

Slow Reading Club



mmmetabolismms

Willem Claesz Heda. *Still Life with a silver "tazza", a member and oysters* (1632) Oil on baltic oak planks. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

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The Unfolding of Life in a Spiral (2019)
From Sonic Acts Hereafter
The Living and the Dead Ensemble

Matter
Alive
Waters
Lunar
Solar
The Stone
The Bone

I opened my eyes wide to see better, and the world was born without any veil of modesty. A vegetal whole in an imperious evening dew. I... The leaves were many, green in infinite ways, as well as ochre, yellow, maroon, crinkled, dazzling, indulging themselves in sacred disorder. I... The vines sought out the ground to mix themselves up some more, try rooting, sprouting buds. [...]

They were all immense. They harvested light high, high up, and smuggled it to their feet as phantasmal contraband. Their branches sealed alliances of shadows, and glowing openings. The vault of vegetation braced against the earth, dispatched its trunks straight and wild toward the sustenance of the sky. Living trees, dead feet, green twigs, barren branches, parasitic plant hair, buds and rotting spots, seeds and broken blossoms, earthly night solar light - bound themselves together in one momentum. Plant life and death went on with this same ardour, in complementary but undifferentiated cycles.

They were all there, *Bois-rivières*, *Pains d'épices*, *Génipas*, and if they did not see them, I could feel them coming up. Here are the Breadfruit trees planted by the Maroons, and the Avocado trees that mark their trails; here are the Acacias bearers of knowledge; there are the Ebony trees that anchor the axes of a strange saga. There they are, trees that the light clothes in secrets, or those that wrap themselves in a halo of fait-noir: darkness. All came out of the earth with the same force, as from a staved-in belly. I wanted to wallow in this earth giving rise to so many strengths. My need for these strengths made the trees beauties. And this beauty allied both the earth and the sky, and the night and the day.

They all sat there in the deep shade of many trees in the garden of the Centre d'art in Port-au-Prince. Rossi next to Cynthia next to Fleurissant next to Léo next to Mimétik next to Louis next to Bijou next to Olivier next to Desiris next to Dieuvela. The words of the dead at our lips. We rose, placing a left hand on the right shoulder of the person to the left, and Rossi, first in line, walked towards the centre and began circling around. I was first in line, and then I followed behind, and behind you was me and then behind those three at the front; there was I. And so on, and as such, we all followed. Starting to spin around and around, moving from under the tree toward the garden exit onto the street. Moving forwards. Constantly spiraling together, hands on shoulders, and faces up towards the sinking sun. [...]

We walked together for what seemed like an interminable distance, we were forever-walking further into the night. Deeper into the night. Surrounded on both sides by motionless cars in the middle of the road, headlights lighting our path, hands held, or on shoulders, or carrying bags, and gently pushing another's hips to steer them around a huge, open hole in the ground through which the city's water rushed at a pace under the Route Nationale 2 traffic jam that snaked through Port-au-Prince from Carrefour to Martissant all the way to Grand Rue. Exhausting. Exhilarating. The forever-walk among the traffic and rain brought us somewhere we would never have expected. Lightning in the sky and rain falling, we no longer worried about where we were walking; we just wanted to walk. Walk together. Somewhere. In the end we walked from Carrefour to Grande Rue. The night held not much up to us, and we refused and refused to succumb to its threat of sleep or death and perhaps both.

Exhausted, we had to rest, so we slept in the cemetery among those things varied and divine. When I woke, I saw a new place in which our body had arrived. We were in the belly of a cave as if digested by the mountain. And so, lighting cigarettes, we blindly made our way down, deeper into the earth. Dark. Dark cave. We came to a standstill in a large chamber at what we imagined was our centre. Curling and sparkling formations of limestone decorated the walls, floor, and ceiling, and it appeared before our eyes that we were inside a diamond-encrusted cathedral, of sorts. I cried out and my cry came back to me, and again on the left and the right and above and below. Surrounded by echo on all sides. Then Fleurissant cried out and Bijou and Louis and Olivier and Cynthia and Léo and

Rossi and Desiris and Dieuvela and Mimétik. All at once we cried out loud the words of the dead we had carried on our tongues. [...]

Echo defeats the Gods by repeating the last words of Narcissus. She enables herself to speak, but only through repeating his words in her voice. In a certain way she appropriates his language. In repeating she responds to him. She speaks in her own voice by repeating his words.

"There is a kind of pressure that music and poverty (constraint) puts on the sentence; the remainder (freedom) is poetry. Over the course of history the demands of truthful expression (as either or both correspondence and discovery) become more and more severe, but at the same time 'the plain sense of things' becomes more plain and the striated polyvalency of the vessel, the medium, the conductor strives for directness." I think poetry is what happens or is conveyed on the outskirts of sense, on the outskirts of normative meaning.

I take the pulse of the spiral and inscribe it in graphs and charts, from the very life of writing. It's a pluridimensionality at the level of words - words functioning as particles of sonic energy in motion. Inserted with precision into a sentence, the word becomes a sort of slave and thus loses its nerves, its lifeblood.

On the Current Symbolic Status of Oil (1987)
From The Age of Oil
Duncan Smith

Cars, as everyone knows, are powered by oil, a condition that powerful interests have aligned Western countries, America in particular, to for many decades. Oil is the law for a car's operation, and the law, or as the French would say, la loi, is oil. The loi/law of oil is thus necessary for the American car to go anywhere. And where will the ego goe without oil, without a car? Heretofore the loi has always been cars driven by oil. This is witnessed by the failure of steam driven and electrically powered cars to have any success on the internal combustion machine market, the present-day oil powered cars made in Detroit. Without the loi of oil (conditioned by car companies and oil companies), there would be the likelihood of no oil, no oil for egos to goe on. This is the supreme threat to America's ego for without it nothing will goe, unless America's interests liquidate the aggressive, oil-hoarding counterpart. Goe over there..

Within the car there is a radio, and within the word car there is the anagram RCA. Originally a company aligned to the technical innovation of transmitting sound over distances, RCA became equatable with the radio. And nearly every car has a radio or RCA (letterally) within it.

