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The Language of Trees

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The Language of Trees

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by

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Preface

1 Overview

The poems in this collection came about as I explored my surroundings upon moving home to Denman Island after six years living away. My history in this place goes back some thirty years, and I have tried, with this work, to map the psychogeography of it, of what this place is to me. To do so, I had to articulate for myself how personal meaning becomes located in a place, and how one's psyche becomes embedded there.

Walking is a constant in my life, and I explored, re-discovered, and re-acquainted myself with home by retracing familiar routes or paths: hence, *walking home*, traversing known territory, but with knowledge displaced by time. I have tried to incorporate the proprioceptive experience of each route, and to synthesize the surroundings, movement, and thought that comprise a moment in time, and that are part of both conscious and subconscious perception.

Each poem has an epigraph: the name of a place or trail, and a waypoint that is the latitude-longitude coordinates of the farthest point from home reached that day. Each poem could be seen as part of a data-sequence that draws a line across the geography of the island. These data are my way of mapping this place as a psycho-geographical space.

The poems are collected as three sections: a prologue – "A Turbulence of Crows"; a sequence of individual poems – "Walking Home"; and a serial poem – "The Language of Trees". Further detail on the poems follows the discussion of poetics, below.

2 Poetics

I came of age as a poet in Vancouver in the late 1970s and the 1980s, and the poetics of that period, considered alternative and experimental, radically expanded for me the range of possibilities for what a poem could be. Poets were taking risks in exploring form and subject matter, and presenting what to me was an amazing range of concepts, all called *poetry*.

Many Canadian poets of the time were part of the broader *language poetry* movement, and through their work I was exposed to, and took into my practice, some of the fundamental approaches of language poetry: questioning conventional thinking about language and writing, and conventional patterns, forms and subjects. Formal and textual experimentation, such as disrupted syntax, ambiguities that create multiple meanings, unexpected juxtapositions, constrained composition methods: I saw how working this way can create openings, bringing readers through to the *place* of the poem.

The *language* movement, and experimental poetry in general, has demonstrated to me repeatedly over the years that language can not be taken for granted as simply words and definitions, and that meaning is multi-dimensional and dynamic, shifting relative to the context constructed by the interplay between language, poet and reader. This perspective has been part of literary and visual arts since the early Modernists, that the viewer of a Modernist painting participates in creating the image and meaning because s/he interprets the painting through the lens of individual experience. I see this as somewhat like Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Principle" (roughly paraphrased): the presence of an observer changes the thing being observed.

Such ideas open my creative practice to a wealth of possibilities and the excitement of unpredictable outcomes. 'Open' is the operative word; I try to compose so that my poems provide openings for readers, to enter or to walk out of, beyond, the space I have created. Poems must be open doors, not just decorated rooms.

When I first learned about Olson's *theory of field composition* and his concept of *proprioception*, I felt a sense of recognition—the ideas affirmed something intuitive. I interpreted Olson's ideas as defining a poem as a state of mind. His *proprioception*, to me, is a sense of self as seen through one's *loci*: places, observations, memories, daydreams and emotions that co-exist at any one moment. And this 'snapshot' of one moment of one's psyche, it seems to me, comprises Olson's "field". It remains for the poet to synthesize her poem, from this.

The concept of combining sensory information with random events or thoughts has become very much the foundation of writing poetry in our time: a proprioceptive 'gathering' that generates and integrates content and form. I trace a direct line from Olson to the Lyn Hejinian of "Happily" regarding perception and experience: "The experiences generated by sense perception come by the happenstance that is with them / Experiences resulting from things impinging on us". It is the randomness of this approach to composition that I find makes sense.

For me, a poem coalesces as phrases, lines, and notes accumulate. I carry small notebooks, and when I write notes I place them, by intuition, onto different pages. Clusters develop, of images, sounds, subjects and observations. At some point, a poem starts to emerge: the notes have enough contiguities or continuities that I can detect a sequence, or pattern – a *coherence* – as if the scattered notes have reached some critical mass.

