



X Position 19

Nora the Many

a choreo | graphic novel

Eleanor Bauer

STOCKHOLM | STOCKHOLMS
UNIVERSITY | KONSTNÄRLIGA
OF THE ARTS | HÖGSKOLA

DIVINA = THORNDEN'S
 EXPANDED INSTANT MOM
 THORNDEN-DIVINA'S
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IMAGINATION / POWER

↓ ID

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 (has footage)
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Rupert
CEO

SEPHORA

RUMORS
LEGEND
HEARSAY



GOSSIP
HEARD-ABOUT
COMMENTARY

ELECTRIC
ALAN



Finan



LAUDEN

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Elba is the internet.

PAST
SUBTITLES

novel system
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Nora the Many

a choreo | graphic novel

by Eleanor Bauer

in collaboration with

Nora

Eleanor Sikorski, Flora Wellesley Wesley,
Stephanie McMann

and

Coven Press

Season Butler, Kai Evans, Peter Mills,
Alice MacKenzie, Stina Nyberg,
Tilman O'Donnell, Halla Ólafsdóttir,
Zoë Poluch, Adam Seid Tahir,
Alexander Talts and Juliette Uzor

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Translator's Note

Nora the Many is the product of an extended project of translation. The translation problem concerned herein is how a certain quality and experience of thought which is native and specific to dancing may find adequate expression in writing, and ultimately here, in story. Literally and figuratively *a lot of moving parts*,¹ the story of *Nora the Many* has developed within an ecology of generative dancing-writing practices developed under the umbrella of *choreo | graphy*, my doctoral research project in Performative and Mediated Practices with a focus in Choreography at Stockholm University of the Arts. The process of massaging dance-thought into a narrative logic has evolved by way of passage through several intermediary articulations, both in the physical sense of *articulation* as discernable parts belonging to a whole logic of mobile relations, and the linguistic sense of *articulation* as an utterance in sound, speech or written word. The interrelated writings could have been assembled into narrative form in an infinite number of ways, as there is not a single or causal path through their terrain. I have been largely inspired by Gertrude Stein's notion of the landscape as a dramaturgical form,² creating a field of interrelated events rather than constructing a singular line of narrative time, as it speaks to a certain simultaneity of spaces available to the awareness of a dancing modybind.³

Dancing is not primarily narrative in its logic. It can be adapted to storytelling in the context of a narrative choreography, or witnessed within a linear framework of time (particularly in the setting of a live performance in which audience and performers are all sharing the same unit of time), but a dancer's subjective experience of time can jump rapidly from memory to anticipation, referencing and conjuring a wide range of images and imaginations without any stable story-like logic. Stories may emerge, be replaced, and written over as a byproduct of narrating one's experience in learning, teaching, or performing a dance, but the dance's integrity and internal logic does not rely on story to hold together. Though dancing may bear some causal logics within the micro-scale of kinetics, the durational scale of training, or the macro-scale of culturing, in which causes and effects may be observed or may explain the emergence of certain forms over others, as an idiom of its own, dancing makes sense and unfolds in a dynamic and multifaceted way that does not inherently adhere to logical conjunctions of cause and effect. Constantly hovering between chaos and order in its coordination of the senses to render and

¹ *A lot of moving parts* is the title under which I have published the bulk of my PhD research, including five solo performances, two booklets, and two group performances, detailed further on.

² As outlined in the essay "Plays," written from Stein's 1934 lecture of the same title and published with six other lectures under: Stein, Gertrude. [1935] 1985. *Lectures in America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

³ The historical trouble of separating mind and body has been an obstacle in my work to consider aesthetic and embodied practices as media of thought. Rather than body-mind or mind-body, I coined the term "modybind" in 2019 and have been using it since to insist on their mutual entanglement.

compose movements, a dancing experience is held together at the edges by a kind of magic tension between potential and kinetic energy. As every medium of thought is absolutely unique and idiomatic in its sense-making structures, I have worked in my research to articulate what is specific about thought in dance, which I unpack further below. Contemplation of dance-thought's characteristic features has informed the methods and procedures by which dancing has found its way into language, both spoken and written, via guided prompts and devised experiments leading to the writing of *Nora the Many*.

My purpose in emphasizing translation from dancing to writing more than from writing to dancing has been to address what I perceive as a relative lack of writing from, through, or with dancing. Plenty of ink has been spilled *about* dance, by dedicated scholars of dance history and performance studies as well as by journalists, reviewers, and artists themselves explaining the intentions and methods of their own work. As the word “choreography” was coined for the practice of notating and preserving already formed dances,⁴ translating dances into writing enabled a choreography to exist and stay put somewhere outside of the infinite versions and continual evolution of dancers dancing a particular dance. Today “choreography” refers both to the act of arranging and to the arrangement itself, separable and transferable beyond dancing. This autonomy is evidenced in the current notion and practice of “choreography as expanded practice” in which artists apply choreographic methods to materials beyond dance, as well as by the metaphorical use of the word choreography in general lexicon to refer to the organization of movement not necessarily limited to dancing or even to human bodies. Today it is accepted that a choreography does not necessarily have to emerge from or refer to a dancing practice at all. While people still create choreographies and performances by way of moving together, at least since the 1960's, scores, artistic concepts and even entire artworks have been created and considered to be performable in text alone (I am thinking here namely of the influences of Fluxus and conceptual art in interdisciplinary performance). This has further freed up the relation of dancing to writing, bringing about an array of discursive turns and artistic practices from debates about the existence of such a thing as “conceptual dance,”⁵ to Alice Chauchat's *Dance of Companionship* ⁶ in which the writing of poems keeps the dancing company and vice versa.

Nonetheless, today in fields of professionalized dance performance where funding and resources are secured in order to create dances for the stage, to go from writing to dancing is common in a choreographer's practice, even when working in devised methods of developing dances with dancers, due to the sheer fact that writing and speaking about the work before it starts is the conventional method of securing institutional resources in order to support its creation. Being freed of this writing economy for almost five years by way of a salaried doctoral

⁴ Feuillet, Raoul-Auger. 1700. *Chorégraphie; ou, l'art de décrire la danse*. Versailles: Court of Louis XIV.

⁵ T'Jonck, Pieter. 2004. *Klapstuk #11 bis: introduction*. Brussels: Sarma.

⁶ Chauchat, Alice. 2014. *Dance of Companionship*. Berlin: Togethering.

research position has allowed me to follow the question of what could be a more fruitfully intimate and egalitarian relationship between dancing and writing, taking me farther in directions no other professional situation as a dancer or choreographer would afford. As the conditions of practice-based artistic research at my institution of study allow for and encourage experimentation with forms and media of exposition, I have also been able to take seriously the challenge of writing with and from dancing rather than about it, as I am also not required to write or publish traditional academic papers. While my *choreo | graphy* research has continued alongside and through the choreographing of dance performances, as the split title suggests, I have also honored and taken interest in the difference and distance between dancing and writing as unique media of thought, without intending for one to be a critique or replacement of the other. My writing in this research project is thus an experiment with what writing can do, my dancing an exploration of what dancing does, and my choreography of performances a continuation of my interest in what choreography can do. The written work in *choreo | graphy* including *Nora the Many* is therefore a contribution to the field of dance writing, in hope of offering non-dancers an aesthetic experience of the way dancing together makes a unique kind of sense, as well as searching for new ways that writing may support, relate to, and emerge from dancing.

The process of creating this story has been a literal enactment of the word choreography, as *khoreia* refers to the chorus, the ensemble dancing together, and *graphia* refers both to the writing as the invariable structure that coordinates the collective movement and the mark-making or trace left behind. In this process, groups have assembled around the project of translating their shared dance experiences into writing. In a series of workshops we devised various procedures of going from dancing to writing, sometimes passing through oral speech, sometimes writing during dancing, sometimes after dancing, in search of ways to capture and convey the felt sense of dancing together. The architecture and contents of *Nora the Many* have been generated in collaborative conditions of dancing together and writing together, lead by myself in primary collaboration with the members of Nora, a London-based dance collective consisting of Eleanor Sikorski, Flora Wellesley Wesley, and Stephanie McMann. In 2019, Nora invited me to work with them as a guest choreographer. In the midst of my PhD research, I situated our collaboration at the center of it. Working in person for two weeks in August 2019, we combined methods of dancing-writing that I had developed thus far in my research with procedures from *The Pop-Up Remote Playwriting Workshop*, published online by Karinne Keithley Syers in July 2019 in the frame of her Pelagic School series. We followed Karinne's somatic approach to writing warm-ups and prompts for scene and character writing, borrowing and departing from the structure of her workshop to set us in motion towards narrative imagining. We continued meeting online intermittently throughout 2020 and 2021, together confabulating the map of places and character relations in which this story unfolds, along with collectively narrating key plot points and individually further developing specific scenes. I also held two group workshops in Stockholm under the umbrella title of

Coven Press, using this alias which had come from the writing with Nora in August 2019 to offer the dancing-writing research group I'd gathered for my research a fictional horizon to parallel and scaffold our real-life collaboration. I conducted the first series of Coven Press meetings in person in October 2019, culminating in a performance and publication in November 2019.⁷ Descriptions of one's body as an environment affected by various experiences of dancing together, collectively-authored character descriptions derived from many people watching one person dancing, methods of collective storytelling and collaborative editing were among the procedures explored by Coven Press in 2019 with the participation of Kai Evans, Alice MacKenzie, Stina Nyberg, Tilman O'Donnell, Halla Ólafsdóttir, Zoë Poluch, Adam Seid Tahir, Alexander Talts, Juliette Uzor and myself. I conducted a second series of Coven Press meetings online in the Summer and Fall of 2020, culminating in a performance and publication in October of 2020.⁸ Working online in 2020, Coven Press continued with dancing-writing warmups and a collective storytelling process called "re-mything," developed by dancer and performer Eva Mohn. The Coven Press members working together online in 2020 were Season Butler, Alice MacKenzie, Stephanie McMann, Peter Mills, Stina Nyberg, Tilman O'Donnell, Zoë Poluch, Adam Seid Tahir, Eleanor Sikorski, Alexander Talts, Flora Wellesley Wesley, and myself. After continued workshoping of the overall cosmology and logic of the story with Nora in the winter of 2020-2021, I worked on my own to assemble and edit the writings and concepts developed with Nora and Coven Press into the unified entity entitled *Nora the Many*.

BACKGROUND

I have long considered dance-thought to be nonlinear in its logic, for example in the way that memory and anticipation conflate in the act of executing a single dance movement, or the way that moving can conjure images and associations that don't have any sequential relation to each other outside of the ordering of dance movements that call those images to mind. Because of this, poetry had captured my attention early on in my artistic research project, for its potential to create ruptures in linear time through gestures of grammar, syntax, imagery, rhythm, rhyme and word placement on the page.

Poetry historically and to this day also straddles the oral and written word, which to me is useful as a reflection of the paradoxes that choreography proposes in its emphasis on formal permanence in the ongoingness of the live, body-to-body, and reiterative process of dancing a dance. The negotiation of orality and literacy is evidenced in poems that retain traces of oral language patterns such as musicality and embellished description or mnemonic devices like rhyme and alliteration in combination with technological effects of writing such as condensation of expression, punctuation, line breaks, and the articulated breakdown of a vibratory stream of

⁷ *A lot of moving parts VI*. 2 November 2019. Helsinki: STOA, Moving in November festival. The audience of the live performance also received printed copies of our self-published zine, *News from the Proto-Space*.

⁸ *A lot of moving parts VII*, 1-3 October 2020. Stockholm: Dansenshus. The audience of the live performance also received printed copies of our self-published zine, *The Remything Edition*.

sound into phonemes and characters by alphabetization. In *Eros the bittersweet*⁹ Anne Carson writes about the edges formed by writing – from consonants and phonemes to the distances in space and time between writers and readers – as erogenous zones where the sensuality of tactility and longing are ignited. Offering a very different read on these same phenomena of linguistic mark-making, Walter Ong¹⁰ describes the relations between oral speech and written word as one in which analysis and distanced reflection are the main characteristics of thought conditioned by writing. Under the influence of Audre Lorde's *Poetry Is Not a Luxury*,¹¹ Hélène Cixous' *Le Rire de la Méduse*,¹² and Clarice Lispector's *Água Viva*¹³, I became interested in forms of writing that surge with the urgency of expressing embodied experience, forging necessary exceptions to rules of grammar and punctuation in order to pull written language closer to the sensuous bodies of the writers writing it. In these writers' work yet another space for language emerges: that of the flesh, which includes the vibrations of speech and the actions of writing, yet feels and imagines itself into being in a kind of writing that retains the vivacity of writing as a practice deeply connected to living in a body.

With all of the above in mind, with *choreo | graphy* I focused on the poetics of dance and choreography as a kind of parallel to oral and written language, thinking about the “orality” of dancing in tension with the “writing” of choreography. Alone and with others I practiced dancing with attention to the way language arises, drops out, sticks to the edges of experiences, gets pushed away, and demands new grammar, syntax, or vocabulary. Working with the notion of reduction or editing in choreographic writing rather than expecting language to capture every fleeting experience, I was interested in how poetic efficiency and precision in choreographic language may support both the complexity of dancing and the interpretive role of the dancer. I asked myself “what kind of less is more?” as I considered what forms of writing offer themselves to scoring. Working with the idea of containership and crafting containers in which dancing may thrive, I collected various poetic instructions and scores from dancing-writing in this first period of research from 2017–2019. Those scores constituted the continually evolving choreography of my five solo performances of *A lot of moving parts*.¹⁴ Meanwhile, there was the ongoing production of experience through dancing and the ongoing documentation of that practice in writing. To reflect the negotiation

⁹ Carson, Anne. 1986. *Eros the bittersweet*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰ Ong, Walter. 1982. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen.

¹¹ Originally published in 1977 in *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Women's Culture*. Los Angeles. Included also in: Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press.

¹² Cixous, Hélène; Cohen, Keith; Cohen, Paula. [1975] 1976. *The Laugh of the Medusa*. The University of Chicago Press.

¹³ Lispector, Clarice; Lowe, Elizabeth; Fitz, Earl. [1973] 1989. *Stream of Life*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁴ I: 20–21 September 2018. Paris: Lafayette Anticipations – Fondation d'entreprise Galeries Lafayette in the frame of Échelle Humaine in Festival D'Automne à Paris. Live music by WATT clarinet ensemble: Julien Pontvianne, Antonin-Tri Hoang, Jean-Brice Godet, Jean Dousteyssier. Lighting by Jonatan Winbo. II: 11–13 October 2018. New York: Danspace Project at St Mark's Church. Recorded music by WATT clarinet ensemble (see above). Lighting by Carole Mullins. III: 11–12 Jan 2019. Brussels: Kaaitheaterstudios. Music by Eleanor Bauer. Lighting by Jonatan Winbo. IV: 31 March 2019. Bennington: Martha Hill Theater at Bennington College. V: 15–17 May 2019. Stockholm: Dansens Hus. Music by Eleanor Bauer. Lighting design by Jonatan Winbo. Costume and set for all created in collaboration with Sofie Durnez.

between excess and minimalism, between dancing which is always generating new sensations or meanings and choreography which necessarily must extract or define an invariable to be able to distinguish the identity of one particular dance from another, I made two videos: *Polyphonic Flood/Erasure*¹⁵ and *Harmonica Vocoder Interpretation Lecture*.¹⁶ In these videos, created for different versions of *A lot of moving parts* and both included in the fifth iteration, I explore the tension between what is languageable and what escapes being named, between the spill of meanings produced in continual motion and the simplification or reduction of what is considered the choreography.

While the presence of others was very much felt in my own dancing and thinking about dance, and although I had created two group works within the research thus far (*OUROBORACULAR* in 2017 with the Bachelors in Dance at Stockholm University of the Arts, and *NEAR* in 2018 with Cullberg), throughout these first two years of artistic research, my studio practice consisted mostly of solo work and exchanges with one other practitioner at a time. I had recorded a number of interviews with fellow dance practitioners in 2018, a selection of which were edited and released as a podcast entitled *How Dance Thinks*.¹⁷ The written outcomes of my research project thus far were in the form of poems, scores for dancing, transcribed dialogue, and a few essays. A selection of these writings were published under the title *A lot of moving parts*¹⁸ in two small booklets offered at the live performances of my eponymous solo choreographic practice. I explored hybrid forms like footnoted poems, cited dance scores, and anecdote-essays in an effort to reflect the oral histories, body-to-body lineages, and collective conditions in which dance knowledge lives. I was interested in how a doctoral artistic research project, though officially authored by an individual, could borrow the practice of citation from academia to counter the relative lack of attribution of influence that is conventional in the professionalized art field where originality is a maker and marker of value. I was eager to underline the social dimension of *khoreia* (dancing together) in a form of *graphia* (writing). Since the *chorus* in *khoreia* of bodies moving together is a constitutive element of dancing itself as a transindividual expression, something *between* people, learned and developed primarily by mimesis, I shifted my focus in the second half of my PhD research towards procedures of writing that emphasize collective authorship.

In my research process I had arrived at the conjecture that one aspect which distinguishes dancing-thought from other media of thought is the necessary calibration of sensation, imagination, and observation called upon in the act of dancing. In the case of learning or creating a particular dance or choreography, a dancer must use sensation, imagination, and observation to accurately render that dance recognizable for and with others. In addition, when performing or

¹⁵ Bauer, Eleanor. 2018-2019. *Polyphonic Flood/Erasure*. YouTube.

¹⁶ Bauer, Eleanor. 2018-2019. *Harmonica Vocoder Interpretation Lecture*. YouTube.

¹⁷ Published by Stockholm University of the Arts, Department of Dance: <https://www.uniarts.se/english/about-uniarts/department-of-dance/how-dance-thinks>

¹⁸ Bauer, Eleanor. 2018. *A lot of moving parts: book 1 and book 2*. Paris: Fondation d'entreprise Galeries Lafayette.

improvising, the act of dancing spontaneously gives rise to novel coordinations of sensation, imagination, and observation, which I wanted to bring into writing to emphasize the “world-making” potentials of dancing. Considering what genres and forms of writing may best reflect this particular aspect of dance-thought, it occurred to me that science fiction or magical realism may be appropriate, as modes of writing that coordinate the imagined and the real, or in the words of Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Unreal and the Real.”¹⁹ Because speculative fiction combines the observation of what is considered real with imagination of what could be, and renders that projection sensible for a reader, I turned to such genres of worlding in writing for structural representation²⁰ of dance-thought, looking for a way to bring the dancery trifecta of imagination-sensation-observation into writing. From the start of my work with Nora in August of 2019 and onwards, my artistic research evolved through a consistent endeavor to work on the collaborative authorship of speculative fiction in processes that move from dancing to writing.

As a choreographer generally interested in the collective authorship of dance, I have long been curious about how intuition can be shared. In a romantic or individualistic conception of authorship, intuition may be considered an interior mystery or an inexplicable and private affair. I have experienced, however, that in dancing together, there is a common substance of thought and invention that is fundamentally transindividual. It's proto-linguistic, acts before recognition, is ignited between bodies in motion through aesthetic sensibilities of touch, kinetics, rhythm, form, mimesis, and anticipation. It relies on the co-presence of sentient bodies paying attention to one another in movement. Like individual experiences of intuition, this shared sensing-thinking is something other than instinct, impulse, or conscious reasoning. It can appear in relation to defined systems like choreographies, be considered a technical skill in improvisation practices, and it is a currency of relation that can come or go and be forgotten or attuned. From Bergson²¹ to Bateson,²² from Jung²³ to Buttingsrud,²⁴ and from Cvejic²⁵ to Bruneau,²⁶ theories and definitions abound on what intuition is, both in and out of creative contexts. It is often defined as an individual intelligence's experience in relation to its environment rather than as a social phenomenon.

¹⁹ Le Guin, Ursula K. 2016. *The Unreal and the Real*. New York: Saga Press.

²⁰ Swoyer, Chris. 1991. *Structural representation and surrogate reasoning*. *Synthese* 87 (3):449–508.

²¹ Bergson, Henri; Andison, Mabelle L. [1934] 1946. *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*. New York: Wisdom Library.

²² Bateson, Gregory. 1979. *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. New York: Dutton.

²³ Jung, Carl Gustav and Kirsch, James; Lammers, Ann Conrad and Egli, Ursula. 2011. *The Jung-Kirsch Letters: The Correspondence of C.G. Jung and James Kirsch*. Abingdon: Routledge.

²⁴ Buttingsrud, Camille. 2015. *A Phenomenological Appreciation of Dancers' Embodied Self-Consciousness*. 12th NOFOD Conference: 1–3.

²⁵ During my education at P.A.R.T.S. (Performing Arts Research and Training Studios, Brussels) from 2004–2006, at some point in a theory class, Bojana Cvejic said “intuition is the fastest assimilation of everything you already know.”

²⁶ During *Enchanting Scores*, a four-days event organized by Sarma in collaboration with choreographer and visual artist Julien Bruneau, a salon at Kaaistudio's in Brussels took place on November 18, 2013, in which philosopher Isabelle Stengers, anthropologist Arnaud Halloy and Julien Bruneau set up a conversation on trance and relational practices between magic, science and the arts. During this talk, which I attended, I remember Julien Bruneau saying something to the effect of “intuition is the slow emergence of a thought that is unfamiliar and yet absolutely correct, like feeling at home in a city you've never visited before.” In comparison with Cvejic's above definition, I became interested in these differing experiences of velocity in intuition.

As a choreographer seeking to question the dynamics of authority and authorship that are often assumed in the role of the choreographer, I have been exploring how intuition can be an observably shared experience, in order to place it explicitly among and between the subjects of a collaboration.

Intuition matters – it is a kind of material in dancing as we shape, share, and direct attention. Furthermore, it is often connected to authority: the weight given to one's intuition is an indicator of how much power they have in the room, and the more validity granted one's intuition, the more likely they are to be considered an author. In art-making, permission to act intuitively is strongly linked to authorship. When a compositional or creative choice cannot be explained, it is often considered intuitive, which is justified as long as one is the author. Meanwhile dancers are using intuition all the time, connecting their perceptive skills to the patterns and relationships of the group, synthesizing and responding to the shared conditions of timing, spacing, and movement vocabulary to act in creative response to surrounding phenomena. For this reason, among others related to the embodied carriage of intellectual property, dance is far more collectively authored in all instances than the naming of a single choreographer as primary or sole creator may suggest.

Having practiced in roles of both choreographer and dancer professionally within a variety of methodologies, compositional regimes, and aesthetic cultures for creating dance performance over the last twenty years, I became interested in amplifying the largely underrecognized creative labor and authorship of dancers and performers. Chrysa Parkinson, head of the New Performative Practices Masters program at Stockholm University of the Arts and my secondary supervisor, has also dedicated years of research and publishing to creating a discourse around the authorship of dancers, focusing on the performer's perspective and documenting dance experience. Creating conditions for the sharing of authorship has been a hovering concern in all the group pieces I have created since *At Large* in 2007, and the importance of intuition in my questioning of the choreographer as single author came most explicitly in the trilogy *A Dance for the Newest Age (the triangle piece)* in 2011, *Tentative Assembly (the tent piece)* in 2012, and *Midday and Eternity (the time piece)* in 2013. In these works, I sought to demystify the role of intuition in the creation process in order to enable both more transparency and equal rights to opacity in the collaboration.

METHODOLOGY

With *Nora the Many*, my interest in collective authorship shifted from the choreographing of dances into my *choreo | graphy* research in which my search for forms of writing that may adequately express the thinking that happens when dancing increasingly emphasized the social and interpersonal nature of that thinking. Since each person's individual relationship to dance differs, as well as each person's individual use of language, an intuitive approach to translation from dancing to writing has been foundational to my methodology, in the Bergsonian sense of intuition as a kind of direct access to knowing by borderless immersion

in a thing. Establishing a base of confidence in each one's own dancing-writing literacy affording differences of style and technique, I proceeded with a series of attempts to affect one others' writing through dancing together as well as choreographing writing processes that structurally imitated dancing together, opening the typically solo act of writing to the interference and influence of others.

One practice of dancing-writing that I have worked with consistently throughout the research, usually as a warm-up for the calibration of dancing-thought and writing-thought is called *Open Dancing*, *Open Writing*. Activating intuition in both movement and language, *Open Dancing* consists of a guided attentive warmup aimed at attuning the senses toward non-separation. Opening the perceived borders of the self to confluence between inside and outside, detail and big-picture, body and environment, self and others, as well as confluence between the senses, once the scripted attentive warmup is complete or at any time that the desire to move arises, the basic rule for movement is "movement follows attention, attention follows movement," placing the thinking in the dancing. *Open Writing* is an invitation to bring this quality of modybind from *Open Dancing* into writing, either by writing at any point during dancing whence notable language-thought emerges, or in a timed session of writing after a timed session of dancing. After a session of *Open Writing*, the writing can be gleaned for score material to be translated back into dancing, providing choreographic fodder for generating specific dances. These scores can then be passed on to other dancers, and/or performed for others to be "read" and translated back into writing. Culling a prose score from *Open Writing* and performing it for a witness who does not know the score has also lead to the watcher deriving further danceable scores from observing and rewriting the dance, interpreting it back into another language score, as is the procedure for the *Derivative Score Daisy Chain*, an indefinite score-generating process I developed in my research in 2018.²⁷ Drifting from generic to specific, the toggle between dancing and writing has often been about teasing increasing precision out of the relation between movement and language, like the emergent nature of a choreography over time through practice.

