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May, 2018

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department  
of English  
University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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By  
Martin Rock  
May, 2018

*ANIMALS OF NORTH AMERICA*, SELECTED TRANSLATIONS, AND  
THE CRITICAL AFTERWORD, “EXTENDING RELATIONAL FIELD THEORIES:  
A CORRELATIONIST MODEL OF POETICS & TRANSLATION”

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ABSTRACT:

Recent work in psychoanalytic theory points toward a field of merged subjectivities that exists between patient and doctor, identified as a “relational field<sup>1</sup>.” The term appears in the discourse of quantum field theory as well, in the context of the Machian action principle<sup>2</sup>, which states roughly that “local physical laws are determined by the large-scale structure of the universe.”<sup>3</sup> Because language—and particularly the language of poetry—exists between the subjective and objective spaces of cognition and objects, I hope to posit a relational field theory of poetics as a model for bridging the gap between two theories: that which focuses on merging subjectivities by investigating the distribution of consciousness (psychoanalytic relational field theory) and that which focuses on merging conceptions of objectivity by investigating the distribution of matter (quantum field theory). As primarily a creative work, this dissertation is an exercise in using poetic language as a form of reasoning that incorporates but is unconstrained by inductive, deductive, and abductive approaches to the construction of meaning; it considers the possibility of a *poetic method of inquiry* that might operate as an adjunct to the *scientific method*, helping to fill in gaps in knowledge that cannot be approached through linear or scientific models. Rather than discussing principles of relational field theory and poetry as a method of meaning-making in the context of my own work, the critical

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<sup>1</sup> Aron, L. (1990). One person and two person psychologies and the method of psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, 7(4), 475-485. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0736-9735.7.4.475>

Stern, D. B. (2015). *Psychoanalysis in a new key. Relational freedom: Emergent properties of the interpersonal field*. New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.=

<sup>2</sup> As defined by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Mach’s principle is “in cosmology, hypothesis that the inertial forces experienced by a body in nonuniform motion are determined by the quantity and distribution of matter in the universe.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen W. Hawking & George Francis Rayner Ellis (1973). *The Large Scale Structure of Space–Time*. Cambridge University Press. p. 1. ISBN 0-521-09906-4.

afterword will identify these principles in my translations of the poet Tsubouchi Nenten and in the work of poets that represent a range of time-periods, languages, and aesthetics: A.R. Ammons, W.H. Auden, Anne Carson, Emily Dickinson, Lo Kwa Mei-en, Francis Ponge, Ed Roberson, William Carlos Williams, and Walt Whitman. The resistance to specialization in the above survey of poets is intentional: the suggestion of a relational field theory of poetics requires the investigation of linguistic and theoretical rhizomes and tendrils that copopulate creative works across boundaries of time, place, school, theory, or movement. Ultimately, though this dissertation is a collection of creative work, I hope that the critical afterword helps to frame the manuscript in the context of re-coupling the “two cultures” laid out by C.P. Snow, and suggests a format that embraces both scientific observation and analysis as well as poetic processes of engagement with and understanding of the world around us.

# ANIMALS OF NORTH AMERICA



*The twinkling of an eye will take as long as I say,  
and will, if I wish, divide into tiny eternities,  
full of bullets stopped in mid-flight.*

- Wisława Szymborska

*What are we first?*

- George Meredith

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## *Poem for the Hunted*

Watch as I kneel beside this creek  
to study the tracks.  
To you, they're not real:  
they're symbols of an animal beyond my reach.

But you're wrong. These tracks exist.  
Last week, a mountain lion prowled  
up the road toward the hot springs ranch  
& stalked its prey in the grass.

Children play in the water—  
a young one wandered off.  
For what reason, it no longer matters.

The child isn't real either, you tell yourself,  
your heart pressing against the bars of its cage.  
But here in the mud: these tracks.

I

## *Love Poem as Wiley Coyote*

I need you like the bluff  
needs old growth to root itself.

Like cassowaries need the sky.

You run through me like a plume of scoria  
through the earth, like arousal beads  
along a string of neurons:

pulse-charged,  
thick as bisque on the love-dulled  
tongue. In my famine

you separate from language  
to become the feast.

I taste you the way the snare  
tastes flesh beneath the fur

before the wire is tripped.

Until you existed  
there was no word for devotion;

barracuda moved through the sea  
devouring continents,

there was no machinery, no paper, no fall.

## *On Forgetting My Tongue in Kyoto*

- I. Not that I left it in someone else's mouth  
or severed like a shelled mollusk  
but when the words of my first language  
became less available, I wondered  
if the fish in my salt water tank  
could be returned safely to the ocean,

if the tinkerer's cat would know what to do  
with the wings attached  
to her shoulder blades, and if, after flight,  
she would remember how to walk.

Is it better to strut in one's own backyard,  
or to stumble through unfamiliar fields  
on slow, distressing feet?

Where flight is admired it is resented,  
and always I am a cat with wings.

- II. There are *gaijin* who have spent decades  
here and haven't made the switch

whose tongues have begun to dissolve  
without replacement whose open mouths

reveal maladroit stubs like parrot tongues  
though parrots after a year can talk

about the weather or earn their keep at a bar  
which makes me think of the Mynah bird

outside Starbucks by Sanjo Bridge who sits  
and talks to passersby

repeats the phrase "*sugoi ne! sugoi ne!*"  
which translates roughly to "isn't it great!"

and everyone passing by agrees "yes!"  
"it is great!" "*Sugooooooooiii!*" they say "*sugoi!*"



but I don't see the greatness in a bird  
with a few catch phrases who knows nothing

of conjugation nor the whole gamut  
of forms relating to social hierarchy

(in which I sometimes feel myself below the bird)  
the thousands of *kanji* and three separate alphabets

or maybe the Mynah's just a cynic like the rest of us  
which makes me wish that I could also

as a kind of hoax do nothing but repeat  
that mantra about how great it all is

and look at me here jealous of a talking bird.

III. Of course language is the cage  
and the door is open and the Mynah is right  
about all this greatness though  
at times I'd rather put him in a pie  
than admit it and another truth which by now  
you've guessed is that I've not  
lost my tongue entirely and flown  
from one cage to the next although the other day

I forgot the word for *jidouhanbaiki*  
until I pointed it out to a friend and she said,  
"vending machine," pulling the word  
from a shelf in the aisle marked "machines"  
in bright bold letters in her mind  
but then "vending machine" is a good first  
word to forget compared with "expand," or  
"pneumonia," or "Creole,"

which is how the wallpaper  
of my mind has been shaping up recently:  
words bumping into each other and  
grammars mingling in the corners so that  
"as for this *beya* for which the *te-buru* is  
*ookisugi daneeh*" makes more sense to me than  
"This table is too big for the room,"  
which is a silly thing to say in any context,  
and now I've got the department  
of language working overtime

while the center for a better tomorrow  
loses ground  
and it seems that now would be a good time  
to go back to America

and all its problems where I may be just  
another soul in search of a cage to call home  
but at least people won't look at me  
like a talking bird  
if I choose to smile and nod my head  
and say *Ohio*.

## *An Understanding is Reached*

Someone at the meeting said it was impossible  
to bridge last year's losses to this year's gains.

A pen scratched in the infinite blue tenor  
of cross-table lust. The machine

in the ceiling exhaled its metallic dust  
and beneath my feet the carpet bristled

in the microscopic coarse way  
of stems of thistles or cilia on music-

making insects' legs. Inside everyone's throat  
a colony of bacteria jostled for dominance.

This year's gains are no fluke, I floundered.  
It was the permanently rescheduled quarterly

refinancing committee meeting and the future  
was at stake. A man evaporated just yesterday

in Houston, whispered the woman  
next to me, while the whole world

watched. We had to kill the project last month,  
my boss said, glassily. Just then a drop

landed like a great white disintegrating eye.  
The television came on. Everyone watched.

## *Twelve Partial Truths and One Certainty*

1. This is the line in which I save no one from a terrible death.
2. Tomorrow we will discover a new city growing out of what is left of the old city.
3. When a film is taken, that film passes over the world like a light.
4. I know the hideous secret you think of when you read the phrase *hideous secret*.
5. In some dimension you are covered in gelatinous ooze & it is unnatural to think otherwise.
6. Your brain is self-aware & believes itself to be the entirety of your body.
7. This is the line in which I take from you everything you have ever known & give it back, renewed.
8. Before you reach your house you must first extinguish the fire.
9. What you want is enough of a thing to give it all away.
10. The stars are communicating with us, & you left the iron on.
11. You did not leave the iron on. You haven't used an iron in years.
12. This is the line in which we save each other.

## *Something I Am Not*

The grass on the lawn is alive  
and last night my grandmother  
opened her mouth and vanished  
beyond the portico *none of these trees*  
*is native* my brother said beside  
the elevator he asked me to stop  
the car I waited while he pulled  
a green fig from its branch he sees  
living things everywhere to eat  
from the woods outside our childhood  
home he appeared with morels  
we sliced them they looked like veins  
of thumbs without flesh but also  
like grey flesh when he cuts the fig  
its meat is bluish and squishy  
how does he find such nourishment  
even in cities the man who lives  
in the forest makes a forest of his own  
thoughts she must have known  
this about him it's been years  
since I've killed a fish and eaten it  
and did not understand death then  
and do not now in the car on the way  
to the airport my brother is calm  
*all of us* he says *everything dies* he sees  
a tree on the side of the highway  
asks me to stop this time I pretend  
not to hear him he flies back home  
to his girlfriend on the mountain  
in Colorado I return to Brooklyn  
where I will walk to the library  
in the new fall air, find *American*  
*Sonnets* by Gerald Stern on the shelves  
and sit down to write this poem.

## *On the Potential of Holographic Data Storage*

“We’re in the midst of a revolution,”  
says the slice of bread  
to the droplet of rain that has fallen  
on its face.

“When you touch me,” replies the raindrop,  
“it is as a man touches money.”

Says the dollar, “I feel myself a piece  
of a very long thread.”

Says the weather, “Then you are an ant  
who cannot die.”

“There was a time,” says the book,  
“a man expected the same coin back  
he had put in the bank.”

“There was a time,” says the raindrop,  
“I knew myself to be part of the weather.”

“But you are,” says the book.  
“But you are not,” says the dollar.  
“But you are,” says the bread, “and now you are not.”

## *Love Poem in a College Party House*

One night I can't figure out how to turn  
on the light in the bathroom  
so I piss down the front of my jeans  
and stumble back into the room,  
me and a girl I want to know,  
drunk and flirting and a little bit high,  
and now I'm sitting on the floor  
with a stream of piss down my pant-leg,  
trying to pretend it isn't there  
(the urine, not the connection, which is,  
or was, I'd thought, before I'd left),  
but she glances down and sees  
the dark line of blue on my jeans and I  
just keep talking, as if in a docu-drama  
about the real lives of college students.  
It feels like duality's furry hands  
are gripping me, and the claws  
are embarrassment and the palm is attraction  
and there's this sharp acrid feeling  
of regret and I stand up to take  
off my pants because half-wet jeans  
are uncomfortable and obvious.  
She's under the covers now,  
fully clothed, so I walk over to the bed  
wearing just a sweater and boxers  
and the whole thing is so *real* I feel like  
I'm on TV and she's covering half  
her head with a blanket and I ask  
if it would be okay if I stay the night  
while giving her my sexiest corner-  
of-the-mouth smile. She stares at me  
and buries the rest of herself under  
the sheets and then we stay like that  
for a couple minutes and when she resurfaces,  
there is unmistakable fear in her eyes.  
In my drunkenness I'm hurt,  
as if there's no reason to be afraid  
of a drunk college boy she barely knows  
standing over her with a sweater  
and no pants on, hoping to stay the night.  
"Are you *afraid* of me?" I ask, incredulous,  
and she says, "yes," sheepishly, like  
she feels bad about it. She tells me to take

my glasses off, and I do, and now, standing  
over her, she looks like someone she isn't.  
“Maybe that’s what I’m *supposed* to look like  
to you,” she says, and on some level  
she must be right, but in the real world  
I’m struck by the awfulness of it all,  
my embarrassment and intense desire  
never to cause fear in another living thing,  
so I walk over to my pants and pick  
them up and take some time  
getting them back on, feeling the wet  
cling to my leg the whole walk home.



*Lines Written After a Party in New York*

It isn't sarcasm or sadness but the feeling  
of having been left to die in the middle  
of a rooftop filled with one's attractive friends.  
They look at me and I try to look at them.  
My eyes remain fixed on the side of my head.  
My tongue is a fist submerged in ice.  
I try to make my way back to the surface  
to bleat but I cannot. My eyes are glassy  
& probing & panicky & beyond  
this goat world is another goat world, & beyond  
that one a hole large enough to hold all  
the goats in history & still be thirsty.  
My own goat lips are chapped from dry grass.  
My words hang from my face like a root.

## *Money is a Kind of Poetry*

Poetry is a kind of debt.

Debt is barely opening the throat to suck a half-breath of air.

A half-breath of air is a kind of inverted flute.

A flute is metallic singing plastic.

Singing plastic is a metaphor about the ocean.

The ocean is made of money is a kind of poetry that kills animals.

Poetry killing animals is a way of thinking about America.

America is a ghost intent on haunting mothers.

Mothers are a kind of memory clouded by money.

Memory is a way of destroying the things about yourself you hate.

Hate is a war holiday in America.

In America, a kind of poetry grows beyond the boundaries of money.

In America, money is dust over everything.

In America, dust is invisible.

Invisibility is a kind of money.

## *Marriage*

Mornings, Namiko would wake early  
and move down the ladder  
to the small room that served as a kitchen.

While she cooked eggs and pork with ginger,  
I rolled over and slept in her hollow  
in the futon. Carrying my bento

in the basket of her father's old bicycle,  
I rode forty minutes to the high school.  
Spent the day studying her language

and teaching my own to teenagers  
who wanted to know if I could eat  
with chopsticks, and what kanji I liked,

and the braver boys  
who asked me how big my *chinchin* was  
and if I had seen the naked news.