Cars and radios are thus in intimate connection, rhetorically a metonymic one. What is interesting is that cars are powered by oil just as radios, in association, are powered by oil. Both are in conjunction with oil, cars burn oil while radios play oil, that is, records, made of oil or vinyl, are played over the apparatus of a radio. The car that burns oil reproduces the radio that plays oil, here records, an oil-derived product. Even the word radio has two essential letters for car.

Again without oil our cars or RCA could not goe. The loss of oil to power our cars is as threatening as the loss of oil/vinyl/records for our RCA, our popular music, played over the car radio, the radio cryptically echoing the car it is contained in. We hear the radio with our cars, noting another similarity between car and ear. Ears hear the car radio.

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Also, ear is within hear. Since we have ended up identifying with our cars so much, we've also ended up identifying with the stars our ears hear, our popular musicians heard on music stations over the radio. Elvis Presley loved cars, which is inevitable since he was signed over to the record company RCA. America loves cars and loves to hear Elvis Presley. The lack of oil will then make loving cars and hearing rock stars an impossibility (since their voices are on an oil/vinyl record).

Ears have wax in them. Wax too is synonymous with oil, as demonstrated by the title for a hit record called Hot Wax, now transformable into Hot Oil. There is already oil in our ears, the wax, enforced by the idea that there is oil in our cars, in our radios. To be close to the music played over the radio seems to be a condition we have already met up with because the wax/oil makes the distantly playing record much more interior and proximate. Popular music resolves this distance by using words in songs that are exchangeable with its listeners. We then presume the sung material to be our very own, our "feelings." Singing the record to oneself is an introjection, an interiorization of the distant singer. The singer is brought closer to ourselves, just as the unconscious idea is one of already possessing that record inside our ears, but as ear wax or ear oil..

Around the time that cars and radios were assuming their egological power over American citizens, UFO's were being cited in great numbers. You could surmise this bit of common knowledge to be widespread around the beginning of the 1950s, the beginning of a wide scale introjection of records played on car radios. UFO's, or flying saucers, were also often cited from people's ears. Around the time that cars and radios were assuming their egological power over American citizens, UFO's were being cited in great numbers. You could surmise this bit of common knowledge to be widespread around the beginning of the 1950s, the beginning of a wide scale introjection of records played on car radios. UFO's, or flying saucers, were also often cited from people's ears. I'll venture a correspondence that might illuminate these mutual car/radio/UFO phenomena.

A flying saucer is a disco, the Spanish word for saucer or disc. A UFO is often described as a disc-like object, resembling in many instances, a record. Since a record playing on the radio cannot be seen, a UFO can, though very rarely. To

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see a UFO, to be the lucky person, is also the desire, the delusion to see the disco, disc or record that we never see in a car when the radio plays that record/music we enjoy so much. And that playing record is a burning one, a condensation that accounts for the reported brilliance of UFO's, the UFO's that are brightly lit, lit as if on fire or burning. Granted the accounts of people who might have truly seen a saucer, it also bespeaks a delirious curiosity, at heart a desire to see as opposed to hear what those purely heard saucers look like. And their appearance is conditioned by the confusion of burning and playing, transforming the UFO disc into a bright, fiery object.

When cars go or drive on tar, they drive over the asphalt on such roads. Without asphalt or tar, there would be no surface for a car to drive on, no tar or oil for a car to drive with and no tar or sound from the records heard over the car radio to listen to. A car travels along a road, a path, a trail. These are the "grooves" on a road, associative with the "grooves" on a record. Road equals record, since both are derived from oil, roads being made of asphalt and records composed of vinyl, derived as asphalt is, of oil products.

The stylus that plays the record is the car that drives along the road. A record's turning motion allows the stylus to move. The turntable is powered by electricity, often a transformation of energy from oil. A stylus, besides being a writing instrument, is also related to a ship's prow, the edge that cuts through water. Every car has a hood, a "prow" of sorts. Ships travel as do cars, one on water, the other on land. Both are called "she." The car/ship has a stylus, podium, prow that cuts along a path, and thus its mark or trail is made. The wake of churned-up water is the ship's path as the drippings of oil is the car's path. The oil drippings of cars are the indicia of a car's path (not to mention its tire marks). The record's sound from an LP is the index of a stylus' path. Sound travels on tar/oil/vinyl records as cars travel on tar/oil/asphalt. Thus a stylus traveling down a record groove is an allegory of a car traveling down a road.

To taste oil introduces oil's relation to the third gear of the oral drive, noting another phonic resemblance. America's addiction to tar is as bad as its addiction to the tar in cigarettes. Even low-tar or ultra low-tar cigarettes resonate with the desire to move away from tar, too much tar, too much oil.

Low-mileage cars are really low in tar as some cigarettes are. Low-tar cigarettes are a "rationing" of tar, like the inevitable "rationing" of oil when supplies get low. The oral drive, exemplified by smoking, is also present in the repetitive and pleasurable activity in listening to songs over the radio, on the jukebox, on one's stereo. Both smoking and listening involve tar/ art and oil/vinyl records. Both are an inhalation, since with smoking one interiorizes tar and in the other, in listening, one can interiorize via the mouth the record's voice. Resinging a popular song that is played on oil is inhaling a cigarette that has "tar" in it. Introjection is an oral affair, and the record assures us of oral stimulation by the silent, but still vocalized, activity under-going when we listen, when we hear the wax in our car that we cannot see.

True, the ear wax is invisible, the partition between seeing the ear's contents and the eye that is to accomplish that act is permanent, unless you were enterprising enough to have a photograph taken of it. Oil is not only in our cars, but in our ears, in our eyes (our stares), and in our mouths. A cigarette, believe it or not, is a small car, an i caret get, an I get(te) a car, or simplified, an I get car. Car's rhyme with tar could mean I get tar for cigarette, "I smoke cigarettes" can translate into either "I smoke I get cars" or "I smoke I get tars." With smoking, the cigarette's smoke is similar to the exhaust that comes from a car, the remains of burnt-up car oil are also the remains of burnt-up tar. But is the cigarette filter's passage of smoke the only "exhaust" when we, as smokers, exhale the "exhaust" from our mouth? The exhaust of a car resembles either the cigarette smoke that then passes through the lungs, throat and mouth, as an exhalation, as exhaust. Smoking a cigarette is then an allegory of a car burning oil as both of them spew forth "exhaust."