Making my notes on paper matters in this process. Writing on paper gives me a clearer intuition of the sense and especially of the evolving structure, both more difficult for me to see on a computer screen. I need to look at the piece spatially, as a 'page', to see the lines between things. The emerging poem *takes shape*: shape here defined as both the 'logics' (Hejinian,

Introduction) and the structure of the poem, like developing an architectural drawing or sketching a landscape: a site, a place the poem dwells.

Olson, in his *Projective Verse* manifesto, and before him, Ezra Pound, both say that a poem is a form of energy. It is a perception that permeates the history of poetry, seen in the work of some poets at least since the early Modernists. I partially understand the idea of this 'energy' when I have, not just an intellectual response, but a physical response to a poem.

I think language is the source of energy. A phrase, juxtapositioned words, musicality, imagery, or metaphor, can create excitement, at least in this poet. By *excitement*, I mean an increased energy level, as in the physics of light, when photons move faster or more of them are emitted. Finding ways to produce that energy drives poets to pay intense attention to not just diction and metaphor, but to deepening the poem through compression, so that its energy, like an electrical charge, penetrates the psyche of the reader. I think of it as *synergy*, the whole becoming something more than just the sum of the parts. The energy a poem contains, and/or transmits, is what I think Olson is talking about as *proprioception*, and Hejinian as *sense perception*.

In addition to the language-centered elements discussed above, the poems I love are 'lyrical'. We tend to categorize as 'lyrical', poetry of self-expression, somewhat in the tradition of the Romantics, often using imagery from nature. However, I want to apply that term instead to flow or movement in the poem. Jan Zwicky, poet, philosopher, and classical violinist, whose work I much admire, defines *lyric poetry* in terms of *lyric thought*:

> *lyric poetry is an attempt to express lyric thought or awareness in language, and it tries to use language in a way in which every detail is resonant.* … [lyric thought is] *poignant, and musical. It moves by association of images.* ("Details")

The focus on awareness and resonant detail impresses me as a guiding principle for composition, much as "composition by field" has done. The idea that lyric thought "moves by association of images" reinforces for me the function and significance of interconnections in a poem: words and phrases linked by meaning, sound, associations and resonances. This is what makes a poem *coherent*, in the sense of being a unified whole.

Lyn Hejinian refers to such interconnections as "linkages":

> *In the course of the experiencing of experience, poetic language puts into play the wildest possible array of logics, and especially it takes advantage of the numerous logics operative in language, some of which take shape as grammar, some as sonic chains, some as metaphors, metonyms, ironies, etc. There are also logics of irrationality, impossibility, and a logic of infinite speed. All of these*

> *logics make connections, forge linkages. That, indeed, is the function of logics;*
> *they motivate the moves from one place to another. But the emphasis in poetry is*
> *on the moving rather than on the places—poetry follows pathways of thinking*
> *and it is that that creates patterns of coherence.* (*The Language of Inquiry*)

I like the idea of working with "pathways of thinking" to create "patterns of coherence", and this is an approach I hope to refine in my poetic practice.

Ideas such as those discussed above are influences I can identify: concepts rather than specific poems or poets. In addition, I feel I must be influenced in one way or another by most poets I have read; a very small sampling of today's list of influences would include W.B. Yeats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, Lorine Niedecker, Daphne Marlatt, bpNichol, Susan Howe, Marianne Moore, C.D. Wright, Jan Zwicky, Anne Carson, H.D., William Carlos Williams. I am most attracted to work in which I find language transformed through awareness of semantic depth, which has sonic and visual resonances, and in which there is movement and energy.

3 The Poems

Prologue

In "A Turbulence of Crows" I wanted to balance the clichés and stereotypes often applied to crows – as scavengers and pests not worthy of our respect – with my own sense of wonder at their intelligence and adaptability. I chose a more traditional lineated form for this than for the rest of the collection, thinking that the appearance of the poem might signify a more-or-less traditional cultural view of crows, while the content might contradict that view. Through that form-content contradiction, I hoped to build tension in the poem by celebrating the beauty of which the crows are a part, at dusk on a winter's day near Still Creek.

