HAND AMPUTEES HAVE AN ALTERED PERCEPTION OF IMAGES

AT ARMS LENGTH

Justin Lee Irizarry, B.A.

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APPROVED:

Bruce Bond, Major Professor
Corey Marks, Committee Member
Haj Ross, Committee Member
David Holdeman, Chair of the Department of English
Michael Monticino, Dean of the Robert B. Toulouse School of Graduate Studies
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The preface to this collection "Dust Clouding: Ambiguity and the Poetic Image," highlights the ways in which poets such as W.S Merwin and Donald Revell use ambiguity and the poetic image to strengthen their poems and encourage equality between reader and writer. *Hand Amputees have an Altered Perception of Images at Arm's Length* is a collection of poems and poem like adventures.
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PART I

DUST CLOUDING: AMBIGUITY AND THE POETIC IMAGE
"As long as there have been men and they have lived, they have all felt this tragic ambiguity of their condition,” says Simone De Beauvoir in her book, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* in which she argues that ambiguity is an expression of freedom (7). Certainty, for her, is a means of oppression, a way of tricking people into thinking that the world is made of certainties and facts alone. This oppression manifests itself in organizations and certain schools of thought associated with religious groups or various forms of politics or bureaucracy. In opposition to the certainty offered by these organizations, by these schools of thought, is art. Poetry in particular offers a means of expressing truth (or one’s version of the truth) in a way that is conducive to a pluralist view of meaning. Ambiguity in poetry allows for the poet to show the human experience in a more truthful vagueness, a way of representing the world, or our (human) experience of it, without ignoring the limitations of our perspectives, the unchanging (and thus uncertain) nature of time and the hesitant labeling that is language.

In writing, ambiguity is often viewed as a kind of deficiency. While clarity in writing, as well as in speech, is necessary for interpersonal and organizational communication, this necessity does not imply an embodiment of absolute truth. If it is the job of art to represent life in an honest and illuminating manner, then ambiguity is as crucial to artfulness as it is to language itself. It’s important not to confuse ambiguity with absurdity, or with confusion for the sake of confusion. Simone de Beauvoir clarifies, “The notion of ambiguity must not be confused with that of absurdity. To declare that existence is absurd is to deny that it can ever be given a meaning; to say that it is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won”
What ambiguity offers, in poetry in particular, is a way to do the work that it takes to understand and properly represent the world and its complexities. Ambiguity thus offers respite from the tedious and never-ending falsity that is stanch certainty and the ridiculously simple claims it makes. The question that then must be asked is what is in opposition to ambiguity and plurality. Simone De Beauvoir argues,

Man's unhappiness, says Descartes, is due to his having first been a child. The child's situation is characterized by his finding himself cast into a universe which he has not helped to establish, which has been fashioned without him, and which appears to him as an absolute to which he can only submit...The means that the world in which he lives is a serious world, since the characteristic of the spirit of seriousness is to consider values as ready-made things...He finds himself happily irresponsible... (35)

What De Beauvoir is insisting on is that one enters the world with the assumption that absolutes exist already, that, “The real world is that of adults where he is allowed only to respect and obey” (35). She argues that children are able to play and to imagine and pursue happiness freely through their understanding that nothing can happen through them (as children), but that everything is already given. This infantile view of the world is most often redacted in adolescence when a child starts to think for his or her self and ask questions such as, “Why must I act this way?” However, Beauvoir insists,

There are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the
ceiling which is stretched over their heads. Like a child, they can exercise freedom, but only within this universe which has been set up before them, without them. (37)

When talking about the human experience, about notions as abstract as morality or grief, there is a paradox that must be respected. Simone de Beauvoir describes this paradox as that of the “Rational Animal.” She argues,

[Man] asserts himself as a pure internality against which no external power can take hold, and he also experiences himself as a thing crushed by the dark weight of other things. At every moment he can grasp the non-temporal truth of his existence. But between the past which no longer is and the future which is not yet, this moment when he exists is nothing. This privilege, which he alone possesses, of being a sovereign and unique subject amidst a universe of objects, is what he shares with all his fellow-men. (7)

It is not ambiguity’s job to make things less clear, but to refer to the multiple congregations of meanings that accompany any represented moment or reality. The labyrinthine nature of plurality lends itself to a culture of deconstruction, and in this way ambiguity illuminates the never-ending constructedness and instability of meaning.

Ezra Pound describes the poetic image as, “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” (Pound, 32). The emotional and intellectual complexes come from the poet’s ability to fill a poem (or that instant of time) with hindsight and unobvious detail. If ambiguity is, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it, a type of
freedom, then a poet who embraces the poetic image writes a poem not disillusioned by certainty. The poem “The Other The Wings” by Donald Revell relies heavily on both abstract and imagistic ambiguity:

Vivid out of nowhere,
the ashen paper-smell of summer
cripples the garden.
The poor peonies
are dead of their own weight,
every wound exposed.

I went walking. In the park, the defunct observatory wore a helmet of hot moonlight. Its basement glowed where the AA meeting, already frantic with cigarette smoke, made exaggerated, weightless gestures like those of astronauts on the lunar surface. Otherness is not the prelude to meaning. the moon cures no addiction, prevents no wars.

The phrase that starts the poem, "Vivid out of nowhere," is surreal, but not in the way that word is often misused, which is to say having the disorienting, hallucinating qualities of a dream, but in that the phrase "Vivid out of nowhere" seems to describe the very process of writing that André Breton defined to be the process of the surrealists, a process that quiets the self in order to access the unconscious mind, or the nowhere. It is
important to note here that this process is the same process from which epiphanies emerge sporadically from or outside of the moment. The phrase “Vivid out of nowhere” could describe the unexpectedness of true epiphanies, the way they seem to come untraceably from the ether.