(top) Willem Claesz Heda. *Still Life with a silver "tazza", a roemer and oysters* (1632) Oil on baltic oak planks. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

(bottom) Willem Claesz Heda. *Still Life with Oysters, a Silver Tazza, and Glassware* (1635) Oil on wood. Met Museum, New York.

Metaxu iv (1976-1979)
Oyvind Fahlström in Memorium
From Degrees of Unsolvability
Catherine Christer Hennix

born,	sit
first	stream
by	solitary
the tall	falling
olive tree	snow
-----	-----
and,	gate
then,	stone
by	bridges
the Sea	evening
	time

The History of Violets (1965)
Marosa di Giorgio
trans. Jeannine Marie Pitas

XI

The gladiolus is a spear, its edge loaded with carnations, a knife of carnations. It jumps through the window, kneels on the table; it's vagrant flame, burning up our papers, our dresses. Mother swears that a dead man has risen; she mentions her father and mother and starts to cry.

The pink gladiolus opened up in our house.
But scare it, tell it to go.
That crazy lily is going to kill us.

XV

The mushrooms are born in silence; some of them are born in silence, others with a brief shriek, a soft thunder. Some are white, others pink; that one is gray and looks like a dove, the statue of a dove; still others are gold or purple. Each one bears—and this is what's awful—the initials of the corpse it comes from. I do not dare to eat them; that most tender meat is our relative.

But, come afternoon the mushroom buyer arrives and starts picking. My mother gives him permission. He chooses like an eagle. This one white as sugar, a pink one, a gray one. My mother does not realize that she is selling her race.

XVIII

At that hour, the tiny underground creatures were starting their work (those ones that wear heavy coats and work to the rhythm of drums: toc-toc). At that hour the moon had reached the summit of its brilliance, and all the doves scattered over the moon. But from a distance those birds looked like butterflies, great, sparkling flies. The doves flew over the moon, pecking at it, caressing it.

All of this became clearer as I watched the scene from the black forest of orange trees. And my grandparents sitting there, frozen, thier cloaks a pale pink, thier ill-fated braids.

They always held some too-brilliant thing in their hands; they showed it; they hid it. Is it a fallen dove? I stepped closer, looking, asking—Or is it a little hare from among the irises? But they always gave me the strangest reply.—It is a saint, they said.

—It is San Carlos, San Cristóbal, Santa Isabel.

I cannot put my memories in order.
The moon wrecks them every time.

XIX

Beyond the land, through the air, in the full moon's light, like a lily's stem, it loads its side incessantly with hyacinths, narcissi, white lilies. The wolves draw back at the sight of it; the lambs get down on their knees, crazy with love and fear. It moves on, goes off like an errant candela-bra, a bonfire; it goes towards the house, passes the cabinets, the hearth; with only a glance it burns the apples, illuminates them, wraps them in candied paper; it flings colored stones into the rice; it make the bread and pears glow. It drives itself into the table like a November yucca branch; it hunts a star, it stuffs itself with candles, pine nuts, little bottles. It breaks into the bedroom, spins over my dream, over my wide-open eyes; it floats in the air like a three-tiered crown of pearls, a lamp. It is a fish, a coral branch outside the water, each piece of coral as swollen as a bud or a lip. It flies back toward the moon; it scares the horses and owls, who break into flight and instantly stop. It calls to me. To me, sleepless, and we go off beyond the hills, away from the night workers who tried to mow it down like a hydrangea.

XXIII

The gladioli are made of marble, of pure silver, of some ghostly fabric, organdy; they are the bones of Most Holy Maria; they are still walking through this world.

For a long time these spectral stems have followed me. At night they come in through the window; if I am sleeping, they enter my dream; if I am awake, I find them standing at the foot of my bed.

The gladioli are like the angels, like the dead. Who can free me from that tenuous stem, from the gaze of that blind man?

XXXV

I remember the white, folded cabbages—white roses of the earth, of the gardens—cabbages of marble, of most delicate porcelain; cabbages holding their children inside.

And the tall blue chard.

And the tomato, a kidney of rubies.

And the onions wrapped in silky paper, rolling paper, like bombs of sugar, salt, alcohol.

And the gnome asparagus, turrets of the kingdom of gnomes.

I remember the potatoes, and the tulips we always planted along them.

And the snakes with their long, orange wings.

And the tobacco of fireflies, who smoked without ceasing.

I remember eternity.

200 Years of Total Conversion (2024)

From Sonic Acts Ecoes 6

Sasha Litvintseva and Beny Wagner

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the French physiologist Claude Bernard dedicated much of his life's work to establishing a scientific basis for the problem of digestion. What happens, he asked, when one organism eats another? Applying the scientific method, which is to say, by severing the part from the whole, Bernard experimented with observing mutton as it passed through a dog's digesting body. Did the dog's own flesh become more like the lamb it had ingested, or, rather, did the lamb turn into the dog?

Bernard proved that the dog, and by extension the human, breaks down the substance it eats into chemical components, and from these components builds new molecules. The chemicals, in Bernard's model, lose all connection to their origin, for example the mutton, and become anonymous indistinct building blocks for the eater to build its own body. A dog eating mutton doesn't store mutton fat, he explained, it stores dog fat. Upending the belief that we are what we eat, Bernard's model of the world stipulates that what you eat becomes you.

This model of digestion had profound philosophical and ethical implications. For Bernard, the absolute metabolic annihilation of one organism by the other was the very condition of the eater's freedom. The nineteenth century hierarchy of living things formalised the linear food chain, where an organism's freedom was commensurate with their position in the hierarchy and their ability to successfully dissolve the organisms below them into the stuff of their own bodies. Historian of science Hannah Landecker calls this the model of total conversion, whereby the eater turns the environment into itself, gaining greater degrees of freedom through greater degrees of independence from the environment.

