



The Way Things Go

by
Louis
Bury

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Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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for Helena Goodman, née Ita Frejbaum, in loving memory

Now, when it is hard to hold for a moment the giant clusters of event and meaning that every day appear, it is time to remember this other kind of knowledge and love, [...] the attitude that perhaps might equip our imaginations to deal with our lives—the attitude of poetry.

— Muriel Rukeyser

Art is here to prove, and to help one bear, the fact that
all safety is an illusion.

— James Baldwin

2,556. At the Guggenheim's 2016 Fischli and Weiss retrospective, *How to Work Better*, my then-four-year old son Ethan sat transfixed through the entirety of *The Way Things Go* (1987), a thirty-minute-long film in which, similar to a Rube Goldberg machine, everyday and industrial objects such as bags of trash, car tires, and oil drums knock into one another in what appears to be a continuous chain reaction.

2,555. Ethan only stood up to leave when the looping film returned to the scene at which we had begun to watch it.

2,554. The cause-and-effect movie, we called it.

2,553. That night, Ethan and I rigged out our own cause-and-effect contraption — a merry gearbox of Paw Patrol, Thomas the Train, and Duplo pieces — and filmed the toys dominoing toward their conclusion.

2,552. The camera phone video lasts for just seven seconds and ends with Ethan and I cheering as a Duplo person gets flipped into a ceramic mug from a makeshift diving board.

2,551. The way things go is one thing happens after another and sometimes we have a hand in what happens.

2,550. The way things go is one thing happens after another and sometimes some things cease to be things in the way they once were.

2,549. When my father, Wiesław Bury, was born in 1946 Poland, his parents — one Jewish (Helena), one Catholic (Bronisław) — had both lost almost their entire extended families during the Second World War.

2,548. When I was born in 1981 New York, my father's mother, Helena Markowicz, née Ita Frejbaum, sewed a gold coin inside her bra and smuggled it and herself from communist Poland to capitalist United States.

2,547. When Ethan was born in 2011 New York, my heart became a stopwatch counting the seconds until its own expiration at twice the actual rate of time's passing.

2,546. The life expectancy, in years, of a white American male born in 1981 is seventy-one, same as the number of sentences in this chapter and the number of chapters in this book.

2,545. Each of this book's successive chapters decreases in length by one sentence, from seventy-one, to seventy, sixty-nine, sixty-eight, and so on down to one.

2,544. Writing it these past several years has felt like building an ark that you know won't be sturdy enough to float when the flood arrives but whose attempt puts you at ease with the endeavor's futility.

2,543. The French sociologist Bruno Latour distinguishes between the terms *futur*, the future as an open horizon of possibilities, and *avenir*, the future as that which is incoming (*à venir*).

2,542. The difference between *futur* and *avenir* is similar to the difference between a stopwatch that counts up from zero and one that counts down to it, that is, a matter of one's orientation — half-full or half-empty — toward time.

2,541. Pessimism feels cheap because, if it's cosmic enough in scope, it'll always be correct in the end.

2,540. Optimism feels braver, if also more foolish, because it requires ignoring so much of prior experience.

2,539. The Japanese concept of *mono no aware*, or beauty tinged with sadness, seems to have no Western equivalent, no compound Greek or German word for beauty that's neither fatalistic nor naive but instead at peace with the fact that its bloom will also be its undoing.

2,538. "Some endings of the world," writes Ed Roberson in his poetry collection, *To See the Earth Before the End of the World*, "overlap our lived / time, skidding for generations / to the crash scene of species extinction / the five minutes it takes for the plane to fall, / the mile it takes to stop the train, / the small bay to coast the liner into the ground, // the line of title to a nation until the land dies, / the continent uninhabitable" (2010, 3).

2,537. The way things go is one thing skids into the next and different generations find different words to express the collisions' sad beauty, their causes and their effects.

2,536. A skid is an ending playing out in such slow motion it looks as though it were a middle.

2,535. The rising oceans are the skid of the civilization, the family the skid of the DNA, the book that of its author.

2,534. When my parents moved to Staten Island's Oakwood Beach neighborhood in 1976, their house, located three-fourths of a mile from the shore, sat on the last developed city block between the highway and the beach.

2,533. When Hurricane Sandy hit New York City in 2012, the floodwaters stopped one city block away from my parents' house, engulfing the working class bungalow community that

had been built in the 1980s upon the wetlands between my parents' house and the beach.

2,532. The beachfront streets that once contained rows of bungalows now look like a mouth missing most of its teeth; the few homes that remain—some inhabited, others abandoned—manifest a stubborn, weathered pride.

2,531. In the years after Sandy, my parents didn't sell their home right away but instead embarked on an ambitious project of what they called "Swedish death cleaning," in which they preempted their own disappearances by purging the house of knick knacks, furniture, photographs, depression glass, antiques, games, tools, and toys: two-plus generations' worth of belongings.

2,530. Stripped of its furniture and wall hangings, but not its stubbly beige wallpaper, my former bedroom looked like a crater in the shape of my adolescent soul.

2,529. The way things go is a poem written and revised in the lines on our faces.

2,528. "A cloud is / whatever it is," writes Roberson, "on average / only eleven minutes / the elephant / polar bear the whole gone" (53).

2,527. Every time they break a line, poets try to stick an imprudent finger into fate's gearbox.

2,526. I like to think of line breaks as the spaces between dominoes and of the poem as the cascade of tumbling bone.

2,525. The difference between *futur* and *avenir*, between counting up from zero and counting down to it, is similar to the difference between writing a book and reading one.

2,524. When my younger sister Emily was diagnosed, at age sixteen, with severe pediatric lupus erythematosus and told her life expectancy was thirty, I became a committed reader, carrying a serious book with me everywhere and always seeing it through to the end.

2,523. When Emily gave birth, at age thirty-one, to healthy twin boys, I became a committed writer, composing a paragraph a day as though it were guided meditation and finding it unpleasant to inhabit most other people's writing for much more than the length of a poem.

2,522. The trick of writing this book — similar to the trick of living — will have been to fill it with optimistic content despite its pessimistic form.

2,521. In statistics, correlation does not imply causation, but in poetry and art cause and effect are free to skid past one another with the streaky, associative logic of sky and cloud.

2,520. The sentence, "The way things go is the way things go," expresses both a philosophical tautology and a poetic truth, another matter of glass half-empty or half-full perspective.

2,519. When Emily and I were children, our mother, Marianne Bury, was fond of saying that her mother, Helen Migliaccio, was fond of saying *Que será, será* whenever the former would ask the latter an unanswerable question about the future.

2,518. I like to picture my mother's mother, a bon vivant who passed away before I was born, dancing at one of her Brooklyn house parties, eyes closed and drink in hand, to the deterministic strains of Doris Day.

2,517. The concepts of family and of home promise not only links to a usable past but also two of the perceived surest ways to secure a future.

2,516. In the 1980s and '90s, Staten Island was infamous as the home of Fresh Kills Landfill, which was established by Robert Moses in 1948 and was the world's largest landfill from 1955 until its 2001 closure.

2,515. Around Fresh Kills's perimeter, a berm and a layer of tree cover were built to make residents feel psychologically insulated from their proximity to the world's largest planned concentration of solid waste.

2,514. Growing up, I imagined that the landfill was somewhere on the other side of a forest, way out near New Jersey, until, as an adult taking a tour of the city park being built on the site, I stood atop a capped and sealed garbage mound and was staggered by the proximity of the MACY's sign that stood, along with the rest of the Staten Island Mall, across the street from the mound's base.

2,513. In the 2000s, as I obtained a measure of psychic and geographic distance from Staten Island, Great Kills, the neighborhood between my parents' neighborhood and the former landfill, became the epicenter of a decades-long opioid epidemic.

2,512. Heroin promises an oblivion as pure and powder white as snowfall, as silent and sinister as the suburban American dream.

2,511. When Emily became a heroin addict in her twenties, our parents' house phone would ring during the night and they'd wake up wondering, in my mother's words, if "the call was from the ER or the morgue."

2,510. The way things go is you can flee the Brooklyn neighborhood of your childhood, to a remote-seeming and lily-white

Staten Island neighborhood, and you still can't insulate yourself or your family-to-be from harm.

2,509. "We're like family," my Staten Island friends used to say to each other as a term of endearment, as if the simile were a berm that could protect us from whatever we imagined lay on its other side.

2,508. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, many words acquire their meaning through "family resemblance," that is, they aren't defined by a particular essence or trait but possess a variety of traits shared by some, but not all, of their kin (1953, 27).

2,507. One night, bored of reading Ethan the same rote bedtime books, I ad libbed the words to *Pete the Cat: A Pet for Pete*, turning a story about a cat who paints portraits of his pet goldfish into an absurd parable about Plato's critique of mimesis in Book X of *The Republic*.

2,506. The more obscure and funny-sounding the philosophical nomenclature with which I peppered the story — mimesis, umwelt, noumenon — the harder Ethan laughed.

2,505. The next day, a friend visiting our apartment casually remarked, "That's my philosophy," at which Ethan grinned at me and said, "We know philosophy, right, daddy?"

2,504. We do, Ethan, we do.

2,503. When I was a professional poker player in my twenties, I believed that you could insulate yourself against loss and the vicissitudes of fortune by maintaining serene indifference to them.

2,502. *Que será, será* was my philosophy: you can't control what you can't control, so why let lost causes affect you.

2,501. “Results-oriented thinking,” poker players call Stoicism’s irrational opposite, disparagingly.

2,500. “The art of losing isn’t hard to master,” maintained Elizabeth Bishop, in one of poetry’s most artful and notorious self-deceptions (1984, 178).

2,499. The day of the September 11th World Trade Center attacks, my father’s mother walked from her midtown Manhattan office building to my Union Square NYU dormitory to have somewhere to stay while the bridges and subways back to Brooklyn were closed.

2,498. When she arrived at the dorm, towers’ smoke still smoldering in the sky, my grandmother gushed, discordant, about how much she loved the building’s architecture; gesturing at the distraught students around us in the lobby, I admonished her for the remark’s inappropriateness.

2,497. “Oh, please,” she cut me off, with a wave of her hand, “after what I’ve been through, this is nothing.”

2,496. *This is nothing* is an erasure poem that I first read, as a child, in my father’s silent, watery-blue eyes.

2,495. *This is nothing*, I once convinced myself about Emily’s illness, Emily’s drug addiction, and even, for a time, Emily herself.

2,494. *This is nothing* is the sound my depression used to make while talking to itself.

2,493. *This is nothing* pretend the berms and the creeks and the methane-flushed trees.

2,492. The way things go is not nothing, even when nothingness is the state toward which they tend.

2,491. When my father's mother, Helena Markowicz, née Ita Frejbaum, was fourteen years old, she used fake Aryan papers to smuggle food and medicine into the Warsaw Ghetto for her family.

2,490. She knew that this food and medicine could not secure more than a few moments of comfort and sustenance for her family but she also knew it was worth the risk.

2,489. She continued smuggling until, caught and severely beaten, it became too dangerous and she had little choice but to leave the Ghetto for good and try to save herself.

2,488. Standing on a cold and windy street corner in 1941 occupied Warsaw, my grandmother's mother, Regina Hoffnung, tied a scarf around her fourteen-year-old daughter's neck and begged her not to go.

2,487. "I have to," my grandmother replied, in tears.

2,486. The way things go is a philosophy of the future—optimistic and pessimistic, survivalist and elegiac—written time and again in the past.

What can I say to you, darling,
 When you ask me for help?
 I do not even know the future
 Or even what poetry
 We are going to write.

— Jack Spicer, “A Poem without a Single Bird in It” (2008, 73)

It wasn't quite prayer but the more I recited its words the more incantatory power they assumed. “What can I say to you, darling,” I repeated to myself, “When you ask me for help?” It was early on an otherwise ordinary weekend morning twelve or fifteen years ago. The Long Island Rail Road car speeding me out east, not fast enough, grooved a quiet rumble into the day. The uncluttered spring sky looked like itself, only crisper, and Spicer's poem was a tender bruise I kept pressing on to see how it would feel.

Even earlier that morning, my phone rang me awake and I had that old sense of dread I used to get whenever my mother would call. She's calling to tell me that Emily is not okay, I thought, the words “Mom Cell” aglow on the rattling nightstand. The thought was less a bolt of clairvoyance than a groggy intuition that a call this early in the morning could only mean something was wrong. That I correctly assumed the call was about my twenty-something sister, rather than an elderly relative, was also a piece of subconscious logic. For a good part of the decade prior, phone calls from my mother meant yet more bad news about Emily.

Still, something seemed different this time. My sense of foreboding may have been logical but, startled out of sleep, it felt like divination when confirmed. “Emily's on her way to the hospital, coughing up blood, having trouble breathing.” Immediately I thought I knew that today was the day on which she was going to die. The “knowledge” seized me with physical awareness.

Every occurrence, urgent yet deliberate, tingled at the thought of itself: the warm shower [on the day my sister died]; the brisk spring air outside [on the day my sister died]; the stale air in Penn Station [on the day my sister died]. Outside the train window, rows of suburban lawn whooshed by, whispering, “I loved you once but / I do not know the future” (Spicer 2008, 73).

When I entered the hospital room, crowded with relatives and balloons, my family reacted as though the Pope had arrived to deliver a benediction. “You didn’t have to come,” my father said with deference, “We really appreciate it.” My family’s disproportionate gratitude at my appearance was a splash of ice water on the eyes. I hadn’t realized how much of a stranger I’d become to them, how much of a stranger I’d become to my own powerful feelings about Emily. For years, her premature death seemed so imminent, so inevitable, one way or another, it had felt like proleptic reality. The only question in my mind was when and how it would happen, not if it would. The blood clots in her lungs that morning — life-threatening but not, in the end, fatal — seemed confirmation of a “fact” about which I long ago became convinced.

Confronting my own cognitive dissonance that morning in the hospital felt like the reverse of seeing a ghost. What spooked me was the live person, sitting there before me, not dead or dying but laughing and smiling in the circle of family warmth. “Of course I came,” taking my father by the shoulders as though he was the one who needed to be centered, “Did you think I wouldn’t?” But that “of course” was only convincing, to the extent it was, because I’d believed I was coming to confront, once and for all, the loss of my sister. Instead, I was forced to confront the loss of a peculiar narrative of loss to which I had become attached.

We often act as though poetry exists to consecrate moments of heightened significance. Like a mischievous adolescent holding a magnifying glass to a dried-out leaf, the poet takes an otherwise ordinary object and focuses language upon it until it flames. Too sensible for petty arson, non-poets outsource the work

of inspired foolishness on those occasions (weddings, funerals, Presidential inaugurations) whose preposterous grandeur demands poetry's awkward, baffling grace. The poem endows the occasion with enigmatic intensity. You become convinced that your sister is dying and so you enhance the mood with a poem about serenity in the face of despair.

But that's not quite how poetry works. Or, if that is how poetry sometimes works, it constitutes one of its least interesting functions. Heightened, lyric occasions contain plenty of intrinsic power. Poems will be written about those occasions, moving poems even, but people were going to have to reckon with the occasions' implications anyway. Instead, it's those times we're least likely to reach for poetry that we need it most, all the rote habits and everyday tasks through which we muddle, disgruntled or contented, looking the other way.

Poetry can help grasp the subconscious commonplace because poetry is both a leading and a lagging indicator of the heart. When something big or beautiful or scary transpires, its emotional impact is obvious, harder to avoid. But when something ordinary or beyond notice transpires, its emotional impact more easily remains below the threshold of awareness. Like a leading indicator, which in economics foretells changes to come, the poetry that resonates with you hints at submerged feelings that you haven't yet processed. Like a lagging indicator, which registers changes only after they've already taken place, those poetic hints don't become full-blown personal knowledge until it's in a sense too late.

When you recite a poem by heart, you become a gong shivering at the memory of the mallet, a yogic *Om* strumming the belly with breath. Obliquely, bodily, you iterate your way toward an understanding of the poem more concerned with sound than sense. Pressed against the unthinking tongue, the recited poem enters the bloodstream with the solemnity of a communion wafer. The best reason to memorize a poem is because you believe in what it augurs, are convinced of its each syllable, need

its molecules to bind with your own so it can become an agent of the change you were already about to undergo.

That morning on the train, I swallowed Spicer's poem aloud so as to better digest its question. Spicer claims that, because he doesn't know the future, there's nothing of use he can say in response to darling's plea for help. Yet despite these protestations, including the cruelly mocking suggestions to "commit suicide" or "go mad," the poem itself constitutes an answer to the plea, represents what Spicer has chosen to say in response (73). The poem's apparent quietism may make it a frustratingly ineffectual response, especially for the beleaguered darling, but part of Spicer's point seems to be that no help or advice could be adequate to the unnamed predicament. Only poetry, foolish herald of the beyond, impractical *in extremis*, is itself impossible enough to address our earthly impossibilities.

Emily, I'm not sure what of use I can say, even now, years later. When we were younger, you used to call me on the phone, drug-clenched, for help: a place to crash; money to borrow; wild-eyed advice. I used to think that I should have urged you to seek professional help sooner. Then I used to think that it was a mistake to try to talk through your problems when your calls weren't seeking actionable advice so much as a witness to your misadventures. But ignoring your phone calls would have been a no less painful mistake, as I subsequently learned from ignoring mom's. It hurts to realize that little I could have said or done would have protected you or me or anyone else we love.

Not everything will be okay, maintains Spicer's poem, and that's fine, maybe even a good thing. In the way only a memorized poem can be, "A Poem without a Single Bird in It" has been for me a talisman, a penny kept tucked under my tongue. Discolored and abraded, the poem reminds me, whenever I roll it around my mouth, that you can never be fully insulated from harm. I've needed that reminder, just as I need the near-accidents that occur weekly riding my bicycle, not simply because I've spent my professional and personal lives trying to manage risk, fooling myself into believing it can be mastered, but also

because the future becomes a little less abstract when it threatens to be revoked.

Emily, I want to write the poem that imperils the future in order to secure it. The poem that wouldn't be a poem at all, but prophecy, conflagration, life. Emily, the future is an improbable chess move we're not talented or foolish enough to discern, the future is today's chessboard played to conclusion under a foreign, as yet uninvented set of rules. Hold your magnifying glass up to the proud, cross-topped king. The lens is a crystal ball and the chess piece is a totem. Can you see it? It's the crown polished in lyric flame, the game disappeared in smoke.

When Emily was sixteen years old, she was diagnosed with pediatric systemic lupus erythematosus and told her life expectancy was thirty. She was diagnosed with the disease after inexplicably becoming bedridden for over a month with joint pain. During that anxious month, she and my parents followed a trail of medical evidence to the office of the country's leading pediatric rheumatologist. He delivered the bruising prognosis with professional clarity and reassurance. Her case was severe but not hopeless. With the aggressive course of chemotherapy he recommended, Emily's life expectancy could be prolonged another twenty years. It was a high risk, high reward proposition. My sister and my parents took the bet.

At the time, I had just moved away from home for my freshman year of college. Updates about my sister's mysterious condition arrived in the form of regular phone calls from my mother. Like so many of the bad news phone calls I would receive from her in the subsequent decade, I have little recollection of their contents. What stays with me instead is the sound of my mother's voice, its tightrope walker's tone of wobbly composure. Taking a deep breath, she would describe each new batch of medical information with clinical precision, using the full complement of Latinate terminology. Despite its confident vocabulary, her voice had acquired a tone of barely subdued despair. It sounded like she was gritting her teeth through the throbs of an open wound, pretending the pain was nothing.

In striking this tone, my mother wanted to keep me informed about Emily's condition while also insulating me from it—wanted to let me start this new phase of my young life outside the blast radius of my sister's pain. Giddy with the freedom of living away from home, I was happy to oblige. Information about my sister reached me through the phone but, self-involved and at a physical remove, its implications didn't reach

me on a more immediate, visceral level. My literal and figurative distance from Emily's illness diminished my sense of its reality.

I remember a phone call with my mother that feels representative. I don't remember the call's contents other than that, because I was high on pot, I absentmindedly *Yes'd* and *Uh-huh'd* my way through it without fully listening. When I hung up, I told my then-girlfriend, Lauren, who'd been in the room, about Emily's latest travails. "I'm so sorry about your sister," she said, rubbing my shoulders, "it's just awful." Emily had been ill for two or three months by this point but it took hearing the emotion in Lauren's voice to feel my own emotions as something other than a cloud of flies to be swatted away.

The opening question of Jack Spicer's "A Poem without a Single Bird in It" swats away its interlocutor's request for help as though it were a gnat. "What can I say to you, darling," muses the poet, "When you ask me for help?" There's something about the helplessness of others that can make us also feel vulnerable. Spicer copes and deflects by offering flimsy excuses ("I do not know the future") and preposterous advice ("Commit suicide. Go mad") (2008, 73). As escape tactics, neither proposition can extricate Spicer from his own feelings of impotence. And so he doubles back upon them later in the poem, repeats the advice, in slightly varied form, in hopes it will become more convincing when reiterated.

But the most convincing lines in the poem are its two mentions of poetry. Both are doozies of a line; both feel like tender spots in an otherwise calloused poem. "I do not know the future," Spicer offers, in reply to his own rhetorical question, "Or even what poetry / We are going to write." And by way of hushed conclusion: "Go mad. Commit suicide. There will be nothing left / After you die or go mad, / But the calmness of poetry." Both invocations of poetry are powerful because unexpected. Like plastic snakes sprung from a can, only not a gag, their surprise contents appear incongruous with the container they inhabited only a few moments ago. In particular, the

“future / Or even” line break defies predictability even when you know it’s coming (73).

Poems are vessels for delivering safe dosages of astonishment, polymer-coated pills we swallow to enhance and regulate the mood. In the face of someone else’s despair, Spicer places his faith in the power of poetry to console and, even, save. Nothing else in “A Poem without” offers the possibility of hope or acceptance. That’s why knowing “what poetry / We are going to write” would be almost as good a form of help as having psychic knowledge of the future (73). The as yet unwritten poetry Spicer wishes he could foresee will one day tell the story of how the future managed to extricate itself, or not, from the present. The promise of such proleptic wisdom is the carrot dangling from the stick of art. If we could only grab hold of it, now, in the present, we imagine it would help us figure out how to live better or, failing that, how to come to terms with the living we’re fated to do.

When Emily was diagnosed with lupus twenty-five years ago, I didn’t know any of these things. I didn’t know what was happening inside her body, on a physiological or emotional level. I didn’t know what was happening inside my own body, on an emotional or an intellectual level, on account of not-knowing about her. I certainly didn’t know much about poetry, didn’t know it was a form of knowing so oblique and insidious as to resemble not-knowing. I hadn’t yet discovered how metaphors, pullstrings from brain to tongue, can be more knowledgeable than their authors. I didn’t know that I didn’t know these and other things, and I didn’t know how not knowing them, but wanting to, would lead me to become a writer.

I only knew that, because my teenage sister faced the prospect of dying well before might be expected, I wanted to figure out how best to live. Many college-aged young people, adulthood yawning before them, reckon with a similar existential question. The difference in my case was that, having won a genetic coin flip (women are almost ten times likelier than men to have lupus), the question felt like it was of hair’s breadth con-

sequence. As siblings, Emily and I could easily have been in each other's shoes; a tree that straddled both our property lines had, by chance, fallen on her house and not mine. And as third-generation Holocaust survivors, we had both grown up in the long family shadow cast by traumatic near-death experience.

In short, I needed to process an experience I wasn't yet ready or equipped to process. Books seemed the perfect medium for metabolizing the experience. Reading (and its older sibling, writing) promised a greater understanding of the world but was in no great hurry to disclose its secrets. The act of reading was slow and necessitated literal and metaphorical withdrawal from the world. Reading also confronted me with just how much more I would have to read to become well-read. Books are dominoes toppling one into the next; we call their ripple effects tradition, influence. When I was in college, I used to walk through the "Literature" sections of bookstores and imagine a future in which I'd read everything on the shelves, an ambition, it now strikes me, that presumed I had the full statistical lifetime, and then some, that my sister didn't.

Books can help you figure out how to live but, because they require you to stand at a remove from life in order to inhabit it better, they help in a backward, oblique way. Much like the telephone, books are a technology of detachment in service of connection. Or is it the other way around? Regardless, the responses you get when you call upon a book are rarely the ones for which you'd hoped. Like therapists, most good books don't directly answer the questions you pose to them but instead volley new questions back at you. The exchange won't save you — it's far too slow for that — but its laggard wisdom might help repair the damage you'd been trying to prevent in the first place.

The curator's question was so obvious nobody in our family had ever thought to ask it. "Did anybody wonder," she asked my father, "why you were attending college in Israel when you were from a Catholic country?" He couldn't recall being asked about it at the time. "Maybe people assumed he was Jewish," I offered, "Why else would he be there?" My parents and I had come to the Museum of Jewish Heritage to donate my late grandmother's Holocaust-related documents, but the curator in whose office we were sitting had become fascinated by the shaggy-dog story of my father's life when he left Poland in the 1960s. "That's right," my father chimed in, "Everybody assumed that I was Jewish. They used to call me 'Moishe.'"

They called him "Moishe" in tribute to his mother's father, Moses Frejbaum, who died in the Treblinka extermination camp during the Second World War. The revelation, which my father delivered as casually as if recounting what he'd eaten for breakfast that morning, was a thunderbolt. "Do you mean that a couple friends called you 'Moishe,'" we pressed. No, he explained, everybody did: classmates, friends, teachers, strangers. Sure enough, in his school books from that time, my father, current legal name Wiesław Edward Bury, inscribed his name as "W.M. Bury." For the first three years of his adult life, my father went by an alias commemorating extreme familial and cultural trauma and never mentioned it to his subsequent family, not even his wife of forty-six years, until the curator, Erica Blumenfeld, drew it out of him by accident.

The name "Moishe," Yiddish for "Moses," derives from the Hebrew *mōsheh*, meaning "drawn out" or "drawn out of the water." The Biblical Moses was given the name when Bithiah, Pharaoh's daughter, rescued him as an infant from the Nile. Bithiah "drew out" Moses in the sense of extracting him from danger, rather than in the sense of helping him speak freely, but the two senses of the phrase are related. Speaking freely about

trauma can feel like deliverance from it, but even at its healthiest such direct recall still produces a painfully lucid afterimage. Silent avoidance of prior trauma produces its own painful afterimage, but a dulled and indistinct one.

