, all the air. Is it necessary for there to be a first air—an air that simply is yours? A place supremely young and old where you've spent your whole life. Growing up dying, going down to the beach, drinking, kissing. Are there people who have never lived in their air. Is this mine. I have never been one of a pair of young lovers, a young couple—but this air is mine. I know my air. Drifting, never landing, a life at sea. The sounds and the smells of that restless night, the lights, the feel—a body, if an animal didn't need a body. A drift.

I'm thinking of the beach I used to bring you in the morning—really early, about nine. About twelve years ago. The light was magical. It was just you and me and one fag—a waiter and he was swimming nude. It was his ritual. My own shirt was off—it was an abandoned part of the beach in a pretty gay town. All the other women were way on the other side of the beach. I liked this loner set up and I felt I was more than a bit of a man. A friend of mine used to have a crush on this waiter in New York. He had a kind of over-developed upper lip like a duck and he was slim and combed his hair back in a classic old-fashioned style. Not extravagant at all, but he was hip in a continental way. The fact that he could be with me on this beach in another city almost fifteen years later and not recognize me at all made me comfortable. It was like family. I had my dog and I had him who didn't know me. I have a striped towel—orange and dark blue. One of two. I buy one, forget it and buy another one. You'd think it was a straight town now. The beach is littered with couples and people with kids. Some man flies his kite delightedly and I want to say hey can you please go back the other way, you are taking way too much space. Yet I think it's wrong to talk to people like that. I can leave—go to the gym I think staring at the dunes. I can go walk the street looking for people to have dinner with. Then I put my nose in my notebook and I'm writing again.

Save.

The problem with getting Rosie to the beach on the little military island is that you have to walk *here* from way back down there cause the beach is right here by the guy with the gun. So the dog would have to be able to walk that far and this dog can't. This dog has become a puppet in her own life. I lift her up and talk to the dog head she is now. The permanently alive dog breathing in here. In fact I'm writing this book to *keep* talking to her.

Paige came to visit (I told her it's not going to be a vacation, she said very seriously I know) and she would get out with the dog at the mouth of the beach and I would go park and then join them. At some point sitting on the beach in the morning it seemed like maybe about a hundred guys in crew cuts went by running. She took a picture. She smiled at me and shrugged. It was the army training on the beach. I thought of her being Canadian. This was a whole other kind of beach.



After you died I went over there and I heard on the radio that the president George Bush was there and I stuck my head out the window and started screaming at people. He's a killer don't you know. Then I realized I couldn't go there anymore. You know they took Emma Goldman's boyfriend out in the desert here and anally

raped him. The San Diego paper said they should do it to her too. It's *still* that paper. That's why I was so mad. He's my president too.

She changed suddenly that week. We went up to LA for the weekend cause there was nobody left in San Diego she could stay with. It was getting harder and harder to find anyone to stay with a dying dog. I'd call this one and she'd refer me to that one. Since about June which was when the fits began I'd wake up every morning thinking about it and unable to plan the future because of it not knowing where to be and frankly also feeling a little chased out of town by all the different kinds of young women. I felt overwhelmed by them. A college town is like totally bugged. You can't be old. You can't be invisible. You're just walking around being lonely. That's why everyone's married. You're either wrapped or unwrapped. There's too much youth. That's the job. It's too erotic. I came with someone and it didn't last. I had you.

So we took you up to LA for the weekend with us. And there was a dog lady you could stay with. She reminded me of the couple with a kid on E. 7th Street you stayed with when you were a puppy. This lady just had dogs, maybe cats too. No husband just animals. Cushions all around. You looked a little stunned when we left. It was just for the night and then we took you home.

How was she. She wouldn't eat dog food. She just had steak. The woman shrugged. Like it was cute. She must've liked that we laughed. To be an animal owner you get to be broad. Even a little deceitful. Nobody can speak up for herself. It's like an eternally silent child. Who you trust. Who shouldn't trust you. Who just keeps playing with the same ball and likes the same walk and is getting old.

We stopped off at that great place in San Juan Capistrano and got food and you had your own little taco. That was fun. We all ate in the car and drove home. I don't remember being happy. It was dark.

I remember being full. We were all in the car. It was nice, everyone had food and we drove down the coast.

These places are all catholic places. San Diego. San Luis Obispo. I think of the monks who started the missions and the story they told us in school about the monks having boiling water poured on their heads. The Native Americans were making a joke. It was that one detail they taught us forever.

That first night Paige was gone I was standing out in the front yard in my bvd's holding up your ass in a puddle of piss. It was like dawn. It was all night long. It kept happening. And my arm hurt and your legs were gone and I thought we can't do this anymore.

You would not eat dog food. Never again. You would only eat sausages and little steaks. And meanwhile you no longer would shit. You would never shit again for the rest of your life. She'll shit on the other side. That was my joke. Meanwhile I can no longer eat these sausages you get in health food stores that you liked because they remind me of your turds. Your whole insides aching, waiting for relief.

I went out on Friday night to read in that sex shop in North Park with the big back room where things happened. You were so quiet when I left. You were barely breathing. You were almost gone. There was this ottoman at the window where you were lying. You were so still.

Before Paige left she lowered the bed. To make it easier for you to get up cause you couldn't jump. But it was like changing the world and she won't be in it long. I remember thinking that. I liked it low for a while.

I used to clean this woman's house in New York. Years before. Her cat died and the cat was in bardo on the bed when I cleaned. I worked with this guy David who got me the job who died of AIDS

and he said go look in the bedroom. It somehow made the house feel very good when we cleaned. Having a dead body in there.

I like to make it heavier sometimes. Saying versions of the same thing. I mean here. You probably already guessed it but I like saying it again. That one little piece again with a twist. And a thud. I don't feel this way about everything but there are moments that need to be heavy. As a fact. Not an idea.

When I got the puppy when I was a kid my father said go in the bedroom Eileen. It was my mother and father's bedroom where I was never allowed so I hated him telling me to do it. It didn't make sense. It scared me. Go in the bedroom, Eileen. The little dog walked out.

I read for Rosie that night. Read every poem she was in.¹ Dedicated it to her. Not that she needed it. She did not need poetry.

She was it. Mainstay of my liturgy for sixteen point five almost seventeen years. She was observed. I was companioned, seen.

I read a long one about dogs I wrote before I ever even had one. It was about attachment. How I wanted it. Needed it. Least I had habits said the poem since I didn't have a dog. There was one about walking on the beach with a dog and hearing things. Hearing old people groaning as they walked in the sand. One was about counting things when I walked her. Almost losing her once. The color of her leash. My friend dying and its color getting mixed up with that. Her leash was so important. I started assigning numbers to each of the colors of the world like it was a paint-by-numbers that year before she was dying. I filmed her too. I was scared. The painting was fading. I was having my religion torn from me. Her body smelled corny. Her fur smelled like corn to me always and I never bathed Rosie till she was sick. I bathed her if she rolled in shit or dead fish. That was her P-town trick. & I never washed a floor. Not in my life, in all my worlds I never looked down. She had sores

on her body all her life. All the puppies in her litter had bumps on their bodies. I got worried but after a while I'd just leave them there. I had a girlfriend who thought that was cruel. I went to the vet when I had money. You died when I had money. Most of the other puppies in your litter died. There was Africa who was last seen running between parked cars, scared. He was with that cute young couple but they must have abandoned him. There was "38", who someone in the neighborhood found and dropped off at the pound. What's going to happen to him now the guy asked as he was leaving. Gas said the woman at the counter. No one wants a pit. What cage is he in asked the guy. 38. He went back and got him. We used to see 38 all the time. There was Buster who lived in Tompkins Sq. Park with a homeless kid. We saw him sometimes then I heard he ate rat poison and died. Point is that I am a fucking saint. There was your mother Lucy, white with a handful of pale black spots who lived with the restaurant woman on 4th street, then Lucy was gone. We used to see her up on the fire escape all the time.

I needed to talk to you about things. This was in the fall. You died in December. I heard about this woman who could communicate with animals. I was having dinner with two friends one from the west coast one from the east and they had both heard of such a woman and it turned out she was the same one. That's good.

Rosie's in California, I'm in New York the woman is in western Mass. The way we do it Dawn Allen said is you tell me what you want me to ask her. It's going to be silent on the line for a few minutes because I'll be talking with her. I'll tell you what Rosie has to say for herself.

Dawn came back giggling. This is an amazing dog. I've never heard a dog talk this way before. She's quite a little poet. Oh she must have known everyone says. I don't know. My question was what was keeping Rosie around. She likes the smell of the world. She likes the

feeling of the wind on her fur. She likes grass. She loves San Diego. She's very happy there.

She says she'll cross that bridge when she comes to it in reference to moving to LA. That's my family's talk. I knew it meant she wouldn't be there. It's how we say no.

When I came in from the reading she was on her hassock by the window. Again very still. I had to stare to catch her breathing. I crouched down. We've been together for a while I said. If you're ready to go it's okay. I got down with her eye to eye. It was grey. I felt like she was swimming in some fluid and I was in there with her. It was our intimacy. A silent place. I felt I was guided by her. Her deep prescient calm. I would miss her so much. I wanted to keep swimming with her. But I couldn't help it. I pulled out. I had to say no. I'm not dying with you. But who will I be without my dog. And I carried you to the bed.

1. Note: We should do a little pamphlet of Rosie's poems.

The Death of Rosie

In the morning she felt very still. I felt like I could pick her up like a little football and pass her through. She hadn't moved all night.

I called the vet. It was Saturday morning. What's it like in there now. It's very quiet but you better get in here fast.

I called Ali and Anna who said they would come. Were coming. We need coffee. I grabbed her and my sleeping bag. I carried her, rolled up. I put her in the car.

There's a few ahead of you said Marcy as we came in. That's okay. I'm waiting for my friends. Why don't you take her into the corner said Marcy who was one of the people who stayed with her. Everyone in the animal world has a little business. They work at a vet's and they have dog walking cards on the counter.

Why now she asked, stroking Rosie's head. She was stooped down on the floor with us.

You don't think she's ready?

We've all been waiting for you. It is time.

The room kept filling. All the people with their young cats and dogs watching us in our sorrow. Did you know what was going on? Anna and Ali blew in. Rose Anna said crouching down. Is there anything

we can do. Has she eaten? What would she like—How about some carne asada, Rose would you like that. Anna waved the money off. I'll be right back. Oh Rose said Ali her face growing big.

Anna fed Rosie the whole serving by hand. Rosie's eyes were large, bugged out like the only parts of her alive were the screaming whites of her eyes, the dark flat irises and her mouth. Prayerful but getting it down.