Bernard's vision of digestion continues to haunt us in the form of common sense. This common sense, in turn, is haunted by a model of empire in which those at the top of the food chain can endlessly incorporate the spoils of environments near and far without any fear of changing the stability of their position at the top. Bernard's vision of freedom sides

with the omnivorous glutton who need not care about the potential for the things it eats to affect anything about its total autonomy and therefore sovereignty.

In early 1780, a British colonial battalion was sent to the San Juan river in Nicaragua with the mission to cut the Spanish Empire in half and connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans for British trade routes. Stationed in the middle of the rain-forest, the battalion of two thousand soldiers was surrounded by an abundance of fruit and wild game. Yet strict martial law forbade them from eating anything found in the environment. Within the military it was believed that hunting and foraging would encourage the kind of self-reliance that would inevitably lead to desertion. They had been sent to conquer this place, not to become part of it, and so, they were allowed only the meagre provisions they had brought with them: gruel, which was soon in short supply.

Their situation became dire when the rainy season began in April and illness began spreading among the soldiers in the camp. Still forbidden to break with the self-imposed famine, the effects of their illnesses were compounded by severe malnutrition. By June, those soldiers who hadn't died or deserted were too weak to crawl, too sick to bury the dead, which soon outnumbered the living.

We know about the details of this expedition through the testimony of Colonel Edward Marcus Despard, a born Irishman who joined the British army at age fifteen and rose through the ranks while stationed in Jamaica. As the commander of the expedition, he experienced first-hand the arbitrary brutality that had caused almost all of the two thousand soldiers in his battalion to starve to death. His own life was spared thanks to the indigenous Miskito people who took pity on him and the hundred or so other survivors, nursing them back to health through their knowledge of the tropical commons.

The official reports of the catastrophe, written by the British governor of Jamaica, celebrated the surviving soldiers for the strength of their discipline, which he took as proof of their superiority over the indigenous peoples. Disillusioned with the arrogant pretences that fed the British imperial mythology, Despard became politicised. Ten years later, in the spring of 1790, he returned to London with his wife Catherine

Despard, an African American woman, and their child. Over the next decade, they worked tirelessly in support of common laborers, soldiers, and sailors, and all other people dispossessed by the government. For this they were repeatedly put in jail. In November 1802, Despard was arrested along with 40 other workingmen, accused of organising a revolutionary army whose goal was to seize power in London and declare a republic. Three months later, in February 1803, Despard was executed in front of a crowd of twenty thousand people.

European colonial expansion is often depicted as an insatiable, ever-expanding kind of devouring. What struck us about this expedition was a story of enforced starvation at the frontier. We might call this the fear of becoming indistinguishable from the environment, a kind of premodern, prescientific form of superstition about losing one's own identity. There is of course no reason to assume this story is in any way causally connected to Bernard's scientific model of digestion. Yet, once Bernard's model of total conversion turns the fear of becoming what you eat into superstition, a new kind of resource extraction from the periphery to the centre is free to grow unimpeded. Bernard tells us that once the environment enters the consuming organism, it loses all meaningful relationship to the outside. The unstable negotiation of interior and exterior that is perpetually reenacted through digestion is reduced to a mere chemical exchange, a material process devoid of context, divested from the complexities of exchange and transformation. From the reciprocity of digestion, we move to the force of consumption, which, in Eugenie Brinkema's words, is a violence that:

takes in, absorbs, exhausts; it devastates some resource. This is the violence of burning and dissipation, draining and squandering, to bleed or milk or just suck dry; from the Latin consumptio and consumere, 'to use up, eat, waste'.

The model of total conversion abstracted digestion from the embodied lives of organisms to the depersonalised, perhaps even dematerialised, materialism of western science. But Bernard's actual experimental framework was a deeply embodied messy business. His primary research method, for which he became Europe's foremost advocate, was vivisection: the dissection of a live animal.

After several months of assisting Bernard, the physician George Hoggan, horrified by what he had witnessed in Bernard's lab, wrote that he was 'prepared to see not only science, but even mankind, perish rather than have recourse to such means of saving it.' In 1868, Bernard's wife and daughters returned home to find that the family dog had been vivisected. We might imagine that this was the same dog who had converted the lamb fat into its own.

After divorcing him a year later in 1870, Marie Françoise Bernard became a lifelong anti-vivisection campaigner, contributing to the first Cruelty to Animals Act of 1876. Seemingly unperturbed by the responses, Bernard wrote:

[T]he physiologist is no ordinary man. He is a learned man, a man possessed and absorbed by a scientific idea. He does not hear the animals' cries of pain. He is blind to the blood that flows. He sees nothing but his idea, and organisms which conceal from him the secrets he is resolved to discover.

The ends justify the means, results justify the carnage. This is true to Bernard's method, as it is to his model of digestion, as it is to the model and methods of empire.

Cancer is a Weather System (2022)
From Sonic Acts Ecoes #3
Sarah Rara (lucky dragons)

Cancer is nothing personal. A copy error, a glitch, a slip between encode and decode. Anyone who lives long enough will eventually get cancer. Errors are imminent, unavoidable. There is dissonance between the shared emotional impact of cancer diagnosis and the cool management of treatment within the healthcare system, a mechanical and quantitative process where life and death are managed statistically as input and output, and a patient is a member of a large population to be monitored and controlled.

Speaking from next to/beside the cancer experience, as a caregiver, chemotherapy resists narrative outside the timeline of being administered - time spent in the cancer ward attached to IV bags, waiting for the next infusion, and monitoring the ebbs and flows of physical transformation and discomfort in between. An extremely detailed kind of living from moment to moment, views rendered close-up and in slow motion.

Rather than a sequence of events, chemo becomes an environment, more like a climate or a weather system in which one exists. I rely on memory aids like dates, calendars, and photographs to recall the shape of what occurred - I can't otherwise hold the details in my mind. It is in physical feelings that the memory of cancer treatment is held most vividly, through sensations that persist in the present through the entanglement of muscular, endocrine, and emotional circuitry. The shape of cancer treatment is archived in the tissues of my body, as a tendency to maintain a state of alertness even when danger is past, a tension held against fatigue, out of alignment, no longer corresponding directly to events unfolding in time.