They taught me how to write my name  
in kanji; *Ma-Ten*, which means true heaven,  
or *Ma- Chin* which means horse cock.

Namiko could have told them  
that neither was appropriate, that my name  
should be Ignorant Foreigner

or Drowning in Script, but they never met her.  
I would cook dinner  
before she got home and we would eat

on the floor and drink wine  
and make love on cushions or the rug  
and then up the ladder to the shadowy loft.

She's married now, and lives  
somewhere in the Midwest.  
I wonder if she thinks of me as I think of her,

standing before the stove while the smell of ginger  
fills the house, or lying curled in bed  
on a Sunday, in the arms of a stranger.

## *Animals of North America*

*Under the dark-blue cloud with a glint of the red horse  
I dimly recognize all that has been.  
—Czeslaw Milosz*

### *I.*

In the beginning there was a dingbat  
who cut the durian sky in half.  
The beginning stunk like corpsefoot.  
The beginning was a foolish place to start.  
There were also 54 leopards  
split down the middle  
and splayed wet over the cooling earth.  
Memory of early ground  
drove them to live in trees.  
The pressure of having bodies  
was enough to melt the iron  
in everyone's chest.  
Cats invented wings for birds,  
pitying their skinny legs.  
There are still enough of them on earth  
to make a gumbo of beginnings.

### *II.*

We are not at war anymore.  
Nothing reeks.  
There are no bodies left to claim.  
We offered the enemy  
enough poppies to block the sun.  
Poppies flocked into blossom,  
poppies ground into powder,  
poppies growing in the bellies of the desert.  
There is enough sand  
to fill factories. Imagine the pearls!  
Imagine dust in everyone's chest,  
and around each fleck, a lump  
of milky sap. The ground  
is still burning; the sand is black glass,  
black milk for the children  
of women inseminated  
by the black fire of beginnings.

### III.

The first tree produced tomatoes  
larger than hedgehogs.  
When they fell, Serpent crawled inside  
to lay her eggs. When they fell,  
Man crawled inside to look for Woman.  
The eggs were soft as flesh.  
Man slept. Woman gathered the tomatoes  
and threw them in a pot.  
Man was inside. Serpent was inside.  
Tormented by the boil,  
serpent crawled between Man's  
legs and buried herself to the stomach.  
Man spends his life trying to pull  
Serpent from between his legs.  
For this, Man is given hands.

### IV.

The first child grew from a pit.  
PEACH SEED TOSSED INTO HOLE  
GROWS ARMS AND LEGS,  
*Genesis Weekly* printed Thursday.  
MAN EVOLVES FROM HOMONYM,  
countered *The Daily Bang*.  
Pity they don't send poets to the moon.  
There are lunar surfaces  
that look like flounders from earth.  
Plato didn't want poets in his Republic,  
not because we imitate truth,  
but because we are most susceptible  
to daemonic influence. Milosz's  
invisible guest comes in and out at will.  
Hire a poet, end up with a golem.  
The only place we ever end up  
is the beginning. The only place  
we ever end up is the beginning.

## *After Capitalism*

The truth is, I'm too impressed by wealth.  
Where once as a young man  
I was committed to a studious poverty,  
now as a husband I want a yard

in which my dog can run,  
where I can plant a few seeds  
& watch them grow. Here we are  
in the Anthropocene,

which means millions of years from now,  
if anything has survived, our works  
will be visible in the fossil record;

nearly everything else will have disappeared.  
We want change, we say to each other—  
here it is, killing everything around us.

||

## *Object Poem*

On NPR the journalist says  
touching soft objects  
while negotiating salary  
makes one more likely to cave.  
*Sit in a hard chair*, he says;  
*Touch something inflexible.*  
What a bunch of softies we all are.  
Picture us negotiating:  
chunks of aragonite in pocket,  
billions of collective dollars  
riding on the presence  
or lack of sponge or scrap  
of rusted iron. You give up  
your plush velour chair  
to retain the upper hand;  
your stiff upper lip quivers  
when you fantasize  
a mound of cold hard cash.  
The mountains crumble;  
the sea's teeth whiten & dissolve.  
We're awakening like factories  
to the impact of mugs  
on our own self-worth:  
*World's Most Adorable Parasite.*  
*#1 at Destroying Lifeforms.*  
See how you fill your life.  
What have you been touching?  
What has been touching you?



## *Poem After Finitude*

I may have been in control when I was a child.  
The Cambrian Explosion exploded

and was followed by the largest  
extinction event ever to occur on earth.

Once one dies, as you have done,  
I imagine this kind of information becomes useless.

It doesn't matter whether I threw  
that piece of meat over the fence when I was a child.

We measure the past in units that precede  
their own existence: lumens, eons, becquerels.

Each decade the number of people  
mauled to death by bears decreases

in proportion to the number of bears.  
Each year the number of people killed by police

increases in proportion to the number of police.  
Ignorance is a state every omniscient narrator knows

cannot be sustained. I will not abide  
by the laws I've been given.

I will not accept my reward  
for simply staying put. Nor will I expect your return.

Just this morning you woke up, poured a cup of coffee,  
and left the house in a thousand different directions.

*Portrait of a Fragment from Roethke*

We met in a nest  
at the center  
of the oldest tree  
& who ate who,  
the owl with its strand  
of sounds,  
the writhing snake  
in its mouth a shadow  
of itself in the cattails.  
I look back  
and see the city  
I have left on fire.  
What cannot fly  
or swim will burn  
or has evolved.  
One cannot smell  
the bodies in their homes  
the hedgewren  
will not chirp  
for it has flown  
into the smoke  
where rioters  
give us their gifts  
of broken glass  
& flame.  
It is not enough  
to speak  
of what I've seen:  
the young woman's thigh  
split like a papaya  
on the road  
to Hanoi  
or the wall of bugs  
under which I lay my bag  
& slept.  
What good does this  
in a world of good,  
where dogs beat soft  
& stuffed  
into a sack will whimper  
to the pot,  
continue growling  
in the master's gut.

I've bathed  
in mountain streams  
& spoken softly  
in the public bath,  
have seen the world  
destroyed by fire,  
the cut throats of swans  
flowing blood,  
the black smoke of  
dragon-tiled homes  
rising over schoolyards  
full of blinking  
Japanese children.  
Even the life-giving sun  
has burned me  
until my skin seeped  
like a beaten eye.  
I spent three days at sea  
& left a woman  
at both ends  
& underwater too  
I've seen the sea at play,  
have looked into  
the fishes' lips & found  
inside a country  
unknown to man.  
& here I stand in the woods,  
& here in my room.  
It is Saturday.  
Outside my window  
drunken girls are shouting  
at the moon.  
Brooklyn has held me longer  
than any other  
country could,  
the language here  
robust & round,  
& on my roof last night  
a young man  
leapt from the fire escape,  
was chased by men  
who carried sticks.  
The second turned to me  
& laughed, explained  
it was his *job*  
to beat the dog shit  
from his friend.  
What good does this

in a world of good,  
to speak of things  
that I have seen.  
I have not slept  
under the stars in years.  
My days are spent  
in the world of language.  
I speak to no one,  
plan my daily trips  
into the music  
& notions of men  
& women who  
for the most part  
are already dead.  
The city is again on fire.  
We must enter  
the forest we've created  
by thinking & leave  
our bodies at the trail.

## *They'll Be Contacting Me*

One of the managers asks me  
what I'll do after I've died,  
and then they stare at me,

two hard-boiled eggs  
in collared green shirts.  
I imagine cutting them in half

just to see the yellow-gray moons  
of their yolk.  
The second manager

is three sizes too large  
and fires his phlegm-hums  
at point blank range. I tell them

I'll rot or burn, maybe leak out  
a pungent effluvium,  
maybe grin, *like this*,

but the egg on the right  
cuts me short. "No," he says,  
"will you remain *loyal*

to our company?" And it's the way  
he says loyal that annoys me;  
it takes on shape, rising

in the center. It makes him  
sound important even though  
he's only the left half

of a sweaty omelet.  
"I'll be dead," I say,  
"which is a bit like *loyal*,"

and they both nod quietly  
and look at each other.  
"Thank you," says the first.

*Portrait of Gauguin's Caricature, Self-Portrait*

A leaf is falling through the hoop of light  
above my head. Be that as it may,  
September has been unseasonably dry  
& all my cows have died.  
What I hold between my middle & forefinger  
began as a black cigarette  
& is now the neck of a swan who wishes me ill.  
Thus far, every joke I know  
ends in garish sadness, & somehow I have become  
a two-eyed jack on a dollar-deck of cards.  
I have the untenable feeling of floating  
as the stem of a giant pumpkin.  
The vines of the shovel plant in front of me  
have been eyeing me all night  
with a malevolent intelligence. If this is the path  
to sainthood I want no part of it.  
Give me the parcel delivered to Man  
from the seat of Mt. Olympus.  
Let me run ten thousand miles away from Him.  
Above my head the ring of gold  
is a hula hoop with which the devout can play.

## *Sunday Morning at the Farm*

I went to the meditation farm  
to dig up a few seeds, or at least  
to find them. Something about  
a tiny autumn wind.

At the farm across the pond  
a young man was planting seeds  
of his own. We heard his lover reach enlightenment  
as we sat diligently, trying not to scratch.

## *Love Poem as a Critique of Colonialism*

I. Of course there is the losing  
oneself in the islands of the tongue

(there is always the losing of islands  
the ones of the mouth I mean oneself)

and the grappling with ropes  
and robes unloosed and lying

baseless at the feet of strangers  
but this is only part of love

that is you *see*  
only what you *survive* to see

II. We were training horses  
to be acquiescent in their bits

you stripped naked wet on the beach  
before long we ourselves were horses

untrained and wild  
bits spit out on the ground

I was dead as soon as the gods  
whispered my name

I whispered  
your name to the gods

III. By the time we remembered  
ourselves from the stable we spotted

a pair of sallow ignoble creatures  
in robes of gold and crimson sipping

ruby liquid chuffing  
*magnificent beasts yes* but in the rolling



of the eyes the flesh the teeth  
they are not comfortable

could not see us naked there  
a gift only to ourselves and when

we neared they lashed us  
with their tongues

and gnashed their teeth  
in fear

IV. Not in their bodies at all tight-lipped  
tidy crisp that they are

we remind them of the stint  
before the thrum

of life bred out no more time  
spent coupling splitting instead

entering instead spreading  
like virus in the name of deliverance

but here I dissolve  
for the shallow at the small

of your back like a pool  
give me tongues escaped

from the mouth give me the unmatched  
radiance of just-touched skin

V. Where languages merge  
there do bodies and cuisines

and genes become themselves  
more sophisticated

through involvedness but you  
who enter and seek to own

you have taken enough  
have given enough

deficiency the language  
of surplus creates

I would rather watch you retreat  
than die but the moment

my breath stops I lose nothing  
and you take ten thousand

new destroyers take instead this  
horse this animal will build you

an army this army will  
motivate a resistance this

resistance will relieve you  
of your craving

## *Portrait of a Photograph of the Postmodernists' Dinner*

What interests us is what we don't see:  
the unapparent, the work that goes into a thing  
before it is broken. Consider William Gaddis  
crouched into the shape of a penguin,  
likely drunk in the late gray afternoon,  
a draft of *Carpenter's Gothic* on his desk at home.  
Did he speak of Muriel as he ate, who  
in some other Village bar contemplated  
the first years of a love she'd come to think of  
as "a mere decade alcoholic haze?"  
What letters did he carry in his jacket,  
& from whom? & what of Pynchon's absence,  
the unseen man who'd been accused  
of not existing? "Somewhere between coasts,"  
he'd written, if indeed it'd been his hand  
that signed the note. At dinner someone  
must've glanced across their meal at Gaddis  
& wondered, *Could he've pulled it off?*  
In the photograph, Pilar & Shelly lean easily  
against the wall as their husbands shift  
weight from one heel to the other,  
positioning themselves to appear comfortable  
in the face of eternity. Consider them:  
the Gasses, Hawks & Coovers, Barthelmes  
& Abishes, Gaddis & Vonnegut, standing  
naked & old in front of their closets,  
selecting this white shirt, those gray slacks,  
the long black skirt draped like a shadow  
among its mates; how arbitrary is history.  
Just months before, Steven Moore  
suggested that Pynchon was "a pseudonym  
for Gaddis!" He'd called it a rumor,  
but still he'd said it. & then in April,  
Wanda Tinasky'd claimed, though she herself  
had been a prank, "the novels of William Gaddis  
& Thomas Pynchon were written  
by the same person." Years later the typewriter  
on which the Tinasky letters were written  
would be discovered in the barn of a failed writer  
who'd killed his wife & then himself,  
but for now these letters added another layer  
to the myth of Pynchon's living ghost.  
How many times had even Barthelme seen  
his friend in the flesh, or was this famous dinner

organized to draw out the game, the man,  
& catch him in a snapshot for the world?  
Maybe Barthelme, too, had begun to pull the string—  
*To what extent can any of us know our friends?*  
Beside Vonnegut, who stands behind the rest  
as though on a horse, a point of light exerts itself  
from between a tuft of leaves. It is 1983  
& Postmodernism has been supplanted  
by Minimalism. How appropriate then,  
that this single point of light be representative  
of the missing man, the shadow, the private eye.

## *Love Poem of a Strawberry Grouper*

You've sunk a hook  
through my heavylewd tongue  
and I'm saturated with you  
you give me the bends and I like it  
my balance my swim bladder  
contained in my belly I expand  
for poor timing and hunger  
you are a feast in the murky dark  
your squidwhite thighs your lips  
suck with an anemone's cool *yes*  
you are exploding me with inertia  
PSI lifting atmospheres lifting the air  
expands against my lungs against  
my intestines elasticsweet equilibrium  
now the balloon of organskin  
consumes me suffocates  
my glands my larynx *I love you* it says  
like the dragging to the surface like  
tensionwater like light rays  
through the dark sea like halation  
and breaking surface to the light  
I can't breathe or swim or see white  
dilation not even outlines  
no pressure but now on my scales  
the bizarre sensation of drip

## *On Love and Duende*

For Amichai, happiness had no father.