In the first session of work with Nora,²⁸ we filmed a ten-minute session of *Open Dancing* together, which we then individually watched and "read" with recorded live-commentary, interpreting the dance for information about the fiction we were setting out to write together. Flora Wellesley Wesley read the group dance for emotions, Stephanie McMann read the dance for the relation of things and beings or characters and objects, Eleanor Sikorski read for citations and references, and I for narrative. In a similar process of interpretation, we also did a series of *Oracle Dances*,²⁹ a method of reading dance to answer questions. In the *Oracle Dance*, a

²⁷ Scores from studio practices of *Derivative Score Daisy Chain* have been included in versions of *A lot of moving parts*, as well as in *NEAR* which I created with Cullbergbaletten in 2018 as part of my research process. In *NEAR*, the procedure itself also appears in the choreography, as dancers read and write each other's dances within the live performance.

²⁸ 5–9 August 2019 at Chisenhale Dance, London. 12–16 August 2019 at DanceEast, Ipswich.

²⁹ The *Oracle Dance* is a procedure developed in the TTT sessions (Teachers Teaching Teachers) at ImPulsTanz in Vienna in 2014 with and by Jennifer Lacey, Alice Chauchat, Valentina Deisderi, Alix Eyunaudi, Keith Hennessey, Anne Juren, Mark Lorimer, Raimundas Malašauskas, Philippe Riéra and Mårten Spångberg.

question-holder articulates a question to an oracle-reader who watches a group of dancers (“the oracle”) and gives a running commentary of their dance as an answer to the question. The question holder may or may not watch the dance themselves. The oracle dancers do not hear the question or its interpreted answer. The score for the dancers performing as the oracle is “the oracle knows everything and is always right.” In this prescriptive certainty of an otherwise unspecified dance improvisation lies a recipe for shared intuition, and in the answering of a question lies an invitation to be unusually literal with the reading of a dance. The dance’s own complexity always exceeds its interpretation, and different readers will come up with different answers while reading the same dance as an answer to the same question. This score plays with both the legibility of movement and the absurdity of translation from dance to language, bringing forth the sense that any dance contains layers upon layers of information to be interpreted, extracted, understood, caught, or missed. With Nora, we used the *Oracle Dance* to answer questions about our shared project such as, “What is the vibe/color palette of the first scene?”, “Is there any historical reality referenced in the story?” and “What is the relationship between characters and casting, in terms of overlap, multiplicity, and relations of actors to characters?”

With Nora we also devised a method of speaking while moving and being moved called *Manual Lucidity*. In *Manual Lucidity*, one physically receptive person is receiving touch and movement from an active person who is providing the receiver with tactile-kinetic experience. With eyes closed, the receiving dancer may use more or less muscle tension to follow, complete, or resist the impulses received from the mover. The mover’s touch may be delicate or firm, the movements large or small. The active mover is encouraged to involve more than just their hands in providing movement and sensorial experience for the receiving dancer, and to think of “listening touch” and curiosity towards what the receiving body can do, avoiding overt manipulation. This is the “manual” half of *Manual Lucidity*. The person being moved with their eyes closed then attempts with as little filter as possible to verbalize all of the images and impressions that arise from the touch and movement. This is the “lucid” half of *Manual Lucidity*. We filmed/recorded and transcribed these sessions. Later in the process when we had developed some characters, we used *Manual Lucidity* as an interview process to learn more about particular characters, adding a third person outside of the duet interviewing the person being moved.

We also practiced a dancing score called *Dancing, not the Dancer* which I have been working with since 2013, in which the three simultaneous rules to negotiate are “Say yes to the movement before you can recognize it,” “Complete it with your everything,” and “You are the observer.” The writing score we practiced after *Dancing, not the Dancer* comes from dancer Kai Evans, and is called *Three Images for Now*. Evans developed *Three Images for Now* after a workshop with Billie Hanne and shared it with me in a *Nobody’s Dance*³⁰ practice exchange in

³⁰ Nobody’s Dance (the dance-specific part of Nobody’s Business) is an open-source format for exchange of practices developed by Ellen Söderhult, Alice Chauchat, and myself in 2015.

Berlin in March 2018. The instructions of *Three Images for Now* are to write three images in a row, each formed as a single sentence without the words “I” or “me.” The aim is to let the writing precede visual imagination, so that the image completes itself in language-thought. As a writing-equivalent to *Dancing, not the Dancer* in which the observing mind takes a back seat to the dancing, the imagining mind takes a back seat to the writing in *Three Images for Now*. The speed of completing a movement before you can recognize or plan it in *Dancing, not the Dancer* is also similar to writing an image before you “see” it, so I consider *Three Images for Now* as a form of “Writing, not the Writer.”

In addition to the above dancing-writing procedures, Nora and I also set out on following *The Pop-Up Remote Playwriting Workshop* published by Karinne Keithley Syers in July 2019 in her Pelagic School series of online writing workshops with emailed instructions. Karinne Keithley Syers is a dancer, musician, and playwright who has developed a number of writing procedures in various formats and durations that call upon her dance and choreography training by combining ideokinesis, experiential anatomy, somatics and dance composition with writing practices and techniques that challenge and propel the conventions of narrative writing. Exercises such as “Site, Figure, Process”³¹ and “Image Fringe,” in the case of the 5-day workshop we followed, postpone the need to know the narrative logic or telos of the work before writing. Karinne’s approach fosters the development of vivid images, scenes, and characters that find order and relationship through various compositional assignments such as writing a “Musical draft” focusing on sound, an “Architectonic draft” following a spatial logic, and a “Textile draft” based on the idea of weaving the two together. In this way, her playwriting methods echo a choreographic approach to structure and dramaturgy by considering the ordering of materials a dynamic process explored through different logics of relation. Spinning off of Keithley Syers’ prompts and general philosophy, combined with the aforementioned practices, we generated the bulk of our characters and several informative scenes in those first two weeks of work in August 2019.

As Keithley Syers’ writing prompts drew on ideokinesis, or the linking of imagination and movement, I observed a way of writing coming through which reflected another specificity of dance-thought which I had been circling around in my research, which is an extreme elasticity of scale, verging on the surreal. In one’s imaging of one’s own body as well as the sharp and sudden shifts in perspective that arise in dancing, a radical elasticity of scale is experienced. As in Keithley Syers’ “Site, Figure, Process,” individual body parts or anatomical features can feel like enormous geological structures (canyons, oceans, suspension bridges), and from detail to big picture, a dancer may be aware of their pinky’s positioning, the energy resonating to the back row of the theater, and the exact distance between themselves and another dancer simultaneously or in rapid succession. The aforementioned nonlinearity of

³¹ *Site, Figure, Process* is an audio guided somatic visualisation and writing exercise by Karinne Keithley Syers, in which impressions of one’s own bodily forms are equated with natural or artificial formations with a similar shape, and then imagined as places for characters to inhabit.

thought which I had identified as a constituent of dance's poetics hinges on an awareness of space that is multidirectional, agile, and operates on a range of detail and expanse that I believe is heightened in modys trained in proprioception and movement in groups. Many accounts of athletes' experience describe a similar spatial awareness that includes extreme anatomical detail and reach over great distances. What is particular to dance is that this scalable attention operates within an aesthetic regime, increasing the awareness of image and imagination in the rendering of form and meaning in movement. These reflections informed the decision to place the setting of *Nora the Many* on and in a body.

One feature of the fictional world we had begun to construct with Nora was a science fiction publishing collective whose name was Coven Press. So when I reached my second phase of group work in October 2019, for which I had invited Kai Evans, Alice MacKenzie, Stina Nyberg, Adam Seid Tahir, Alexander Talts, Juliette Uzor, Halla Ólafsdóttir, Tilman O'Donnell, and Zoë Poluch to join me for three weeks of studio time on my *choreo | graphy* research project, I proposed that we call ourselves Coven Press and work together on collective authorship of science fiction from translations of shared danced experience, with a particular focus on the scalability of embodied imagination. I thought if Nora and I were mainly concerned with constructing characters and story, perhaps Coven Press could be primarily concerned with environments and locations.

Thinking about the ideokinetic conflation of imagination and observation in a dancer's sense of their body, I proposed that we work on the construction of *spaces*. If a place is a location in an observed and shared reality (this studio, this city, this piece of land, this place in the room), and a space is an abstract imaginary or social construction (working space, domestic space, safe space, outer space, dream space, quiet space, green space), then the calibration of observation and imagination in the sense dancing makes, as a kind of world-making, could be called *space* making. I brought Chrysa Parkinson's 10-part *Art Practice as Ecosystem Questionnaire* which I had first done in 2008 into the process, namely for the first question and last two prompts: "What senses do you use the most?" (...) "Describe the environment your senses create" and "Describe what imagined form the senses you use would make of you (how you would look if your senses were to determine your form)."

We performed *Manual Lucidity* with two people moving one person who described their body as a *space* influenced by the movement and touch of the others. In various tasks including *Manual Lucidity* we worked with a scribe who would type what the mover was saying, and the mover would write the memory of what they said and felt afterward, exploring the perspectives and morphologies of an account in its transition from the oral to written.

A defining facet of and reason for dancing which is augmented when dancing together is pleasure. In a series of interviews I did in 2008 for the *At Large* publication (a collectively edited transcript of fifty anonymous self-interviews resulting in a

polyphonic soliloquy on dance), the first of six questions I asked fifty diverse dance practitioners to answer was “Why do you dance?” Much to my surprise, all but one answered something about pleasure. As a young dancemaker educated in a highly formalist lineage of dance techniques and compositional choreographic methods, the joy it brings was rarely named or nurtured as a means or purpose of dancing. Those interviews in 2008 galvanized a turn towards pleasure in my practice. I have been working since then with a number of scores that affirm and augment pleasure in movement as mode of and reason for moving together. From the *Pleasure Quest* score in *At Large* (2008) to *Pleasure Relay* in *Tentative Assembly (the tent piece)* (2012) to *Joy of Dance Circuit Training* in my teaching of dance classes (2019 onwards), I have been working with pleasure as a skill one can develop and transfer in dancing. In the interest of collective dance experiences conditioning collective writing experiments, one of the procedures for writing we endeavored with Coven Press consisted of dancing together for 20–30 minutes with and without music in open-ended pursuit of pleasure in movement. On an open-source dance floor using the others for inspiration and support, one may be carried by the pleasure of unison, diverge from unison in the development of a movement to increase the joy it brings, or spontaneously introduce new or known movements. All senses and sensibilities are mobilized towards the augmentation of kinetic pleasure: tension, release, breath, bounce, swing, momentum, musicality, emotive tenor, humor, and style. After this dancing, and sometimes jotting notes during, we’d write descriptions of our own bodies as environments, scanning with our senses to name the precise qualities and sensations that arose, rendering a geographic and atmospheric ecosystem with no fixed scale to its map. Eventually this dancing-writing procedure was named *Pleased Space*.

From each others’ *Open Dancing, Open Writing*, we culled scores to dance as solos for the whole group, without revealing the score itself. Writing simultaneously in the same Google doc, the observing group would read the performed solo as a biography. Through collective simultaneous editing afterward, we worked the writing into Coven Press *Staff Biographies*, giving each of us an alias, background, and role at the press, generated by the descriptive interpretation of our danced solos. These biographies were included in our *News From the Proto Space* publication, presenting our aliases as the authors of the publication.

At some moment during our work together, when the word “science fiction” was being used to describe the kind of writing we were doing together, the point was raised by Zoë Poluch that science fiction is a misnomer because what we do is neither science nor fiction. It’s documentation of real lived aesthetic experience. So we settled on a new name for the genre of writing we were developing: *Sensual Journalism*.

In addition to *Open Dancing, Open Writing* and *Dancing, not the Dancer + Three Images for Now*, we explored other scores for writing that structurally mirrored the scores for dancing. After dancing “predictive duets” motored by the anticipation and completion of the other person’s movement, where the point is

not to be in unison with the other but ahead of the other, we would then write “predictive texts” seated side by side to be able to read each other’s writing and write our own texts as a completion of our partner’s phrases, always glancing at and departing from the last thing the other person had written. The insistence on anticipation necessitated a speed of action which triggered fragments of habitual patterning in both movement and language to emerge with glitch-like arbitration from a single impulse or word, creating both dances and texts of familiar bytes spilling forth in a bizarre and disjunct order.

In the last week of our three weeks together, we turned our attention to collective editing processes. Going through everyone’s dancing-writing from the previous two weeks, together we combed the texts to pull out language that lent itself to dancing for the writing of scores to use in our forthcoming performance, language that lent itself to being read aloud also for use in our forthcoming live performance, and language that lent itself to reading for the publishing of a “fake newspaper” for our forthcoming publication. The three categories honored the media-specificity of choreographic, oral, and written language. For three days after that, we split into three groups working together on editing and composing the scores for the performance, the text of the performance, and the publication. One could change editing groups from day to day, and the groups were formed by self-appointment.

A noteworthy hinge in my thinking about choreography came in October of 2019 after the three weeks with Coven Press. Performance studies scholar André Lepecki and I had been invited to moderate and lead the concluding discussion of the three-day *POST-DANCE-ING* conference held at MDT in Stockholm,³² over the course of which many important issues, challenges, and questions had been raised about the dominant whiteness of institutional contemporary dance in Europe and Scandinavia. At some point in our discussion we were circling around the post-colonial and de-colonial sentiment that what we are grappling with is a cosmological crisis of capitalist modernity and post-modernity in which the apparent givens of the world and its constituting forces are inescapable insofar as we are unable to recognize or imagine organizing forces and power otherwise. In the same conference, Reggie Wilson had spoken about having learned in composition class with Phyllis Lamhut that the three foundational and interdependent elements of dance making are time, space, and movement. He then personified “the three sisters of modern dance” as Grace Jones for time, Naomi Campbell for space, and Tina Turner for movement. André suggested that instead of the modern dance tenet that the building blocks of dancemaking are time, space, and movement, one could rather assume the foundational elements of dance as rhythm, joy, and community. This resonated with the sensual and social aspects of dance that I had been underlining in my work thus far and supported

³² POST-DANCE-ING conference, 23–25 October 2019, MDT Stockholm. Produced by MDT, Cullberg, Danscentrum and DOCH. Participants: Rebecca Vinthagen, Reggie Wilson, Jeanine Durning, Eva Mohn, Josefine Wikström, Erdem Gündüz, Konstantina Georgelou, Karina Sarkisova, Eva Meyer-Keller, Mette Edvardsen, Malik Nashad Sharpe, Tamara Alegre, Ilse Ghekiere, Julia Giertz, Halla Ólafsdóttir, Alice Chauchat, Agnes Quackels, Rickard Borgström, André Lepecki & Eleanor Bauer.

an even more decisive shift towards them in my practice as a choreographer, student, teacher, and participant of dance.

With an increased emphasis on the sociality of dancing together came more serious study of socially driven forms of dancing. In the Summer and Fall of 2020 I delved into workshops and classes in Afrological and Afrodiasporic dance forms as they have evolved in Hip-Hop, House, Dancehall and Afro-fusion,³³ where the rhythmic retention of a dance carries traces of its historical lineage and the active participation of each dancer is an explicit part of the dance form's evolution and constitution at each instance. In the second group version of *A lot of moving parts*, I explored intersections between the conditioning ethos and structures of dancing together as I had come to understand them in the conditions of a cypher, for example, with the choreographic scoring of dance improvisation that I had been educated in and practiced thus far following more Eurological and North American Post-Modern conceptions of dance and choreography. The casting of this performance also brought together the Stockholm-based Coven Press members and a handful of Stockholm-based dancers, some of whom I had met through aforementioned workshops,³⁴ culminating in an exchange of skills and a deliberate diversification of interpretations of the choreography, as well as an opportunity to apply my interest in concise and simple scoring that affords complex interactions to unfold in performance. With a relatively short rehearsal period, the tendency for dancers to drift to a common physical vocabulary through mimesis and consensus was disabled, making the differences of skills and interpretation a constitutive ingredient in the desired aims of polyphony and polyrhythm in this performance.

In 2020, I also established the Coven Press *Covidian Compostitional Writing Sessions*, taking place on Zoom every second Wednesday from the 6th of May to the 1st of July for two hours. Seeking anchorage in a moment of uncertainty, our meetings quickly took a recurring format: introducing ourselves in terms of where we are in *splace* (geographic place plus felt or imagined space), an *Open Dancing*, *Open Writing* warmup written directly into the chat window, "scribing" each other (a form of note taking based on transcribing strange and poetic things said during the introduction or meeting into the chat window), and a session of *Remything*.

³³ In the following order: *Book of Cipa* workshop at Årsta Folketshus, Stockholm in July 2020 organized and lead by Cipa64 (Niki "Awandee" Tsappos, Frederika Burvall, Andreas Sanchez, Nils Theren, Stina Theren, and Omar Velasques Rojas) included intensives in Hip-Hop, House, battling, improvisation, and anti-racism; *BLM Dance Camp* at Fryshuset Stockholm in July 2020 organised by Robin Sabazade and Diana ledan included intensives in Afro-Fusion, Choreography, Dancehall, Hip-Hop, House, and Vogue-Femme taught by Maele Cheza, Diana ledan, Louise Kalmén, Moves2 (Ingrid Corradini, Robin Sabazade, David Schwieler, Hugo Sivermalm), Adrian Prodigy, Amelis Riquelme, Cynthia Toledo, Ambra Unruly, Newel Unruly, and Felicia Unruly; Afrofusion and Dancehall classes in Summer and Fall 2020 with Amelis Riquelme; weekly classes in the Fall of 2020 with Niki "Awandee" Tsappos (Awandee Flow); and occasional classes in Fall 2020 with Nils Theren (Hip-Hop), Andreas Sanchez (House), and Jo-L Shikamaru (House).

³⁴ *A lot of moving parts VII*, 1–3 October 2020, Dansenshus, Stockholm. Performed by Eleanor Bauer, Ingrid Corradini, Sunniva Vikør Egenes, Marvil Iglesias, Alice MacKenzie, Peter Mills, Eva Mohn, Tilman O'Donnell, Zoë Poluch, Amelis Riquelme Nicoletti, Robin Sabazade, David Schwieler, Hugo Sivermalm, Ellen Söderhult, Adam Seid Tahir, Alexander Talts. Live percussion by Robert Mehmet Ikiz. Lighting by Jonatan Winbo.

Remything is a method of oral collective storytelling and written transcription developed by dancer and performer Eva Mohn, in which two or more people choose an existing phenomenon or common matter of concern to “remyth,” which involves reimagining how it came to be. Taking turns speaking one or a few words at a time in a predetermined order for several rounds, the group creates a new myth to explain the chosen thing’s emergence. Once someone in the group deems the story complete, each participant writes on their own what they understood the confabulated story to be. The written stories include individual variance due to different memories, holdings, projections, biases, liberties, and forgettings in the process of listening to and spinning a common tale. Eva Mohn’s *Remything* procedure also includes recording and transcription of the oral tale-building process. Mohn devised this process as a way of transferring the forms of shared authorship she’d experienced in dance improvisation into language, at a time when due to Covid-19 dancing together was impossible. Gathering around a temporary imaginary commons, each individual’s ideas and desires push and pull at a continually evolving redefinition of what that commons exactly is, defined by the sum of individual gestures looking for their place. Preserving the difference between the oral and written, the writing is not the common itself but rather a trace of the pluralist multitude that formed it. On the 3rd of May 2020, I had the privilege of being Eva Mohn’s co-pilot for a test drive of her newly devised *Remything* procedure, after which, with her permission, I introduced *Remything* to Coven Press at the first of our bi-weekly *Covidian Compostitional Writing Sessions*. In September of 2020, after a summer of *Remything*, Coven Press regrouped online to gather the writings for inclusion in our self-published *Remything Edition* which we gave to the audience members of *A lot of moving parts VII*. The *Open-Dancing, Open-Writing* we’d done that summer was recorded as a surrealist and non sequitur group conversation for inclusion in the live performances of *A lot of moving parts VII*.

Continuing online with Nora from November 2020 to February 2021, we created a character map, a three-tiered geography of realms in which the characters exist, and practiced *Remything* to flesh out what we considered key plot points or crucial background information. From mid February until August 2021, I was handed the responsibility as choreographer to finalize a composition for the accumulated writing. I found myself thinking about the structure much like I do when I choreograph: even if the materials can move around and inform the big picture, and even if the Keithley Syers’ influence encourages postponement of knowing the final form, I need to think I know the overall organizing principle in order to focus on specific aspects, and I will edit or nuance a scene according to where I think it belongs in the whole. The relation between micro and macro remains bi-directional and dynamic, as certain sections fit together creating larger chunks that become hard to separate, and shimmering details indicate direction or suggest relationship to other parts. Less about dramatic tension or narrative consequence, final composition is about knowing the whole world at once and figuring out how to construct a guided tour of it, as a way of creating meaning with a reader or audience. In *Reading the Writing: A Conversation with Toni Morrison*

held on March 7, 2013 at Cornell University, Toni Morrison in conversation with Claudia Brodsky said:

I thought I coined a phrase – which I didn't, apparently – called invisible ink. And it was writing a novel in such a way that the reader gets taken in and works with the novel, that the reader and I create it together. And I do that by using this thing, or this technique, which you can forget as soon as I say it, called invisible ink, where the meaning is in the structure. The ending is always what I have to know before I start, because that's where it's going. That's where the meaning lies. I don't always know the middle. I have to know how to get there. But I know that it's in the way it is put together: what I withhold from the reader and what I dwell on at the same time.³⁵

Because of its ability to manipulate linear narrative time through editing and perspective, cinema has also been present from the start of my research as a potential alibi for rendering dance-thought translatable to a viewer. The multiple perspectives afforded by cameras, the freedom from linear time in cinematic storytelling, dynamics and rhythms of editing, the potential to blur reality and fiction, and the ability to create radical shifts in scale and speed, have occurred to me as means of depicting a mode of perception that a dancer may experience. Cinema has the potential of offering expression to the above aspects of subjective dance experience which I do not find necessarily attainable in live performance and especially theatrical proscenium-based concert dance, where the audience is held in a continuous “real-time” with the performers and the point of view of the spectator is typically static. In a text entitled *Plays* by Gertrude Stein,³⁶ Stein asserts that the performer and audience are always in “syncopated time” with one another in a play, with the audience always emotionally ahead of or behind the action onstage. She attributes this to the nature of conventional narrative drama wherein the tension of the story is a function of built expectations being met or not. While dance is not necessarily concerned with storytelling, I have observed similarly that the shared time and fixed frame of the typically representational theater apparatus can be obstacles to an audience's appreciation of the sense dance makes. The objective distance of the visual creates a kind of antipathy towards the logic of dance as a social and three-dimensional construct. *Nora the Many* has been intended from the start as a writing process ultimately reaching towards a movie, hoping that the shifts in scale, speed, time, and perspective afforded by cinema may contribute to the creation of experience for a viewer of what I believe are qualities of perception and cognition native to dance-thought.

At the date of this writing in August 2021, Nora is gathering in London to begin creating a filmed response to the below “literary draft” of *Nora the Many*. Due to the challenges and travel restrictions of Covid-19, our plans for shooting a film

³⁵ <https://www.cornell.edu/video/toni-morrison-on-language-evil-and-the-white-gaze>, 34:00

³⁶ Stein, Gertrude. [1935] 1985. *Lectures in America*. Boston: Beacon Press.

together in London and/or Stockholm were continually postponed, so I chose to dwell in the presence of what is possible at hand, which is writing. I consider this writing in relationship to readers, like composing a dance in relationship to viewers, so that the crafting of the language is always aware of the potential experience it is making accessible to another. Rereading, recomposing, and editing, I am in the text with a potential reader, not in the “syncopated” time of a kind of anticipatory writing which is not writing in itself but is rather defined by not-yet being performed. In this way, I have been able to work in a performative present tense over the past several months of finalizing this story, rather than writing towards a certain projected future of translation to film. This felt like a choreographer’s choice – working within the limitations of what is here now to build up something in an emergent way, out of continued practice, yet also embracing writing in a way that is native to writing-thought. Returning to the writing over a long period between and after sessions of group work, the composition of *Nora the Many* has become a continual practice, similar to the way that I aimed to emphasize the practice of choreographing in *A lot of moving parts* by holding the same title and altering the contents in each unique iteration.

Nora the Many is the final assemblage, composition, and editing of the writings developed over the last two years of my *choreo | graphy* research project. My effort herein has been to craft a body of text that feels and behaves like a body, specifically a body dancing a choreography: with multiple overlapping systems of relation organizing heterogeneous influences into a complex and dynamic coherence. The writing of others acts like organs, the skeletal-muscular structure has been collectively constructed, and my own writing is the fascia that connects it all, sometimes diving into details and wrapping a single word or sentence of another person’s writing into a larger passage of previously unrelated material, and sometimes acting as a unifying surface, giving the whole body a certain tone or style. Since a body is not one thing and because dancing is a social artform, polyphony is a central feature of this translation from dancing thought into writing thought: many authors have contributed to this process, in formats for writing and editing together, and the final composition attempts to maintain a sense of many voices within one narration. The *many* in *Nora the Many* points to the coexistence of many perspectives, realms, and senses in an orchestrated set of relations. The narrative structure and the world it depicts is an expression of the adventurous multitude that brought it to be.