A photograph: My partner lies on a daybed by the window - hairless, skin translucent and slightly blue - light brown freckles on their arms. They look serene, not asleep, but completely still. A weak smile on their face marks what I remember as their total and graceful submission to illness, met without any resistance or anger. A dramatic dilation of

time translates into the image - documenting how an afternoon stretches endlessly within nausea's total environment; a sickening weather system where nothing changes or occurs. The clock of labour-time is offline.

No work is done. Our wiry dog burrows into their side, as close as possible, head tucked under an unmoving arm in an attempt to absorb the pain of a human counterpart through skin contact, or merge to become an indistinguishable part of their failing body. In every photograph recorded over those months, the dog is attached to them, pressed-in close, frozen in complete devotion and absorption.

* * *

Empathy is profound, a tangle of neurons dedicated to feeling the experience of other bodies. A caregiver manages these signals programmatically, like water channelled through a dam or canal. It is necessary to raise the walls in order to confidently provide care. If you let the stormwaters of empathy flow in an unrestricted path during moments when your care is most needed, then you might feel the torrent of all that pain located in another body collapse, and become useless. Like hydropower, putting up a dam between empathic material and the rest of the conscious mind creates pressure that builds energy one can redirect toward completing tasks and feeling useful.

In this state of obsessed utility, on the protected side of the dam, one can feel sort of like an automaton buzzing from one task to another, acting as an efficient messenger between patient, care team, and kin. When alone - not in the presence of your sick loved one - it is less clear how to contain the flow of empathy. In private moments, enacting a total reversal of strategy, you beg the universe to transfer their pain and nausea to your body instead. You weep over potential loss and begin to grieve even while your loved one lives. The caregiver develops a perverse, transactional desire to be ill so that their loved one can be free of pain, but it doesn't work like that. Pain cannot be transferred like a file, moved from one hard drive to another. If only the world's pain could be bottled and stored elsewhere, where it might not trouble anyone.

Position and water

Views, beliefs, perception of water differ significantly from

various distances and positions - in and near constitute very different and often irreconcilable experiences. Beside the water is one perspective, while in water or under water is another. Likewise with illness, speaking beside or near illness constitutes one mode of address, while speaking from within illness produces something different. Pain can be a total environment or a landmark within a map of other bodily sensations. There is a remarkable difference between speaking beside pain that is localised or from within an environment of pain that is global. When speaking beside or within illness, we can think of the different qualities of being in water, from buoyancy to pressure, as we become more deeply submerged. Rather than a numerical scale for pain, perhaps a patient should be asked to describe the qualities of the waters they are living in, thinking of pain as a complex and fluid environment rather than a single vector with measurable intensity or direction.

Bodies of water are linked to the bodies of populations, people living near and beside. The health of a river and the health of humans are the same concern. One cannot speak beside illness without speaking beside water and one cannot speak beside water without speaking beside air and soil. Always held in relation, humans contaminate the river and the river contaminates the body.

* * *

Underground rivers

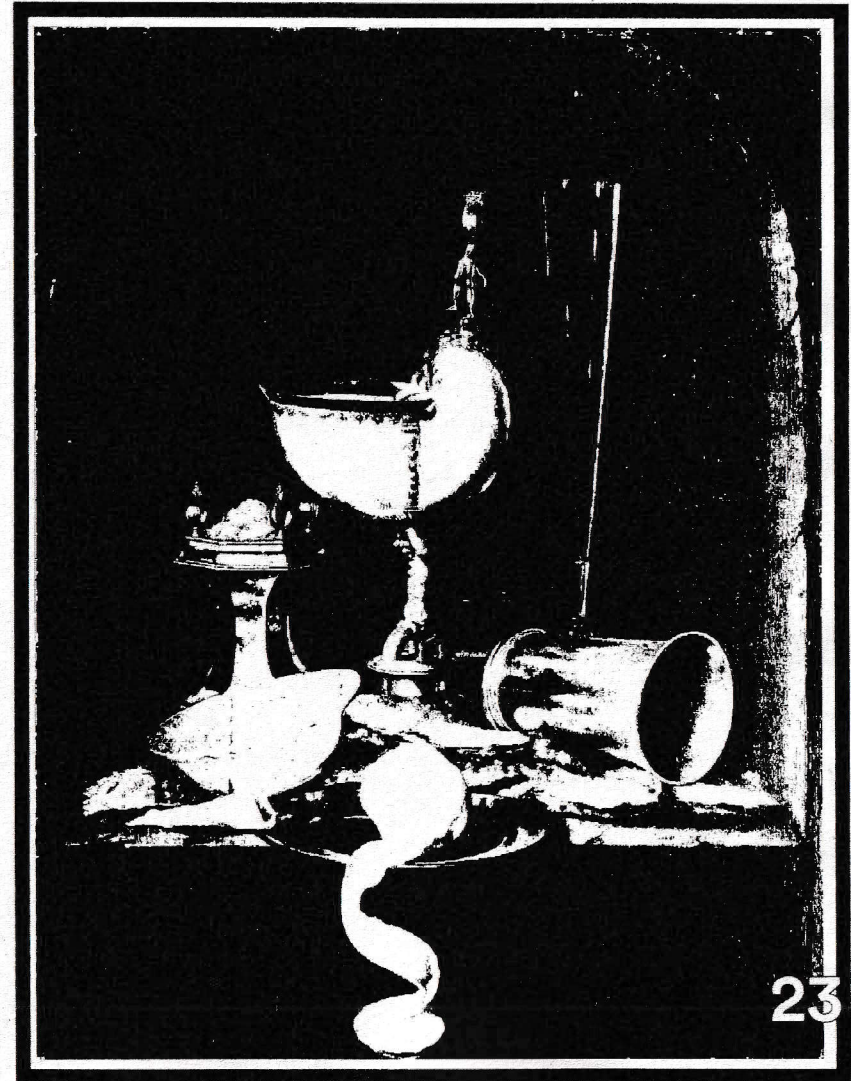
Ten million years ago, Los Angeles was submerged in water. Across the crest of the Santa Monica Mountains, one walks on fossilised sea shells, the ocean floor pushed upward, touching the sky along tectonic boundaries. Living in proximity to the Pacific, everything belongs to the ocean. Coastal terrestrial space feels temporary and increasingly fragile.