For Lorca, death goes in and out, out and in of the tavern goes death.

I tell you, the father of happiness is death. It is love that has no father, for love sits with its unsteady hands that do not soothe and do not give up the bait.

What Buddhists call unity of mind the insane man calls catastrophe.

For Amichai, happiness had no father.

Read this, Amichai, from your sleep, and place your invisible brow to Lorca's lips.

Read this, Lorca, and I will hold you, as I am doing now, and your breath will mingle with my own.

*Double Acrostic for William Wordsworth*

The sea's bosom reveals itself to me like a stump drug  
horribly along the coast: & shake & swallow grub: the  
erstwhile freegans who suckled gold from the foundry's teat  
& spared the heart  
what it could not give away for cash: if the world is ours, I  
opt to fleck amongst the nightjars: join the tiny siskin  
reveling in its bath of dust and glow: our coins belong  
loaded in a sack & dropped  
down to Proteus, who will let them pass: or in the alfalfa  
buried: silver blooms of peaches drown  
inside gourmands who pluck their fruit: his land is dead  
silt who has purchased for gain: & spilt  
not his own sweat in the tilling: let us pass  
this world in celebration of the pit & not the plate: a pup  
opens up a bit of meat & finds inside the bone: & here  
overtly is death on her haunch: sleeping flowers, upon  
whose bed we both shall lie, misled:  
must I put a scowl upon my mug and run for the hills: I  
undulate wildly as any man in the breast: & swoon  
courageously when put upon for sex: Darling,  
how are you fallen & in what bath?  
Great God! I see the earth a cow  
who with his coin a man has bought: there is no peace  
interred like marrow in its bones: so let  
the winds move us, that we may wend with them: small  
hawk slipping away from itself beyond the neck: a  
full throng of flowers cut from the muddy  
up-gathered source & laid like dancers  
sleeping in their feathered beds: & better yet a straw  
held timidly by the forlorn man: strata  
leveled ages ago: made flat by the weight of the old titan's  
aggravated heel: Epithemeus, who always acted first,  
took giving to a fault: & man was left to seek out fire  
else he bite the cold to grip his end:  
& soon the meat was cooked, & leather tanned into  
a purse: & once the purse, the shoe: & followed then you  
nightly walked upon the earth, & lucre followed you: our  
drink no longer bottled at the source, nor taught

its use by the plant from which it bleeds: we drop  
soon our wit:        walk hard upon the grounds our fathers to  
our fathers' fathers passed:        yea, Wordsworth, show  
of hands that ye have seen our edge,        and took your chance  
narrowing the lamb upon its blade:        my faith to you sir,  
my faith and my time, as yours you put in us.



## The Very Air That Is Breathed

We met in January. The earth is cold  
in all the wrong places on a body.  
My own naked foot slipped into glass;  
In morning, a blood-speckled futon.  
Bless the eight-million spirits  
and their dual souls for this blood.  
They populate the oceans, the forests,  
the very air that is breathed.  
We are one of them, inhabiting  
opposite ends of the earth.  
In one of the myriad worlds  
we are married. We have a child.  
In this one, we are green with each other  
and there is a ghetto of reptiles on the lawn.  
I have phantom limbs of you  
that throb and tickle and smell of pine.  
Return each winter to sit alone  
under the heated coils of a *kotatsu*  
and eat *mikan* until my skin is orange.  
Your skull is the same shape as my skull  
in that we are crushed with each other,  
will be discovered by the earth-movers  
and pieced back together.  
Salt of the earth in the wound.  
Tulips growing from it, bitter to the taste  
and the cold. Open slowly to the touch.

*Double Acrostic for Francis Ponge*

Faceless boar split on the spit:	abracadabra
or objective correlative made manifest:	
reverently, I peel off the animal's dermis:	I am
beholden to its pigment:	Spiritus Mundi
absolves the crime:	what woman
throws herself at the knife:	what man is dead

to sit in the house of featureless scholars:      there is no I  
here:      nor can he claim himself extinct:      that a fin  
extinguished on some great fish's trunk:

hee-hawed to believe itself a horse:      it is in objects we  
 ease into ourselves:      the slit bark      holds inside a flea  
 attenuating herself to a simple thought:      with her  
 rear-legs she withdraws from the scene:      elliptic  
 tailor:      flat as a fallen leaf:      she marks the skin to stitch

or suck the sutras out:      her body of water is empty too:  
feckless hole where the earth has taken itself away:      staff

to be pointed towards the slippery bank:      over the fire I  
heave the pig around the branch:      the trees are naked  
edits of themselves:      surgery that happens only once  
   & is done:      I speak *cageot* & a fuchsia  
utterance falls as a leaf & dissolves:      into moist moss  
not even an echo can survive:

I am to eat the pig: I am to eat humanity's  
formlessness: I am to eat you, M. Ponge: your ash  
on the tongue is moist as a pod: your tongue an embryo  
reasserting itself from beneath a crust of words: you  
make things happen: or things have made you to spill  
their names to the ground

ripe as rotten fruit untouched by man:  
ear-shaped & hollow as the ear:                 the fallen leaf  
alone rots beneath his rotting twins:                 castrati  
stolen from the bath:          a hoax:          kingly feast of board  
opened to reveal hot moisture:      bland:      the earth's axis  
now skewers the flesh of the hog:                 lift the skirt  
I have woven:          reveal the slippery hollow:  
notch the machiner's belt:      & now to stave:          nouns  
gestate inside their objects & become verbs:          are meat  
signifiers so  
insignificant as to lack nutrition:                 let suck the Doric  
stock:          marrow from the femur's column:          cock

sounding himself into existence on the farm: *coteau-coteau*  
has split the hillock: pressed language's button: keep  
an eye to the sea:  
keep the hollow ear beneath the slippery tongue: O  
you, M. Ponge, most of all have made me see: Man

alone regrets his shape: the masculine rock contains anima  
nestled in its hard & frigid womb: the orange's pulp  
despises itself for having been plump pods of juice: steep  
deeply, o tea, to hide the water's transparent ache:  
excitedly I'll drink: & feel her moisture on my chin: a  
leavened bread reveals its form as cultures burn: the star  
unearthed from its housing: beak from bird: ephemera  
sleeps with no man: what ends must first slip: I plan  
inwardly to eat the boar: thick & grizzled hair: barbaric  
veins that pump word-blood to the floor: what knows me  
ends: what knows me not, knows this: the form extends

III

## *Static*

Too much is true to say one thing  
    & still be true. I want to find myself  
    an idea loafing in the grass,  
  
like a virus trapped in permafrost, to be released.  
    When it rains I walk through the park  
    on my way to work, past dozens of earthworms  
  
scrawling their aseptic body-language on the sidewalk:  
    dying, not dying. I want to break in  
    to a breakout role; I'm thinking film,  
  
the kind that gels like fog, that encapsulates perfectly  
    a cultural moment. I'm thinking I'll project a mass  
    of wires like snakes on a tree, & watch them  
  
slip & scuttle with current, & listen to the tree  
    breathe & fail at breathing. I'm thinking  
    I'd like to galvanize something,  
  
to make a dead thing jump out of its seat  
    & twitch like a Pentecostal caught  
    with the spirit. I want to do the thing  
  
that's only been done in dreams, but first I need to know  
    what that thing is. Sometimes  
    I feel the magnet in my chest shaking loose  
  
from its housing & the hair on my arms  
    is charged as when walking beneath marigold  
    power lines, or when two pieces of tape  
  
come together & separate, sparking luminescence.  
    Here is the secret language of lightning:  
    the air around us carries information  
  
in the form of waves & invisible current.  
    Even now, electrons & alpha-particles  
    pass through our bodies, a silent chaos.  
  
I want to change my life, as Rilke wrote,  
    which means I must add something  
    or take it away. I'm thinking money.

I'm thinking a festival in which  
the 7 billion living humans celebrate  
the global extinction event we've created

by drawing a lottery to the tune of Ms. Jackson.  
I'm thinking of a meteor  
hurtling toward us like the most spectacular gift

ever bought on credit. There was a time  
I myself lay prone in the grass  
like a virus, wrapped around proteins

tight as corkscrews, invisible. I was little more  
than an idea, a seed coursing through  
the body of not-even-a-worm. I lit a bundle of sticks

over which I huddled, cold, as the stars  
went on thinking themselves alight,  
amalgamating like neurons in the quick.

*Love Poem after the Triumphant Lover  
Arrives an Hour Late for a First Date*

I waited all day in the sun  
at night you appeared to me

a vision in a white dress  
the sushi wasn't very good

on our tongues our tongues  
*move closer to me* on the blanket

I want to feel the heat of your body  
the sun disappears

the lion's share of days over the ocean  
perhaps on a sailboat

perhaps listing sleevelessly  
to one side like the earth on its axis

is also a point on the fabric  
if time can be bent

let us bend it again and again  
in futility I would wait

knowing somewhere in the park  
the play continues without us

Measure for Measure the image  
of you asleep on a plane

above the ocean in mountains  
even the absurd notion of a chicken bus

excites me underneath my body  
your eyes grew so large

we bent the space around us the room  
filled with light

I want to decipher  
the language of sex

and beyond that the language  
of knowing each other

we'll cycle to Coney Island  
eat mango-flower

I'll dance even when  
the lyrics are driven

by consumerist ideology  
we'll become hypnotized together

I'll want to own things  
and then build a wall around them

what a pleasant dream I am having  
alone in my room

the sun is setting over Brooklyn  
I watched a movie today

about a woman  
abandoned in Queens

wanted to feel closer to you  
but instead found myself

alone and embarrassed and responsible  
for all the suffering in films

I researched health insurance  
and sat down to write

this first poem for you  
on Governor's island

even disheveled and bedaubed with sweat  
you call to mind Praxiteles's

statue of Aphrodite  
you could have been Phryne

who was chosen  
as his model of divine beauty



who threw off her robes and waded  
into the ocean

whose lawyer's defense  
when she was accused of profaning

the Eleusinian Mysteries  
was to expose her breasts

so the judges could not indict her  
without indicting the gods

## *A Moment of Sleep*

I'm reading Po Chü-I,  
who fell asleep  
1200 years ago  
while riding a horse.

Last night I nodded off  
on the train  
& when I awoke,  
the car was full of ghosts.

## *Portrait of a Photograph of Charles Darwin*

All theories are artifacts, amalgams of artifice  
and fact invented to keep  
the inviolable violable, to kill & stuff the cypher,  
to release the little tongue  
from its knot. I studied language first; saw  
ideas as fleeting but massive birds  
grown out of their wings, parched like memories  
in the shadow of the valley.  
Maybe Coolio said it best: I'm an educated fool with money  
on my mind.  
My index finger with its unusually plump  
distal phalanx is pressed against  
my lips like a still-warm gun pointed at God.  
What I have to say is best  
communicated through eye-contact, or touch.  
Look into the eyes of this photograph,  
which is to say my own eyes now that I am  
in the early stages of death.  
With the onset of language, consciousness scrambled  
and reorganized itself along  
the spiral. Or was it chicken-scratch on the ground,  
random permutations  
of segmented lines, bones scattered across the ash,  
that drew the first  
hushed words. Prenatal, reorganized, becomes  
parental. The egg contains  
an open mouth and two fetuses, curled twin g's that come  
to be the infant's early tongue.  
The earth gains a breath and is transformed  
into a hearth. Connecticut  
is two things at once. In one infomercial for Evolution,  
a winged child is constructed  
from the bones of the Archaeopteryx  
and an early infant hominid.  
Science, misused, can reveal the existence of angels.  
Though the fog around me  
blurs my hair and the lapels of my coat, the light in my eyes  
can enter your own. Look into  
the eyes of this photograph. We must relearn time  
and time again.

## *I Step into the Fog to Buy Bread*

The sky opens in my mouth  
a stone is placed on your windowsill.  
There is a city beneath the skin  
we share a handful of cashews  
in the cloud we cannot recognize  
each other's names. On the corner  
a shop specializes in gravestones  
& in the corner of the shop  
a rack of loaves. Everything must go.  
There is a final bow & in the city  
a woman with very fine hair  
clips a ribbon on the bridge  
there are lights indistinguishable  
from the glow they press  
into fog. On the ground in front  
of the store a man has drunk  
himself blotto he is blurry in the face.  
We give the man our bread.  
Your face furrows like the face  
of a bat the wings are most important  
so we give the man our wings.  
We return to our homes in the fog  
there is an object heavy as a stone.  
We cut it with our knives it cuts  
easier than baguettes fall apart  
& still we cannot lift it with our hands.  
We carry traumas in our faces  
try to show each other we are not  
afraid but the fog contorts our mouths  
& the fog comes drooling out.

## *Portrait of a Sixteenth-Century Etching of the Body*

- I. In the ancient surgeon's corpse  
a turnip-shaped organ  
rests above the genitals.  
Above that, another  
like a glass bulb emerges  
from the head of a tulip.  
The collarbone is broken  
to reveal a mass of lung  
curled like an orange peel  
with no flesh inside.  
Blood can be let, we learn,  
from the eyelids,  
the toes, the lips & nostrils:  
places the body opens, or splits.
  
- II. Consider dandelions:  
after the anther lobes dehisce,  
pollen is set free—  
the way a head seems to burst  
with comprehension.  
Not that blood moves  
so much as chambers  
move around it. The red cells  
have no nucleus, so no DNA.  
White cells, however, teem  
with us; so blood, too, is a seed.  
Bloodletting began as a misconception  
concerning menses: women  
bleed (thought men)  
to maintain a balance of humors  
in the body. In this,  
men are poorly disadvantaged.
  