OK said the vet opening the door. It was Doctor Todd the old one. So it's time huh Rose. Do you think I'm rushing her. This is the hardest thing in the world she said ponderously but in her heart. My partner and I put our boy down a few months ago. It was the hardest thing we've ever done and we've lost a few. She's been ready for a while. It was you that was holding on. She didn't need to hang around all this time did you Rose. She was holding a syringe up. It was pink. This is an anesthetic. That's all that she needs poor thing. I'll give her half and see how that does her. She pushed it in. Maybe her ass her thigh. She stopped. She put her stethoscope down on her heart. She's gone. It was just a bear of her being still. It was all her black and white my father's touchable body. I'll leave you with her for a few minutes. Take your time. There was a thin young tech, gay I guessed who dashed out of the room the moment her heart stopped. He came back & he put a posy orange and red flowers tiny at her neck. He knows she's Rosie I thought.

He knows the rhyme. It looked so good with her colours, her enormous mouth going slack. The inside of her mouth was all out the scar of her lip. Her long jaw. We all cried and hugged. Do you want to be with her? Yes.

The world was outside the door. It was Saturday morning. It was so generous. To let us be in here now like this. Just us. She was a city dog, born on a sidewalk or a roof. There was always concrete and talk. The world out there now on the other side of the wall. In here, just us.

How will I ever let go of you girl. The first one ever mine. I hugged her long body. Her mouth so still. Her eyes, closed I think. I don't know.

I saw this movie about the jungle. The man died under a tree. His friends were leaving him. Travel well I said. All the seeds of you; and the dream of you, the rot.

Then I stepped back into the world.

INTRODUCTION

Between the Body and the Breathing Earth

wning up to being an animal, a creature of earth. Tuning our animal senses to the sensible terrain: blending our skin with the rain-rippled surface of rivers, mingling our ears with the thunder and the thrumming of frogs, and our eyes with the molten gray sky. Feeling the polyrhythmic pulse of this place—this huge windswept body of water and stone. This vexed being in whose flesh we're entangled.

Becoming earth. Becoming animal. Becoming, in this manner, fully human.



This is a book about becoming a two-legged animal, entirely a part of the animate world whose life swells within and unfolds all around us. It seeks a new way of speaking, one that enacts our interbeing with the earth rather than blinding us to it. A language that stirs a new humility in relation to other earthborn beings, whether spiders or obsidian outcrops or spruce limbs bent low by the clumped snow. A style of speech that opens our senses to the sensuous in all its multiform strangeness.

The chapters that follow strive to discern and perhaps to practice a curious kind of thought, a way of careful reflection that no

longer tears us out of the world of direct experience in order to represent it, but that binds us ever more deeply into the thick of that world. A way of thinking enacted as much by the body as by the mind, informed by the humid air and the soil and the quality of our breathing, by the intensity of our contact with the other bodies that surround.

Yet words are human artifacts, are they not? Surely to speak, or to think in words, is necessarily to step back from the world's presence into a purely human sphere of reflection? Such, precisely, has been our civilized assumption. But what if meaningful speech is *not* an exclusively human possession? What if the very language we now speak arose first in response to an animate, expressive world—as a stuttering reply not just to others of our species but to an enigmatic cosmos that already *spoke to us* in a myriad of tongues?

What if thought is not born within the human skull, but is a creativity proper to the body as a whole, arising spontaneously from the slippage between an organism and the folding terrain that it wanders? What if the curious curve of thought is engendered by the difficult eros and tension between our flesh and the flesh of the earth?.



Is it possible to grow a worthy cosmology by attending closely to our encounters with other creatures, and with the elemental textures and contours of our locale? We are by now so accustomed to the cult of expertise that the very notion of honoring and paying heed to our directly felt experience of things—of insects and wooden floors, of broken-down cars and bird-pecked apples and the scents rising from the soil—seems odd and somewhat misguided as a way to find out what's worth knowing. According to assumptions long held by the civilization in which I've been raised, the deepest truth of things is concealed behind the appearances, in dimensions inaccessible to our senses. A thousand years ago these dimensions were viewed in spiritual terms: the sensuous world was a fallen, derivative reality that could be understood only by reference to heavenly realms hidden beyond the stars. Since the powers

residing in such realms were concealed from common perception, they had to be mediated for the general populace by priests, who might intercede with those celestial agencies on our behalf.

In recent centuries, an abundance of discoveries and remarkable inventions have transformed this culture's general conception of things—and yet the basic disparagement of sensuous reality remains. Like an old, collective habit very difficult to kick, the directly sensed world is still explained by reference to realms hidden beyond our immediate experience. Such a realm, for example, is the microscopic domain of axons and dendrites, and neurotransmitters washing across neuronal synapses—a dimension entirely concealed from direct apprehension, yet which presumably precipitates, or gives rise to, every aspect of our experience. Another such dimension is the recondite realm hidden within the nuclei of our cells, wherein reside the intricately folding strands of DNA and RNA that ostensibly code and perhaps even “cause” the behavior of living things. Alternatively, the deepest source and truth of the apparent world is sometimes held to exist in the subatomic realm of quarks, mesons, and gluons (or the still more theoretical world of vibrating ten-dimensional strings); or perhaps in the initial breaking of symmetries in the cosmological “big bang,” an event almost inconceivably distant in time and space.

Every one of these arcane dimensions radically transcends the reach of our unaided senses. Since we have no ordinary experience of these realms, the essential truths to be found there must be mediated for us by experts, by those who have access to the high-powered instruments and the inordinately expensive technologies (the electron microscopes, functional MRI scanners, radio telescopes, and supercolliders) that might offer a momentary glimpse into these dimensions. Here, as before, the sensuous world—the creaturely world directly encountered by our animal senses—is commonly assumed to be a secondary, derivative reality understood only by reference to more primary domains that exist elsewhere, behind the scenes.

I do not deny the importance of those other scales or dimensions, nor the value of the various truths that may be found there. I

longer tears us out of the world of direct experience in order to represent it, but that binds us ever more deeply into the thick of that world. A way of thinking enacted as much by the body as by the mind, informed by the humid air and the soil and the quality of our breathing, by the intensity of our contact with the other bodies that surround.

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In recent centuries, an abundance of discoveries and remarkable inventions have transformed this culture's general conception of things—and yet the basic disparagement of sensuous reality remains. Like an old, collective habit very difficult to kick, the directly sensed world is still explained by reference to realms hidden beyond our immediate experience. Such a realm, for example, is the microscopic domain of axons and dendrites, and neurotransmitters washing across neuronal synapses—a dimension entirely concealed from direct apprehension, yet which presumably precipitates, or gives rise to, every aspect of our experience. Another such dimension is the recondite realm hidden within the nuclei of our cells, wherein reside the intricately folding strands of DNA and RNA that ostensibly code and perhaps even “cause” the behavior of living things. Alternatively, the deepest source and truth of the apparent world is sometimes held to exist in the subatomic realm of quarks, mesons, and gluons (or the still more theoretical world of vibrating ten-dimensional strings); or perhaps in the initial breaking of symmetries in the cosmological “big bang,” an event almost inconceivably distant in time and space.

Every one of these arcane dimensions radically transcends the reach of our unaided senses. Since we have no ordinary experience of these realms, the essential truths to be found there must be mediated for us by experts, by those who have access to the high-powered instruments and the inordinately expensive technologies (the electron microscopes, functional MRI scanners, radio telescopes, and supercolliders) that might offer a momentary glimpse into these dimensions. Here, as before, the sensuous world—the creaturely world directly encountered by our animal senses—is commonly assumed to be a secondary, derivative reality understood only by reference to more primary domains that exist elsewhere, behind the scenes.

I do not deny the importance of those other scales or dimensions, nor the value of the various truths that may be found there. I

deny only that this shadowed, earthly world of deer tracks and moss is somehow less worthy, less REAL, than those abstract dimensions. It is more palpable to my skin, more substantial to my flaring nostrils, more precious—infinately more precious—to the heart drumming within my chest.

This directly experienced terrain, rippling with cricket rhythms and scoured by the tides, is the very realm now most ravaged by the spreading consequences of our disregard. Many long-standing and lousy habits have enabled our callous treatment of surrounding nature, empowering us to clear-cut, dam up, mine, develop, poison, or simply destroy so much of what quietly sustains us. Yet few are as deep-rooted and damaging as the habitual tendency to view the sensuous earth as a subordinate space—whether as a sinful plane, riddled with temptation, needing to be transcended and left behind; or a menacing region needing to be beaten and bent to our will; or simply a vaguely disturbing dimension to be avoided, superseded, and explained away.

Corporeal life is indeed difficult. To identify with the sheer physicality of one's flesh may well seem lunatic. The body is an imperfect and breakable entity vulnerable to a thousand and one insults—to scars and the scorn of others, to disease, decay, and death. And the material world that our body inhabits is hardly a gentle place. The shuddering beauty of this biosphere is bristling with thorns: generosity and abundance often seem scant ingredients compared with the prevalence of predation, sudden pain, and racking loss. Carnally embedded in the depths of this cacophonous profusion of forms, we commonly can't even predict just what's lurking behind the near boulder, let alone get enough distance to fathom and figure out all the workings of this world. We simply can't get it under our control. We've lost hearing in one ear; the other rings like a fallen spoon. Our spouse falls in love with someone else, while our young child comes down with a bone-rattling fever that no doctor seems able to diagnose. There are things out and about that can eat us, and ultimately will. Small wonder, then, that we prefer to abstract ourselves whenever we can, imagining ourselves into theoretical spaces less fraught with insecurity, con-

juring dimensions more amenable to calculation and control. We slip blissfully into machine-mediated scapes, offering ourselves up to any technology that promises to enhance the humdrum capacities of our given flesh. And sure, now and then we'll engage this earthen world as well, *as long we know that it's not ultimate*, as long as we're convinced that we're not stuck here.

Even among ecologists and environmental activists, there's a tacit sense that we'd better not let our awareness come too close to our creaturely sensations, that we'd best keep our arguments girded with statistics and our thoughts buttressed with abstractions, lest we succumb to an overwhelming grief—a heartache born of our organism's instinctive empathy with the living land and its cascading losses. Lest we be bowled over and broken by our dismay at the relentless devastation of the biosphere.

Thus do we shelter ourselves from the harrowing vulnerability of bodied existence. But by the same gesture we also insulate ourselves from the deepest wellsprings of joy. We cut our lives off from the necessary nourishment of contact and interchange with other shapes of life, from antlered and loop-tailed and amber-eyed beings whose resplendent weirdness loosens our imaginations, from the droning of bees and the gurgling night chorus of the frogs and the morning mist rising like a crowd of ghosts off the weedlot. We seal ourselves off from the erotic warmth of a cello's voice, or from the tilting dance of construction cranes against a downtown sky overbursting with blue. From the errant hummingbird pulsing in our cupped hands as we ferry it back out the door, and the crimson flash as it zooms from our fingers.