My father does his best to try to limit his psychic exposure to pain. When Emily was undergoing chemotherapy, he would drive her and my mom an hour and a half to and from the hospital every weekend. But he never once stepped inside the hospital, let alone went upstairs to my sister's room, because it would have upset him. What amazes me about this fact is that I was unaware of it at the time. In my regular visits to the hospital, I didn't attribute significance to his absence, and my mom and sister didn't mention it to me until over a decade and a half later. If the rest of my nuclear family isn't quite so avoidant, we nonetheless observe some of the same ritual silences.

It bothers me, more than I feel it should, that one root of these family silences extends back to traumas my grandmother experienced on another continent eighty years ago. I've long known the Holocaust to be part of my family history, but, baptized Roman Catholic and several generations removed from that era, growing up it didn't feel like a trauma that had much to do with the person who I was and the life that I was living. But the style of depressive and withdrawn coping that I refined as a twenty-something adult was behavior I adapted from my father, bunkered away in his basement office, who himself must have adapted it from his parents. My emotional obtuseness about the Holocaust's impact on me and my family is itself a legacy of my ancestor's Holocaust experiences.

My father's parents both lost almost their entire nuclear and extended families during the war. For my father, an only child, this familial void would have been not only conspicuous but also oddly normal, just the way things were in the world he'd inherited. For his parents, however, the contrast with their robust and flourishing previous family lives would have been acute. In poker-faced family photographs from the 1950s and '60s, the three of them, formally attired and unsmiling, wear their Eastern European stoicism like a carapace.

I don't know what would have been the tone and contents of their routine family conversations but I do know how my grandmother told my father that she was Jewish. When my father was ten years old, his parents took him on a trip to Warsaw from their rural village of Krosno Odrzańskie. Amid the rubble of the site that was once the Warsaw Ghetto, my grandmother revealed that during the war she had been quarantined there because she was Jewish. I don't know if my grandmother tried to prime my father for this disclosure, but I suspect it arrived sudden and stark. Both times he's mentioned it — once, in a written interview I did of him, and, years later, at the museum — he described himself as being in shock. “The things I used to say about Jews when I was a kid,” he confessed to the curator, “I wouldn't ever repeat them.”

Several weeks after that museum visit, my parents and I were at their local bank to authorize me to access their safe deposit box, in anticipation of their eventual passing. My parents disagreed with one another about whether they should relinquish the box, given that they didn't store anything of great monetary value in it, but my father's insistence that they keep it won out. As he extracted the box from the vault and pried it open, I could see why he wanted it. Packed inside were family documents and heirlooms — my father's father's war medals and birth certificate; my parents' grandparents' and great-grandparents' marriage certificates and wedding rings; the gold ruble, dated 1899, that my grandmother smuggled to the US from Poland — that encompassed a mix of financial and sentimental value. For my father, as for his parents, maintaining a secure private space, sheltered away from the more dangerous elements in the world, feels integral to family- and self-preservation.

In the house where I was raised, my father's office functioned as a similar preserve. Located in the furthest corner of the basement, the tiny room was packed floor to ceiling with electrical engineering equipment. The desk, filing cabinets, and bookshelves were strewn with oscilloscopes and ammeters, signal generators and transistor testers, and stacks of those green cir-

cuit boards that look like scale models of futuristic cities or alien chess sets. I rarely saw my father use any of the equipment but, like canned food in a fallout shelter, it was available if needed.

The room, a stockpile of circuitry, radiated a staticky warmth. It was formally an office but functionally a hideout. Its two slivers of window, squeezed up near the ceiling and looking out to the backyard, were like portholes on a ship, reminders of your physical proximity to, yet conceptual distance from, the outside world. Sounds from the yard or from upstairs (children's gleeful shrieks; the floorboard creak of footsteps) reached the room as if through earmuffs. These spatial and sonic buffers suited my father, who remains politely muted and remote even when among company. He would spend hours holed up inside that room — absorbed in grading student papers, working on the computer, or daydreaming about whatever fathers daydream about — until the aboveground world again required his presence.

In Poland, name days (*imieniny*) are celebrated and accorded greater importance than birthdays. A male and a female saint have been assigned to each calendar day and citizens who share a name with that saint host a social gathering to celebrate the occasion. Growing up, my mom would buy my father and his mother a card, and maybe flowers or a small present, to honor their name days. My father would remind us of the tradition's cultural importance, how in major cities each day's names would be displayed on mass transit.

What my father never mentioned was his family's complicated relation to the tradition's Catholicism. Coming from someone who temporarily adopted a Jewish name upon leaving Poland, and whose Jewish mother permanently adopted a Catholic name as a life-and-death necessity, the omission feels conspicuous. It reflects his subdued dissociation that made him a mystery to me for so long. Like our overdetermined family name — a Polish word (for “mottled grey”) that passes as English (for “put or hide underground”) — my father contains deceptive depths: proudly Polish yet secretly different from most Poles in

a way many of them once scorned; traumatized by the Second World War's aftermath but not the war itself; a gentle and kind-hearted man who yearns for human connection yet maintains a formal distance from even the humans he loves most.

In that above-mentioned written interview, I asked my father if he wished Emily and I could speak Polish, and why he never tried to teach it to us. He answered the first question, tersely, in the affirmative, and left the second one blank. We understood each other perfectly. Like him, I know how it feels not to be able to speak the language that in part formed you, know how it feels not to know essential parts of yourself. Tucked away inside my father is a poem, quiet and static, written in the language of the heart. He is its author and its subject, but can't remember having helped write it, or even what it might be about.

2,278. I don't remember my father trying to teach Polish to me and Emily, or even speaking the language to us other than occasionally to mention a lone word's meaning.

2,277. I don't remember experiencing this linguistic omission as a lack, that is, as something that felt like it ought to be present in my life but was missing.

2,276. I don't remember our family having any Polish relatives, friends, or acquaintances other than my father's mother and, during my adolescence, my father's PhD supervisor, Dariusz.

2,275. I don't remember finding it odd that my father appeared more at ease, more himself, on the occasions he did speak Polish.

2,274. I don't remember feeling disconnected from Polish-American culture, or even, a sign of the disconnection's extent, that there was such a thing as Polish-American culture.

2,273. I don't remember finding it odd, growing up on Staten Island, that white children, the children I knew almost exclusively, would define their ethnic identities as fractions and percentages of European countries.

2,272. I don't remember recognizing the irony that the grandchild of a Holocaust survivor could uncritically accept the premise that identity was an ethnic measurement.

2,271. I don't remember learning the term "intergenerational trauma" until my thirties.

2,270. I don't remember connecting my father's dissociative tendencies with the circumstances of his post-traumatic upbringing, with the fact that, as they raised him, his parents had to reconstruct their lives out of the Second World War's rubble.

2,269. I don't remember realizing, also not until my thirties, how astonished my father must have been when he met my mom's close-knit, extended Italian-American family, and how their jokey affection must have intimidated but also appealed to him.

2,268. I don't remember recognizing how offbeat my mom's choice of partner would have seemed to her family, nor how my father's foreignness must have appealed to her.

2,267. I don't remember, when I would answer classmates and friends that "I'm half-Polish, half-Italian," placing greater mental weight on the Polish or Italian side.

2,266. I don't remember distinguishing between "Italian" and "Italian-American" in these self-definitions, even though my mother's family, most of whom are descended from Italy, had been living in the US for several generations by the time I was born.

2,265. I don't remember encountering robust discourses, popular or intellectual, about Italian-American identity, unless you count the mafia movies I watched several times too many as an adolescent.

2,264. I don't remember my mom or her family talking about their relatives and acquaintances affiliated with the mob other than to say it was the kind of thing that wasn't spoken about.

2,263. I don't remember contemplating either side of my family when I first read the mystic final line of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence," only that it left me speechless (2002, 89).

2,262. I don't remember, as a student, knowing what attracted me to difficult literature and art—the kind filled with poetic silences, gaps, and voids—or why, after writing about such work, I'd marvel at how much I'd found to say about it.

2,261. I don't remember considering myself or my family in relation to discourses of immigration, nor do I remember understanding this disregard as assimilationist ambition.

2,260. I don't remember the name of the Brooklyn candy shop owned by my mother's grandparents, Michael Migliaccio and Marianne DiBlasi Migliaccio, nor could I remember her grandparents' names just now without texting her for help.

2,259. I don't remember grasping what it meant, in a personal or sociological sense, that my mother's father, Louis Migliaccio, rode the rails during the Great Depression.

2,258. I don't remember much about the grandfather after whom I was named, but I can recall how satisfied he looked, on a visit to New York from Florida, while tending to a pot of boiling lobsters and chiming in to the dining room conversation with wisecracks.

2,257. I don't remember being struck, in the way I am now, at how much my grandfather resembled my mother, and she him, while standing over the stove and “busting chops,” that is, teasingly giving your family or friends a hard time.

2,256. I don't remember when I recognized my own sharp tongue as part of my Italian–American inheritance, only that I've long relied on humor and wit to deflect from uncomfortable everyday situations, intimate ones in particular.

2,255. I don't remember attributing significance to the way my extended family would tease me, as well as my mother, about my booksmarts.

2,254. I don't remember grasping how big a deal it would have been that my mother was the first person in her family, man or woman, to attend college and, soon after, graduate school.

2,253. I don't remember apprehending the educational and class dimensions of the intergenerational alienation between my mom and her family, or me and my own.

2,252. I don't remember why I'd forgotten that, when she would get mad at Emily during Emily's adolescence, my mom would mention that she wasn't close with her own mother.

2,251. I don't remember imagining what it must have meant to my mother that her mother was in a tuberculosis sanitarium for the first three years of my mother's life.

2,250. I don't remember understanding, until I became a parent myself, how parents imitate their own caretakers yet also try to compensate for what they perceive as their caretakers' lacks, like revising a script while in the midst of plagiarizing it.

2,249. I don't remember finding it unusual that both my parents held graduate degrees and worked white collar jobs, yet lived in a working-class Italian-American neighborhood, had a modest household income, and moved in social circles where many people hadn't completed or attended college.

2,248. I don't remember noticing that my parents' closest friends were also my mom's relatives.

2,247. I don't remember finding it telling, in the English professor way I do now, that my mom studied sociology in college and social work in graduate school.

2,246. I don't remember fathoming, in a concrete way, what it must have been like for my mom to grow up with little money, nor that her thrifty adult habits (clipping grocery coupons; sewing patches on torn jeans) were part financial necessity and part intergenerational muscle memory.

2,245. I don't remember what my mother's father did for a living (cab driver comes to mind, though that might be confusing him with other relatives), but I will never forget that my mother's mother made and sold her own jewelry for small bits of extra money, nor that, decades after she passed away, her genre of homemade jewelry had accrued collector's value.

2,244. I don't remember attributing significance to the fact that my mother never wore jewelry or makeup except on the most formal occasions, that she disliked stereotypically feminine accessories so much she didn't even have her ears pierced.

2,243. I don't remember grasping that my mother's regrets about not saving her mother's homemade jewelry had little to do with the jewelry's eventual monetary value, nor that my mother's hobbyist antique collection (vintage furniture that she stripped and refinished; a gleaming trove of Depression Glass) might be compensatory.

2,242. I don't remember possessing an iota of self-awareness about my upbringing's cross-class peculiarities (leaning upper class in education, middle class in finances, and lower class in socialization) while reading Pierre Bourdieu as an undergrad at the US's most expensive private university.

2,241. I don't remember admitting how important it felt to me, at the time, simply to be familiar with the name "Pierre Bourdieu," nor do I remember cognizing the feeling's Bourdieuan basis.

2,240. I don't remember resolving to lose my New York accent, only that I returned home for Christmas one year in college and

my mother and extended family busted my chops, as if I thought I were too good for them, for pronouncing vowels at the end of words like “mozzarella” and “ricotta.”

2,239. I don’t remember, since losing my accent, feeling comfortable with either pronunciation of ricotta: both the Italian-American *ree-goth* and the dictionary phonetic *ri-’kă-tă* feel awkward on my tongue.

2,238. I don’t remember realizing how much it must have hurt my mom, that same Christmas, to hear me declare across the table, “We know, we just chose something different,” when she and several cousins were expressing regrets that their children don’t know what it’s like to have a close-knit extended family.

2,237. I don’t remember ever being so startled, in terms of understanding my life as an intellectual, as when my friend El, a nonsense native New Yorker, claimed that people choose, even if subconsciously, to lose or keep their regional accents.

2,236. I don’t remember any book catching me more off-guard (again, not until well into my thirties) than Didier Eribon’s *Returning to Reims*, a sociological autobiography in which Eribon explores why, in the intellectual circles of his adulthood, he felt more shame about his working class roots than his homosexuality.

2,235. I don’t remember thinking about my college choice between CUNY Baruch, where tuition was \$3,200/year and my scholarship would have been \$5,000/year, and NYU’s Stern School of Business, where tuition was \$21,000/year and my scholarship was \$7,000/year, as anything other than an apolitical decision about personal affordability weighed against potential return on investment.

2,234. I don't remember attributing significance to the fact that the colleges I was deciding between were located close to home but not too close.

2,233. I don't remember having any doubt that private colleges were on average inherently better than public ones, whatever "better" meant, nor do I remember late 1990s students at Staten Island Technical High School feeling much different.

2,232. I don't remember substantial conversations about social class taking place among early 2000s NYU undergrads, other than gossip about the enormity of certain students' allowances and discrepancies within friend groups about what sort of trip, if any, was feasible during spring break.

2,231. I don't remember finding it odd that my roommate A, whose father was a doctor and whose allowance was spent on video games and drugs in bulk, hired a limousine back to campus for his friends after having us over at his parents' Long Island home for a Super Bowl party.

2,230. I don't remember what happened to the chinos of mine that A's friend S (whose family's wealth made A's family look middle class) threw up on in that Super Bowl limousine, only that I declined to let her buy me a replacement pair or take me out to dinner to make it up to me.

2,229. I don't remember extensive or intimate interactions with wealth until I attended college, nor do I remember, once in college, feeling skeptical about them in the way that now, as a proper intellectual, I feel I ought to have.

2,228. I don't remember attending the CUNY Graduate Center for any reason (ideological, intellectual, or geographical, say) other than that it was the only doctoral program in English that accepted me the year I applied.

2,227. I don't remember grasping the extent of the subconscious self-selection in our personal and professional lives until (again, in my thirties) I started my tenure track job at Hostos Community College, CUNY, and Diosa, the long-serving English Office Assistant, welcomed me by saying, "We're like family here."

2,226. I don't remember hesitating, out to lunch with the hiring committee after my Hostos teaching demonstration, to quip, "That's okay, I only answered the question so that I can sue if I don't get the job," when one committee member admonished another for illegally asking me my age.

2,225. I don't remember ever making interviewers laugh so hard as in that moment, or ever feeling comfortable enough with them to venture such a joke.

2,224. I don't remember when most people stopped calling me "Lou" and instead referred to me as "Louis," only that after completing my PhD and starting my first full-time teaching job at NYU, I resolved to start going by Lou again, as it reminded me of a time when I was happier and healthier in how I related to others.

2,223. I don't remember, when I was in graduate school, Shari saying much about my late-night poker hours or about the days when she'd get home from work and the only thing I'd have done is played online poker and maybe fixed myself a sandwich, not even showered.

2,222. I don't remember grasping that Shari's silence about my poker habit fit all too comfortably with my internalized ideas about how families relate to one another.

2,221. I don't remember my mom commenting on my poker playing beyond a sarcastic, "Great, so my son is a professional gambler," when I described myself as a "part-time professional

poker player” in the bio accompanying my first published piece of writing.

2,220. I don't remember explaining to her just how much I dislike gambling, about how, if you're disciplined with your money and more skilled than your opponents, poker contains trivial amounts of risk.

2,219. I don't remember figuring out, until long past when I should have, that my desire to play things safe contains its own risks.

2,218. I don't remember perceiving that depressively playing online poker reproduced in me the same oblivious feeling I would get while tuning out my mother's voice on the phone as she updated me about Emily.

2,217. I don't remember seriously considering the possibility that I was addicted to poker, even though I used to joke with friends that, unlike my sister's addiction, at least mine made me money.

2,216. I don't remember grasping the extent to which poker warped my relationship to money.

2,215. I don't remember caring, once I got good at poker, about thousand-plus dollar wins or losses, even when experienced in a single hand, though I do remember feeling great pride at my indifference.

2,214. I don't remember processing what it meant that I could win or lose in a single day what my peers and I got paid to teach a course for an entire semester.

2,213. I don't remember recognizing how my poker winnings, together with Shari's salaried job, insulated me not only from a student's typical subsistence concerns but also from more

intimate conversations with peers, rather than merely abstract intellectual ones, about social class.

2,212. I don't remember understanding my oblivion as a choice that I kept making and calling inheritance.

The players always sit around the table in a circle. Even when the table is rectangular or ovoid, the players circle around it in spirit if not in space. They sit in a circle because a circle is a closed system, admitting no outside elements, and because every point in a circle is equidistant from its center. At table's center is the pot, the sum of money that has been wagered in a given hand. Every player has equal access to the pot; suspended in the middle, it belongs to everybody and nobody, until at last it belongs to somebody. Then everybody antes up and does it all over again.

The cards and the money at the table also obey a circular logic. Any competent poker player can tell you that, all else being equal, the money at the table flows from right to left. That's because the person on your immediate left has what's called "position" on you, which means they have the benefit of acting after you in every hand, but one, during each dealer's orbit around the table. Their position means that they get to make their decisions knowing more information about your actions than you do about theirs, which on average translates into winning more from their winning hands and losing less from their losing hands versus you. Of course, the player on their left enjoys the same competitive advantage versus them, just as you enjoy it versus the player on your right: subtle inequities within the circle's larger equilibrium.

The equilibrium at a poker table is temporal rather than competitive. Linear time doesn't seem to penetrate the circle's closed ranks. The game itself progresses sideways rather than forward, as with each new hand the dealer's button shifts left, then next-left, then next-next-left, until you're right back where you were a few minutes ago. Time inside the poker circle doesn't actually stop or return back on itself but instead ceases to contain obvious markers of its passage. Every poker hand looks pretty much like every other one: the cards and the players and the

money differ only in inconsequential ways. And every poker table looks like a waiting room — anxiously banal, whatever its décor — whose circumspect patients can't quite articulate what ails them.

Standing up from a poker table after a long session feels like you are one of those cartoon characters who has run off a cliff but only falls into the gorge below upon looking down and realizing the earth is no longer under your feet. You'd thought, suspended inside the circle's cocoon, that you were able to exist, for a moment, outside time. But the whole time you were subject to the same laws of physics as everybody else; you just hadn't noticed or cared. Poker's absorptive indistinction is its reason for being rather than its byproduct. Casual players imagine that it's a game of sportive camaraderie, and professionals imagine it's a game of ruthless exploitation, but at bottom it's a game about experiencing time's passage. The players sit in a patient circle and wait and watch as the cards flow around the table like water swirling a drain.

I've killed time at all different kinds of poker tables: sleek, leather-trimmed tables at high-end casinos; dusty old tables on riverboat casinos; wobbly fold-up tables at friends' apartments. But the majority of my time has been spent, via computer, at virtual tables. To the uninitiated, online poker seems an impoverished version of the live game. "How," I've often been asked, "can you play poker if you can't see your opponents' faces?" The common, romanticized view holds that good poker players are astute judges of character, capable of looking their opponents in the eyes and seeing to the bottom of their knavish souls. The reality is that, online or live, poker requires only the most superficial of character judgments and contains even less in the way of glamor and adventure. Advanced poker strategy is based on probabilities and betting patterns; the game's psychological dimension mostly involves typecasting simplifications. Online poker may seem a diminishment of the live game but, like a reduced sauce, is actually a condensation of its essence.

At the time I played, during the 2000s, most professionals preferred to play online because it allowed them to play a higher volume of hands. At nine-player casino tables, players are dealt on average between twenty and thirty hands per hour; at the same sized table online, that number more than doubles to between fifty and seventy hands per hour. Playing live also limits you to playing one table at a time, whereas online most players play between four and six tables at once, and, for the true obsessives, as many as twenty-four. Though the quality of your play declines from playing so many tables at once, you can make up for it in profit by volume.

The greater quantity of hands online, and the lack of sensory stimulation other than slot machine-style beeps and buzzes, intensifies certain aspects of the game, reduces the play experience down to an abstract Darwinian exercise in game theory. What matters, in this exercise, is the quality of your decisions multiplied by the amount of time available to realize the results: consistently make better decisions than your opponents and, over time, you profit. Players have control over both their in-game decisions and their time spent playing, but the former is a matter of skill, with a high and mostly theoretical upper bound, while the latter is a valuable and frustratingly finite resource. There's always room for strategic self-improvement but not always the time to reap its rewards.

Poker in its online form thus makes apparent, in a way its live form obscures, that time is the game's true currency. Live, players handle chips and make small talk, which distractions make poker seem a game of sociable hazard. Online, every aspect of the game has been abstracted except for the passage of time. This elimination of extraneities, along with the accelerated rate of game play, focuses the experience on its temporal dimension. As in a time-lapse film, each chronological interval of online play contains a greater proportion of experience than ordinary. This concentrated encounter with time makes it feel uniquely tangible, like seeing your breath in wintry air.

Poker players have a deserved reputation for profligacy but their wastefulness is as much temporal as pecuniary. Every committed poker player has a story about some impossibly long session they've played, often lasting in excess of twenty-four or thirty-six consecutive hours. If you ask, they'll cite reasons for the session's length: they were tilted and chasing losses; a friend bet them they couldn't last for the duration; it was the most profitable table at which they'd ever sat. But such extravagance makes for a good story because it flaunts the player's disregard for time's workaday demands. Slumped around the table with bovine indifference, poker players act as if they have so much time available to them that how they spend it is of no consequence.

This indifference resembles the attitude Jorge Luis Borges speculates human beings might adopt if they could live forever. In his short story "The Immortal," he imagines a "secret city" whose residents cannot die and pursues this conceit to one potential endpoint (1964, 106). Rather than providing relief or empowerment, the immortals' freedom from death proves closer to a curse. With an infinite span of time behind and ahead of them, Borges' immortals become a complacent tribe of troglodytes who sit curled up in their caves contemplating the nature of existence. They have cultivated such extreme philosophical detachment from the outside world because they know that, "in an infinite period of time," eventually "all things happen to all men" (114).

Playing poker doesn't, alas, grant you immortality but it does allow you to sample the experience of infinity's droll tedium. When life is finite, wasting time feels costly, at least in retrospect, but the appeal of wasting time, in the moment of its squander, derives from the illusion of abundance. You allow yourself to experience time the way multi-billionaires experience middle-class sums of money, as though its expenditure had no real ramifications for you. Procrastinators and smokers, both of whom also flaunt their contempt for time, know this feeling of doomed freedom well. It's the feeling of having bought today's pleasure at the price of tomorrow's pain.

In poker's purest variant, the cash game, there is no tomorrow unless you want there to be one. With no game clock or terminal game objective, the cards and the money will continue to circle around the table for as long as there are players willing to sit there. In Borges's story, the narrator encounters a philosopher who posits that "to draw out the span of a man's life was to draw out the agony of his dying and multiply the number of his deaths" (106). The philosopher's koan suggests that, in killing time at the table, the poker player doesn't just want to postpone and allay his own death, but also to multiply and exacerbate it: to draw it out, prolonged, as if to experience it, over and over again, in slow motion. It's a logic as circular and puzzling as the game itself.

The hourglass is a peculiar and inconvenient timepiece. Each hourglass can only measure one predetermined unit of time with exactitude. Measuring other time spans requires either estimating the fraction of sand remaining in the glass, flipping the device over when its sand runs out, or utilizing additional hourglasses. Though the hourglass's exact historical origins remain undetermined, it's known that during the Middle Ages sailors were willing to tolerate the device's limitations because it was more dependable at sea than its older sibling, the clepsydra, or water clock. For those on land, however, the development of the mechanical clock rendered the hourglass impractical from the 1500s onward.

The continued existence and, even, in fringe cases such as board games and egg timers, usage of the hourglass owes to what the device does uniquely well. No other timepiece dramatizes the passage of time in such a concrete and threatening way. The shrinking cone of sand in the device's upper bulb, and the accumulating mound of sand in its lower one, represent the receding future and the expanding past. The needle of flowing sand that connects the two zones enacts the ease with which the present moment slips away into the dustbin of history. And sand, as a material, conjures a sense of ashes-to-ashes eternity. In its whispered countdown to an appointed zero hour, the hourglass embodies the pessimism of what Bruno Latour calls *l'avenir*, the future as that which is incoming and inescapable, in contradistinction to the more optimistic *le futur*, the future as an open horizon of possibilities.

Cuban artist Glenda León's installation, *Wasted Time*, seeks cause for optimism in the face of time's inexorability. An hourglass rests, half-buried, at the apex of a seven-foot-tall mound of sand. The mound is almost eight feet in diameter and pyramidal in shape and color; the wood and metal hourglass atop it looks like a homespun Christmas tree topper. In the version of the

installation that I saw at the Art Gallery of Ontario's 2017 *As If Sand Were Stone* exhibition, the voluminous mound was as smooth as an untouched sand dune. In images of another version, at London's Maddox Arts, the mound had the clumpy and misshapen appearance of a hill after a mudslide.

Whatever the version, this simple installation proves deceptively complex. Like its embedded hourglass, *Wasted Time* contains optimistic notes within a fundamentally pessimistic structure. The wistful title encourages the work to be read as an elegiac monument to lost time. Sand is an equally wistful material, evoking the past's fragility and impermanence. In its hilly shape, the sand resembles a burial mound; in a gallery setting, the mound feels like a transposed and reconstructed archaeological relic. The half-buried hourglass inside the mound is the literal and figurative topper, a bleak, seemingly overdetermined symbol of time's relentless passage.

But the installation does more than traffic in banalities. As a monument to lost time, it contains compositional elements that move beyond mere lament. The hourglass's position half-in and half-out of the mound's peak is a Rorschach test of the viewer's capacity for optimism. While the glass is dwarfed in size by the sand mound, it nonetheless occupies an ascendant position atop the mound, like a mountain climber on a summit. The shape of the hourglass's wooden crown resembles a lighthouse lantern room: another small beacon of hope in an otherwise funereal installation. *Wasted Time* doesn't ask viewers if the proverbial glass is half-full or half-empty, but, more darkly, whether there's any water in it at all and, if not, whether it can be refilled.