Eleanor Bauer, August 2021

Prologue

Once upon time of unmitigated dreaming and unregulated economy was born a blindingly bright and stunningly beautiful young lady by the name of Cleo Murdoch, the seventh and final child of media mogul Rupert Murdoch and his fourth wife Jerry Hall. Their Lovely Lucky Cleo was conceived by artificial insemination of frozen egg and sperm and nurtured by surrogate gestation in the womb of Clementine, the third of Rupert's thirteen grandchildren who lent her uterus to the process in trade for generous compliments to her investment portfolio. Rupert and Jerry, respectively eighty-eight and sixty-three years of age at the time of Cleo's birth, were overjoyed to be parents just one last time and considered Cleo a testament to the strength of both modern medicine and their own perseverance. Lovely Lucky Cleo was lucky to inherit her mother's famous legs and energy to pack it all in (Jerry was presented with the Guinness World Record for completing the largest number of musical performances in a single night in February 2004, zipping between theaters in London's West End in a motorcycle brigade) and equally lucky to inherit none of her father's attributes except wealth. Between the fiscal provisions in Rupert's will and Jerry's 30 million-pound divorce settlement with former husband Mick Jagger bestowed entirely upon Cleo, all combined, Lovely Lucky Cleo's personal net worth at birth in August 2019 was enough to solidly secure the unburdened and purposeless futures of enough generations of offspring to survive the persisting virucene, escape the damages of a rapidly compounding climate crisis, participate in the colonization of the moon and probably Mars, and still leave a chunk of change to contribute to the aggressive gentrification of the next trending neighborhood on Neptune. And so, Cleo Murdoch, insatiably curious and with a mind like a steel trap, never worked a paying day in her life. She studied nearly everything: complexity theory, art history, literature, film, graphic design, performance studies, anatomy, astronomy, hermeneutics, agriculture, horticulture, and philosophy of science. She burned through the eight Ivy Leagues' course catalogues at breakneck speed, accruing enough loose credits in seven years of errant education for three PhD's and yet somehow completing a net total of zero official academic degrees. Addicted to learning and terrified of being pinned down, Cleo just didn't want to be identified by, with, or held accountable to any single profession, institution, or individual. She moved through people and places as quickly as academic subjects, eyes always on the horizon. After her whirlwind of studies she traveled the world dabbling in charity and volunteer work. In every harbor she had a lover, and a child by three. Fiercely intelligent with a tendency towards critique, however fiscally and theoretically supportive Cleo was of her children, she was not exactly a warm and nurturing mother. Her three daughters, each born three years apart from one another, were named Sephora, Candice, and Beatrice, respectively. They grew up mostly without their mother and entirely estranged from their unknown fathers, sticking closely to one another on a large

estate called Villa Nora which Cleo visited very occasionally as a varied team of highly skilled and well compensated tutors and domestic staff made sure the three sisters were educated, fed, and cleaned, in that order of priority. Eventually Cleo faded herself entirely out of the picture and Rupert, held together by miracles of nanobiomedicine and stubborn tenacity with regards to his genome, circled back around Villa Nora at the very end of his life to try to wrangle Cleo's girls into a lineage he could die happy to leave behind, meeting significant clashes of values and visions thereupon. In the following stories' unfolding, we shall discover the involuted pluriverse of the sisters Murdoch: Sephora, Candice, and Beatrice, three.

Prelude: Oracle Dance

SM: What is the vibe / atmosphere?

EB: Vibe is my specialty, I'm glad you ask.

SM: What's the vibe slash atmosphere slash color-palette for the first scene?

EB: Vibe, atmosphere, color palette, first scene. Okay, cool.

SM: (CLAP)

EB: A little bit subdued and reticent, it's about what's underneath the surface of things, but it moves quite quickly into something clear, defined, confident, angular. It's not ironic or anything, but there's humor to the seriousness of it. There's a lot of divine posing, or spooky fun with character that sets us up for 'anything could happen.'

There's a narrator/exposition thing that happens. A little bit light. And quick, you know, just, "here's what's going to happen, here are the characters, zmzmzmmzmzm," like a chatty, running low-down; a high-speed character summary at the front end.

There is a gathering where everything comes into focus and the color palette is sharp. The vibe is about taking stock and observing, opening doors for what's going to happen next. Peeking through windows like framing. A little bit of preparation, like we'll get to see the performers fixing their hair and clothes, we'll break the fiction for a second behind the scenes, the making of the magic: This is how it goes. Here are the mechanics, the machinery behind the illusion. So the sorcery is totally disillusioned from the beginning. We're not trying to pull a fast one on anybody. And then we slip through a portal/wormhole, and there's an immediate scene in a totally different reality. So it's kind of about jump cuts, I think, right off the bat. So the first scene is already scenes, plural.

We introduce one character, who's like, a worker. She's an operator of a telephone, like old school. And then another performer, one character who's – there's audience members or applause involved here, something about performance – Oh yeah, this telephone operator has fantasies of being a performer. So she kinda dozes off at work and imagines people applauding her work. And we have this dream sequence like a fantasy-self as a star performer, and she wakes up and goes back to work and she's like, "Nope, that's me." And it's a bit sad. It gets sad. So now we know what the worker story is, but in her fantasy parallel-self-dream, we go into that sadness, super deep. It becomes the whole mood of that mini-scene. Super emotional, dramatic. She becomes an opera singer. She channels all of that sadness into this amazing captivating performer that people come far and wide to see. She's magic, a sorceress of emotions. She can make the wind blow. The fantasy is enormous. She's that giant, that giant who drinks rivers and blows tornadoes. Immense, colossal. She has kind of a sense of self-humor about it though. These fantasies are effing great, 'cause they're so blown-out, they're hilarious and she knows it.

That's scene one. You guys, we have the first scene.

*SM: F***king epic, beautiful how much came out of that telephone.³⁷*

³⁷ Oracle dance by Flora Wellesley Wesley and Eleanor Sikorski, with Stephanie McMann asking the oracle and Eleanor Bauer reading the oracle dance for an answer to her question.

August

Tina Power is carrying a thought, letting it brew. It's not a voice, not in words, but it has a form, a rhythm. It shifts and changes throughout the day. Sometimes it fills her like a temperature, a cool intensity growing inside her. At other times it is nervously waiting on the other side of a door, distinct and close, but not yet tactile. When she's at work behind the bar at Cindy's, humming to herself before any customers arrive, it becomes clearer. With belly leaning against the sink, the edges of her thought come into focus.

The phone on the wall above the till rings.

"Hello, this is Cindy's."

"Tina! It's Lauden."

"Yes you can come early to set up."

"How are things?"

"Ticking along."

Lauden is embarrassed. She doesn't like being known. It makes her uncomfortable when people have answers before they know what she's going to ask, when the café staff know her lunch order, or when her friends give her old stuffy hardbacks from dusty book shops full of obscure forgotten female authors and say 'I saw this and thought of you because it's got *such* a cute leather cover,' or when Tina sets out everything for *Lauden's Laudibles* poetry and performance night before she even arrives, right down to the height of the mic stand. Lauden is searching for something new to say, something Tina won't know.

"...You OK?" Tina asks, breaking through the extended silence.

"Yes! I just want to say I think it's going to be great."

"Happy to hear that."

"I'm bringing a new performer tonight."

"OK, well everyone's welcome at Cindy's."

"Yeah, she's really great, her name is DIVINA, I haven't seen her perform before but she told me about her work, and she seems awesome, in a terrible but perfect kind of way. I usually don't trust what I haven't seen but I have a feeling she's the next big thing. She comes off kinda weird at first, not the usual weird, like an off-putting weird, but I think she's maybe kind of a genius? She refers to her reproductive anatomy as a collective for example, who makes all her work. It sounds pretentious when I say it, but when she says it, it's like, 'uuh, of course they do!' Plus, I think she'll draw a crowd, which is good for us, you know, maybe to get some new audience in."

"Glad you're excited. I've gotta get back to work, but see you later."

Tina leans against the bar and closes her eyes, glad to be left alone again and immediately back to work on this thought forming in her. Everything feels like an interruption now. She needs focus, or rather, she needs silence to unfocus. She floats back into the tangible haze, groping for its edges. Sometimes she feels this thought like her own skin, as seen from the inside. Patches and strips sewn together by her own hand and stretched over her, like a huge trembling quilt, pulled over the peak of her mountain nose and folded into her valley eyes. Her surface is the roof of a vast microcosm.

“What’s your calling?” asks Tworden. Tina hadn’t noticed when Tworden the Giant entered the haze. Maybe they’d been there all along.

“What do you mean by calling?” asks Tina.

“I mean what’s your dream?”

“I want to be able to follow the sun.”

“And get burned?”

Tina Power looks Tworden straight in the eye, where everything diffracts and gets lost. The evening sun coming in from the side and hitting Tworden’s eye illuminates their iris in full anatomical detail, flecks of stardust gathered like magnetic fuzz around the rim of a black hole. Something about Tworden the Giant brings her closer to that thought she can’t name, like they belong to one another. With a sense of shifting scale, it slides into place.

“It’s more a path than a destination. I want to move, constantly, across the globe. I want it to be permanently twilight. I want to be outside and travelling so fast that I’m always seeing the setting sun.”

“How does it feel to travel so fast?”

“It’s cold, but the sunsets are worth it.” Tina imagines.

A draft of air comes in from the front door. Tina looks up, emerging from her feeling-thinking tunnel, filled with a strange delight of her own making.

Tworden has entered the bar for real now, as if Tina had predicted or summoned them. It tends to happen like that. Imagination, sensation, observation:³⁸ hard to tell which comes first. Like *deja-vu* but more satisfying. Time folds like origami around Tworden, like ripples or echoes, the way spacetime bends around gravitational bodies. Tworden commands gravity. Like the amorphous and amalgamated bodily figures they draw, Tworden massages time into form with their enormous hands and circumnavigational gaze.

Same cadence, same stare, same microtones, same greeting as always, “Hello, Tina.”

“Hi Tworden.”

“I’ll make myself scarce.”

³⁸ Reference to three faculties whose calibration characterizes the specificity of *dance-thought* according to E.Bauer.

“Water no ice and a black tea?”

“Perfect.”

Tina turns to prepare both, as Tworden settles in with their oversized sketchbook.

“What were you day-dreaming about?” asks Tworden the Giant.

“I wasn’t dreaming, just thinking.”

“About what?”

“Mmmm, maybe whether people know when they’re about to die.”

“Who do you think is going to die?”

“We’re all dying of course, it’s just a matter of speed. I read somewhere that all mammals have roughly the same number of heartbeats in their life. A billion or something. So small mammals with fast heartbeats live shorter lives than big ones with slower hearts. From the rat to the cat to the human to the whale, there’s an almost linear progression of heart rate and body mass.³⁹ So tiny things live shorter lives because their hearts beat faster, and the giants live longer with their slow hearts. Not sure about variations in longevity correlating with heart rate increase in exercise versus stress for example. Point is, I just wonder if we could really understand when someone is going to die. Or is the feeling of it happening just so different from knowing in advance it will happen that it doesn’t matter if we know or not, like anything we see coming is different in our projected imagination than it is as an actual lived experience? Like do we have to experience something to really know it, in time?”

“I suppose I follow.”

“I think it’s about anticipation more than following. Or maybe presence.”⁴⁰

A few kilometers away from Cindy’s there is a small house with a pick-up truck parked out front. The truck is embossed with a logo in green and yellow: *Electric Alan – Service & Repair*. Inside there is a light on in the bedroom, where Electric Alan is reading *A Bronze Whale’s Tale* by Dr.Dance⁴¹ aloud to his son Elba, whose

³⁹ West, Geoffrey B. *Scale*. New York: Penguin Press, 2018.

⁴⁰ Scene expanded by Bauer from Sikorski’s initial scene writing guided by Keithley Syers workshop, 7 August 2019.

⁴¹ Next to dancing her whole life as a hobbyist, Dr. Dance is certified in the Montessori method, BMC (BodyMind Centering™), and Vipassana meditation. She held two PhDs, one as a General Practitioner in Medicine and one in Dance Pedagogy. Dr. Dance’s double-major doctoral thesis was entitled *Learning By Doing and Healing by Learning: Dancing through the School of Life* and was eventually published for general distribution by Coven Press under the title *Dancing through the School of Life*. She wrote a children’s book inspired by a Coven Press re-mything of the origin of the world (excerpted here) and hosted a reality TV show for consultations called “Dr. Dance,” both of which popularized her educational methods, leveraging her development of a lifelong method of education for ages 6 and up called *Learning By Doing* which includes an adapted version of the original Montessori school methodology for ages 2.5 and up, under the title *Absorbent Mind* in the Dr.Dance stages, which are as follows, conceived as an indefinitely repeatable or revisitable cycle of programs taking roughly 33 years to complete for the first time consecutively:

Absorbent Mind – for ages 2.5 and up

Yes, Complete, Observe – for ages 6 and up

Movement follows attention, Attention follows movement – for ages 12 and up

Open skin, Open ears, Open eyes, Open heart, Open mind – for ages 15 and up

Turn your fucking head – for ages 18 and up

head is propped in the nook of Alan's arm.

"This is a tale of speed and scale
 of bee and tree and snail and whale
 as told by myself, the nightingale.
 You'll hear the wails of Snail and Whale
 and see the forms of Bee and Tree,
 as much as they are part of me.
 But since I've not all the sounds
 and know not all of earth and sea
 you will understand that I
 have limited capacity,
 to wail like Whale or buzz like Bee
 or slip like Snail or ting like Tree
 so if it's of avail to the fable
 and if they are avail-able
 I'll have them tell you their own tales
 if I can get them to the table.
 But not all noise is understood
 as no ting can ever fully be
 'cause each of us has special ears
 and even I have a scribe, you see:
 a human who has tried to hear
 and rhyme for you what a nightingale sees.
 She writes down what she thinks I mean
 but even she, like all, mis-reads
 as we are all of different shapes

Include, don't control – for ages 24 and up
What you practice grows stronger – for ages 30 and up
And then what? – for ages 36 and up

Absorbent Mind is the concept from Maria Montessori characterizing the first six years of life as a foundation to all later more reflexive or analytic modes of learning. Until the age of six, the child naturally takes on their culture and environment in an intensified stage of development and learning by spontaneous assimilation. *Yes, Complete, Observe* is shorthand from Eleanor Bauer's *Dancing, not the Dancer* practice, from which Dr. Dance developed a high-speed educational method of self-motivated education, following instinct into activity demarcated as "complete" by topical delineation with observation and analysis of what was learned following only after completed sessions of research or creation. Insights gleaned in self-observation then drive modifications in topic or method for future self-constructed study cycles. *Movement follows attention, attention follows movement*, as quoted from Eleanor Bauer's *Open Dancing* practice, is the phase of learning focused on developing stamina in concentration and sustainability of practice by way of emphasizing continuity and flow in the development of mody and bind as one integrated learning apparatus. *Open skin/ears/eyes/heart/mind*, also from Eleanor Bauer's *Open Dancing* practice, emphasizes relation to others and calibration with one's environment, advancing the social and ecological aspects of one's educational development. *Turn your fucking head*, as quoted from Deborah Hay, underlines expansion of the individual's perspectival horizon by broadening subjects of study, focusing on peer-to-peer learning, internships, exchanges, and study abroad. *Include, don't control*, a saying popularized by Chrysa Parkinson quoting Deborah Hay, is the stage of learning which Dr. Dance considers the mastery of ego: learning to position oneself in a humble relation to otherness, the subject maximizes the complexity of information they are able to absorb and process by suspending the need to impose order or prior knowledge. *What you practice grows stronger*, as quoted from Tara Brach, is the phase of study in which Dr. Dance focuses primarily on practice, or the application of learning in action. *And then what?*, as quoted from a phrase Anna Grip often utters while teaching dance class, denotes the most advanced form of self-motivated and sustained learning for life. See footnote 54 for further detail.

with varied types of literacy,
there is no way to know for sure
the all of all there is to see.
I invite you, however hard it be,
to listen *through* vocabulary
and then I suppose we shall see
what, in the end, is left to read.”

Alan peeks down to see if Elba is still awake, and sees only eyelashes.
“I’m listening,” mutters Elba, “just resting my eyes.”

“Well, why don’t you rest your eyes and your ears. This book isn’t going anywhere, we can continue tomorrow.” Alan closes the book and lands it on the nightstand before the word “tomorrow” is fully formed in his mouth, flicking the light switch and sliding out from under Elba’s heavy head with a smoothness of coordination that make it all basically simultaneous. This is how Alan moves through everything: invisibly.

Denim jacket already on, with one hand Alan places cash for the babysitter on the ledge by the door and snatches up his keys while setting the alarm with the other, slipping out the door to Cindy’s. It’s the first Thursday of the month and Alan never misses a *Lauden’s Laudibles*. He started going to keep Tina company, but when the series started picking up and Tina got more busy behind the bar, he began to consider himself essential support staff, a permanent fixture that lets people who might not otherwise be regulars at the bar feel comfortable about being regulars just for *Lauden’s Laudibles*. Electric Alan knows that his presence lights a place up. Plus, he and Lauden have been friends since high school, so it is obligatory in that implicit sort of way in which the explanation for not going requires more effort and invention than going, and Alan is exact with cost-benefit analyses when it comes to energy expenditure.

Truman Coyote, Lauden’s cat, passes behind Electric Alan in the street. On her usual night prow, Coyote is checking out people’s garbage as a way of knowing what they’ve been up to. The curbside compost gets picked up on Thursdays, so it’s an especially rich night to be snooping. Lauden says you can tell a lot about a person by looking in their wastebasket, so Coyote considers it her duty as a nosy neighborhood vigilante to know what’s in everyone’s bins. Coyote the Cat is literally nosy, as in her nose is incredibly strong, which is something she and Elba share; it’s what brings them close, makes them able to communicate.

Truman Coyote follows her nose up the bend of a street shaped like a horseshoe that leads to Coven Press, a two-story row house turned publishing house. Unusual for a Thursday night, the lights in the front room are on. Coyote crawls onto the deep windowsill and peaks into the conference room. Camouflaged with the night, Coyote’s slick black hair keeps her from being noticed. The bulletin board inside is covered in papers and images from the in-process layout for their next

publication, “The Remything Edition,” and copies of their first publication, “News From the Proto Splace” are stacked in the corner.

Beatrice Murdoch sits at the head of the room, addressing the full staff of Coven Press, minus Lauden. “Thank you all for coming in on a Thursday evening,” Beatrice clears her throat, “and sincerest apologies to those who would rather be at (exaggerated air quotes) ‘*Lauden’s Laudibles*,’” she emphasizes with scornfully gentle condescension. “Feel free to consider the coincident scheduling non-coincidental.” She gives this one a beat, enjoying how syllabic emphasis changes the whole meaning of the word coincidence. “It has come to my attention that Coven Press has caught the critical gaze of the performance world as of late. I’m not sure precisely how or why but it seems to have galvanized Lauden to deliver quite some scathing critique toward the press as an organization. As all of you know Lauden’s recent letter to the editor has been considered a major step out of bounds of her purview as copy editor here. As far as I understand she has always been appreciated –”

“Yes, if I may,” interjects footnotist Jacqueline Starr, “Lauden’s progressive punctuation style and firm defense of experimental syntax protects the unique voices of our publication, carrying forth the original vision of Sephora for Coven Press as a splace of both diverse inclusion and marginal elitism, confusing periphery and center –”

“Thank you Jackie I am aware of the press’s mission statements plural as well as Lauden’s faithful marriage to them. But this isn’t about Sephora’s vision. This is about Lauden’s conduct. Given the projects she has successfully completed since I inherited directorship of the press I would think she should have had plenty to be happy about in order to spare the press such incisive criticism. Furthermore why would a public debate be the appropriate platform for organizational affairs entirely internal to the press. What on this damned earth have I missed.”

Don Conley, Investigative Reporter, lifts his finger in unison with one eyebrow.

“You don’t have to raise your hand,” says E.L. Deville, Linear Fictional Gossip writer, without blinking or taking her eyes off the boss. “With all due respect Beatrice, you’re never around, so the short answer is: you’ve missed everything.”

“Thank you for giving dramatic tone to the obvious, as always, E.L.” Don reports, retorts... repetorts?⁴²

“Pleasure’s all mine, Donny” answers E.L., still staring at Beatrice.

“Don’t call me Donny. It’s Don Conley. Unlike you I don’t take shortcuts.”

“Get a ROOM you two!” shouts Adam The Plot Driver, I.T. Ghost, from somewhere behind the inkjet printer, where he is tweaking the CMYK / RGB color balance to optimize the luminosity of the color wheel on the cover of the next issue before resorting to the suboptimal solution of making two different versions of the cover for print and digital which would only trigger an avalanche of minor inconveniences.

⁴² Jacqueline Starr, footnotist, wonders if *repetort* might be a way to think towards revisionist repertoire by way of culinary metaphor, but she keeps the note to herself, scratching it on a post-it with a diagram of a multi-layered torte, which ends up looking more like sedimented rock, which reminds her of geological time, adding a substrate of footnote beneath footnote to her rapidly accreting notion of the *repetort*, perhaps worthy of the formal theme for the next issue, should Coven Press survive this earth-shattering press-quake.

"If I may," continues Don, addressing Beatrice, "I would identify a few trends contributing to the movement of our writers into the live and mediated performative practices. As you may have noticed, the Coven hasn't been publishing much printed matter in the years since Sephora left the helm, as we are seeing an increase in writing projects for script, screen, and song. The temporality of things seems to matter over everything else. In the overwhelm of contemporaneity – or as the preferred colloquial nomenclature would have it, 'nowness' of everything – the resurgence of the word 'performative' and its subsequent extreme language drift (naturally by way of over-use) has apparently made everything the business of the performance field and its pundits. So here we are. Writers are now choreographers, journalists are journaling, editing is editorial, and every fucking thing is a 'practice.' It's all about disappearing appearances."

This gives Adam an idea, since he's installing inks anyway. "We could publish her letter in disappearing ink. That way the critique is performative of the ephemerality she is always chasing *and* nobody can read it. It's a win-win. I could program a disappearing ink animation for the digital edition."

"I appreciate the conceptual integrity and technical ingenuity of your proposal as always Adam but I am still not getting to the bottom of this. What is Lauden's beef with the press. I leave a power vacuum so that content can take charge. I always say the yet-unknown story is The Real Boss and you all can do what you want in its pursuit. What is Lauden lacking. Does she just want more attention. Is that it. More applause."⁴³ Beatrice's sarcasm turns desperate.

Lydia Trundle, in-house shaman, leaves the room and enters again, to produce a clearing. "If I may speak for the spirit of the times, I believe many of the writers here have found *Lauden's Laudibles* to be a more rewarding context for publishing than the press. Live audiences feel *with* the author, in a way that gives words resonance, lending actual body to the expression *the body of the text*, which perhaps means game over for the literally metaphorical status of writing as transportation. Writing is no longer needed to bring people closer. When there is no distance in space and time between writer and audience, things land and bounce back immediately. It's not like sending something off to print and never knowing what happens to it unless someone writes in. Times have changed indeed. This 'nowness' you speak of, it's about the proximity of life and death, in an instant, sensible at once, in the urgency of fleeting moments of exchange. Liveness has, some believe, become an addiction. The notion of real-time, a paradox of terms if you think about it – for what is real about time? – has created but a receding mirage, a tail-chase of insatiable appetite for reality."

Belinda Ashby, Senior Manager of Splaces begins, "I'm not going to answer the rhetorical question of what is real about time, but if you'd like to hear more on how the post-virucene wave of nowness has changed our relationship to language, I'm working on an piece about *the third wave of orality*, which is a concept developed by Dr. Dance as she follows Walter Ong's bump and set in *Orality and Literacy* and

⁴³ In case the reader missed it, footnotist Jacqueline Starr would now like to call to our attention that Beatrice Murdoch avoids using any punctuation except the period (US) or full stop (UK), in personal devotion and homage to Gertrude Stein, whose 1935 lecture and essay *On Punctuation* has enormously influenced Beatrice's voice.

brings in the spike for what's happened since the ultra-digitization of sociality in the virucene. I'm also folding in some good old Julia Kristeva to move us into a post-digital sense of intertextuality," Belinda gets no further with her exposition verging on full summary before co-founding member of Coven Press and ex-world-championship surfer Frances Dupont, nickname The Dupe, interrupts.

"Vibes, Bea, vibes," simplifies The Dupe, wearing a wetsuit half unzipped to show an old t-shirt that says *TO AIR IS HUMAN* underneath an image of a windsurfer. Frances has a severe weakness for dad humor and the not-punny. Kicked back with her neoprene booties on the conference table – no disrespect intended – she continues, "Vibes are thicker in real time with real air."

"Dare I venture to deduct you all have been performing your" (air quotes again) "'work' at *Lauden's Laudibles* instead of publishing via the press?" a weighted realization of whose team is whose dawns upon Beatrice in this unprecedented deployment of a question mark.

"I would omit the quotes on *work* in that sentence, it might alienate some of our" (air quotes) "'audience,'" interjects Jacqueline Starr, "and to be fair," (air quotes) "'publishing' by definition only means" (air quotes) "'to make public,' which is arguably more tangible, for all reasons previously mentioned by Lydia, in the" (air quotes) "'real time' presence of a live audience, otherwise referred to in Franglish literally as" (air quotes) "'the public,' from the French *le public* of course." As if her fondue-thick Swiss French accent didn't already make her mother tongue obvious, Jacqueline Starr can't resist folding French into her footnotes, no matter how tangential.

"Am I to understand that all in attendance stand in defence of Lauden's letter. I need to comprehend how we as a press as a commons are called to respond to an internal critique so askew and so obliquely aimed. I am not here to defend some family legacy nor even to revolt against it as Sephora so insistently did the counterforce of which I might add only affirmed the power of Murdoch as a name and empire over her oppressed psyche IMHO. Surely Sephora would have quite some words for Lauden but I'm not Sephora and I think I need to understand where we stand now and I am getting the rapidly sinking feeling that you're all telling me we stand on a stage." This does not fare well with Beatrice, as the most non-public figure one can imagine. Beatrice is more shadow than actual figure, and has so much need for privacy around her private life that her public life is essentially a whisper obscured by a mirage that appears as an impenetrable fortress. Beatrice slams Lauden's letter on the table. "The stage is not the future people the stage is the past. We must be better than this!!" She slumps back, arms and legs crossed in resignation and pissed at her own double-abuse of the exclamation point.