Structurally, the poem alternates between a six line small strophe, and a five (and later six) line strophe that is made up of longer lines. In the poem, the alternation between the short-lined strophes and longer- lined strophes act in the same way that the verse-chorus song structure works. The smaller lined strophes, the chorus, sharply contrasts with the rest melodically, and assumes a higher level kinetic intensity. In the poem the chorus is there to bring the reader to the surreal, to the subconscious, to the ambiguous ether from which epiphanies emerge. The second strophe pulls the reader from the ambiguous chorus into the gritty life of the verse.

In the poem's first verse, the defunct observatory is lit both by a ‘helmet of hot moonlight’ and also the AA meeting taking place in the basement. The image of the dual-lit observatory calls to mind the image of something being burned at both ends. In the poem the participants of the AA meeting are represented by the (poetic) image of the observatory, while the moon is a representation of time. Revell’s use of the acronym AA, instead of the words alcoholics anonymous, leaves the addiction ambiguous. AA has spawned many different branches that deal with many different addictions. They however share a philosophy that would have easily disturbed Simone de Beauvoir. One
of the pillars of AA is the 12-steps each member must take to start the sobering process. The first two steps are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

What one should take away from these steps is that the 12-step method is first concerned, for whatever reason, with powerlessness, something that resembles very much the childish ignorance described by Beauvoir earlier. These members are slaves to their own repetitions. Addiction is a way of replacing meaning with a constructed mood, a prescribed state, in effect making them the basement image in the poem, burning inward like the cigarette smoke that fills the room.

The next line in the poem reads, “Otherness is not the prelude to meaning. The moon cures no addiction, prevents no wars.” Accepting powerlessness, admitting to oneself that the world is in someone else’s hands, is not going to lead to meaning. Meaning is work. The chorus begins again, “Vivid out of nowhere, / the wind is food.” The wind, which physically is nothing more than a flow of gases on large scale, represents the velocity of life, the spreading of seeds, the scattering of dirt. “Each/ house along the street exposed interiors in yellow lamplight, but no/ one moved inside.” The physical existence of these houses represents the collective memory (which in itself is a nebulous thing) that is accepted truth. The (unnatural) lamplights that light the empty dwellings represent the hollowness of constructed truths, prescribed meaning and/or
certainty. The next line adds to this, “To see things without their circumstances is the most difficult happiness” —which could easily suggest that it’s hard to see things outside of their situations, outside of their arranged certainty. The last chorus of the poem provides a vague resolution:

Vivid who were frightened before,

The circumstances of physical life,

Weight and wounds,

Drift instead of death.

The hairy back of Arnold Schoenberg

Is a moth.

The first line has gone from “Vivid out of nowhere” to “Vivid who were frightened before,” Whatever it is that is vivid (and it is ambiguous) it is no longer frightening. They were scared because the world seemed exact and concrete. In an exact world the inexact nature of life is out of place. We then return to the word circumstance, which earlier was related to a happiness that comes with seeing past the constructedness of meaning, now refers to the circumstance of physical life, “weight and wounds.” These circumstances drift; they are always changing, ambiguous in that they are never finalized.

The last two lines of this chorus concern the hairy back of the Arnold Schoenberg. Arnold Schoenberg was an Austrian composer associated with the expressionist
movement in poetry and in art. What he is perhaps most notable for is the twelve-tone technique used in musical composition. The technique is a means of ensuring that all 12 notes of the chromatic scale are sounded as often as one another in a piece of music while preventing the emphasis of any through the use of tone rows, an ordering of the 12 pitches. All 12 notes are thus given more or less equal importance, and the music avoids being in a key. This relates very closely to a pluralist view of meaning, in not giving any of the twelve notes any specific significance, and subsequently keeping the piece from being in a specific key one creates both an equality of sound and a lack of concrete definition. Arnold’s hairy back suggests his subconscious, his primitive mind basement. The subconscious, being a moth, is atavistically drawn towards light, without any facile reasoning. The light is perhaps where the Vivid comes from.

Declarations of certainty and slogan propaganda maybe good for businesses and market-based cultures, but fall terribly short when addressing the questions poets tend to ask (metaphysical, philosophical, anecdotal, etc.). The poem "Some Last Questions" by W.S. Merwin uses ambiguity and the poetic image to explore certain metaphysical questions.