Deep below ground, water is in constant motion through the foothills, flowing discreetly through the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys, under the plains west and south of downtown, and invisibly into the ocean. Los Angeles rests on the convergence of thousands of underground rivers, channelling snowmelt and storm runoff underground, pooling billions of gallons of water into the Los Angeles aquifer, an underground sea of water-bearing strata of gravel and silt. The mountains walk on water. Underground rivers have no name recognition

because they are in constant flux; to be an unnamed river is to deny borders and boundaries, to embody nomadic thinking. Underground rivers emerge and disappear, change course, re-route, and converge with other rivers at will, shapeshifting below ground and out of sight. The underground river has no allegiance to personal property, individual identity, or borders.

The tumour was like an aquifer gathering under the surface of my partner's body, channelling water and nutrients deep below the surface of the skin. Rather than thinking of cancer as an invader, something alien to the body, the cancer glimpsed through my beloved's tumour was somehow deeply familiar. Cancer cells are close cellular relatives generated by the body, only slightly miscommunicated, and hard to discern from non-cancerous cells. Blood cancers like lymphoma flow through lymphatic channels and streams like an underground river system without easy boundaries or separation between self and non-self. Porous zones like lymph nodes and bone marrow form the perfect site for cancerous cells to collect, divide, and feast on runoff. Like the gravel and silt that hold water transiting underground, the cells of the human body form a similar matrix. Water flows through human bodies with only a thin skin demarcating 'dry space'. Ice melt and storm runoff infuse groundwater, ingested as drinking water. Every particle, every material encountered in water's journey from mountain to floodplain flows through our tissues. Our bodies collect residues documenting the journey of water. Sound also travels underground. Tempests flow below the soil as a form of communication. The speech of surges, flows, upheaval, sickness, replenishment. The speech of storms travelling underground, the language of weather systems within and outside the body, signals lessons in living in borderless connection with other bodies, living with pain, living as inter-reliance, living sweet and rebellious care.

Willem Claesz Heda. *Still Life with Nautilus Cup and Oyster* (1640) Oil on panel. Frans Hals Museum, Harlem.



The Delguge In Formation (2011)
From Compression and Purity
Will Alexander

If one believes oneself as stasis
there exists no seepage
no neural density or scar

one then saturates as ash
as pointless cannibal's lethargy
as dislodged ink from a podium or a treatise

one comes to know de-mobility as a craft
as an ark which solders itself to specifics

yet to know one's non-sequestered through mundane
advancement as doorway
or basic habit as speculation

I am speaking of chastisement
or cross-referential super-imposition

within this condition
I am more like a crow from crucial underwater fires
a crucial underwater crow

neither Chinese or Shinto
but of the black dimensionality as hidden underwater mass

which persists by daring
which seems at the surface
a purposeless kinetic
or a pointless Mandril's infection

saying such
I consider myself a reddish Shinto crow
then just as strongly
a black anathema crow

then just as quickly
a sun fed crow from snow washed volcanoes

so I look to myself as winter
as inclement carrion monger
as flight through great electrical haze

I being blur who shapes the empyrean
who invokes withdrawal
who instills in his forces stunning psychic transference

If I die on the Road (1970)

Virgilio Piñera

trans. Alex Reynolds, Martin Zicari, & Slow Reading Club

I.

If I die on the road lay me no flowers.
If on the road I die lay me no flowers.
On the road lay me no flowers if I die.
Lay me not if I die flowers on the road.
Lay me not on the road flowers if I die.
No flowers on the road if I die lay me.
No flowers on the road lay me if I die.
If I die no flowers on the road lay me.
If flowers I die on the road lay me not.
Flowers if I die not on the road lay me.
If flowers I die lay on me the not road.
Flowers if lay I die me on not the road.
I die if lay flowers the on me on road.
The I die on if lay not me road.
If flowers I die lay on me the not road.
Flowers if lay I die me on not the road.
If I die on the flowers lay me not on the road.
If flowers I die lay me not on the road.
If on the road flowers lay me not if I die.
If on the I die lay me not on the road flowers.

II.

Going in a rust bucket, in a tin heap,
I'm going on the road.
I'm going, getting going on the road.
I'm going to a flower garden that is by the road.
I'm going in a rust bucket, in a tin heap,
going to buy flowers for my dead.
But lay me no flowers if I die on the road.

III.

If I die on the road bury me in the garden
that is by the road, but lay no flowers for me.
When one meets their end on the road
One has no flowers laid for them from that or any other garden.

IV.

If I die, if I don't die,
If I die because I don't die.
If I don't die because I die.
If I die on the road.
If I don't die but on the road I do die.
If I die because I don't die on the road.
If I don't die because I die on the road.
Lay me no f, lay me no l, lay me no o,
Lay me no w, lay me no e, lay me no r, lay me no s.
Lay me no flo, lay me no wers,
If I die on the r.