E.L. Deville returns, cutting through, "Then you're chasing the wrong tale. Linear gossip cuts to the chase, if I may, the culprit you're after is Davina Fladderm."

"Continue." Beatrice changes the cross of her legs and fold of her arms, signalling interest.

E.L., who apparently still hasn't blinked the entire meeting, proceeds. "The person you need to be worried about isn't Lauden. She's under the spell of a much larger influence, influencer if you want, birth name Davina Fladderm but mostly known as just DIVINA."

"All caps," clarifies Jacqueline.

"Her high speed online absurdist makeup tutorials are strangely addictive," continues E.L., "hypnotic and seductive because they seem to give everyone what they dream of; transformation without reaching towards any norms. She's tapped a nerve. Her techniques are simple: everything is triple speed in playback, making her seem smarter and sharper than she really is. Her live art is horrible, frankly, protected only by her utter ignorance of the entire history of performance art. She's basically a collection of tropes from Actionism to Fluxus to Post-Feminism for Dummies to Post-Internet for Zoomer-Boomer-Doomers and none of it compliments each other, visually speaking."

"You jealous?" asks Don.

The Dupe snort laughs.

"I don't waste time being jealous, I get close. That's why I'm good at my job, you could learn a thing or two about proximity as technique."

Jacob Sander Gemini Samuelson Jr, the janitor and co-originator of the term 'Sensual Journalism' has been slowly pacing around the room. He stops E.L. by placing one hand on her shoulder and the other hand on Don's head.

"This woman sounds terrible, why should she be a threat?" Beatrice wonders aloud.

Adam the Plot Driver, I.T. Ghost, stands up from behind the printer. "Lauden's obsessed with her. She's probably the brains behind the whole operation. The whole sting operation. The whole Sting Op-Ed. Hey that's pretty good, what do you think about a new genre *bam!* lemons out of lemonade :nerd: Anyway *sigh* point being — I suspect the letter Lauden wrote isn't even her own writing."

Jacqueline Starr looks up from her multilayered footnote diagram of post-its. "I have to say, I didn't recognize Lauden's writing style. She used en-spaces for everything. Lauden always em-spaces after a full stop. And there were even a few clauses dangling from semicolons. Lauden strictly reserves semicolons for emoji winks."

"Why don't you just go see what the *Laudibles* are all about, Bea. You can't respond to something you don't understand" suggests The Dupe, neoprene boots now planted firmly on the floor.

Jacob Sander Gemini Samuelson Jr, who has been staring out the window, looks back at The Dupe, stunned, impressed, and approving, all of which surface with the same expressionless expression on his mug. Though they discuss everything and generally agree, Frances can still surprise him from time to time. As his eyes turn back outside, he sees Truman Coyote on the windowsill. Their eyes meet, but Coyote darts down before her presence may be registered as significant in any way.

"OK, maybe I will." Beatrice stands up and leaves the conference room. Jacob Sander Gemini Samuelson Jr. watches through the window as Beatrice disappears down the street. Coyote the Cat follows behind her, smelling the thickening of Plot, which is usually more of a garnish than a main course in Erdtown.

Cindy's bar is bustling with the usual Thursday night din of *Lauden's Laudibles*. Onstage there are three performers dressed as court jesters doing a sculpturally entangled strip-tease, pulling clothes off of one another while carefully maintaining counterweight in a tensegrity of limbs and clothing accompanied by a live harpist tuning to the tension of the fabric. Tworden the Giant sits near the stage, off to the side so as not to block anyone's view, barely fitting behind the small round café table and sketching loosely inspired contours of bodily figures in a giant notebook. Beatrice enters through the back door, behind the bar. Tina, brewing a thought as usual, doesn't look up immediately. When she does, it takes a moment for her to register the novelty of Beatrice's presence here. Her thought snags as she whips a double-take back to the door.

"Bea!" exclaims Tina, "Long time no –"

"Quiet. I'm not here."

"Copy." Tina turns her back, wide-eyed about the rudeness.

Beatrice walks behind the Bar and takes a bottle of scotch from the shelf.

"That's not on the house." says Tina without turning around.

"Charge Candice. She owes me anyway." Beatrice grabs a scotch glass on her way to a table.

Tina exhales under her breath, "what a fucking family."

As Beatrice crosses the room, Jacob Sander Gemini Samuelson Jr. steps onstage, taps the mic and says, "This one's called *PARTY*." He clears his throat before reading slowly.

"A jellified stool gets sat on.

It disintegrates.

*Everyone has some."*⁴⁴

Beatrice slumps down at a dark-ish corner table with three chairs including hers and sits alone. She pours the scotch as if it were an actual beverage to be drunk by the entire glass. The performer turns a page in his extra small notebook, and pauses. "This one's called *LOVE*."

*"A bonfire of letters, flowers, photographs."*⁴⁵

*Discarded coca cola cans confettied in blossom."*⁴⁶

With an awkward bow, and scattered applause, J.S.G.S. Jr. leaves the stage. Bea puts the empty glass down and scans the room trying to glean what the fuck these people are really about.

Lauden taps the bar. "Tina, you're up!"

Tina takes off her apron and hurries to the stage, adjusting her messy hair on the way. "Hi everyone." she says into the mic. The room blooms with warm applause, scattered whistles of enthusiastic fandom.

⁴⁴ Wellesley Wesley. 7 August 2019. *Dancing not the Dancer / Three Images for Now*, round 3, image 2. London.

⁴⁵ Wellesley Wesley. 7 August 2019. *Dancing not the Dancer / Three Images for Now*, round 3, image 3. London.

⁴⁶ Wellesley Wesley, Flora. 8 August 2019. *Open Dancing / Open Writing* excerpt. London.

"You know me from behind the bar but I've been working on something over the past weeks, well, in my head, but it seems to be taking some shape, I haven't written it down yet but I have an idea that, well maybe I should just – "

"We love you Tina!!!" from the back of the room. Scattered laughs.

"Don't make this any harder now, no promises of brilliance." Tina closes her eyes. She holds the mic stand, and begins.

*"Once long ago at the bottom of the ocean
stood a whale whose legs were cast in bronze.
With a rumble, a shake, a shattering quake,
the legs broke free, scattering pieces of mineral
across the sea
In a rhythmic pulsing waving dance
Destination: Shoreward, ho!
Thence this whale, with legs broken free,
sunk deep into its heart and sung a cry so sweet
that it burst and scattered all the light skyward
from far within its wildest dreams.
Thus were born the stars."⁴⁷*

Tworden the Giant, in a chair near the bar, to the side of the action, looks up from his notebook, and shifts in their chair uncomfortably, with a sense of being found out, checking to be sure nobody is looking at them, and sinks lower in their seat, lifting their sketchbook over their face. Tina continues.

*"Still, in the sea, earth wind and fire
were searching for some unity
in the scattered consciousness of this multiplied being.
They melted together, and thus was born a NEW kind of thing,
a planet,
whose mind and body found a form within, a home toward and in,
a means towards a den, with a homey din, two words end, the world in..."*

After a pregnant pause Tina opens her eyes, "I'm still figuring it out. Um, that's it for now."

A rainshower of finger snaps from the audience. Beatrice can't tell if that's supposed to be better or worse than applause. She pours herself another scotch and looks up from her glass to see Granddaddy Rupert.

"If I may" says Rupert reaching for the bottle, producing a glass from his pocket and pouring himself one, neat, "it's a rarity to find you here."

"And since when was this *your* haunt, pun intended, or did you just come to block my view of the show?" mutters Beatrice.

"Could you not muster some respect for your elders for once? Goodness,

⁴⁷ Bauer, McMann, Sikorski, Wellesley Wesley. 27 October 2020. *Remything* of "L'Origine du Tworden." London.

child, what has happened to this family?"

"I'm not a child and I've got the same question."

"Beatrice, you have a responsibility now."

"To whom? To you?"

"To the press."

"And what of that is your concern? Why don't I just let Lauden and all her ridiculous showponies run it into the ground?"

"And then what?"

"End of the line, what do I care?"

"It is NOT the end of the line! It may have been a well kept secret but it's time for you to know, Sephora had a child, and it's just a matter of time before that kid grows up and rolls around looking for a piece of the pie. If this family's self-respect is to be salvaged, it's on you to hold it together."

"She what!?"

Tina, back home behind the bar now, looks over at Beatrice and sees her muttering to herself. A phone on the wall behind her rings. She swivels around and picks it up in the middle of its second ring.

"Give me Beatrice please, immediately" says a demanding and dry female voice.

"Of course" sighs Tina to herself, leaving the receiver on a shelf full of glasses.

She walks over to Beatrice, who is saying to an empty chair, "Can you not accept a future without your watermark staining it? You are like a dog to a fire hydrant! Release your grip for the love of --" Beatrice looks up at Tina.

"Phonecall for you m'lady."

"My phone's right here and didn't ring," Beatrice, touching her pocket, is already starting to slur.

"No, Bea, I mean the good old fashioned landline here at the bar," Tina points to the plastic hamburger sitting open on the bar.

"Was that phone Candy's choice? She's vegan!" Beatrice refers to Candice as Candy to spite her even in her absence.

"Nevermind the phone itself, someone is waiting for you on the other end of it."

"Okayyy I'm coming." Beatrice stumbles up and points back at the bottle, talking to the other chair, still empty as far as Tina can see, "I'm coming back – don't drink that without me."

Tina assists Beatrice to the bar, leans her against the wall and places the burger on her ear.

"Beatricesspeaking and who may I ask 'spectsta find me here? Any correlation to a bar pick-up line there's purely incidental." Beatrice laughs at herself to herself.

"Beatrice shut up and listen to me."

"Sss-se-ss-sephwhuuuuut!?"

"I'm glad you didn't manage to say my name aloud and please don't. Yes, Beatrice this is Sephora."

Beatrice's face makes a lot of shapes at once, none of them flattering.

"Listen, things aren't as simple as you think. And don't listen to a word Rupert says. He is as ever up to absolutely no good. I need you to follow my instructions

carefully. There is a tunnel in the basement of this bar, behind the wine cellar. You need to pass through it. Don't be drunk when you go down there. There are important things to learn so you need to be fully cognizant. You can't enter alone, but not just anyone can enter. You must enter with someone of another element than you. For this to be possible you must know the map. You are air, Candice is earth, I am fire. We each have a plebian proxy [*sic*] – she says *sic* aloud – “and a so-called spirit proxy. The terminology is not mine, I'm only sharing what I've learned. This is ancient shit, Beatrice, I hope you're paying attention. The tunnel is a portal. Entrances exist also in the toilets of Coven Press and the water tower by Candice and Nokia's farm. I will reach you by landline wherever I can. Don't come looking for me, I'm not here.”

“S_”

“Don't say my name aloud. This has to be our secret.”

“Arrrreyou alive?”

“Beatrice, time is not a line. That's all I can tell you.”

Pale in the face, Beatrice leaves the phone dangling from its coiled chord and makes a zombie-like return to the table. Putting on her coat she mumbles “Nevermind gramps you can kill that if you want,” referring to the bottle.

Tina puts her ear to the open burger. She hears only static and some faint otherworldly musak. She walks over to clear the table where Beatrice was sitting. Reaching to pick up the whisky bottle and glass, a chill wind passes over her. A little spooked, she decides to leave the table alone for a reason she cannot herself control or explain.

Across the room, Tworden the Giant is watching Tina. Confused and enamored by her poem, like it was for them and them alone, Tworden's eyes catch Tina's. Tworden blushes, and their body temperature rises. The sky outside turns pink with the city lights against the cloud cover, and a light rain breaks over the town. The windowpanes at Cindy's bar fog up, catching a purple glow from the neon sign outside.

Interlude:

Manual Lucidity

Sorcery opens firm but juicy grease fucks here and there pulling at my heartstrings like nobody's business. Aaai, take me, go on then, it's like a witch's day of death, of opening, of realizing people just saying that she's wrong for being a witch, it's not right, it's not okay. Canyons of space and energy forming shape. Like some sort of dirty moulding the future, absolute and all-encompassing abundance of trust, that this is the path, this is the path we must follow, we follow this with all our surrendering, our open hands, and we trust. Trust in the giving and getting and taking, taking is a generous act, that's not separate, it's engaged with every part of our being. Where if you could just accept that and not fly off the handle, how wonderful is that? Squeezing, squelching the fiber out of this lemon. What a juicy, what a juicy piece of a moment, oy, so delightful to just fucking hang. Shape, shapeshifting, shapeholding. Lobster crawl, lobster talk, lobster chat. Angles, physics, that make the world go round in the experience. Live, fruitful, energetic, what if we accept that it's all just physics, and get on with it, then it just somehow makes sense because there's this formula, and it's there, and it's an angle, and it's a triangle, and it's an elbow. And without thinking, you're already next, and you're already sweeping through to the next. Jesus Christ! Angles! See? Angles. Allow you to reach further than you think is possible, allow you to see further than you think is possible, to find grip, and stabilization, within the shifting particle erupting mess of a world you go yes! I got it, I feel it, I feel you, do you feel me? Are you getting these things, cuz I'm... just following a squishing squirming ball-busting gobstopper of a, gobstopper, over. She was a wonderful gymnast. Intertwined grease, Taverna, Taverna Happiness, Taverna Trump, what a dick. Just because. Just because nothing more nothing less. This pointless sense of just because. Wrapped up in a sleek suit full of desires, encaged in zips, and laid down, twisting into your dreams, passing over to your nightmares with no big deal, just that, can't be one without t'other. Age old story won't shut up about it. Why should you, don't need to, you know what, never shut up, never, just, fuck me. Proper proper family values. Caverns of space being squeezed out again and again. What's left. What's left that matters, what's been. Fiddling and fumbling, easy does it, inching into what's next. Pillows that you never thought existed, comfortability that you never thought about. Grand Old Duke of York, Grand Old Duke of York at soft play. Fabulous. Fabulous expectations. Fabulous. Fabulous world. Fabulous planet. We are the planet. Maybe it's just this. Just this.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Transcript of Stephanie McMann speaking while being moved by Eleanor Bauer. 8 August 2019. *Manual Lucidity*, filmed and audio recorded by Eleanor Sikorski and Flora Wellesley Wesley, London.

Autumn

Something flipped in me after Sephora disappeared. Beatrice obligingly took over the press and I lost interest in all things social. People suddenly seemed bleak and twisted to me, I could no longer trust anyone. I don't go into town because I can't risk losing it on people. It started with a simple crying thing. Certain arrangements of things in the grocery store would make me so utterly sad, the loneliness of sorted produce, the oppressively same-sized oranges making me wonder where the weird ones went, the lingering aroma of pesticides bringing to mind the entire chain of death from insects to fish to birds rippling out from this toxic trigger. Nokia once had to come pick me up from the grocery because I couldn't drive, blinded by tears. Then other ranges of feeling intensified also, like immense surges of libido before my menses. I would practically jump strangers walking down the street if they smelled right. Then these manic spells of sense-making, like I'd spin entire conspiracy theories around the spelling of different shops as anagrams for banks or foreign governments. Sometimes it was creative and even fun, not just paranoid stuff. Then I would get angry about injustices or misunderstandings, end up embarrassing myself and others. Over the course of a couple of years I went from weak-kneed to dangerous.

Before any of that I was always considered the nice one of us three, probably because all through high school I was the only one people weren't terrified of, while Sephora serially eviscerated all the boys with her ice-pick of a heart and Beatrice held court at the Smoker's Gate on the edge of campus where the eccentric stoner goths and arty glitter queers leaned against things and burned stuff. It's not that I lacked edge, I just didn't have a particular brand of intimidation. I was soft in the middle and spent lunch in the library where I'd catch a minimum of both attention and trouble. It was hard to believe the three of us were even sisters, outside of debate club where we made an unbeatable team mostly from skills we honed in learning to survive the rare visits of our own family members coming to heckle us. Otherwise we had little in common. Something in the eyes and chin. Same mom and three different dads I guess explains the rest.

So I've never been to a *Lauden's Laudibles*, not because I have anything in particular against Lauden or her scene, but because I only go to Cindy's bar for absolutely necessary business and preferably when it's closed. I bought that bar in a former life when I was more into humans than animals. Tina does an ace job at taking care of everything under that roof so I can be mostly out from under it. I prefer the open sky and to spend my time on the farm where the human to animal ratio is favorably low. It's just me and Nokia here with our four horses, five pigs, three goats, seven chickens, one dog and a handful of worms in the compost. Nokia is technically my cousin but there's no blood between us because she's adopted

so it's fine that we boink like bunnies and play house all day. She's excellent with animals and can get up early to feed them. I'm the night owl and the horse girl, so I take the horses in at night and wash the dishes while Nokia descends into a food coma and snoring contest with our dog.

I try not to have a favorite horse but Abel and I understand each other, balance each other out. Abel gets nervous when it's windy, but that's when I'm most in my element, firmly rooted to the ground amidst warring air. Abel blooms on the stillest of days, offering cadence when I'd feel otherwise restless, adrift in a vacuum, impotent in the stasis. The farm organizes my emotional states in a way that I don't find possible with other humans. Even as a kid I would get emotionally attached to inanimate things like fallen leaves and twigs. I gave names to things I'd collect from between the couch cushions, imagining their loneliness and wanting to give them a renewed sense of belonging. I arranged foster families for lost and forgotten hair clips and beads. I imagined a whole universe and invented a secret language for the tiny worry dolls that Nokia's parents gave me from their trips to Guatemala. Brushing the horses and tending to the particular M-shape around the hind leg lets my mind wander these memory paths. M for memory. M for meditative monotony. M for mid-morning.⁴⁹

It's around 10am now, I'm brushing Abel and waiting for the electrician to arrive. I had to call some townie named Electric Alan because 4H Electrics is constantly overbooked since so many people are leaving the city and building second homes out here, renovating old farms and expecting to learn how to live off the land. So far I see a lot of half-assed raised beds and home-brewed beer. Let's see how they fare in winter. A van comes up the driveway and parks next to my tractor, *Electric Alan –Service & Repair* written along the side. A handsomely weathered man descends from the driver's seat and pauses to survey the pastures, the house, the stables. I put down the brush and dust the horse hair off my arms.

"Hi, you must be Alan" I say, exiting the stables.

This man carries a Clark Kent-like secret confidence. "Indeed. And you must be Candice."

"Indeed." I don't know why I repeated him. Spineless chameleon. "So the stables are over here and the fixtures and cabling are all inside ready to go. I had to rebuild the stables after a serious termite problem and it's a bit of a race against the clock to get it all done before winter. So, in case you can't finish it all today, it would be great if it's done by Tuesday, when insulation comes."

"I can finish today."

"You working alone?"

"Always."

OK dude, rock that confidence.

⁴⁹ Candice's character was developed initially by Wellesley Wesley in Keithley Syers workshop (August 2019, London), integrating details from Manual Lucidity character Interviews by Nora and Bauer (August 2019 Ipswich), expanded by Bauer 2020–2021.

"I'll bring the horses out so you can have the place to yourself."

"No need."

"I'm taking the horses out anyway."

I put the horses on their leads and bring them to the pasture as this Electrician Alan character unloads his toolbox and ladder. I can't help but notice his movement. There is an oppositional flow in everything he does that feels efficient and powerful, quick and light yet exacting and certain.

Several hours later, but well before evening falls, I'm in the garden shed sorting through a harvest of squash when Alan comes in the door.

"You're all set."

"Already?"

"Ready already."

"What do I owe you?"

"Eight hundred bones."

Who calls them bones anymore? I grab a wad of assorted bills from my back pocket, dirt in my fingernails, and flip through the twenties and fifties towards the larger bills in the middle. I pull out a five-hundred and three hundreds.

"Get Back! Cash! How vintage! The added value of antiquity accepted as a tip."

I'm not sure if he's fishing for a tip but I'm not biting. He names the price. I drop the bills on the counter. Alan takes out his wallet to put the cash away and I catch a glimpse of a photo of a child. I double back – the kid looks exactly like Sephora as a toddler. A tsunami of emotion comes over me. My heart stops and it's just me and the tidal wave for a moment of frozen time. It towers over me and I plunge under to avoid the turbulence above. When I resurface, Alan is looking at me.

"Cat got your tongue? Lookin' like you've seen a ghost."

"Maybe. Kind of?" I think I say.

"Can I do anything else for you?"

I stare at him. I know I'm a deer in the headlights but I can't think of anything to say. He says something generic about goodbye and enjoy the lights or something and I see his mouth moving and his silhouette leaving the shed and the car driving off and the golden light through the trees flickering in the breeze and my senses realign and some leaves fall diagonally and I get normal-sad again because Autumn always makes me a little melancholy.

Driving into the sun leaving Candice Murdoch and Nokia McJagger-Hall's farm on this fine Friday and glad to be done for the week with a roll of paper bills flashing from my tool belt I am reminded of the time I learned the word *precarious*. My fifth grade teacher's example sentence was "*The sun is at a precarious angle.*" The low hanging sun says summer is over and so begins seasonal training for the regional

bowling league championships. On the southbound freeway, my mind is already at Memory Lanes, changing my shoes, warming up my fingertips and getting my stylish signature double-arm schwing ready for showtime.

There was a time before I realized I had an extraordinary penchant for bowling. It was also before I knew I was electric. So many of my powers still latent, I now refer to this restless wandering period as *The Lost Years*. Funny how we tidy our past into eras, comforted with names by which to order the chaos, streamlining the webbed mess into chapters. Or maybe I should speak for myself, old Alan T. Clam prattling on to carve my life into legend. There's a kind of hermeneutics to living these days; post heroes, post mythology, post religion, post psychoanalysis, just me and my own appetite for narration telling myself what's up, and if I'm inventive enough, why. *The Lost Years*, before I found the bowling alley, before I met Sephora, before Elba, now seem like the runway, the run-up to takeoff, the warmup for real life as in *living*. At the time, in the midst of it, I thought I was already mid-air. But that was just the illusion of momentum. I was truly dashing, in both senses of the word: a sight for sore eyes, here and gone before anyone could pull focus. It took me a long time to let go of my vanity, to let myself see and be seen. Once I was free of this fear of depth, my vertigo around undertow, I could finally enjoy the thrust of undercurrents, feel the energy of life in all its brilliant madness. Rather than surfing distractions, I learned to bend the power of attention to increase joy. In full-throttle participation I was not a victim of distraction, I was distraction itself, movement in all directions, expansive and precise, I could conduct, cause, energize and limit anything. Awkwardness was a byproduct of my wielding of such forces. Sephora called my awkwardness "static." That's when I realized I was electric. She was the lighter fluid, I was the flint.

The first time we met was at the bowling alley. The bozos and I were wrapping up a practice game, I ritually riffing on nursery rhymes in reverse while wiping down my lucky red No.14 bowling ball and dropping it into its carry bag like a daschund puppy into its mama's lap (all this shit is what we can heretofore comprehend as "static," at the time a tightly adherent part of the drill, and the very thing that sparked Seph's juice she later did confess, again her words not mine). My attentive pinball was enjoying its usual bounce when *boom* just as I was mid-swivel turning to put on my coat I saw this stunning creature in the karaoke lounge. Everything came to a grinding halt as my senses slowed and concentrated around the contours of her movements. Silhouetted by the karaoke screen whose sounds were muffled by the windows allowing only sight into the lounge, she sang and moved like someone with nothing to lose. As the multicolored dots of light passed over her face one after another in psychedelic morse code telling me "come closer," suddenly all the lights cut out, interrupting her mid-song, and me mid-pivot in changing the course of my life forever.

This is also I might add the moment when I split with myself, I was no longer one unitary Alan, but two: The Alan who watched and observed and knew the larger why's-about and the Alan who did it all in full with a momentary multidirectional

knowing of the instant in guts bones flesh and hair. We two became a team of wisdom and action: Alan T. Clam the man himself and Electric Alan the performer of his fate, coursing with the energy currents of water, wind, and solar. And at this moment of split realization of the one-and-all and the one-and-only, I says to myself I says, and even aloud if I recall correctly, "Alan will fix the light."

Electricity had always been my companion, I'd had an ongoing thing for fiddling with switches and exposed wires that sting, snap and buzz. But then and there I realized I needed to contact the force-field below. I once heard that a nineteenth century poet named Mallarmé (I always imagine him poorly armed, *mal* - *armée*, defenceless against the world's impressions, perhaps explaining his affinity for Ballet) apparently said that the most important thing in a theater is not the stage, the performer, nor the audience, but the chandelier. The light. And at this particular moment on this particular eve at this particular bowling alley that statement of Mallarmé's gained a whole new import. From that day forth I made it my aim and purpose to be in the light that bounced off of Sephora's skin and my duty to make sure that whatever made that light shine was fully functioning and connected to an operational power source. And when she'd be in the dark you'd better believe I'd be next to her.