"A Turbulence of Crows" also differs slightly from the other poems by location. Still Creek is not on Denman Island. It is in metropolitan Vancouver, and is an internationally known crow-roost, one of only a few North American sites where so many thousands of crows come to rest at night. For several years I worked nearby. Leaving the office on winter afternoons, the sight of the crows flying in from all over the territory between sea and mountains to their Still Creek roost often made for a slow, skyward-focused and awe-filled walk across the campus to the car. The occurrence of the poem was an end-of-storm afternoon when leaving work coincided with the 'rush hour' of gathering crows, against a dramatically lit sky and a backdrop of silhouetted trees and rooftops. I stood watching for a long time. And because it was born of a singularity, a moment that makes one stop and pay attention, "The Turbulence of Crows" opens the collection.

Walking Home

This series began as Oulipo-like constrained writing. I had not worked with constraints before, and I was interested to see how poems would develop, compared to my more usual practice of extracting elements from chaotic notebooks.

The constraints involved categories of observations, random selection of route or destination, location data recorded by GPS, and a word count. I derived the word count from the coordinates for *home*, a waypoint marking my front porch. Early drafts of the poems had two sections, one of forty-nine words (49° North), and one of one hundred twenty-four words (124° West). I used the Microsoft Word word-count function to provide the official count. To set up the random element, I gessoed the faces of playing cards and wrote the name of a walk on each card. Three days each week I picked a card at random and took that walk. On the walk, at a point I judged to be farthest removed from home, I noted my observations.

I wrote my notes on individual sheets of paper, giving each poem an individual identity. I folded the sheets twice, forming four rectangles, because folded, the paper fit better in my jacket pocket. At some point I noticed that I was recording different categories of observations on separate faces of the folded paper; this became part of the procedure. I noted flora and fauna, weather, and whatever I had been thinking about as I walked.

For this series, I thought prose-poem paragraphs would be the most flexible structure for the compositions I had in mind. I wanted the phrasing and semantic flows to echo the way my thoughts flowed and intersected, halted, followed tangents, or ran in circles as I walked. In this way I hoped to reveal layers of experience of a place, as a kind of archaeology, uncovering links between present and past, and conjunctions of internal and external worlds. However, the prose-poem structure meant giving up line breaks, which like most poets now, I usually rely on to reinforce sound, image, phrasing, pauses, tone – most facets of a poem. I have tried to structure sentences and fragments to accomplish some of what I might have done with line breaks.

As I worked on the poems, I decided to lift the word count constraint. It was interfering with the precision I wanted in diction and phrasing; I had started rationalizing some phrasing simply to achieve the word count. In a sense, the poems had 'outgrown' the initial form. I wanted the writing to serve the poem, rather than vice versa, and I wanted to be free to work with the paragraphs as more flexible units to compose in accord with the observations.

The Language of Trees

Like the poems in the "Walking Home" section, "The Language of Trees" was generated by a walk one day, in the Lindsay-Dickson Forest – an area of first-growth that was saved from logging by the determined Mrs. Lindsay-Dickson early in the twentieth century, and which is now a conservation area. I sat to enjoy a ray of sunlight penetrating the dense canopy. I started thinking about the way 'nature' functions as a source of images and a touchstone for ideas in much of my work. I started thinking about *community*, in the sense that ecologists discuss a forest ecosystem as a community of inter-connected flora and fauna. That combination of concepts led me to consider how humans impose various schemas on the world in an attempt to understand at least something about it. It seems to me that Western European/North American culture conceptualizes the natural world at arm's length, as an aspect of the world – almost as a separate world – to be categorized and catalogued, and as if humans are somehow not 'in' that world. We have organized what we see 'out there' into a hierarchy of orders, families, species and varieties. It seemed to me that day that our way of approaching the natural world parallels the way we approach language: to analyze and categorize language as comprised of syntax and semantics.