For too long we've closed ourselves to the participatory life of our senses, inured ourselves to the felt intelligence of our muscled flesh and its manifold solidarities. We've taken our primary truths from technologies that hold the world at a distance. Such tools can be mighty useful, and beneficial as well, as long as the insights that they yield are carried carefully back to the lived world, and placed in service to the more-than-human matrix of corporeal encounter and experience. But technology can also, and easily, be used as a way to avoid direct encounter, as a shield—etched with lines of

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code or cryptic jargon—to ward off whatever frightens, as a synthetic heaven or haven in which to hide out from the distressing ambiguity of the real.

Only by welcoming uncertainty from the get-go can we acclimate ourselves to the shattering wonder that enfolds us. This animal body, for all its susceptibility and vertigo, remains the primary instrument of all our knowing, as the capricious earth remains our primary cosmos.



I have no intention with this work to offer a definitive statement, much less a comprehensive one. The complicated and often terrifying problems arising at this moment of the earth's unfolding entail the widest possible range of responses, to which every one of us must lend our specific gifts. I've written this book, a spiraling series of experimental and improvisational forays, in hopes that others will try my findings against their own experience, correcting or contesting my discoveries with their own.

This venture will start slowly, gathering energy as it moves. Simple encounters from my own life—encounters unexpected and serendipitous—will provide a loose, structuring frame for each investigation that follows. The early chapters take up several ordinary, taken-for-granted aspects of the perceived world—shadows, houses, gravity, stones, visual depth—drawing near to each phenomenon in order to notice the way it engages not our intellect but our sensing and sentient body. Later chapters delve into more complex powers—like mind, mood, and language—that variously influence and organize our experience of the perceptual field. The final chapters step directly into the natural magic of perception itself, exploring the willed alteration of our senses and the wild transformation of the sensuous, addressing magic and shapeshifting and the metamorphosis of culture.

Many of our inherited concepts (our ready definitions and explanations) serve to isolate our intelligence from the intimacy of our creaturely encounter with the strangeness of things. In these pages we'll listen close to the things themselves, allowing weather

patterns and moose and precipitous cliffs their own otherness. We'll pay attention to their unique manner of showing themselves, attuning ourselves to those facets that have been eclipsed by accepted styles of thinking. Can we find fresh ways to elucidate these earthly phenomena, forms of articulation that free the things from their conceptual straitjackets, enabling them to stretch their limbs and begin to breathe?

The early explorations in this book will soon lead us up against some basic cultural assumptions, forcing us to ruminate a range of reflective questions regarding bodies, materiality, and the language of the sciences, as well as the manner in which our words affect the ongoing life of our animal senses. Such discussions will leave us freer to dance in the later chapters, able to follow our investigations wherever they lead.



Some might claim that this is a book of solitudes. For I've chosen to concentrate upon those moments in a day or a life when one slips provisionally beneath the societal surge of forces, those occasions (often un verbalized and hence overlooked) when one comes more directly into felt relation with the wider, more-than-human community of beings that surrounds and sustains the human hubbub. Awakening to citizenship in this broader commonwealth, however, has real ramifications for how we humans get along with one another. It carries substantial consequences for the way a genuine democracy shapes itself—for the way that our body politic *breathes*.

Why, then, is so little attention paid to the social or political spheres within these pages? Because there's a necessary work of recuperation to be accomplished (or at least opened and gotten well under way) before those spheres can be disclosed afresh, and this book is engaged in that work of recuperation. A replenished participation in the human collective, forging new forms of place-based community and planetary solidarity, along with a commitment to justice and the often exasperating work of politics—these, too, are necessary elements in the process, and they compose a vital

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part of my own practice. But they are not the primary focus of this volume.^a



Writing is a curious endeavor, swerving from moments of splendid delirium into others of stunned puzzlement, and from there into stretches of calm, focused craft. The writing down of words is a relatively recent practice for the human animal. We two-leggeds have long been creatures of language, of course, but verbal language lived first in the shaped breath of utterance, it laughed and stuttered on the tongue long before it lay down on the page, and longer still before it arrayed itself in rows across the glowing screen.

While persons brought up within literate culture often speak *about* the natural world, indigenous, oral peoples sometimes speak *directly to* that world, acknowledging certain animals, plants, and even landforms as expressive subjects with whom they might find themselves in conversation. Obviously these other beings do not

^a The phrase that titles this book, “becoming animal,” carries a range of possible meanings. In this work the phrase speaks first and foremost to the matter of becoming more deeply human by acknowledging, affirming, and growing into our animality. Other meanings will gradually make themselves evident to different readers. The phrase is sometimes associated with the late-twentieth-century writings of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and his collaborator, the psychoanalyst Félix Guattari (1930–1992). Like many other philosophers, I have drawn much pleasure from Deleuze’s endlessly fecund writings, which are fairly brimming with fresh trajectories for thought to follow. We share several aims, including a wish to undermine an array of unnoticed, other-worldly assumptions that structure a great deal of contemporary thought, and a consequent commitment to a kind of radical immanence—even to *materialism* (or what I might call “matter-realism”) in a dramatically reconceived sense of the term. My work also shares with his a keen resistance to whatever unnecessarily impedes the erotic creativity of matter.

Despite the commonality of some aims, however, our strategies are drastically different. (One of my meanders through the backcountry will sometimes cross one of Deleuze’s lines of flight at an oblique angle, but our improvised trajectories are rarely, if ever, parallel.) As a phenomenologist, I am far too taken with lived experience—with the felt encounter between our sensate body and the animate earth—to suit his philosophical taste. As a metaphysician, Deleuze is far too given to the production of abstract concepts to suit mine. By choosing for my title a phrase sometimes associated with Deleuze’s writing, I nonetheless find myself paying homage to the burgeoning creativity of his work, even as I hope to open the phrase to new meanings and associations.

speak with a human tongue; they do not speak in *words*. They may speak in song, like many birds, or in rhythm, like the crickets and the ocean waves. They may speak a language of movements and gestures, or articulate themselves in shifting shadows. Among many native peoples, such forms of expressive speech are assumed to be as communicative, in their own way, as the more verbal discourse of our species (which after all can also be thought of as a kind of vocal gesticulation, or even as a sort of singing). Language, for traditionally oral peoples, is not a specifically human possession, but is a property of the animate earth, in which we humans participate.

Oral language gusts through us—our sounded phrases borne by the same air that nourishes the cedars and swells the cumulus clouds. Laid out and immobilized on the flat surface, our words tend to forget that they are sustained by this windswept earth; they begin to imagine that their primary task is to provide a *representation* of the world (as though they were outside of, and not really a *part of*, this world). Nonetheless, the power of language remains, first and foremost, a way of singing oneself into contact with others and with the cosmos—a way of bridging the silence between oneself and another person, or a startled black bear, or the crescent moon soaring like a billowed sail above the roof. Whether sounded on the tongue, printed on the page, or shimmering on the screen, language's primary gift is not to *re-present* the world around us, but to call ourselves into the vital *presence* of that world—and into deep and attentive presence with one another.

This ancestral capacity of speech necessarily underlies and supports all the other roles that language has come to have. Whether we wield our words to describe a landscape, to analyze a problem, or to explain how some gadget works, none of these roles would be possible without the primordial power of utterance to make our bodies resonate with one another and with the other rhythms that surround us. The autumn bugling of the elk does this, too, and the echoed honks of geese vee-ing south for the winter. This tonal layer of meaning—the stratum of spontaneous, bodily expression that oral cultures steadily deploy, and that literate culture all too

easily forgets—is the very dimension of language that we two-leggeds share in common with other animals. We share it, as well, with the mutter and moan of the wind through the winter branches outside my studio. In the spring the buds on those branches will unfurl new leaves, and by summer the wind will speak with a thousand green tongues as it rushes through those same trees, releasing a chorus of rustles and whispers and loudly swelling rattles very different from the low, plaintive sighs of winter. And all those chattering leaves will feed my thoughts as I sit by the open door, next summer, scribbling and pondering.

These pages, too, are nothing other than talking leaves—their insights stirred by the winds, their vitality reliant on periodic sunlight and on cool, dark water seeping up from within the ground. Step into their shade. Listen close. Something other than the human mind is at play here.

Interspecies Architecture

There is no natural environment. The world is always, in every part, conceived, designed, and built. And more importantly, space is always designed and built by other species, and for other species than the one that occupies it. This is why relations with the world are never simply physical or natural, but always political. For each species, being in the world means living in space designed and built by others. To live is therefore always to occupy, to invade a foreign space and to negotiate what a shared space could be.

Let's start with the most common, most trivial phenomenon relating to living beings (or at least animals): breathing. Our relationship to the world is first of all one of air and breath. For us, space is not only space to be travelled, seen, and touched. All living space must be breathable space. Space is therefore primarily the object of breathing, fuel for our lungs. And in this sense, the inaugural architectural act is not the construction of walls, but air-conditioning.

We are accustomed to thinking that breathing is the most natural of motions, the most obvious and ordinary relation connecting us to the world and to space. We are

used to thinking of air as the most natural of elements, one that exists in its purest form, beyond any manipulation of nature. And yet air, with its 21% oxygen content, is only a by-product of plant life. It results from the metabolism of plants, it is the waste produced by their existence. In other words, it is an entity modified by someone, an artefact. The derivative of a plan, a project in the world, which does not come from humans or from individuals belonging to any species related to humans. Yet the result of this accidental, non-human conception makes the world viable for us. We know that the permanent settlement of animals on land was only made possible thanks to the radical metamorphosis of the layer of air that surrounds and envelops the Earth's crust, produced by plant invasion and the activity of cyanobacteria. Without the oxygen produced by photosynthesis, the Earth's atmosphere would not have changed its internal composition permanently and become the most immediate environment for all living things. From this point of view, the world is a plant entity far more than a zoological one, a garden rather than a zoo. And if the world is a garden, plants are not, or not really, or not only, the content of this garden or its inhabitants. They themselves are the gardeners. Recognizing this fact means that there is nothing transcendental or original about the Earth: it is an object produced by gardening. We, like all other animals, are the object of the gardening action of plants. We are one of their cultural and agricultural products. In more familiar terms, plants are not the content of the landscape but the very first landscapers. They metamorphose the world.

This very simple fact deserves to be considered more broadly as the paradigmatic example of the relationship between a species and space. It is not only plants that

produce the face of our world, that shape and reshape the Earth: every living being does so. Architectural and urban agency is not something limited to the human being, it is the most widely shared faculty of living beings.

This is the conclusion to be drawn from the evidence of our animal nature: if mind is made up of atoms, tissues, and molecules, then mind is everywhere, in every living species. Biology is therefore a cosmic phenomenology of spirit. And reason expresses itself in non-human forms which we have both inherited and internalized.