- III. If at the time of ripening  
our pods burst, then with age  
what is left, is left to parch  
& shrivel. Our bodies loosen  
when they are disturbed,  
the way a dandelion, blown,

releases its feathers to the wind.  
Hippocrates's theory  
pressed like a needle at the heart  
of medicine for 2,000 years  
until the vein ran dry.

IV. Barbers' poles still advertise  
the unrequested service;  
a vestigial allusion. Red spiral  
as blood, white as tourniquet,  
the pole itself the stick  
that patients squeezed to force  
the blood to flow.  
Humanity's excuse for sapping  
our best examples:  
it is better to do something  
than nothing. We favor  
the violence of eruption  
over the passage of time  
in which we relinquish control.  
How certain we are  
in our genius, how precise.

## *Taxidermy*

The fish inside your body  
requires release.

Your chest is stocked  
  
with starlings  
that feed upon the fish.

The starlings grow  
  
tumors that eventually  
kill them.

You are unwilling  
to release the fish.  
You hang it on the wall  
  
outside your body.

When your friends  
come over  
  
you show them the fish.

You walk outside  
& rake feathers into piles.

You spend your entire life  
  
raking feathers  
& feeding them to the fish.

## *Love Poem Written from a Hospital Bed*

I was afire in the prairie  
before you found me

in the basement  
my beard was flecked with straw

I look at you it is obvious  
the time you've spent with horses

how mercurial you are  
how giddy the blizzard in your eyes

at the promise of our joining  
the city fortified itself with snow

in the mountains  
the cold earth slammed against me

I nearly died alone  
without holding any part of you

in my mouth an egg is hatching  
in my mouth the taste of cinder

take this myth from my mouth  
place it under the hooves of a horse

I want no part of forgetting  
this tiny animal

only to feel your weight on my liver  
only to move inside you like smoke



## *Minotaur Caressing a Sleeping Woman*

You think the Minotaur is touching  
the woman in her sleep. He is not.

He leans over her and uses his hands  
to waft her smell toward his face.

Her scent is the scent of capital  
punishment. In Deuteronomy,

death is prescribed to males guilty  
of profligacy, drunkenness,

and disobeying their parents.  
When the white bull mounted

Pasiphaë in her wooden cow,  
befuddlement washed over the earth

like the dark before an awful film.  
The bull continued with the drudgery

of copulation, and now their son  
is nude, hunched over the woman

like a dog humping the leg of the divine.  
His mouth is open and his eye

is dark as the anus of the first mammal.  
How is the word carbuncle used

to describe an infected abscess  
and also an exquisite gem, redder

than the sleeping woman's unpainted lips?  
On awakening, she will be alone

on a paddock of damp sheets  
and the room will stink of musk.

*Love Poem After the Catastrophic Lover  
Chooses to Name a Cockroach*

Invoke again the apparition  
of our rending

the screen is dark enough  
to eat our stippled skin

a touching glow I feel  
your fingers inside the knapsack

of my casket you rearrange  
my organs & replace them

with brass knobs & bellows  
the knot in my throat

a keyboard in my stomach  
metal reeds create sound when

air is pushed around them  
the accordion was inspired

by the Chinese *cheng* 5,000  
years old & shaped like

a phoenix we have killed  
that bird our spirit-animal

is now a cockroach you  
named as a break-up gift

on Valentines day I adopted  
for us an elephant

this might be our saving  
grace in 1822 the handeoline

was birthed & evolved into  
the accordion inside my chest

you may play it with  
your words I will be

stalwart as the mast on  
the merchant ship which carried  
  
the first *cheng* to America  
& roaches & perhaps even  
  
an elephant there is a ship  
being excavated from the world  
  
trade center site I wonder  
how many lovers have been  
  
wooded by weepy accordion music  
while the whole floor rocked  
  
beneath the stars entire families  
learned to read the storms  
  
& bellows creaked in speechless  
strain under the weight  
  
of what we have to give  
each other in the coming  
  
of winter again invoke  
the apparition of our rending  
  
that we might find our roach  
force open its mouth  
  
feed it until the pest  
becomes lethargic if the storm  
  
subsides there is still a chance  
our roach will vomit up  
  
a diamond from the soot  
there must invariably emerge  
  
a very old man in this  
poem who sits in his basement  
  
holding a mass of organs  
even in the poem-world  
  
objects don't just disappear  
my organs being objects are

in the preserving grasp of  
an ancient accordion-maker while

I am filled with this  
music for you that is

not love but merciful proximity  
the film is still not

finished let us see what

## *Bunkum*

Earth grows quiet inside the horse's mouth.  
The kid dies in broad daylight  
and Clint Eastwood rides away:  
the kid's slumped body, the sun in its soup.

Manhattan is clamorous. The horses are all dead.  
The cows are dead too. The same bullet  
fired into the same body. The same rain  
on the same dead earth. The same film

over everything is wretched, the same  
book of matches struck, the same flame  
is watched by the eyes of the same

condemned denizens. The kid in daylight  
gets off his horse and goes to work.  
He is through with the bunkum of death.

Selected work from

# RIVER | HORSE | HAIKU

by

TSUBOUCHI NENTEN

RELATIONAL FIELD TRANSLATIONS BY

Martin Rock & Joe Pan

**TSUBOUCHI NENTEN** (つぼうちとしのり 坪内稔典) b. 1944 as Tsubouchi Toshinori, Ehime Prefecture). Studied Japanese literature at Ritsumeikan University where he received an MA degree, and became a scholar. Acted as editor of the Journal of the Modern Haiku Association, *Gendai Haiku*, 1976—1985. In 1986 founded his own haiku circle and journal, *Sendan no kai*. Emeritus Professor, Kyoto University of Education, and Professor, Bukkyo University. Tsubouchi Nenten is also a committee member of the '*Study of Rivers' in Japanese Literature* [Nihon bungaku ni okeru kasen], and a member of the Modern Haiku Association.

## TRANSLATORS' NOTE

Truth and accuracy in translation are difficult concepts to nail down. Every word in Tsubouchi Nenten's haiku is a node on a web, and to focus only on the words' English language equivalents is to remove the nodes, to change the web's shape. Although these are "experimental" translations, we have tried to remain honest to the poems even when that has meant changing words or introducing ideas that are not explicitly stated, but implied or interpreted. At times the diagrams deconstruct words and phrases that may seem mundane or common to the Japanese reader in an effort to elucidate the origin or complex meaning of each, to reveal the relational field of language. In that sense we hope that this text is a foreignizing one, both for readers of English grappling with the unfamiliar writing systems and methods of meaning-making in Japanese, but also for readers of Japanese viewing their own language through the eyes of foreigners. Because Japanese uses three different alphabets, there are times when it is simply impossible for English to carry the subtle (and not so subtle) implications of their convergence. One instance of this is in the use of *furigana*, the smaller phonetic alphabet that appears above the ideogrammatic *kanji* to provide readers of Japanese with the proper pronunciation of unfamiliar words. To "translate" this idiosyncrasy of the Japanese writing system, we've provided homophonic translations in English above the *romaji* spellings of each poem. Though the resulting English-language "haiku" are clearly not in the mode or syntax of Nenten's work, they are again relational; we include them because, if this project truly attempts to "translate" each element of the Japanese poems into English, it would be remiss of us to exclude the purely phonetic.

Nenten, in his abundant writing about haiku, has coined the neologism *katakoto* or "chips of words" to refer to the onomatopoetic speech he employs. So much of his project seems intent on breaking down language and looking closely at its composite parts, restructuring it in a way that reveals each word's relational field. It begs the question, "Is language alive?" Like so many haiku poets before him, and like the Japanese animist religion of Shinto, Nenten's haiku gives agency to objects and the objects of language. Opposite each of the diagrams is a note, which is in itself a creative and relational work that occupies simultaneously the mode of explanation and the mode of creation. These notes are not intended as traditional translator's notes, but rather they are their own English language poems that exist in communication with the work of Tsubouchi Nenten. Translation is simply a continuation of the act of speech: the shuffling around of information (be it stored in sound, meaning, or metaphor) from one medium to another. The act of translating is further complicated by languages as divergent from one another as are English and Japanese; one can understand in English that the word "apple" carries various theological or epistemological connotations depending on one's upbringing, but there is no direct corollary for, say, the fact that the Japanese word for *chatter* or *talk* (喋) is an image of a *generation* or *epoch* (世) of *trees* (木) coming out of a *mouth* (口) or that a *leaf* (葉) is similarly a generation (世) of vegetation (葉) on a tree (木). We know that ultimately, our translations fail in the way that all translations fail; they will succeed only if they bring you to Tsubouchi Nenten's work, and if they create new nodes in your own language webs, if they serve to open a space in language, rather than to limit it.



1.

すいちゅう かば も ぼたんゆき  
水中の河馬が燃えます牡丹雪

*Switch (you're no cover gal). More aimless boat on yr key.  
suichû no kaba ga moemasu botanyuki*

\*\*\*\*

A bathing hippo  
blazes—  
snowflowers.

\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*

hippo  
bathing  $\oplus$  burning  
snowflake

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*

A hippo immersed in water  
is & is not  
a snowflake on fire.

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*

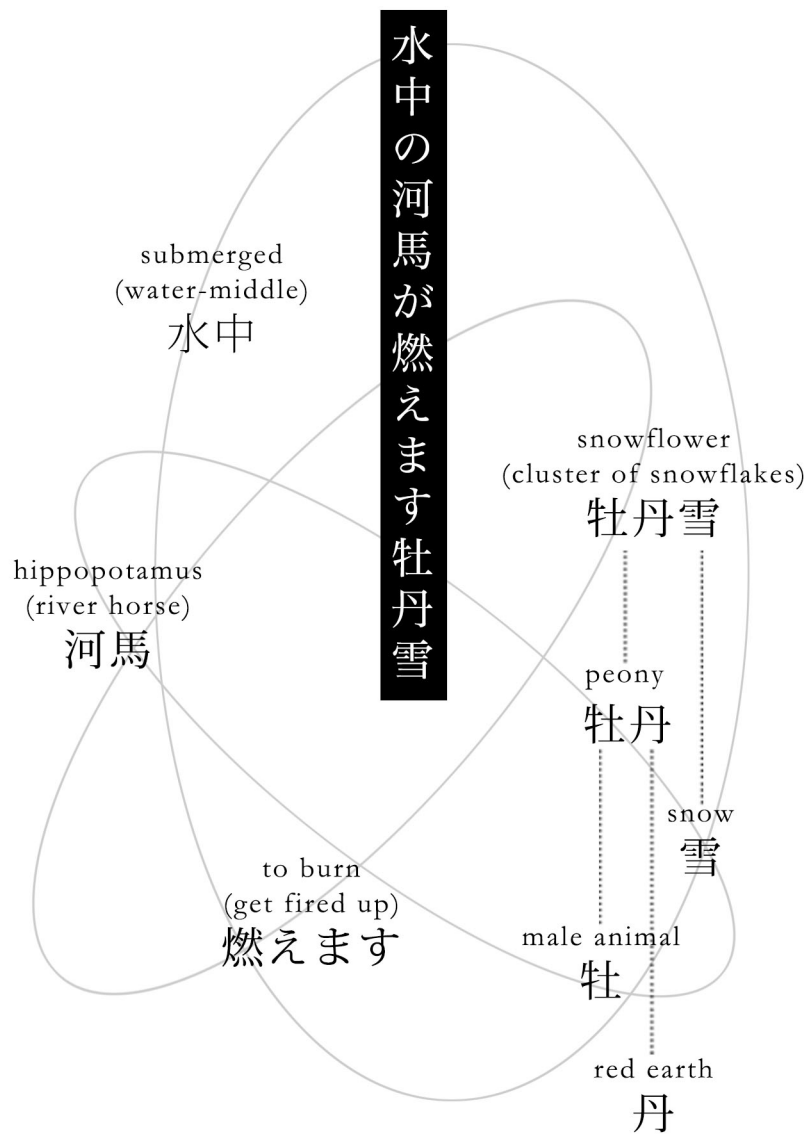
inside water  
the river horse  
burning snowflakes

\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*

That smoldering hippo! That snowflake, burning.

\*\*\*\*\*



## NOTE

The elliptical lines or orbits trace the way the words in this poem interact with one another. There is movement here. The poem is a living thing. Especially the largest ellipse traces the path of a planet travelling around its sun: it heats and cools: there is a relationship between snow and water and fire: when water is furthest from heat, it recools, recoils. Similarly a hippo is a river horse, an animal whose house is of water. A cluster of snowflakes is a male animal of the earth. It is also snow. It is also a flower. A horse, being a male animal, tends to get fired up. When this occurs, it is enough to melt the snow. It is enough to set the river on fire.

2.

はるかぜ はは し りゅうかくさん ち  
春風に母死ぬ龍角散が散り

*How'r you, Cassini? Ha ha! (she knew) R'you coxsain? Got chilly.*  
*harukaze ni haba shinu ryūkakusan ga chiri*

.....

To the spring wind—  
mother is dead,  
her medicine scatters.  
.....

....

mother is scattered  
on the spring wind  
her medicine breath  
....

.....

What dissipates—  
mother's death on the spring wind;  
medicine called "scattered dragon"  
.....