What is the head

A. Ash

What are the eyes

A. The wells have fallen in and have

Inhabitants
What are the feet

A. Thumbs left after the auction

No what are the feet

A. Under them the impossible road is moving

    Down which the broken necked mice push

    Balls of blood with their noses

What is the tongue

A. The black coat that fell off the wall

    With sleeves trying to say something

What are the hands

A. Paid

No what are the hands

A. Climbing back down the museum wall

    To their ancestors the extinct shrews that will

    Have left a message

What is the silence

A. As though it had a right to more

Who are the compatriots

A. They make the stars of bone

The poem's title suggests a shedding of the physical body, and the questions address the purpose of the body and how that relates to questions beyond the physical, questions of morality, truth, and representation. The protagonist of the poem (the questioner) asks
questions concerning the body and its appendages. The questions themselves do not concern the literal body. Instead the protagonist is concerned with the body as metaphor. When Merwin asks, "What is the head" he answers with one word, "ash", the artfulness of this being that one word answers usually imply simple questions and simple answers. The question could have easily been what is consciousness, or what does it mean to think, what is memory. The answer, ash, as a poetic image forces the reader to think about fire, the past tense of burning, and the solid remains after fire. If the head is ash then the machinations of the body is the fire. And though the actual word 'fire' isn't in the poem, the image is implied. The metaphor of life as fire (the consumption of oxygen, the uncontrolled movement of flame) leads to the question of eyes. The question "What are the eyes" suggests the questions: what are the limitations of perspective, or what do we actually see, what does it mean to visualize. The answer is an image, as are all of the answers in the poem. The image of the fallen-in well suggests the limitations of people, not only in the optical sense (the limited spectrum of visible light), but also in terms of people's knowledge. We see only from our own apertures; our perspective is hindered by the architecture of our wells.

The two longest answers of the poem come in the two instances in which questions are re-asked. These are the questions of hands and feet, limbs through which we explore the world physically. Both of the answers to these questions are deemed unsatisfactory by the questioner, marked only by the word "no" in front of the original question. Both of the original answers have to do with wealth, but like our representations of it (money, credit), the answers are too shallow to yield any substantial meaning, thus
the re-asking. The first of these questions, "What are the feet," is concerned with the idea of work, and as evident by the first answer, "wealth." The impossible road that is moving is time. Its impossibility suggests that time as a whole is not easily paved, or easily whole for that matter. The image of the broken necked mice pushing balls of blood with their noses brings to mind Sisyphus (his boulder-mountain paradigm) and the grinding nature of work.

This allusion flows nicely in to the question between the two long answers, which is "What is the tongue." The image of the black coat, as well as that of the wall, signifies the artificiality of authority; the black coats easily could represent judges or members of any given clergy. The sleeves are there to tell you the hands are paid, as evident by the first answer to the question 'What are the hands," but this answer is too obvious for the protagonist. And when asked again, the answer becomes a more complicated poetic image. The poetic image of hands represents both man's connection to other people, as well as our concepts of give and take. The silence in the second to last question signifies both death and nothingness. The key word in the answer to the question, "What is the silence," is "right" which leaves open who might have given his right (it is not given according to the answer), and also what it means to be right as well as what it means to have rights.

The answer to the last question, and the overall theme of the poem, uses the poetic image and that ambiguity to point out not only the complicated network of realities that is our bodily existence, but also the constructed nature of meaning and
representation. The gaps in the poem's logic create an experience of interpretative freedom. The poem "Poem Under No Illusions of Itself as an Olive Branch" by Chad Prevost addresses the issue of interpretative freedom from the point of view of a poem.

This poem was minding
its own business in a local café, trying to nail down what’s been
on its mind, when a former student of the author’s asked him
what he was doing. When he told her he was trying to write
this poem, she said, “I’ve never liked poems. Why not just say
what you mean?” After a few beats she said, “Put me
in one of your poems?...”

When the ex-student tells the writer, “I’ve never liked poems. Why not just say what you mean?” she (and subsequently Chad Prevost) gives a perfect example of the kind of thinking that makes ambiguity in writing thought of as wrong and misleading. The poem's rebuttal is to ask that the poem have its freedom, freedom from the certainty the female student wants to force onto it:

Like anyone, this poem only wants
to mean exactly what it says, wants to be known, accepted
for what it is. Maybe it knows it doesn’t deserve
any better than what it gets, knows what you’ll do to it
even as it puts its trust in you, even as it makes a kind of idol
out of you, saying to you the very things it would love to hear..."
The poem makes the reader an idol in that its meaning (the poem's) is based largely on the cognitive work the reader is going to put in. What the poem would like to hear is the music of its own destruction. A poem is, at first, always asking, "Does this hold weight?" And it if it does, then the meaning reaches past the constriction of certainty to a higher, and by the nature of altitude, more universal image that might give light to what it might be like to be a subject amidst objects. And since subjects are always moving, or at the very least, always being seen from another angle, then any representation of the human experience must address what Simone de Beauvoir calls, "the tragic ambiguity of our condition" (7).

What poets like W.S. Merwin and Donald Revell try to do in poems like "Some Last Questions" and "The Other The Wings" is to use ambiguity (by way of the poetic image), not to obscure or distort, but to illuminate the plurality of experience, to not fall prey to the tempting laziness of certainty. Simone de Beauvoir argues,

That is what makes criticism so easy and art so difficult; the critic is always in good position to show the limits that every artist gives himself in choosing himself; painting is not given completely either in Giotto or Titian or Cezanne; it is sought through the centuries and is never finished; a painting in which all pictorial problems are resolved is really inconceivable; painting itself is this movement toward its own reality; it is not the vain displacement of a millstone turning in the void; it concretizes itself on each canvas as an absolute existence.
Art and science do not establish themselves despite failure but through it" (129-130).

Yes, ambiguity can obscure and abate meaning. Politicians can use ambiguity in their public speeches and discussions to make their talking points and distinctions passive and unobjectionable. Their passive ambiguity leaves them less vulnerable to criticisms, and, real or perceived, failure. While politicians use ambiguity to hide from failure and criticism, poetry, particularly from poets such as W.S. Merwin and Donald Revell, uses ambiguity to embrace failure, encourage criticism, and give more interpretative freedom to the reader. Certainty, particularly in language and art, is a type of condescension, a way of making slaves of the readers and listeners. "Some Last Questions" and "The Other The Wings" succeed as poems, as works of art, because they accurately represent the inaccuracy of representing, because they do not aim to placate the reader, but to encourage equality between reader and writer in their pursuit of substantial answers.
Works Cited


Prevost, Chad. "Poem Under No Illusions of Itself as an Olive Branch."