Each species is a conscious actor, capable not only of mistakes and bad choices, but also of arbitrary behaviour that does not necessarily relate to what would be better and more useful for it. Every living species therefore also has an aesthetic relationship to the world around it.

Being alive does not just mean perceiving the world differently from other species, but also constructing it, shaping it in a different way. The environment is not something that pre-exists natural species, it is something that each species reshapes in its own image. The animate world is a world of architects. And because there is only one world and each species is in a sense obliged to live in a world produced and designed by others, and vice versa, architecture is always a multispecies affair.

So, humanity came into the world because the Earth had already been designed by other species . . . and not really for the good of humanity. To breathe is to use, to live off something that someone else has produced, and to turn that something into our first little cubbyhole. That's the goal. Space, or what we like to call the natural environment, is never 'natural'. What we call space is always a designed, produced space, not something that has been there, intact and equal to itself since the

dawn of time. The space in which we live is the product of someone else. This architect of our common space (considered not only as a geometrical entity, but as a set of forms, objects, and contents of all kinds) is no man or woman or god. It is an individual (or group of individuals) belonging to another living species.

Since the world is the same for everyone and for all species, every act of design is also an act that blurs boundaries and disturbs the world of other species. Every time a bee, an oak tree, or a bacterium changes its environment to make its own life possible, this species also changes the environment of others. So architecture is not only the active relationship between a species and the world, but the necessary relationship between them. Each species relates to others as an architect of the world. Architecture is not just a human affair, a cultural fact. It is not even the relationship between a species and space, a form of life and its world. It is the paradigm of the interspecies relationship.

Our Mind is Always in the Bodies of Other Species

We are used to thinking that the interdependent relationships between different species are physical, energetic, or anatomical in nature. We never suspect that this interdependence is first of all of a cognitive and speculative order. If every relation between species is technical and artificial, not natural or purely physical, it is because every species finds its mind, its intelligence, its ability to think, *always* and *exclusively* in its relation with other species. Each species is linked to one or more other species as to its *mind*. This is the great lie of neurobiology: the intellect is not an organ, it always exists outside the body of every living individual.

Intellect is not a thing, it's a relation. It exists not in our body, but in the relations our body establishes with other bodies. If minds exist outside the body, it is because they are not the monospecific equipment of individuals: what we call mind is always an association between the life of two species. This idea of mind as ecology is not foreign to contemporary biology. The first to explore the idea was Paul Shepard in *Thinking Animals*,² where he showed how thinking is the effect, and not the condition of possibility, of the symbiotic

cohabitation between plants, animals, bacteria, etc. It was only and always in interspecies relationships that large predators developed intelligence: without herbivores, large carnivorous predators would have been completely stupid. Shepard, however, still thought of this interspecificity of intelligence in teleological terms. On the contrary, we should imagine that the intellect of any species is embodied in another species.

You only have to look at a meadow to realize that. With the flower, the plant turns the insect into a geneticist, a breeder, a farmer: it entrusts another species belonging to another kingdom with the task of making a decision on the genetic and biological destiny of its own species. It entrusts them with the task of directing the metamorphosis of its species. In a certain sense, the flower transfers the plant's species-mind into the *body* of the bee. It is not simply a collaboration, it is the constitution of a cognitive and speculative interspecific organ. This means not only that all evolutionary development is co-evolution, as Peter Raven, Paul Ehrlich, and Donna Haraway have shown, but also that, as we have seen, co-evolution is what we normally call agriculture or husbandry. Each species decides, in its own way, the evolutionary fate of others. What we call evolution is nothing more than a kind of generalized interspecies agriculture, a cosmic crossbreeding – which is not necessarily designed for the benefit of one or the other. The world as a whole thus becomes a kind of purely relational reality where each species is the agro-ecological territory of the other: every living being is both garden and gardener of other species. The world then is this relation of reciprocal culture (never defined purely by the logic of utility, nor that of free usage). In this sense, no ecology is possible, because every ecosystem is the result of an agricultural practice and the involvement

Our Mind is Always in the Bodies of Other Species

of other species. There is no wild space, just as there are no wild animals, because everything is cultivated. The relationship between culture and nature is always reversible: any species can embody nature for us, and vice versa.

The soil then ceases to be an autonomous reality.

There is no soil. The soil of one is the life of others. Politics can no longer be carried out on a territorial basis, but only on the basis of the interspecies relationship: so a city is only the relationship that a group of humans has with a series of other species (and with all the species that the existence of those species requires). There is no territory, no neutral space upon which the living could settle. Originary settlement is an act of agriculture or zootechnics. We always settle upon the lives of others, and, conversely, every one of us is always the soil for other living beings. Each lives off the body of the other. Each drew their body from the body of the other. As if, from the beginning, the Earth was a body formed of the bodies of all species, each of which lives off the lives of others, and all of which are inseparable.

Every living being is an Earth for others, every species is the terrain of life for an indefinite number of other actors, both living and non-living. There is no urban soil, no pure space to settle in, all is agricultural land. Soil is not what separates one living thing from another or one species from another, but what obliges each to mix with the other. Every territory is in itself a metamorphosis in progress, by virtue of which living beings, species, and non-living actors receive their share of the same power of acting that is common to the whole planet. Conversely, each of us, like all living things and all species, is part of a collective metamorphosis. A soil for other living things and other species. It is as the soil of others that we have a power to act.

This interspecies relationship that we call mind, intelligence, or 'brain' is not something natural. It is not spontaneous, eternal, purely biological – it is a technical fact and, in a sense, an artistic one. Any relationship between species must be read not only as something contingent, but as something like the relationship between an artist and the material they manipulate or, better still, as the relationship between a curator and an artist. The choice of insects as to which flower to mate with which other is not based on a rational calculation but on taste: how much sugar does the flower contain, that's the key. Evolution is therefore based on taste rather than utility. The sensitivities of one species decide the fate of other species. So evolution is just fashion in nature, a fashion show that lasts millions of years and allows any species to wear clothes taken from other species or that have been designed by others. Every landscape is an exhibition of contemporary nature or a masquerade where the fashions of nature are on display: a multispecies Biennial, an installation waiting to be replaced by hundreds of others.

Everything in nature, like everything in our own existence, is artificial and arbitrary. An artificiality produced by the action of different species. The history of the Earth is a history of art, an eternal artistic experiment. In this context, each species is both artist and curator of other species. And conversely, each species is both a work of art and a performance by the species whose evolution it represents, but also the object of an exhibition curated by those other species that made it emerge.

Evolution and natural selection are totally revolutionized. Fish, plants, lice, bacteria, viruses, fungi, and horses: whether large or extremely small, whatever kingdom they belong to, all living beings are minds, and not only for themselves (thinking, feeling, capa-

ble of decision-making), they are also the minds of other species. All living beings are capable not only of consciously changing their own and other species' environments, of forging arbitrary interspecies relationships that are not necessarily oriented towards some utility or other, but also of altering the destiny of other species. When looked at in this way, the world becomes the ever-changing result of this universal and cosmic intelligence and sensibility of the infinite forms of life. Conversely, this cosmic mind is produced by an infinite series of arbitrary and rational encounters and decisions taken by different species at different times, according to the strangest of intentions. Mind – that is to say, interspecies evolution – is the life of the metamorphosis of the world.

The End of Wilderness

Metamorphosis teaches us that being squirrel or boletus, kiwi fruit or dandelion, is not a destiny that has been assigned to us by an immortal subject and that we must accept as a natural given. The face of each species is an artefact, in the literal sense of the word: it is something that is built over time, using the most varied and disparate materials. Each species has built itself, following a series of arbitrary choices that are not necessarily related to needs imposed upon it by the environment. It was Darwin himself who suggested this explicitly. In 1871, in his book *The Descent of Man*, he realized that the morphological variety of many species could not be explained through the mere mechanism of natural selection – that is through a dynamism which is not controlled by living beings, and which ‘obliges’ them to adapt to the environment. The shapes of living bodies – their colours, decorative patterns, etc. – are not only expressions of the individual’s adaptation to the world around them. They are also and above all the expression of a taste, of a sort of artistic will that drives the individual of a species to prefer one form over the other. With the term ‘sexual selection’ Darwin designated the fact

that the evolution of species is also based on judgements of taste, actively expressed, almost always by female individuals. In 2017 the great ornithologist Richard Prum published an epochal study in which he confirmed and radicalized this intuition.³ Species are nothing more than expressions of a 'biotic art', a sort of aesthetic performance conducted on an anatomical level. Ecology should stop mimicking economics or looking for a form of 'durability' – clearly an economic category. Instead, it should understand that all ecological problems are aesthetic problems in the sense in which, from Schiller onwards, this term has been used: to designate the sphere in which necessity and arbitrariness are combined in the alchemy that we call play. Species identity is therefore a space in which life ceaselessly plays with its own forms. And it is this game that we should begin to call architecture. Every species identity is a technical, architectural fact, and as such is never definitive, but remains subject to the changes which, generation upon generation, each individual will want to make to the building of which they are at once the structure, owner, inhabitant, and usufructuary. But if this is the case, then nothing in nature can any longer be considered as 'wild' or 'savage'.

Contemporary anthropology has long since enabled us to have done with the idea of the savage within the human world. What we imagined to be a radical cultural break turned out to be a difference in ways of articulating knowledge of the same object, the world, which nevertheless remain comparable in their 'intellectual application' and in their 'methods of observation'.⁴ History can end up producing a considerable distance between cultures, sometimes greater than that caused by geography, but it can never break the continuity of human experience. On the other hand, there is no single

modernity that we could oppose to a void, a lack of civilization and history – primitive time – but parallel and different forms of modernity which, moreover, have continually intersected and hybridized with one another. ‘Modern’ and ‘scientific’ thinking and ‘wild’ thinking are ‘two parallel modes of acquiring knowledge [whose] theoretical and practical results differ in value [but which] require the same sort of mental operations and [...] differ not so much in kind as in the different types of phenomena to which they are applied’.⁵ The attribute ‘savage’ is thus only the residue of the contempt and unthinking racism that any self-consciousness projects onto the foreigner: the presumption of superiority is an optical effect of any culture towards others. Every civilization tends to consider the other savage. ‘When we make the mistake of thinking that the Savage is governed solely by organic or economic needs’, wrote Claude Lévi-Strauss in his masterpiece *The Savage Mind*, ‘we forget that he levels the same reproach at us, and that to him his own desires for knowledge seem more balanced than ours’.⁶ It is not that some cultures are close to nature, nor that others are excessively mediated: there are just different formations of knowledge. Indeed, cultural difference can never be interpreted as a greater moral perfection: no culture gives us greater access to the Good than others.