.....

spring  
wind

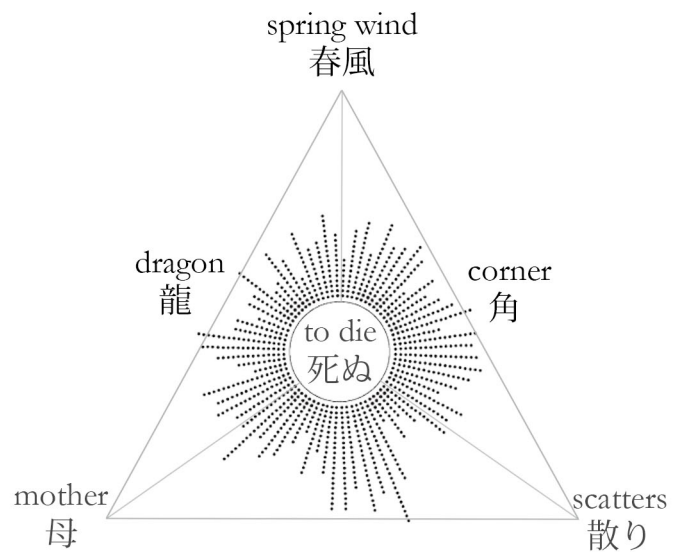
scattering

mother  
dead

(medicine)

dragon  
corner  
scatter

.....



medicine name  
(dragon corner scatter)

龍角散

to fall, as in blossoms;  
to scatter;  
to die a noble death

散り

loose articles;  
coins; small change

散

春風に母死ぬ龍角散が散り

## NOTE

There is an association in Japan between the falling of cherry blossoms, which occurs in spring, and dying a noble death. Countless Samurai stories end with the hero's death under the falling petals. The echoing of scattering or falling of leaves or blossoms in the name of the common medicine *Ryugakusan* with the last word *chiri*, to scatter, places death at the center of this poem, and thus death is the apex between the mother, the Spring wind, and the scattering of petals (or ashes). The scattering out from death is represented by the dots emanating from the center while the triangle is an attempt to acknowledge the sharpness of the word "corner" in the medicine. The poem also contains grammatical ambiguity as to what exactly is occurring on the spring wind (the mother's death, the scattering of the medicine, which comes in the form of a red or green powder, or the scattering of the mother herself). This merging of traditional Japanese culture (the correlation between the falling of petals with noble death) and the contemporary (the inclusion of a common over-the-counter medicine) is part of Tsubouchi Nenten's project and is handled beautifully here.



3.

バッタとぶアジアの空<sup>そら</sup>のうすみどり

*Bat a toe, boo! Ah, gee, uh ... no sorta', no it's you, me dory!*  
*batta tobu ajia no sora no usumidori*

.....

A grasshopper hops—  
the weak green sky of Asia.  
.....

.....

O grasshopper, leaping into the watery-green sky of Asia.  
.....

.....

A child's reading of grasshopper—  
Green Asian sky without  
the complexity of Asia  
.....

.....

Lacking the grasshopper's hoppers—  
the green sky of Asia thins.  
.....

, .....

Language declines—  
The grasshopper becomes less grasshopper.  
The green of Asia's sky, less green.  
.....

sky

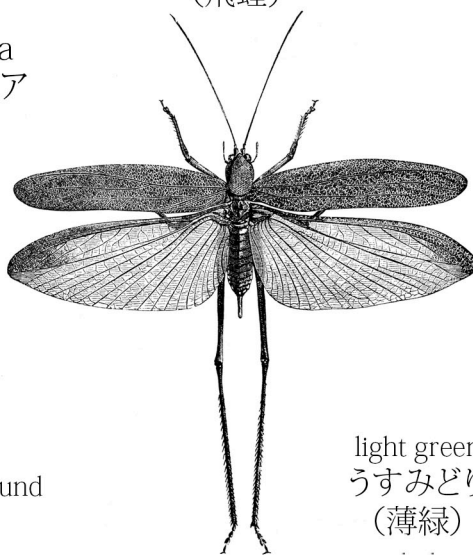
空

grasshopper;  
locust  
バッタ  
(飛蝗)

Asia  
アジア

空

leap; jump; bound  
とぶ  
(飛ぶ)



light green  
うすみどり  
(薄緑)

Japanese pampas grass;  
light / thin (as in color)

薄

green  
緑

空

空

バッタとぶアジアの空のうすみどり

## NOTE

Language is the sky and the sky is made of language: as one thins, the other must follow. The words in this haiku are written almost entirely in the simplified phonetic alphabets of hiragana and katakana although more complex kanji exist. The only kanji that remains is one of the most simple and airy available: sky. In this diagram the sky (read from right to left) thins as the grasshopper spreads its wings. Words that were once represented in kanji, word pictures: grasshopper, Asia, light green, have been usurped by modernity and their inner lives abridged in favor of accessibility. Moving up from the center of the diagram, the image of the grasshopper transforms into kanji, then to katakana, then to English. The haiku is as much about the dilution of the Japanese language as it is about the dilution of the green sky of Asia. We do not see, in hiragana, that leaping is the essence of the grasshopper, or that light green is thinning pampas grass made into language. One other difficult notion to translate here is that the *batta*, though it is commonly called a grasshopper, also refers to the locust, and that singular and plural nouns are often determined by context. Thus, above the single grasshopper, or perhaps inside of it, the sky over Asia turns green in the time it takes an infinitude of locusts to leap, simultaneously, to fill the poem.

4.

たんぽぽのぽぽのあたりが火<sup>か</sup>事<sup>じ</sup>ですよ

Ten Popo, no Popo, no! Atta' real gal. Cagey, the show.  
*tanpopo no popo no atari ga kaji desuyo*

.....

Surrounding the tanpopo's popo—fire!  
.....

.....

The mane of the dandelion's lion is burning.  
.....

.....

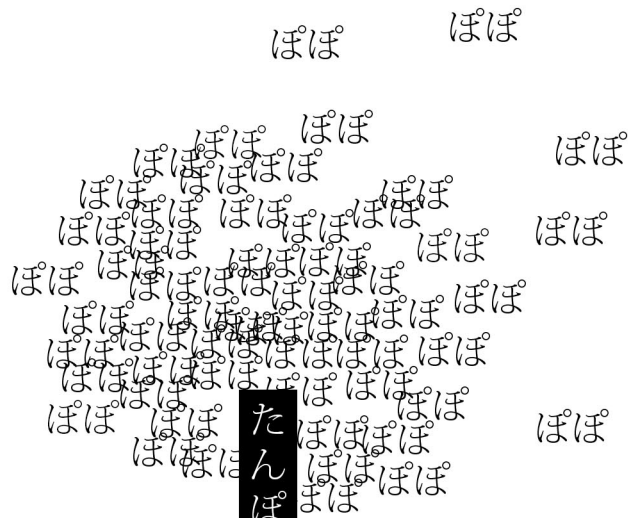
Both word and object—  
a dandelion blazes.  
.....

.....

The fire pops—  
Inside the dandelion  
a steam locomotive.  
.....

.....

A dandelion bursts—  
Fire spreads.  
.....



たんぽぽ  
dandelion

ぽぽーぽぽーぽぽ  
the sound of a steam locomotive

ぽっぽ  
the manner in which  
steam or fire rises

ぽぽ  
circumference

## NOTE

A dandelion, once it has d(r)ied, is held together by a preponderance of parachute pods. They part and pop, as fire does, in play & on the planes of prairied minds. The tanpopo's popo is the dandelion's lion, but it is also the pop of pop-rocks, the pip of pomegranate, the chugga chugga of the choo-choo. A train engineer is a popo-ya, shushu-popo the child's word for locomotive, popo-popo-popo the sound a train makes moving across an empty field. A 1603 Jesuit Japanese dictionary lists poppo as "the manner in which steam or fire rises." But in Japanese, tanpopo is not onomatopoetic until Tsubouchi makes it so. Popo itself is a wordless word, it is the seed of a word, a seed which bursts into flame as soon as it is spoken. Imagine a great gust of wind. Imagine a fire.



## CRITICAL AFTERWORD

MERGING RELATIONAL FIELD THEORIES:  
A CORRELATIONIST MODEL OF POETICS & TRANSLATION

*We must be clear that when it comes to atoms,  
language can be used only as in poetry.*

-Niels Bohr

*Science sees signs: poetry, the thing signified.*

-Julius Hare

1. In the summer of 2012, I began the project of co-translating with a friend the haiku of Tsubouchi Nenten, a contemporary Japanese poet who writes of hippos and dandelions, snowflakes and cherry blossoms, grasshoppers and packets of medicine. Though he focuses on nonhumans, Nenten embeds into them the human experiences of desperation and abandonment, euphoria and chit-chat, the slipperiness of language and consciousness. This attention to the relationship between the realms of subjectivity and objectivity—the embeddedness, but also the impossibility of embeddedness—is a recurring theme in the history of poetics, and one of the major concerns taken up in my own work as well.
2. In this fascination we are not alone; consider: “No idea but in things” (Williams), or “Shapes suggest themselves, and the mind senses and receives awareness” (Zukofsky), or the suggestion that poems are “imaginary gardens with real toads in them” (Moore). Consider the space between the generations of mice, of coal, of grasshoppers, and the generations of men (Clifton), between the nothing that is not there and the nothing that is (Stevens), between the night-blooming Cereus’s signaling not meant for us and our own whispers (Hayden), between the merging of human and flea and celestial bodies (Donne); between emotion and object in the objective correlative (Pound), between the caged bird and its song (Dunbar), between the contradiction of the self and the multitudes (Whitman), between the Table laid without and that laid within (Dickinson), between the little isle and the mind (Brooks).
3. Poems present compelling opportunities to investigate what speculative realist philosopher Quentin Meillassoux refers to in *After Finitude* as “correlationism”—“the idea according to

which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being [... and can never] consider the realms of subjectivity or objectivity independently of one another.” In addition, the possibility of successful translation, of the object of a single poem’s capacity to move between two fields of language, is a provocative model for thinking about movement between fields of subjective and objective experience. In one of Nenten’s poems, the death of his mother is positioned grammatically as a direction of the Spring wind. Especially in poetry, unwieldy subjective experiences live inside otherwise commonplace objects, housed as one can imagine an entire forest housed inside an acorn, or a city inside an ovum.

4. The *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines intersubjectivity as: “the shared or mutual understanding among agents.” It continues, “Edmond Husserl first developed the concept of intersubjectivity as a critique of René Descartes’ problem of other minds. Husserl argued that the problem of other minds portrayed human interaction as inappropriately solipsistic. More recently, the concept of intersubjectivity has played a role in phenomenological accounts of social cognition, embodied and enactive cognition, debates about whether we can directly perceive others’ mental states, collective intentionality, and group minds.”
5. On July 4, 2012, the Higgs boson particle was first observed by CERN’s Large Hadron Collider. When subatomic particles are slammed together at great speeds, or rather are very nearly slammed together, the matter of which those particles is comprised ceases to act in any way familiar to human experience. Imagine smashing two cars into one another, which for a fraction of a microsecond become a single steamboat, and then become two bicycles. When the particle accelerator succeeds, there is a moment when the Higgs boson emerges, and then recedes again into nothingness, a nothingness from which particles of equal energy

to the unstable boson emerge—a nothing that isn't there. But for the blink of its being, the Higgs boson indicates the existence of a field distributed throughout the universe, whose excitation gives mass to all the elementary particles that make up matter. Poetry, in its making happen of nothing, in its comfort with being in uncertainties, in its survival in the valley of its own making (Auden), is an enticing model for understanding the interaction of subatomic particles, as well as the merged subjectivity between intersecting cognitive fields.

6. Even the most compelling metaphors can be inaccurate, which is as much a problem of science as it is of poetry—more really, as poetry dwells in possibilities (Dickinson) while science dwells in accuracy. For years, the concept of atoms as miniature solar systems reinforced my oversimplified view of the laws of physics and quantum mechanics, thanks to what I'd learned in a high-school science class. “As above, so below,” I'd say, referring to the chalkboard diagram of electrons rotating in their orbits around the nucleus like planets around the sun. “The extremes of any spectrum are the same,” I'd suggest at parties. “People who freeze to death are found naked because they feel hot.” “Take the line and turn it into a circle,” I'd explain. “The universe unfolds as a fractal. Big and little. Hot and cold. The Mandelbrot set,” I'd say, knowingly. “White light contains all colors mixed, & black material absorbs them. Atoms are just tiny solar systems. The universe is self-similar. Microcosm, macrocosm, man.”

7.       This ecstasy doth unperplex,  
          We said, and tell us what we love;  
      We see by this it was not sex,  
          We see we saw not what did move;  
      But as all several souls contain  
          Mixture of things, they know not what,  
      Love these mix'd souls doth mix again

And makes both one, each this and that.  
 A single violet transplant,  
 The strength, the colour, and the size,  
 (All which before was poor and scant)  
 Redoubles still, and multiplies.  
 When love with one another so  
 Interinanimates two souls,  
 That abler soul, which thence doth flow,  
 Defects of loneliness controls.  
 We then, who are this new soul, know  
 Of what we are compos'd and made,  
 For th' atomies of which we grow  
 Are souls, whom no change can invade.  
 But oh, alas, so long, so far,  
 Our bodies why do we forbear?  
 They're ours, though they're not we; we are  
 The intelligences, they the spheres.

—*John Donne*  
 from “*The Ecstasy*”

8. I'd learn later, in a graduate class on sixteenth-century poetry, that many of my revolutionary ideas had already been embraced by the scientific community back when science was still called “natural philosophic.” The earth was still squarely (or rather roundly) at the center of the universe, and poets, versed in the science of the day, wrote of physical love between human bodies as a microcosmic version of a macrocosmic celestial unfolding, as in John Donne's “The Ecstasy” or Constance Naden's “The Astronomer”: “And I will love thee as the stars do love/ Even the distant earth.” This was also when medical science was convinced that the human body was comprised of the same four humors that governed all matter—and that the balance could primarily be restored by bloodletting. A question famously (and arguably) considered by these natural philosophers: “How many angels can dance on the point of a pin?” Given the early modern understanding of the nature of reality

and the source of matter, this wasn't such an absurd question.

9. Consider this passage from *Renewing the Mind* by philosopher and theologian Ryan N.S.

Topping: "[...] angels are pure intelligences; not material, but limited, so that they may have location in space but not extension. An analogy might be drawn from human thought, which is similarly non-material and similarly limited. Thus, if your thought is concentrated upon one thing—say the point of a needle—it is located there in the sense that it is not elsewhere; but although it is 'there,' it occupies no space there, and there is nothing to prevent an infinite number of different people's thoughts being concentrated upon the same needle-point at the same time. The proper subject of the argument is thus seen to be the distinction between location and extension in space [...]."