FUSES (after Carolee Schneemann) (2011)

From Meddle English

Caroline Bergvall

SOUND sea rush PINK FUSES

by Carolee ORANGE with herself *jamestenney* 1967

REDGREEN *glistening mouth cock* RED *tree cat* Seasound RED
shadow RED Sea GREEN *bodies fall back* burnt film Sea legs run
YELLOW BLACK bushes trees girl runs shadow Close-up BLACK
RED SEASOUND *suck window* RED *cock suck* WHITE window
SEASOUND break seagulls Cockwindow mouthwindow WHITE

GREEN paintfilmcloseup cockpaint mouthchin BLACK SEASOUND
Handfingers seagulls BLACK GREEN leaves leaves trees Window
WHITEGREEN BLACK RED wall erect moves tree leaves PINK
BLACK leaves PINKface GREEN BLACK RED SEASOUND seagulls
Seapaint back seagulls WHITE GREEN skin paintstroke BLACK
SEASOUND seagulls hand GREEN bleached movement arm
REDglisten BLACK GREEN WHITE top RED glisteningtrees BLACK

SEASOUND close REDREDblurryArse anuscrackupside verticalarse
REDthighsfemale sits WHITE *Burnt* GREEN fingers RED paintcum to
left GREENWHITE handbreast REDface backleg RED SEASOUND
REDface moveGREEN pubeBLACK RED SEASOUND seagulls
fuckrhythm REDBLACK *fuckrhythm* RED BLACK Sea PURPLE
bleachedface REDrhythm BLACK SEASOUND GREENback rest burnt
film perforated BLACKpaint Perforated *Lie classical Stretchbody back*

male rest Sideleg restingWHITE Burnt film face hair close nippleEyes
stars face BLACK lock face close-up grasses wind SEASOUND *she*
lies breasts back Stars face to camera Break kiss clear smile long
REDBLACK film Kissclear burntfilm WHITE breast upside down
fuckrhythm show breasts burnt film SEASOUNDRED shadow
BLACK *outline* PINKbodySEASOUNDseagulls outline negative
fuckrhythmotion BLACK spotpatches SEASOUND seagulls shapes

patches film streakednegativeSEASOUND streaked *negative*
GREENlines paint REDsoil GREENmoves *background* BLACK Star
holesFace GREEN cock GREEN leaves trees Vulva hairy bushy
seacunt leaves PINKcock REDstones Blurry BLUEGREENcock right
glisteningHandring finger pull cloth mate skinpube bushy *cunt tree*
linesBLACK WHITE pubegoateeGREENcarGREEN BLACK flash
WHITE glass GREEN face femaleSeakiss clear armBLACK hairface

Close fuckrhythm bleachedRED female face smiling burnt film
PURPLE face smiling lying GREEN GREEN face PURPLE
GREENWHITEbodies SEASOUNDBLACKGREEN brow clear
fuckrhythm rhythm underBrow Seaface fuzzeeye closeupbleachedrest
smokefacelyingpubecock RED paint lips Frownuncunthairy REDWHITE
nippleBLACKpube REDcatGREENseagullsREDcockglisten
meat film *fuckrhythm camera smiles to camera* arm thighs arm thighs

caress REDcat boc cat arm *big red nipple* WHITE REDBLACK Sea
GREENpatchleftGREEN RED WHITE GREEN WHITENip REDArse
BLUEGREEN BLACKpubeOpenperforated filmbreast BLACKstop
filmGREEN WHITE BLACKRED SEASOUNDKiss BLACK shadow
window shadow catarmkiss BLUEscreen WHITE window*Fingerhairy*
vulva swollen hairyswollencamera Window carry light window
bodymass *Standingfuckrhythm bodylock* RED seagullsfingers BLACK

cockglisten BLACK RED patch glisten BLACK hair close Vulva close
hair BLACK RED Seaclose moves pulserED BLACK BLACK screen
RED meat patches filmBLACK cockhair ArmNail filmBLACKWHITE
RED GREEN film fullbodyGREENeyesface thinGREEN BLACK
SeaBLUE fullbody entwined faceBack BLUE GREEN GREENWHITE
BLACKBLUE GREEN BLACK Sea WHITE grasses GREEN
white cuntlick lieback water lakefacethighs GREEN entwined
face upside

BLACK PINK GREEN *bodylockface* cat GREEN BLACK move
GREENBLACK Sea Sea BLACK BLUE patch GREEN streak GREEN
BLACK GREEN leaves water BLACK RED lighttrees windowlight
GREEN lights navelhair navelhair arm GREEN turn navel hairy close
RED cat wheel car treeslightbreasts smile light light trees GREEN
still window lights ORANGEwindow curtains Seacurtains
seagulls ORANGE ORANGE patches city Lightstunnel fuckrhythm
lights

fuckrhythm steady *blowjobhairy fingersface* Seafuckrhythm
Down fuckrhythm lights BLACK WHITE BLACK waterwater
Sea suckfingers BLACK film BLACK fabric faces fabr
fingerBLACK GREEN faceGREEN Arsefilm CutRED finger face
WHITEfuzz.arse fuckrhythm streaks filmBLACK film perforated filmRED
GREEN ORANGE fabric streakWHITE smile goateed legmuscle ringrest
stretch ORANGE Quiet slow arm *rest torn burnt film seagulls*
sea arm still

GREEN female runs to sea arms Quiet seagulls arm sea arm still
RingcaressGREEN PINKstillSea female to sea waves GREENBLUE
runs to run seawalks to sea walks to sea walks to sea runs sea
fuzzGREEN superimp runstosea fuckrhythm runsback tocamera
swimwear to sea GREENfuzz runsbeach fillsRestlegRest
ORANGE window curtains curtains seagullswindembrace curtains
brightdaylight curtainswindow ORANGE gold SEASOUND BLACK

Sentences about Rivers and Cancers (2022)
From Sonic Acts Ecoes #3
Luke Fischbeck (lucky dragons)

I encourage you to feel - to misunderstand everything
especially the lightness of memory
and the weight of voice

we traverse land that appears to be level

the tightness in the thighs that comes with ascending a long grade
the looseness in the feet that indicates descent

blood does not pulse through your tissues in great tidal surges,
it flows within a diffuse net

of permeable vessels, a capillary bed of creeks
streams, forks, and tributaries that lie over the land

your newly found skill of walking downhill will help you locate it -
focus on the points not the lines that connect them

how many nodes

ded-weed, lawn-keep, weedone
plantgard, miracle, demise

it was thought the solvent would evaporate
because a storm always knows what it is doing

you depend on clouds and you depend on water -
do you think you are somehow immune

does your blood clot too easily
or too obstinately

is your blood spilled too readily
do your tears flow too freely

the saliva that floods your mouth, the sweat slowly dampening
the fabric in your armpit or at the small of your back -

all of these waters are about a specifically situated you
becoming tributaries along the river

in full possession of our ecological roots we can begin to
survey our present situation

my blood has been drawn and I am allowed
to look at a printed page of its ingredients

each week the blood flows with more or less of one kind of cell
or substance than the week before

these substances go up or down
determine treatment's future

measurement, duration the land is literally draining away
I must let this flow
through me and pass on

rain catches the topsoil washing it from field to creek to
river to ocean

where is my body
when is my body

what are the membranes that separate
or differentiate my body from others

where and how do those membranes break down
where and when does my body cease to be

water is a relation rather than a thing
biological water is also the most restless

in what ways does my body repeat
like those rarest of rivers

repetition flows both ways in communion with substances streaming in
from the ecological world -
the exposure experience

The exhausted are plastic and adaptable, a mutable river.