Sitting with such thoughts in that single ray of sunlight, surrounded by gigantic trees and the sound of breezes in the canopy, a *field of composition* emerged. Given my readings of language theorists such as Noam Chomsky and Stephen Pinker; given Saussure's structural linguistics; given biological research on plant responses to stimuli; given recordings of the sounds of roots growing underground, and the rhythmic gurgle of trees taking up water; given Dr. Lynn Margulis and her hybrid science of evolution, biology, and earth sciences; given the spectrum of ideas about non-human sentience and inter-species communication; given the *Gaia principle*: the question arose, what would a language be like, if of trees? I decided on a poem of investigation, in which I would apply a few general concepts of linguistic structure to a few imagined fragments of a non-human language, with a syntax that might encode an experience of the world from a non-human perspective.

I also wanted *The Language of Trees* to respond to the concept of *Nature* in poetry, whether as subject, image, simile or metaphorical device. Much of my work draws on the natural world in some way, and my concern is with the way poetry with a natural world referent is often stereotyped as not much more than lovely and lyrical romanticism. As Jan Zwicky notes in her essay "Lyric Realism: Nature Poetry, Silence, and Ontology", the stereotype is based entirely on the content of the poems; she offers an alternate perspective:

> … I want to suggest that … the nature poet is not simply someone whose subject matter
> lies out of doors. The nature poet is, first and foremost, someone who does not doubt

the world is real—or, more precisely, someone who would resist the suggestion that the world is a human construct, a thing that depends on human speaking or knowing to exist. … For the nature poet, it is not that when we pay close, animal-bright attention the world seems to come awake and speak. When we pay attention, we can tell that the world is awake, that it 'means'*, hugely and richly, all the time.* (85).

Zwicky's ideas have helped me articulate some of my thinking when formulating the beginnings of "The Language of Trees". I realized, for example, that a language of trees would need to be based on perception of a world that is independent of human assigned meaning. 'Translating' such a language (for human readers) would have to involve somehow identifying concepts relevant to tree physiology, as framed by human scientific knowledge, that could conceivably be embedded in that other meaning world.

4 Conclusion

The idea that the world has meaning outside of human consciousness seems to contradict the idea, shared across literary movements and by language theorists such as Derrida or Foucault, that language constructs the world, and that therefore the world exists only through human consciousness. I vacillate between these schools of thought; at present it seems impossible to resolve the question of reality and constructed meaning. But I believe there is common ground—that of paying attention. I suggest that both Olson's *proprioception* and Zwicky's *animal-bright attention* rest on observation, insight, and analysis of external realities and internal truths, including the physicality of how we respond to the world, whether constructed through language or defined otherwise. The poems in this collection attempt to locate band-width in the spectrum of poetics even as contradictions hover among contemporary philosophies of language.

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I Prologue

A Turbulence of Crows

Black ink-drawn glyphs on tumbled gray
sky lifts after heavy rain, scattered handfuls
in each burst of wind the crows come

home, gather as the particles of night
collect, condense and fall to the ground.
This much does not change.

Still Creek. A lazy flow this end spreads to marsh:
scrub willow, false spirea, alder, occasional
cottonwood. Crows roost here, drawn

home another word for *gravity*, irresistible
and constant. Complete the winter afternoons,
reassuring in their thousands. They gather

a living of front lawn insects, alley leavings
on garbage day discarded styrofoam outside
the fast food place, wilted lettuce behind the market.

And even as the creek is culverted, bridged, lined with railyards,
the wetland filled, and big-box stores sprout like fungus
after autumn rain, they claim ancestral territory,

settle every limb as every day darkens to silhouettes
crown trees with winter dusk etched glyphs writing leaf,
branch, crow: cadmium yellow, burnt umber, black

II Walking Home

Eagle Rock

Gray alto-cirrus diffuses the day though one moment sun lights the boulder-strewn crossing to Eagle Rock. Opens as ebb tide exposes tenuous footholds. Bronze seaweed. Green algae. Salt-patina rocks smoothed by tumbled centuries.

Eagle lifts from stunted wind-twisted fir. Out here everything is salt burnt arbutus, its limbs contorted roots clutch stone. Bleached seagrass blue-eyed mary chocolate lilies. Water pools in sea-eroded sandstone. Sedimentary and igneous, the veins splice ancient history layers fold

one geological era into another. Another eagle, two. Eagles tumble above cliff above treetops above motor scream tablesaw. Unexpected from the lighthouse now a dustcloud workshop. Gust raw wind. Gusts drag shoreward a sound, two-stroke somewhere off the point.