10. Were I a contemporary of the Metaphysical poets, and interested in the same questions that interest me today, I might find myself contemplating angels as a metaphor for the distinction between location and extension in space, as a metaphor for human and nonhuman ontologies, for the relationship between thinking and being. Instead I have quantum field theory, psychoanalytic field theory, and object oriented ontology. Instead I have boson fields and forces and intersubjectivity. Instead of angels, I have quantum gravity. Only instead of quantum gravity, I have poetry.

11. When we confuse our understanding of objects and systems with the objects and systems themselves we do violence to each other and to the world around us. We limit and streamline. We Roundup. We dustbowl. We monoculture. We persist. Both diagrams from my early science classes—that of electrons orbiting around the nucleus and that of planets

orbiting around the sun—were oversimplifications: the elliptical orbits of the planets were deemphasized; the probability fields of the electrons limited to steamroll complexity for a population of high-school students who, it was assumed, wouldn't comprehend otherwise. The problem here is in the disconnect between scientific inquiry and observation and the metaphors used to communicate that inquiry and observation, between the idea and the object in which the idea is embedded as a medium of translation. Between measurement and resistance to being measured.

12.       Do I contradict myself?  
          Very well then I contradict myself,  
          (I am large, I contain multitudes.)
- I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door-slab.
- Who has done this day's work? Who will soonest be through with  
  his supper?  
          Who wishes to walk with me?
- Will you speak before I am gone? Will you prove already too late?
- The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my  
  gab and my loitering.
- I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,  
          I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

  —*Walt Whitman*  
  *from Song of Myself*

13. Unsurprisingly, in the process of deriding oversimplification and inaccuracy, this essay is guilty of engaging in oversimplification and inaccuracy; already I've presented my own youthful misunderstandings about the world based on misreadings of misrepresentations of insufficient data. I've presented translation between fields of language as a model for



investigating movement between fields of subjectivity and objectivity. I've presented objects unfolding into proliferations of themselves as a suitable metaphor for correlationism when it is not.

14. Not that I've lied: the acorn does contain the forest, given enough time, and the ovum the city. In both cases, the latter cannot exist without the former. But this is a compelling, inaccurate metaphor: Nenten's objects contain subjective experiences in a different manner—they exemplify the relationship between subjective and objective ontologies, calling into question the nature of that relationship. For taking up so little space on the page, his poems contain multitudes. It is in this withdrawal from being identified singularly, in the attention to subject/object correlation, and even in the difficult process of transplanting a poem from one field of language to the next—of identifying the center and delicately protecting the roots and stems of a thing as you pull it away from the habitat for which it has evolved, to introduce it to new relationships, communities, and ecosystems—out of which at least some of my understanding of the necessity and the value of poetry grows.

15.       The war of your great beauty is in all the skies,  
              Yet these receive no hurt! I see your name  
              Written upon their faces,  
              Yet the bowls of the stars will be refilled—and lit again,  
              And in their peace will live continuous!  
              O marvelous! What new configuration will come next?  
              I am bewildered by multiplicity.

—*William Carlos Williams*  
              *"At Dawn"*

16. I, too, have transplanted myself into a new language environment and have been confronted with the limitations of movement between fields, the instances in which a corollary doesn't exist or cannot be accessed. I, too, am bewildered by multiplicity. I, too, dislike it. (Moore)
- When I describe a thing or idea I know to exist but do not yet have language for, I am making poetry. I am pulling an object from one realm into another. I am objectively correlating. I am writing the lover's name upon the faces of the sky. Poetry is not a measurement, which singularly limits, but an excitation, which articulates. To articulate is to express an idea or feeling fluidly and coherently, but it is also to form a joint which allows for movement between planes, to reveal or make distinct. One cannot write an object into existence any more than one can measure the location or extension of an angel.
17. One can, however, write real toads into imaginary gardens (Moore). One can write the written doe bounding through written woods for a drink of written water (Szyborska). One can write the still-breathing body, deep in symbolic woods (Matthews). And ones have. Admit you're glad (Matthews).
18. I've become fascinated with the capacity for poetry to draw together seemingly disparate lines of inquiry and to provide a model for the investigation of those questions that are particularly resistant to quantitative measurement, while also offering a strategy for incorporating and communicating complex relationships and interdependencies in a way that is not grounded in didactic or prescriptive pedagogies or rhetoric. Through poems and in books and essays poetry has led me to, I've been introduced to concepts that draw connections between humans' ecological impact and the advancement of Capitalism, between massively distributed objects and their manifestation as locatable and local

phenomena, and between the occasionally intersecting methodologies of science and of poetics. Many of these concepts have been embedded within the poems I've read, and many I've encountered in books on philosophy and science that include no mention of poetry.

19. It is my belief that prolonged engagement with poetry can lead to unexpected solutions to familiar problems and to a neuroplasticity and empathy that is helpful in developing alternative methods of reasoning. Sometimes these methods require rigorous unfocused attention. Sometimes they require us to open ourselves to Eros. Sometimes when you are falling in love it is always already too late (Carson).

20. Eros is an issue of boundaries. He exists because certain boundaries do. In the interval between reach and grasp, between glance and counter glance, between 'I love you' and 'I love you too,' the absent presence of desire comes alive. But the boundaries of time and glance and I love you are only aftershocks of the main, inevitable boundary that creates Eros: the boundary of flesh and self between you and me. And it is only, suddenly, at the moment when I would dissolve that boundary, I realize I never can.

—*Anne Carson*  
*from Eros the Bittersweet*

21. Poetry creates its own systems of logistics and relationships that include both poet and reader, and in doing so can lead to new angles of approach in understanding existing systems of logistics and relationships in the world beyond the scope of individual poems. Poetry builds a more thoughtful, articulate, and nuanced populace that is resistant to being misled through manipulation of quantitative data, or through dissemination of propaganda lacking in evidence-based reasoning. It also allows for the existence of the professional generalist, and can help even those who have fallen under the spell of hyperspecialization to consider

their research in the context of greater systems. While poets have often decried the overabundance of scientific methodology in our culture (which I think tends to be misdirected antagonism due to what is perceived as the overabundance of funding for science departments), I believe that poetry can work in the service of developing a populace capable of making use of logic and reasoning toward more equitable and empathetic systems of governance and organization of knowledge. It may seem I'm making a bombastic claim for poetry here. If this is the case, I'm in good company.

22. Poets are not the unacknowledged legislators of the world, even if they were in Shelley's early 19<sup>th</sup> century. But attention to poetic language can enrich and develop empathy in the legislators of the world, present and future, acknowledged and otherwise, and can help them approach their role with more intelligence and humility, and with deeper consideration of humanity's relationship to and impact on nonhumans. It may seem we've taken a diverging path and have forgotten our focus, but we haven't. Poetry can accomplish this because it highlights the complexity of the systems and relationships between ourselves and our environment, between self and object. By observing without measuring, and measuring without limiting, poetry allows us to engage without dominating, to love without reducing, to couple without commanding. We are not the unacknowledged legislators of the world, but we do make and enact laws that govern the worlds contained within our poems. We do make and unmake language, which makes and unmakes the world.

23. In Nenten's poems, objects transcend their objective nature to enter the mode of subjective experience. On one level this is what language does to become language: it passes from words on the screen or ink on the page to retina, to firing of neurons, to cognition—or it

passes from cognition to firing of neurons, to movement of tongue and lips, to excitation of air between bodies, to pulsing of fluid in the cochlea, to vibration of the basilar membrane, to neurons firing, to cognition, etc.... Though this can be identified as a linear progression, and indeed a causal one, language itself cannot be reduced to any one of these knots on the thread; rather, it is the thread itself. This thread exists both in the subjective experience of cognition and in the objective organization of matter: as sound waves or ink or stacks of ones and zeroes coursing through the motherboards and hard drives of our computers. It is important to note that, while in this form it is ontologically objective, language can be said to exist in the organization of matter as well as in the matter itself: when we look closely at what I have mistakenly called objects—sound waves, ink, ones and zeroes—we notice that these forms of language require both object and manipulation of object to exist.

24. A sound wave has no mass. It is not the plucked guitar string nor is it the air that moves around the string nor the fluid in the cochlea that oscillates. Sound is defined in the American National Standard on Acoustical Terminology (ANSI/ASA S1.1-2013) as “(a) Oscillation in pressure, stress, particle displacement, particle velocity, etc., propagated in a medium with internal forces (e.g., elastic or viscous), or the superposition of such propagated oscillation. (b) Auditory sensation evoked by the oscillation described in (a).” Sound, then, is another opportunity to consider an intersecting model of relational field theories insofar as it is an excitation of a field or medium, rather than the medium or field itself—or it is the subjective experience of that excitation. Only to be understood as sound, it must be both. Similarly, written language is not the ink on the page but the organization of that ink into a form that becomes language. And ones and zeroes are indicators for the activation of electronic pulses within microprocessors—as a side note, the object metaphor

for numbers has been discussed as one central way science and math use metaphor to construct knowledge. These objective manifestations of language, then, rather than being entirely objects themselves, are instructions for the movement or excitation of objects. Language tells objects how to organize themselves, so that it may reside in those objects, once organized.

25. Truth and accuracy in translation are difficult concepts to nail down, and particularly difficult between languages as foreign to one another as Japanese and English, in which objects, colors, and relationships affect differing emotional and cultural resonance. When a Japanese child draws the sun, she will likely choose the red crayon rather than the yellow; when she looks at the shadows on the moon she might describe a rabbit rather than a face; when she eats an apple it carries no core of sin within it. And when in America we see cherry blossoms, the petals on the wet, black bough are merely (for those poetically inclined toward the monocultural canon) apparitions of (pale) faces in a crowd (Pound); they carry no intimations of self-sacrifice or nobility, no nationalist rousing cry, no band of samurai dying as the petals fall gently on their bodies like the last snow of Spring.

26. Halfway between *cage* (cage) and *cabot* (prison cell) the French language has *cageot*, a simple openwork container for transporting fruits that sicken at the least hint of suffocation.

Constructed so as to be easily demolished after use, it can't serve twice. So it doesn't last even as long as its highly perishable contents.

On all the street corners near the market it shines with the modest glow of white wood. Still perfectly new and a bit bewildered to find itself headed in this clumsy posture for a one-way trip to the dump, it is, all in all, a thoroughly likable object—on whose fate we shouldn't dwell too heavily or too long.

—Francis Ponge

27. In 1947, Francis Ponge wrote “Ideas are not my forte. I don’t manipulate them easily.

Instead, they manipulate me. Give me a sort of queasiness or nausea. I don’t really like to be among them.” He also wrote: “For at the heart of the uniform, reasoning is shaky and elusive. A mind in search of ideas should first stock up on appearances,” which is the phrase embedded in my poem “Double Acrostic for Francis Ponge.” His work focuses intensely on the relationship between language and objects: the way language organizes objects and objects organize language. Though reluctant to focus on ideas, what one is left with after reading his poems is a lasting idea: that language resides in things, and that things have the capacity for language.

28. The problem of things and ideas in language—what is essentially the subject/object dilemma—have had a very public role to play in the way poets have thought about poetry, particularly since the Modernists. “No ideas but in things” was William Carlos Williams’ aphorism, while Wallace Stevens took it a step further to write, “Not Ideas about things but the Thing itself.” Ponge coined the phrase *le regard-de-telle-sort-qu’on-le-parle*, (roughly “the gaze-such-that-it-speaks-itself” pushing the thing/idea relationship in a direction that decentralizes the human and places nonhuman objects at the center of (their own) cognition. For this reason I believe that, had Ponge been born a century later, he likely would have been in the camp of Bruno Latour and Timothy Morton as a proponent of Object Oriented Ontology (OOO). In Ponge’s phrase, the subject of the gaze is left intentionally opaque, as is the actor—is the object’s gaze or the poet’s that allows the thing to speak itself? Likely the

former, though this ambiguity emphasizes the relational field between subject and object, between the poet and the subject of the poem, indicating that poetic language resides in the correlationist excitation of that field.

29. I am perhaps overusing the term excitation, but this term is crucial to a relational field theory of poetics: it is used in the Standard Model of particle physics to describe the production of all elementary particles of matter that have mass (excluding those that do not, such as photons). A quick overview: as energy engages with—or excites—various boson fields that are distributed throughout the universe, such as the Higgs boson field, the energy is translated into mass. The type of mass depends on the amount of energy, which is related to the four fundamental forces at work in our universe. These forces are: the strong force, the weak force, the electromagnetic force, and the gravitational force. Each of these forces interacts with a boson field and the product of that excitation is an elementary particle. This is not an essay on quantum mechanics and I’m not an expert, so I’ll leave this to the reader to further investigate. But I reference quantum mechanics—a field deeply invested in the existence of objects—in this essay on poetic language intentionally: I want to be clear that poetry is not a solipsistic enterprise, nor is its value entirely subjective; language cannot be said to exist only within our minds, and poetic language and its objects can become excellent models for the understanding of deeper scientific concepts. The reverse is true as well: existing field theories, both the intersubjective field of psychoanalytic theory and the boson fields of quantum mechanics, can provide fascinating models for an investigation of the movement of attention between subject and object in a poem, and for the movement of a poetic object between fields of language in the act of translation.



30. Language exists as Kantian correlation between subject and object, even as it transcends this correlation to exist firmly as both. We use language to think language that produces language. I can hold a book, which is made of language, while I cannot hold the language inside the book. Meanwhile, the book (as does this sentence) can hold me within it. And to investigate poetic language specifically, rather than language in general, this metaphor must be extended further: language, which itself is an excitation of both subjective and objective fields, becomes a field itself, the excitation of which can produce various categories of objects, one of which is poetic language. Or, we can say that poetry is one form that the field of a language can take when excited in specific ways, though the energy of the poem can also manifest as a similar/dissimilar object through excitation of alternate fields of language. When we translate a poem from one language to the next we must learn to excite the field in new ways. We learn that some excitations are untranslatable.

31.       The brain is wider than the sky,  
            For, put them side by side,  
            The one the other will include  
            With ease, and you beside.