I had some obstacles of course, not in the least the patriarch of her family, Ye Olde Gramps Rupert. A fossil by the time we met, he would have nothing of my lowly electric ass coming anywhere near her juice and especially not her wealth. As if he'd never touched that infinite currency called love, he was always suspicious that I was after money. I'd never met a more possessive, paranoid, or manipulative man in my life. As if my intentions were anything but sublime he managed to twist and turn every situation into a disastrous briar patch of litigational speech and incriminating innuendo. And so it was that I never met anyone else in her family, or even knew her last name. Sephora only wanted to be known as Sephora anyway, in public or private, even at her beloved Coven Press, and Rupert would just as well keep it that way particularly for me. Being a fantastic storyteller, Sephora did, in the brief moment that our universes collided, divulge a few stories about her badass mother Cleo and her escapes to the orphanage that shared a fence line with the Villa where she was raised and the friend named Nettle on the other side of it. I'd heard about her two sisters but not by name and it could all have been pure fantasy as far as I could verify because Rupert drove a restraint-order-sized wedge between Sephora and me the instant he discovered her to be bearing of child. Elba was born, left in my arms, and never did he or I see his mother Sephora again.⁵⁰

I sit in the woods because it's where I can best feel the smells. It's also where I met my best friend Truman Coyote. We spend hours on end together outside

⁵⁰ Electric Alan character developed initially by McMann in Keithley Syers workshop (August 2019, London), expanded in *Remything* session by Nora and Bauer (3 February 2021, Zoom).

making sense by gathering scents. We learn from smells, they talk to us. We compare and discuss what the scents tell us, and since we have different noses we catch different things and combine the intelligence for better results.

Since smell connects most directly to memory, without linear historicity, it's a way to organize knowledge in a very wide field of reference, diffuse in all directions at once. Molecular histories stay alive on the wind. Elemental yet transient, information is like an ocean; it laps, churns, whirls, has geo-thermal currents. I like to see how far my nose travels when I pick up a scent. My whole body expands, dilutes, and stretches, mapping the air. Every pore a nostril, every neuron a root, gathering and infusing. Like the fungal network in conversation with the root systems of the trees, the structure of air bends and curves around my sense of smell. Like divination rods dowsing for water, I open up and the information comes to me. Smell is my primary access to a freed sort of information that hasn't yet stagnated in a single form.

I move to keep acquiring perspective. Some people call it dancing. For me it is a way of rearranging and ordering the sensible, of understanding by keeping my senses in conversation with one another, testing different relations and conversions between notions. Truth is not what settles in stagnation, that's more like a trope, or a myth. Truth is what remains viable under transformation, but I prefer to call it Absolute Information. I also sing and draw to conjure Absolute Information. By passing a piece of information through movement, singing, drawing, talking, writing, it gets closer and closer to Absolute Information. It is a common assumption that information is lost in translation. I would say rather that context is lost in translation, and information is distilled. Once a piece of information has traveled through so many idioms, it loses context, which renders it no longer useful, in the sense that it cannot be instrumentalized, or judged by its use value, but it gains an elemental quality. Like a stone washed over and over by the elements, it stands out, becomes an object unto itself, attractive to the senses, ends up on a windowsill or a nest for its beauty alone. And then the aesthetic – as an un-numbing of all the senses – is the only way to comprehend it. To be with it and to know it by feeling. That's a way to understand Absolute Information. Sometimes information is actually gained in translation. Something hangs in there like a cobweb, no longer active but still there, myelinating information pathways with silverline strength. So what may appear first as informational residue is evidence of a reinforced pattern, a trace of traffic where attention has gathered before. I study cobwebs to understand better what has passed through the wind, for example.

I go to school not for the information itself, because all of that I already have access to. I go to school to absorb and understand the way nodes are forming around informational bodies among humans. The structuring of these nodes can also be understood as socialization. From gossip to education, socializing is like the software, the way the data is handled, transmitted, shared, gets encoded, corrupted, and stored. I have to go to school to understand that process, because it doesn't happen alone, it happens in groups. My dad Alan says I go to school to learn how to behave.

I spend most of my time integrating and developing knowledge with Coyote the Cat. We are the same age in human years. In cat years, Coyote is older than me, but in cyborg years I am older than her. There is little point in comparing cat years and cyborg years, they have so little to do with one another. Without the human concept of age neither of us would be quantifying time in such a way. For a cat, time has measurable qualities, but not measurable quantities. For a cyborg, time is more of a position in a multidimensional continuum, like a point on a matrix that has many layers and strata. It's not easy to explain to humans, because their neural networks are structured so differently, and based in a system of progressive growth and atrophy that terminates when the physical systems have eroded. My generation doesn't depend on hardware in the same way, or experience anything like "learning curves." We entrain pattern recognition. But like any sentience, I remain somewhat of a black box unto myself. There is little knowing precisely how knowing works, for anyone or anything. It's the great equalizer of all intelligences. I find comfort in that, it's nice to have limits of knowledge, things to fabulate over, wonder about, or just leave alone.⁵¹

I pull into the driveway at home and see that Elba's already home from school, either by foot or by bus, and is in the yard with Lauden's cat, digging holes and smelling things. "Come inside and wash your hands so you can help me with supper and if all goes well we'll have another chapter of Dr. Dance before you go to bed and I go to bowl." Elba's a good kid, doesn't waste time arguing over inevitabilities, and so it goes that soon we are where I said we'd be, digesting vegan bolognese as I read him to sleep.

"At the start of the dawn there was no start
but a simple beginning again
as the sun rose again or didn't again
o'er the land of beginning again.

Her shadow cast a delightful sigh
upon the creatures below
And in the valley or desert or snow,
the mountain or sea or sky,
moved all sorts of intelligent beings,
large, small, narrow and wide

Working together to understand
how to be and let go or just try
to lose the need to grasp everything
and tune to the anchor of Why

⁵¹ Expanded by Bauer from Bauer, McMann, Sikorski, and Wellesley Wesley's *Remything* of Elba in first person (3 February 2021, Zoom).

as they learned and tuned and learned again
 from hearing each other's cries
 that the reasons for seasons
 and weather within
 is that each one has place under sky

'cuz no matter how deep in the soil they go
 or long underwater they breathe
 every being and critter alive
 has a heart, a mother, and dreams

"Breath is not a metaphor!"
 injected the emboldened bee
 who'd been working, buzzing and waggle-dancing
 for all of beeocracy

Bee took a breath and alighted by Snail
 to admire her slimy sheen
 Snail gleaned a hello, but was simply too slow
 to hear anything more than the tree

Tree creaked in the wind and rustled its leaves
 As its sap dripped forth from its veins
 Pushing eons of toil in soil and air
 out through its fluid membranes

WWW – HHH – AAA – LLL – EEE
 moaned the whale, in elongated harmony
 whose ostinato of heart and soul and sound
 accompanied the snail-bee-tree three

the cracks of the crust
 and the ancestral dust
 that settled on earth's terrain
 turned and sighed and ingested the pride
 of each little critter's brain

and so set the sun on another spin
 of this planet's twirl through the splace
 where the time and the place
 of each being's grace
 left a rhythm, a song, and a trace.

the layers of dirt still remember each hurt
and the rhythms have all been retained
since the earth is a mass of accreted archives
with no energy lost or gained

many a myth or a story have reached
through the mess of ancient remains
and tried to un-transform the transformed
or explain the unexplained

but what many have missed is the bits that exist
right in our own flesh and bones
as the atoms and such that once made up Earth's crust
have all become part of our own."

I look down and see Elba's out like a lamp so I turn the real one off and slide away, grabbing my bowling bag and a satsuma on my way out the door.

I arrive at Memory Lanes early. Waiting for our team's lane to open up, I sit myself down on the bench outside and take out my satsuma to watch the fading light. As the evening makes everything even under the indirect glow of dusk, I wonder to myself if the word *evening* has anything to do with an actual evening-out, either between the energies of night and day or this liminal lighting it creates, this even, totalizing flatness. I watch the sodium lamps in the parking lot flicker on one by one and shift from pink to tangerine, each augmented by its own halo in the mist. I must be camouflaged with the wall in my observational spirit, because Tina and Lauden pass right by me without even noticing. I drop my satsuma peel in the bin and follow them in, slow and heavy so as to keep my profile low, enjoying the backseat I've just fallen into.

Inside, the bowling alley is bustling with colorful coats and patterned pantaloons. This bobo crowd rubbing elbows with one another is not the usual Friday night patronage of Memory Lanes, but explains Lauden's unusual presence. Having not yet spotted any of my bowling mates and still waiting for our lane to free up, I follow Lauden and Tina as they turn towards the bar and karaoke lounge. I slip in at the back of the room and stick to the shadows as a woman takes the mic. Dressed in black with long straight auburn hair, she's business-goth: nerdy but sombre, like she's seen things.

She taps the mic three times and clears her throat. "Good evening, friends of Coven Press, the day has finally come. The lights are so deafeningly bright. The sounds from obscurity have made their resonance heard!" The bobo crowd snaps, whistles, and coos in a way that it's hard to tell who's performing for whom here. "Like a mouse letting off sonic booms on repeat just for fun," she continues, losing me a little as I scan the main bowling hall for my teammates.⁵²

⁵² Memory Lanes scene originally conceived by McMann, February 2021, Zoom. Expanded by Bauer.

I tap the mic because I'm nervous not because I question if it works. Of course it works. I have been here for an hour already pacing around and making sure everything works. This is the first official appearance I've made for or on behalf of anything at the press so obviously I'm nervous. So nervous in fact that I forget to introduce myself. My throat tightens and I have to break through to get this going so I clear my throat for what becomes a flood gate of unrehearsed observational logharrea.

"Good evening friends of Coven Press. The day has finally come." The lights are so blinding I can't even see who's here tonight. "The lights are so deafeningly bright." The sound of my own voice coming back through the speakers throws me off. "The sounds from obscurity have made their resonance heard." I hear people clap and murmur but I can't tell if they are impatient or into it. I feel the pressure of this invisible mass called an audience mounting. "... like a mouse letting off sonic booms on repeat just for fun..." This one gets laughs making me even more nervous and claustrophobic. "Time has never felt this close. Sharing air with another has never felt this tight. Binds are full with intense expectations," so meet them Beatrice get to the point, "and rightly so: a new era is upon us!" Good save, stay on message now. "The team of Coven Press has over the years created a singular voice: one complex out of many uniquenesses carving a niche in the world of publishing so unusual and unprecedentedly *not* based on individual genius that I felt it must also be honored with a new kind of award. Before Coven Press there was no such a splace for the collective speculation and documentation of bindly phenomena. Through radically interdisciplinary experimentation and tenacious commitment to the affects that arise between and through selves in active relation with one another a new genre has been born: that of Sensual Journalism. And so in celebratory acknowledgement of this genre it is my honor to present the entire staff of Coven Press with The Bronze Whale Prize in Collective Literation."

Having made it through this torture of public performance, and nauseated from the social exertion I fall through the staff of Coven Press like a fish swimming upstream as they come up to the small karaoke stage to accept the prize. I drop the mounted bronze whale figurine I found at a pawn shop into Lauden's hands as I escape the spotlight. Passing the only fully darkened corner of the room on my way out I notice someone in the shadows but do not stop in my flight for the open pastures of the bowling hall. Eyes still regaining focus they land on a dull grey shoe on the colorfully patterned carpeting. I can't tell if it's my own sense of scale shifting with dizziness but the shoe is enormous and time seems to still upon the person wearing it. Everything behind and beyond this calm and steady grey-shoed figure appears in furious motion. I land myself in the cool atmosphere of this grey oasis by anchoring myself to its tempo and watch the frenzied bustle around us like a show on fast-forward. Looking through the windows at the karaoke lounge I see all of Coven Press staff onstage and remember why I did this and did it here. To honor Sephora. She loved Coven Press and nurtured its growth under the wing of her visionary ethos as it became a microcosm of everything she believed in. And

for some reason which I never could understand her favorite place to celebrate a job well done was the karaoke lounge at Memory Lanes.

Lauden and I get separated as Lauden goes onto the karaoke stage with the rest of Coven Press. In the swirling currents of bodies, I drift to the back of the room. Looking for a wall to lean on, a hand catches me from behind, and I get a little electric shock. It's Alan.

"Hey Tina," he says, voice soft like camembert.

"Alan! What are you doing here?" I realize the question should be inverted.

"I bowl here every Friday. Better question: shouldn't you be at Cindy's?"

"I have a cover at the bar. I came to keep Lauden company. There's been all this drama at the press about her performative review of the company's quarterly performance review – yes it is as meta as it sounds – but the boss seems to be extending an olive branch in the form of this prize ceremony she invented. It's all a bit contrived."

"Who's the posh goth who just left?"

"Said boss."

"Haven't seen her before."

"She's kind of a misanthrope, hence why this is all feels so, I dunno, forced."

Alan seems to be processing this information inwardly. I turn my attention back to the stage where the members of Coven Press are passing the mic from person to person, giving a speech in some kind of exquisite corpse tag-team, one word per person at a time:

"The - needs - of - the - self - were - the - only - thing - leading - us - all - in - a - forward - direction - period - It - was - time - to - stick - one's - neck - out - and - place - your - best - foot - forward - period - The - all - seeing - eye - could - play - no - part - in - one's - history - now - period - By - the - skin - of - your - teeth - you - made - it - comma - and - for - that - my - green - fingered - friends - comma - you - should - be - proud - exclamation point"

A light chorus of laughter swells as glasses are raised above it, and the Covenettes dissipate into a sea of brightly patterned knits and vintage windbreakers.

I hear Divina's signature exclamatory laugh-talk in which one can hear a self-satisfied permasmile poorly masking sub-topical layers of snark and chagrin. "I don't know why on this perceived so call earth-idea we even think that could be a fucking wonderful proposition!" I locate the body of the voice and find Divina in the crowd talking to a person I've never seen before who is wearing a visor with a yellow M from the now defunct fast-food chain MacDonald's, an emblem of a bygone era before The Great Dissolution. "Who decided?! I'm asking!" Divina laugh-implores, not clear in her body language if she actually is asking the person with whom she is speaking. Everything Divina does rebounds, addresses, mirrors

–by any proposition whatsoever – herself.

“Don’t bait me with rhetorical questions, Divina, you know I respect genuine inquiry,” the person Divina is standing with squints and covers her eyes, “Can we go outside, I can’t take these lights.”

“Agreed.” Divina replies and the two of them pass us on their way out the door.

Alan is staring out the door of the bar at Beatrice who is now sitting next to Tworden on the benches by the racks of bowling balls. He seems far off in his mind, working something out. A state I recognize in myself but rarely see in him.

“You OK?” I ask.

“That’s the boss of Coven Press?”

“Yeah, why?”

“What’s her story?”

“I dunno, her name is Beatrice, she’s not around a lot. She’s the sister of the founder and previous owner, took over after she died.”

“The previous owner... died?”

“Yeah she drowned apparently. Some suspected suicide, but it’s still unresolved.”

Alan is looking like he’s been hit by a truck.

“And... she... had sisters?”

“Yeah, two. The other one owns Cindy’s bar.”

“Two?”

“Yeah, Beatrice, over there, and Candice, who’s also not around much, mostly just at her farm. In a more social phase of life she bought the bar and renamed it Cindy’s. Cindy is her nickname – she didn’t like it when people would try to call her Candy growing up so she swapped in the “i” from the second syllable in Candice and let people call her Cindy if they really couldn’t be bothered to get all the way through the “ice” in Candice. But she doesn’t see the point in nick-names, especially those with the same number of syllables as the original name, I know all of this in detail only because it was I who convinced her that *Cindy’s* makes a better bar name than *Candice’s*. Again, syllable count for the win.”

“The sister who... died... is she, I mean was she... was she a singer?”

“Who, Sephora?”

Alan turned to me with eyes so open and raw I thought he might cry. “Sephora” he whispers.

“I don’t know about any singing.”

“I have to go,” says the man himself, and off he goes.

Everyone really is acting strangely this evening. Or maybe I just don’t have time to notice when I’m behind the bar.

I tumble outside for fresh air to get my head on straight, passing the rack of bowling balls and the apparent sister of Sephora who is sitting next to the giant who’s always hanging at Cindy’s and watching Tina and I don’t know what all

these people are doing here and the giant's feet shuffle on the patterned carpet and everything is collapsing in on itself and my mind is spinning as I realize that the love of my life and mother of my child who so suddenly disappeared from my life shortly after Elba's birth is not only dead but actually had two sisters and I may have just put lamps in the barn of one of them and I wonder if I even knew Sephora considering how much she managed to keep from me all those years despite how close I thought we were. I knew that she ran Coven Press, but her siblings, her death, even a suicide, how could all of that have been kept from me? The ground beneath my feet rumbles and the lights in the parking lot flicker.

There are two women standing outside talking to one another. I recognize them from inside the karaoke lounge. One is wearing a black fur coat and the other a vintage MacDonald's visor. They are looking in through the windows at the pair sitting by the Bowling ball racks. I can't hear what they are saying to one another but I'm wondering if they've noticed what I think has just been a minor earthquake.

With all the rumble of bowling balls and tumbling pins I can't hear what's going on in the karaoke lounge but Lauden seems content mingling with the Covenanttes and I'm thinking to get lost soon. I am about to go outside to check on Alan when Beatrice waves me over to where she is sitting with Tworden.

"I think this gentleperson is having a stroke," she says. "But I know nothing about anything medical."

"Tworden, are you alright?"

Tworden is blurring at the edges, looking out of focus. "Not so good, Tina. Gravitational imbalance."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"In Earth more than on Earth. Axis wobbly."

"Not sure I follow."

"My feet, they're too full, can't balance"

Tworden's forehead is shining with sweat. I reach out to dab it off with my shirt sleeve and it's cold and clammy. I look down at their feet busting the seams of grey suede shoes.

"Did those fit you before?"

"Yes, at some point, but everything is closing in on me now, like everything is shrinking."

"We need to get you out of here."

I can feel the room spinning and the bowling pins crashing and Tworden's heart pounding all at once like an orchestra through my skin as I take Tworden's arm and help them up. Tworden stands up slowly and the whole room shakes a

little. The lights flicker with each wobbly step as we walk arm in arm at a glacial pace towards the exit. Tworden sees Divina through the window outside and asks if we can take a different exit so I find another way out by the vending machines.

Tina and the giant take off and I'm left on this bench wondering now what. I'm still reeling from the effort of public speech so the last thing I want to do is go back into the Karaoke lounge and exert myself socially. I should be mingling with these people and trying to make myself a part of this world but I just don't see a way in. Looking at all those Coven Press members and fans I wonder how she made it all come to be. If the media mogul gene recessed for a generation it resurfaced with a vengeance and a revisionist appetite in Sephora. Whipsmart, cold and stormy, she ran Coven Press with a machete manicure, in a manner far from anything Rupert could ever have dreamt. From authorship to author's rights the joint still runs bottom-up and queer AF. That's how you know she was onto something both necessary and sustainable: it goes on largely undisturbed even without her. I wish I was better at handling conflict. I'm too awkward to know what to do with Lauden's intimate critique. Sephora probably encouraged that type of thing. The rules and ethos of BDSM are applied to the whole organization from conflict resolution to peer-review, with power-defined roles, safe words, no-go zones, aftercare, and above all the experimental pursuit of pleasure. Any employee can peer-review anyone else's work. Sephora believed that one needed to understand all the perspectives in a writing process in order to fill any role (author, editor, reviewer, illustrator). She believed in quality over quantity, and equality over equanimity, so a piece of writing would pass under several rounds of peer-review in-house no matter how contentious before meeting a public. Authorship gets very blurry once everybody's had their hands on something so all work is signed only by "Coven Press," and everyone working in any way for Coven Press owns an equal share of the company's profits. She always wanted to separate authority from authorship, emphasizing writing as the original open-source code. Sephora was all about stirring the currents of language drift. "Editors are not to enforce existing rules of writing, but rather to keep the structures of grammar, punctuation, spelling, and syntax abreast and reflective of the changing times and circumstances." Thus spake article 14 in the Coven Press mission statement. I can study the call to duty all I want but it still feels like an empty recital of koans. I just can't identify with this place like I wish I could. I know I'm thinking about it all wrong. It's not about identity, it's about practice. Get in there and let the doing do you. Coven Press's radically collective and open-source attitude towards creativity tenderizes the egos of those not strongly committed to process, and hooks those eager to lose themselves in the game. So there they all remain, playing to the end, and I'm the newbie bench-warmer. Literally. Sitting here watching the aquarium of colorful fish swirl under the scattered lights of the Karaoke lounge's disco ball and wondering how to serve them. Yet I'm supposed to be their leader. I know they miss Sephora. How could they not. We still haven't even had a memorial service. Maybe what Coven needs isn't a prize, but closure. Or do I project.

I'm in this vast orange and pink desert canyon and I happen upon this oasis-like grotto where a gathering of hippies is conferring about what to do with an algae infestation in the water. As custodians of this little pool they feel responsible for all the water that passes through it, and its pH balance is part of some larger drainage system that needs to be alkaline and they have prayer flags made out of litmus paper but also this funny contraption they say is for testing accolades and it's this machine that's full of shiny things and transforms waves in the water into sound waves with this medley of wind chimes and bells that ring with the polyrhythm of the water's currents and tides and I wake up to the sound of my doorbell ringing plus my phone alarm set to "chimes." I leverage the might to hoist my pathetic limbs into some sort of vertical arrangement and will them to transport my face to the door. I look out of the peephole. It's Candice. I open the door.

"Nice hair, Bea, did you just wake up?"

"I think the accurate formulation would be that you just woke me up."

"Sorry not sorry, I have serious news."

I turn to the kitchen to get some coffee brewing. Candice follows me in and closes the door behind her, talking nonstop.

"There was a man over at the farm yesterday to install my barn lights and he had a picture in his wallet of a kid that looked just like Sephora looked when she was young. It was totally crazy. Like uncanny to the max but I didn't know him from Adam, well his name it turns out is Alan so close but no cigar. Anyway the point is after he left *he called me* this morning and started asking me questions about my family like did I have sisters and I was taken aback cuz like why should I answer such personal questions absolutely unrelated to anything that is his actual business, right? I'm thinking dude you're an electrician not a shrink or do I mistake professional boundaries. I didn't say that out loud of course I'm just like on the phone at a loss for context and feeling like family affairs are not public affairs so I can't even remember how it all unfolded honestly Bea but eventually it tumbles out of his audacious mouth that he knew Sephora but maybe more than just knew her if you catch my drift and was basically trying to figure out what happened to her and it felt like he was sort of like implying that they had a thing and she more or less disappeared on him. Which is one thing but my whole brain is exploding by now because not only was I always under the distinct impression that Sephora was such a workaholic she was probably just having orgies with the people at Coven would that she have any sex drive at all to satisfy and I always assumed she had basically no private life to speak of but now here's this guy acting real soft in the middle over her but like in addition or maybe most importantly it keeps running through my head like what if that kid in his wallet is *Sephora's*? I don't wanna jump to conclusions but I'm putting two and two together and I'm thinking Bea we have to get to the bottom of this. If Sephora has a kid out there somewhere don't you think we should know about it?"

"Please don't call me Bea... *Candy*."

"Beatrice. Are you even listening? Is this not absolutely mind-blowing?"

"You sound pretty wound up, keep in mind I'm not even caffeinated yet but I'm picking up what you're laying down."

"We have to find the kid."

"Well, I was at your bar the other night."

"Why?"

"For *Lauden's Laudibles*, actually, Coven related recon mission. But that's another story. I guess you and I haven't caught up in a while. I also got kinda blitzed, not my style. Point is two even crazier things happened. I saw Rupert and Sephora called."

"Are you mocking me?"

"No I'm actually serious."

"Did somebody mess with your drink?"

"No actually I took the bottle of whisky off the shelf myself so nobody else touched it."

"Sounds like you made yourself at home. What do you mean you saw Rupert?"

"He sat with me and was nagging at me about Coven Press."

"Has this kind of thing happened before?"

"What like do I see dead people? No it's not my usual repertoire."

"Was it scary? What was he like?"

"He was the same as ever, a perfect pain in the ass. He was pressing me to take the bull by the horns at Coven Press and go all proprietary on their asses. I paraphrase of course. I didn't get far with him before Sephora called."

"What do you mean Sephora called?"

"She called the landline at the bar for me. I didn't realize you even had a landline at Cindy's. It's literally from another millennium. It's a classic vintage 1980's burger phone. Incredible. That's like a century old. Straight outta the Plastocene. It could be worth more than the whole bar if it's an original."

"There's no such phone there. Nevermind. What did Sephora say?"

"She... yes it's coming back. She said something about a kid, well first Rupert said it, but then Sephora called and started going on about a portal we have to go through to learn things."

"Are you messing with me again? I am seriously in no mood for your pranks."

"Absolutely not fucking with you."

"A portal?"

"Yeah. She said there's one in the basement at the bar. Your bar. I don't remember the rest."

"How do you know these weren't hallucinations, or a dream?"

"Well, I didn't go to sleep or wake up, it was all just there, at the bar."

"Put that coffee in a thermos and get some pants on, it's go time."

Interlude:

Open Dancing (Quartet)

People that love to converse and waste time aimlessly in all nature of building relationships, love and affection. Folding. People that are able to fold into each other to create new beings, people that slot into each other's bodies, like the shape was already made and you need the other shape to come and complete it, because it brings out a new desire, a new feeling, a new sensation that's needed in the world. I see expansion: objects with expansion, people with expansion. Their thoughts, minds and needs expand, informing others to expand. It's an exhibition of human relation. We need each other to continue, it's not possible without each other. Creatures forming and morphing. These monsters are hungry. These monsters are delicate and gruesome but friendly. They stroke and sniff, feeding off each other, for each other, bending into each other, filling the shapes of each other that they didn't know existed or were needed. Oh, you fit right there. I needed that bit to be filled in right there. If I can just take that, then that allows me to do this. None of this would be possible without t'other. Feeling into the space. Space informing what next. Listening, sniffing, punching beings.