Although the ‘wild man’ and the attribute of ‘savageness’ (along with that of the ‘primitive’) have now been excluded from historical and scientific discourse relating to different human cultures, similar tropes are still strongly present in the discourse around the non-human. We continue to speak of ‘wild’ spaces where living things construct a world without the contribution of the human species; we strive to define as ‘wild’ any form of life that is closer to its Good and

The End of Wilderness

to the conditions of possibility of its own maximum perfection.

The terms 'wild' and 'wilderness', when referring to non-human life, acquire a double meaning, as was well explained by William Cronon in a seminal essay that triggered an extremely broad and important debate.⁷ According to Cronon, the history of this notion and the paradoxes it feeds are linked to neo-colonial and religious prejudices. On the one hand, the idea of savagery (wilderness) is nourished by the myth of the border, which presupposes that the American natural space was uninhabited and thus passes over in silence the massacre of local populations by colonists. On the other hand, the wilderness, previously considered negatively as a demonic place and the suspension of all forms of morality, has undergone a kind of sublimation that has transformed it into a place of encounter with divinity and thus of moral perfection. The myth of a wilderness that is expressed in the idea of a natural park is thus the inversion of the founding myth of the modern state. The latter thought of nature as what precedes the state and civilization: the association between human beings was supposed to replace, correct, and suspend the state of nature. The myth of 'wild' nature, on the contrary, sees the city fantasizing an outside self that would allow it to purify itself from the excesses of civilization and to balance them out. From this point of view, the attribute of wildness, when applied to non-human beings, fulfils a function opposite to the one it has when applied to human cultures: it does not belittle but instead exalts all that is supposedly devoid of culture and technics. Humanity may perhaps be considered technically superior, but morally inferior to other species. It is indeed because they lack reason and agility (and thus all forms of artifice and culture) that living things in the 'wild'

state are supposedly 'purer' and more authentic than all human life: they are incapable of poor choices and errors, and are therefore unable to distance themselves from anything useful to them. It is because of its lack of subjectivity and freedom that the non-human being will never be able to distance itself from the Good. If, thanks to Darwin, biology has made it possible to understand that human life is no different from the life that is expressed in other life forms, it nevertheless continues to understand non-human life as being governed by an absolute and unfailing adherence to its own nature and its own perfection. There is nothing radically contingent about natural history: evolutionary choices made mechanically through competition necessarily produce local and global utility and promote the affirmation of the 'best' for the species as well as for their totality. It is impossible to imagine that non-human life can make bad choices. Impossible to imagine that there will be error, misunderstanding, catastrophes caused by the 'levity' of non-human species. There is a teleological order that allows all non-human life to automatically and unconsciously attain good and perfection.

The logic of utility implied in evolution is thus seen to represent a more acute form of rationality than any human doctrine, allowing non-human communities to do without any form of civilization, any accumulated and transmitted knowledge, any historical contingency. It is this theological bias (for it is impossible to demonstrate scientifically that non-human life tends by itself to its own good and that evolution always makes choices beneficial to species) that makes it possible to think of the 'wild' as a more morally perfect order than the political order produced within humanity and the world of artifice, which often leads to error.

To overcome this prejudice – to have done with sav-

agery and the wild – it is therefore not enough to affirm that man is an animal species: it is necessary to put a stop to the impulse to idealization that afflicts both human life and non-human life, placing them in moral opposition. Everything that constitutes us derives from the non-human and has the same nature, but the reverse is also true: everything that defines humanity, beginning with error, art, artifice, and moral arbitration, also defines the totality of living species. The consequence that a post-Darwinian biology should be able to draw from this fact is that there is a perfect equivalence between all species not only from an ontological or a cognitive point of view, but also from a moral point of view. All species in nature are morally equivalent. And all species are ambivalent: they do not automatically tend towards the Good, they do not always do the right thing. Every species, because of its freedom, can also make bad choices, for itself and for nature in general.

If the mind is a matter of atoms, tissues, and molecules, then it is everywhere, in every living species, even if in different forms; and inversely, in a world where every form of life has a mind, a mind capable of error, no species can be considered either exemplary or scandalous. All life and all ethoses are cultural facts, everything is artificial, everything is also arbitrary, contingent, and sometimes dark, enigmatic, equivocal, as it is for humans. Biology should be transformed into a phenomenology of the cosmic mind, which would show how reason expresses itself mainly through non-human forms, which we have both inherited and internalized. And this phenomenology will not always be a day trip to paradise.

Contemporary Nature

Each species decides the evolutionary destiny of the other, at once artist and work. We humans, for example, are a work of art made by those primates who decided to modify their bodies to produce another way of life. We are a species-performance by them that has lasted for three hundred thousand years.

The Earth itself must be considered as an artistic experiment. Evolution is in fact the production of what should be called contemporary nature.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, when art established itself as avant-garde, it ceased to fulfil an aesthetic function. It freed itself from the task of producing beauty, of decorating what already exists and bringing it into harmony. In claiming to be contemporary – that is, in claiming to embody a form of time and not a form of space or matter – art became a collective practice of the divination of the future. From that moment on, through art, every society constructs something that does not yet exist within it: no longer a harmonious reflection of its own nature, but an attempt to reproduce itself differently from what it is, a way of being different and of divining a difference that

does not yet exist. Art embodies a society's desire for and project of metamorphosis.

Contemporary art is not defined by any particular medium, method, or discipline: it is a movement that crosses over and disrupts all media, all cultural practices and all cultural disciplines, so as to allow culture to differentiate itself from what it is. Art is the space in which a society manages to render visible what it cannot confess, think, or imagine.

We should think of evolution as the mode of life that corresponds to what contemporary art is for culture. Nature is not only the immemorial prehistory of culture, but its unrealized future; its surrealistic anticipation. Contemporary nature is the scene where life enters into the avant-garde of its future. It is life as a natural avant-garde. It is the surrealistic reproduction of forms of life.

Cities should become something like museums for contemporary nature, not just ecosystems of cohabitation. The concept of the ecosystem continues to presuppose the idea of a natural and immutable equilibrium in which any human intervention is perturbing and which excludes all technical innovation. What we have said about evolution as technical progress should be enough to convince us that every ecosystem is in fact a city – i.e., a space where innovation and progress are concentrated – and a museum of contemporary nature, a space where this progress does not follow a predetermined logic, but is freely available to all species.

The city as a museum of contemporary nature is nothing other than a collection of arts and technics in perfect continuity with our own. It will contain a kind of hybrid of old museums, zoos or botanical gardens, old human cities and white cubes. Life in these institutions will have to coincide with a kind of interspecies urban planning, a multispecies landscape architecture.

Metamorphoses

These new museums will have to be the promoters of an 'eco-surrealist' (but not necessarily eco-modernist) culture, capable of imagining nature beyond its limits. Bringing together artists, scientists, designers, architects, and farmers, it will be a matter of building multispecies associations somewhere between city, garden, plantation, and stable, where each living being produces works for others and for themselves. In this virtuous exercise of the imagination, both aesthetically and naturally, cities become the practice of a collective metamorphosis of species.

The city must become what makes the contemporaneity of nature possible. Nature is not the prehistory of civilization. It is our present and above all our future. It is always a futuristic projection of the present – its metamorphosis.

34Kg. Seagull

When I saw I was white I knew I was a seagull
I spread my wings to fly
numbness spread through them
I said I'd walk on the face of the sea
when the sea stopped being scared
I placed my wet foot on his face
I swallowed a fish
he shivered
his roar penetrated my ears
suddenly
my body melted
& I began to drown
I looked at my wings
but could not see them
the fish I thought I had swallowed
was swimming inside me
my wings were nothing but a wave
my sky was nothing but a sea
my white colour nothing but foam.

30Kg. Astronaut

The first star he saw in his life was
a bright reconnaissance plane that hadn't yet determined its target.
But he was very happy.
He jumped up & pointed at it: This is where I want to go.

The plane found its target
wrapped him in death like a cocoon
tore him to pieces
grew wings on each piece
& sprinkled them on the stars

Rubber Boots Methods

Outline for a Multispecies Study of the Anthropocene

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The former brown coal mines near the tiny Danish town of Søby are an unlikely microcosm of the Anthropocene. Covering an area of only eleven hundred hectares, the former mines are easily dwarfed by the megamines and tar sand pits elsewhere in the world. What they lack in size, they also lack in drama. Set in the flat and rather drab heaths of western Denmark, the former mines are now a wooded, rolling landscape that has been declared a cultural heritage site as testimony to a bygone chapter of resource exploitation. And located as they are within a welfare state on the northern rim of Europe, the mines are part of a multispecies landscape that has been relatively cushioned by geographic fortitude and economic history from the much more clearly violent historical dramas that have become the hallmarks of a planetary climate and environment going awry. No monstrous storms, no unprecedented forest fires, no king tides, and no mass extinctions plague these landscapes. No draconian forms of government intervention, genocidal evictions of Indigenous populations, or resource curses haunt these landscapes and their human and nonhuman inhabitants. Søby is, in both spatial scale and historical drama, an unremarkable patch of the Anthropocene. And yet, it is exactly the undramatic mundaneness of this version of the Anthropocene that has attracted us, the members of the research project Aarhus University Research on the Anthropocene (AURA), to its simplified landscape since 2013. Headed by Anna Tsing and funded by the Danish National Research Foundation, AURA made the former brown coal mines in Søby a methods lab, an experimental site that anthropologists,

biologists, ecological historians, and philosophers of science could visit to test their own fieldwork-based methods and learn from those of others as we all tried to make sense of the landscape. The former brown coal mines in Søby became a playground for methods experimentation across disciplines that shared a tradition of empirical fieldwork attuned to multispecies socialities and histories, as well as a test site for how best to retool these fieldwork traditions for the Anthropocene.

At a time when both biology and anthropology have come to realize that the conventional objects of their disciplines—natural ecosystems and human sociocultural worlds, respectively—can no longer be studied in isolation, it seemed to us particularly timely to try to regain the lost common ground between the disparate fieldwork traditions of these two disciplines. Anthropology, after all, borrows its tradition of modern fieldwork from biology (Stocking 1983a) and developed from this its own robust methods for studying human worlds. But these methods have primarily been geared toward humans. They have until recently been anthropocentric in the best sense of the term: driven by an ambition to describe human ingenuity and injustice, to understand how human lives are lived differently, and to analyze how human worlds might be constructed otherwise. Anthropological fieldwork methods were born out of attempts to work against Occidental prejudice, colonial oppression, and modern myopia. But even though the worlds otherwise that anthropologists sought to paint through their discipline-specific fieldwork and writing methods often included cows and other animals, plants and forests, spirits and materials, the worlds anthropology depicted were first and last *human* worlds. In recent years, however, the unwavering faith in a world in which humans are the only protagonists has crumbled, challenged



FIGURE 1.1. A view of the former brown coal mining area in Søby. Photograph by Nils Bubandt.

from within academia as well as by the more-than-human environmental and climatic crisis sometimes called the Anthropocene. In the Anthropocene, the issue of social justice is still and more than ever a matter of addressing the social, racial, and gender inequalities and forms of historical violence that affect human lives. And it indexes the intimate entanglement of those inequalities and forms of violence in broader landscapes of multispecies livability.