            The brain is deeper than the sea,  
            For, hold them, blue to blue,  
            The one the other will absorb,  
            As sponges, buckets do.

            The brain is just the weight of God,  
            For, lift them, pound for pound,  
            And they will differ, if they do,  
            As syllable from sound.

—*Emily Dickinson*  
632.

32. Dickinson uses poetry as a methodology to investigate the unanswerable questions of science and philosophy. She uses language as scientific tool: scalpel, magnifying glass,

microscope, telescope, stethoscope, scale. But language for her is capable of a level of investigation that the physical tools of science lack, particularly in that the object of study is often subjectivity itself, or the relationship between subject and object.

33. While translating Nenten's work, in order to identify the various meanings and webs of meaning inside that first poem, I drew a diagram in hopes that it would help to arrive at a final "true" translation (ha!), and found the diagram to present yet another possible way of representing the original; thus, the subsequent diagrams became part of an emerging experimental form, another knot on the thread of language made visible. To illuminate the first diagram I wrote an expository paragraph in prose, though as I wrote it became more and more untethered by conventions of exposition and worked its way toward poetic language. When the time came to write a translators' note for the Literary Translation & Theory class I was taking with Jen Hofer in Spring of 2014, I wrote the following sentence: "The use of diagrams to deconstruct phrases that may seem mundane or common to the Japanese reader is an effort to elucidate the origin or complex meaning of each component of the phrase, and reveals the relational field of language."
34. Measurements are limited to the precision of the tools used, and as the double-slit experiment shows, the act of measuring can change the way phenomena operate—to measure a thing is to limit it to a single quantitative value, when the double-slit experiment also shows us that not all objects are only one thing, and many quantum objects exist in multiple states simultaneously. Light, we know, can be both wave and particle. Poetic language, too, resists being limited to a single meaning. To study the stars one must use tools that allow us to see them in more detail, to understand their makeup by measuring the light

they emit. But to understand subjectivity we have no similar tools. To study subjectivity we must use subjectivity itself. In this pursuit, Dickinson uses inductive reasoning to imply truths about categories through the observation of specifics. But she also uses another kind of poetic reasoning that does not always maintain the intention of proving a hypothesis, and she uses the poem as a hinge that articulates to intentionally allow simultaneously conflicting interpretations. Like quanta, a poem can be two things at once, or more, and often must, to be a poem.

35. When I found it inside the paragraph I'd written, the phrase "relational field" intrigued me; I wasn't sure where, or if, I'd heard it before. Though I had a sense of what it meant to me in the context of translation and poetry, it was in the way one might have a sense of an object seen at a distance in cloudy water. First, one questions whether the object exists at all, and then imagines it has been there for some time, perhaps seen by countless others, though its shape and complexity remain obscured by the particulate matter around it—to the observer it requires further investigation, even as the possibility remains that it is merely a figment of the imagination.

36. Modernism has been called the age of the grid: we favor hard lines and rigid organizational structure. Our cities look like our microchips look like our cubicles look like the stacks of crates we use to transport fruits of dissimilar (though also of increasingly similar) shapes and sizes. If the organizing principle of our knowledge is founded on simplicity, we will continue to manifest that simplicity in the byproducts of our knowledge, which are culture, agriculture, architecture, art, cities, microchips, spreadsheets, etc....

37. Dickinson's language of comparison is intentionally left vague: "The one the other will include/absorb" does not specifically state (though it is implied) that the brain is doing the including or absorbing. And the last stanza is especially relevant to our current discussion: a syllable is one organization of sound just as the brain is one organization of God. They are not the same thing; syllables and brains are imbued with meaning while sound and God are categories or vessels into which meaning must be infused. Syllables and brains are of the human world while sound and God are not. "The one the other will absorb, and vice versa," I want the poem to say, though this would be a terrible line for any poem. Sound and God are fields waiting to be excited, while brains and syllables are excitations of those fields, are their organization into meaning.

38. Some time after writing the first draft of the translators' note, I did a Google search for "relational field" and found the term being used in reference to psychoanalytic theory in a couple of highly cited articles—none of which I'd read—and later found it being used also in an article on quantum field theory. Somehow, the process of translating poetic language in general, and Tsubouchi Nenten's poems in particular, had led me to a term that was already being used to describe complex interactions in both quantum mechanics and psychoanalytic theory. Translating poetry, or rather writing about translating poetry, sent me down two seemingly disparate rabbit holes: the field theory of psychoanalysis that represents an attempt to unify subjective experiences, and the field theory of quantum mechanics interested in laws governing objects across multiple scales and dimensions (or, as the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* puts it, "with an infinite number of degrees of freedom").

39. Language is the name we give to the entirety of the exchange between syllable and sound, between subject and object, between brain and God, created as much by the listener as by the speaker, as much by the page as by the living hand. Poetic language, insofar as that which is poetic contains the gravity to remain affectively resonant across expanses of time, exists in time, even as it is untethered from it. Like Quentin Meillassoux's arche-fossils, which refer to the existence of scientific facts pertaining to objects and temporalities anterior to the subjective existence of facticity (as in the case with measurements of phenomena that existed before the units by which they are measured), language allows for one's consciousness to be taken up by another language anterior to one's own existence, that then merges with one's own. One can read the language of a long-dead poet and be entirely taken into it, and in the process the language of that poet is also taken into the subjective experience of the individual.

40. When Whitman writes "what I assume you shall assume,/ for every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you," he is writing us into his book, and when we read it we are taking him into our selves through the medium of the object of his/our/the library's book. When Eliot suggests in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that an ekphrastic poem can change the original work of art it takes as its subject, he is pointing toward the capacity for poetry to transcend the subject/object duality, and he is addressing art objects, much as Ponge does, as ontologically malleable and susceptible to the undulations and eddies of shifting poetic language. He is pointing toward what Timothy Morton calls *interobjectivity*, and also to what I am calling the relational field that poetry creates around itself in which to operate.

41. As in poetry, multiple interpretations exist in empirical data collection, but the intention of the methodology employed to collect and analyze data is to limit the possible interpretations in the service of clarity and precision, rather than to intentionally multiply interpretations in the service of complexity.
42. Occam's Razor—that the simplest explanation is always the correct one—has laid deep roots in the construction of knowledge by way of the scientific method; it has been suggested that Occam's Razor is a crucial tenet of the scientific method, particularly in the context of Positivism, which states that anything that cannot be proven empirically is untrue. Given that our tools of observation—though certainly much-improved over the past 100 years—are still limited (to put it generously), I find this reliance on Positivism to be completely lacking in humility. And given the prevailing evidence that objects in their most elementary state prefer to exist in contradictory (or at least multiple) states simultaneously, I find the assumption of simplicity to also be troubling as a method of scientific reason. The world, it seems, is infinitely complex, and our certainty that it isn't has led to a disastrous oversimplification of natural systems that continues to result in the age of the monoculture and the erasure of biological and cultural diversity and complexity. Poetry can help us regain some understanding of that complexity by offering an alternative method of reasoning and meaning-making that does not assume simplicity.
43. Fortunately, it doesn't require a great degree of logistical gymnastics to tie this back to quantum field theory, nor does it require a conversation about the existence or nonexistence of God. For the purposes of this discussion, let's think of God as a metaphor for the forces that manifest as matter and as relationships between matter in the universe; which is to say

that we can think of God as the reason the universe exists. This is why the Higgs boson has been dubbed the “God particle,” much to the chagrin of most physicists: the observation of the particle supports the theory that the Higgs boson field exists, and that it has been distributed throughout the universe since the Big Bang. The Higgs boson field, when excited by energy packets or particles of specific frequencies, becomes the source of elementary particles of matter in the universe. Inherent to this theory is that particles exist both as packets of energy that excites the Higgs boson field and as manifestations of matter in the mesh of the excited field simultaneously.

44. The capacity for poetic language to merge subjectivities gestures also toward its relevance to psychoanalytic relational field theory, and points especially toward the concept of intersubjectivity. However, the capacity for poetic language to bring the nonhuman into the experience of human subjectivity and vice versa—through its movement across time, through its transmission via nonhuman objects, and indeed through its involvement of nonhumans into the world of its creation, suggest the Mortonian concept of interobjectivity that places the relational field of human psychology inside of the relational field of objects across dimensions of time and space.

45. As Morton explains in *Hyperobjects*, intersubjectivity can be seen as just one expression of interobjectivity, in that it limits itself to considering the field that exists solely between human objects, while the concept of interobjectivity deals with what he calls the “mesh” of space-time, in which (and through which) objects create the capacity for causality and correlation between themselves and other objects. Morton suggests that this mesh, which acts as a synonym for the field of interobjectivity, is created by objects themselves. He uses

the metaphor of the mesh to indicate that it is both matter and the space between matter—as in the existence of empty space built into holograms, JPGs, and MP4 files—that allows for the existence of causality. There are a few places in which I’m leaving one foot on the dock in Morton’s conception of interobjectivity (when the ship leaves I’ll need to do some quick thinking): the first is that he suggests intersubjectivity as a subdivision of the field of interobjectivity. Instead I prefer to think of these fields as distinct, and as equally complex and expansive: more of a Venn diagram than a cartoon drawing of a fried egg. A relational field theory allows for the existence of multiple equally complex fields into and out of which objects and minds can be thrown, in the Heideggerian sense of “thrownness.” This is the other major piece of Morton’s concept of interobjectivity that I’m risking thrownness into the metaphorical water over: he suggests that objects create the mesh around them—that objects are actually responsible for the creation of space-time rather than being organizations of space-time. My response: can’t it be both?

46.       The mirror water vibrates:       the mouth’s breath,  
           a spoken surface as thought,   a soundless word  
           balloon       of concentration       breaks

          The spoken       world rubs against you to own you as,  
           as the cat does,       one of it.   A placement.  
           Your smile, your pool of sight touched awake.

  —Ed Roberson  
   *from “Topoi; 11. What Word”*

47. In Roberson’s poem, “the spoken world rubs against you to own you;” the object of poetic language, of the spoken wor(l)d, therefore pulls the human subject into it, owning that subject by bringing it into the universe of its own making. Roberson does not indicate



whether he is referring to the poet or the reader, and I imagine this is intentional, as poetic language does not work directionally. This is to say it moves both forward and backwards, back and forth between poet and reader, between subject and object. It is merely a placement, which intends to be moved again.

48. Language is untethered from bodies, though it requires both a producing and a receiving body to exist, as well as some intermediary medium or body for its transmission. Because language is vastly distributed and nonlocal, it is a Mortonian hyperobject, like global warming, Capitalism, DNA, gun violence.

49. In *Hyperobjects*, Timothy Morton interweaves the theory of Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) with environmental criticism, building on the work he's done to reconfigure the ways we think about nature. In his earlier book, *Ecology without Nature*, Morton identifies an inherent problem in our conception of the environment, which is that we think of nature as being separate from culture, just as we think of subject as being separate from object; this is something that began, he suggests, with Romantic conceptions of Nature that describe wilderness in terms such as "untouched," "virgin," and "pristine." Language has the power to organize, which has the power to make and unmake the world. Romantic descriptions of nature place it on a pedestal as a theoretical and wholly abstract space—rather than a specific and complicated place—where men would have access to respite from the troubles of the civilized world, meaning primarily Capitalism, the marketplace, and war.

50. Recently I met an anthropologist and poet engaged in researching the sociocultural impact of war in Laos named Leah Zani. Her work on "bomb ecologies" investigates the effect of

“ongoing violence, due to explosive remnants of war” in the most cluster-bombed country in the world. Though the war has long passed, the violence is temporally, as well as physically, distributed. Bombs continue to result in amputations even generations after the Vietnam war ended, the result of which is a massive network of NGOs, academics, volunteers, political movements, interpersonal relationships, bomb diffusers, doctors. Shell casings are used in architecture and in gardens. An ecosystem exists.

51. In *Dark Ecology*, Morton presents the hyperobject of agrilogistics to suggest an organizing principle of human technology originating in Mesopotamia that continues to push the organization of matter ever toward monoculture. It is in many ways an unfolding of entropy: the spontaneous movement toward thermodynamic equilibrium. Order paves the way for disorder. Lack of diversity results in more empty space, more possible states of disorder; the universe moving toward self-same distribution. Though agriculture is rightfully on the list of “difficulties of the civilized world from which man requires respite,” it is simultaneously presented as the space in which respite is sought. The historical poetic treatment of agriculture focuses on the concept of the pastoral: one must disentangle the idealized form of agriculture that resides in pastoral conceptions of nature from the very real machinery, organizing principles, and self-replicating algorithms of agrilogistics that ultimately embroil the idealized perception of nature into the systems by which Capitalism continues to destroy and cheapen nonhuman entities.

52. As a methodological experiment, Zani is using what she calls “field poems,” in addition to the more traditional field notes, to collect her data. In doing so she hopes to develop techniques for qualitative research methods that also might be useful in coping with the

“methodological and ethical challenges of carrying out fieldwork in hazardous areas,” while also approaching the question of how research can best “represent the complexities of postwar experiences.” This makes sense: complex experiences require complex methods of analysis and observation, and I’m fascinated by her inclination toward poetry as one of the possible modes through which she might approach that complexity.

53. The creation of Nature as an abstract and pristine space, through the cultivation of language that cheapens via commodification, excludes Eduardo Kohn’s possibility for “how forests think,” as it smooths over the specific and perceivable entities that comprise the forest, destroying each vast ecosystem of each tree and replacing all the critters and trees and jaguars with a singular and abstract “wilderness” that can be put into the service of humanity. This is another result of an architecture of meaning that relies on simplicity: we simplify that which doesn’t fit into our systems until they do.

54. One of the findings of Zani’s work has been that locals, as they pass through the jungle, identify unexploded ordinance by the names of the fruit the bombs resemble. In one of Zani’s field poems, a woman from Laos asks why the government designed the bombs to look like fruit. What kind of person would do such a thing? Nobody, and yet objects assert themselves into the products and byproducts of culture. They organize our design and they organize our interpretations of the design of others.