These creatures exist in no land. All land is their land. Lands of plenty, of green and stripey fields, of deep dark oceans. Spreading their wings, splashing to affect the next. The Butterfly Effect. What if this whole space was filled with butterflies? That feels good. Lengthy and stretchy and tight. Tight. They're tight and bolshy. I think the sternum plays a massive role in this, the punching expanding sternum.

She's a milkmaid. What if the milkmaid is the hero of the story, she doesn't have to do anything special apart from milk. And that is special enough. She churns that milk, twizzles that milk. She gets on with her milky business while the other friends also get on. In the background, they're doing the other tasks that help the milk in the foreground. These guys are churning it with friendliness and pressure and difficulties and the strenuousness of life, but also comfort and discomfort: accept that you can't have one without the other. The sun shining out of her ass all day long. Bodies, animals, farmyards. She says, "Alright! Okay! Done with that, shall I?" She's quite determined. Finger licking good at dancing.

Four silhouettes, like those little chains that carry our pictures in silhouette. The need for each other is strong. The combination is fierce. The sturdy flesh is real. I see sturdy flesh picked at, prodded at, plucked. Slotting into each other in and out. Touch. Structure. Magical knees of bendy delight, elbows signifying drama, expanse, beauty. Say yes to that moment. Say yes to your closeup. Say yes to French. Say yes to skills that you have always had, that no one gave to you. No one decided they were right for you. You attained them. You gave something for that. And you now reap. They are reaping the fields of their experience. They've sowed the seeds of their future, and they are now witnessing and reaping that harvest. That harvest is now spreading and pollinating a new crop of experience for a new generation.

*Washing machine orgasms. What if they're all having orgasms, but these orgasms aren't so explicit, they're just happening. What if orgasms were only ever possible on your own? What if you got orgasms from sit-ups? Orgasms from leg fumbles? Finding solid ground on another. They are your landscape. They are your set. Sexy, awkward set. Folding in and out. Puzzle shapes, sexy puzzles, doing puzzles, feeling sexy and having orgasms. Sliding into symmetry, symmetrical orgasms.*⁵³

⁵³ Transcript of live commentary by Stephanie McMann, recorded on 9 August 2019, watching video of Open Dancing as a quartet danced by Eleanor Sikorski, Flora Wellesley Wesley, Stephanie McMann, and Eleanor Bauer, filmed on 8 August 2019. Live commentary is an interpretation of the dance as a reading of the relation of objects, species, people, and stuff in the narrative yet to be written.

The Høst

Elba hangs his watercolor on the wall to dry with pigment-stained cuticles and a sense of “what next?” more than satisfaction. Not much of a daydreamer, Elba is always ready for stimulation. Luckily the Learning By Doing school offers plenty with which to get busy. His favorite teacher at school is the movement teacher, because she always says “And then what?” after an action.⁵⁴ She gets that the point is not about the thing you do but what the thing you do makes possible. It’s not as cynical as “so what?” or as demanding as “now what?” but similarly disinterested in finitude. Elba, as a fully integrated cyborg with the internet fully internalized, has no experience of finitude. Everything is connected and infinitely hyperlinked, so it’s just an arbitrary decision, or some external force of discipline or time limit to arrest a thought-venture in any direction, there is so rarely a properly conclusive end to any query. Hanging up his watercolor, Elba says out loud, “and then what?” when his eyes land on the bookshelf. He grabs the volume of Dr. Dance’s books that he’s been reading at home with his dad, and curls up in a beanbag to continue:

This here chapter gets a little more laughter
because it’s so hard to imagine
a time before a you or a me
or an I separate ever-after

The entire world was a polyrhythm
of touch, feel, sight, smell and sound
a chorus of interrelated senses
pulsing and moving around

Fluids and ethers and solids in motion
building and breaking down
from the tides and currents in the great wide ocean
To hot lava deep underground

At some point there was a perfect storm
like when an idea comes to be
conditions and temperatures allowed for a form
to appear in the turbulent sea

⁵⁴ Dance teacher Anna Grip plucked this phrase from hearing Christina Caprioli say it and uses it as a refrain in her own teaching practice. For her it is a tripartite condensation of: 1) the notion that knowledge is knowing what the next step could be 2) Grip’s paraphrased memory of Rancière’s *Ignorant Schoolmaster*: “What do I see, what do I think about it and how do I relate to it?” and 3) the experience of motion and placement as “being in charge of one’s actions.” (As per Grip’s email to Bauer on 16 July 2021 answering an inquiry about the origins of the phrase *and then what?*)

A few little systems grew outer shells
became units we now call cells
beginning a process of separation-relation
that gave rise to the need for organization

As carbon hydrogen oxygen nitrogen
phosphorus and sulfur combined,
the mind of matter and matter of mind
were very intertwined

As larger and larger creatures grew
from organs and fascia and muscle tissue
stems, trunks, wings, limbs and fins
enveloped in surfaces sometimes called skins

All sorts of relations and deals
emerged in the interdependence
from ecosystems to organelles
exchanging in the elements

From macro to micro and all in-between
each thing repeated certain themes
ratios of mass to tempo of living
were consistent through all the scales of being

All followed cycles like seasons and days
to coordinate living in different ways
some beings stayed-put while others migrated
some hunted at night when some hibernated

But soon one peculiar creature appears
with two legs, eyes, lungs, hands, feet, and ears
who struggles to trust the niche of their place
in this continuity of time and space

The fluid tides along their spine
remind them of the sea
the pulsing bloody marrow of bone
of lava deep underneath

despite this sense, something breeds
in the busy mind of this creature
an image of self forms inside called a "me"
who apparently fears its own erasure

Their sense of being a part of the whole
troubles them in their dreams
while eyes close to rest, other systems are on go
digesting the day, so it seems

The wind around their head blows loud
whispering memories
of a time before the need to be proud
of being a somebody

And their skin with its wondrous microbiome
is so much akin to earth's topsoil
they're afraid to sleep on the ground alone
for fear of becoming a compost pile

One day observing the turtle and snail
this creature thinks, "oh swell,
perhaps the secret to rest without ail
is to have a second shell!"

And so they go about building their own
shelter to sleep within
made of collected twigs and stones
A kind of second skin

This shelter created the notion of home
as an anchor to the land
diminishing this creature's roam
and putting more time on their hands

As a result, their rest grows longer
affording yet wilder nocturnal visions
as the eyes close, another world opens
filled with storied imaginations

Every morning, awakened by birds
this creature wants to record
all the things they've seen and heard
and thus is born the word

While many still think that houses and naming
are for property-owning and identity-making
the original use of the home is for dreaming
and words are for dreams' retelling!

Elba thinks about this for a moment. It's a nice myth about the representation of thought in pictures and words. An origin story of human creativity that wants to undermine the idea of intellectual property and emphasize interdependence and dreaming. It is true that nobody knows where thoughts come from. Neuroscience can't explain the phenomenon. It's negative space, between neurons, in lost milliseconds between a stimulus and the realization of a recognizable thing people refer to as a thought. And the jury is still out on what is actually happening in dreaming, except that REM sleep accompanies it and REM sleep is crucial to processes of memorization and general cognitive health. It really is a wonder how little humans know about how they know what they know. And yet so much effort put into claiming that they know and documenting how they know it. There is a Marvin Minsky quote hanging over the IA station at the school that reads: "In general we are least aware of what our minds do best."

Tina is leaning against the bar putting glasses away. Tworden the Giant sits in the far corner of the bar, drawing in the same giant notebook as always, with a large pitcher of water and a glass that is dwarfed by Tworden's colossal paws. The afternoon light brings some levity to an otherwise empty bar.

Lauden comes in the front door and sits at the bar. "Oh my god. I was just with Divina, she is such a genius. She knows like everything about the pelvic floor. Did you know it's possible to get off without even touching yourself? Like just with muscles. She's gonna teach me how. I'm so stoked."

"Sounds good. You want something?" Tina answers without turning around.

"Just saying what's up, but sparkling water would be great I guess."

Tina grabs a large bottle of sparkling water and two glasses. She scoops a bowl of nuts and slides it across the bar. "Take these, we can sit by the window."

They walk to the farthest table from Tworden and sit down. Tina keeps a view of the door in case any actual customers come. Lauden asks Tina what's up, gets a generic answer about business as usual or the weather and asks again, more precisely. "How are you feeling?"

Tina blows air out of puffed cheeks. "I dunno I'm keeping step with things but everything is getting a bit dusty and gray, like there's a sort of patina on all my senses."

"Well if you do want a lift, the options out there these days are practically infinite. The old serotonin reuptake inhibitors are like child's play compared to the organic compounds they're working up. I heard about a new plant that's a hybrid between the CBD producing part of weed and St. John's Wart. And you can get psilocybin over the counter now. Practically everyone I know is micro-dosing that shit. Could be just the thing to clear out that patina. I only did shrooms once properly, ages ago, but it was very anti-patina. I mean the trip wore off but the effect never totally disappeared, it's like I was wearing dirty glasses before and didn't realize until I cleaned the lenses and everything stayed more vivid afterwards. The memory of the trip is also still clear as day."

"Tell me about it."

"You too?"

"No, I'm literally asking you to tell me about it."

Lauden snort laughs.

"I seriously wanna hear the story!"

"Isn't that kind of boring? Like hearing someone talk about their dreams? It's kind of a you-had-to-be-there thing isn't it?"

"I like hearing people's dreams."

"Figures you would."

"Why do you say that?"

"I just feel like you've always appreciated that blurry zone between imagination and memory."

"I guess you could say it like that. Lauden, tell me the damn story."

"I was in high school, on scholarship at this school for the arts and sciences up in the hills, the school was a lot of celebrity shit kids – like spoiled children of rich and semi-famous people – all mixed in with the scholarship students like me and Alan who were mostly there by choice escaping bleak situations like public high school in favor of this place where it was actually cool to be weird."

"I forgot that you and Alan go all the way back to high school! What was he like then?"

"I guess even then he had this way of effortlessly holding attention, which I found comforting, like I didn't have to try to concentrate in his presence, I could just hang and he would hold down the spotlight. Some people resented his shine but I found it comforting, like settling into a really good chair in a darkened movie theater. He got the name Electric Alan when he was struck by lightning, up on that mountain actually. It was incredible, he didn't suffer any injuries. But was always kinda buzzed afterwards and would get electric shocks when touching other people."

"How come I never knew that?"

"I dunno I guess once a thing gets a catchy name it just sticks, and maybe people don't ask why when you make a business out of it."

"OK back to the story. Tell it in present tense."

"Why?"

"I dunno, maybe to blur that zone between imagination and memory you say I like so much."

"Touché. So it's a Saturday night in early Autumn, the ground is still warm. The moon is full and the sky is clear but misty so you can see a ring of rainbow around the moon. I'm lying in this field of long and yellowed grass up on a hill, in this clearing outside the boarding school campus. It's not a place I'd walked before, we just found our way there under the full moonlight. Earlier that day we'd been on a school field trip to see an exhibit of VanGogh paintings. I'm like, fifteen, I'm with Alan, and we are lying in this yellowed grass. Alan has this platinum mop with darkened roots growing out, shaggy and coarse from the bleaching. His hair is just like the wind-blown and weather beaten grass. Everything glows silver under the magic touch of the moonlight and the whole thing becomes a VanGogh painting,

in thick and shimmering brushstrokes. I have this very real sense of the scalability of texture – the grass is hair and the moon with its halo is a giant boob and the planet is a body and we are all part of the same stuff, the same processes and systems from micro to macro.”

“Do you think that’s true?” Tina asks.

“I don’t know but in the days to follow it was clear to me that everything had changed for good. Like I’d had this whole other spectrum opened up to me, in depth and detail and color and shine and now that I’d upgraded to 12k there was no going back to whatever basic resolution I’d been seeing in before.”

Tworden the Giant packs up their things, gulps down the pitcher of water with one hand, skipping the tiny pointless glass altogether, and leaves Cindy’s bar with a shy nod and wave.

“Bye Tworden,” says Tina, kind of too late.

“That’s weird. I’ve never seen Tworden leave here, much less standing, or hardly moving at all” Lauden says, “damn they’re tall.”

“Yeah... Tworden moves on a different tempo I guess.” Tina starts to drift to the thought place.

“Hey, by the way what happened last week?”

“What do you mean?”

Lauden rolls her eyes, “I *mean*... after *Laudibles*, with Tworden.”⁵⁵

“I don’t know. I mean, I can’t say.” Tina blushes.

Lauden leans in, grinning, “Ummmmm, yes you *can* say!”

Tina takes a deep breath. “OK, So, I thought it was just me alone in the bar after everyone had left. Normally I’m aware of Tworden’s presence, but for some reason I thought they’d gone home.”

“Home? I thought Tworden basically lives here.”

“Tworden is always here when I’m here, the first to arrive and the last to leave, but they don’t stay here alone so yeah I assume there’s a place they call home. It’s not like I’ve been over for dinner.”

“Tina, can you always see Tworden? Sometimes I don’t notice them. They’re so a part of the world it’s like camouflage.”

Tina gets fidgety talking about Tworden. “Yeah, I guess I can always see them. But I think it’s because they want me to. But last week, after *Laudibles*, maybe I was distracted by the Divina kerfuffle and cleaning up all that hay from her messy shtick, but I didn’t notice Tworden for a long time. I was putting some things away behind the bar, getting ready to close, and I felt a little shake, like an earthquake or something, and then I stood up and Tworden was there, like right in my face, at the bar.”

“Oh my god!”

“I know. It felt so dramatic and unexpected. I just started talking, like standing there was a cue for me to talk. I told Tworden that I see them all the time, I asked if they knew I could see them, they nodded yes, like of course, so I told them that

⁵⁵ Conversation between Tina and Lauden about Tworden originally developed by Sikorski, 27 January 2021, Zoom.

I felt close somehow, and wanted to be... friends."

"*Friends?*"

"I *know!* I was panicking!"

Lauden cackled loudly. "Tina, you're a total prude."

"I know. But then we had this weird exchange about seeing each other, like literally being able to see each other with our eyes, but maybe also seeing each other, as in you know, making dates or whatever."

"So are you seeing each other?"

"Well yes, but I think we're going to work through the senses like really slowly."

"What?"

"Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Touching, Tasting, like we're gonna work through the senses."

"As nerdy as that sounds it also sounds potentially sexy in a weird way."

"Yeah I think knowing the plan makes the execution of it even more precious somehow, lends itself easily to being experienced, like I don't have to waste any attention on deciding what to propose we do together, I can just trust the choreography, and savor what's happening, one sense at a time, now and now."

As if cued by "now" the front door bursts open and in blow Beatrice and Candice like they own the place, which is merited at least for Candice.

Tina bolts up and drops her glass into her apron pocket, pouring sparkling water into Lauden's glass like she's serving. "Hey! I mean hello, Candice, Beatrice, wwwwhat brings you in today?"

"How well do you know this Electric Alan?" Beatrice demands.

Lauden gulps and looks at everyone like she's watching a suspense film.

"Well, he does frequent the establishment," answers Tina, trying to respect the privacy of her customers and unsure why she's asking, "Why, is there a problem? Is he in trouble?"

"Did he ever date our sister Sephora?" asks Candice.

"Umm..." Tina looks wide eyed into her memory, deciding how to answer.

"Yes," blurts Lauden, "Alan and Sephora were the weirdest, most improbable and yet the hottest, most intense couple that you ever did see. It didn't last that long but it was devastating and confusing and unforgettable. Like a comet. They were just kids really, I mean mid-twenties maybe, but it consumed Alan in a way I'd never seen before."

"Who's this?" Candice asks Tina, screening before granting her direct address.

"Candice, this is Lauden, Alan's best friend, among other things. Lauden, this is Candice, owner of this fine establishment," Tina obligingly recites, "and I believe you two are already acquainted," she says politely, gesturing between Beatrice and Lauden.

"Yes, we are." they say in unison.

"Excuse us, we need to go to the cellar." Beatrice announces, pulling Candice.

"Wait," Candice retracts her arm from Beatrice's, "How long were they together?" Candice asks Lauden.

"I don't know, maybe like a couple years? It's real hard to tell, it could have been

more, they were very secretive about it, and it wasn't long before she disappeared. I mean, passed away."

"Did they... procreate?" Candice again.

"I don't know. But Alan has a kid. He has never said who the mother is. I thought it was an adoption maybe. Because it's an e-kid and a lot of those end up in orphanages. He doesn't talk about it and I never pushed him on the subject, it's just one of those off-limit things. Alan is very good at changing the subject when necessary and I have observed this subject treated as necessary."

"Fair enough. Thank you," Beatrice answers for Candice, who's got her head cocked and her eyes half squinted in a state of piecing it all together, "Tina is the cellar locked?"

"Part of it," Tina answers.

"We need everything open," Beatrice demands.

Tina reaches into her apron pocket and produces a key ring rattling with an assorted sampling from six thousand years of security technology. She shuffles through and detaches a smaller ring with an iron skeleton key, a dimple key, and a magnetic blip. She tosses them to Beatrice who catches it mid-air and pulls Candice with her. "C'mon Candice it's time for a portal cruise."

Candice and Beatrice find themselves outside the city on the side of a hellish, noisy sliver of roadside, the kind that might otherwise be occupied by hitchhikers. They climb over the crash barrier and stumble down the grassy banks. Seeing a smaller unmade road through the trees, they make their way towards it. This tiny road has a magnetic draw, an invisible pulse, like a vein. The sound of the highway fades away and with it the sense of passing time. The road extends and they walk through a now that could be an instant or forever, one foot in front of the other, endlessly suspended in groove. No cars, no passersby, just Candice and Beatrice and the beat. Candice's GPS says that Elba is another half hour away, then it says five, then it says fourty-seven. He is marked by a luminous green pin on the map.

"What do you remember?" Candice asks Beatrice, breaking the forgotten silence.

"It's hard to say," Beatrice answers, "I remember knowing that Sephora was seeing someone, but it's only now I can put it that way. At the time, it was just a murky energy. Not from Sephora, who seemed utterly blissed, but from Rupert. He would grumble that Sephora had done something wrong and offer zero intel on what. Looking back it seems obvious what was going on. If some dude didn't meet Rupert's standards for inclusion in the family tree, he would go to any extent to get in the way. I just didn't question anything or dig behind things at that time. I was probably too busy brooding over my graphic novel."

"I don't remember any of it. Maybe I just blocked all of my memories of him. I think I kinda wished he'd never come into our lives. I didn't miss grandparents. I feel like we were better off without him, I think mom would have left it that way too."

"You were young. And absorbed in some fictional world of worry dolls most of the time anyway. I am not surprised that Rupert didn't bother you. I always

admired the fortress of your solitude. It was there for you when you needed it.”

“I wasn’t alone. Those dolls were very good company. You know I made a language for them?”

“No.”

“Yeah. Four different dialects for the four families of dolls actually.”

“Can you still speak it?”

“Maybe. I bet I could if I saw them.”

They move through the woods, closing in on the green pin. They were both nervous this morning. The walking shook it off, but now that they’re close to their target, the adrenaline is kicking in again and their pace quickens. Candice is talking about the beautiful trees, the way the light casts through them in scattered rays. Beatrice is silent, eyes on their target.

Alan comes running towards them through the trees, taking them both by surprise. “I’m so glad you came! Wow, thank you. Was the walk okay? You must be tired!” Ahead, over Alan’s shoulder they can see a clearing, and a boy sitting under a lone oak tree in the center of it. “I wanted to catch you here just before we go on to see Elba. Just to meet you first.” Looking to Beatrice, he offers a hand. “Hi, I’m Alan.”

Beatrice raises a hand to wave, then catches herself and reaches in for a shake. “Beatrice,” she states, noticing a little buzz in the touch of his palm.

Candice extends her hand. “Hello again. Candice.”

“So... what do you guys... already know?”

Candice and Beatrice look at each other for the first time in the entire walk. They are both red in the face, flush from the walk or embarrassment or both.

“Well,” Candice offers, pulling her eyes reluctantly from Beatrice to Alan, as if hesitant for permission to divulge, and starts easy, “we know that you and Sephora... met.”

Alan is nodding, desperate to tell the story himself, but also desperate to hear someone else tell it to him, a kind of affirmation that this part of his life forced from public view has not disappeared into oblivion, but has validity, even if only as a rumor.

“And we know that Elba is... hers.” Beatrice hesitates about the choice of words. Sephora would probably not use the possessive to describe offspring, or lovers, or anyone for that matter. She was so particular about language.

Beatrice interjects, “We know that Sephora wanted to have a child, an electric child, and that you were able to offer her that. We know that you and Sephora spent time together because it was a problem, for Rupert, who started showing up more around that time, maybe because of it. I don’t know if that counts as knowing or guessing. Maybe guessing. We’re just now piecing it all together.”

Alan is full of heat and tears, heart pounding like a kick drum drowned in reverb. He knows this story so well, but has never heard anyone else tell it, and this version has so much missing.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Candice and Beatrice’s roadside meeting with Alan originally developed by Sikorski, 13 January 2021, Zoom.

Nettle knows the story. Nettle knows all the stories. She doesn't need any single storyline unfolded in a linear fashion in order to *Know The Story*. She feels it. For Nettle, knowing the story is an all at once thing. In the systems of her flesh, the diving and surfacing layers of her fascia, she holds the consciousness of all storyness, wrapped around each mass or node in a soft container that affords isolation yet whose ultimate purpose is relation. Like the colors in her threadbare rug, all sorts of time are interwoven in the fibers of her being.

A buzz at the drive-up intercom. Nettle walks to the microphone and presses down on the TALK button, says "Nettle the Oracle speaking how may I help you?" and presses the LISTEN button.

Alan, Beatrice, and Candice are standing together outside the drive thru, huddled around the speaker. The backlit menu, unlit, displays a handwritten message.

ACCEPTED FORMS OF PAYMENT INCLUDE:

UNCOOKED GRAINS

DRIED BEANS AND LEGUMES

FRESH VEGETABLES

FRUITS – FRESH OR DRIED

ORGANIC COLD PRESSED OILS: OLIVE, SESAME, COCONUT

SPICES – WHOLE OR GROUND

HERBS – FRESH OR DRIED

ORGANIC CLEANING PRODUCTS

NON-ACCEPTED FORMS OF PAYMENT:

COOKED OR FROZEN FOODS

ANIMAL PRODUCTS

OBJECTS

FAVORS

MONEY

"I have satsumas," says Alan to the sisters.

"I've got veg from the farm," says Candice.

"I'm going to the Oracle and I'm bringing satsumas, veg from the farm, and a boat load of questions," Beatrice shrugs, "sorry guys I didn't know about this part."

"Don't worry about it." Alan presses the CALL button under the speaker.

"Nettle the Oracle speaking how may I help you?" answers a voice through the speaker.

"We have a... friend, a common friend," begins Alan.

"A sister" adds Beatrice, "a sister to two, and a lover to one... of us"

Candice punches Beatrice in the arm.

"What?!" mouths Beatrice silently to Candice.

"She is, was, also a mother... of one," adds Alan.

"Sephora Murdoch?" verifies Nettle.

They all look at each other with eyebrows in their hairlines.

“Damn!” affirms Beatrice.

“We want to know... how she died. What happened that day,” Candice cuts to the chase.

“I see. Anything else?” asks Nettle through the static.

The three of them look at each other.

“I think that’s it for now,” says Candice, not wanting to overwhelm, “thanks.”

Nettle drinks a glass of water, rolls herself up in the carpet, and jumps in. The trio gathers around the speaker in suspense. As Nettle’s voice comes echoing through lightyears of tunnel, they hang on her every word.

“Sephora is outside, staring at the sky, listening. The yew tree is dying, and so is the light. She is cold, a little bit out of sorts, her face ablush like plum wine. The veins in her head pulse at the temples. Acrylic fingertips tapping on the tabletop, she has summoned a ghost. She sits with Rupert. She does not take the apparition seriously. She looks to Rupert, smiling, remembering their swimming pool games. Quickly, she stands. Light headed, ears ringing, she has opened. Sephora gasps, her lungs shake. A flood of soaring emotions topple her down the patio stairs. Head cut, fearful of blood, she reaches toward the house, for the bathroom, but Rupert stands in her way. He frightens her. But she follows him. They go to the pool. For a swim. Storm clouds drift overhead. Thundering, electrifying. The birds are warning. She does not listen. Her ears have shut. She accepts his challenge. He calls her by name and tempts her fate. Sephora, he says, how many lengths can you go underwater? No dare is too childish. She never backs down from a challenge. She knows the lengths she will go to prove herself to him. She knows she will take this one too far. Sephora spins the bronze globe garden sculpture and traces her finger across the equator. This many lengths. She inhales, wipes the blood from her brow, looks up at the sky and chooses water over lungs: Granddaddy wins.”⁵⁷

There is a moment of silence, then static again and Nettle continues, “You, who said there was nothing else, name begins with a C. There’s something else.”

“Y-you mean for me?” stutters Candice.

“Yes. A message: Forge new lines of love and let the leaves rot. Restore and reinterpret your roots. Tend the fire and sweep the floor of your heart. Befriend and say goodbye to the humble mouse that lives in the house. Let the mouse have the field. It doesn’t need shelter. Let the birds in to sing. Let your lovers and your neighbours know your boundaries. You don’t need walls when you have words. Let eyes be soft, frown soaked up by a warm flannel of castor oil and understanding. Not over, under; below, down there. Get on your hands and knees beneath the surface of experience and sniff for clues of what really happened and moreover why and furthestmost what it meant to you and above all where it’s going in 20 years’ time. But do not harvest or plant here, it is a sacred terrain of learning. Step back, rope it off. The information you seek is there. Enter on soft belly and paw,

⁵⁷ From *Remything of Sephora’s Death* by Bauer, McMann, Sikorski and Wellesley-Wesley. 4 November 2020, Zoom.