The Anthropocene is a contested concept that means many things to many people (Swanson, Bubandt, and Tsing 2015). The conventional claim is that the Anthropocene describes the Great Acceleration of an increasingly globally connected world after World War II in which humans have become a force of nature on a geological scale (McNeill and Engelke 2014; Steffen et al. 2015; Zalasiewicz et al. 2017). This claim has been the object of important critiques from a variety of scholars in the social and human sciences who point out that the concept of the Anthropocene is driven by a Western worldview, a universal and gender-blind idea of “the human,” and a politically liberal notion of history that ignores the dynamics and history of capitalism (Danowski, Viveiros de Castro, and Latour 2014; Demos 2017; Grusin 2017; Malm and Hornborg 2014; Moore 2016; Yusoff 2018). This critique notwithstanding, the Anthropocene is also a fundamental provocation to the academic division of labor and modern accounts of the world that for some scholars activate concerns to rethink “life” and to tell new stories about the positions and responsibilities of humans in the world (Zylinska 2014); to shift the way that the past, present, and future are envisioned, breaking with the self-evidence of modern progress (Chakrabarty 2009); and to speculate about novel foundations for future coexistence (Latour 2018; Morton 2016). We use the notion of the Anthropocene heuristically here, exploring it both critically and with an eye for the provocations it raises. Most importantly, we insist that the Anthropocene is emphatically not an epoch of the human (the *anthropos*) but rather a multispecies phenomenon—and a multispecies crisis—through and through (Haraway et al. 2016). Understood in this way, Anthropocene scholarship aligns with the recent “multispecies turn” within anthropology, geography, philosophy, and related disciplines (DeMello 2012; Kirksey and Helmreich 2010; Lorimer 2015; Wolfe 2013), a turn that itself can be traced to a broader “nonhuman turn” and a critical posthumanism (e.g., Wolfe 2009; Braidotti 2013) as well as an array of intellectual and

theoretical developments including but not limited to actor network theory and the politics and ecology of things (Latour 2004, 2005; Ingold 2012); feminist scholarship and the ontological turn (Viveiros de Castro 1998; Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2006; Grusin 2017; Kohn 2013); new approaches to materiality (Bennett 2010; Harvey, Krohn-Hansen, and Nustad 2019); affect theory, animal studies, and assemblage theory (Deleuze and Guattari 1987); new media theory, speculative realism, and systems theory (Grusin 2015); as well as postcolonial and decolonial approaches to human–environment relations (Gómez-Barris 2017; Green 2015; de la Cadena 2015).

It is out of this theoretical and analytical trajectory that the methodological experiments of this book grow. We offer a multiplicity of methodological approaches, attuned to a variety of particular landscapes and the specific socioecological histories tied to them. And throughout it all, the former brown coal mines in Søby infuse the methods, remaining a place from which to think and a place to think with, a reminder to always ground ourselves in the concrete. This is because the landscapes of Søby were the practical common testing ground for our first efforts in retooling and reconceptualization. In this miniature landscape of a mere eleven square kilometers, we experimented with the methods needed to study on a planetary scale the more-than-human coordinations and perturbations of the Anthropocene in a critically comparative and curiously transdisciplinary mode. It was by thinking and fieldworking with others within this site that it became clear that “more-than-human” does not mean “without humans”; it does not mean ignoring unequal economic history and (post)colonial political history or indeed human sociality and experience. On the contrary, it means taking the uneven complexity and multispecies entanglement of human existence seriously by not reducing it to the modern conceit of (Western) Man, a peculiarly racialized species in splendid isolation from and yet somehow also in full control over other species. Highlighting the multispecies nature of the Anthropocene is not a denial of human agency, injustice, and suffering. In fact, it is the opposite: a refocusing of diverse histories of human agency, injustice, and suffering through their complicity and synchronicity with relations to nonhuman beings and forces in a multispecies, historical landscape shaped by modernity and colonialism. As the chapters that follow will illustrate, more-than-human methods for the Anthropocene seek to attend to the ways that human injustice and ecological disruption are entangled in

the same treacherous histories (Baker et al. 2020). The chapters explore how we might retool anthropological and aligned disciplinary fieldwork methods and analytics to better deal with multispecies forms of life and death after human exceptionalism. The chapters also address how different disciplinary approaches might be activated together to be attuned to particular landscapes and the socioecological histories tied to them. They show that more-than-human methods are a way of attending to issues of human existence, social justice, colonial history, and geopolitics by studying them in their multispecies entanglements (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019).

LEARNING TO TRACE MULTISPECIES TRACKS

So how can we learn to track the histories of more-than-human socialities (Tsing 2013)? Answering this question means experimenting with the ways in which human-centered fieldwork methods might be augmented by the fieldwork methods of biology, ecology, and landscape history without giving up their critical edge and ambitions to be open to serendipity and wonder (Helmreich 2009; Tsing 2015; Myers 2015). It also means rethinking, along the lines already pursued by critical political ecology (Johannes 1981; Pauly 1995; Robbins 2007; Swyngedouw and Kaika 2014; Escobar 2018), how ecological fieldwork practices could learn from ethnographic fieldwork. We offer this book as testimony to the many kinds of method experiments necessary to study multispecies livability. It is our claim and point of departure that the changing conditions for human and nonhuman life on Earth—for which the concept Anthropocene is a contested and admittedly imperfect moniker (Haraway 2016; Yusoff 2018; de la Cadena 2015)—demand new modes of sensing and seeing, new forms of collaboration, and new foci for description in which landscape histories matter. Studies of more-than-human life in the Anthropocene, in short, require new kinds of multispecies fieldwork methods.

Søby was a place to cultivate multispecies curiosities, transdisciplinary collaborations, and landscape histories that such multispecies methods require. In Søby, we experimented with multispecies methods by following the tracks left by humans and nonhumans alike. This meant finding traces inscribed on the landscape, such as in the sand or in the muddy lake sediments. It also meant locating the traces left in the local archives and

scientific reports. In Søby, multispecies methods involved studying the historical forms of deer grazing patterns and forest regrowth areas as much as the memory of Søby's human inhabitants (see chapter 11). In addition to practicing the classical methods of anthropological fieldwork—participant observation, interviewing, and “deep hanging out”; collecting oral histories and undertaking archival studies to get a historical perspective; following pipes and technologies and documents as science and technology studies (STS) scholars might do—multispecies methods in Søby entailed cultivating landscape observations; paying attention to animal etiologies and plant forms; attempting field identification of plants and animals; experimenting with the use of microscopes and wildlife cameras; and seeking additional information from DNA analysis, sediment sampling, and transect studies. It meant reading works from patch ecology and landscape history as well as from anthropology, STS, and history (see chapter 12). It meant developing new forms of “slow collaboration” across disciplines (see chapter 9), and it meant experimenting with new ways of doing-fieldwork-with-others, humans as well as nonhumans (see chapters 6 and 8).

“Rubber boots methods” is the playful name we have given to these more-than-human method experiments across disciplines. The name reflects our practical realization that waterproof footwear was essential in the cold, waterlogged landscapes of the former brown coal mines. The term also grew out of a wish to defend “rubber boots biology,” a derogatory term used in Danish biological circles to denote fieldwork-based biological observations of ecosystemic relations. Rubber boots biology (Danish: *gummistøvlebiologi*) has in recent years been marginalized from university education and research, pressured by more prestigious branches of biology, such as laboratory-based microbiology, molecular biology, computational biology, ecosystems modeling, and biotechnology. This marginalization of field-based approaches is part of an overall institutional trend (see chapter 13). The natural sciences have been moving toward more computational methods and technologies for decades and have become dependent on big data and mathematical modeling for their knowledge production. This is not in itself a problem. We do not categorically suggest that remote sensing and other advanced technologies and practices for data generation, storage, and analysis are not useful; they are! It was, after all, computer modeling and big data that allowed climate change, species extinction, ocean acidification, and

planetary boundaries (Rockström et al. 2009) to emerge as scientific objects, political concerns, and moral problems (Barnosky et al. 2011; Edwards 2010). We wonder, however, what is lost when scientific knowledge production about changing ecosystems is dominated by sensing from afar and by modeling. What realities and stories, what kinds of critical connections, never make it out of the dust, mud, or water of lived lives and fieldwork observations into research results? What sensibilities do we need to cultivate to tell the multispecies stories of a changing world that remote sensing and big data cannot deliver? Rubber boots are the metaphorical device through which we call for and invoke the sensitivities, interactions, and histories necessary to bring out these realities and stories. We do so by noting that these realities and stories are the stuff that makes up fieldwork and that one only gets access to tell such stories by wearing the methodological footwear most appropriate for the terrain and sensibilities of the particular field. Rubber boots methods are the tools and perspectives needed to get into the patchy landscapes of the Anthropocene (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019), to notice and generate empirical material for the critical descriptions and analyses required in and for our times. Once walked through and sensed “from below,” environmental and more-than-human histories may well be enriched by the perspectives produced by ecological models or microscopes. And, so we argue, ecological models may well be complemented by multispecies stories (see chapters 1 and 2).

RUBBER BOOTS METHODS IN THE MUDDLE OF OUR TIME

Lowly rubber boots seemed a fitting metaphor for the AURA attempt to restore the broken bonds of empirical, anecdotal, and fieldwork-based research between the human and natural sciences, a type of research that is as denigrated by the inclination toward “high” (often French) theory and speculation in the human sciences as it is by the big data revolution and “evidence-based” styles in the natural sciences. It was “rubber boots biological” skills—detailed attention to landscape change and co-species coordinations—that allowed James Estes and Robert Paine, rubber boots biologists if ever there were, to observe the complex ecosystemic relations between sea urchins, sea otters, and kelp forests in the seas off the Aleutian Islands in Alaska, for instance (Estes 2016). Their careful field observations were critical

to the development of the ecological notions of “keystone species” and “trophic cascades,” ideas that have since become central to extinction studies and debates about planetary limits in the Anthropocene (Estes et al. 2011). Our call for scholars to “put on rubber boots” and experiment with multi-species, transdisciplinary, and landscape-historical field methods should in this light also be seen as an invitation to develop forms of knowledge production that grow from a meandering, curious, and peripatetic imagination even as they are empirically grounded, based on fieldwork. It is a call to cultivate the multiple forms of slow, bodily, and intimate (as opposed to “remote”) sensing implied in fieldwork that for many decades has characterized anthropology as well as biology and other field-based sciences (see chapter 10). Anthropology’s tradition of grounded research and insistence on the value of long-term field-based experiences, observations, relations, and anecdotes as traces of larger patterns seemed, to us, to be a suitable experimental ground on which to restage a transdisciplinary encounter between fieldwork-based methods in a world of science otherwise addicted to models, big data, and “large theory.” At the same time, we are acutely aware that if big data methods are epistemologically tainted, so, too, are fieldwork methods.