Hourglasses measure time in a portentous fashion yet the fact that the device can be flipped back over when the sand runs out means that its design affords the possibility for infinite reuse. This feature of the hourglass makes it a schizophrenic timepiece. On one hand, when in use, it counts down time with eschatological menace. On the other hand, whether in use or dormant, its countdown need never be terminal. Even at its most doomed-seeming, the hourglass always contains the potential for a fresh

start. As with the design elements of other, more common and convenient, timepieces, such as a clockface, the hourglass's invertibility implies that time has a cyclical quality. But the hourglass's cyclicity is unique in the way it seesaws between extremes of fatalistic pessimism and evergreen optimism.

In *Wasted Time*, the hourglass rests dormant, its upper bulb emptied of any sand. The device's capacity for reuse, however, remains unclear. Not only is its lower bulb buried out of sight, but the amount of sand in which it's buried goes far beyond what either of its bulbs could have physically contained. This arrangement creates the surrealistic impression that the sand on the gallery floor flowed out of the hourglass' tiny upper bulb into a disproportionately enormous mound. Even if the hourglass itself could conceivably be extricated, flipped over, and put back into use, the overabundant pile of sand in which it rests seems less susceptible to reuse. Wasted time, the artwork suggests, cannot easily be repurposed or redeemed. It exceeds the vessels we build to measure and contain it.

León's wager is that art can give form and purpose to time's bedeviling dissipation. In her other installations, she attempts to render time's passage more tangible by focusing the audience's attention on one or two of the five senses and gently defamiliarizing them. In *Hope (Out of Season)*, for example, installed as part of the 2004 La Centrale Performance Art Festival in Montréal, León glued artificial leaves to a real tree at the beginning of autumn and documented, as the season turned to winter, the gradual disappearance of the surrounding, actual leaves. *Thawing*, a short film that depicts an ice cube melting on a bar table top, is also a sensuous, slow motion study of loss. Again and again, León contrives to frame time itself as the sculptor of her works, which is why so many of her installations have titles such as *Every Sound Is a Shape of Time*, *Every Step Is a Shape of Time*, and *Every Word Is a Shape of Time*.

Wasted Time differs from León's typical installations in that it depicts the loss of time as having already taken place rather than in process. This shift from present to past tense might seem cause for resignation, in that all seems lost. But it actually

creates space for hope. Where León's diachronic installations, vessels marking time's dissolution, throb with doomsday fear, *Wasted Time* rests content in stasis, knowing its midnight hour has already struck. The former artworks dread the arrival of Latour's fatalistic *l'avenir*; the latter, wreckage of the past behind it, calmly looks toward the possibilities of *le futur*. More than just a site of folly and regret, wasted time can be sculpted into the ground for future action.

However, the frustrating thing about the latent optimism of dormant hourglasses is how quickly that hope, once acted upon, reverts to gloom. An hourglass always affords the possibility for a fresh start but, as soon as it has been flipped over, a new, no less doomed, countdown begins. These abrupt mood swings might make it seem as though the hourglass is well-suited for capturing beginnings and endings, perpetually beginning again, then perpetually doubling back on itself. But the stopwatch, with its hundredth-of-a-second precision and skittish deadline whip, presides over the realm of starts, re-starts, and finishes with greater conviction and authority. What the wishy-washy hourglass does best is pine for whatever state of being it doesn't inhabit at present. Forever dissatisfied, it anticipates the future with a mix of longing and dread.

Wasted Time honors the place of both emotions as a means of moving past them. Like an hourglass, the installation implicates itself in a cycle of hope and regret that is as unending as it is inevitable. Unlike an hourglass, however, the artwork, large and impassive, manifests no anxiety about the ups and downs of that cycle. Its dumb funereal mound, an image of the past that is also an image of the future, emanates acceptance. Its modest hourglass doesn't try to be something that it isn't. The way things go, it seems to say, is the way they go.

While they existed, Olafur Eliasson's series of disappearing *Ice Watch* installations exuded doomsday anxiety. The first two iterations consisted of twelve immense ice blocks, harvested from Greenland's Nuuk fjord and weighing over eighty tons total, circularly arranged in a public plaza to resemble the hour marks on a clock face. The Copenhagen version, installed in City Hall Square, was timed to mark the fifth assessment report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC); the Paris version, installed in the Place du Panthéon, to coincide with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In every version, the ice blocks' dwindling, misshapen forms served as reminders of the dwindling time left to mitigate anthropogenic climate change.

Against their Capitoline backdrops, the ice arrangements possessed a mysterious, prehistoric aura, as if they were hermetic communiqués from another time and place, like the Stonehenge monument or the Easter Island Moai. The glassy, white ice, which visitors could touch, emphasized this strangeness through its material and formal contrast with the surrounding expanse of urban stone. And the arrangements' ring shapes (also present in the London version, though not in a clock face count of twelve) made it appear as though these public spaces had been demarcated for a ritual.

But these material and formal effects risk being overshadowed by the works' over-obvious conceit. Like the titular pun on "watch" as both verb ("to observe") and noun ("a small timepiece worn on the wrist"), the works' eco-political point — that time is running out to address climate change — is, as the animating idea for an artwork, more cute than profound. Present-day civilization doesn't need artworks costly in environmental and financial terms to remind itself that the window for substantial coordinated action keeps shrinking. If anything, each iteration's frosty countdown to its own disappearance reinforced

the defeatist notion that climate change has a doomsday threshold (350 parts per million of CO₂ in Earth's atmosphere; 2° Celsius of planetary warming) past which lies apocalyptic oblivion.

Eliasson's unobtrusive message contrasts with his subtle materials, encapsulating the works' tension between spectacle and withdrawal. Ice has aloof and self-effacing material qualities, yet Eliasson timed, sited, and scaled the glacial hunks to draw notice and encourage interaction. These attention grabs were notionally in service of consciousness raising but their grandiloquence betrays a zest for spectacle. The work's extravagant iterations, each less necessary than the last, confirm the suspicion. It's as if Eliasson kept repeating the aesthetic gesture to compensate for its futility.

More than anything, the installations were unintentional reminders that reminders don't always have their intended effect. Eliasson wanted to confront civilization with uncanny harbingers of its dissolution, in hopes the ice blocks could be smelling salts, but instead confronted visitors with their own climate fatalism. While the installations appear striking in bird's-eye photographs, the most telling images are close-ups in which pedestrians interact with the ice: hugging it, kissing it, pressing a cheek against it with eyes squeezed shut. In their artlessness, the pedestrians' embraces resembled deathbed farewells.

Perhaps I'd understand the *Ice Watch* installations differently had I encountered one in person. However, because I've only experienced them at a remove, through language and images, I'm inclined to understand them as parables of climate change epistemology. That is, the second-hand way in which I know the artworks resembles the second-hand ways in which both experts and laypersons know climate change. We know that harmful anthropogenic climate change is happening but the knowledge is more abstract and intellectual than visceral and immediate. Climate change deniers are the most extreme manifestation of this disconnect. Yet even if your day job involves measuring carbon dioxide levels in Antarctic ice core samples, even if you're a park ranger in a Colorado forest ravaged by mountain pine bee-

tles, your first-hand experience of climate change, while starker and more immediate than typical, is still partial.

Philosopher Timothy Morton uses the term “hyperobjects” to describe how phenomena such as climate change are “massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” and, thus, how “any ‘local manifestation’ of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject” (2013, 1). The term has since been widely adopted in critical and artistic circles, to the point where this concept about ontological strangeness has become an intellectual commonplace. It has analytic use, allowing Morton to classify such objects’ philosophical characteristics. But its widespread adoption owes at least as much to its emotional force, allowing users to name a new source for that age-old feeling of human smallness.

Eliasson’s *Ice Watch* installations are more successful as epistemological rather than political allegories. That’s because in a real sense we don’t experience climate change as real. Scientists and other experts issue dire warnings and set ultimatums the gist of which, if they’re even half-accurate, is that civilization should be emergency planning for its future survival at unprecedented scale and depth. Yet little in our experience confirms the need to plan with the requisite urgency. At both an individual and a collective level, there are numerous climate measures our species ought to take, many we could feasibly take, and some we’ll actually take, but mostly we’re going to sit around, by turns distracted and focused, and watch and wait as parts of the world as we’ve known it change and disappear. Bleak reminders that traumatic knowledge is slow to thaw, the *Ice Watch* installations knew, while they existed, that humans will never quite know about climate change until it’s in a sense too late.

This book is also a reminder of knowledge’s poetic belatedness. Its zero-hour countdown, in which each successive chapter decreases in length by one sentence, is a book-length version of the Oulipian constraint known as the “melting snowball,” a short poem in which each successive word decreases in length by one letter. However, unlike Eliasson, I have no illusions about

allegory's efficacy. My modified melting snowball form serves as a timekeeping device rather than a parable, a way to measure the extent of my own oblivion. The hope is for acceptance rather than salvation.

The OuLiPo group demonstrates that the extremes of literary form can render oblivion noticeable. A collective of writers and mathematicians whose name stands for "Workshop for Potential Literature" in French, the group was founded in 1960 Paris by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais and still exists, active and thriving, to this day. One of its principal activities is the invention of arbitrary constraints that can be used to generate literary texts. Georges Perec's lipogrammatic novel, *La disparition* (1969), translated into English as *A Void* (2005), an allegory of his family's disappearance during the Holocaust written without using any word containing the letter "e," is one of the best-known constrained works realized by a member, but the collective has produced a cornucopia of rules-based, formalist literature, from Jacques Jouet's procedural subway poems (2001) to Anne Garréta's novel written with no grammatical indication of its characters' genders, *Sphinx* (2015).

In an oft-quoted line, the prominent late American Oulipian, Harry Mathews, explains that the one inherent virtue of literary constraint is that "being unable to say what you normally would, you must say what you normally wouldn't" (2003, 282). While most Oulipians don't theorize their use of constraint in terms of its relationship to either of oblivion's two definitional senses, forgetfulness or extinction, Mathews's line hints at an important, related psychodynamic. Saying what you normally wouldn't can make the writer, as well as the reader, conscious of their unconscious language and thought patterns. In particular, literary constraint does this through extravagant rhetorical flights, as in this wry passage from "Chapter I" of poet Christian Bök's *Eunoia*:

Writing is inhibiting. Sighing I sit, scribbling in ink this pidgin script. I sing with nihilistic witticism, disciplining signs

with trifling gimmicks—impish hijinks which highlight stick sigils. Isn't it glib? Isn't it chic? (2001, 50)

This self-reflexive baring of the device occurs not just at the level of word choice and syntax but also the text as a whole. Literary constraint likes to call attention to itself, doesn't want its swerves from the norm to go unnoticed.

Those swerves render literary form more perceptible than usual. Whereas most visual artistic form has tactile immediacy, most literary form is only perceptible gradually and in an abstract way. Compact literary forms like the sonnet or concrete poetry do have a visual shape that can be perceived as a gestalt, but literature typically has to be read for its shape to become apparent (a memoir organized by theme; a short story structured around flashbacks). Even then, that shape is, like that of a hyperobject, more abstract—metaphorical—than tangible.

The word “metaphor” comes from a Greek term meaning “transfer” or “carry across.” What's carried across in metaphor is one word, image, or situation to another, seemingly different one, such as the idea that a piece of writing could be a melting snowball. But what's also carried across in conspicuous literary formalism is one aesthetic medium's way of knowing to that of another. In contrast to book knowledge, which is abstract and unhurried, art knowledge, immediate and intuitive, feels easier to grasp. Even when you're unsure what an artwork means, its physical presence is more palpable than that of literature.

What's confusing about the way things go is how palpable and uncanny loss can feel. When you encounter someone or something that's in the process of disappearing (a melting ice hunk; a loved one on their deathbed), their waning presence hints at their impending absence. When you encounter the void left by someone or something that has already disappeared (the puddle of water where the ice used to be; the now-empty other side of the bed), their traces hint at their former presence. Literature and visual art both offer varied angles of approach for representing presences and absences. Yet what such representa-

tions can't do is preserve things in the way they are, or were, in anything other than a valedictory way.

Dear Climate,

In the middle of the artist's book published in conjunction with her gnomonic Queens Museum exhibition, *The Wandering Lake, 2009–2017*, Patty Chang offers a stunning meditation on the role of art in the Anthropocene. Contemplating the practice of Japanese Ama divers, who descend as much as sixty feet underwater without breathing equipment, Chang cites mid-century scientist Pierre Dejours on the four stages of underwater breath holding: the “easy-going phase”; the “gasping point”; the “struggle phase”; and the “breaking point” (2017, 46). According to Dejours, the struggle phase begins with involuntary gasps for air and ends, if the diver cannot get back above water in time, with loss of consciousness and, shortly thereafter, death.

Chang has long been aesthetically interested in situations of bodily discomfort and duress. Dejour's respiratory schema pinpoints the hard-to-measure “moment before a trauma.” In realms of endeavor beyond diving, Chang asks, what are the “signs of a struggle phase?” Her ecologically inflected answer: “Art making as a grieving of living as opposed to a fight against it. Is it a sign of acceptance or giving in?” (46). The proposition is literally and figuratively breathtaking. We like to believe that contemporary ecological art struggles to effect positive cultural and environmental change, but Chang entertains the possibility that such work actually struggles with its own fatalistic and disempowered sense of grief over the culture's impending demise.

As a sometime professional poker player, I understand, at least in the intellectual abstract, the importance of accepting those aspects of fortune you can't control. But I only understood

acceptance in a fuller, embodied sense when I began to practice yoga. In yoga, origami sequences of movement and breath fold your thoughts in upon themselves until they take a shape near-coincident with that of your body. Such careful attention to the body's angle and measure requires neither willpower nor surrender. Instead, the practice facilitates a meditative state of focused distraction, a narrowing of concentration to the immediate physical moment that is the obverse side of illness and pain.

Climate, dear abstraction, my species's struggle to know you with greater immediacy is our way of preparing for traumas we realize are on the verge of arrival. "Prepare" not in the sense of pre-planning for action but in the sense of readying to cope. Letters like this one, artworks like Chang's, are the needles and yarn we bring to the oncologist's office for distraction. Their soft clacks spook and soothe as we await the dread prognosis.

Climate, in the fabled past, artworks addressed themselves to a posterity understood as ongoing and exalted, even if uncertain. But today, the human present understands its anxious tumult as the species's death rattle. Focusing our attention on the pain, here at its onset, helps us grieve a future incapable of grieving for us.

Artfully yours,
Lou

10.27.17

Dear Climate,

Each of the half-dozen "Meditations" in the Dear Climate artistic collective's eponymous multimedia project (2012–22a) focus the listener's attention with introductory and concluding chimes. Like the vibratory yogic mantra *Om*, the sonorous

chimes, lasting ten seconds each, demarcate the beginning and end of a period of heightened receptivity.

The scripts, recited with hypnotic equanimity by the alternating voices of a man and a woman, also have a meditative bent. “May all beings be happy + free,” begins “Laguardia,” as the sound of an airplane taking off whirs in the background, “May all beings be protected from outer + inner harm” (2012–22a).

The collective currently consists of Oliver Kellhammer, Marina Zurkow, and Una Chaudhuri (Fritz Ertl was a founding member). Their work, which also includes visual and written components in the form of posters and letters, moves beyond quietistic plea by virtue of its knowing humor. “Laguardia,” for instance, entreaties not simply for the stereotypical objects of ecological concern (“May all earthworms be happy + free”) but also for overlooked or underappreciated humans (“May all coffee, bagel, magazine and gadget concession workers be happy + free”), as well as for harmful, unwanted, or threatening non-human entities (“May all free radicals be happy + free”) (2012–22a).

Climate, I used to practice with a yoga teacher who was fond of instructing us, in the middle of difficult poses, to “turn up the corners of your mouth.” The principle behind the instruction is that if you lead with the body, the mind will follow; performed willingly, a simulated smile can become an actual one. It felt corny doing it but the trick always worked.

Climate, I’m writing to seek your help in leading with my body. I want to learn, from your example, how to smile with contentment even as I grieve. I want you to teach me how to welcome death as a way of life. *Śavāsana*, they call it in yoga, from the Sanskrit, for “corpse pose.” It’s the pose I practice, each morning, as a writer.

Breathlessly yours,
Lou

Dear Climate,

The problem with writing or talking about yoga is that the practice involves a type of knowledge—embodied, preconscious—resistant to articulation. Hence the reliance, in popular yogi speak, on shopworn mantras and New Age clichés: hollow linguistic forms that don't pretend to be anything more than placeholders for experiences they can't adequately capture.

The Dear Climate collective demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of this linguistic predicament. In a series of seventy downloadable posters, they use dark, almost fatalistic, humor to deform stock expressions. "CLIMATE CHANGE," asks one such poster, "WILL IT MAKE ME LOOK FAT?" "DON'T KNOW / YOUR PLACE," reads another, with an image of a hurricane-damaged house occupying the space of the line break (2012–22b). The posters' impish wordplay adopts a tone far different from the grave admonitions of much ecological discourse.

Like a mouth turned up at the corners, the posters' jokey embrace of disaster begets the meditations' reassuring equanimity. Where the posters confront stale language by reinvigorating cliché, the meditations accept language's inadequacies and limitations by using it in a simple, ostensive way. "Puddles. Springs. Sources," begins "The Hydrosphere Incantation," as water drips rhythmically in the background, "Phytotelmata. Oases. Ciene-gas." The catalog form here, with its steady splash of syllables, emphasizes the words' sounds over their sense. "Seeps. Boils. Geysers. Headwaters. Channels. Brooks. Licks," the poem continues, content to let language point, unadorned (2012–22a).

This state of contentment receives its fullest expression in the chimes that begin and end each meditation. More than just calls to attention or temporal boundary markers, the chimes are sounds that, similar to an *Om* chant, convey a paralinguistic

sense of felt presence. It's a sensation of acceptance that develops from the inside out.

Warmly,
Lou

11.2.17

Dear Climate,

Chanting *Om* feels a bit like swallowing your own tongue. You close your eyes, clasp your hands in prayer at your heart, and try to speak the word that would obliterate speech.

Mum's the word,
Lou

11.3.17

Dear Climate,

Leave it to a writer to venerate silence. Leave it to humans to behave inhumane.

Leave it, leave it alone, let it be: these were the ineffectual mantras of my twenties.

Climate, when you leave someone or something be, in the way I once tuned out my sister's pain and my species mostly tunes out yours, your body continues to recite the words your lips refuse to speak.

Unmuted,
Lou

Dear Climate,

I accept what can be spoken about and what can't, the way things go and the way they don't. I accept the "fluster / of lost door keys / the hour badly spent" (Bishop 1984, 178). I accept my body's cell cycle, the treadmill march of fingernails and follicles, all the mitochondria and telomeres whose growths and divisions are not just feats of self-maintenance but also dress rehearsals for death.

Climate, I accept the long moment before a trauma and the even longer moment after. I accept the great distance between us, as well as the great intimacy. I accept the incongruous sound of your smile, the whistle of birdsong as dawn floods the cemetery with light. Climate, I accept all these things and more, but most of all I accept that I may struggle to remain acceptant.

Happily + freely,
Lou

11.9.17

Dear Emily,

When you became pregnant three years ago, I wrote a series of letters addressed to you that I never sent. I wrote because your pregnancy seemed an impossibility: not only was it medically uncertain whether you could get pregnant and carry a fetus to term, but you also conceived Tim and Andy at the exact age, thirty, doctors had once said was your life expectancy. A reckoning with my own feelings and beliefs about you was in order.

Yet I never sent you those letters because I still hadn't come to terms with the style of preemptive coping that I refined in my twenties. At and away from the poker table, I conditioned myself to expect losses, including and especially the loss of you, so as to remain indifferent to them when they arrived. It was as though I'd decided to walk through life with my abdominals flexed, in case the world ever sucker punched me. It was as though I'd decided to self-administer a years-long dose of novocaine to the pain receptors in my heart. Writing you letters and then not sending them fit this pattern in that it allowed me to explore my feelings of vulnerability without actually being open with you.

Emily, I'm going to send you this letter when it's completed, but I'm not sure it's functioning much differently. I remember when I visited you in Rochester last summer and belatedly showed you a published chapter from this book, the one where I recite a Jack Spicer poem on my way to visit you in the hospital. You said, accurate and perceptive, that it was strange to see yourself addressed in a piece of writing and yet to know that you weren't the actual addressee. Open letters function the same way, main-

taining an intellectual distance even as they posture at intimate address.

Emily, I want to write the letter that collapses the distance between us even as it maintains it. The letter whose head and whose heart would be open, acceptant, one and the same. Emily, we're heirs to an emotional withdrawal that, in the person of our father, looks as though it were masculine obliviousness or indifference but is actually an inherited form of self-preservation against genocide's horrors. Telling yourself that nothing can hurt you won't make it true but it just might grant you the temporary strength that perseverance requires.

un-preemptively yours,
Lou

11.14.17

Dear Emily,

My first day of sixth grade, a corpulent older kid from the neighborhood informed me, his face twisted into a scowl, that it would be "freshman Friday" at week's end. The other sixth graders and I were to expect to receive "free shots" on the school bus that day. Each night that week I'd close the door to my bedroom, take off my shirt, stare at my lean torso in the mirror, tense my stomach muscles, and punch myself in the abdomen. The harder I clenched my stomach, the more pain I convinced myself I'd be able to absorb.

The punchline, as it were, is that I never got punched by anybody other than myself. The Friday bus ride came and went without the least bit of recognition on any upperclassman's face. Somehow, I didn't feel silly or relieved so much as proud. Nothing transpired but I believed that I would have been ready if something had. As if to reinforce the delusion that you can

preempt pain by preparing for it, I soon after developed the habit of doing fifty sit-ups each night before bed.

Emily, in addressing you like this, I'm trying to find a way to write about the experience of non-experience, the event of the non-event, the reality of imagination. Why you? Why from an intellectual remove? Because even though I had minimal direct experience of everything that happened to you from sixteen to twenty-six — the illness, the drug addiction, the physical and emotional pain — that indirect experience has been one of the defining experiences of my life.

unclenched,
Lou

11.20.17

Dear Emily,

In the hours after the September 11th World Trade Center plane attacks, grandma walked the mile or so from her job in the fashion district to my NYU dormitory near Union Square. With the subways and bridges closed, she needed somewhere to stay until she could return to her Brooklyn apartment.

When I met her in the dorm lobby, strewn with dazed and sobbing students, she was discordantly effusive. "What a beautiful lobby," she gushed, "I love its architecture!" "Grandma," I admonished her, gesturing at the distraught surrounding students to indicate her comment's inappropriateness. "Oh, please," she cut me off, with a wave of her hand, "after what I've been through, this is nothing."

The exchange's dark absurdity puzzled me. Comparing two tragedies' degree of severity seemed trivializing. But that was the point: grandma's experiences during the war had instilled in her the value, if not necessity, of dissociation for psychological sur-

vival in times of duress. She was as rattled as anybody else in New York that day but expressed it by dismissing the possibility that anything short of genocide could rattle her.

Emily, as I write this letter I miss grandma like never before. I miss the way she made toughness appear so tender, miss the way that, from within the warmth of her protective shell—snuggled together on the fold-out couch bed—she made it seem as though the world had never blown cold. Emily, I haven't experienced a winter anywhere near as dark as what grandma did, but the memory of its chill remains in our blood. They say lupus causes the extremities to run cold on account of restricted blood flow. But even without the disease, my instinct has been to insulate myself against even so much as the possibility of a shiver.

thawingly,
Lou

11.21.17

Dear Emily,

This is nothing is something I still sometimes try to tell myself but it no longer works. As a mantra, it can temporarily numb unwanted pain, allow for a spell of much-needed calm. But as a philosophy, it hardens into a form of denial that masquerades as acceptance.

Emily, I accept that this letter is not nothing, that my feelings are not nothing, that your disease isn't either. What does acceptance look like in a fuller, embodied sense? It looks like one generation learning how to speak the previous generations' wounds.

tenderly,

Lou

11.22.17

Dear Emily,

This year I've let my body grow softer, less defined. Instead of waking up and exercising, I wake up and write. Instead of riding my bike through the cold rain, I take the subway. I haven't done a sit-up in months, no longer care how loose or tight my stomach appears. What was I preparing for during those years of bench presses and protein shakes, during the year of waking up at 6am to run lonely marathon loops around Central Park? As I conditioned myself to withstand physical pain for no reason other than to feel it a little bit less the next time, I was secretly proud of my high threshold for self-inflicted suffering.

Emily, the last time we spoke before we became estranged in our twenties, you cursed what you perceived as my perfect life. The irony is that I spent those depressive years sitting at a virtual poker table, trying not to feel: vacuum-sealed perfection. Emily, the softer and less defined I've let my body grow, the softer has grown my heart. Everybody in our family disapproved of your pregnancy because it was a risky proposition. But you made space for that risk. It was a bad bet but a good way to live.

with love and admiration,
Lou

From: Louis Bury <[REDACTED]>
Date: 11/29/17 6:12 PM (GMT-05:00)
To: Emily Bury <[REDACTED]>
Subject: letters

Hey Em,

Hope you're continuing to feel better. I'm at the office again today, slogging through paperwork :)

Since we haven't been able to catch each other, I wanted to send you some letters I recently wrote that are part of my book project.

The first piece (Dear Climate) I recently read in Toronto. I'm including it because, after the reading, someone in the audience asked me about the open letter as a form, which gave me the idea to write you in the same way.

The second piece (Dear Emily) is addressed to you and is intended to follow the Dear Climate letters in my book. Nothing bad in the letters to you, I don't think! A version of "Dear Emily" will be published in a collection on the Canadian writer S.D. Chrostowska. Though it may be adapted in some way because I don't ever actually mention Chrostowska in my letters to you.

Hope you and the boys are well,

Lou

From: Emily Bury <[REDACTED]>
Date: 12/3/17 12:24 AM (GMT-05:00)
To: Louis Bury <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: letters

Thanks for sharing these. I really enjoyed both pieces. It was interesting to see the climate-focused piece. Not what I anticipated. You're quite the creative chap. I'm sure you got great feedback at the reading. There were a few killer *Om* descriptions in there but I loved the last line in particular you had about holding an *Om*. That must've made for an interesting shift from pen to tongue.