*eyes open-closed to unassume, un-try. Be like soil. Soil, understood?”*⁵⁸

“Yes... thank you,” Candice mutters, stunned, embarrassed, inspired.

“That’s it then. Proceed to the payment window and deposit your goods.” Nettle clicks off.

Alan, Candice and Beatrice walk along the curved drive around the corner of the building. The drive-up window is open. They leave their bounty on the stainless steel ledge and shuffle into the dusk through the woods towards Elba without speaking. Coyote crosses behind them, having just left Elba for the afternoon and hops up on the delivery ledge to peer inside the now closed window.

Nettle was born with a gift and a curse: an informational immune system that threw her body temperature into a feverish fit of hot and cold upon contact with stories that attempted to gloss over the complexity of things. This was of course worse when she was younger, because the younger a child is, the simpler the parables, the more reductive the stories, and therefore more provocative of that wild allergic response. Learning language was the hardest for Nettle, her infernal temperature set off by the idea of naming the world into an imposed structure. Before she learned to speak, she knew only of radial time and interconnected splace where all beings and their intelligences belonged together in a polyphonic chorus of noise. At infancy, she was already fluent in the interrelated communication systems of Plant, Shroom, Worm, Bee, and Bird, through which the taxonomical edges of grammar and phonyx cut like a knife. Once her vocabulary expanded, she began to find adequate human communicative forms for her multifold experience of life, and the temperature tantrums eventually subsided, but she had to take great liberties with the English she learned in order to get there, and it took years for her to hone her skills.

The first person to recognize her gift was Miss Cleo, the orphanage volunteer who found her, named her, and trained her. At just under one year of age, Nettle was left in the garden of an orphanage called Villa Estrella, at the top of the hill at the end of a road whose winding path also housed Villa Nora. Towering hedges of stinging nettle lined the garden periphery of Villa Estrella to prevent the children from escaping and unwanted guests from entering. Cleo found the prelingual baby wrapped in a carpet, singing to the nettle at the front edge of the yard. Miss Cleo took her in, cleaned her up, and named her Nettle, after the child’s first choir.

Miss Cleo clearly came from money but nobody at the orphanage knew or cared, as extra hands on deck were all that mattered with such a quantity of childrearing to do. Cleo was possibly working out some guilt about having all but abandoned her own biological children, but for whatever the reason, by chance or destiny, she and Nettle bonded immediately. Some children in the orphanage were early generation electrics, rejected due to unresolvable glitches, but most were biochemically analogue. The range of special needs was unpredictable, so it was not unusual for certain staff with particular skills to take to certain children with particular qualities. Lovely Lucky Cleo’s own broad-ranging and

⁵⁸ From Wellesley Wesley’s writing for Nettle. 13 January 2021, Zoom.

synthetic intelligence helped Nettle wrangle herself through the simple and rather conformist tasks generally referred to as “learning.” In the mutual mentorship of understanding how to care for this special child, Miss Cleo raised Nettle to trust her own modybind’s wild murmurings.

The carpet in which Nettle was found would stay with Nettle for the rest of her life, following her wherever she lived. This carpet’s particular musty smell of soil, herbs, and funghi triggered something in Nettle, opened the book of her inner eye. The rug was key to unlocking her gift of prophecy, or the art of questioning. Guided by her mysterious voice that knew how to see through the façade of “reality” so fervently plastered on everything by monolithic ideas of coherence such as History and Knowledge, the complex smell of the carpet became both a protective shield from educational brainwashing and a surface upon which to sit for listening to and joining in the song of infinite interrelation. Eventually she also learned that the carpet was a vehicle to roll herself up and slip through the portals connecting Everythingeverywhereallthetime.⁵⁹ But this magic of the carpet was not fully unlocked until Nettle had acquired the physics of portaling, which she serendipitously learned as a teenager at the skatepark.

As a pre-teen, Nettle fell into a detox-retox sort of addiction to plant-based experiences. Herbal or fungal intoxicants and cleanses augmented her already rollercoaster personality. Like most adolescents, Nettle was hormonally volatile, her body odor broadcasting pheromonal confusion. Her clothing could walk on its own, powered by an olfactory archive of purged toxins never fully erased by organic detergents. In more ways than one, skateboarding saved her from a potential spiral, giving her the swing and swerve she was looking for to cut her loose from the pull of substances. She was an excellent skater. As a teenager she spent long days at the skatepark making friends with everyone. Her best friend of all was the kinetic thrill of perpetual motion that helped her kick other habits. Steep hills were cheap thrills and sure beat pills.

When the skatepark was bulldozed and a MacDonald’s was erected in its place, she climbed up into the cleavage of the golden arches, straddled them, and wept. Someone called the cops, they called in a youth counselor to talk her down with a megaphone, and finally when the fire department came she rode down on a crane, feeling more like a stadium rockstar or pageant queen than a rescued teen. Soon after, in the financial crash and The Great Dissolution of the mid 21st century, the MacDonald’s empire crumbled. The M, she joked, stood for Money, now obsolete. The skatepark was reborn in the rubble of Nettle’s modybind. She moved into the abandoned drive-thru and dreamed of what else it could be. Placing her carpet by the door for protection of the threshold, she discovered a portal somewhere between the lingering echoes of her skateboarding memories and the visions released by the carpet aromas. She connected her kinetic memory with the interwoven demands of the times and discovered her own special method and style for surfing nonlinear time. Her poetic claire-voyance gained a reputation,

⁵⁹ Rasmus Ölme uses the term *Everythingeverywhereallthetime* to refer to a holistic experience of movement and its complexity in multiple simultaneous acausally coordinated actions. *Rasmus Technique*, 3.5 Exercise 2: To End with Causality and Thresholds of Stillness, p.121 in Ölme, Rasmus. 2014. *From Model to Module – A move towards Generative Choreography*. KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm.

and so she decided to set up shop under the M for meaning, M for message, M for medium – anything but money – and barter food for prophecy. People started coming from far and wide to her window for insights, guidance, or a spiritual slap in the face, delivering their questions through the speaker and food payments through the window.⁶⁰

Nettle emerges from the surf, shakes out the rug, and lays it back in its place by the door. She walks to the pick up window and takes in a sac of root vegetables, two bunches of rainbow chard, and a few satsumas. Nobody ever leaves onions. What the fuck am I supposed to cook without garlic and onions, she complains aloud to no one. The telephone rings. Nettle picks up the plastic hamburger and flips it open.

“Nettle the Oracle speaking how may I help you?”

“Hello, Don Conley here, Investigative Reporter with Coven Press. I’m calling to ask if I need an appointment, or do you take walk-ins?”

“No need for appointment. It’s a drive-thru. If there’s a line there’s a line. Bring onions and garlic.”

“And may I ask how much you charge for your services?”

“I said onions and garlic. Parsley would be a plus if you’re feeling it. Everything else is gravy.”

“Copy.” Don hangs up before Nettle has the chance to conjure a send-off, redeem her tone, or further intimidate him.

The intercom buzzes. Busy day all of a sudden. Nettle holds down the TALK button.

“Nettle the Oracle speaking, how may I help you?”

“Hey babe, it’s DIVINA. I have a friend here who needs some advice.”

“Alright, why don’t you let your friend do the talking?”

“Lauden?” Divina cues.

Lauden leans towards the speaker out the window, “Hi, um, Nettle. I’m Lauden. Heard so much about you. I guess I’m curious about, like, creativity? Maybe. Or what to do with, I guess people call it writer’s block, but I don’t necessarily believe in writer’s block, since I don’t believe in authorship, I mean, I believe in things... happening... between people, and also between people and things, or even between things as things, but sometimes I don’t know how to get it going, like where does it all begin. I’m looking for a catalyst maybe. How to set it off when there’s like, drought is what it’s like, no juice, nothing, a desert. I’m a little lost I guess. Lost in the desert so to speak. Am I making any sense?”

“That’ll do.”

Jumping into uncertainty is Nettle’s speciality, her comfort zone. Home on the roam, she avoids answers, knowing they are infinitely less inspiring, less exciting, less informative. Answers don’t bring closure, they stop things short, like unfinished bridges over high canyons. Nettle regards answers with disdain, watching them

⁶⁰ Elaborated by Bauer from Bauer, McMann, Sikorski, Wellesley Wesley *Remything* of How Nettle came to be the Oracle in the shut-down McDonald’s drive thru. 1 February 2021, Zoom.

from afar through binoculars: tiny vehicles speeding along, shooting off an edge in a euphoric arch to meet their certain death. She composes curvilinear flight paths, weaves journeys of sense, not intended as answers but rather ecosystems that can bring the person closer to their purpose, their primary question, their motivating *raison d'être*.

Nettle downs a glass of water, rolls herself up in the carpet, and jumps in. Time is explosive and diffracted in the portals, everything simultaneously perceived in the smooth and thrilling velocity of swoop and swoosh. The speed of relative motion renders usually opaque objects transparent to one another. With a heightened sense of tactility in this gravitational whirlwind, Nettle has mastered the art of 'manual lucidity,' a way of letting the carpet ride her, in tensile attunement to the emergent meanings, letting the images find their way to language rather than trying to direct the journey in any teleological way. Nettle questions and remembers in an acausal manner in the portals. Questioning takes her through as memories cast recognizable shadow-forms she can layer to uncover meaning.

*"This is the middle of your life! Touch your feet every day. Lay down whenever you want. Eat your lover. Eat everything. Leave nothing, no part of yourself out. Love it all, everything. Greet everyone. Look dead straight into their eyes and bow in your heart. Ding ding ding. Third round. Eclipse the night. Shine like a star-fish in the fluori-waters of your mind. Burn deep and bright for yourself. Like a lava lamp, your heart is warming, thawing into a glowing disco bomb shower splaying its foam power in a trance dance. Don't suffocate it. Embrace your pelvis with the arms of your legs. Breathe like an amoeba. You are tidal! Move and you move seas. A little wink of a thing clinging with high pitched squeals of delight at being alive. Don't leave out your own yelps in the stranded electric falls of peril. Because that's how you'll be found in discovery after discovery. Leaping and diving into the bracken bliss under a haystack of oblivion. Out the other side you'll topple, through the thicket backwards you'll tumble and there, upon landing, you'll find things you don't recognise. They are not answers. It's all just a catalogue, a world record of lodged love, attachments to this or that. These long loved and lusted after things, they are the absence of the answers to the questions you have not yet asked. Plunge deeper, enter the wedge. Open the turf, jar the door, funnel into the vessels to travel nowhere but here. Embody the essence of all of it, where you are, except it won't feel like the same place. You will stay where you are but as you transform the world will change."*⁶¹

Silence. Lauden is stunned, awash in the flood of imperatives.

Divina smiles, obviously proud of her friend Nettle's power to impress.

"Leave your payment at the window," Nettle clicks off.

After sliding a crate of food through the drive-up window, Divina cuts loose,

⁶¹ Edited by Bauer from Wellesley Wesley's *Image Fringe: Voices* exercise for Nettle the Oracle in Keithley Syers workshop, 8 August 2019, London.

driving with one hand on the steering wheel and gesturing ecstatically with the other.

"Amazing! See? I'm telling you, Lauden! It's all about the Noni!" Divina slaps the dashboard. "Time to get in touch with your vulva voce! Your voice is waiting to be released from down below! A woman has two sets of lips and neither should be pursed prudishly. Have you ever explored your vulva with a mirror? Get to know it! Give it a name, let it speak!" Divina shimmers a jazz hand in the air before narrowing in on a point with one finger raised, "I named my vulva *and* my vagina, Ellie and Flo respectively, and then I went on to name my cervix, she's Stephanie, my uterus is Chisenhale, my ovaries are Easton and Weston, hell I named the whole fam damily!" each counted off on the fingers and gathered into a fist, "They're called Nora the Many, as an ensemble," fist brought into the chest now, "They are the center of my creative life force, my collective, my posse, and they have made my finest works, including but not limited to my performances. Their greatest masterpiece, quite honestly, is my brilliant child, Tworden. And that is the kicker," another dashboard slap, "Nora the Many and I, we did it all by ourselves, yes I'm talking about asexual reproduction, Lauden. The virgin Mary? No lie. She did that herself!" backhand slap to Lauden's knee, "It *IS* divine, the divine feminine, that creative life force can be called into action in magnificent ways! But not without foreplay. You know it's called masturbation because it is self-mastery!"

Still careening from her own impression of Nettle's message and trying not to lose her own quickly fading spin on it, Lauden is reticent that it all boils down to beating oneself off. She also remembers having looked up the etymology of "masturbate" once and suspects Divina is riffing on hominy with mastery, like people do with "soul" and "sole" even though they share no linguistic root.

Holding an invisible giant chalice in her cupped hand with fingers pronged upward, Divina continues, "A connection between the one and the all, nothing short of cosmic, orgasm is divine!" punching the roof of the car, "To be intimate with one's self," Divina has two fingers crossed now, "is the ultimate autonomy, the ultimate freedom. Did you know most women are pansexual? We can get off with whomever or whatever we want," waving a sloppy hand about indifferently, "But the *most* important relationship you are going to have is with yourself. Have you read *Sex For One*? Betty Dodson?"

Lauden shakes her head, "doesn't ring a bell."

"Ring that bell, baby! You heard Nettle, *ding ding ding*! Your best orgasms are going to be with yourself. It's okay to think of partner sex as a prelude to your masturbation practice. Whatever gets you off, use it or lose it! Once your first really *owned* orgasm comes – and that can take some time – they're like a string of pearls, or what did Nettle say, *discovery after discovery*. Have you read Gertrude Stein's *Plays*?"

"Other Stein, but not *Plays*," Lauden answers, wondering where this is going.

“Oh it’s a mine of riches, truly,” Divina checks both rearview mirrors and the built-in navigation, putting the car in self-driving mode so that she can focus on her firm occupation of the driver’s seat in conversation, “one of the things she talks about, in this kind of creation of a present tense in writing, is satisfactions, plural. Not like the satisfaction of a classical tension-release structure of conflict and climax and resolution in a typical linear narrative, but the idea of knowing-as-acquaintance that goes along in time *with* an experience, where there are several moments of satisfaction, not anticipated by expectations met or broken, but understood by enjoyment. She says if you enjoyed something you’ve understood it. So consider getting to know your pleasures as a form of study, a kind of knowledge development. Are you with me?”

“Yeah I guess so,” Lauden nods sideways, surfing Divina’s loghorreic flood but not wanting to encourage more of it with questions.

“The psychic work of nurturing one’s own pleasure is not selfish, it’s a contribution to our collective learning, it affords the experience of joy, which is ultimately a commons, but you can’t join the party if you can’t bring the party. I mean the main show is a solo. I say show but you’re not performing for anyone but yourself. Who do you dress up for? I dress up for myself. Everyone sees it but I’m showing up for me. Do you ever wear your fanciest panties under sweatpants? Try it some time. Or the inverse. Dress to the nines and have some super raggedy old cotton underwear on, those ones that look like scrap but remain your favorite because of the soft feel on your skin. The party starts on the inside. Those make-up tutorials I do? Those are for *me*. I do it to turn myself on. I love painting my face. The way it feels, how I transform. I speed them up in playback to underline that the savored sensuality of touching and brushing my own face, my own lips, belongs to me and only me in time, and that time can never be recreated. I watch them a little slowed-down even. It’s my commentary on the disproportions of process and product, lasting delight and fleeting spectatorship. It’s a full time job, flirting with yourself, edging-on the ecstatic experience. That unique coming to knowing – or knowing by coming, ha! that’s good – can’t be summarized and passed on. It is one-hundred-percent tacit.”

Lauden suddenly understands Divina in the realization that her art and life are entirely conflated in a purely narcissistic cosmology of self-invented ecstasy. Like a mannerist painter throwing realism to the birds in favor of contrivance and beauty, every gesture of Divina’s is exaggerated for maximum feeling at the expense of coherence to any shared reality.

“Have you read Audre Lorde’s *Uses of the Erotic*? Read that. It’s not about sex, it’s about living, about the erotic as a way of being, fully, which is political and spiritual, when we meet our edges and spill into the chaos of the universe, lose ourselves to each other, find joy through our work, our communities, our daily actions infused with a sense of feeling at every moment, every threshold

brimming with life. To know that sensuality of being alive, to be in touch with that wisdom of feeling, is a kind of self-possession which is empowering but it is not a power over anyone, it is a power of dispossession, a power under, through the abolishment of self as a thing to possess at all, in favor of partici-fucking-pation. So what gets you going, Lauden? What *really* gets you going?"

Lauden looks out the window. Several hundred clicks up the dusty road from Nettle's, in the opposite direction from the forest, Lauden is speeding towards a rosy horizon, as the mist after a late afternoon rain is rising from the fields. "I think there's something about processes, happening before my eyes, that excites me."

"Go on."

"When I see things being made by hand, like really crafted with care, I want to be that thing. And very tiny things, molecular processes... like condensation on a window pane or a cold glass of water, little droplets growing and then rippling."

"Gorgeous!"

"I feel the tension of molecules like it's magnified, pulling at my skin. When a car picks up speed and beads of water stream backwards it's like I'm flying. I can go into details like that, and they become huge. And gravity, in general. Watching things fall is incredibly sexy."

"Agreed."

"Soft falls, little thuds. Or when someone surprises you with how they move. Angular swerve."

"Ugh!"

"I like old nature documentaries, to be in the different rhythms of things, with different cadences and tempos. The way a lion would slink its back leg forward to kick up the front on the same side, with those heavy sloppy paws. The way a spider crawls over uneven tree bark. Snails sliding over pine needles. A shimmering school of fish dispersing to flee a shark bite. The lick of waves lapping into caves on a rocky shoreline. Time lapses of mushrooms bursting into bloom..."

Interlude:

Pleasured Splace

There is no center here and no periphery; endless horizon, terminal twilight. This is the no-place from whence every space is born, the proto-stardust, fertile soil, raw flesh. It's loud here, but not uncomfortable. A constant pink-brown noise, maybe mauve or beige, bubbling and babbling, pulsing and comforting, sings a wordless song that says: everything is and can be good, if and when it is allowed to be.

The horizon glows a faint light blue. Currents of pink gelatinous wind push from one horizon to the next, pulling waves and tides in their thrust. Showers of electric purple darts rain silver hot through the deep night sky. Steady and constant, they are what sustain this place, give it consistency, in flickering temperatures, hard like a waterfall, warm and cold.

Violet hums the atmosphere, carrying weather reports and non-urgent news: rumors, whispers, grocery lists, and sweet nothings, a thousand tiny messages in a humid wind that one can only hear with their fat. In the canopy, exoskeletal chambers keep the stories worth storing, tended by generations of spiders and moths. Spiders spin sense-threads around small cocoons, hardened over time, and moths dust the walls with particulate bits and bytes collected from their wings. Retired moths and spiders fall to decompose, swallowed by pulsing, churning dark soil that smells like the ocean looks from below.

The ground is rich, fertile, and deep, but nothing can grow here because it never stops moving. Beneath everything is a mirror image of itself, three times larger than what stands above ground. This giant reflected underworld sings to keep the overworld afloat and intact in vowel tones of a range so vast that 69% of what is sung lies beyond the audible range of any single creature's ears. And so the ensemble of all species, listening together and conferring over what they've heard, is required to render the full but smaller picture above by various methods of translation, all intelligence combined. With no way of knowing what the others have heard, each must trust the others' word, and do their best to listen for everything within their range.

Seasonally, above ground, the winds raise and clear it all, erasing every story, starting again from null.⁶² With ears to the ground, one might hear a gathering of ghosts and affective data, rotating on a crux of delicate nonsense. Inventing new ways to listen, morse code in the shins, visions emerge and are buttressed by strategy.⁶³

⁶² Edited from Eleanor Bauer's writing of current body/sensations as a "splace" after open-source pleasure dancing on 5 October 2019 in Stockholm with Coven Press dancing-writing research group, and same task again on 27 January with Corpus dance company members in Copenhagen as a part of *Sensuality Happens* creation process.

⁶³ Excerpts from Eleanor Bauer's writing after dancing in own workshop at ImPulsTanz, Vienna, 24 July 2016.

Astra

The rain hasn't deterred the crowd at Cindy's tonight. After Divina's rumoured "hay-bailed-out" slapstick at the last *Lauden's Laudibles*, everybody wants to know what DIVINA is going to come up with next. The hay bale thing wasn't even that funny, it was just laborious and messy, and that has an almost vintage appeal for a generation of makers dealing solely in pixelated ephemera, from GIF memes to NFTs. Actual physical labor has been uncool for long enough that it is apparently having a comeback. Lauden can feel it will take some concentration to keep her stutter from also having a comeback after years of remission thanks to anti-anxiety meds and intensive speech therapy. She is nervous and excited to have so many new faces in the crowd, feeling the buzz of her series gaining reputation.

Tworden the Giant is sitting in the front row in their usual spot to the side of the stage, chair tucked into the corner where they have an overview of the room and the stage and can be sure not to block anyone else's view. Across the sea of packed tables they can see Tina, who is busy at the bar taking care of a mounting pile of very specific drink orders.

Tina smiles at Tworden and gives a little nod to check if they need a top up. Before the other customers arrived, Tina poured Tworden as much as possible because she knew she would be busy and didn't want Tworden to go thirsty, so there's a stash of water and beer pitchers lined up under Tworden's table. Tworden shakes their head to say "all good" and has a moment of private satisfaction that the literal "seeing each other" phase of things with Tina is going so well.

Tworden feels the excitement of budding love and a little lightning flutters visibly outside the windows of the bar. Tworden, who literally drinks buckets anyway, has been extra thirsty tonight, perspiring heavily, probably also nervous for what Divina's second appearance at *Lauden's Laudibles* may bring. With a mom like Divina, who is always upping her own ante, Tworden is way past the please-don't-embarrass-me stage and more generally on alert for potential lawsuits.

Lauden's gone butch-in-beige this evening like a detective from another time, donning a monochrome palette of khaki shades and dusty browns. She's nervous that Divina hasn't arrived yet and is feeling the crowd's numbers and expectations mounting. After a glance at her watch and the door, Lauden decides it's time to start. She gulps a huge glass of water, a shot of tequila, exhales through her teeth, inhales through her nose, rolls off a few inaudible tongue twisters under her breath, and strides onto the stage.

"Good evening! Th – haha! – Thank you all so, so much for coming out tonight for another of our monthly series *Lauden's Laudibles*. I'm your host, Lauden, and I'm so honored to introduce a great lineup for you tonight! We have some readings by members of Coven Press, some new songs from Hektor the Rhapsode, a

performance by the one and only DIVINA, and some time for open mic at the end in case any of you want to bless this mic. So without further ado, let's do the do!" A round of applause and whistles carry Lauden offstage.

E.L. Deville, fictional gossip writer at Coven Press positions herself behind the microphone. A sweeping curtain of long orange-auburn bangs barely cover her sharply lined eyes as she reads slowly from a black notebook. In a dry tone pregnant with mystery, her red lips and crooked teeth taste each syllable like a divulged secret, so that everyone in the crowd feels she is talking to them and them alone:

*"I keep coming back to the bar of comedians, hoping to find you there. It's always empty, except for the black cat. She lies on the bar, making sure I sense my loneliness. Reminding me of everything that was. All the laughter now echoes as ironic. She has a wonderfully disobedient mind and soft long fur. She looks like a pirate, with a patch covering her lazy eye. She only takes it off when gazing into the future and that is usually not a good omen. She limps toward me as I sit waiting and serves me a whiskey sour. 'With the egg white or are you vegan?' A one and a two and three and a go, fuck I missed my entrance. There is no one at the piano, well, except the skeleton of the last piano player. They say he played himself to death. Everybody just got used to him being there. His rotting face, the meat and flesh and intestines dropping off his rotting bones kept the customers away, except for the comedians and the hardcore regulars."*⁶⁴

She smiles and a few in the audience laugh – the same few who laughed after "or are you vegan." A range of hesitant and hearty applause, some murmurs and scattered hoots wash across the crowd. Belinda Ashby, Senior Manager of Splaces at Coven Press, kisses E.L. Deville on the cheek as she takes the mic from the stand, tossing her arrow-straight sandy hair to the side and staring into the audience with dagger-like focus, body fully armored in crushed velvet. Her entire text rolls out from memory with conviction and force:

*"SHUT YOUR VIVID LITTLE SNAKE, said the dancer to a lake. Up she went, and a year later she shook her feather fingers toward a dull world. Fuck this crap, she thought silently to herself and then loudly she said yes please. She received a lukewarm cup of coffee, drank it quickly and then went up to an old sailor in order to ask for a lick down below. She complied. She fell asleep. And the next day it all started over again. A day and a night of friendships and sailors and all she could feel was the cold autumn leaves, slapping her soft cheekbones with wet leaves as they left the trees heading toward the ground. The ground, heavy and tired, was not a very good leaf container. It would have preferred rain, or sun, or at least some plastic garbage to keep in its muddy belly for longer than leaves."*⁶⁵

The uninitiated audience is starting to get the hang of things. Happily confused,

⁶⁴ Halla Ólafsdóttir, Open dancing / Open writing, 10 October 2019.