No sea lions. I came to see them hunt. And after having fed, how they haul out on ledges the sea laps beneath. To roar and tangle necks. But silent sea surrounds these minutes. Held. The distance between looking and thinking, nothing.

Central Park

Every small hollow water-filled. Walk means wade the runoff floods. Land now called *park*, contours barren. The logging. Not enough trees now to hold soil.

Alders. Salal. Grow back to cover what has been. Exposed. This land someday will be new forest growing out of community ideals. Mapped trails signpost the vision soft green.

Runnels. Gravity drags water and water. Erodes and washes loose sediments down the trail now a streambed, wade upstream. Against the wind to *Beaufort View* the view gray glisten rain.

If for even a few minutes: sun, birdsong. But rain storms rains storm. Until no words but words for rain.

Graham Lake (I)

i

Reading the stars has shown variations in the speed of light. Introduced doubt: can light be trusted to land here eight minutes and nineteen seconds after leaving the sun? A question of faltering absolutes. If the speed of light is ~~constant~~ not constant

~~Einstein~~. Rethink. How far away really is Alpha Centauri?

ii

Light pours into the bowl of the lake. Proof. Day has come: this much I will take on faith. But constants are in question, even small changes.

New planks [dock + boardwalk] = wood breaks down / in water.

Proof: wood is not constant.

We could calculate a breakdown rate:

$$\frac{\text{wood species}}{\text{water composition}}$$

x (water ℃ + ambient ℃ + seasonal **Δ**℃)
x wood-eating (bacteria + insects)

+ wind, gale force (∑how many knots how many winters pelting the dock with rain, burying under snow.)

Proof: the true constant is lake-bottom muck. No illusions

iii

but light, this light pours sky blue water blue purples the alders. Across

the ninety-three million miles.

Never mind the constant, faltering. Light can stream any speed. Doesn't matter now light

streams this slow creep the first color calls back the world from winter. To lean in to light

and prove the constant: February blossoms.

Ridge Above the Madigan

i

Path to the ridge most of the way trespasses. But still this is the way. Known. Now who owns the Madigan are not here. In California they won't know everyone says everyone still takes this trespass not discussed.

The way each step known. Calls to mind the next, next, and next will appear a certain stone, granite, white quartz band across the top. The shape of a certain fallen log moss sandstone outcrop Oregon grape, here. Arbutus cantilevered over the edge. Reminding,

unfolding. Amygdalic map traces neural paths inscribed deep by accrual, so many times over. And what it was this place to walk before. To see it. Because to witness a place day by day is all the owning that matters.

ii

Below the ridge the path still crosses the marshy field. To cross the island without walking the long way by road.

They've dumped truckloads of riprap and gravel a road straight across. New owners. Built up the old farm track. From the twenties, thirties maybe. People say Japanese people farmed the Madigan then a market garden.

This time of year wading the old track a slow brimming flood. Grasses bleached broken stalks tangle mirrored. Dark water. There used to be wintering swans.

Graham Lake (II)

Treed ridge westward reflects green water overcast with what's coming: clouds, no rain yet. And warm, maybe eight degrees. Mild for a January afternoon an hour before sunset. *Set*. Though it seems no sun rose today only slow light.

No engines no animals. One merganser floats near. The dock reposed between lake and sky. Mist, a freshet, seeps south from the marsh catches what little light. Wafts the question, which will break through first: sky, water, any small sound

as in a sleeping house a sigh floats uncertain between reflect and imagine, opens the dark flat water how still, water suspends boundaries. But time

cannot hang indefinitely, only so long as winter seems. People will come.

The Rope Trail

i

Not the way I remember forest until. Clearcut. Landmark trees hauled away. Route to the bluff re-marked blue ribbons in the slash. Land divided by white stakes the surveyed parcels, one small plot named *park*.

Ropes line the way down the bluff as before, but at the edge, orange painted stakes mark where stairs will be built.