PART II

HAND AMPUTEES HAVE AN ALTERED PERCEPTION
OF IMAGES AT ARMS LENGTH
The Paradox of Overcoming and at the Same Time Preserving

You could lie
and say I lost
myself and considering
our lives are spent
mostly with descriptions
of parts
without thought
or awe for the whole,

someone would believe you
and say welcome back
to the path we all lose
our center time to time.

It's easy to imagine
logic as that road
extending towards
something obdurate or perhaps
overwhelming.

Progress is the child of balance
and repetition.

Ash.

Show me freedom
without grind and I will show you
thin but determined strings hanging
things nicely in a place that would make you believe
privilege sits in bone.
Workshop

Encouragement means nothing, like the knives of quotation marks.

In any event, what do you say to a man who only has description?

It’s true the moon can pull it away. The text is noise, a pulpit of slate.

Numbers are the same as the word brick. Technically, there are no corners on the globe. What does despotic music sound like to the outdoors?

Consonant onyx Astute glimmer
It's possible to say something enigmatic about death, perhaps its attachment to gravity. In another world

the artifice recognizes people for who they reiterate, and we will pull flowers from the ground that created us admitting there is no lasting exactly.
**Accuracy**

"I don't throw darts at balloons, I throw balloons at darts"

- *Joe Montana*

As though it was as easy as, do this, or put that there. Life, they might tell you, is about accuracy and practice.

What of luck, and the fact that time is anterior?

The invention of consciousness was as brutal as it was the birth of the past tense. The Past itself not a place, but the echo of a place. Placation, endless rearranging and no tables to speak of. Memory is a bag of grapes from the grocery store. A metaphor for the act of reaching. The super market does nothing for depiction of chaos' position in the universe. We are a more durable smoke, or if you prefer a more liquid fire. What I would really like to know is what isn't a moving target? Spare me the speech on the security of obedience, We are all concerned with the weather of limitation, the constant gravity of failure. The difference is how we handle the vulnerability of reaction. The key is soft eyes, to see everything as a blurry whole, not to lull in expectation, but to see opportunity in a world where nothing is fixed. Between distance and chaos there is free will, or if you prefer something more ornate, there is the opportunity for the staggering. But I digress, everything that does not need you is real.
**Invisible Leashes**

Flying is more like swimming
than I would like to imagine.
Sure, there's oxygen, but birds' lungs
are more like gaunt rooms.

Damn

at least we are bipedal. Upstanding. Feet
gave birth to hands and there is not civilization
without hands, or perhaps they were once
whiskers on the face of the primordial it.
Molecularly, we become a part of what
we tread and then this dirt fills our perpetual hollowing.

Tradition is a carnal anthem. The universe is itself process.

Between past and future there are the aisles of now,
which are empty if dimly lit. We carry the past in
that we are decayed by it. The future is thundering
in a corner of the room.

Humanity is tethered to the earth if it is anything.
Inmigración

I see men in the backs of kitchens manipulating heat, flesh. Men with lawn autonomy and menial reciprocity, appallingly trying not to misinterpret freedom. I see the subtle anonymous fight for their infinity building and rebuilding, Scarves under hats and the beds of trucks.

I see politicians hunting scapegoats mostly, Men who adopt oppression as if it didn't have enough fathers.

Yes, there is blood on the feet of tender white men, who face the hatred with their mouths closed. And I see them looking down on the wet backs of cement men who thankfully scrape change from under the table, from those that are never done with their endless cake.
Pyramids and Liberal Guests.

People refuse to admit someone could have been intelligent or cruel enough to build pyramids using the available resources, and since we are dealing with the dead and an intense attention to cats, mystically we are obliged to be open minded. For some it's hard to imagine dark slaves manually laboring large quadrate stones up a man-made mountain in the name of death or against death in the name of memory or narcissism. As if slavery to the human-gods is unfamiliar, somehow unimaginable. One liberal guest on the news said he is fearful of the shrinking middle class. He feared that people seemed to lean too much on future debt. He argued the mass collapsing of the middle class would create an ocean of the lower class. He seemed to think this would create a chaos much like the idiot chains of slavery. He feared the military would be needed to suppress the rebellion for the safety of the aggregate. Not once mentioning the previous lower classes working assiduously simply just to eat and have space. He also did not mention the bridge between modern banking and indentured servitude. The broken necked pushing boulders up the road to a man who collects boulders: exploitation often builds monuments. Perhaps due to time constraints they had to edit the man's conversation on business and how it is inherently pyramidal. How he feared the conglomerate's absorbing of the obelisk bricks. Eventually, he said, most of us will be working like slaves for one of the very few tapering monoliths. He probably said, in business opportunity knocks tyrannically first. The network most likely broke for commercials.
Campaign in Poetry, Govern in Prose.

**Republican:** Fleet shadow, I laugh at your pompous graying.

**Democrat:** A colorful hat

**Art:** What is a game that does not admit it is game?

**Speech:** Citizens, these laws have gotten out of hand. This unchanging game of blame and trepidation. These mittens of shit. The artifice has risen against us. They say freedom is a given right, but that it is not free. Citizens, you cannot price a right. There are turbid moats of lobbyists surrounding our elected representatives. Their soft hands reach up from muck to grab the darkness beneath the sleeves of our suited representations. Citizens, they sell us something they themselves do not own. I remind you that we do not own anything. To own is to admit to a permanence that does not exist.