I don't think the letters about me are at all negative. You even end on a compliment. It was sad to read the rough parts of your journey, but then really good to see your impressive growth. I so appreciate being let into those parts of your world. I don't know if I sufficiently put into words how floored I was when you shared your other piece with me. I never considered myself such a big influence on you. I imagined your internal operating system looking very different. I want to say I love you more now for it, but that feels off. I think it lets me love you more fully.

The part on grandma making suffering comparisons (your paragraph about her love melted me with its spot-on description by the way) reminded me of one of the shittiest feelings I've ever had. Grandma called me when I'd moved in with Bobby and yelled at me to go home and said I had nothing to be upset about because she lost her entire family when she was 14. When we hung up, I remember thinking how it would be so much easier when she was gone and there would be one less person I'd feel guilty about hurting. When she did die, I blamed myself in part. Not in the my-thoughts-can-manifest kind of way, but in the stress-can-contribute-to-heart-disease kind of way. I'm still in touch with the therapist who got me through that. She researched heart disease for me.

That reminded me about a poem I wrote about grandma for a writing group in a sober house. Here it is:

I am my grandmother's dream

A girl! Yes, I know just how the blanket will look. The pink yarn I saw in the shop when I was pregnant, I know the pattern I wanted to make when I saw it. I could see it just so. I will find yarn just like it, the best yarn, soft and warm. I will make this very blanket. I always know it is meant to be.

Dreams can come true

Emci, you still do? Ha! Yes, every day I put cream on my elbows. Feel how smooth. Let me see yours. Oh, ah! Yes, you are a lady too. A lady must have smooth elbows. You remember.

Now, tell me, you will marry this one? Jeremy, he will support you, be good to you. He is good.

Oh, I am talking, talking—we shall find a vase for this. Such beautiful flowers! But why do you do this, jabcia? So much money. Too much. Ah, yes, but they are lovely. You are lovely. You are—Ah, you know it.

I give my grandmother nightmares

Listen, jabcia, jabcia moya swotka, I am worrying. It is marijuana, yes, but that is now. Then it will be heroin. You will be addicted. This is what I see. The soap opera showed it. The girl, she was addicted to drugs, meeting the dealer in a dark alley, it was very very bad. Not you, Emci. No. This cannot be. Be good. Be good.

Nightmares can come true

You MUST do as I say. Go back to school. Be a mensch. Leave this — this place. Who is this man, this Bobby? You MUST LISTEN to me. You are lucky. You have parents that love you, that want you home. My parents died when I was 14. I was alone. FOUR TEEN. Go home, Emci, go home. Please! What is wrong with you? What are you doing in this place? You are too bony. Eat. You need to eat, eat. I will cook for you. You come to me. Please.

I live to pass out

I give her eulogy, high. Everyone tells me how proud she'd be of it, how she's giving me a hug through my sweater because she stitched every stitch with love.

I'm back at Bobby's place, finally. I rip the sweater off to look for a usable vein. The needle rocks me to sleep.

I am waking up

My dealer looks me over as he hands me a bundle. "Get in the car, E. You're not right." I shut the door and the sobbing starts again. Afucking-gain. Ugh. I'm already high. I double my usual. I feel it, the warmth. Damn do I feel it. But it doesn't tame the tsunamai of sobs. I need more. I need...

He takes me with him to Target. It takes forever. Toilet paper, cheerios. I swear I can't do it. Ok, focus — heel, toe, heel, toe, toe... He talks and talks and talks. Something about God. Death. Am I dead? Is that why the lights are so fucking bright? He tells me, "You know what you need to do." Over and over he repeats it. No, that was just once, wasn't it? I can't tell.

The long dream

Teardrops fall on the flowers as I set them on the ground.
I miss you so much.

Can you see me, do you know I'm ok, know I'm 9 months clean? I think you can. Is it like seeing at all? I feel you with me sometimes. Is it really you or my mind missing you? It feels so real. It must be. It is, it is. It definitely is. I have so much to say. I just don't know how. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. There's so much more in my heart that I can't put into words. More than I'm sorry, more than I love you — Ah, you know it. I know you do.

From: Louis Bury <[REDACTED]>
Date: 12/21/17 12:23 PM (GMT-05:00)
To: Emily Bury <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Re: letters

Hey Em,

Thanks for sharing your thoughts and feelings about my letters. After ending with that line comparing your pregnancy to a wager, I tried to take the book in a poker/gambling direction. But writing about poker, which I expected to be fun and easy, somehow feels more strenuous than writing about family, which I expected to be onerous. I suppose I still don't quite know how to confront my own addictive tendencies, from online gaming to fossil-fuel dependency.

It's interesting how new all these revelations about me feel to you. I get why they'd feel this way, cause they are in fact new to you. I think I'm able to write about them now because I'm in a sense safely past them. So, yeah, there's nothing terribly hurtful in what I'm writing, I don't think, but it also, thankfully, doesn't hurt to write it. At least so far!

That's crazy what grandma said to you when you moved in with Bobby. I'd always thought that mom and dad kept everything that was happening with you, drug-wise, from her. But that phone call indicates otherwise.

Glad to hear you no longer blame yourself for grandma's passing. Shari and I used to joke that she stayed alive long enough to see me marry a Jewish woman, then was content to let go. It's funny, if unsurprising, how much power of self-determination we attribute to her.

Thanks, finally, for sharing your poem. It's an expanding and contracting muscle, tearing itself so as to repair itself. I'm glad you got sober and have done so well that it doesn't even feel like a question whether or not you'll remain that way.

Love,
Lou

From: Emily Bury <[REDACTED]>
Date: 1/1/18 6:32 PM (GMT-05:00)
To: Louis Bury <[REDACTED]>
Subject: Re: Re: Re: letters

No, mom and dad never gave grandma details beyond pot. Whatever the details grandma imagined, she just inferred that I wasn't on a good path. Mom actually used grandma to try to get me clean, saying that if I got bad enough that I needed rehab, she'd have to share everything with grandma. That made me afraid to get help, of course, but I can't criticize her. I can't imagine what she went through. I find it funny too that at that point mom thought I'd get through without rehab, like I was a recreational heroin user.

Glad you've processed it all and moved on. Now you can just be glad I've given you so much material and a whole book idea. You're most welcome.

1,830. The Thanksgiving, in 2019, before my parents closed on the sale of their family home of forty-five years and moved to an apartment in Rochester, NY, Ethan, then eight years old, was full of questions on our farewell visit there.

1,829. “What was it like growing up in a house,” he wanted to know, “Where did your friends live? Did you have to drive to see them?”

1,828. His inquisitiveness reminded me of the time I visited his second-grade class to read a poem of mine, an excerpt from a list of all the objects I threw out in 2015, for his school’s “Everybody Reads” week.

1,827. During the Q&A, Ethan raised his hand, scrunched up his face, and remarked, perplexed, “I didn’t know we had this poem inside our home.”

1,826. His phrasing’s literalism grabbed me, as if poems have the same kind of visible presence as any other household object, as if people keep poems around the home the way they keep pets and plants and chests of drawers.

1,825. The concept of home pretends there can be clean separation between inside and outside, concealment and revelation, knowledge and its opposite.

1,824. Poems recognize the necessity of trying to draw such lines, as well as the necessity of breaking them.

1,823. Where I’m from, growing up in a house was like memorizing a poem without grasping its sense, like swimming in the ocean and not knowing you’re a fish.

1,822. Growing up in a house rather than an apartment, getting around by car rather than public transit, facilitates the illusion that the line between self and world can be thicker than the outermost layer of dead cells we call a skin.

1,821. “A permaculture guru I heard speak once,” writes Allison Cobb in her poetry collection, *After We All Died*, “likened a house to slow release fertilizer as it imperceptibly crumbles back into dirt” (2016, 52).

1,820. Journalist Alan Weisman’s bestselling book-length thought experiment, *The World without Us* (2007), speculates on the fate of civilization’s infrastructure in a post-human world.

1,819. According to experts, the New York City subway system would flood within days of humans’ disappearance and Lexington Avenue would become a river within twenty years (30).

1,818. According to my parents, my sister and I were just going to throw out all this junk anyway.

1,817. To say goodbye to my parents’ house, Ethan took dozens of camera phone pictures of its half-empty, box-strewn insides.

1,816. His wobbly camerawork conveyed little about the rooms themselves, their size or shape, and instead focused on my parents’ as-yet unboxed remains: two phone chargers dangling from a wall where the kitchen table used to be; slippers and shoes stacked on a staircase landing; a lone seltzer bottle on a hallway ledge.

1,815. More than just practical necessity, my parents’ years-long purge of their accumulated belongings was also a slow-motion dress rehearsal for their eventual passing, a way to approximate the experience, while we were all still here, of the world without them.

1,814. Somewhere there must be a compound Greek or German word for imagining the present world as though it were a future one, for envisioning the garden-to-be in the newly planted soil, or, conversely, the barren dirt in the garden-that-is.

1,813. The philosopher Eugene Thacker calls the latter act of imagination “cosmic pessimism” and defines it as “a drastic scaling-up or scaling-down of the human point of view” that morosely contemplates “the world without us” (2015, 12–13).

1,812. In the original Greek, the word “apocalypse” means “uncover” or “from hiding” (*apo* + *kaluptein*), that is, the revelation of what was there all along but invisible.

1,811. The contaminated soil is the apocalypse of the house, the flood the apocalypse of the civilization, the child that of the parents.

1,810. *After We All Died* opens with a tender catalog of bodily self-forgiveness: “I forgive you coiled intestines lined in tissue soft as velvet”; “I forgive you golden seams of fat in semi-liquid state, encasing in your oily cells the poisons of the world” (1).

1,809. The catalog closes with a paradoxical, consummately poetic absolution: “I forgive you every part performing all the intricate and simple tasks that make this mass alive. I forgive you all for already having died” (2).

1,808. I forgive you, Ethan, just as my parents forgave me and their parents them, for showing me how to love a world that will one day no longer include me.

1,807. I forgive you, 489 Lynn Street, for exposing me to harm even as you provided me shelter, forgive you your dust spores, asbestos fibers, and gas leaks, all the noxious traces of your slow release decay.

1,806. Cobb: “humans are slow release fertilizers too — how one soaks up poisons and leaks them back to the world” (52).

1,805. I like to think of reading as a safe, controlled way to absorb other people’s toxins, and of writing as the waste management facility for processing them.

1,804. I learned how to ride a bike, as well as how to drive a car, on the asphalt lot off the road leading to the Oakwood Beach Wastewater Treatment Plant.

1,803. The fenced-in, tree-shrouded compound had no tall or prominent buildings, just a gate with a “No Trespassing” sign at the end of the one neighborhood road on which children never played.

1,802. Thacker describes pessimism as “poetry written in the graveyard of philosophy” and considers it to be “the last refuge of hope,” a notion that gives me more hope than it probably should (3).

1,801. Whenever I’m in an eschatological mood, I try to remind myself that there’s never been a time when humans didn’t orient themselves in relation to an imagined end time, and never a time, at least not yet, when their cosmic pessimism has been wholly correct.

1,800. Philosopher Martin Heidegger distinguishes between fear, which takes as its object someone or something, and anxiety, which isn’t directed toward a specific person or thing but the world as such.

1,799. Which is it that’s unbearable: climate fear or climate anxiety, our world’s disappearance or our world as such?

1,798. In *Better Never To Have Been*, anti-natalist philosopher David Benatar argues that coming into existence always consti-

tutes a serious harm, on the grounds that those who never exist cannot suffer or be deprived.

1,797. Queer theorist Lee Edelman's 2004 polemic, *No Future*, argues against "reproductive futurism," the normative belief that the figure of the child represents future possibility while the figure of the queer embodies its narcissistic negation (4).

1,796. I forgive you, parents and children, your homely narcissism — as though each family with child were the axis around which the world spins — even as I understand its loving, self-protective intent.

1,795. I forgive you, philosophers and theorists, your glass half-empty idealism, forgive you all the imaginary lines you draw across real gardens.

1,794. "Imaginary gardens with real toads in them," that's my philosophy, as is the famous opening line of Marianne Moore's "Poetry": "I, too, dislike it" (1958, 266–67).

1,793. Cobb: "the German word for poison / is 'gift,' same in Danish, Swedish, and Dutch, / from the Greek for *dosis* — a giving" (15).

1,792. Writer Lewis Hyde, in *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*: "The art that matters to us [...] is received by us as a gift is received" (1983, 2).

1,791. Among poets, it's a point of pride, if also soreness, that poetry operates on a gift economy.

1,790. Among poker players, a "leak" is a hole in a player's game that consistently costs them money and about which they remain unaware, an unintentional gift to their opponents.

1,789. If you want to know more about the world without us, you don't need to run sophisticated predictive algorithms or perform acrobatic philosophical speculations, you just need to pay attention to the leaks and holes in the world-that-is.

1,788. If you want a taste of the world without us, reread a favorite poem until you can feel its footprint on your tongue.

1,787. "There will be nothing left," concludes Spicer, "After you die or go mad, / But the calmness of poetry" (2008, 73).

1,786. Cobb, born and raised in the post-atomic thrum of Los Alamos: "Every day when I wake up I do a healing reiki meditation that [poet] CAConrad taught me, and I hold in my mind the images of all the women I know who have cancer [...] I hold them in my mind and feel the warm buzz between my palms. Then I apply the warmth to my own body, over [the lump in] my left breast" (52–53).

1,785. Early in this book project, I developed the habit of reading a single poem immediately before writing each morning.

1,784. At first, the habit felt like doing calisthenics for my brain, but now it feels more like lighting a votive candle or dedicating my yoga practice to someone or something.

1,783. Around that same time, I adopted a personal uniform for each season — the same outfit, everyday — which habit, expedient and consistent, anchored me to my new writing routine.

1,782. I once told a therapist that I feel most a man while getting dressed for a funeral and watching myself, silent and serious, button up my white shirt in the mirror.

1,781. Routine shades over into ritual when it orients itself more toward death than life.

1,780. Living in a house shades over into poetry when your accumulated belongings conceal the extent of what you take for granted about your habitus.

1,779. What I like about funerals is that they formalize social decorum while at the same time undoing its stuffy pretenses.

1,778. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, that's my philosophy.

1,777. What I like about the archaic and often awkward ritual of the poetry reading is the way it inclines toward sacrament.

1,776. When I heard Cobb read from *After We All Died* at the St. Mark's Poetry Project (located, as poets know, in a church), she performed the poems with a vulnerability that felt like benediction.

1,775. Her tone of delivery sloughed off any sense of what the poet and scholar Chris Nealon calls "masochistic species-/shame" (Cobb 2016, 99).

1,774. Poetry means "to live in the most fragile house, with the most fragile soul" (69).

1,773. Ethan, your grandparents' house was no more fragile or strange than any other, was no more or less self-aware than any place you and I have or could call home.

1,772. Sometimes I notice all the citizens carrying around disposable coffee cups in the Manhattan morning and marvel at my species's ritualistic wastefulness.

1,771. Other times, I forgive everybody this creature comfort as a form of end-of-life care.

Staten Island, NY
pandemic diary #1

5.8.20

As I contemplated how to ease myself back into daily writing in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, I kept returning to a story the artist Marion Wilson told me when I interviewed her this past winter.

5.9.20

Wilson trained as a painter but went on to work in other media, social practice in particular, because she felt it hard to get painting “out into the world” (Wilson 2020).

5.10.20

She only resumed painting, decades later, after experiencing a gallery fire in which she lost three years’ worth of work.

5.11.20

In the catastrophe’s wake, she resolved to work for one year with what remained in her studio.

5.12.20

She found glass microscope slides — “about one inch by three inches in size, three inches by four inches max” — and decided to paint on them landscapes of the Solvay Wastebeds, a Syracuse, NY superfund site that she’d been visiting.

5.13.20

The slides “made sense to use” as a support, she explained, “because they felt scientific.”

5.14.20

Just as important, they made sense to use because “their tininess made painting feel nonthreatening.”

5.15.20

As Shari recovered in April from a long illness and my capacity to focus returned, I kept asking myself what would be the writer’s equivalent of a 1" × 3" support.

5.16.20

I wanted a form whose tininess felt nonthreatening, manageable, supportive.

5.17.20

Nothing too ambitious, I decided, just one new sentence each day.

5.18.20

Writing this way these past ten days has felt as effortless as using a weightlifting machine on a setting so low it feels as though you’re not even lifting weights.

5.19.20

I’ve never looked forward to my daily writing practice as much as I have these past two weeks — and I usually look forward to it quite a bit.

5.20.20

About three or four years ago, in a water cooler conversation about writing habits, my colleague, Michael, said something that I subsequently adopted as my own mantra: “Every day that I get to write is a good day.”

5.21.20

These daily sentences remind me of the summer, in my mid-twenties, I resolved to run exactly one mile—no more, no less—first thing each morning, so as not to burn myself out with mileage expectations.

5.22.20

A year and a half later, I would wake up and automatically run five-plus miles each morning in preparation for the New York City marathon.

5.23.20

At the rate of one sentence per day, I will have completed this book in approximately five years: marathon distance, in writing terms.

5.24.20

Preoccupied with teaching, magazine art writing, youth soccer coaching, and everything else I'd been doing week in and week out before the pandemic, it's not like I was realistically going to progress with this book much faster anyway.

5.25.20

“no wrong,” writes artist Nayland Blake, in cursive swirls of hot pink, magenta, and cherry red colored pencil, in one entry, 12.23.15, of his years-long daily drawing practice.

5.26.20

As a rule, when I put aside preconceptions of what I’m supposed to be writing, and instead prioritize what I want to be writing, the results are better, the process more satisfying.

5.27.20

If I’d been composing these sentences in March and April, it would have been some version of the same sentence every day: Writing is not my priority right now, much as I’d love it to be.

5.28.20

Writers sometimes say that they need to write their way out of a writing problem — that is, to continue producing work until the project’s purpose comes into focus — but sometimes the desire to write is itself the problem.

5.29.20

In recent days, I’ve again found it hard to focus: Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin brutally murdered George Floyd on Monday, May 25, and in response Black Lives Matter protests are spreading across US cities.

5.30.20

Writing is not my priority right now, much as I’d love it to be.

5.31.20

Still not my priority.

6.1.20

Today the President of the United States ordered tear gas to be used on citizens peacefully protesting, so as to clear the way for a photo-op at a nearby church.

6.2.20

Experts on authoritarianism warn that there's rarely a single moment to which you can point, in retrospect, and say that was when the switch flipped from light to dark.

6.3.20

Instead, there's a gradual dimming of cultural and governmental norms until one day you look back and realize that, when the switch did flip, the room was already near-dark anyway.

6.4.20

I'm not, if you couldn't tell, an optimist, but these recent Black Lives Matter uprisings somehow give me a sense of hope.

6.5.20

What gives me hope is that many people, rather than an isolated few, are taking action in ways they might not have even thought possible several weeks ago.

6.6.20

On the other hand, since March we've been living in my father-in-law's unoccupied house in Staten Island, the whitest, most

conservative borough in New York City, and, to judge by street life here, you'd barely know that protests have been roiling other parts of the country for over a week now.

6.7.20

One definition of whiteness might be the illusion that your well-being, and yours alone, is sufficient for stability.

6.8.20

The question is to what extent individuals are willing to risk their own stability so that others, even complete strangers, might achieve something like it themselves.

6.9.20

The answer, historically, has been not nearly enough.

6.10.20

Meanwhile, yesterday temperatures in the Arctic Circle hit 30°C/86°F.

6.11.20

Every night, I step outside my in-laws' climate-controlled house and relish the humid shock of air as I toss the day's garbage in the trash can.

6.12.20

The house is located across the street from Freshkills Park, the remediated city park being built upon the infamous former Fresh Kills Landfill, which fact complicates my sense of the air's, well, freshness.

6.13.20

The night before collection day, the trash cans line up in front of the houses like offerings to an implacable deity.

6.14.20

The house sits on a road whose function is to connect traffic between New Jersey, via the Goethals Bridge, and the commercial corridor near the Staten Island Mall.

6.15.20

Day and night, diesel trucks clatter past spewing angry clouds of exhaust.

6.16.20

The few pedestrians who use the sidewalk leave behind a disproportionate amount of debris: a sock, a paper plate, a cereal bar wrapper, a neon lanyard, and a plastic bag in recent days alone.

6.17.20

On Zoom calls with friends and colleagues, I joke that I've developed Stockholm syndrome with this house.

6.18.20

The week we relocated here the house's hot water heater broke, two sinks had plumbing leaks, and my father-in-law's car had a slow leak in one of its tires.

6.19.20

When I called my father-in-law to tell him about the flat, he told me that the tire had been losing air for months but was fine when refilled.

6.20.20

When I took the car to the repair shop, they found a nail embedded in the tire.

6.21.20

100.4 degrees Fahrenheit in the Siberian town of Verkhoyansk yesterday.

6.22.20

Our species treats this planet's warning signs the way my father-in-law treats his property's warning signs: pretend as though you'll deal with the problem before it's too late.

6.23.20

Among the oddities we discovered upon relocating to this house (a dresser drawer filled with fanny packs; a medicine cabinet brimming with expired bottles of pills; a screen door wedged shut with a metal rod because its lock was broken), the baskets full of dirty laundry were the least fantastic yet most telling.

6.24.20

It was as though my in-laws were so eager to escape to their newly purchased Florida home they didn't even have the time to clean one last load of laundry in this one.

6.25.20

Since she's recovered, Shari has been organizing this house's clutter with efficiency and restraint, discarding whatever's broken or expired and bundling the rest into boxes.

6.26.20

It's clear that her father and his wife will never do for this house what my parents did for theirs (that is, streamline their belongings in anticipation of their eventual passing) so Shari is using our time here to start the sifting process that will one day fall to her anyway.

6.27.20

"O build your ship of death," bemoaned novelist and poet D.H. Lawrence, late in his brief life, as if the way things go could be made sturdier, more assuring, through metaphor (1993, 717).

6.28.20

As if building, rather than letting go, was what's needed to make the passage.

6.29.20

When my hoarder cousin, Victor, passed away in his late eighties, his small Brooklyn house contained eight dumpster loads worth of objects.

6.30.20

The house as his daughters found it was apparently so packed with things that each of its rooms barely even had a path to walk through it.

7.1.20

Jack Spicer: “There will be nothing left / After you die or go mad, / But the calmness of poetry” (73).

7.2.20

Tiny, nonthreatening, and supportive, like a line of poetry or a bottle of prescription pills.

7.3.20

Kill your darlings, writers used to say in workshop days of yore.

7.4.20

Which simply means take stock of what’s necessary and why.

7.5.20

Less than you might think and more than you might want, in writing as in life.

Manhattan, NY
waste diary excerpt

9.23.15

sandwich wrapping; 7 napkins; 2 receipts; 95 squares of toilet paper; 3 witch hazel pads; 2 mini-chocolate wrappers; 1 placemat, paper; jam jar, glass; 1 magazine; cardboard toilet paper roll; cardboard paper towel roll; 10 tissues; 4 paper towels; mail order catalogue; medium cardboard box; bubble wrap; junk mail, 3 pieces; 1 length of dental floss.

9.24.15

5 napkins; 3 plastic cups; 2 plastic yogurt containers, 6 oz; plastic spoon; 20 squares of toilet paper; microwave popcorn bag + plastic wrapping; 14 tissues; gnocchi box + plastic wrapping; sausage wrapping; frozen vegetable bag.

9.25.15

soap wrapper; plastic yogurt parfait container + insert; plastic spoon; 4 napkins; 2 plastic cups; sandwich wrapping; brown paper bag; 40 squares of toilet paper; 1 length of dental floss; used condom + wrapper.

9.26.15

1 bad orange; plastic hummus container; coffee filter + used grounds; grocery list; lollipop; 2 sandwich wrappings; brown paper bag; plastic cup + straw + lid; 7 napkins; 30 squares of toilet paper; parchment paper, 1 piece; 1 length of dental floss; 7 tissues; pear core; 3 plastic bags.

9.27.15

1 Q-tip; 9 tissues; 8 paper towels; 1 length of dental floss; plastic food container; 12 napkins; tissue box; take-out rice container; receipt; small paper coffee cup; 13 half-eaten apples; 2 apple cores; paper soup container; plastic spoon; sandwich wrapping; paper bag.

9.28.15

4 uneaten English muffins; English muffin box + bag; 40 squares of toilet paper; 2 tissues; soap wrapper; coffee filter + used grounds; sandwich wrapping; brown paper bag; 3 napkins; 2 slips of paper; name tag + plastic holding case; 3 baby wipes; 2 plastic cups; plastic fork + knife; 2 plastic plates.

9.29.15

90 squares of toilet paper; 10 paper towels; receipt; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; 2 napkins; 2 plastic spoons; 1 plastic fork; 1 tinfoil food container + plastic lid; 2 baby wipes; banana peel; peach pit; used condom + wrapper; 2 plastic cups; small coffee filter.

9.30.15

1 length of dental floss; soap wrapper; 9 tissues; 3 paper towels; 1 Q-tip; 2 coffee filters + used grounds; 2 apple cores; 1 piece, tinfoil; brown paper bag; 4 napkins; plastic fork; 30 squares of toilet paper; large cardboard box; pasta box.

10.1.15

50 squares of toilet paper; frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; 14 paper towels; 3 plastic cups; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; plastic spoon; tinfoil food tray + plastic lid; plastic spoon; 6 napkins; 2 baby wipes; muffin baking cup, paper; paper cup;

8 plastic bags; hot dog package, plastic; frozen peas bag; frozen corn bag; 6 tissues; junk mail, 1 piece; 1 length of dental floss; apple core.

10.2.15

tissue box; 4 tissues; hot dog bun bag; 1 magazine; 2 plastic cups; 60 pieces of paper; large envelope; tinfoil food container; plastic spoon, fork + knife; tinfoil, 1 piece; plastic food container; plastic knife; 5 paper towels; union leaflet; museum ticket; junk mail, 1 piece; 1 envelope; 1 bad apple; small plastic food container; uneaten cup of pesto sauce; 4 chicken bones; frozen edamame bag; 2 bowls of edamame shells; cardboard toilet paper tube; plastic raspberry box; plastic blueberry box.

10.3.15

tissue box; 12 tissues; 50 squares of toilet paper; cardboard paper towel tube; 16 paper towels; sandwich wrapping; brown paper bag; soap wrapper; 1 origami frog; plastic yogurt container; plastic food container; tinfoil, 2 pieces; pork chop bone; pork chop wrapping; salad bag, plastic; apple core; 8 pieces, used masking tape; 2 handfuls of peanuts; small bag of dates rolled in oats; 1 handful, pretzels; 1 length of dental floss.