 Stairs.

Lines on maps became white-peg lots, soon to become listings. Picture window ocean view beach, the beach to become private it will seem, without the rope way down we will have to relinquish

the descent hand over hand one after another we brace each step. Backward against the bluff, grasp and pull full weight blue hawser knotted to thinner rope yellow bleached white a third, yellow. Rope ends about five feet above the beach.

ii

Bluff longs to be one with sea. Sea licks washes sprays and hurls waves high, pulls down
sloughing sand more each tide each storm. Deep grit-laden runnels the rains lay down sand.

Never twice the same foothold where rope ends. Early spring rained a hole in the place to jump
from. Today it is filled almost flat. Easy. Might be our last time jumping down we don't know
when they will take the ropes.

How can stairs last they won't last more than a few winter storms those stairs will slide just as
the cliff slides and falls. Still

the ropes will be taken. Because in this sere devastation someone imagines a seaside idyll.

Lindsay-Dickson Forest

Improbable organisms, that such mass structured as columns could persist over three hundred million years a living made of water, light, air, a few minerals siphoned from dirt and rock transformed to syrup streams fragrant blood through every cell every clinging needle.

Wind-pushed they bend but resist falling, proof they hold vertical ideologies. Prolong lines of restive poets. Breathe the centuries, archive spent appetites in heartwood. Cradle songbirds. Long for light.

Black Rock Beach

Two eagles up a snag, watching for fish. We assume. And debate how soon turquoise the channel with spawn. Herring, Lambert Channel. Clouds, semen washing ashore. And the sea looking tropical in maybe less than a month and eagles, two, three to a tree.

Herring skiffs we watched couple years back. In the whitecap wind. Reels turning pulling in nets laden silver. How many million fish billion eggs. How many days the opening that year. How eagles lift off a branch in one big downstroke. Spiral above clamor cry gulls chug diesel packer boat spotter plane roar low flyby.

And sea lions among waves, rocks, a distance from the skiffs. But two close by the black rock shelf we looked from. Out farther, more, five. Another five, almost mid-channel, circling. Breaching amber in one glowing instant. Sun, and white froth chop the deep blue. Far sea lions closing then aligning it looks parallel to shore a line forming, why?

Then we could see. Headed this way before them splash jumping small silver. Herding herring. To these rocks where the others wait. The twelve circle, net-like it looked like they took turns diving into the mass encircled silver, open mouth inhale ingest, drink in the treasures. Herring thrash against the black rock the amber wall of sea-lions. I held my breath.

Later we debated. Origins of cooperative hunting among sea lions. Intelligence and consciousness. And who of them first figured the strategy how long ago. But that time

we looked straight into their eyes. They came so near.

III The Language of Trees

The Language of Trees

1

It is said one can hear trees. Subsonic it must be
like elephants singing low one to another the sound
can cross miles of plains, woodlands, forests.

Only now this is said. Four point four million years, deaf
among trees. Or might it be said, once we could hear
a sounded syntax, the forest. Patterns buried, forgotten, sub-
conscious among trees what sounds?

2

When winds rise. Fissured stiff skins moan soft
low when winds rise and one too close, rubs against
another. *Limbs,* we say, as if they reach
one for another.

Trees spread wide their limbs. In wind they sound
their hearts' desires.

3

The language of trees rounds vowels, opens
to air, releases sound as if through tuned strings.
Some passages long-drawn, keening.

Heavy winds elicit sharp plosives: limbs crack,
break. Percussive bass: falling,
landing hard.

4

Limbs, we call them—
translated: *toward the light*

—with undertones some say, longing
for light, a resonance
of origins—nouns and verbs of elongation. How trees extend

their limbs to embrace light. Capture.

Otherwise: *inhabit the open*—where limbs remain
in perpetual shadow, diminish or stop
sap flow.

5

Angle and duration of lightfall—phrases
identify which leaves open
at daybreak, where limbs grow longer:

toward where low horizon first light spills, or
away from mid-day shadows beneath.