The real threat? Our deafening sense of entitlement, our feeble monument to boredom. Citizens, I could piss on a sheet of paper and call it a law.

If you will permit me the acquiescence, we must rise like stalks of carbon walking up the ladder steps of the sky, we must rise against anything that separates us with the idea that it is right. Let us wash away this sense of owing and earning in the eventual rain, let us wash away the stink of possessing and leave the bare glare of being.

Citizens there are no tangible ideas

When your children's children ask what it was like when people worked as if salary was a destination, tell them art dismantled the sad tournament. Competition is the politics of trophies. And citizens, we are not confused by the shiny; there are no natural teams.

**Thesis of speech:** Flags on caskets.
A Metaphysical Problem Pragmatically Considered.

On your gravestone it might read there weren't enough explosions.

The air will be good for breathing.
The sky will continue to do

nothing. The difference is we never realize faces are always made of water.
Photographs are why we see particles and even between them there is this distance. Existence is the funneling of windows into houses. A slimming of the panorama.

Before there was hard architecture there was running. The silence of a noncommittal infinity.

Still, under us there are no roads only basalt gravel, death and forgetting. Memory is a war between time and cake. Hands and feet.

Grief is the filth after the body's leaving.
A Novel

Chapter 1: Death

I too hate its encompassing white hands.

The moths fly from its darkness.

Chapter 2: Reservations

If I have no arms
How will I open doors?

Chapter 3: Time

That wealth that annuls all distance.

While we talk?

All languages say nothing.

Chapter 4: Melancholy

In November the cat curls up next to silence teaching itself itself.

Chapter 5: Birthday Cake

I have seen petals beg for corners.
Blood continues to follow music.

Chapter 6: God

The stars do not believe in each other.

Chapter 7: Love

I can’t imagine life without hands
or a shoulder
where she lays her head
waiting
or not waiting
for the buildings
to cover the stars.

Chapter 8: Youth

Even before the pages have turned the horses carry the hands of clocks waiting for midnight.

Or they will grow like everything that dies.
They Say Morals Are As Implied As Bone

As if
in another world punishment fits
crime like
snug mittens.
Convenience or Death

All pride is propaganda

It is misused silence

and among the days of installation
and cascading
it's device lies
maudlin and unmoved

Who expected speech to leave
the periphery

I know in art they wear their denouement
in the mien of peacocks roaming
freely staggered
in lit zoos

But from what I see life rewards
life with life
and that's it

It's understandable grabbing

at what you can
with your hands,
like chlorophyll reaching
but

despite its ornament
equality does not exist

there is only the invention
of inequality

Incidence lies
like the argyle trees
in sporadic autumn

What I'm trying to say is life
is merely the music
of what receives blood and air
not an arrival

there are no doors
To The Mother with the Pond Eyes and the Purple Velour Tracksuit

“There was this woman sitting in the corner of a Discount Tire Company with her young son. Watching them the child would start to ask something and the woman would shush him and adjust him into his seat. Although it was obvious she was unhappy, she seemed to have an enjoyment in sternly placating her son. The child would look at the clouds for a little while then try again to say something, only to be shushed again. I imagined this woman as the type of mother who would lead a group in the PTA that wanted to ban certain books, or would call the movie ratings board to complain about what she felt was appropriate. The woman's shirt read God Bless America." - Epigraph

A child who has not yet grown
into to his large face looks up
at his mother who looks down
at her knees or perhaps the empty
tiled floor.

I imagine this kid gets on a soapbox:

I'm starting to believe
you chose to have me
so that you could feel
significant, so that, for once
you could tell someone else
how it tends to be.

Was it meaning
that you had hoped to birth?
Should you be admired
now that I am what you pose,
because now you can ignore
what is wrong outside of your
own family?

Your political stance is child safe,
as if to say if I cannot define it thinly
to my children, it is wrong. Is censorship
the projection of your own struggle
with give and take?

If you take the puissance you use
towards censorship and place it
against tyranny the need to cover up
would taper eventually.

The suburbs we live in is an illusion.
A reference to an order that is as inhuman
as it is universally false. Conformity
is the language of the misinformed.

The most important thing is an open mind
that is why it is the only thing I was born with.
The fact that you baptized me as a child amuses
the word unnecessary.

What does it say about our sense of permanence
if our world will die, mostly unnoticed,
and at the hand of a comparatively lukewarm sun.

Look at those clouds and understand no one is ever
that beautiful and whatever game you decide to play
to make you feel as if you have earned the atmosphere
is a brick wall. Those clouds are beautiful because they
are the amalgam of time and water. Denseless. Life is
a fluid; equal parts time and water. Maybe,

Maybe that’s where consciousness goes
when our bodies die. It makes sense to think
of death as an ocean. It’s comforting to think
death is your gravity graduating from its body.

And maybe looking up at our dead is right
but keeping in mind clouds do not cover everything
is just as important. I’ll admit maybe anytime
we talk about anything large it is always a metaphor
for something words cannot hold, because who are we
that attach meaning to exactness as if you open a stone
to find the word stone.
A Performance Artist and The Heterodyne Principle

When he started he just stood there silent, staring at the crowd who in reaction were looking away at their cell phones, at each other, awkward, clearly waiting, which had art to it. The music of the audience of John Cage. Waiting is what we learn first as living things. Autonomical metronomes aside, he then started writing letters aloud to the crowd. First, it was the paternal nouns. Dear Father, you taught me to be a clever doormat.