10.4.15

coffee grounds bag; coffee filter + used grounds; 1 egg shell; cold cut wrapping; half an uneaten grapefruit; pork chop bone; museum ticket; museum sticker; small paper coffee cup; 7 tissues; 4 receipts; apple core; small plastic bag; turkey burger wrapping.

10.5.15

frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; glass pasta sauce jar; glass barbeque sauce flask; orange rind; coffee filter + used grounds; 2

glass salad dressing containers; 90 squares of toilet paper; glass peanut butter jar; chicken cutlet wrapping; ground pork wrapping; frozen brown rice box; frozen brown rice plastic package; frozen peas bag; 1 piece, junk mail; 2 junk mail magazines.

10.6.15

plastic food container; tinfoil quiche tray; plastic fork + knife; paper plate; plastic cup.

10.7.15

50 squares of toilet paper; 13 paper towels; 2 lengths of dental floss; coffee filter + used grounds; English muffin box + bag; 2 pieces, tinfoil; head of cauliflower bag; 1 piece of Tupperware; plastic juice box package wrapper; 2 plastic trail mix bags; handful of cranberry trail mix; 6 tortilla shells; plastic tortilla shell bag; 10 rice cakes; plastic rice cake bag; 2 bowls of granola; 3 ziploc bags; handful of cheese puffs; handful of almonds; chocolate lollipop + wrapper; 4 gummy snack pouches; handful of gummy bears; 2 plastic food containers; handful of pine nuts; 2 dozen shelled pistachios; small lime; handful of peanut M&M's.

10.8.15

tinfoil food tray + plastic lid; 4 plastic cups; 7 napkins; 2 plastic forks; plastic knife; 2 paper plates; sundry pork bones; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; brown paper bag; 8 paper towels; 25 squares of toilet paper; 2 baby wipes; 5 tissues; 2 pieces, note paper; 1 length of dental floss.

10.9.15

cardboard toilet paper tube; coffee filter + used grounds; frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; 2 plastic straws; 50 squares of toilet paper; 3 plastic bags; 2 plastic food containers; plastic

fork, knife + spoon; 4 napkins; plastic cup; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; used condom + wrapper; 1 length of dental floss.

10.10.15

2 receipts; sandwich wrapping; 3 napkins; brown paper bag; 1 length of dental floss; 1 magazine; grocery list; 50 squares of toilet paper.

10.11.15

museum ticket; 3 tissues; 4 paper towels; pasta bag, plastic; 2 plastic food containers; 2 glass pasta sauce jars; frozen vegetables bag; 1 receipt; 1 length of dental floss; 50 squares of toilet paper.

10.12.15

English muffin; ziploc bag; pork chop wrapping; ravioli box + plastic wrapping; coffee filter + used grounds; sandwich wrapping; 3 napkins; receipt; plastic bag; 6 tissues; 3 paper towels; 2 pork fat rinds; 1 piece, tinfoil; gallon milk jug, plastic; 50 squares of toilet paper.

10.13.15

5 paper towels; 2 baby wipes; paper plate; plastic fork, knife + spoon; sandwich wrapping; 1 napkin; 80 squares of toilet paper; 1 length of dental floss; used condom + wrapper.

10.14.15

25 squares of toilet paper; 1 paper towel; 5 tissues; bread bag; small container of ground pork; 2 pork chop fat rinds; uneaten bunch of asparagus; half bag of grapes + plastic bag; 4 pieces, avocado; uneaten pork chop; handful, uneaten rice; half piece,

moldy salmon; 1 tortilla shell; half an uneaten turkey burger; tissue box; cracker box; 1 length of dental floss.

10.15.15

1 Q-tip; 25 squares of toilet paper; 1 paper towel; 1 tissue; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; plastic sushi tray; plastic fork; 5 napkins; tinfoil food tray + plastic lid; 2 plastic spoons; 1 junk mail; plastic take out bowl + lid; wooden chopsticks; plastic food container; plastic face wash dispenser; 1 length of dental floss.

10.16.15

glass peanut butter jar; 50 squares of toilet paper; cardboard toilet paper tube; toilet paper roll plastic wrapping; receipt; sandwich wrapping; 4 napkins; 2 baby wipes; 3 paper towels; tinfoil food tray + plastic lid; plastic spoon; 1 beer bottle; pear core; 1 length of dental floss.

10.17.15

12 tissues; 3 cold cut wrappings; several spoonfuls of oatmeal; 2 apple cores; plastic food container; 1 piece, tinfoil; brown paper bag; 6 napkins; plastic dry cleaning bag; 2 magazines; plastic gift card; plastic gallon water jug; microwave popcorn bag; microwave popcorn box; 1 piece, tissue paper; 1 rose; bunch of carnations; 8 paper towels; frozen vegetable bag; shrimp bag; glass pasta sauce jar; pasta box; 2 receipts; plastic Listerine bottle; note paper, 1 piece.

10.18.15

frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; grapefruit rind; 60 squares of toilet paper; banana peel; apple core; chicken cutlet package; plastic pasta bag; cauliflower head plastic wrapping; tinfoil, 2 pieces; chili marinade glass jar; 12 paper towels; 6 tissues;

wooden chopsticks; 1 napkin; small paper coffee cup; 1 length of dental floss.

10.19.15

banana peel; 2 tinfoil food trays + plastic lids; plastic fork, spoon + knife; 3 napkins; small coffee filter + used grounds; junk mail, 5 pieces; 2 receipts; 2 plastic clothes wrappings; 1 length of dental floss.

10.20.15

2 baby wipes; 8 paper towels; 1 tinfoil food container + plastic lid; plastic fork + knife; 1 napkin; 4 tissues.

10.21.15

25 squares of toilet paper; 2 baby wipes; 9 paper towels; small plastic dinner roll bag; coffee filter + used grounds; receipt; tinfoil food tray + plastic lid; 6 napkins; plastic sushi tray; soy sauce packet; wasabi clump; ginger slices pile; union newspaper; envelope; 1 length of dental floss; small plastic cup; paper plate; 2 plastic forks; plastic knife; paper cup; plastic plate; gallon plastic water jug.

10.22.15

1 paper towel; 5 napkins; 2 baby wipes; sandwich wrapping; receipt; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; plastic spoon; microwave popcorn bag; 3 plastic grocery bags; roast chicken carcass; ravioli box + plastic wrapping; junk mail, 1 piece; 1 junk mail magazine; hanger + dry cleaning wrapping; plastic food container; 2 condoms + wrappers; 1 length of dental floss.

10.23.15

50 squares of toilet paper; plastic soup bowl; 5 tissues; 3 paper towels; receipt; paper towel tube; toilet paper tube.

10.24.15

soap wrapper; travel tissue wrapper; 2 tinfoil food containers + plastic lids; museum ticket; handful of uneaten spaghetti; 25 squares of toilet paper; 4 napkins; paper cup; sandwich wrapping; large paper coffee cup; receipt; 3 paper towels; 1 piece, note paper; apple core; 2 lengths of dental floss; 1 Q-tip; gallon plastic water jug; tissue box; 7 tissues; museum ticket.

10.25.15

2 apple cores; plastic food container; 1 paper towel; bread bag; 10 tissues; broken electric razor blade, ceramic; 1 magazine; sausage wrapping; plastic pasta bag; frozen vegetable bag; 2 receipts; return receipt label; 25 squares of toilet paper; chips bag; hot dog bun bag; large kitchen garbage bag; junk mail, 3 pieces; 1 junk mail catalogue; plastic granola bag; 1 length of dental floss.

10.26.15

frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; plastic spoon; 5 napkins; 2 baby wipes; 5 paper towels; 6 tissues; paper plate; tinfoil quiche tray + plastic lid; plastic food container; plastic fork + knife; coffee filter + used grounds; 2 receipts; 25 squares of toilet paper; apple core; 1 length of dental floss.

10.27.15

apple core; plastic food container; 7 paper towels; coffee filter + used grounds; 1 tissue; 6 napkins; envelope; 1 piece of paper;

receipt; tinfoil food tray + plastic lid; plastic spoon; 1 length of dental floss; 50 squares of toilet paper.

10.28.15

2 Q-tips; 6 paper towels; receipt; 2 baby wipes; brown paper bag; tinfoil food container + plastic lid; plastic fork + knife; 2 napkins; tissue box; 2 tissues; coffee filter + used grounds; plastic banana bag; banana peel; 4 uneaten chicken cutlets; 50 squares of toilet paper.

10.29.15

6 paper towels; 3 baby wipes; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; plastic spoon; 35 squares of toilet paper; note paper, 1 piece; coffee filter + used grounds; plastic gift card; plastic granola bag; paper food container; 1 length of dental floss.

10.30.15

frozen waffle box + plastic lining bag; apple core; 2 magazines; small plastic yogurt container; brown paper bag; 2 sandwich wrappings; 12 napkins; tortilla chips bag; coffee filter + used grounds; 10 tissues; condom + wrapper; plastic food container; 2 plastic cups.

10.31.15

14 tissues; 2 lengths of dental floss; 6 paper towels; 1 plastic toy coin; 5 napkins; 1 piece, parchment paper; paper plate; small paper coffee cup; ground beef packaging; bunch of string bean ends; cardboard paper towel tube; tissue box; 25 squares of toilet paper; apple core; 1 tea bag.

11.1.15

9 tissues; 6 paper towels; 5 baby wipes; sandwich wrapping; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; museum ticket; semi-sweet chocolate chip plastic bag; tinfoil food container + plastic lid; 1 length of dental floss; orange rind; 1 post-it note; 1 tea bag; 25 squares of toilet paper.

11.2.15

2 baby wipes; 4 paper towels; 5 tissues; paper food container; plastic fork, knife + spoon; coffee filter + used grounds; bunch of string bean ends; Lego box; microwave popcorn bag; 1 length of dental floss; 25 squares of toilet paper.

11.3.15

4 tissues; paper plate; plastic spoon + fork; 10 napkins; 25 squares of toilet paper; 4 receipts; paper placemat; paper hamburger container + small parchment paper; plastic cup.

11.4.15

70 squares of toilet paper; 2 baby wipes; 7 paper towels; 4 tissues; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; tinfoil food container + plastic lid; 2 plastic spoons; 3 napkins; plastic fork; receipt; coffee filter + used grounds; note paper, 3 pieces; 1 length of dental floss; gallon plastic water jug.

11.5.15

4 paper towels; plastic cinnamon spice jar; 1 magazine; 25 squares of toilet paper; 2 receipts; 2 baby wipes; tinfoil food tray + plastic lid; 4 napkins; plastic fork, knife + spoon; roast chicken carcass; plastic single serve hummus + pretzel container.

11.6.15

avocado shell; half-eaten apple; 5 plastic food containers; plastic egg carton; uneaten apple; 2 plastic produce bags; half-eaten avocado; 1 zip-loc bag; uneaten hummus, 5 ounces; plastic hummus container; tinfoil food container + paper lid; half-eaten salad; half-eaten pork chop; chicken wing; 2 mounds of mashed potatoes; glass pasta sauce jar; small paper food container; uneaten broccoli, one handful; uneaten cottage cheese, 2 scoops; plastic cottage cheese container; 2 expired yogurts + plastic containers; uneaten chicken soup, 6 ounces; uneaten tuna salad, couple of bites; small plastic food container; uneaten turkey breast, half piece; uneaten brown rice, several spoonfuls; uneaten pork chop; uneaten insalata tre colori; large plastic food container; 3 uneaten hamburger buns; plastic hamburger bun bag; 10 tissues; plastic yogurt container; 12 paper towels; 65 squares of toilet paper; 1 slice of bread; 1 plastic bread bag; rusted tea kettle; paper tea kettle instruction sheet; worn out sponge; 1 junkmail magazine; 1 junkmail catalogue; junk mail, 1 piece; 2 small cardboard boxes; 2 lengths of dental floss; 1 Q-tip; 2 witch hazel pads.

11.7.15

7 tissues; 2 paper towels; sandwich wrapping; brown paper bag; receipt; apple core; 5 cardboard boxes; 5 plastic bags; 5 slices, expired bread; plastic bread bag; 1 expired pita; 60 squares of toilet paper; plastic food container; 4 witch hazel pads.

11.8.15

130 squares of toilet paper; soap wrapper; 1 Q-tip; apple core; coffee filter + used grounds; 1 antacid tablet; museum sticker; 5 paper towels; 1 length of dental floss.

11.9.15

plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; plastic spoon; 6 napkins; 7 tissues; 1 paper towel; paper plate; plastic fork + knife; plastic cup; tinfoil quiche tray + plastic lid; 2 plastic food containers; receipt; theater flyer; ravioli box; 1 piece, saran wrap; bunch of string bean ends; 1 length of dental floss; plastic yogurt container; 1 piece, note paper.

11.10.15

8 paper towels; 75 squares of toilet paper; 6 napkins; 2 metal museum tabs; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; plastic spoon; 2 plastic cups; sandwich wrapping; museum ticket; receipt; museum floor plan.

11.11.15

tinfoil, 2 pieces; brown paper bag; 12 napkins; 2 small paper coffee cups; metal museum tab; 2 plastic food containers; 2 small plastic bags; banana peel; tissue paper, 2 pieces; 2 plastic bags; pretzel bag; apple core; 1 length of dental floss; 75 squares of toilet paper.

11.12.15

paper soap wrapper; plastic soap wrapper; 25 squares of toilet paper; 3 paper towels; sandwich wrapping; receipt; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; apple core; 3 napkins; tea bag + wrapper; 3 granola bar wrappers; 1 length of dental floss; plastic blueberry container.

11.13.15

receipt; art gallery postcard; 3 paper towels; plastic food container; pear core; coffee filter + used grounds; microwave pop-

corn bag; band-aid wrapper; band-aid; 2 lengths of dental floss; 12 tissues; 2 cheese sticks; 25 squares of toilet paper.

11.14.15

1 paper towel; 3 tissues; cardboard paper towel roll; plastic food container; 2 receipts; sandwich wrapping; 4 napkins; 1 styro-foam cup; 25 squares of toilet paper; 1 pear core; plastic laundry detergent refill jug, 64 ounces; tea bag + wrapper; 2 broccoli stumps; fish wrapping; pasta box; 1 length of dental floss; empty toothpaste tube; toothpaste tube box.

11.15.15

cold cut wrapping; 1 paper towel; plastic sushi tray + lid; 1 napkin; plastic fork; prescription pharmacy bag, paper; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; 1 piece, note paper; 1 reminder note; 13 tissues; plastic magazine wrapping; sausage wrapping; frozen vegetable bag; 50 squares of toilet paper; 2 lengths of dental floss; plastic bread bag; chips bag.

11.16.15

2 tea bags + wrappers; 1 paper towel; 15 tissues; 75 squares of toilet paper; plastic quiche container + tinfoil tray; plastic fork + knife; 3 napkins; 1 flyer; 3 cough drop wrappers; plastic nuts bag; receipt; 2 coffee filters + used grounds.

11.17.15

tea bag + wrapper; 6 tissues; 1 paper towel; soap wrapper; 1 Q-tip; receipt; sandwich wrapping; brown paper bag; BBQ sauce plastic jar; plastic yogurt container; ground pork wrapping; frozen peas bag; 2 receipts; small paper coffee cup; bean can, metal; plastic dishwasher fluid bottle; 1 length of dental floss.

11.18.15

dry cleaning hangar + wrapping; 6 paper towels; plastic sushi tray + lid; plastic fork + spoon; tinfoil food container tray + plastic lid; 3 napkins; receipt; envelope; college play flyer; cough drop wrapper; small cardboard box; plastic book packaging; 1 newsletter; ½ pumpkin pie; tinfoil pie tray; saran wrap, 1 piece; 25 squares of toilet paper; 7 tissues; junk mail, 2 pieces; 1 length of dental floss.

11.19.15

25 squares of toilet paper; 1 paper towel; sandwich wrapping; 1 napkin; coffee filter + used grounds; 15 tissues; plastic yogurt parfait cup + insert; 3 baby wipes; 2 light bulbs; uneaten couscous ; uneaten rice, one cup; uneaten fish, small piece; overripe uneaten avocado; ½ an uneaten onion; 3 pieces, uneaten bologna; 2 glass pasta sauce jars; 1 length of dental floss.

Sallie Tisdale: “People with terminal illnesses talk about the knowledge as a kind of border. Life is divided into the time before and the time after which one knows one is dying — really knows. The day will come when we cross the border between theory and fact” (2018, 13).

Dana Ward: “Some people think that well-meant neglect is the same as the avoidance of harm but what if, so poor, anyone became a person too alone to live” (2013, 54).

Brian Thill: “waste is every object, plus time” (2015, 8).

a commonplace chapter of quotes relevant to core themes, ie, rereading groys’ idea of the flow

a chapter that summarizes/lists the books I read that were duds, either because they weren’t relevant or because they weren’t good

a chapter of discarded chapter ideas, like in my previous book

a housekeeping chapter where I do something with my never-ending lists of notes/links/exhibitions/books/etc?

a chapter on addiction and climate change, our species’s capacity for denial and repression

a chapter that begins in the Jewish Heritage Museum curator’s office, how I didn’t find out my dad once went by “Moishe” until I was 37

a chapter on the optimism of Thomas's late friend, Kaylin, how, at age 30, she would make plans for her future as though she didn't have terminal brain cancer

actuarial chart of my statistical probabilities, insurability, etc

Arthur Danto: "The future is a kind of mirror in which we can show only ourselves, though it seems to us a window through which we may see things to come" (quoted in Morgan and Purje 2015).

Mark Rifkin: "Native peoples occupy a double bind within dominant settler reckonings of time. Either they are consigned to the past, or they are inserted into a present defined on non-native terms" (2017, vii).

spicer's "a poem w/o a single bird" and dickinson's "hope is the thing w feathers"

Koshi: fantastic yoga instructor who was also a geriatrician

need to decide if this book will count up from 1 or down to it
 — probably down to it, for the hourglass effect a chapter on funerals
 — funerals formalize social decorum while also undoing its pretenses
 — Charles's mom's funeral: so many men wearing colorful button downs, so different from the Italian-American funerals I grew up with, in which all the men looked like pallbearers

Jil's friend's amber analogy:

— when your parents die, it's as though your feelings about them get frozen in amber

"extinction debt"/"relaxation time":

— a species that looks like it's thriving but is actually going extinct

28. In their *Nature* article, “Habitat destruction and the extinction debt,” Tilman, May, Lehman, and Nowak coined the term “extinction debt” to refer to a species’s future extinction caused by past events (1994).

27. Influential scientist-writer Jared Diamond called a similar phenomenon “relaxation time” (1972).

26. Whereas “extinction debt” imagines a species’ evolutionary endpoint in economic terms, as a default on prior commitments, “relaxation time” makes this lack of a future sound almost pleasant, as though extinction were, like sleep, a state of being you can enter with acceptant ease.

Art in the anthropocene matters because it’s an example of how to continue to make and care for things, in spite of what we know about the planet’s — our species’s — future
— art as preemptive eulogy

looking at Facebook photos of my college friend Elliot after he passed away, in his mid-thirties, in a car crash with a tractor trailer

— photos of the past that seem tragically unaware, oblivious:
Roberson’s “skid”
— I remember how carefree Elliot danced in his dorm room at 4am the night before a final he chose not to study for

this book’s countdowns are a coping device rather than an expression of fatalism, a way to divide up the project — a way to divide up life — into manageable, nonthreatening intervals

my dad driving Emily and my mom for E’s chemo every week but never himself stepping foot inside the hospital

the lesson I learned from poker wasn’t to be indifferent to money but to make sure you have enough of it, given your needs, such that it’s easy to remain indifferent to it

the Fischli and Weiss film doesn't allow space for stops or pauses, it pretends to be continuous

ballet classes my new yoga because it has fewer stops and pauses?

visiting Emily in the hospital, stepping out for lunch, then finding out she'd gone into anaphylactic shock while I was out:

— example of something that, intellectually, I knew took place but that, emotionally, felt distant, unreal

for years I would imagine I was Emily looking for a vein whenever I got blood drawn

— vicarious trauma

looking at Greg Lindquist's coal ash paintings feels like lying in a grave and having dirt thrown over you

Cunsolo and Landman, eds. *Mourning Nature* — excellent rec from Brenda

thought exercise: slow down the time expectations for your activities/life

Nayland Blake's daily drawings and habit

— maybe compile a list of artworks about habit

Q: habit as a personal limitation or a positive form of self-expression? A: both

trying to regulate my bodily mood throughout the day: intakes of food and caffeine, rest, exercise, have mostly stopped drinking alcohol, etc, as attempts to micromanage equilibrium: neither high nor low, but steady and sure, the condition that enables me to write

reading a good book makes you want to do something quixotic, maybe even a little stupid

anticipatory grief is deeply sentimental

Cecilia Vicuña's precario sculptures ♡: both precarious and precious

Baldwin: "Art is here to prove, and to help one bear, the fact that all safety is an illusion" (2011, 55)

carbon footprint + half-life + poker stats

One of the reasons I play online games obsessively is because I want to get to the long term as soon as possible (holy shit)

my mom re: Emily: "the phone would ring and you didn't know if it was the ER or the morgue"

Adorno: "the [lyric] poem as a philosophical sundial telling the time of history" (1991, 46)

maybe I pursue perfection because I know it's not possible (and I want to fail)

Ethan, before playing board games when he was little: "let's not play a winning and losing game"

fear of harm underlies Benatar's anti-natalist argument

The lawsuit, which is brought by a collective called Our Children's Trust and is often described as "kids versus climate change," is built on an appeal to the equal-protection clause, namely, that in failing to take action on warming, the government is violating it by imposing massive costs on future generations; it is scheduled to be heard this winter in Oregon district court.

Spicer poem—3rd generation Holocaust—proximity, indirect—connection to climate change: real and impactful even

when not directly experienced or cognized — masculinity: take it like a man — john cage and silence — my dad — reserve distance detachment aloofness obliviousness indifference — Spicer knows/understands these things in the body — his use of the word “crack” — writing *to* “darling” rather than just about them — melodrama exaggerates to arrive sooner at acceptance

reading a *New Yorker* article on Bishop and being both elated and disappointed to learn the backstory to “One Art”

Spicer’s phrasing — “what poetry *we are* going to write” rather than “what poetry *are we* going to write” — implies that it is not a question but almost a command (2008, 73)

the future is no more uncertain than the present. — Whitman

prospect theory: people think in terms of expected utility to a reference point (ie, current wealth) rather than absolute outcomes

Last sentence/chapter of this book: The perfect book would, upon completion, eliminate its author’s need to write.

Last sentence/chapter of this book: The way things go is...

Calling it loss or progress when really what you mean is the steady whoosh of objects + time.

Staten Island, NY
pandemic diary #2

7.7.20 – 7.20.20

It's time for me to relax a bit. Let the dates and the countdowns slide. Allow a bit of slack into my prose. Into my habits. In Manhattan, before the pandemic, I would wake up at 7 and get myself and Ethan ready for the day. Shower, fix breakfast, get dressed, make sure we're both packed. Walk him to school at 8. Walk back to my preferred coffee shop/bar. Make small talk with the barista and the regulars. Slip on noise canceling headphones. Write until 10 on a teaching day. Until 11 or 12 on a non-teaching day. Skim artnetnews during my first bowel movement. Hope that K, the alcoholic regular whose bar tabs are draining his retirement savings, doesn't try to start a conversation when he sees me returning from the bathroom with headphones off. Buy a sandwich to eat on the train. Pack up, pay, head to the subway. Wave goodbye to Costa or Michelle or Mino, whoever's working that day. Arrive to campus fifteen minutes before my class begins. Take the stairs to my fifth floor office and hope that's not my only exercise for the day. Turn on my office computer, check my department mailbox, greet Shalema and Arisbel and any other colleagues around. Get my teaching materials ready, walk to class and arrive at 11, not a minute to spare. Teach until 12:15, refill my water bottle, teach again from 12:30 until 2. Grab a second small lunch and hot water for my thermos. Eat and chat with my officemate, Charles, on the days he's also on campus. Check my calendar and my email inboxes. Pretend I can get three-plus hours worth of work done in the hour remaining before my 3:30 meeting. Rejoice on the days there is no 3:30 meeting. Chat with Charles some more or tell Charles we both really should get to work. Send a couple quick emails, grade some papers, whatever

work needs doing and is relatively low intensity. Make small talk whenever I step outside my office. Text Shari about dinner or babysitter logistics or even just a “How’s your day?” Skim art-netnews again during my second bowel movement. Reluctantly make my way to my 3:30 meeting. On the days there’s no 3:30 meeting, pack up as though I’m a fugitive and hop on the subway to an art gallery or museum. Check *Artforum’s* artguide app while riding the train and plan a loose itinerary if I don’t already have one in mind. Keep drinking tea, if I’ve remembered to refill my thermos with hot water. Make my way through the galleries at whatever pace feels appropriate. Make small talk with gallerists or not. Grab a snack or not. Appreciate that walking around a gallery neighborhood or museum is now a substantial portion of my regular exercise, even if I wouldn’t have considered walking to be serious exercise ten years ago. Decide if I have the time to visit galleries where I’m friendly with the staff. Visit anyway and be grateful for the conversation, even when it means I won’t have the time to see all the shows I’d hoped to catch. Text Shari that I’m on my way home, figure out any unresolved logistics like a trip to the grocery store or pharmacy. Get home around 6. Greet everybody who’s at home with tired cheer. Cook or order dinner, or eat the dinner that Shari or Jen, the sitter, has already cooked. Ask about everybody’s day, talk about what’s happening in our lives, the lives we live together yet also apart. Skedaddle back out the door if there’s a literary or art event I’m attending that night. Attend such events less and less as the years go on and don’t miss them all that much, even when they’re good. Play “socky-sock” (living room soccer using a small ball) with Ethan. Relax on my phone for thirtyish minutes, until it’s past time Ethan ought to get ready for bed. Wrangle Ethan through his bedtime routine, tell him I love him. Lie down on the couch and knock down some more grading. Decide if I should watch a tv show or a movie or if I have the energy to squeeze one last piece of work into the day: some emails, some edits, some reading. Tell Shari I love her, make love together or masturbate alone. Change my pillowcase so that as I lay my head down it feels unencumbered by yesterday’s residue.

Staten Island, NY
pandemic diary #3

7.21.20 – 8.14.20

One thing that I need to relax is the frequency with which I publish art writing.