The ideal is *where lights the crown from above a long time.*

6

Nouns such as *pollen* and *sap* are always plural: drops of water
in a cloud, a cluster of cells.
A scale of millions.

Moon encodes its periodic gravitational effect
on sap flow—external force, the pull inside:
that which sends light in dark pulses the sap upward as seas rise.

7

Seeds after dispersal wait for warmth, moisture, light:
safely in anticipation

Some seeds enclosed in cones
so resistant only wildfires can spring them:
opens into time after fire

8

Nouns for *twig*, *branch* and *silhouette*
recognize fractals
—pattern word forms: shape of a twig
shape of a branch the shape of the whole
tree. As clouds, coastlines and ocean
waves form in mathematical progressions,
irregular
but self-contained.

9

Persistence, in the language of trees,
is worded in composite verbs, continuous
present, integrating:
standing strong a long time enduring, and
rooting where the seed by chance touches earth.

Persistence is a stand of trees.

10

Distance between trees: not as static
or fixed measurement, but as changing
configuration—*space between*.

$$space\ between = \frac{open\ air^3}{(vt\ I + vt\ II)\ (\%\ community\ mass)}$$

where:
vt is *variable transformation* (rate of growth, variable by species;
topography; climate; available light, water, soil
(modified by negative
—that is *the space between.*

One in time expands within the whole becoming
implies *space between* has four dimensions: Volume($h\ \pi\ r^2$),
Noted in singular moments of community as space
changes through time.

11

From the Devonian age proto-language
concepts of competition, the source
of *will to live* constructions:
draw water among thirsting ones;
reach for the bright open.

12

Strong breeze, we might say of wind
that moves limbs of large trees.

Words for wind measure increments—push
against the vertical ideal:

      1—touch fills separations

      2—crowns incline to another

      3—rise limbs, tangle

      4—bole crosses space between

Words for wind measure risk, imbalance:
how far push across the space between and not pull loose the roots.

13

Persisting, trees root
and penetrate the substrate. As roots grow:
to insist between stone walls;
patiently to swell the root through time.

Persisting, a tree's force against rock, a tree can force
rock to cleave, fracture, yield.

14

Movement in non-trees is defined as change.

Moving among trees, an animal is
one on limbs changing.

Bough-like, the wings of birds in flight:
limbs rise and fall without wind.

Birds are
those who disperse as seeds not needing wind and choose their landing place.

Rivers are paradoxes. Water moves
but riverbeds remain
filled with water:
change in water is not change.

15

Trees must have been first to recognize *pi*,
magic number, no rational ending

the word derived from *meandering river.*

Proving an ancient dictum:
that the distance a river meanders, compared to
its length from source to mouth as the crow flies,
approaches *pi.*

16

Incantation-like fragments invoke *pi*,
to protect the forest from contradictions
that cannot be expressed precisely—
the architecture of the pyramids; the evil eye:
as lightfall cycles, so the never-ending number circles the tree

17

Slowing the pulse, quieting to withstand drought or endure cold
—expressions of dormancy vary. Arid region derivations
describe holding water, like holding breath,
closing every pore.

The word for winter means
standing somnolent, still under crystalline rain, wind blown white.

18

Words for circles occur in several semantic categories,
most constructed with affixes to *pi*. One category, *layering the circles*
—forming growth-rings:
circling to shelter the heart.

One expression, archaic, describes young trees
growing around first-growth stumps:
standing we circle together a paean to the old one fallen.

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Will to live constructions use syntax of cause and effect,

derived from the Devonian age proto-language

terms for *compete*, *survive*, and *persist*:

to draw water among the thirsting ones; and

to reach for the bright open.

Sprouting buds post-trauma is

to renew in time after the first tenderness is broken.

Will to live is casting pollen to the wind, scattering

seeds across the space between.

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Processes of millenia: cycles of pollen, seed, root, leaf,
adapting each cell nucleus over four point four million
years the generations require

far-past verb tenses embedded in the language, the ages
Ice ages, we say, when from snow ice builds. Miles deep.

Ice miles deep melts—the last glaciation
eleven thousand seven hundred years ago:
the long past circles.

VITA

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