Then his letters were addressed to ideas; Dear Freedom, How do you deal with purpose? Dear Integrity, Your shirt is stupid. Then he took off all of his clothes and started bombarding a large woman in the front row with insults. I see you prefer your chairs with no arms he said. Then he put on a plastic cop uniform, stabbed an abnormally large badge into his chest, went back to the heavy woman, and yelled several times, you kids break it up. He took a picture of her and commented repeatedly on how long it was going to take to print.

Most of the audience was laughing but guilt hung in the air. The artist demonstrated this by spelling the word out on a chalkboard with his feces. Eventually, the smell spread
and the audience realized what was being smeared in front of them. They started to boo, some started to leave. In apropos he began throwing cardboard puzzle pieces at the audience and the audience leaving. Some started to throw the pieces back at the artist, others started trying to find pieces that fit together. Others still did nothing but watch. Then people dressed as ghosts, or people with sheets covering their bodies, brought a small desk to the stage where the artist sat down, and to display the savage and lazy nature of human existence he shoved a large metal pencil through his thigh into the desk chair, binding the two, then with his hands, one covered in shit, the other with blood, he started to play the Theremin the ghosts had just finished setting up. Normally this would hinder a musician, but the artist's hands entered and left the magnetic fields surrounding the Theremin antennae with such grace you forgot he wasn't playing the Theremin the whole time, scoring the film of that experience or at least that's how it will be remembered and though the Theremin was broadcasting to itself, the audience felt as if it was singing to them, at first in an eerie dark place way, but then when his hand started trembling the electricity became voice and one couldn't help but imagine an opera house, projection and large women thundering electric. He could have still been making fun of the large women in the front row, but nobody noticed, not her nor the bleeding, which with the trembling was puddling much faster,
only the music, and it sounded like it was infinite, like all of time was inhabited by this music, by this/these moments, now. But it was not, the artist eventually passed out from all the bleeding and the audience did nothing, they sat there, awkward, checking their cell phones, wondering if this was a part of the performance.
It's all fun and games until someone mentions poverty.

How:
it makes buckets of people.
The minutia of struggling

fiscally, the weight of time and our cultural fatalism.

Yes:
well, I'm sure there isn't anything lackadaisical about the wealthy.
They say nobody works harder than the son of a CEO.

What if I told you my mother was a butler once?

that she swept the halls of this dim mansion

cleaning both what was lived in as well as the many empty rooms left over.
Usually:
The family just assumed
the rooms never got dirty
because they were never used,
but it was she who cleaned them and
asked,
one day,
why they need such a house.

The emptiness of it
She Paused:
fills me with sadness.

They Replied:
We miss the old days, when a house was big enough to fit a generation.
A house that gave the feeling that everything is taken care of.
We want that.

She Replied Under Her Breath:
Back when skin was uniform, those days?
What is True for Us, What is True for Them.

Members of the committee
to properly label tragedy
have considered your children’s
deaths and the progress of that famine.
There just isn't enough sky.
Given the barbarity of the word
resource and the constructed
nature of our separate but clearly
interconnected realities, we must deflect
our attentions elsewhere.

The clouds are sepia oatmeal.

I didn't say it was the thunder
that scared me as a child it was
the distance between the lightning
and the boom. Time is suffering.
It was the clarity of waiting,
the lean forward. Now, it reminds
me of this quote you gave me:

' Talent hits a target no one else can hit
Genius
hits a target no one else can see' 

Which means the smartest among us
see no targets at all . Still, it was the walls
that were comforting, with the ceiling,
it was the opposite of target. Except
to the lighting, or anything that bombs.

I'm not sure what's worse-- greed or
the illusion of safety but it's becoming
impossible to feel anything. Do you
remember when you told me you
thought banana won the lottery
of artificial flavors and I wanted to say that it was simply the natural evolution of the close relationship to man and banana, but I was thinking fuck luck, in several ways, and I couldn’t see the tease of gravity or the interchangeability of *time* and *decay* and not think that certain people are born f***ed more than others and to counteract the gut-plummet of that sadness, I thought again about you and how love is the multiple tasks of hands, then I thought about how far that reaches, which initially brought to mind contracts, but we always knew to see through them, they impact only filing. I thought we could be an example, we could show everyone time is on suffering's side, and the answer is always love and more hands.

Then as a poet I thought, obviously. And as an American I thought again about contracts, committees and distribution, the goal of it all, the staggering tenacity of suffering Yes, there is a contract that states "All men are created equal." But if it is only true for us. Then it isn't true at all.
IV.
Through The Clock

Look consciousness
nothing
is still.

Nights are not
Separate.

Blood walks through the
water clock.

Through.

Time is neither the clock
or your pain.
If you leave
you will leave nothing
but your dissonance.

Ice to a diamond.
The Current.

There is a building on top of my building, and like several other institutions it’s forgettable.

But these are titles, I could have easily said living is a type of contracting. Which reminds me of when I said justice when I actually meant self-indulgence. There is something disgusting about executive satisfaction, if not disgusting then intermutually vain. Why do you hate joy?

Someone asked me. I wanted to say irony is the shadow of joy, but instead I made fun of his taste in music.

Your music reminds me of the stock photographs given to make frames more sellable. The hiss and click of refrigerator silence. The gloss and fragility of toys that accompany burgers and side fries.