I find art writing easier and more fun than book writing, but:

I want to write this book.

I have incentive to write this book sooner rather than later (to help earn promotion to full professor).

Art writing takes away time and energy, as well as momentum, from progressing with this book.

In recent years, I've had it in my head that I should on average publish around one or two pieces of art writing each month.

Why that benchmark?

John Yau's prolific *Hyperallergic* output (one or two reviews each week) was one model.

Regular reviews amount to a map of a contemporary moment and that critic's values within it.

Publishing more frequently forces the writer to be less precious about their process and output.

Yau's criticism champions artists whose work deserves greater recognition.

Much eco art, the focus of my own coverage, doesn't lend itself well to commerce.

Novelist and poet Gilbert Sorrentino's writings about writing were another, more subconscious, model: "The writer's reality is, however, proved to him only in the act of composition [...] that process which tells him that he is alive" (2001, 4).

The process of writing regular reviews provides structure (write every weekday morning) and an enjoyable sense of purpose (visit galleries as often as possible) to how I live each week in Manhattan.

The published review notionally justifies the process but mostly feels incidental, a peculiar artifact of my labor that is already history to me by the time others can read it.

Pre-pandemic, two pieces of art writing per month represented the maximum amount of time and energy I could dedicate to such work while still fulfilling my other professional and personal commitments.

I would allow one work week for a short review (400–800 words), two for a slightly longer review (1000–1200 words), and three for a long or involved review (1500+ words).

I would write for 2–4 hours each weekday morning, depending on my teaching schedule as well as my focus and energy.

I'm a slow writer, typically progressing at the rate of one new paragraph every two hours.

On days when I had the time, momentum, or deadline pressure, I would sometimes write again in the afternoon.

I would avoid writing on the weekend, as I found it leads to burnout, although sometimes I would sneak in a weekend writing shift or two to meet a deadline.

I would work on edits, as well as low-intensity genres like interviews, in the afternoons or evenings because they require less energy and focus than composing reviews from scratch.

Even before the pandemic changed my work and living conditions, my professional and personal commitments were stretching me thin.

When I took on a second (!?) volunteer youth soccer coaching commitment during the Fall 2019 semester, all my other activities felt strained: I had noticeably less time and energy to view and write about art; to grade papers; to meet with students; to send emails; to attend committee meetings; to see friends and family; to cook or clean or exercise; to attend poetry or art events.

I had thought my day-to-day life contained a nice balance of professional and personal activities when in actuality I was squeezing as many things as possible into the interstices of my overscheduled weeks.

Overscheduled even with babysitters to pick up Ethan after school every day and a cleaner, Heidi, for our apartment every two weeks.

It was as though I'd streamlined my life toward the end of producing one or another intellectual output, a fact driven home to me as I've been preparing my tenure portfolio in recent weeks.

It's cliché, if nonetheless true, to find it strange to see my entire professional life reduced to line items on a curriculum vitae.

It's even stranger to finalize my tenure application while living in the midst of a pandemic, a faltering democracy, the planet's sixth mass extinction.

Even in less imperiled-seeming times, I had a hard time caring about journal impact factor, grants awarded, committees chaired.

Connections with students and colleagues, on the other hand, may not count for much in terms of professional advancement but are harder to wave away as cosmically trivial, even if most such connections are modest and fleeting.

Tiny, nonthreatening, and supportive, like a laugh shared at the water cooler or an out-of-the-blue thank you note.

Best I can tell, some people like or want to be overextended, always with something to do or somewhere to be, always stretched a few inches beyond what their body can bear.

I enjoy having a bit of structure and purpose in my schedule but prefer to have pillows of free time in and around that structure.

Which is another way of saying that I prefer doing things rested and prepared.

At least before the pandemic, art writing was for me the perfect blend of work and leisure, structure and freedom.

I contemplated leaving academia to pursue full-time work for an art magazine but am confident the writing and editing would be less enjoyable once they became obligations.

My philosophy of work has been to pretend I'm doing the thing I'm supposed to do while instead doing the thing I want to do, akin to what Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, calls *la perruque*, "the wig" (1984, 24).

As a PhD student, I played poker; as an English professor, I write art criticism; if I were a full-time art critic, I would no doubt want to do something else.

The pleasures of perruque-ing in part account for why so many people in the arts call themselves curators when really what they mean is that they want a little bit of structure and a lot of freedom.

In my mid- to late thirties, I realized that I only had the energy to do one thing well each day and that I wanted writing to be that thing.

Whereas in my twenties and early thirties I planned my days around exercise and recovery from exercise, now I plan around writing and recovery from same.

Exertion followed by relaxation, that's my philosophy.

The problem is that I have a track record of pursuing relaxation with such intensity it turns into exertion: running 400 meter intervals with a stopwatch in the cold winter rain; studying poker until it becomes a side job more lucrative than my actual job; visiting galleries with the same sense of vocation I once felt for libraries and bookstores.

I remember, as a teenager on a cruise with my family, finding it bizarre that my mom complained the entire week that she didn't know how to relax.

This Staten Island summer has relaxed my commitments down to essentials: cooking, cleaning, exercise, writing, and spending time doing things everybody in our household enjoys.

The wisest thing I've done so far this year has been to say no to all the paid and unpaid summer CUNY work offered me (a luxury of choice, I recognize), particularly the committee that wanted me to continue to meet, uncompensated, in violation of my teaching contract.

The biggest lesson I've learned from two decades in academia is that you can't waste someone's time and then wonder why they resent it.

The biggest lesson I learned from poker is that, once my basic needs are met, my time is worth more to me than anything else.

The biggest lesson I learned this summer is that even with minimal weekly commitments, I still don't have enough time to do everything I need and want to do.

Post-pandemic, I will need to relax whatever I thought I knew about commitments and priorities, habits and values, the world and my place in it.

Geographer Jared Diamond coined the term "relaxation time" to refer to a species that looks as though it's thriving but is actually going extinct (1972).

"Relaxation time" makes it sound as though the species is taking a well-deserved rest when in actuality it's conducting business-as-usual, oblivious to its own decline.

What if we understood the present not in terms of seize-the-day experiential immediacy, all the poems and pop songs that assert the joy of being alive in the moment, but instead as a condition defined by its asymmetrical knowledge of both the past and the future?

What if these pandemic diaries were being read by a future historian, and what if that historian was something other than what today we might call human?

Reflective Statement
Application for Tenure

My first semester teaching at Hostos, I arranged a class visit to the Bronx Museum of the Arts for my English 110 students. The visit served as the basis for a writing assignment in which students used a written text to make an argument about a visual artwork. Trained as a writer and English scholar, I felt on surer footing when it came to teaching the assignment's literary component. But I'd long enjoyed visual art and was willing to nudge myself, as well as my students, outside our comfort zones. Still, to be extra sure about the museum content, I arranged for a docent-led tour of the museum, happy to interject lessons about writing while deferring to somebody else's visual art expertise.

Six years later, as I submit this tenure portfolio, I've unexpectedly become an expert on contemporary art. Not only am I now capable of guiding students through galleries myself (in recent years I've led class visits to the Bronx Museum, The 8th Floor Gallery, 601Artspace, and the CUNY James Gallery), but I also regularly publish reviews, interviews, and essays for leading United States art magazines such as *Hyperallergic*, *BOMB*, and *Art in America*. In my first year at Hostos, I published a book of literary criticism, *Exercises in Criticism: The Theory and Practice of Literary Constraint* (2015) with Dalkey Archive Press, a well-regarded, long-standing small press in my field. I then continued to publish criticism and poetry in noted literary venues such as *Boston Review*, *Bookforum*, and *The Believer*.

However, my focus gradually shifted to short form (600–1500 words) magazine art writing. At this point, I have published approximately eighty such pieces, earning me a reputation as an insightful voice on contemporary eco-art, my area of

focus. My 2018 review of Storm King Art Center's exhibition, *Indicators: Artists on Climate Change*, for example, was cited in a *New York Times* profile of artist Allison Janae Hamilton (Mitter 2018). It's an educational commonplace that students undergo great personal and intellectual growth during college but it's less acknowledged that faculty can undergo dramatic growth alongside them.

As an educator, I draw on my past and present growth experiences as a way to help students better realize their own. This way of connecting with students was driven home to me early in my Spring 2019 work with three Student Research Assistants (Golvis Tavarez, Danilo Liz, and Frank Sefa) for the Title V-sponsored SURF program (Student Undergraduate Research with Faculty). After a group meeting on research methodologies, Golvis, an engineering student and poet, asked me a question about my poetry background. That question led to a free-ranging conversation about my upbringing on Staten Island, my father's background as an electrical engineer, and my development as a teacher and writer. The conversation helped Golvis, Danilo, and Frank perceive me as a person whose life has had twists and turns like everybody else's, rather than as a classroom authority figure handing out As and Bs and Cs. I don't try to downplay the challenges students can face in pursuit of their own goals but I do try to help them see that education is rarely a linear, A-to-Z path. Philosopher Paulo Freire famously described this linear delusion as the "banking model of education" (2005, 72).

My development from poet and literary scholar to art writer has not only expanded my intellectual horizons but also enriched and varied the content, and ways of delivering it, I offer students. In addition to my regular English department course offerings, I have also developed and taught a variety of courses both at Hostos and in the larger CUNY system. These courses include: a Writing Intensive (WI) version of Media Design in the Digital Age (DD 102); a WI version of Creative Non-Fiction (ENG 204); a hybrid version of Introduction to Literature (ENG 111); an asynchronous and Open Educational Resources (OER) ver-

sion of ENG 111; as well as two asynchronous courses for CUNY's School of Professional Studies (SPS), History of Film (CM 314) and Film and TV (CM 316). In dialogue with Professors Catherine Lewis and Andy London, I am working to develop an English department elective for Digital Design majors, Technical Writing (ENG 202), which I expect to be offered early in my post-tenure years. At the same time that I have pursued this breadth of curricular endeavors, the quality of my teaching has remained high, as reflected in my student evaluations and faculty observations and as described in the "Teaching" section of this portfolio.

My record of publication is also wide-ranging and of a high standard. I am proud of my book, *Exercises in Criticism*, whose blend of poetic and critical methodologies has found a readership in academia and beyond. I have delivered invited readings and talks about the book at academic institutions such as University of Virginia, James Madison University, New York University, CUNY Graduate Center, University of Calgary, and University of Pennsylvania. The book has been reviewed in literary and journalistic outlets such as *The Brooklyn Rail* (Rodgers 2015), was named to *Entropy Magazine's* "Best of 2015: Non-Fiction Book" list (Entropy 2015), and has led to my being invited to contribute to several edited collections in my fields. In particular, my contribution to OR Books's *The Digital Critic: Literary Culture Online* (Barekat, Barry, and Winters 2017) received a positive, paragraph-long mention in the *Times Literary Supplement's* review of the book (Howard 2018). My letter of tenure support from poet and Professor Catherine Barnett speaks to these aspects of my work.

My art writing has also begun to receive recognition. I am a three-time finalist for the \$30,000 Creative Capital/Andy Warhol Arts Writer's Grant in Short Form writing. I have been invited to deliver talks and readings for art colleges (such as California College of the Arts), galleries (such as apexart, in NYC), and magazines (such as *The Brooklyn Rail*). My letter of tenure support from Professor Una Chaudhuri speaks to my track record as a critic of eco-art. I'm particularly proud of the trust

I've earned from editors at *Hyperallergic* and *BOMB* magazines, both of which have been regularly publishing my work for years. My letter of tenure support from Professor Albert Mobilio, editor at *Hyperallergic*, speaks to my standing at an art magazine that has had an outsized influence during its first decade of existence. My reputation as a critic has also led to opportunities to publish at other, more traditionally influential art magazines, such as my July 2020 *Art in America* review of Thomas Erben Gallery's group exhibition, *ecofeminism(s)*, curated by Monika Fabijanska (2020).

It has been a joy to share my intellectual and artistic passions with the Hostos community through service initiatives. In 2015, I founded the "Close Readings" poetry series, which has brought to campus well-regarded poets such as Adjuja Greaves, Rachel Levitsky, Omotara James, Chloë Bass, Lo Kwa Mei-en, Anna Gurton Wachter, Ekere Tallie, and Lara Mimosa Montes. I have also brought my writing expertise to bear in my five years of service on the Writing Intensive Task Force. Other departmental and college service includes: five years as co-course manager of English 111; three years as Faculty Advisor to the Writing Center; three years as Faculty Senator; one year on the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) Advisory Council; and one year on the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) Standard VI Working Group. In addition to these Hostos endeavors, for years I served my professional field by co-founding the Modern Language Association's (MLA) Creative Writing Forum in 2015. We created the Forum to represent the interests of the many MLA members who have a foot in the worlds of both academic scholarship and creative writing. January 2020 marked the fifth and final year of my service on the Forum's Executive Committee, most recently in the capacity of President.

As I submit this tenure portfolio, more than any specific accomplishment, I'm most gratified at how my professional endeavors feed into one another. My book's creative-critical methodology led me to develop a WI Creative Non-Fiction course, which in turn led to my serving on the college's Writ-

ing Intensive Task Force. The “Close Readings” poetry series helps me discover new ways to discuss poetry with students. My magazine art writing affords me new angles of insight into the interests and needs of Digital Design students. It also allows me to make connections between Hostos and its neighboring arts communities, such as when I was awarded a CUNY Diversity Projects Development Fund (DPDF) grant that brought Bronx artist Alicia Grullón to campus to collaborate with students to produce a broadside about environmental justice. I cannot imagine undertaking these endeavors — cannot imagine having grown in these ways as a teacher, writer, and person — without the Hostos community’s resources and support. In the years after tenure, I look forward to continuing to grow alongside our students and colleagues.

CU The Greatest Urban
NY University in the World

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Louis Bury

Recommendation for:

Appointment

Reappointment

Promotion

Reappointment with Tenure X

Other (Designation as Vice President, Dean, etc.)

Current Title: Assistant Professor Department: English

Effective Date: 8.14

I. Higher Education

A. Degrees

2011 PhD, CUNY Graduate Center, English

2003 BA, New York University, English

II. Experience

A. Teaching Experience

2014-present Hostos Community College, CUNY, Assistant
Professor, English Department

2011-2014 NYU, Language Lecturer, Expository Writing
Program

- 2007–2011 NYU, Adjunct Lecturer, English Department
 2004–2007 John Jay College, CUNY, Adjunct Lecturer,
 English Department
 2003–2004 BMCC, CUNY, Adjunct Lecturer, English
 Department

III. Academic or Professional Honors

- 2017/19/20 Finalist, Creative Capital/ Warhol Arts Writer's
 Grant
 2016 CUNY Chancellor's Reception
 2015 Best of 2015: Non-Fiction Books, *Entropy*
Magazine

IV. Publications

A. Refereed Publications

- 2015 *Exercises in Criticism: The Theory and Practice of*
Literary Constraint, Dalkey Archive Press

B. Other Publications

- 9.12.20 "Red Flags Are Flying at Rockefeller Center,"
Hyperallergic
 9.5.20 "Martha Tuttle's Sentient Stones at Storm King,"
Hyperallergic
 8.8.20 "Take a Virtual Nature Walk at Wave Hill,"
Hyperallergic
 7.20.20 "What Ecofeminist Artists Learned from
 Indigenous Cultures," *Art in America*
 6.27.20 "Nature as Filtered through a Screen,"
Hyperallergic
 6.12.20 "Water Portraits: Carolina Caycedo Interviewed
 by Louis Bury," *BOMB*
 4.23.20 "Art into the World: Marion Wilson Interviewed
 by Louis Bury," *BOMB*

- 3.30.20 “Strangeness and Beauty: Dear Climate
Interviewed by Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 3.7.20 “Digital Meditations on Water,” *Hyperallergic*
- 2.15.20 “Getting Your Weather Report at the Art
Museum,” *Hyperallergic*
- 1.11.20 “Nature Offers the Best Designs at the Cooper
Hewitt Triennial,” *Hyperallergic*
- 1.9.20 “Uncanny Landscapes: Alice Miceli Interviewed
by Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 1.4.20 “Agnes Denes’ Future Imperfect,” *Hyperallergic*
- 2019 “The World without Us,” *Tripwire* 15
- 12.2.19 “Social Sculpture: Elias Sime Interviewed by
Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 10.26.19 “Painting Disaster from a Distance,”
Hyperallergic
- 10.19.19 “A Greenhouse for Extinct Flora,” *Hyperallergic*
- 9.16.19 “Reimagined Objects: Jean Shin Interviewed by
Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 9.14.19 “Listening to Plants,” *Hyperallergic*
- 9.7.19 “A Sanitation Worker’s Collection of Salvaged
Objects,” *Hyperallergic*
- 7.18.19 “Spiritual Praxis: Tattfoo Tan Interviewed by
Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 7.13.19 “Rachelle Dang’s Meditation on Past and
Present,” *Hyperallergic*
- 7.9.19 “Building an Architecture for Climate Change,”
Hyperallergic
- 7.6.19 “Mo Kong Maps a Post-Climate Change
Future,” *Hyperallergic*
- 6.16.19 “The Southern Gothic Moods of Allison Janae
Hamilton,” *Hyperallergic*
- 6.8.19 “Paradise Lost: Paul Davies’s Fictive California,”
Hyperallergic
- 5.29.19 “So Green and So Hopeful: Leslie Carol Roberts
Interviewed by Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 5.26.19 “Josh Kline’s Water World,” *Hyperallergic*
- 5.11.19 “Coping with Climate Change,” *Hyperallergic*

- 5.4.19 “Materializing Memory and Trauma,”
Hyperallergic
- 4.25.19 “At Union Studio, Artists Engage in Serious Play
Around Notions of Ecology,” *Hyperallergic*
- 4.22.19 “Making Space: Ronny Quevedo Interviewed by
Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 4.20.19 “Three Poems,” *The Brooklyn Rail*
- 4.5.19 “Making Interiority Visible: Dawoud Bey
Interviewed by Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 3.30.19 “Claire Sherman’s Leafy Canvases,” *Hyperallergic*
- 3.17.19 “Hans Op de Beeck Stages Silence,”
Hyperallergic
- 2.9.19 “Lynette Yiadom-Boakye Explores
Psychological Depths,” *Hyperallergic*
- 2.5.19 “Art and Ecology: Mariel Villeré and Dylan
Gauthier Interviewed by Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 2.2.19 “Rocks, Waste, and Water,” *Hyperallergic*
- 1.3.19 “Nature’s Nation: American Art and
Environment,” *BOMB*
- 2018 “Topical Criticism and the Cultural Logic of
the Quick Take,” in *The Digital Critic: Literary
Culture Online*, ed. Barekat, Barry, and Winters,
OR Books
- 2018 “Un-preemptively Yours,” in *Something Other
Than Lifedeath—Catalyst: S.D. Chrostowska*, ed.
David Cecchetto, Noxious Sector Press
- 12.29.18 “Edward Burtynsky Depicts Our Alien
Domain,” *Hyperallergic*
- 10.27.18 “Vanished Art Recalled and Reinterpreted,”
Hyperallergic
- 10.22.18 “Culture and Place: Juanli Carrión Interviewed
by Louis Bury,” *BOMB*
- 10.3.18 “Dorian Gaudin: The Coffee Cup Spring,” *The
Brooklyn Rail*
- 9.29.18 “Drawing the Essay,” *Hyperallergic*
- 9.5.18 “The Scandal of Style: Jeff Dolven Interviewed
by Louis Bury,” *BOMB*

- 8.18.18 “Refuse Transformed: Reuse as Social Repair,”
Hyperallergic
- 8.11.18 “Urban Ecological Consciousness at Wave Hill,”
Hyperallergic
- 8.18 “Lara Atallah’s Mediterranean Whisper,” *White Hot*
- 7.29.18 “The Ghosts of Our Future Climate at Storm King,” *Hyperallergic*
- 6.24.18 “Mirtha Dermisache’s Writing Is a Rorschach Test,” *Hyperallergic*
- 5.13.18 “Mary Mattingly’s Poetry of Things,”
Hyperallergic
- 4.11.18 “Studio Visit: Greg Lindquist by Louis Bury,”
BOMB
- 4.7.18 “Kay Rosen’s Writing on the Wall,” *Hyperallergic*
- 3.17.18 “Refereeing Trump,” *Hyperallergic*
- 2.8.18 “An Artist Named Artist Finds Order in Digital Waste,” *Hyperallergic*
- 1.27.18 “Painting the Sky on Sunday,” *Hyperallergic*
- 1.2.18 “Serious Play: Samson Kambalu’s Graphomania,” *BOMB*
- 2017 “Anticipatory Blurbs,” in *Verbivorous Festschrift, Volume Six: The Oulipo*, ed. M.J. Nicholls, Verbivorous Press
- 12.14.17 “Overcoming Daily Life with Nayland Blake’s Daily Drawings,” *Hyperallergic*
- 12.2.17 “Ruination and Ruminations on the Anthropocene,” *Hyperallergic*
- Fall 2017 “The Immortals,” *Seneca Review*
- 11.16.17 “An Artist Adopts Avant-Garde Poetry to Express the Limits of Language,” *Hyperallergic*
- 10.28.17 “Dale Chihuly’s Road Not Taken,” *Hyperallergic*
- 10.21.17 “Rose DeSiano Holds a Mirror Up to Nature,”
Hyperallergic
- 8.27.17 “Bookforum Talks with Albert Mobilio,”
Bookforum

- 8.26.17 "A Participatory Studio of Utopic Creativity," *Hyperallergic*
- 8.19.17 "Tom Pnini's Cinematic Études," *Hyperallergic*
- 7.8.17 "Ronny Quevedo's Field of Play," *Hyperallergic*
- 6.24.17 "The Contested Histories of Water," *Hyperallergic*
- 5.20.17 "Lung Power," *Page Boy IX*
- 4.29.17 "One Minute Sculpture at Twenty: Erwin Wurm's Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order," *Hyperallergic*
- 4.8.17 "The Embodied Life Writing of Aynsley Vandembroucke," *Hyperallergic*
- 3.19.17 "Revising on the Fly: Adjua Greaves in Performance," *Hyperallergic*
- 1.28.17 "Great Balls of Fire: Arthur Jafa at Gavin Brown's Enterprise," *Hyperallergic*
- 12.10.16 "I'd Prefer Not To: Enacting Stillness at The 8th Floor," *Hyperallergic*
- 10.23.16 "The Tender Proceduralism of Solmaz Sharif's Look," *Hyperallergic*
- 6.11.16 "The Political Art of Alicia Grullón," *Hyperallergic*
- 4.20.16 "A Throw of the Dice: On the Risks and Rewards of Art," *Hyperallergic*
- 4.25.16 "What Poetry Are We Going to Write," *Boston Review*
- 4.16.16 "Beguiling Simplicity: The Poetry of Robert Lax," *Hyperallergic*
- 3.20.16 "Running Down a Dream," *The Los Angeles Review of Books*
- 2015 "Introduction," in *Lifeline Rule*, by Doug Nufer, Spuyten Duyvil Press
- 12.19.15 "Speak, Memory: Becky Suss' Painterly Anthropology," *Hyperallergic*
- 11.15.15 "X Marks the Spot: E.J. McAdams' Sculptural Nature Writing," *Hyperallergic*
- 11.9.15 "On Bp Nichol," *Coldfront*

- 9.26.15 “Clifford Owens’ Scatological Whispers,”
Hyperallergic
- 9.5.15 “In and Out of Frame: Lorraine O’Grady’s ‘Art Is...’” *Hyperallergic*
- 8.29.15 “The ABC of Art Criticism: Some Recent How-To’s,” *Hyperallergic*
- 4.7.15 “Autobiography by Other Means,” #alt-academy
- 3.2015 “Negotiating Academic Constraints: Clara Lewis Interviews Louis Bury,” *The Conversant*
- 1.27.15 “One should not try to go over the limit,” *The Believer*
- 12.28.14 “Fables from Artlandia: The Miraculous by Raphael Rubinstein,” *Hyperallergic*

VI. Grants and Sponsored Programs

B. Internal (CUNY or PSC)

- 2020 Research Award 51, PSC-CUNY, \$3500
- 2017 Research Award 48, PSC-CUNY, \$3500
- 2017 Faculty Fellowship Publication Program, CUNY Office of Recruitment and Diversity, N/A
- 2016 Diversity Projects Development Fund, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Human Resources Management, \$1500
- 2016 Stewart Travel Grant, CUNY Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences, \$500
- 2016 Title V Conference Grant, Office of Academic Affairs, Hostos, \$1000
- 2015 Research Award 46, PSC-CUNY \$3500
- 2015 Stewart Travel Grant, CUNY Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences, \$500

VII. Conference Presentations and Invited Lectures (Indicate invited lectures/presentations with *)

- 10.16.20 *The New Social Environment, *The Brooklyn Rail*, via Zoom (reading)
- 11.13.19 *Doubletake 27: Louis Bury, Christian Hawkey, Sawako Nakayasu, Susan Wheeler, apexart, NY, NY (reading)
- 4.8.19 *ECOPOESIS, California College of the Arts, Oakland, CA (symposium)
- 3.11.19 *KGB Monday Night Poetry: Louis Bury & Diane Mehta, KGB Bar, NY, NY (reading)
- 3.10.19 "Towards a Typology of Anticipatory Grief in Visual Art," American Comparative Literature Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC (conference)
- 11.18.18 "The World without Us," Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts 32nd Annual Meeting, Toronto, Canada (conference)
- 11.18.18 Roundtable: Collaboration, Catalysis, and DIY Publishing, SLSA 32nd Annual Meeting, Toronto, Canada (conference)
- 10.27.18 *"Rats Build Their Labyrinths: On the Psychology and Aesthetics of Puzzles," Puzzles, Bots, and Poetics: An Interdisciplinary Symposium, Institute of the Humanities & Global Culture, University of Virginia (symposium)
- 10.25.18 *"The Way Things Go: Elegies for Our Climate Future," James Madison University (reading)
- 11.19.17 "Marina Zurkow's Eco-Om," Tuning Speculation V, Toronto, Canada (conference)
- 10.12.17 *"The Cultural Work of Play," The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing, NYU (symposium)
- 8.13.17 Roundtable: Race and Poetic Form, Modernist Studies Association 19, Amsterdam, Netherlands (conference)