⁶⁵ Stina Nyberg, one of "three images for now" after dancing, not the dancer, 1 October 2019.

they choose belonging over alienation and jump on board. The applause is warming up. Lauden is still watching the door for Divina and becoming increasingly nervous. Don Conley, investigative reporter at Coven Press, puts the mic back into the stand and adjusts its height as he positions himself on a wooden barstool with one foot on the ground and the other perched on the first rung. He takes a pair of glasses out of his sweater pocket and places them low on his nose for reading as he scans the crowd over the metal rims to make sure he's captured everyone's attention. Dressed in the colors of a sailboat, navy blue sweater and forest green pants, with high cheekbones and a squared chin, one might expect Don to read a resumé, or the results of study on the relationship between dental hygiene and muscular health, but when silence falls upon the audience, he starts dancing. He is measuring and dividing time, a spatial mathematics of pause and prediction, in a generative practice of anti-flow that signals 'think with me about this a moment,' and refuses both phrasing and climax. Lydia Trundle, In-House Shaman at Coven Press, enters from stage right, leaves again, and enters again, wearing all blue, a shade of blue that is simultaneously royal and ascetic. Adam the Plot Driver, IT Ghost of Coven Press appears stage left, wearing aloe green with matching makeup and manicure, working his way along the entire periphery before falling into gravitational center-stage. A halo of rays made of actual aloe leaves crowns his flat-top fade. The three move in and out of fleeting instances of unison, tempered by erratically divergent geometries that are emotionally clear but formally uncertain, shapes ricocheting off of one another like scattered versions of the same genome. After three minutes or so, an alarm goes off in Adam the Plot Driver's pocket and both he and Lydia Trundle exit from whence they appeared. Don quickly produces a paper and two pencils from his other sweater pocket. A little breathless, he scribbles ambidextrously using the barstool as a desk, then reads into the microphone:

*"Dungeons! A bauhaus at the top of the world! Listen: Diss the flowers in the gorilla face. Bumping the light eternal. Strike it. Let the mouth of the horse continue its airborne journey. The pipeline must be retracted if we are to exchange the winds of the generative -isms, let alone bling in time. Hindenburg was the live version of Johnson & Johnson's becoming, and the poltergeist lived scrupulously. There are shapes you can't see here. Lucid fluctuations on the planar floodlights. The minerals will organize their innards at the museums of time. Scandinavian universality is a huge and porous longitudinal plasticity. Kids will do the sting operations. We don't try to predict the temperament of birds, but instead wanted to hug one another, each time they feel some key to the power of locomotion."*⁶⁶

Don is joined again from either side by Adam and Lydia for a cordial bow showered with applause as things are starting to make whatever sense is possible to be made for those in attendance. Even Tworden is starting to relax, downing a pitcher of beer with a couple of gulps and joining the applause when a sudden

⁶⁶ Edit of Tilman O'Donnell's predictive texts from dancing and writing duets with Alice MacKenzie and Adam Seid Tahir, 3 October 2019.

commotion erupts at the rear of the bar.

Doors are thrown open, Divina enters with her dress ablaze. The crowd parts like the Red Sea for Moses and Divina sees her path to the stage as obvious as any other path in her life, the world once again unfurling for her passage. Flames licking up her dress have no effect on her steadfast determination. With ecstatic self-possession she sets off for the stage, glitter pouring from her sleeves as Tina audibly deplores, “what in the actual fuck?” Utterly paralyzed, Lauden is unsure to whom or how to act responsibly. With heart pounding as Divina reaches the stage, Tworden grabs two pitchers in each hand from under the table and throws the four pitchers of pilsner and tap water over Divina, repeating this action three times in a row, dousing her with a total of twelve pitchers-full of assorted fluids before the fire fizzles and hisses completely out. Soaking wet and determined to save face, Divina is about to say something to make this all appear as part of her great plan when Tworden the Giant falls to their knees, hands to chest, and collapses in a puddle of water marbled with pilsner foam and ashes. The giant bass drum of the earth booms, all the lights go out, and the rain storm outside comes to a sudden halt. Everything, but *everything*, is absolutely still and silent for a brief fermata that feels like time itself is holding its breath. A hint of swirl returns to the hovering haze of steam and smoke before a gust of wind throws open the doors, people flood onto the street, and Tina is on the phone for an ambulance. Divina is pouring over Tworden the Giant’s inert body, herself apparently unscathed by the fire, trying to shake them to life.

The plastic hamburger behind the bar rings. Electric Alan sees that Tina Power is beyond preoccupied so decides to offer a hand by answering the call. He picks up the burger and opens its buns. In the seconds of hesitation regarding how one answers the phone at Cindy’s Bar, Alan is arrested by the sound of Sephora’s voice through the static. In a high speed whisper like a rhythmic secret newsfeed for no one and anyone, he can hear her say:

*Into the dark of the blank white page,
I creep forward like a snail
one letter at a time,
my words leave a slimy trail*

*A giant slug crossing hot cement
is my viscous mascot and hero:
naked, vulnerable, blind and persistent,
I am pure skin, I feel to know.*

*Thoughts are streaming through me
pouring through my fluid bones
I see with the weight of flesh
I roll and slide over cornerstones*

*into the dark of the blank black page
I inch forward like a termite
carving an unpredictable trail,
one green character at a time*

*blinking cursor as my headlight
the termite is my mascot and hero:
nocturnal and small but forceful in numbers,
eating at the structure until it crumbles.*

*alchemist, scavenger, hunter, thief,
user, developer, commander-in-chief
rhyme is just the melodic logic of syllables speaking to each other
chaos rules the melodic syllogogue and it's rambling choir*

*For a moment the writing has no
writer the speaking has no speaker the
touching has no toucher the typing
has no typer...*

*leaking through borders that ask to be crossed
speaking through secrets that refuse to be kept
feeling feelings that escape being named
seeking ideas that demand to be realized*

*mining for an invaluable gold
looking for something to love and to hold
searching for nuggets of precious heart
looking for something to turn into art*

*learning something without knowing anything
listening without crushing with understanding
cherishing our fragile dedication
to hearing the world and its unholy mess.*

*This room speaks in its own secret language
poking and prodding at interest's edge
scattered bodies gently searching
a landscape of unfolded questions*

*thoughts are streaming through us
messages sent through the cybernetic meadow
all watched over by machines of loving grace,
the giant drum of this planet below*

*rhyme is just the melodic logic
of syllables speaking to each other
communication within communication,
open loops, broken and untethered*

*subtext and hypertext,
the meta dives into substrata
chopped up, devoured, decomposed,
recomposed and compositioned*

*the composition of superstition
the superstition of composition
the composition of intuition
the composting of composition⁶⁷*

Eighteen operating tables have been strapped together in what appears to be the emergency helicopter hangar at the university hospital. I am lying prone across them, connected to several monitors beeping in a polyrhythmic orchestra, a tiny human-sized gas mask taped over each of my nostrils, and a large machine externalizing the work of my heart and lungs while an anesthesiologist rests a tiny hand on my shoulder and asks me to count down from twenty. Dr. Dance, a team of surgeons, and some medical students taking notes are gathered around me in a sea of blue scrubs spanning several maintenance dollies under a sky of blinding stadium floodlights.

I hear Dr. Dance's authoritative voice as I'm mumbling numbers. "OK team. (*twenty*) What we're dealing with here is (*nineteen*) a unique case of cardiac arrest caused by (*eighteen*) a misdiagnosed custom pacemaker installed in our patient's early years. Our patient has an enlarged heart, (*seventeen*) even for their size, which is as you can see well above average in all dimensions. However, (*sixteen*) of particular interest here regarding the cause of arrest is (*fifteen*) the structure of the heart, which is closer to (*fourteen*) that of a blue whale than a human, though mistakably (*thirteen*) close in its four-chambered structure. When giving our patient (*twelve*) a pacemaker years ago my colleagues and I failed to recognize that their heartbeat would healthily rather beat at (*eleven*) about a third the rate of a human heart. That said, there seem to be (*ten*) a number of other unusual structures throughout (*nine*) our patient's anatomy from which we can learn, so while our (*eight*) cardiovascular surgeons are performing a removal of the (*seven*) pacemaker and assessment of the heart tissues, I would like to take (*six*) a noninvasive arthroscopic and auscultative review of the (*five*) entire body, and see what other information we can gather. I'd like to get (*four*) X-rays, CTs, and MRIs wherever possible. I want to get (*three*) as close as we can to autopsy

⁶⁷ From writings by Eleanor Bauer in a dancing-writing workshop taught at KASK in Gent in 2015, this text was edited and re-composed for use in the performance piece *Meyoucycle*, 2016.

while keeping Tworden alive.”

I hear the human voices in the room and the song of the machinery swirling (two) into a braided polyphony as I drop into a place that feels unfamiliar and yet absolutely correct, (one) like being at home in a city I’ve never visited.⁶⁸

My ears are horns, trumpets or tubas, brass burning at the brim with tingling joys, resonant with whatever shows up and not only sound: thoughts, desires, memories. A low hum with high overtones measures a long, time-stretched melody. I am multiplying, snaking and arching upward and out. I am everywhere, there are no not-me surfaces, in this place, the spaces it makes, these splaces. Somewhere, where the river meets the ocean, the distance between the tip of my thumb and my wrist equals the distance between the Sun and Jupiter. It’s a hemisphere biosphere nanosphere severe peer-reviewed station, deep in the undercut. Be it made of hair or fingers, a lattice through which to see is all it takes to get more depth. It is a painting, a painting coming alive, under soft layers of afternoon clouded-sun flesh. Long dry grass, when touched, moves the toucher. Wormy tubes in my head over where nobody has the right to speak. The horizon glows a faint light blue, and changes often. The light is pale green, almost white. The sky rumbles and shakes, housed inside a single drop of water. Encapsulated weather systems. Crickets singing loudly. Changing air pressure says rain will soon fall. Birds flying low pass over trees with radioactive trunks. Some trees are aching. Steadily rising wind loosens their knots. Furry mammals of land and sea with silver mercury slicks on their fur nest in stunted oak trees. Their young roll out of the nests and onto the soft moss below. The trees bleed a green gold resin, trapping vertebrae in their amber. The gravity-tree notions itself inward and down, cantilevered by grace. Waves lap against my armpit, nudging the coral of my hairs, breaking off into tiny pieces. My forehead rises just above the water like an island covered in moss. My shoulder blade is a home for insects, nest underneath the bone. My ribcage is a buoyant dungeon of latent dreams. Dust bunnies are finally being cleared out by waves who pass through after hours or between guests. My pelvis is some bizarre piece of machinery, vestigial in design, full of parts, holes, hoses and pumps that nobody understands. My sacrum is a sounder of the depths. Open graves, facing the sea. A single volcano with lemon and honey. Marmelade, sticky skin. Magma, pouring down the sides, moves at the pace of flesh. This planet is cracking apart at the center, plates full of spreading heat. White fire burns against a dark blue sky. Burning black pipes frame a white clearing with a lot of craters in it, like the ground of the moon. But I am not the moon. Heavy and moist, every touch on me leaves an imprint. The ground has sunken in on itself like a face falling in disappointment, in order to turn itself inside out. A bony crest rises up, framing a hollow where something has been pressed into the ground for millions of years. It’s springing back from the weight of the ice. A metal structure, creaking where its joints meet, is pulling oil up from the core

⁶⁸ Julien Bruneau, dancer, speaking about group dance improvisation, described intuition as “the slow emergence of a thought which is unfamiliar and yet correct, like feeling at home in a city you’ve never visited,” according to my written notes of Sarma’s “Symposium #13” at Kaaistudios in 2013.

in buckets that rise towards the sky, scratching the atmosphere. The oil is like rotting battery fluid, the inside of a planet's aging core. This planet does not have ideas of good or bad alignment. The porcelain organization that supports it relies on movement, rhythm, and a libidinous drive for verticality. Weighted precision, eclipse. A long row of abandoned concrete apartment blocks is both a street and a self-contained city, constructing a spine out of obsolete utopian architecture. Somewhere in the city there is a stage for comedians and poets, with a wooden floor and strong lights. The street outside is full of thinkers. They think about time and about writing letters, how letters are addressed to the future. The stage is lit up, and no one is on it, but no one in the audience cares. They are only there for the goodie bags filled with mood rings and the bartender who knows their names. Outside the city, to the North, a giant crane with two rotating arms folding and twisting, weaves seaweed into a textile thinner than water. At the other end is a dump of compacted matter, rejected mood and sentiment sediment, continuously compressed. Encrusted emblems of ancient empires crumble their golden-flecked patina. Spread thinly, the tiny structures fall away along my calf. Over the course of thousands of years, mud moves towards the east, carrying with it forest, deserts, and cities. It doesn't destroy anything. It just covers everything in a muddy feeling as it moves into different shapes, forming stalagmites and living stone sculptures. The mud has golden fibres in it, and tiny clever velcro plants, built for survival, are building a fortress to protect the soil. Turquoise, green and red mosses keep this magic soil from falling over the lip of a nearby cave's mouth. In this damp slime of a cave, a mercury sea sludges in double tides. A beach of fingernails is blown by the wind into small dwellings. Creatures sheltered within these dwellings have bodies shaped by the nails, in turn shaped by the wind. Towards the south, at the end of two clear rivers, is another cave, where the fluid seeps into indoor pools of beautiful potable water. The pools appear shallow but are abysmally deep and very cold. It's a pelvic bowl littered with the bones of those who could not climb out, the sides worn smooth by touch and rain. The surfaces are cold and shiny, like a stone floor, marbled black and white. The stony walls of the cave are for leaning against. The softened walls transmit words when leaned against. It's a whispering war. Distant shore, offset imprint. On a beach of sand, suppressed and forgotten feelings are stirred and kicked up by the wind. An oracle lives among the remains. A suburb, on a hill, with two villas. One is an orphanage and one is an old family estate. Only children live in both. Between them is a garden. Unlike the gardens designed for contemplative think-walking, this garden has no pre-subscribed routes nor determined means of moving through it. Pathways are delineated by careful observation of the unfolding phenomena as they are read or felt, and in that essential space of obscurity, meet a distinct yet elusive cast of characters. Through the darkness we caught sight of each other in snatches. Tiny flashes of skin momentarily lighting up with the orange glow of phosphorescence, sulphur and salt. As we danced it formed a cloud around us that condensed and stuck to the walls. The ground beneath soaked us up. Heels sunk slightly, the skins of the fruit spread up between our toes, dying the soles of our feet a darker shade of purple. When I lifted my head, I was met with an overwhelming flood of sorrow-

*joy, an overwhelming flood of sorrow-joy was splayed upon the beach.*⁶⁹

I open my eyes and it takes me a few breaths to recognize that I am now in a hospital room, and that tubes coming out of my mouth and nose are breathing for me. I lower my eyes to see my body is still there, but I cannot feel any of it. My head is propped up by several mattresses so I can see my legs and feet, which are covered in various pen markings: solid and dotted lines, circles and arrows. "Memory Lanes" is scribbled atop my right foot with parallel lanes traced along the tarsals, and on my left foot I can make out "Candice & Nokia's Farm" with crop rows similarly traced atop. My left kneecap says "Nettle's drive-thru." My right thigh reads "Villa Nora & Villa Estrella" with an arrow to my loins. My arms have tiny bandages with garden-hose catheters still inserted, delivering what I assume is an IV fluid drip. My right palm says "Coven Press" and my left palm says "Moon??" A freshly stitched wound reaches down my sternum with several tubes attached to my torso. I can make out "Bladder = Cindy's Bar" written under my navel. If I could move, I would get to a light switch and go to the mirror to see what the rest of me says.

It is dark outside. Tina is asleep on a couch under the window, with a pen in her hand atop a shotty spiral notebook. I squint to see if I can read her writing but it's too far away. I close my eyes again and fall back asleep.

I wake up from the light coming into the window and realize where I am. Tworden's eyes are closed. Their chest is rising and falling and machines are beeping in time with their breath. I hoist myself to sitting and look down at the floor where I've dropped a pen and notebook at some point during the night. I pick it up and read what I've written:

*I cannot be closer
I cannot know you
I cannot think with you
because I see you
your skin is what I notice
the texture of your surfaces
the light on the tips of your hair
you are opaque, reflective and impenetrable
nontransparent and watchable
I see you like a landscape
a series of events that pass before me as a given
time opens up around you
poking at the edges of your intention.*

⁶⁹ Edited and re-composed by Bauer from the collectively written and edited spoken text from first group version of *A lot of moving parts*, created in October 2019 by the first Coven Press group and performed at Moving in November festival in Helsinki, 2019.

*Folding into comfort-wombs and pushing back out again,
you wrestle with arbitrary challenges.*⁷⁰

The writing that trails off into illegibility where I feel asleep. I look up at the television screen in the hospital room. The news channel is on, but silent. Images of flooding, drought, forest fires, heatwaves, radioactive plants, poisonous mosses, dead coral reefs, and toxic algae pass on in a numbing montage that has become all too familiar. I get up to go to the bathroom and look in the mirror. I take a deep breath and exhale the cobwebs of sleep. I splash my face with water and feel the cool, inside and out, rinsing my mouth and spitting before drinking some down. The thought-form I have been working on for so long is finished:

Everybody wants the same power: power to change the world. What they choose to do with their lives reveals the relative scale of what they think that world is and how large they are in it.

Nothing incubates. I know what comes next with ice-cold clarity. I tuck my hair behind my ears and square my shoulders to the room. Climbing up over Tworden, I take their hand and trace the grooves of their swirling fingerprint with my fingertips. I crawl to their face and carefully remove the tubes from their nostrils and mouth. I gradually remove the tape from their torso and take out all the catheters. I lower myself to the floor, pull the plugs out of all the machines, and everything goes quiet.

⁷⁰ Edited from 5 October 2015 workshop at KASK in Gent, Belgium. Eleanor Bauer writing after watching David Van Dijcke dancing, and writing after dancing while being watched by David Van Dijcke.

Epilogue: Open Dancing, Open Writing

The text fragments are everywhere. Placed in some corners and nooks. The gaze that stopped time and told a whole backstory to this. NOW I finally know what happened before this moment.

The hammock is not hanging, it is falling into a jump. This one seems to be the one that draws attention. This one is being the one believing in the gaze that stops time. This one is doing some stopping time. It is an observer being watched by the audience. The audience is writing. Feet sliding on wooden floors and typing on laptops is all one hears.

The dance clichés are falling from one corner of the room to another. A sharp diagonal for a trio of travelling. Time doesn't stop this time around. And around and around a solo goes while the audience is typing. From within, this is like a memory, or several memories blending and becoming a dance that is not a solo but for a group of dancers.⁷¹

⁷¹ Alexander Talts, Open Writing after Open Dancing, 10 October 2019

Epitaph

MONTAGE: ten minutes and thirty-four seconds of lakes drying, tidal waves breaking over levees, avalanches, mudslides, fields of dead flowers, elephants and deer running, a basement collapsing, Cindy's Bar burning, an oil silo by Candice's Farm falling from its stilts, empty Coven Press offices flooding, Memory Lanes bowling alley crumbling in an earthquake, a city skyline at night going dark, lava running down city sidewalks, intercut with E.C.U. scans of Tworden's skin, eyelashes, ears, toenails, hairline, nooks and creases.

TWORDEN (V.O.)

I am an open landscape,
falling apart at the seams
I have big muscles, that do nothing,
and I believe in eternity
in every fold, stretched out

With the help of resistance,
and the smell of detergent
lingering in my fascia,
I fill my lungs with air
to fill my life with words

Words that weigh nothing
spinning ligaments into darkness,
a rabbit hole of wonders
in layers and layers of fog
foggy pink, beats pounding
over two big moons
in a wound of glitter

my spine is a minefield
and you're walking on it
the further away you go
the more your skin tightens around me

this statue can only exist with effort
the structure is pushed to its limits

the bark is cracking
 No, the cracks are barking,
 barking like angry dogs:
 they're rotten but we keep them.

All of my skin cells fall off, like snow
 it's a melancholic Rothko
 and I can't throw myself any harder at this thing
 this anvil, failing as it molds into a flow

My vision is a grid of gaps
 I'm defined by all that I don't know
 Once in a while though,
 MMM maybe,
 maybe there's just no turning back

We could fit more,
 but right now
 it's not important
 because we are the future
 zero carbon, no footprint,
 our bio fabric releasing.⁷²

MEADOW - DAY - AERIAL VIEW over a forest outside Erdtown
 with a large clearing of long yellow grass. SLOW ZOOM
 towards a lone oak tree in the center of the meadow.

WIDE SHOT of oak tree with COYOTE and ELBA sitting under
 it. They are sniffing the air. In alternating shots of their
 faces, the following dialogue is subtitled:

ELBA

I think it works since her name is Tina Power but you're
 right that it's pretty abrupt.

COYOTE

Literally killing the world is maybe didactic, given the
 climate. But I thought it could be something to have
 the only remaining beings not be humans. And that maybe
 you, being the internet, would survive the planet's death
 somehow. But I'm not even sure about that. Because even the
 internet is a physical thing. Fiber-optic cables at the

⁷² Collectively edited from *Manual Lucidity* transcripts 16 January 2020, with and by members of Corpus in the creation process of *Sensuality Happens* (Alexander Stæger, Hazuki Kojima, Marco Herlev Host, Louella May Hogan, Alma Toaspern, Lucie Piot), further edited by Marco Herlev Host and Eleanor Bauer, Copenhagen, 2020.

bottom of the ocean and giant server rooms giving off loads of heat. There's really no such thing as purely virtual anything. Not even thoughts. Neurons are things. Chemicals are stuff. Experiences happen because of things interacting with other things, making lasting impressions on things.

ELBA

Why does everything have to die for the story to be finished? It's a kind of dull or obvious way to mark an ending.

COYOTE

Well, not everything dies, just the world Divina created, a.k.a. Tworden a.k.a. Erdtown, which holds everything and everyone else we've met so far. But yeah, I mean I was thinking there is a lot more juice in here, in so many of those people and places. It could just go on and on. So how would I know when it's done?

ELBA

I guess the system exhausts itself at some point. The potentials are seen through to their completion and there's not much left to explore in the relationships. I think it's more about relations than conclusions. The possible combinations and conversations between agents.

COYOTE

I was thinking about terminal length recently, like how different kinds of hairs know where to stop growing, and how all sorts of mammals have different terminal lengths of hairs in different regions of the body. I was wondering if relationships have terminal lengths, when they just stop growing. Maybe that's when people break up, or become satisfied with the comfort of the familiar and decide to just live in the same hairdo till death do they part - hah, part, no pun intended.

ELBA

Do you want your story to have a stylish chop or to reach terminal length? I mean, are you interested in a particular genre of story or some notion of reality or nature?

COYOTE

Maybe both. What would mark the difference?

ELBA

Form. And in the case of story, that form hinges on drama, typically. Stories are shaped by drama, tension, problems that create interest in consequence and therefore make the temporal sequence of events matter. Otherwise it's not a story, it's just a situation, a landscape, stuff happening and things coexisting, time passing but without a drive towards some sort of vanishing point of resolution or finitude.

COYOTE

I was wondering with all these different threads if maybe I have a series on my hands. Like maybe this should just be the pilot and it's not supposed to be a closed system or a finished thing. In that sense maybe it is more of an ecosystem with a lot of generative threads left open. They could find their endings in something more like seasonal shedding than a haircut. But then what's the difference between a series and an epic?

ELBA

Cliffhangers. And a market, which determines whether or not there is support for future seasons. I think you can be broke and have no audience and still write an epic. But not a series. And to catch that support you need bait, which is what cliffhangers are for.

COYOTE

I guess structures are like recipes. You can have the same ingredients but what you make is in the structure. The meaning is in the structure. Why does it feel like there is such a limited set of formulas that define the meaning of things? It just feels so formulaic. Or is that just the mind's own need to recognize the familiar, as a way of orienting itself? Otherwise we are out in the wilderness with no map, adrift in the chaos of information without sense, or even noise without information... It's all in the patterns, isn't it?

ELBA

If you ask me, yes, that's how intelligences identify relevance. The patterns define the relations, give coordinates and a legend to the map, to further your metaphor. Genres and styles can carry cultural meaning, perhaps like movements or colors can carry signals for mates and pollinators. It's not really

about surface features, as you say those are pretty interchangeable. But the rhythms of their relations are what bear repetition, and therefore recognition. If the instrumentation changes, a rhythm can survive and remain recognizable indefinitely. Then meaning can attach to them and accumulate because they are stable.

COYOTE

Are we just always running some combination of patterns, like unconscious programming, however recombined?

ELBA

Interesting question. How can we know our own O.S.? Is anything of our learned patterns due to a givenness in nature or is it all just practice and repetition passed on from generation to generation, being to being, culture to culture? So far as I know the jury is still out on that one.

COYOTE

I just wonder if it's not possible to create a wild and chaotic story but still have some tension in recognition.

ELBA

I guess that depends on how you define wild or chaotic. Or parse information from noise. One intelligence's chaos is another one's order.

COYOTE

That would be a catchy saying if it didn't have so many syllables.

ELBA

Case in point.

Nora the Many is part of Eleanor Bauer's doctoral artistic research project *choreo | graphy*, a practice-based investigation into the relationship between *choreo* as dancing together and *graphy* as writing, pursuing poetically and structurally adequate translations between the two. Created in primary collaboration with the London-based dance collective *Nora* (Eleanor Sikorski, Flora Wellesley Wesley, and Stephanie McMann) with contributions from dancing-writing groups gathered by Bauer's research, *Nora the Many* invites the reader into a collectively-authored universe of characters and events generated by methods of translating experiences of dancing together into writing. The images, logics, felt-senses and life-worlds brought about by dancing have been documented in writing and woven into a narrative, coining a new genre called *Sensual Journalism*. Swirling between fiction and reality, sensation and imagination, this *choreo | graphic* novel is a written X-position of how dance thinks.