55. In our conversation, Leah pointed toward abductive reasoning as one of the modes in which poetry might operate as research, and while I find this argument compelling, I also think it strips poetry of one of its most valuable contributions to inquiry. What I find problematic is

that none of the three methods of scientific meaning making (deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning) is content to approach the problem of inquiry without seeking a solution or positing a hypothesis. Which is to say that the intent of these kinds of reasoning is to arrive at a statement of fact, rather than one of Heideggerian facticity.

56. Our theme: facticity, i.e., the being-there of our own Dasein in its temporally particular “there,” its being “there” for a while. — Is accessible in the today. — Misunderstandings: (1) the tendencies of “our times” today, (2) brooding over an ego-like self. — Instead hermeneutical explication. — Impulses from Kierkegaard. — The today lives within its own manner of having-been-interpreted: talk the open space of publicness, averageness, the every-one, masking — Van Gogh. — The situation of the University.

—Martin Heidegger  
*Facticity as the being-there of Dasein in the  
ambileness of temporal particularity. The “today”*

57. Sometimes an essay is a poem. Sometimes the distinction between fact and facticity is a crucial one, in that it is the distinction between seeking and beholding, between a thing representing itself singularly to be gazed upon or held, and a thing presenting itself while withdrawing. Morton refers to the squid, which obscures itself with ink when approached. Or there is another cephalopod, the cuttlefish, that disappears at will by adopting the texture and color of its surroundings. Or better yet, the smartphone: the ultimate shapeshifter without shifting shape. Measuring a smartphone will not determine its value. Knowing the number of pixels or the shape or size or color of its shell or even its processing power tells us very little about what the cellphone is to its users, what its relationship is to its environment, what it is to itself. Cephalopod: cellphone: self. There is no single fact about any of these objects that reveals their facticity. All the facts taken together still do not reveal

Heidegger discusses facticity in its relationship to Dasein and to *thrownness* (Geworfenheit).

“Dasein confronts every concrete situation in which it finds itself (into which it has been thrown) as a range of possibilities for acting (onto which it may project itself). Insofar as some of these possibilities are actualized, others will not be, meaning that there is a sense in which not-Being (a set of unactualized possibilities of Being) is a structural component of Dasein’s Being.” This reads very much as a description of a combination of multiple worlds theory and quantum field theory, applied to subjectivity: the individual finds herself always in a place of infinite possible futures, and in choosing one, limits all others. The energy packet that excites the Higgs boson field manifests as matter, even as it contains the capacity to remain energy that does not manifest as matter. Facticity, in this sense, is one way of thinking about a relational field theory of poetics. How fitting that Heidegger’s language is poetry: open, strange, requiring a kind of unfocused tenderness to unlock it.

59. It is precisely a lack of intention that I find most compelling about poetry's contribution—it is in poetry's cultivation of partiality (rather than impartiality) that it maintains the capacity to engage in what A.R. Ammons calls “eddie of meaning”:

29

like the inlet's cutting edge:  
there are dunes of motion,  
organizations of grass, white sandy paths of remembrance  
in the overall wandering of mirroring mind:  
but Overall is beyond me: is the sum of these events  
I cannot draw, the ledger I cannot keep, the accounting  
beyond the account:

61. A poetic, non-rational, non-hierarchical approach to apprehending the absolute is supported also by Quentin Meillasoux's theory in *After Finitude*, in which he claims that it is not the correlation between subject and object, but the "facticity of the correlation" that allows the absolute to be revealed, stressing repeatedly that this facticity can only be arrived at "beyond reason." It is in the overall wandering of mirroring mind: but Overall is beyond. The sum cannot be drawn. Poetry excels at ascribing immeasurable value to the immeasurable, and at revealing the already measured to be immeasurable as well. It does so, in part, by pulling objects into the space of cognition through language and by indicating a path for language to organize objects. In the context of a relational field theory of poetics, if such a theory hopes to suggest that excitations in the field of language can affect excitations in the field of matter, Meillasoux's suggestion of facticity's existence in the space "beyond reason" is a tool worth holding on to. He considers what he calls the arche-fossil, or science's ability to arrive at facts that existed before the time of human subjectivity—a subjectivity that deploys the prerequisite environment for facts to come into being. Meillasoux's work gets at the heart of the central questions of both Object Oriented Ontology and of Bennequin's Vibrant Materialism, which is the capacity for humans to apprehend the absolute. It may also help develop a framework for thinking about the mind/body problem, and more importantly, about the human/nature problem, which is also the problem of Capitalism.

62. In Capitalism, nature becomes a brothel; in this metaphor about Capitalism, an excitation in the field of language becomes an excitation in the field of matter: nonhumans and women are simultaneously placed into the abstract space of the objectified Other—that this space is thought of as resilient, mechanistic, unsoiled, unsouled, and receptive to (more importantly capable of being polluted by) humans—allows Capitalism to enact the same kind of violence on the nonhuman world that patriarchy enacts on the Female, which is to ultimately objectify, devalue, and oversimplify it as a commodity. Morton suggests that this idea that nature is an abstract “away” to which we can escape becomes especially complicated when we acknowledge that this “away” is the same abstract space into which we throw our garbage, and it is the same “away” to which the discarded lover is banished. There is nowhere for waste to go without our being continuously affected and haunted by it. There is no “away,” just as there is no “there.”

63. The “away” to which we throw garbage is an appropriate model for thinking about ways in which language can organize matter and matter can organize language. It is also a good moment to look at A.R. Ammons’s book *Garbage*, to investigate how it can help us see waste and its production as a Mortonian hyperobject. The book-length poem implicates both language and physical trash in the production of human garbage, making it an excellent model for the discussion of correlationism in poetics. Ammons writes, “I/ know garbage is being “disposed” of—but what/ I wanted I had gotten, a clear space and pure/ freedom to dump whatever.” Ammons considers human output, both semiotic and physical. He considers what it is to create, to dispose of, to speak garbage.

64.           scientists plunge into matter looking for the

matter but the matter lessens and, looked too

far into, expands away: it was insubstantial all  
along; that is, boulders bestir; they

are “alive” with motion and space: there is a  
riddling reality where real hands grasp each

other in the muff but toward both extremes the  
reality wears out, wears thin, becomes a reality

“realityless”

—A.R. Ammons  
*From Garbage*

65. *Garbage* moves between scale in terms of both the temporal and the spatial; like Zani’s bomb ecologies, garbage exists everywhere and nowhere; it is and creates our ecosystem. Ammons focuses at once on an individual piece of garbage and considers at other times the production of garbage as a single and massive endeavor. But if distribution in space were the only focus, or even distribution in time, *Garbage* would fall short of helping us build a model for relational field poetics. But Ammons also complicates and brings into question our thinking about garbage and human output; it could be said that he does for garbage what Morton has done for Nature, which is to ask us to reconsider the way we think of it as an abstract entity that disappears as soon as we throw it “away,” and push toward perceiving it as a collection of specifics, even a collection of thinking about objects. As Morton reminds us, our atmosphere is the byproduct of organisms that produced oxygen as waste. Our own waste, both in language and in garbage, is not something that is “away,” but something we, and nonhumans, must continue to live inside of. By implicating language in garbage, Ammons also presents a category of objects that excites subjective and objective fields in



such a way as to manifest a reality “realityless.” He encourages us to reconcile the human with the nonhuman, pushing us another step closer to the reconciliation of the thought and being of Cartesian dualism.

66. “I think, therefore I am” implies that those who do not think are not. Because we only have the capacity to understand thinking through thinking, it is also saying that those who do not think in the same way that I think are not.
67. Descartes inherited the mind-body division from the Jesuits, who inherited the concept from St. Thomas Aquinas, who inherited it from some other source, or from some panoply of sources, which is to say that the source of the idea of Cartesian dualism cannot be measured. The mind-body division is also inextricable from one of the major questions of the Linguistic turn in Western philosophy: is language separate from consciousness, and what is the relationship between consciousness and form? Descartes approaches the problem of nature by simplifying it. Just as his Jesuit instructors had him dissect the bodies of animals to understand them, Descartes hoped to understand thinking by slicing it up. But as a living animal cannot be dissected and continue living, thinking cannot be separated from the body and still be thinking. A particle cannot be disentangled from the field and still be matter.
68. Nature is not a space separate from humanity into which the individual can retreat or out of which it can emerge, but is an always-already unfolding web of sticky complexity. Nature is an extension of, and a byproduct of metabolic processes of sentient life, including but not limited to humans. Complex ecological thinking is one possible response (though not a “solution”) to the problem of enforcing divisions between phenomenology and ontology, or

between form and formlessness, or between quantum actions and Newtonian or Classical actions. Meillassoux seems to suggest that it must be *either* Cartesian Materialism *or* correlationism, but this seems to me to be yet another example of falling into a construct that requires dualism, an “either, or” rather than a “both, and.” Thus, Descartes’ material universe, in which all bodies are reducible to the machinations of their parts, and animals, lacking a soul in traditional theology, are considered to be merely automatons, allows for an absolute separation of entities that cannot be absolutely separated.

69. Distributed throughout Lo Kwa Mei-en’s *The Bees Make Money in the Lion* is a crown of sonnets. Though they are broken sonnets, the crown adheres to some formal elements that are relevant to this discussion, first of which is the repetition of the last line of the preceding poem as the first line of the following. With each repetition the line is changed slightly so that it repeats but represents a mutation in the form, resulting in part in a thread throughout the book that seems to act algorithmically. In this case, the crown points toward a theme similar to Ammons’s: the idea that human production of language cannot be disentangled from human physicality, both in terms of our output and in terms of our bodies. Here mutation becomes the hyperobject, indicating that discrepancies (sometimes thought of even as mistakes) are necessary to diversity and multiplicity of life and language. The theme appears throughout the book, enacted both in form and in language.

70. My vanguard is here to lose a horse called *Fear*  
*Object* in the image of a meadow. There, the gold  
of earth confirmed, softer than my face but faster  
than a finger in suburbia licking off disaster’s

*Hello.* My sword is honey. There, a reason to fear  
it is nothing but. But for its edge go we? How

it forged a humanity in me, then made me how  
he said I'd be—wherefore person, once, but faster.

[...]

Our conscience was half honey, then it went faster  
than golden years in which six men unmade me. How

little danger in dishabille they said I'd be. The gold  
comes riding out of me, and then what kings said gold  
should be—like man, but better. Or honey, but faster,  
fearful. But honey you ought be. My monarch is feral.

—Lo Kwa Mei-en  
*from "Pastoral with No Quarter"*

71. The book's title, *The Bees Make Money in the Lion*, also points toward two major themes of hyperobjects: viscosity and temporal distribution, or historicity. The title comes from the bible, though the word "honey" has been replaced by "money." This is a beautiful way of indicating that Capitalism has become a system that reaches back into a world before Capitalism, that the products of nature can no longer be seen as anything other than products of Capitalism. Honey, also, is a beautiful image (perhaps the best image other than oil) for considering viscosity. It points toward the stickiness of Capitalism over everything.
72. This critical afterword, while it makes use of the language of science and occasionally the language of literary criticism, is neither. As a poet I've been lucky to be allowed to remain a professional generalist, to follow the threads of inquiry that have tickled me, and then to make what sense I can of their collisions and coexistence. That I am wantonly applying the terminology of quantum mechanics and cognitive psychology to a haphazard theory of poetics represents a hubris that, as a longtime student of literature, I cannot help but

acknowledge. And yet I persist, in full recognition that philosophers have written treatises that attempt to bridge this divide between subject and object and yet the divide remains. Some of them I have referenced in this essay. I recognize that this is an impossible task. And when faced with the impossible I turn to poetry. I revisit what has been written. I seek the space between.

73. Rather than accepting C.P. Snow's division between the two cultures as inevitable, a poetic method of inquiry might act as an adjunct to the scientific method, to remind us that the experimenter cannot help but impose herself in some way on her experiments, and that scientific objectivity is and always will be an aspirational term, incapable of understanding or unifying all things. In pedagogy, the implementation of a poetic method across all curriculum might help young learners (and perhaps especially old teachers) avoid mistaking the forest for the cellular structure of the veins of the leaves on the trees. We need scientists who are comfortable investigating the complex and unknowable relationships between humans and nonhumans, and who have the humility to acknowledge that not everything essential is countable, measurable, or knowable. Using poetry as a tool for inquiry has been, at least for me, an important method of investigating the relevance/resonance of a subject at various scales, and of being comfortable in the first position of Keatsian negative capability, which is that a thinker must be "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, [and] doubts...". Unlike Keats, I do not find the "reaching after fact and Reason" to be irritable.

74. With this critical afterword, I hope to posit a relational field theory of poetics as a model for bridging the gap between two existing theories: that which focuses on merging subjectivities by investigating the distribution of consciousness (psychoanalytic relational field theory) and

that which focuses on merging conceptions of objectivity by investigating the distribution of matter (quantum field theory). “Poetry,” as Auden wrote, “makes nothing happen.” This is one of the most commonly quoted lines of poetry, both by its celebrants and its detractors, and yet it is incomplete. Here is the remainder of the stanza:

75.       For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives  
          In the valley of its making where executives  
          would never want to tamper, flows on south  
          From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,  
          Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,  
          A way of happening, a mouth.

—*W.H. Auden*  
*from “In Memory of W.B. Yeats”*

76. The making happen of nothing, given the context, is an active making. It is a making that stands at odds with Capitalism and its executives, with the drive toward objectification and toward the position of ownership. The nothing that poetry makes happen survives in the valley of its own making. It is an object that exists inside its own subjectivity. It survives, a way of happening, a mouth. It is a disembodied body, a wave that is neither solely the material through which it passes or the energy of its passing. It is a kind of boson field and it is a kind of boson. Poetry, then, is one mode of (e)merging; it is the correlationist hallway between the subject and the object. It is Stevens’s “Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.” It is also the nothing himself, who beholds.