- 8.13.17 Roundtable: Questions of the Present in Contemporary Poetics, MSA 19, Amsterdam, Netherlands (conference)
- 1.8.17 "Creative Critique, Critical Creation," Modern Language Association 132, Philadelphia, PA (conference)
- 4.9.16 "Conceptual Poetry and the Craft of Criticism," Poetics: (The Next) 25 Years, SUNY Buffalo (conference)
- 2.26.16 *Creative Criticism: An Abecedarium, University of Calgary (reading)
- 1.10.16 "Public Privacy: Self-Address in Digital Short Forms," MLA 131, Austin, TX (conference)
- 11.11.15 *"Louis Bury and Doug Nufer," The Kelly Writer's House, University of Pennsylvania (reading)
- 6.2.15 *"Louis Bury, Doug Nufer," Phinney Books, Seattle, WA (reading)
- 6.1.15 *"Louis Bury, Doug Nufer, John Beer," Mother Foucault's Bookstore, Portland, OR (reading)
- 5.30.15 *"Hybrid Moremints: Louis Bury, Emily Hunt, Sean Zhuraw," La Commune Café and Bookstore, Oakland, CA (reading)
- 5.3.15 "La Perruque as Publishing Tactic," Northeast Modern Language Association 46, Toronto, Canada (conference)
- 5.3.15 "Exercises in Criticism," NeMLA 46, Toronto, Canada (reading)
- 5.2.15 *"Skanky Possum Presents: Bury, Chiang, Goldman, and Wagner," Skanky Possum Press, Toronto, Canada (reading)
- 4.25.15 *"The PhD Wager," Models and Methods: Unconventional Dissertations, CUNY Graduate Center (symposium)
- 3.31.15 *Great New Books in the Humanities, NYU Humanities Initiative (reading)

- 2.21.15 *Launch Party for Louis Bury's *Exercises in Criticism*, Proteus Gowanus Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (reading)
- 2.7.15 "Negotiating Disciplinary Constraints," ACL(x) Otherwise 2, Columbia, sc (conference)
- 1.16.15 "The Test That Is Not a Test," CUNY Games Festival 2, NY, NY (conference)
- 1.11.15 "Style as Symptom: On the Epistemology of Creative Criticism," MLA 130, Vancouver, Canada (conference)

VIII. Service

A. College Service

- 2020 Member, Distance Learning Task Force, English Department
- 2020 Presenter, Spa Day, Center for Teaching and Learning
- 2020 Moderator, Spa Day, CTL
- 2019–present Member, CTL Advisory Council
- 2019–present Member, Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standard v1 Working Group
- 2019–2020 Faculty Advisor, Writing Center
- 2019 Faculty Mentor, Student Undergraduate Research Fund
- 2018 Presenter, Writing Across the Curriculum Workshop: Writing in the Digital Age
- 2018 Member, Senate Library Committee
- 2018 Member, Portfolio Grid Committee, ENG Department
- 2018 Judge, First Food Photo Contest, Natural Science Department
- 2017–2020 Senator, College Senate
- 2017 Judge, Hostos English Club Student Poetry Contest
- 2016 Editor, Writing Center Program Manual

2016	Presenter, Service Learning Day
2016	Judge, Barbara Summers Essay Contest
2015–2020	Course Manager, ENG 111
2015–2017	Faculty Advisor, Writing Center
2015–present	Member, Writing Intensive Task Force
2015–present	Founder and Organizer, Close Readings poetry series
2015	Member, Columbia Core Committee
2015	Interviewer, Writing Center Summer Workshop Leaders
2015	Contributor, “Chalk Talk,” Office of Academic Affairs newsletter
2014–2015	Member, Tenure and Reappointment Guidelines Committee
2014	Judge, English Club Poetry Contest
2014	Member, ENG 111 Research Paper Assessment Committee

C. Community Service

2018–2020	Juror, apexart Open Call
2018–2020	President, MLA Creative Writing Forum
2017–2018	Secretary, MLA Creative Writing Forum
2017	Peer Reviewer, Publication of the Modern Language Association
2016–2017	Co-founder and Member, MLA Creative Writing Forum

IX. Memberships in Professional Societies

2016	Association of Writers & Writing Programs
2014	American Comparative Literature Association
2011	Modern Language Association

Date submitted

10.5.20

- Life expectancy of a white US male born in 1981, the year I was born: 71.1 (Arias and Xu 2019)
- Life expectancy of a white US female born in 1983, the year Emily was born: 78.7 (Arias and Xu 2019)
- Prevalence rate of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) in the US population: 0.002% (Rees et al. 2017)
- Factor by which women are more likely than men to have SLE: 9 (Rees et al. 2017)
- Average number of years SLE shortens one's life expectancy: 22 (Inacio 2017)
- Emily's life expectancy, according to her pediatric rheumatologist: 30
- Minimum number of years by which her lifespan has exceeded that estimate: 10
- Number of years Emily had been taking phenobarbital, a barbiturate used to prevent seizures, when she had her first severe lupus flare: 15
- Number of months she took intravenous Cytoxan, a potent immunosuppressant typically used on cancer patients, to treat SLE: 6
- Number of years she took prednisone, an immunosuppressant steroid, after completing that course of Cytoxan: 4
- Annual academic merit scholarship monies Emily received, at age 18, to attend Drew University: \$20,000
- Number of semesters she attended Drew before being expelled for drug use: 1
- Approximate number of years Emily was an intravenous heroin user: 5
- Approximate number of those years that she and I were estranged: 2
- Percentage of those estranged years that overlapped with my poker habit: 100
- My approximate Fall 2010 semester poker winnings: \$20,000

- Approximate amount of money I would have in play, across nine virtual tables, during an online poker session: \$5,000
- 2010 NYU Adjunct Lecturer compensation for a four credit course: \$5,000
- Age at which I began to place weekly football bets with a neighborhood bookie: 12
- Median household income of 1990 US Census tract 128.05, the Oakwood Beach neighborhood of Staten Island where my parents lived for 45 years: \$38,953 (US Department of Commerce 1992)
- Percentage of 1990 Oakwood Beach residents who were white: 95.1 (US Department of Commerce 1992)
- Percentage who were Italian–American: 48.7 (US Department of Commerce 1992)
- 2020 rank of Staten Island, among US counties, in proportion of Italian heritage residents: 1 (Wikipedia 2022)
- Factor by which Staten Island’s opioid overdose rate exceeds that of NYC’s other boroughs: 2 (New York State Department of Health 2018)
- Months after Emily kicked her heroin addiction for good that her ex-boyfriend, Bobby, died of a heroin overdose: 3
- Distance, in minutes driving, from Oakwood Beach to Great Kills, the neighborhood that was the statistical epicenter of Staten Island’s opioid epidemic during the 2000s: 3
- Fall 2020 rank, among NYC zip codes, of 10306 (Oakwood + adjacent neighborhoods) in per capita Covid-19 case rate: 3rd (US Census Bureau 2022)
- Fall 2020 rank, among NYC boroughs, of Staten Island in per capita Covid-19 case rate: 1st (US Census Bureau 2022)
- Fall 2020 Oakwood Beach median real estate price: \$578,258 (Neighborhood Scout 2021)
- Distance, in minutes driving, from Oakwood Beach to Staten Island’s Fresh Kills, the world’s largest landfill at the time of its 2001 closure: 10
- Distance, in city blocks, from my parents’ former house to the Oakwood Beach Wastewater Treatment Plant: 10

- Distance, in city blocks, from my parents' former house to Hurricane Sandy's 2012 floodline: 1
- Fraction of neighboring families' children I grew up with who, as adults in 2019, still lived with their parents in the same house: 4/7
- Percentile rank of Oakwood Beach among US neighborhoods for residents who've lived there five or more years: 96 (Neighborhood Scout 2021)
- Minutes in each direction I would walk, in 1995, to meet a group of teens and go drinking on the steps of Moravian Cemetery's Vanderbilt Mausoleum: 40
- Minimum number of people I recognized from that drinking group at a 2019 Fourth of July barbecue held by my parents' new next door neighbor: 4
- Number of times, in casual conversation with that neighbor about the Department of Sanitation, for whom he works, I thought about mentioning longtime DSNY artist-in-residence Mierle Laderman Ukeles, then thought better of it: 2
- Date on which Fresh Kills landfill was supposed to receive its last barge of waste: March 22, 2001
- Tons of material transported on an emergency basis from Ground Zero to Fresh Kills in the year after September 11, 2001: 1,200,000 (NYC Parks 2021)
- Daily tons of residential waste received by Fresh Kills during its peak operating capacity in the 1980s: 29,000 (NYC Parks 2021)
- Approximate tons of solid waste currently in Fresh Kills: 150,000,000 (NYC Parks 2021)
- Estimated year of completion for Freshkills Park, the remediated New York City public park being built on top of the former landfill: 2037
- Medium projected 2037 sea level rise, in inches, for the waters surrounding New York City: 12 (NOAA 2021)
- Minimum number of objects that I threw away in 2015: 23,408
- Percentage of those objects that were foodstuffs or food packaging: 14

Percentage made of paper: 81

Approximate number of toilet paper squares that I discarded in
2015: 10,000

Approximate number of junk mailings: 80

Of origami frogs: 1

Of animal bones: 180

Manhattan, NY
pandemic diary #4

“What was it like living in a house,” I ask Ethan as we box up our belongings to return home to Manhattan. “A lot of work,” he answers, unhesitating, “Grandpa’s house is really big and broken.”

This country is also really big and broken: so big and broken many of its factions can’t even agree about the facts causing it to break, let alone what values might hold it together. I have no specialized knowledge about white supremacy, or Covid, or climate change, no deep insights about the typical course of imperial decline. What I know, call it my inheritance, is more simple and more strange: that repression begins in the place you call home, as does the hard work of acceptance and the even harder work of repair.

9.12.20

Red Flags Are Flying at Rockefeller Center

Andy Goldsworthy’s installation seeks to signal anti-imperialism at a notoriously capitalist site.

by Louis Bury

As part of Frieze Sculpture at Rockefeller Center, the renowned British artist Andy Goldsworthy has installed 109 cotton flags, each rubbed with earth taken from one of the 50 US states, around the center’s iconic Lower Plaza. Though the artwork is called *Red Flags* (2020), most of its monochromatic flags are different shades of desaturated orange, with some outliers, such as mustard yellow, pale rose, and maroon. The cumulative visual

effect of the flag rows is akin to the color variations in Byron Kim's landmark portraits of human skin pigmentation, "Synecdoche" (1993). It's a welcome change of pace from the stately array of national flags that ordinarily fly around the plaza.

Though the flags' dusty hues and lack of iconography create a tranquil, down-to-earth mood, *Red Flags* also conveys a sense of alarm. The color orange, used for traffic cones and biohazard signs, can come across as cautionary. The idiomatic meaning of the term "red flag" — a warning or danger sign — is even more portentous. And the flags themselves waver between evoking optimism and pessimism. When the wind blows through them, they recall the fluttering orange pageantry of Christo's and Jeanne-Claude's crowd-pleasing 2005 Central Park installation *The Gates*; however, when the air calms, Goldsworthy's flags droop and sag in a way that's at odds with the vibrancy of the color scheme. The jaunty pop standards piped into the plaza's speakers — Bill Withers's "Lovely Day" (1977); The Talking Heads's "This Must Be The Place" (1983) — feel discordantly upbeat during the flags' more languid moments.

In late-summer New York City, months into the pandemic, this strange mix of moods — equal parts calm and concerned — feels more apt than Goldsworthy could have envisioned when he conceived the work in 2019. *Red Flags* was intended as an anti-imperialist eco-parable, in which the symbolism of a notorious civic site has been détourned with a chthonic twist. The plain, silty flags — each as modest and self-assured as a logo-less baseball cap — work beautifully in this regard, registering subtle discontent with the territorial land claims on which countries and states are predicated. Similar to how Byron Kim's grids of abstracted skin color create a powerful gestalt of the superficial similarities and differences between people, Goldsworthy's flag rows pigmented with soil acknowledge regional geographic differences while also suggesting their bedrock family resemblances.

But it's the unintended pandemic context that makes *Red Flags* feel less an augur of faraway ecological discord than a marker of sociopolitical discord in the here and now. The strangest, most alarming part of my visit to the installation was Rockefeller Center's palpable emptiness. It was a glorious weekday afternoon, during a normal business day, and yet there were no office workers scuttling about on their lunch break, no throngs of tourists clogging up the concourse. Even my bike route along Fifth Avenue felt disconcertingly safe, vacant, just me and the buses enjoying lanes and lanes of space. The cars and the tourists and the office workers and the proud national flags will eventually return to the neighborhood, and *Red Flags* will eventually fly elsewhere. For the moment, though, Goldsworthy has given us a subdued reminder that things are not quite right in this land.

Andy Goldsworthy: *Red Flags continues at Frieze Sculpture at Rockefeller Center (45 Rockefeller Plaza, Midtown East, Manhattan) through October 2.*

9.23.20

Dear Ms. Gioia,

How are you? I am doing good.

This year I am looking forward to seeing my friends, to seeing my teachers, and learning new things. I am looking forward to seeing Colin, Nick, Zoe, and Ally. I want to learn how to be better at writing.

I am worried about the coronavirus, going into 4th grade, and what is happening in the world. I am worried that in 4th grade the work will be harder. I do not know what school will be like this year. I want people to stay safe from the coronavirus.

My favorite part of school is reading. I like to read long chapter books. I like fiction. My favorite book right now is *Diary of Wimpy Kid: The Getaway*. Book buddies in school was fun. I don't think we are going to have it this year because of the coronavirus.

I am good at soccer, reading, and math. I do soccer practice on Monday and Thursday and we have soccer games on Sunday. I am a good midfielder and midfielders pass a lot. I am good at passing. I am not the best at writing, and basketball. Basketball is hard for me because I am better with my legs than my arms.

A goal I have for myself this year is to be a dominant writer. I mean that I hope I write some books in school and to be good at writing.

Sincerely,

Ethan

Manhattan, NY
pandemic diary #5

10.5.20

I'm not worried about the tenure application that I completed yesterday — it will be what it will be.

10.6.20

I am afraid that Donald Trump will remain President of the United States, either through re-election on November 3rd or a coup.

10.7.20

Whether or not Trump remains President, I'm anxious about the general state of this country, which remains in denial about many of its deepest, most systemic cruelties.

10.8.20

Is it repression or self-care — or a bit of both — that I've not yet followed any of the horse race journalism about this year's Presidential election?

10.9.20

That I've avoided social media since long before Trump's Presidency?

10.10.20

Not all self-care is repressive in nature but all repression imagines itself to be self-care at one or another point in its life cycle.

10.11.20

In the past several weeks, as I've tried to avoid closely following the news: Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg passed away and Amy Coney Barrett was hastily nominated as her replacement; the Department of Justice declared New York City, Seattle, and Portland to be "anarchist jurisdictions"; the sitting US President refused to commit to a peaceful transition of power should he lose next month's election.

10.12.20

Since returning home to Manhattan in August, my main form of in-person socialization has been with other parents at our children's thrice-weekly soccer practices and games.

10.13.20

When the conversation turns to politics, many parents express surprise at the news cycle's latest plot twists, Trump's procession of misdeeds.

10.14.20

You can spot the intellectuals in the group because we are quick to point out that none of what's happening is, regrettably, all that surprising.

10.15.20

The pearl-clutching sentiment "I had no idea" and the world-weary sentiment "I knew better" are two sides of the same epis-

temological coin: one represses its capacity for guilt, the other its capacity for innocence.

10.16.20

In the us, we call the former disposition “whiteness” and misconstrue it as a matter of skin color or ethnicity when in actuality it refers to a style of guilt attached to the idea of its own innocence, with deadly consequences.

10.17.20

In the us, intellectuals are prone to overcompensating for the country’s endemic anti-intellectualism by not wanting to appear to not-know anything.

10.18.20

Everybody that truly knows better knows that there’s little satisfaction in it.

10.19.20

Everybody that doesn’t know better knows that on some level they actually do, or at least could, if they wanted to.

10.20.20

“I only know that I love strength in my friends / And greatness,” insists Spicer, unsure how to provide the help asked of him, “And hate the way their bodies crack when they die / And are eaten by images” (73).

10.21.20

I don't know why it took me over three years of working on this book to recall only just now that Spicer believed poems were best written from a place of not-knowing.

10.22.20

His cult classic Vancouver lectures, posthumously collected and edited by poet Peter Gizzi as *The House That Jack Built* (1998), lay out a philosophy of composition whereby the poet takes dictation from some unknown Outside.

10.23.20

Spicer metaphorically calls those outside entities “Martians,” to indicate their alienness, and likens the poet to a radio set picking up the Martians’ signals (Gizzi 1998, 8).

10.24.20

In his seminal postcolonial treatise, *The Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant argues that people, especially the colonized, have a “right to opacity” (1997, 189).

10.25.20

For Glissant, opacity is the right to not be completely understood or explained, the right to preserve that part of yourself which remains incommunicable, irreducible, unfamiliar — not just to others but also to oneself.

10.26.20

All repression is a form of not-knowing but not all not-knowing is a form of repression.

10.27.20

I shudder to contemplate the depth and extent of Donald Trump's not-knowing, the degree to which his malevolence is unwitting and the degree to which it's intentional.

10.28.20

At a recent soccer practice, a fellow parent, also a professor, remarked that this youth soccer season has given her a better understanding of what Hannah Arendt meant by the banality of evil.

10.29.20

I love the way Byron Kim's understated *Sunday Paintings* (2001–present) — 14×14-inch squares depicting each Sunday's sky, overlaid with a diaristic handwritten paragraph — contrast our species's ant-like strivings with the heavens' gauzy indifference.

10.30.20

Regardless whether Barack Obama or Donald Trump has been elected President, whether Kim's daughter, Addee, scores a goal or rides the bench in her own youth soccer games, the painted skies appear impervious to the human dramas unfolding beneath them.

10.31.20

Maybe the surprise isn't that quotidian life persists in the face of great harm but that it took a pandemic and a looming constitutional crisis to help some people to grasp, as Black and indigent folks in this country have been saying for centuries, that we've been living in crisis all along.

11.1.20

Maybe the reason I used to play poker depressively is not because it detached me from my feelings but because it allowed me to feel the depth and extent of suffering's mundanity.

11.2.20

If you feel threatened by progressive discourses about race or climate or gender, if you find their latest terminology an irritant or an affront, that's because they are in fact a threat to the status quo and your place within it.

11.3.20

The way things go is you can't always get what you want / but if you try sometimes you just might find / you get what you need.

11.4.20

The electoral vote tally from yesterday's Presidential election remains too close to call, though Trump keeps making the heads-I-win-tails-you-lose claim that he is the victor and, should the outstanding vote counts indicate otherwise, it would be on account of fraud.

11.5.20

The way things go is the more things change, the more they stay the same.

11.6.20

The problem with the horse race news coverage metaphor, which rose to prominence at the same time as big data election forecasting, is that it centers political narratives around the

spectacular rather than the ordinary, elections rather than governance.

11.7.20

A horse race has the built-in drama of a defined endpoint whereas politics is ongoing and unglamorous.

11.8.20

Today the networks declared Joe Biden the President-elect of the United States and uptown Manhattan streets erupted in spontaneous joy: truly spectacular news, for a change.

11.9.20

When the news broke yesterday, Ethan's soccer team was playing a game at Frederick Douglass field, on 102nd Street and Amsterdam Avenue—it took the players and the spectators several moments to process why the neighborhood suddenly began to honk.

11.10.20

Out for pizza after the game, gathered around plastic tables on the city sidewalk, the kids on the team squealed like spring breakers whenever passing cars or pedestrians whooped and cheered.

11.11.20

The mood on the streets that day, equal parts ebullience and relief, was as though a dictator had been not quite toppled, but avoided.

11.12.20

In reality, what's been avoided are only the immediate worst-case scenarios for legal-seeming consolidation of reactionary power.

11.13.20

Which is certainly not nothing.

11.14.20

Still, more work lies ahead than behind, all endings are also beginnings, etc.

11.15.20

Ongoing and unglamorous, like avoiding crowded indoor spaces during a pandemic, or eating less meat and driving and flying less for the climate's sake.

11.16.20

Many people today look back with overly assured condescension on chattel slavery and Jim Crow-era segregation, but I have a feeling many of our normative turn-of-the-century behaviors will look head-scratchingly unethical to future generations.

11.17.20

The way things go is every era, even its supposedly more enlightened elements, remains a bit blind to its own barbarism.

11.18.20

Yesterday I received word, backchannel, that I've been awarded tenure.

11.19.20

Upon receiving the news, I felt the same sense of relief, as opposed to pride or joy, as when I was offered my first book contract, almost ten years ago.

11.20.20

Psychologists say that avoidance of personal harm often motivates human behavior more than the satisfaction of success, what poker players and other competitive gamers pejoratively describe as “playing not to lose” rather than “playing to win.”

PLAYER EVALUATION

Red Bulls	(1) – Below team expectations
Youth Programs	(2) – Meets team expectations
	(3) – Exceeds team expectations

PLAYER NAME: Ethan Bury

TEAM: Boys 2011 Gold

COACH NAME: Jose

INDIVIDUAL POSSESSION

Ball Mastery (running with the ball, dribbling, turning, and shielding the ball)	3
Attacking 1v1 (ability to manipulate body/ball to beat a defender)	3

GROUP POSSESSION

Receiving (first touch, ability with both feet and multiple surfaces)	3
Decision-making with the ball (when, where, why to pass, dribble, or shoot)	3
Decision-making without the ball (movement off the ball to support possession)	3

PASSING AND FINISHING

Short-distance passing (inside/outside of the foot)	3
Longer-distance passing (driven pass, lofted pass, crossing, etc)	3
Short-distance finishing (inside/outside of the foot)	3
Longer-distance finishing (driven, high/low curl, volley, etc)	2
Overall passing/finishing ability with non-preferred foot	3

Technique selection (power vs precision) 3

DEFENDING

Mentality (willingness/ability to win tackles, challenging for 50/50 balls) 3

Defending as 1st defender (pursuing the ball, pressuring, tackle vs contain, etc) 2

Defending as 2nd or 3rd defender (positional discipline, cover, balance, etc) 2

GAME AWARENESS

Understanding positional roles (maintaining position, executing responsibilities) 3

Reaction to transition moments (actions when team wins or loses the ball) 3

Reading the game (anticipation of the play, recognizing cues) 3

Communication with teammates (verbal and physical) 2

PHYSICAL

Endurance and stamina 2

Speed, agility, and quickness 2

Strength and balance 2

PSYCHOLOGICAL

Team attitude (positive interactions with teammates and coaches) 3

Committed to improving and open to learning (growth mindset, focus) 3

Ability to deal with adversity (i.e., losses, not playing desired position) 3

ATTENDANCE

Practice attendance 12/13

Game attendance 8/8

Specific areas that need improvement

- Communication with the team, Ethan is a strong player and has a lot of good ideas. If he is able to express himself verbally, his teammates could see his genius.
- Confidence — Ethan is naturally quiet and may be a bit shy, but when he shows his creativity and talents you can see an athlete that flourishes. His confidence can come from his creative and athletic abilities.

Areas of strength

- Ethan is very talented with both feet, he's accurate and can place his shots on goal.
- Ethan has great vision and creativity, he can see space in the tightest of spaces which shows his ability to problem solve.
- The passes Ethan serves are incredibly advanced and can place passes in tight spaces
- Ethan expresses himself artistically when he has the ball at his feet.

Additional Resources

Below are links to some very important information for you and your child. We would encourage your child to watch the skills videos and practice in the period between seasons:

- Red Bull New York Skills videos
- Red Bull Youth Programs Red Print
- Match Day Experience

1,035. I remember joining a youth soccer team at the relatively late age of eleven or twelve.

1,034. I remember my friend Kevin encouraged me to play but that otherwise soccer wasn't part of my cultural landscape.

1,033. I remember, at school and in my neighborhood, I would play baseball, softball, dodgeball, basketball, American football, hockey, tag, kickball, table tennis: any sport other than soccer, basically.

1,032. I remember soccer games in the early 1990s US were only broadcast on foreign language television channels.

1,031. I remember the United States Soccer Federation's (USSF) zeal to expand soccer's grassroots reach, make it more mainstream, when the US hosted the 1994 World Cup.

1,030. I remember my father becoming a fan of what were then the major US team sports leagues (MLB, NBA, NFL, NHL) because my friends and I were fans, rather than the other, more typical pattern of the son following the father's interests.

1,029. I remember my sudden interest in soccer wasn't motivated by my father but that his love for the sport seemed a perk.

1,028. I remember my father would participate in the informal, parent-child kick-arounds after my soccer team's practices.

1,027. I remember how out of character it was for him to join a group activity.

1,026. I remember not yet knowing the hallmarks of soccer competence but intuiting from my father's movements that he was fluent in the game in a way the US-born fathers weren't.

1,025. I remember my father's fondness for the trivela, an outside of the foot sliced pass or shot that's considered incorrect technique by coaches but whose awkward charm fans adore.

1,024. I remember his right leg's exaggerated slicing motion whenever he hit a trivela, how youthful it made him appear, as if he were still a boy in rural Poland showing off for his friends.

1,023. I remember the rumor among kids on the team that my father had played soccer for the Polish national team.

1,022. I remember wondering, for a brief moment, if he had in fact played for the Polish national team and somehow never mentioned it.

1,021. I remember, in that moment, my father's past seeming as vast and inscrutable as outer space.

1,020. I remember the artist Ronny Quevedo telling me, in an interview, that his childhood experiences of soccer as an Ecuadorian immigrant to Queens, NY impressed on him "the political implications of making space for oneself" (2019).

1,019. I remember how he described "the well-organized enclave of South American and Central American amateur soccer leagues" for which his father, a former professional soccer player, served as referee for over two decades: "*Noticias del Mundo*, a local newspaper, reported on the games," and "spectators paid entry fees to watch the games and could buy Ecuadorian dishes like muchines, empanadas, and fritada" (2019).

1,018. I remember Quevedo explaining how "the entire enterprise existed on the margins of mainstream culture" (2019) and

contrasting the history he sketched with my own experiences of the sport growing up at the same time and place (we're both born in 1981 and raised in New York City).

1,017. I remember the lone food truck decamped at Staten Island's Miller Field, the grassy, three-acre military facility turned public park, where hundreds of youth soccer games were played each weekend.

1,016. I remember the oiliness of the so-called "dirty water" hot dogs and the doughiness of the white bread buns that held them.

1,015. I remember the sense of independence I would feel, age fourteen, buying those hot dogs for lunch while working a five- or six-hour shift refereeing youth soccer games.