Fieldwork as a research practice emerged, after all, at the beginning of the twentieth century as part and parcel of a colonial legacy of exploration, penetration, and political control (Asad 1973; Clifford 1997; Fabian 2000; Stocking 1983b). Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more colonial piece of footwear than rubber boots. Andrew Mathews repeatedly reminded us of this colonial legacy of rubber boots during the conference on which this anthology is based when he playfully and critically referred to the conference title (“Rubber Boots Methods for the Anthropocene”) as “Boots on the Ground” (see also the discussion about the term in chapter 14). Boots give access, they extend thinking and perception, but they also isolate and trample. And here they are not alone. What can be said of boots methods can be said of all methods. The term *rubber boots methods* attempts to make explicit the historicities of war and colonialism that are latent within all scientific methods and seeks to make awareness of these violences part of its application.

Wellington boots, the British word for rubber boots, are named after Arthur Wellesley (1769–1852), the first Duke of Wellington and arguably the

most famous British general, known primarily as commander of the Anglo-Dutch-German army that defeated Napoleon Bonaparte at Waterloo in 1815. Before becoming the Duke of Wellington, however, Arthur Wellesley spent seven years, from 1797 to 1805, in India. Here he led a series of military campaigns against local sultans and rajas from which he not only amassed a considerable private fortune but also—in close collaboration with his older brother Richard Wellesley, the governor-general of India—became the “architect” of the British colonial empire in India (Severn 2007). Propelled by the fame following his victory at Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington went on to become a key political figure, serving twice as British prime minister. It was as such that he in the public mind in England became synonymous with the particularly high leather boots that he wore. The rubber version of the Wellington boot emerged when Hiram Hutchinson in 1852 bought the patent to apply sulfur vulcanization, a technique invented some years earlier by Charles Goodyear, to rubber footwear. It took the First World War to make rubber boots a global commodity. This happened when the British War Office commissioned the rubber boot company “Hunter” to produce rubber boots for standard issue to its soldiers in the trenches of World War I. The start of the twentieth century also saw rubber becoming a key colonial commodity on plantations from Asia to Latin America, where entirely new arrangements of rubber trees, human labor, and colonial control reshaped landscapes and human lives on a global scale (Aso 2018; Garfield 2014; Harp 2016; Stoler 1995; Tully 2011). As the Brazilian rubber plant (*Hevea brasiliensis*) was planted in straight lines on ever larger plantations in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, rubber joined the ranks of coffee and sugar as a key cash crop in a global constellation linking landscape simplification to regimented labor control and global relations of production and consumption (Mintz 1985; Scott 1998). The Plantationocene, the term suggested for this global constellation as the shadow figure of the Anthropocene (Haraway et al. 2016), is in that sense very much the story of rubber entangled in a history of racial inequality, social suffering, and ecological destruction. Rubber is also the story of the Capitalocene, another contender for the title of our time: the transformation of “cheap” nature into profit by “cheap” labor in the production of goods for “cheap” lives (Patel and Moore 2017). And rubber is the story of the Great Acceleration of human industrial production and consumption after World War II

that now stretches the carrying capacity of the planet beyond its limits (Zalasiewicz et al. 2017). Despite the invention of synthetic rubber, which now accounts for two-thirds of the global use of rubber for the production of tires, belts, and flooring, the production of natural rubber has continued to grow exponentially in the last half decade, fed mainly from megaplantations in Southeast Asia (Kenney-Lazar and Ishikawa 2019). In 1951, the annual global production of natural rubber was around two thousand metric tons; today, it is ten times as much (Umar et al. 2011).

Rubber boots are intimately embroiled in these histories of war, patriarchy, colonization, racism, resource extraction, and ecological change in the same landscapes that we propose to study using rubber boots as a methodological figure. This contradiction is intentional. It serves not as a rubber boot confession, absolving the authors of this volume from their obligation to analyze structures of violence and privilege that have shaped both their fields and their field methods (Smith 2014; Fortier 2017). Quite the opposite, it highlights the tainted nature of all method. The name *rubber boots methods* springs from an attempt to acknowledge that scientific methods are always historically embroiled in the phenomena they seek to study. Rubber boots methods seek to interpellate these histories, not to bury them. Let us offer a concrete example: in the regional dialect of eastern Indonesia, where Bubandt has conducted fieldwork, rubber boots are referred to as *jenggelbot*. The word is an Indonesian adaptation of the English word *jungle boot*, a type of military combat boot developed by the United States Rubber Company and adapted for tropical warfare during the Vietnam War. The word probably came to eastern Indonesia from Borneo, where British special forces used their own adaptations of the U.S. jungle boot—with a higher, Wellington-like cut—during the Malayan Emergency from 1948 to 1960, a guerilla war between Commonwealth forces and the Malayan National Liberation Army that in turn very much grew from the grievances of rubber plantation workers in an export economy in ruins following World War II. Today, people in eastern Indonesia use the word *jenggelbot* to refer to the heavy-duty boots that male workers are issued by mining companies. For the contributors to *Rubber Boots Methods for the Anthropocene*, the fact that rubber boots evoke histories of war, gender, resource exploitation, and the multispecies violence of ecological change is the point: methods are never innocent or pure.

Acutely aware of its etymological problems—the association between rubber boots and war, landed aristocracy, and the colonial legacy of rubber being among them—the chapters seek to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway 2016) of rubber boots methods, making integral the reflexive study of the colonial legacies of scientific methods to their deployment in the field.

Staying with the troubled legacies of our methods, however, also opens up unexpected twists. For as it turns out, rubber boots are more-than-colonial, more-than-patriarchal, and more-than-Western. They are ambivalent and full of tensions—like all colonial phenomena (Cooper and Stoler 1997). Wellingtons may be the footwear of choice for the British landed aristocracy, but they are also highly popular among French smallholders struggling against landed elites. Similarly, “gumboots” may be an icon of colonial endurance for white Pakeha farmers in New Zealand, but settler colonialists are not the only ones who use rubber boots in projects of cultural self-making. As Pierre du Plessis reminded us during the conference on which this book is based, in the 1920s, black stevedores and mining workers in apartheid South Africa developed the “gumboot dance” (called *isicathulo* in the Zulu language) as a nonverbal form of protest against racial inequality and outrageous labor conditions (Erlmann 1989; Mills 2016). Today, in postapartheid South Africa, gumboot dancing, performed in straight lines in mimicry of military parades, has become a major tourist attraction. If colonialism is full of ambivalence, so, too, are protests against it.

As Tsing (2005, 6) points out, the history of industrial rubber is also the rich and ambivalent history of multispecies vicissitudes rather than merely human hegemony or progress: industrial rubber is made in a complex process that involves the savagery of European conquest, the confusion of war and technoscience, but also the resistance strategies of peasants, Brazilian rubber plants, insect pests, and more. It is this very vicissitude, tension, and friction that we emphasize in “rubber boots methods.” Rubber boots are our “figuration” for fieldwork methods that come with genealogies of colonialism but that also open up to the collaborative study of multispecies relations that combine anthropological fieldwork with the denigrated tradition of “rubber boots biology” and ask us to pay “troubled” attention to the entangled human and nonhuman lifeworlds subjugated by colonialism. This attention is indexed by the three sections that make up the anthology: critical description, curiosity, and collaboration. In that sense, rubber boots methods express

an effort to decolonize fieldwork methods across the biological and anthropological traditions and to move beyond narratives about human exceptionalism by suggesting that such efforts require not only critical attention to histories and concepts but also cautious and curious experiments with both natural science methods and Indigenous knowledges.

We invited the contributors to take rubber boots methods figuratively, not literally. “Rubber boots methods” is not a Foot Locker advertisement pitch for a particular kind of methodological footwear; rubber boots methods are a “figuration” for situated multispecies methods (Haraway 2004), choosing whatever methods (metaphorical and actual footwear) that are most appropriate and that allow for most sensibility in the field studied. In the chapters that follow, the authors take us to fields where different rubber boots extensions, such as rubber boots, horses’ hooves, rubber fins, dogsleds, boats, or bare feet become methodological prosthetics that help extend how more-than-human worlds are experienced, thought, felt, and known. Rubber boots methods in their varied forms share an attention to the feet and other means of movement. They emphasize how movement depends on the affordances and histories of the landscapes and seascapes in which it occurs. Rubber boots methods seek to highlight both the sensibilities enabled by the physical contact to the ground (or water) and the tracks and disturbances that all movement leaves behind. Extending calls to see ethnography as a method of walking (Vergunst and Ingold 2016; Kusenbach 2003), rubber boots methods focus on the possibilities of peripatetic thinking and sensing while also suggesting the need to critically historicize our scientific prosthetics and modes of locomotion.

In the broadest sense, rubber boots methods are an injunction to engage with methodology in a new way: an invitation to get out to follow the more-than-human tracks that crisscross the landscape of any field; an invitation also to get outside of one’s own disciplinary comfort zone by experimenting with other methods; and an invitation, finally, to “get out of” the field itself by seeing the landscapes of one’s field as particular landscapes-in-the-making connected historically, politically, and ecologically to the other multispecies landscapes that came before and that exist beside it. Rubber boots methods are an invitation to the critical, curious, and collaborative study of multispecies landscapes.



A Lesson in the Nature of Resistance

A vegetative state is immediately understood as a state of inaction despite being alive and awake. What if a plant can actually stir an action in us while being politically in a vegetative state, feeling defeated in spirit?

My parents' house is surrounded by a large garden, which they have attended to over the years with diligent devotion, cultivating many different plants and fruit trees that grew slowly but insistently until the day finally came when we were showered with their crop; figs, grapes, pomegranates, apricots, pears, loquats, dates, berries, almonds, and all types of citrus. There were also vegetables; lettuce, tomatoes, parsley, okra, potatoes, aubergine, peppers, onions, and garlic. In short, our house is surrounded by a garden that made the idea of buying fruit and vegetables from the market seem very strange.