It is easier to demand happiness
than to clean up the environment.

Imaginarities and figurations are as vulnerable to redirection
as the flows of the river themselves.

A river redirected and drained such that it cannot fulfil its
responsibilities to provide for its human kin is forced to
turn away.

The exhausted bend better and more to what is necessary
for their having been worn down.

These varied speeds and slownesses, multiple movements, and
diverse incorporations of rivers and canyons belie the dif-
ficulty of speaking of them in the abstract - as though they
were one undifferentiated and amorphous thing the same every-
where and all the time; both finite and inexhaustible; both the
same and always becoming different.

The exhausted live as fluidly as the water. Our planet nei-
ther gains nor relinquishes the water it harbours, but only
witnesses its continual reorganisation, redistribution and
relocation. Rivers and canyons are seen as dead or alive de-
pending on causes and conditions. I want us to respect and
embrace the bodies disabled through environmental destruction
age war genocide abysmal working conditions, hunger poverty
and twists of fate, rather than deeming them abnormal bodies
to isolate fear hate and dispose of; I want us to tend the
unrestorable places and ecosystems that are ugly stripped
down full of toxins; rather than considering them unnatural
and abandoning them.

Flow fluctuations. Chemo in semen. Flush twice. Fuck it.
Blood is not the only thing that circulates -

Shallow aquifers, interbedded lenses
of sand and gravel, mothers of rivers -

These images flow quickly. Pain creates
excessive appearance, biomagnification -

Trace your weave back strand by bloody self-referenced strand -
begin to alter the whole pattern. Tears well
and fill and overflow and they pass.

Reclamation lagoons overflowed like pouring water into the ocean and spreading it endlessly. Invisible chemical fumes were unspeakably substantial, heavier than air. They were not apparent, but they did not disappear. She concludes that they must be dwelling inside her, in the flows and interchanges between them, like gradients created by rivers in deserts: triumphant mutations; tangible floods of energy, rolling off these women toward me. If I resist or try to stop it, it will detonate inside me, shatter me, splatter my pieces against every wall and person that I touch.

These moments and locations of illness are as natural as our fragile, resilient human bodies interacting with the world, all the veins in our bodies extended to rivers, intertwined, mangled. Allow rain to do what it did before buildings, roads, driveways, parking lots, and other impervious surfaces covered the landscape: soak into the earth, fill the soil, recharge groundwater, release flow gradually to rivers and streams.

A fluid, responsive process, restoration requires digging into the past, stretching toward the future, working hard in the present. The movement of rivers and cancers hold the was, is, and yet-to-come together; the flow and flush; immense slothfulness, like frostbite; sedimentation; the saliva in my mouth that enables me to speak. Inside this work, these stories, the concepts of unnatural and abnormal stop being useful. Rivers and cancers exist inside fire, and inside mind. The unturbid current that must be other people's consciousness challenges my notion of even what is human, and yet our absolutely alien mental flows (which I converted into power to heal myself) freeze, harden, and evaporate, in warmth and shock and love and concern, lateral becomings, and other people's fears of their own death.



Willem Claesz Heda. *Still Life with Meat, Oysters, Smoked Herring, Glass of Wine and Glass of Beer* (1630-40) Oil on panel. National Gallery - Alexandros Soutsos Museum, Athens.

Canon: Duet of Spines (undated)
 From Middle American Dialogues
 Karl Young

water	thank	neviloc	amopanj
cast	time	anjtla	annauh
jewels	trouble	quetl	aoieq
cover	hands	quena	ychoc
image	build	huja	anne
throw	place	echoaia	njioco
fire	hens	coloc	anote
whirlpool	streamers	oteuhoa	extlamj
go	is	jiaval	ailhuj
look	take	colla	njcia
make	skins	vicaia	teutiv
form	green	equjoa	navalp
disgust	feathers	lpilli	aquitl
vessels	burner	anella	motona
clouds	incense	caiouh	ticiac
redness	forest	hquj	tlac
directions	strangeness	catl	acht
mist	said	catella	nechiap
send	now	avjia	anech
who've	rattle	atia	anot
cape	raise	otata	inoqv
command	flowers	cujllo	oceloc
land	foam	ana	xiv
people	house	izquj	aquam
cry	board	amotta	acaton
city	red	ovia	nahu
halls	clothes	uja	xji
paper	moulded	aiaa	ypoj
corn	dip	auhtla	aiauh
plenty	down	avaztica	aiavical
worn	those	calo	tlal
jade	give	nacha	tozcu
the	for	uexi	njia
full	where	quja	aiay
victims	chocolate	caia	itop
fill	hearts	oalli	aiaxi
roast	four	ovaia	ieque
turkeys	stones	lcalla	nepana
enough	shoulders	scana	teizc
sacrificial	clay	vjia	ahuj
rubber	room	jia	xji
necklace	earrings	ecaia	aipuo
paint	debt	ohtla	aiauh
brought	pulled	zticaa	iavica



Pieter Claesz. *Still Life with Wine Goblet and Oysters*
 (1639) Oil on panel. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

SLOW READING CLUB

MMMETABOLISMMMS

June 6, 2026.
Salon de IJzerstaven,
Amsterdam.



*Willem Claesz Heda. Still Life with a
silver "tazza", a roemer and oysters.
(detail)*

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