There are walls that accompany my building. Because the future is uncertain, it is always winter.
Why have we stopped talking about albums?
The dangling keys of new, while fluorescent,
give nothing to the persistence of vision,
the stairway wit of evolution, or how
moments easily become plastic.
There is no duende in punch-drunk.

We are far too aware to be competent.
Meaning is editing and now we tread the virtual;
these invisible kiosks. The half-actual made not
of mirrors but of the descriptions of mirror-like views.

We are more like moths than we'd like to admit.

If measurable time is anything
it is the origin of skepticism.
We put the past into wax.
First opportunity then retrospect,
freedom then reverberation.
Hard art is not timeless but time itself,
the limited chaos of now made tangible by hands,
it then approaches history in some way.
Krautrock.

I hold my mortality
like stable hands cup water.

I mean, who are we that simply exist.

I hold my mortality
like a window that has been painted shut.

I hold my mortality
like the desks hold wars

I hold my mortality
only in the way stars hold names.

On a certain hillside
stones believe god
will manifest himself
in the form of a stone.

I hold my mortality
like beats hold music.

And yet there is so much
beauty in hyperbole
like a tree taut with distance,
waiting.

I hold my mortality
like there are no jokes.

I think love is
the mind’s rebuttal.

I hold my mortality
like pain holds all other feeling.
Fugazi

Coming from where they did
the aggression seemed appropriately bottled.
Reticent and consequential;
a flick of the thumb,
the bombast of moment.

There isn't much room for commerce here. Who needs the tables. There are ideas, and they are bigger and more just than this. Larger than the people in this room, and by this room I mean moment again.

When is outrage not fitting?
no one is insinuating complacency, being angry is one thing, let's not throw our elbows into the throats of others.

The idea is that violence begets outrage not violence equals more performative violence. Ideas, remember.

I heard once they were homeless by choice.
I once heard they ate only rice.
Well I heard they sold their souls for their fingers.

Authority: " That was Robert Johnson."
Well, I heard they never use toilets.
I once heard they gave children grenades.
I heard the children gave them the grenades.
I'm pretty sure I heard most of them are dead by now.
[**Hydrocodone -500mg**]

Ambition always dims

waiting for signs
pendulous leaves
and if it left

pain—regardless
it climbs
on the sill of some
febrile heft.

Life is how I choose to distort it.

[**Hydrocodone -650mg**]

Lower still

distance
is where a door might go.
I stumble from it.

I am the gray lakes
of ladder shadows.

Oh we have made progress in pain.

[**Hydrocodone -750mg**]

I am tired now

I am subtle

I would like to say poetry
is the opposite of money

but it is our uses
that forsake us.

If it is raining
I cannot tell.
Sleep

A parade
of frames,
usual and curious
The body's
performance
of time
The silent idle
of our bones
palm-muted or
threadbare hiss
A conversation
for balance
Activity and
vivid oblivion

The moon
is slate, and
I have seen nothing
perpetual

There is prospect
in dark matter:
I imagine it to be
material stillness
the antithesis of
cumulonimbus

Oh the staggering
gravity of dissonance.

There is no sedative like white noise
There is no great writer afraid of silence
Let Us Say Internal Dialogue

Why it should happen like this I am not sure, but I'm sitting at a bar,
The man sitting next to me asks:

\[ \text{If I ever wish (sometimes) for more than just this limp time.} \]
He makes this gesture with his hand holding his glass, waving it irregularly
in the air as he speaks, trying in his way to represent the chaos and tumult of life
I nod and take a drink from my glass.

\[ \text{What do you do with music} \]
The music was loud and nobody was dancing.
I guess a pivot for my silence I say, putting my glass down onto the bar.

He puts his drink down, and asks me what I think of love.

"Love is the persistence of vision" the only tangible faith.

he takes another drink from his glass,
puts his arm around me and says

\[ \text{We should always doubt gods and purpose.} \]

I say, \text{when we mention god let us say internal dialogue}, raising my glass in the motion
of toast.

Don't forget the childishness of suicide he says.
We both nod and take a drink from our glasses.

You and I, he says, \text{we are products of an unnamed distance}.

He orders another drink.

\[ \text{I'm glad to have met someone as smart as you are} \]
\text{You wear the performance of speech like a scarf around your cold throat}
pointing his new drink in my direction.
\text{Would you like another} he asks, I say no, \text{I think I've had enough}. 
I really only understand the smash and grab of social interaction when I’m inebriated
he says. We are all the same in the drunk-dark of places like this.
Right:

Either way
it's a pedestal
you made.

Wrong:

Otherness
is a fundamental
category
of human
thought,
within
that
pamphlet,
chaos
is the gift
of existence.
The Shouting, the Tragedy and the Waste

I.
Within all authority there is the capacity for terrorism,

The wretched spectacle of dominion

Not that uniforms don't depict legitimate ranks
of people or that belt weaponry isn't an executive certainty
but that alone law is flawed. Duct tape and garbage bag windows.

The suppression of uncomfortable ideas.

Imagine the pressure of citizens who have to hold it together.

The rigid stones that fill the stomachs of officers that
have to pat the thighs and pockets of men and women

who may look
c contradistinctive.

What it must take to fabricate the muck architecture of
normal.

II.
Again with the gunfire.

What does someone have to take
to deserve to be shot in the back
or tased fifteen times
not into submission, but into this electric genuflecting

that shows the disgusting laziness of bureaucracy,
or how quickly things become atavistic. About anger,
not particular to any such person or moment
but an amalgam of the constant impacting of reality.
III.
Your honor,

We have
rehearsed
our enemies.
Their minds
are young
and inexhaustibly
choreographed.