But at the north-western edge of this garden, where the soil was rockier and less fertile, there grew a small caper bush. Aside from its thorns, it had flowers that blossomed in late spring, adorning the whole plant with delicate white petals that lasted right through to the start of autumn. It also had round leaves that were similarly unruffled by the changing seasons; whether it was autumn or spring, even an Arab spring, they always stayed light green. This plant produced, year round, little fruits that looked like earrings. During our childhood games we would pick them, mindful of the thorns, and drape them around our ears so they dangled like our mothers' earrings did. Apart from that, we did not know what to do with the plant, and barely noticed it, not even its fragile white flowers. It was always there, the last bit of the garden we passed on our way to school early in the morning, and the first thing to welcome us back on our return. Sometimes, despite its spiky thorns and drab green leaves, the sight of it brought on a feeling of warmth and serenity. It was also a reminder of the truth of that piece of land, the nature of its soil and the plants that used to grow on it before my parents eliminated them all as part of their plan for a paradise. That plant annoyed them a lot. Whenever they plucked it out it grew back. After a while they simply left it alone to grow as it pleased. And it did so with no impediments, especially as it



was saved by its thorns from the devilish hands of us children, which showed the other plants and trees less mercy. Every few minutes my parents had to warn us not to step on the parsley bed or the aubergine shoots, and not to climb the apricot or loquat trees and break their fragile young branches.



Then finally the ultimate blow was dealt; or so it seemed to us all, and certainly to my parents. They decided to build a small storage room on the spot where the plant grew. We did not really need a storage room, but they said that at least that way they could put the space to good use, instead of it being occupied by the caper plant, which they considered useless. So they woke up one morning and started digging. They dug a hole about a meter deep and four meters wide, and pulled out the plant and its roots. Then they filled the hole with rocks, and covered it with cement. After they had finished building the storage room, they tiled the floor. Unlike the caper plant, this building, made of bare black blocks of volcanic stone, did not stir up any particular feelings of warmth and serenity. Rather, it evoked highhandedness, especially the highhandedness of my parents. It looked as if they had finally succeeded in banishing the last traces of real nature, as manifested in the thorny plants, from around their house.



It was more than three and a half decades ago when my parents erected that storage room. Last summer, while visiting them, a feeling of nostalgia propelled me to check on that back part of the garden and the secret gate I used to pass through on my way to school and back, in my childhood. This was something I hadn't done since I finished school and left home. As I was walking around, suddenly, at the very top of the storage room's wall, between the bare black lava stones, I caught sight of something pale green. I drew nearer to the storage room. It was nothing but the caper plant, sprouting anew, this time from between the cracks in the wall.

BIO

Adania Shibli (*Palestine, 1974) has written novels, plays, short stories and narrative essays. She has twice been awarded the Qattan Young Writer's Award—Palestine: in 2001 for the novel *Masaas* (2002; translated as *Touch*, 2009), and in 2003 for the novel *Kulluna Ba'id bethat al Miqdar aan el-Hub* (2004; translated as *We Are All Equally Far from Love*, 2012). Her latest is the novel *Tafsil Thanawi* (2017, translated as *Minor Detail*, 2020), which was shortlisted for the National Book Award and nominated for the International Booker Prize. Shibli is also engaged in academic research and teaching at different universities across Europe, as well as at Birzeit University, Palestine (2012–2018). Shibli has been acting in the past couple of years as a co-convenor for the 5th edition of the Bergen Assembly.



Wild Papers editor: Ingo Niemann
Translation from Arabic: Alice Guthrie
English copy-editing: Rosanna McLaughlin
Illustration: Eva Fabregas

Graphic design: Ana Dominguez Studio

An earlier version of this text, also translated by Alice Guthrie, appeared as "A Lesson in the Nature of Revolution" in *World Literature Today*, Volume 86, Number 4, July–August 2012, University of Oklahoma

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(Soma)tic Poetry Rituals

My family has been working in factories in rural Pennsylvania for generations. As a teenager in the 1980s, I wanted nothing to do with the factories and ran off to Philadelphia to live my life as a poet. For years, I had been writing and living as I wanted, but then in 2005, I made new friends who were students in a creative writing graduate program. These new friends had a different kind of connection to their living and writing than I did. Eventually, I realized the difference originated in our childhoods. They had doctors, lawyers, and engineers for parents, whereas I came from a family of factory workers.

When my family goes to work at the factory, they become an extension of the machines they work with for 10 or more hours a day. To survive those mind-numbing jobs, they shut the present off, and their brains live in the past and the future while at the factory. When they go home, they cannot flip the switch back. As a child, I learned to avoid the present, and once I understood this in 2005, I realized I needed a new relationship with time. I created (Soma)tic Poetry Rituals to anchor myself in the present, creating what I call an *extreme present*—meaning I cannot think about anything except what is in front of me.

When I created these rituals in 2005, I had already been writing for thirty years. We must be open to changing everything, and I mean everything, if we need to grow in new ways as artists, even after three decades of creativity. (Soma)tic Poetry Rituals changed my life by helping me see the creative viability in everything around me. In public workshops, I have discovered that the rituals help writers and other artists who have been stuck or unable to create, sometimes for years. Every human being is creative, and we must learn to treat our creativity like a vital organ in our bodies.

- CA Conrad

RITUAL 12

Get a clear drinking glass, a pitcher of water, and a black magic marker.

Make a black line on the middle of the drinking glass.

Place your face near the glass on the table. Pour water while carefully listening and watching it hit the mark; do this 3 times.

Pour the water a 4th time with eyes closed, letting your ears remember the mark. You have successfully braided your eyes and ears.

Now sit back, close your eyes and listen to the most immediate sounds in the building. Let the layers reveal themselves, shifting to what you hear further away, then further.

When you feel you have heard everything, wait. Sit there a little longer, listening for the faintest of traffic in the sky or a faraway rumble. Take notes for a poem.

SONIC MEDITATIONS XII - XXV

All of these Sonic Meditations are intended to begin with observation of the breath cycle.

PAULINE OLIVEROS

INTRODUCTION II

Pauline Oliveros has abandoned composition/performance practice as it is usually established today for Sonic Explorations which include everyone who wants to participate. She attempts to erase the subject/object or performer/audience relationship by returning to ancient forms which preclude spectators. She is interested in communication among all forms of life, through Sonic Energy. She is especially interested in the healing power of Sonic Energy and its transmission within groups.

All societies admit the power of music or sound. Attempts to control what is heard in the community are universal. For instance, music in the church has always been limited to particular forms and styles in accordance with the decrees of the Church Fathers. Music in the courts has been controlled through the tastes of patrons. Today Muzak is used to increase or stimulate consumption in merchandising establishments.

Sonic Meditations are an attempt to return the control of sound to the individual alone, and within groups especially for humanitarian purposes; specifically healing.

Each Sonic Meditation is a special procedure for the following:

1. Actually making sounds
2. Actively imagining sounds
3. Listening to present sounds
4. Remembering sounds

Because of the special procedures involved, most all of the meditations are available to anyone who wishes to participate regardless, or in spite, of musical training. All that is required is a willing commitment to the given conditions.

—V—

Native

Take a walk at night. Walk so silently that the bottoms of your feet become ears.

—VIII—

Environmental Dialogue

Each person finds a place to be, either near to or distant from the others, either indoors or out-of-doors. Begin the meditation by observing your own breathing. As you become aware of sounds from the environment, gradually begin to reinforce the pitch of the sound source. Reinforce either vocally, mentally or with an instrument. If you lose touch with the source, wait quietly for another. Reinforce means to strengthen or sustain. If the pitch of the sound source is out of your range, then reinforce it mentally.

—XII—

One Word

Choose one word. Dwell silently on this word. When you are ready, explore every sound in this work extremely slowly, repeatedly. Gradually, imperceptibly bring the word up to normal speed, then continue until you are repeating the word as fast as possible. Continue at top speed until "it stops."

Re Cognition

Listen to a sound until you no longer recognize it.

—XIX—

Lie flat on your back or sit comfortably. Open your eyes widely, then let your eyelids close extremely slowly. Become aware of how your eyelids are closing. When your eyelids are closed, turn your eyes slowly from left to right, around, up and down. Let your eyes rest comfortably in their sockets. Try to be aware of the muscles behind the eyes and of the distance from these muscles to the back of the head. Cover your eyes with your palms and shut out all the light. Become aware of all the sounds in the environment. When you think you have established contact with all of the sounds in the external environment, very gradually, introduce your fingers into your ears or cover them with your palms. Try to shut out all external sound. Listen carefully to the internal sounds of your own body working. After a long time gradually open your ears and include the sounds of the external environment.

—XXIV—

Focus your attention on an external source of constant sound. Imagine alternate sounds while remaining aware of the external source.

Extreme Slow Walk

The Exercise

Moving as slowly as possible, step forward with the heel to the ground first, let the weight of the body shift along the outside edge of the foot to the small toe and across to the large toe.

As the weight of the body fully aligns with that foot then begin the transition of shifting to the other foot.

Small steps are recommended as balance may be challenged.

Maintain good posture, with shoulders relaxed and head erect.

Use your breathing.

The challenge for this exercise is that no matter how slow you are walking, you can always go much slower.

Score #1, Gone Fishing

>>
>
stand by the shoreline
with a stick in your dominant hand
each time you spot a fish,
wiggle your stick

>

Score #2 Darkness

[illegible]

*This time allows for night vision to wake up. The rod photoreceptors in the human eye are adapted for night vision. They are very light sensitive and after being exposed to bright light it takes at least half an hour for them to chemically reset and become active again.

Score #3 Another

>>

>

Find one entity in the landscape to observe
Using any method, record its movements and its stillness
Repeat in regular intervals

Score #4 Number

Choose an area
Choose one kind of being to count
Walk in a pattern that leaves no ground

uncovered



As you walk, count and record the number of this kind
you find

Score #5 Water

>>

>

Go to the beach, get ready to get in the
water

Stand straight, eyes on the tide, loose hands.

Start walking towards the water.

Each step, breath in, each step, breath out.

When touching the sea with your feet, repeat:

Holy me, holy you, us holy.

Repeat

Repeat

Change the words for others, which sound similar,
as you keep going in

Score #6 Touch

>>

>

You move one thing and everything
responds.

You move one limb and all the limbs respond,
even that far one, on the other side of the room, at the
edge of the fjord

Score #7 Antenna

>>

>

Find a spot outside

What do you hear?

What do you smell?

What do you feel on your skin?

Tune to your body antenna.

Are you warm or cold, tense or loose?

Ask yourself, what do I want to record, archive or transmit? What needs to be documented, kept safe or shared? Find a spot to make a list

Score #8 Map

>>

>

Wrap your left foot with a piece of paper, like a sock. Put socks on, shoes.

Take a walk for whatever it feels like 20 minutes.

Take your shoe and sock off, unwrap the piece of paper.

Look at the map of your surroundings. Go and follow it.

4'33"

Sheet Music From John Cage

I
TACET
II
TACET
III
TACET

* **Tacet** is a Latin word which translates literally into English as "(it) is silent". It is a musical term to indicate that an instrument or voice does not sound, also known as a rest.