There is a line between
the decline of industry
and the paucity and fraud
of public education

Oh the equivocations!

With all-due respect,
your honor, do you really
think this man sold illegal
drugs, and I emphasis
the word illegal because
that's really the issue
here, in this building,
that gavel and that bench
Your honor, this man
has never met you in his life
and yet he, like the rest
of us, stood upon your arrival,
and let me say, your honor,
your black robe was as intimidating
as it was luxurious, the dark
pendulum cloth of it reminded
me of a child putting its hands
over its eyes how it both blinds
and protects almost paradoxically.

**Judge:** Is there a point here?

*I'm sorry, your honor,*
*did you think this man*
*works for pain,*
*that he purposefully*
*leaches on the weight*
*of what it takes to shoulder*
*the ache and pay of labor?*
*Does this courtroom*
*really believe this man*
*wants the disintegration*
*of people, that he works*
*on the side of violence?*

*We used to make things.*
*Now we just have our hand*
*in the next guy's pocket.*
*When did we stop seeing*
*survival as self-defense?*

*My client did not invent*
*the demand for analgesics.*
*Would it have been appropriate*
*for this man to be more poor?*

*Ladies and Gentlemen of the*
*jury, you are inventing sides.*

*Convict is a demographic,*
*and there are no blurred lines.*

**Judge’s Verdict:** My hands are tied.
On The Eminent Dissipation of Christianity

Consistently
history
reiterates
you can have
faith
in anything

and while we
are being
honest let us
say that
its survival
rests on the
small shoulders
of exploitation
not on truth
or accuracy

what's
more Jesus
never spoke
of the latticework
galaxies that net
existence
and non
existence
the same

Right. Of course
Humans were
made in the image
of the original
God, it wasn't
our vanity thrown
to the clouds in
a gospel of this
is the best we can do for now.

I will try to speak for my generation and say we were born with this on our backs

and to future generations I will say without doubt without reason faith is acquiescence
Poem under no Illusion of itself being Howl.
[Moloch the incomprehensible prison!]

I haven't seen the best minds of my generation at all, muted in traffic, stupid, madness like the rest of us, moving like cogs into each other, dragging not only the teeth of the past but the warm metal channel of the present, bone faced televangelists evangelizing dollar fists mistakenly docile for the purposes of prayer or applause, who look creatively for anything that resembles artificial happiness or the comfort of attainable goals, or the unreliable rain of euphoria, who belong to long buildings and the solvent of repetition, who passed slowly through universities with lurid degrees in brick and silence, who are flowering poverty in the smoke darkness of their trophies, who masturbate constantly at the networking prospects of post-modernism, who write in the pendulum grass of passivity, who threw beauty at the page when everyone was looking at the screen, who were too scared to fight for the obscene or any of the lesser known odes, whose music slowly became more plastic, who cowered in the universities, in the constant mall of capitalism, whose nicotine teeth speak loudly to the nature of rest, who relax in the semblance of middle living, who drink the piss and giggle of Richard Nixon, who, still, seek whatever measures are necessary to nullify the emptiness of ownership, who are still ignorant of the brutal taxes of convenience, who were stamped for laughs, who took some sick pride in the pigeon-holing, who continually mistake new for good, who stood like pin holes in the screen light, camera obscuras, at first entertaining but eventually just poorly organized photography, incomparable blind streets of poorly draped slip-covers that pretty over and continually suffocate the tattered couches of time, who live in cul-de-sacs of unnecessary shade, drinking the fat syrup of a white washing, who stand blanched by the segmented light of closed windows by the relevant greed of manifest destinies, who experience distance without ever moving, whose walls are mental walls, who swallow the comeuppance, a fist down their thick throat, who chained themselves to the idea of themselves, unweaving the latticework of actual truth like a sweater bleeding itself, skipping narcotic pebbles of modern love across the rippling ocean of unregistered pain, who were arrested in the cloth of the proletariat silent like the governed eventually lost beneath the black and white of stretched paperwork, who bought books already sold to the machinery
of the tepid, who talked endlessly under the sinew and autonomy
of museum speech on the contradictions of worth, bulimic intellect
meandering in the recursive pools of politics and corporation,
who can find no privacy under the delicate hum of satellites
protracting the skies, who refuse to not be entertained waiting
for the television to get the color of flesh exact, who made music
for treading water, in studios of lacking palpable rhythm, who
worked liberal days to pay the infinite rent of class with their paychecks
of buckets, who threw attention at the cause without any idea
of its velocity, who dream of personal drugs, who dream of
impersonal salvation, cock and absent balls, who fell to their
knees in cathedrals of silence, who watched it happen,
who cannot howl without a voice, or the recognition of the voiceless,
the silence that gave it legs, who cannot even finish this poem,
because this the nation of brevity, this is the nation of default white blinds,
this is the nation of the willing, this is the nation of sheep,
and in the nation of sheep there is no room for the poetry of the wolf.
What is this poem about?
The misrepresentation of doors.

No really?
Perhaps it is about perspective.

Is that important to you?
I imagine it is all I have.

What does that say about poetry?
Humanity is mostly noise.

Is this poem beautiful?
In the prize's eye, the less reliable windowframe.

What is more important than beauty?
Catalyst.

Why is this poem not a sonnet?
Why is your face not a sonnet?

Are you angry with me because this poem isn't about anything?
Emptiness is a mule.

I don't think that's true.
I'm a fly on a window.

How is the life of the fly?
Like smoke that ribbons into oblivion.