1,014. I remember that refereeing money was good for a teenager in the mid-'90s (~\$15/game, tax free) but that the work could be stressful.

1,013. I remember the fistfight that broke out between two opposing parent coaches at the conclusion of the third game I ever refereed.

1,012. I remember the coaches yelling at each other as their teams lined up at midfield to shake hands, then charging at each other to fight, scattering the children.

1,011. I remember the ensuing pandemonium and the half dozen other referees, working on nearby fields, who had to run over to break up the fight.

1,010. I remember that for the next year I only refereed the youngest age group (the under-six division) because their games were so casual they didn't even keep score.

1,009. I remember, as Ethan began to play on increasingly competitive soccer teams, my disappointment in parents who admonished the referee.

1,008. I remember the irony, in an all-volunteer league notionally dedicated to values of sportsmanship, that one yelling parent was himself a head referee in the league.

1,007. I remember Ethan's reluctance to join any organized sports league, the way he refused to join even the casual parent-child soccer game that his kindergarten friends used to play weekly in the park.

1,006. I remember recognizing, as Ethan and I enthusiastically watched the 2018 World Cup together, that the time was right to nudge him outside his comfort zone and have him join a team.

1,005. I remember Ethan's team didn't win a single game that first season, so, as the coach, I would award fake-gold soccer ball pins to three players after each game, to keep spirits up.

1,004. I remember how beloved those pins were by both the players and their parents.

1,003. I remember how proud I felt when I texted a committed bachelor friend, Matt, pics of me running a youth soccer practice and he responded, with uncharacteristic sweetness, "I'm so pleased by your commitment."

1,002. I remember, as I learned about youth sports from a parent's and a coach's perspective, being surprised how much of the enterprise is about fostering the children's psychosocial development and even, I daresay, the parents'.

1,001. I remember the parent (Jordan Cila, a former professional soccer player and us Men's Youth National Team star, whose family we knew through the local JCC) who approached Ethan

after a New York Red Bulls (RBNY) soccer clinic to boost his confidence by letting Ethan know he was more talented than Ethan realized.

1,000. I remember learning about the RBNY youth development pyramid (designed to funnel players, selectively, from youth recreational leagues to the full professional team) and grasping how much the USSF's vision for the sport had been realized in the decades since my own childhood.

999. I remember noticing how culturally pervasive soccer was among Ethan's elementary school cohort: kids wore soccer kits to school, played soccer on the playground and in video games, watched soccer highlight reels on YouTube.

998. I remember chatting with Jordan during subsequent weeks of that RBNY clinic and being amazed at his soccer acuity, the way he picked up on subtleties that transformed my comprehension of what we were watching.

997. I remember the sheer, unanalytic joy I felt from the first time I ever watched Ethan play soccer, the joy of watching him grow into expressive knowledge of his body, himself.

996. I remember the impromptu "dance parties" Ethan and I would have when he was younger, where we'd crank upbeat music and fling ourselves around the living room like invincible video game characters.

995. I remember finally understanding my father's hushed presence at my own athletic events, from my earliest Little League games to when I ran a marathon as an adult, as his way of bearing awed witness to the passage of human time.

994. I remember playing soccer in the park with Ethan and my father and being impressed at how nimble my dad was for someone in his early seventies.

993. I remember sitting with a group of Hostos colleagues, not long before the pandemic, and talking animatedly about a difficult parent from the youth soccer team I was coaching.

992. I remember a demanding senior colleague blurted out, half-amused and half-incredulous, “I just realized you care more about youth soccer than you do your job!”

991. I remember not quite knowing how to explain, in that moment, the implications of making space for oneself.

Manhattan, NY
pandemic diary #6

1.7.21

Yesterday there was an attempted dissident coup at the us Capitol and this morning I'm writing as usual. I don't have much appetite for work right now but I do have the muscle memory. It's 9am on a weekday morning so the thing that my body does is sit at a desk and write.

1.8.21

I keep thinking about my grandmother on the morning of September 11th. The way she said "This is nothing" somehow makes more sense to me today. I feel surprisingly focused and calm. It's a good calm, not a forced one, the kind that springs from reserves of wisdom and strength. I've been practicing for this, whatever this might be, without quite knowing it. Leading with my body and letting the rest follow from that.

1.9.21

Then again, the dissidents led with their bodies, too. The journalistic imagery circulating in the insurrection's aftermath emphasizes the jarring sight of sacrosanct neoclassic architecture overrun by throngs of protestors. It's not the crowds' sizes that are disconcerting (their numbers thin out surprisingly soon in the more panoramic images) but their symbolism. The Capitol appears literally and figuratively violated by all the people swarmed in and around it.

1.10.21

The question, I suppose, is toward what direction you orient your body and why. Numerous insurrectionists signaled their intent through militia gear and insignias but it was the so-called QAnon Shaman, later identified as Jacob Chansley, who cut the most idiosyncratic figure. The shirtless conspiracist had a lean, tattooed torso and wore red, white, and blue war paint on his face, as well as a fur hat with horns jutting out from the sides. In one of the day's more memorable images, a police officer confronts several of the dissidents inside the Capitol Building, gilt-framed portraits of former US Presidents in the background, as Chansley — head tilted back, eyes closed, mouth open, hand balled into a fist — lets out a primal howl. In both attire and behavior, he looks as though he belongs to a separate world.

1.11.21

Calling the insurrection a “cosplay coup,” as many in the media and on the left have done, is both more accurate and more wrong-headed than the clever-seeming put-down imagines. “Cosplay” implies that the dissidents were engaged in a form of make-believe, detached from reality and never all that likely to succeed in overturning the election result. But the metaphor trivializes the fundamental danger of any coup attempt, even if it has a low probability of success. “Make believe” makes the attempt sound harmless, mere child's play, but for at least a generation make-believe has been the predominant form and content of this country's right wing politics — from climate denialism, to the war on terror, to false claims of election fraud — with devastating effect. Republican make-believe provides a veneer of plausible deniability (“Lighten up, we don't actually mean what we're saying!”) even as it exerts a baleful influence on policy and public opinion, on the way things actually go.

1.14.21

Convincing myself that a coup attempt is nothing, at least in terms of my capacity to focus, is also a form of make-believe, a way to minimize the existence of a threatening or unpleasant reality. Just because you remain personally unharmed this time doesn't mean you'll be okay the next time or the ones after that.

1.15.21

There are two types of repression: self-protective and other-harming. The problem is the former can easily become the latter, such as the colleague who witnesses sexual harassment but doesn't report it for fear of sticking their own neck out, while the latter often pretends, with faux self-righteousness, to be the former, such as the pastor who vilifies gay marriage on the belief that it erodes the sanctity of marriage.

1.16.21

The thing I've perhaps not made clear enough in this book is that this complex of feelings (repression; denial; make-believe; minimization) constitutes the predominant ways in which recent Western culture has chosen to process climate change. Climate change is a crisis that, by its very nature, we don't yet experience as a crisis. On account of the pandemic, I've been writing these diary entries from the desk in Ethan's bedroom, the only desk in our Manhattan apartment, rather than at my office desk or my neighborhood coffee shop, and yet this adjustment to my routine still doesn't allow me to feel, viscerally, that I live in crisis the way a fish does in water.

1.17.21

Benjamin Kunkel, "Inventing Climate-Change Literature": "So it is that a crisis at the center of our collective life exists for us at the margins of individual consciousness, as a whisper of dread

or a rustle of personal implication. The main event of contemporary civilization is never, on any given day, the main event” (2014).

1.18.21

Georges Perec, *The Infra-Ordinary*: “What speaks to us is always the big event, the untoward, the extra-ordinary: the front page splash, the banner headlines. [...] as if life reveals itself only by way of the spectacular, as if what speaks, what is significant, is always abnormal: natural cataclysms or social upheavals, social unrest, political scandals. [...] What’s really going on, what we’re experiencing, the rest, all the rest, where is it? How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?” (1999, 209).

1.19.21

Ed Yong, “The Pandemic’s Trauma Won’t Just Go Away”: “A sweeping and continuous crisis produces two almost-paradoxical phenomena. First, people become inured and apathetic to suffering at a mass scale, [...] But people also become sensitized to further traumas in their own life” (2021).

1.21.21

It’s snowing outside—or it isn’t. Ethan has soccer practice today—or he doesn’t. I go down the rabbit hole of reading the news—or I don’t. My parents are calling—or they aren’t. My students are emailing me, publicists are pitching me, I’m pitching an editor. I’m playing cards on the computer, or getting out for a walk, or talking with other soccer parents, or cuddling with Shari, or writing a review, or slogging through a Zoom meeting, or texting friends and colleagues to make the Zoom meeting more tolerable, or planning and dreaming of the day when

my needs and desires are in harmony with the world's demands. These quotidian happenings are at once nothing and everything, noise and signal, the way things go and the way things don't. They're the one aspect of crisis in which I'm a true expert, and it's a form of knowledge as blind as it is mute.

Ecofeminisms
 The Feminist Art Project at College Art Association
 Conference (online)
 Tatiana Flores, Convener
 Ana María Reyes and Laura Anderson Barabata,
 Symposium Chairs
 2.12.21–2.13.21

Day 1

Alicia Grullón, CUNY and School of Visual Arts, “Notes from
 an Artist: From Climate Change to Pandemic in the Bronx”

Say Her Name: The Rule Is Love (2018): a performance that meditates on what propels people to act when another person is in trouble

Black and Indigenous relational ecologies do not accord final moral value to nature or the environment

reorganize us society so that self-development of the people can take precedence over economic expansion and overconsumption

Monika Fabijanska, Independent Art Historian and Curator,
 “The Evolution of Ecofeminism(s)”

1960s/70s ecofeminism: abuse of women, nature, and native people is grounded in patriarchal philosophy and religion

opposition to painting and incorporation of natural materials in the work, opposition to monumentalism and the finished masterpiece

abandonment of traditional art spaces, incorporation of performance rituals, focus on care rather than marking or changing the environment

Anuradha Vikram, University of California, Los Angeles, “Feminism Beyond Humanism: Artists Bridging Gender and Ecology in the Chthulucene”

Donna Haraway, “Chthulucene” instead of “Anthropocene”: humans aren’t that important on the planet

Georges Canguilhem, *Knowledge of Life*: rocks are distant from the anthropomorphic, humans can’t impose our affective character onto them

how might art that expands our acoustic senses foster appreciation for the diverse communication patterns beyond human language?

micha cárdenas, University of California, Santa Cruz, “The Poetics of Trans Ecologies”

Gilles Deleuze: not what is a body but what can a body do

Cedric Robinson: plantationocene, racial capitalism

José Muñoz: “brown commons,” against atomized individualism

model of trans healing that goes beyond the human: must deal with the history of Black people being deemed less than human

Elizabeth DeLoughrey (keynote), University of California, Los Angeles, “(Blue) Ocean Being: Caribbean Arts and Embodiment”

Kamau Braithwaite: “submerged mothers” of African diasporic history, “amniotic logic” of the metaphor of the maternal sea, bodily unconscious

Q&A

Deborah Jack: sites of trauma can also be sites of healing

Anuradha Vikram: How do we share this body of knowledge scholar-to-scholar?

Elizabeth DeLoughrey: importance of local, specific knowledge — it’s okay if the knowledge doesn’t go everywhere

Alicia Grullón: all the ideas are there but we don’t have the luxury of time

Day Two

Nicole Awai, University of Texas at Austin, “Oozing Between: Transgressive Material Realities”

Caribbean space treated as a renewable resource for the Americas

ooze: an object that resists its object-ness, the permeating irrepressible unrelenting accumulation of our present psychological, political, and physical reality

Lilian Garcia-Roig, Florida State University, “Cumulative Nature: Sight on Site”

aesthetic of immersion and entanglement: Édouard Glissant

- plein air, wet-on-wet painting: let accidents happen in the field
- dense woods have ambiguous figure-ground relations
- exhibit non-contiguous paintings as though contiguous

María Elena González, San Francisco Art Institute, “The Power of a Simple Gesture – Tree Talk”

with this pandemic pause we’re living through, less might be more

listening, just listening, not thinking of what it’s going to be, not decoding what it might be saying

Deborah Jack, New Jersey City University, “Intertidal Imaginaries: The Resistant Geographies of the Shore (coast) in the Aftermath of Saltwater (storm surges)”

nature creates her own memorials, unfixed and alive — disaster economics create political control

Rossby whistle: frequency generated when cold Atlantic water travels westward

Black Atlantic: all these bodies that perished in the middle passage make a hum that’s inaudible to human ears but can be picked up by satellites in outer space

Jolene Rickard, Cornell University, “Indigenous Gendered Power Structures and Feminism”

structure of indigenous ceremony reminds us to carry teachings forward and continue to build relationships with other-than-human beings

Macarena Gómez-Barris, Pratt Institute, “Edging Closer:
Beyond the Colonial Anthropocene”

Zakiyyah Jackson: Western ontology organizes biomatter into racialized hierarchies

art that belongs to the realm of collective political struggle rather than the market — how to dissolve all that stands between us without feeding the extractive machine?

Cecilia Vicuña (closing keynote), Independent Artist, “An
Ancient Silence Waiting to be Heard”

the belief that humans are aware but everything else isn't aware is a form of philosophical and linguistic violence

we reverse that violence by entering into the potential hidden inside the words themselves as they have been traveling across time and been used, misused, abused, reborn, and dead, for generations and generations

Art That Goes With the Floe

Works by ten artists have been installed on an ice floe in arctic Sweden where they will remain until the ice melts and they sink into the sea.

by Louis Bury

In his essay accompanying apexart's current online exhibition, *Goodbye, World*, curator Raimar Stange wonders, "What options do the visual arts have in the face of the climate catastrophe?" He responds with several platitudes about art's capacity to raise consciousness. But the exhibition's valedictory conceit proposes a more original, if less comforting, answer. Stange and his co-curator, Andreas Templin, have gathered ten artworks, by ten artists, and installed them on an ice floe in arctic Sweden, where the works will remain until the floe melts and they sink into the ocean with it.

While its spirit of withdrawal is promising in ways I'll discuss, the conceit as realized is ineffectual and melodramatic. Similar to Olafur Eliasson's *Ice Watch* installations—grandiose arrangements of melting iceberg chunks intended to prick our species's climate conscience but that instead evinced climate fatalism—*Goodbye, World* fixates on the idle symbolism of its farewell gestures. Both place too much faith in the efficacy of artistic consciousness raising, while at the same time reducing consciousness raising to an exercise in confronting audiences with symbols of what they already know.

Take, for example, Nika Fontaine's *Bread of Shame* (2020). The installation embeds tragicomic looking skull sculptures, fabri-

cated out of bread, in a charcoal-dusted snow mound. In video footage of a ritual performed during the installation, Templin reads a fire-and-brimstone artist-authored invocation — “I welcome [the earth’s] wrath as an act of self-care and preservation. One more swing of the eternal pendulum of life and death” — then pours wine over the blackened, skull-studded mound. Jonathan Monk’s *The Tragic Tale Of* (2020) is less theatrical but equally flat-footed. On a tombstone-shaped wooden board, the artist has spray-painted the stenciled words “OCEAN WAVE,” in reference to the eponymous sailboat that artist Bas Jan Ader rode on his ill-fated final voyage in 1975.

The show’s more successful symbols have greater nuance. The mannered formality of the place setting in Olaf Nicolai’s *Picknick, égoïste* (2020), for instance, appears knowingly absurd given the desolate arctic environs. Stefanie von Schroeter’s multicolored painted animal bone, *Großer Knochen (animal bone)* (2012), is a compelling blend of the primal and the artificial. Eliana Otta’s wraith-like *Vicarious Fragile Pilgrims* (2020) alludes to the annual Peruvian Quyllurit’i, or “bright white snow,” pilgrimage. Otta’s makeshift structure consists of three white paper streamers hanging from a rectangular gateway made out of tree branches. The installation, a portal to nowhere, loosely recalls the form of the draped orange gates that comprised Christo’s and Jeanne-Claude’s notorious 2005 project *The Gates*, minus the latter’s sturdiness and self-assured pomp.

But it’s the exhibition’s farewell premise, more so than the intricacies of any particular artwork, that raises the most interesting questions. The decision to install an art exhibition on an ice floe is an act of withdrawal on several different levels: geographical, commercial, ontological. As a one-off symbolic gesture, such withdrawal is mildly clever and mostly obvious. As an eco-minded ethos, however, it has considerable potential.

What might it look like for artists and curators to pull back from capitalist expectations of production on environmentalist

grounds? What artistic possibilities exist for eco-minded withdrawal that aren't fatalistic? What forms — aesthetic, interpersonal, institutional — could make such withdrawal viable as an ongoing practice rather than an isolated gesture? What would be a meaningful yet realistic scope for such practices? Admittedly, these are challenging, often counterintuitive questions, whose potential answers can conflict with artists' and curators' basic need to earn a living. But if your artistic response to the climate crisis is going to be impractical anyway — and it doesn't get much less practical than installing an art exhibition on an arctic ice floe — half-measures make little sense.

Templin intuits as much in the conclusion to his own curatorial essay. To make the case for “radical hope,” he quotes gadfly philosopher Slavoj Žižek's answer to an interviewer's question about hope in the post-Covid world. “One can hope,” Žižek contends, “but in a paradoxical way! I advocate a courage of hopelessness. If we want to hope, then we should accept that our old life is over. We should invent a new normal.” That sense of necessary invention, that search for alternatives to extant, failing structures, is precisely what's missing from *Goodbye, World*. Individual artists and curators may not always have their hands on the levers of institutional power. But what's vital to anybody in the arts concerned with climate change is finding ways to imagine what world might come after the present one.

Goodbye, World, curated by Andreas Templin and Raimar Stange, continues online at apexart until March 13th.

Red Bulls RDS

Regional Development Schools

PLAYER EVALUATION

ETHAN BURY

Winter Season 1 / Carlstadt, NJ / Justin

TECHNICAL	Good job using different areas of the foot to dribble and great use of your body to unbalance defenders. Focus now on improving technique with your nondominant foot.
TACTICAL	You show good awareness of when to check into open lanes as your team mates look for a pass. Make sure you constantly scan your shoulders as you get into these gaps.
PHYSICAL	Very good use of your body when shielding the ball. Make sure you use your body to “close the door” once your dribble takes you past a defender.
PSYCHOLOGICAL	You have a great work ethic and a consistent positive attitude that allows you to improve your abilities at all sessions.
SOCIAL	Very respectful to your coaches and teammates and a pleasure to work with and coach. Try to be a bit more demanding on the field.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Ethan try to improve your speed of play when dribbling at defenders. Make sure to recognize when the better option becomes available and be willing to get the ball out of your feet quickly. Try to focus on getting forward as fast as possible, taking bigger touches if the moment allows. Whenever the opportunity to have a shot on net arises, remember to stay composed

and keep your ankle locked as you strike the ball. Trust both your feet whenever you have opportunities in the final third.

GREATEST STRENGTH

Ethan you did a great job working hard to get into open spaces when looking for the ball. Your constant movement allows your team to create gaps within the midfield. Continue to be creative with your runs off the ball, mixing up the types of runs in order to keep the defenders guessing. Keep up the habit of having your head on a swivel at all times so you can always be a step ahead of the defender with your quick decision making on the ball.

NEXT STEPS

Ethan try to continue participating in RDS clinics and camps. Your attitude on the field will help you excel if you always give 100% of your effort at all sessions.

Red Bulls RDS

Regional Development Schools

PLAYER EVALUATION

ETHAN BURY

Winter Season 2 / Carlstadt, NJ / Justin

TECHNICAL	You are able to receive the ball comfortably and maintain control in different areas of the field. You do a good job of using different techniques when distributing the ball.
TACTICAL	Showed a good understanding on when to open up with your first touch and drive forward vs when to maintain possession and drop the ball back to your support.
PHYSICAL	Good use of your body when shielding the ball and making tackles. Focus on improving your urgency to use your speed and strength to win the ball back once it is lost.
PSYCHOLOGICAL	You showed confidence when in 1v1 situations, even at times when you make mistakes — This is an excellent mentality to

have in order to maximize your potential as a player.

SOCIAL

Good competitive spirit and great attitude at sessions. A pleasure to coach and work.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE

Ethan continue to improve the timing of your runs and your off-ball movement prior to getting on the ball. Focus on dragging your defender away from the space you would like to receive the ball in and then think about how you can use the various parts of your body to unbalance the defender, before sprinting away into those dangerous gaps where you would receive the ball in. If you are able to successfully create space from your defender before getting the ball, you will have more time and space to work with once you receive the ball from a teammate. Remember to keep scanning your shoulders as you check in to get the ball as well.

GREATEST STRENGTH

Ethan you had excellent moments receiving the ball and finding teammates going forward. Your composure on the ball relieves pressure for your team. If you have space in front of you, continue to be aggressive and drive through it in order to pull defenders in and open up dangerous runs for your teammates. You also showed good creativity and urgency to exploit numbers up situations (2v1, 3v1, etc). Keep up the good work and make sure to always give 100% of your effort at all training sessions and games, this will take you to the next level. You were a pleasure to coach, keep it up and best of luck next season.

NEXT STEPS

Keep working hard on your own and challenge yourself every day to be a better player. Make sure to incorporate both feet at all sessions in order to take your game to the next level.

Sever's

On the phone with my parents, I describe Ethan's visit to the pediatric orthopedist for Sever's disease.

I explain that Sever's isn't actually a disease but a repetitive use injury, not uncommon in active preadolescent children.

The growth plate in the child's heel becomes inflamed and tender—a bruise that can't be seen—from high volumes of running and jumping.

Sever's improves with rest and self-resolves for good, with no lasting effects, as the child enters puberty, the growth plate hardens, and the growing bones fuse together.

My father interrupts to tell me, as though I didn't know, that when Emily was diagnosed with lupus she was told that her life expectancy was thirty.

socky sock

For years, Ethan and I have been playing a couple minutes of socky sock most nights, using our living room as the field and the love seat as the goal.

Even when not playing together, Ethan had developed the habit of dancing around the living room with a ball at his feet before school each morning, after dinner each evening, and right before bed.

To help us remain active during the pandemic winter in a small Manhattan apartment, I put down masking tape on the living room rug in the shape of an agility ladder.

Using the makeshift ladder, a soccer ball, and a couple cones, we invented various workouts together, a way of making space for ourselves while cooped up in the cold.

As Ethan has rested on the couch in recent weeks, icing his sore heels, the living room has felt discordantly still, almost empty.

the main event

I received the first dose of the Moderna Covid vaccine in January and the second dose in February.

I receive *The Times's* "Climate Fwd" and *The Guardian's* "Green Light" climate email digests each week in my inbox.

I receive most of the news I read through social media, even though I haven't posted content to any of my own accounts in five or six years and was never active to begin with.

I receive medical information from the Internet as much as I do from doctors.

I receive more satisfaction from doing things (bicycling, writing, visiting a museum) than from things being done unto me.

Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss (SSNHL)

The week of my fortieth birthday, I woke up one morning and Shari's and Ethan's voices sounded like mechanical flies buzzing in my right ear.

Within a few minutes, that ear developed a ringing drone that I would learn was tinnitus.

I visited my otolaryngologist the next day, figuring I was overdue to have my ears cleaned, and left with a diagnosis of SSNHL and a prescription for prednisone, a corticosteroid my mom and sister have been prescribed countless times for lupus symptoms.

At the follow-up visit the next week, my hearing unimproved, the doctor prescribed me a dozen different blood tests and a brain MRI to rule out potential causes such as Lyme disease, lupus, or a tumor.

One thing a body can do is find creative ways to signal that something's not right with it.

bargaining phase

The feeling of playing whack-a-mole with everything.

I was more productive but to what end.

Which habits will I carry forward and which ones will I let go.

I can live with tinnitus so long as it's not caused by a tumor.

This book's throughline is not illness or family or climate but the simple passage of time.

avoidance of harm

My mom, recently, on the phone: "I think I cried every day for nine months when Emily was diagnosed with lupus."

Ethan, when asked how he was able to play soccer with heel pain throughout the winter: "I didn't know what it was then."

In an Ipsos/Axios poll conducted shortly after the January 6 insurrection, 79% of Americans said that the country is "falling apart" (Allen 2021).

In a recently published Pew Research poll, 67% of Americans said the federal government is doing too little to reduce the effects of global climate change (Tyson and Kennedy 2020).

Ethan, recently, to Shari: “Promise me you and Daddy will never die.”

ambiguous loss

- Ambiguous loss is loss that occurs without closure or understanding
- Two types:
 - There is a physical presence but a psychological absence
 - There is a physical absence but a psychological (emotional) presence
- Complicates and delays the process of grieving
- Often results in unresolved grief, frozen, living in limbo

the rule is love

Sitting in a waiting room feels like being both the dog and the owner holding its leash.

Reading the news feels like having an out of body experience with someone else’s body.

Reading poetry feels like waking up, disoriented, from a nap.

Looking at art feels like visiting an empty tomb erected in honor of a person or group of people whose remains are elsewhere.

Better to have loved and lost, etc.

39-36

Enzo Clinical Labs
60 Executive Boulevard
Farmingdale, NY 11735

SPECIMEN INFORMATION

Specimen: M7022397
Collected: 3/26/202115:41
Received: 3/26/202123:38
Reported: 3/30/202116:10
Reprinted: 3/30/202116:10

PATIENT INFORMATION

Bury, Louis
DOB: 3/81
Age: 40
Gender: Male
Fasting: N

ORDERING PHYSICIAN

Rao, Birju

CLIENT INFORMATION

Westside Family Medicine
535 West 110th St, Ste 1E
New York, NY 10025

Test Name IN Range OUT Range Reference Range

ABNORMAL SUMMARY

BUN/Creatinine Ratio

Urea Nitrogen 23 H 6-20 mg/dL

HOW HAS OUR THINKING ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS CHANGED? – PODCAST

<u>Test Name</u>	<u>IN Range</u>	<u>OUT Range</u>	<u>Reference Range</u>
Complete Blood Count			
Platelets		148 L	150–450 $10^3/\mu\text{L}$

PLEASE NOTE: The abnormal summary is supplied as a tool for identifying abnormal results. All results must still be reviewed as some abnormal results will not be included due to their interpretive or textual nature.

TSH	1.44		0.27–4.20 uIU/mL
Thyroxine, Free (FT4)	1.39		0.8–1.7 ng/dL
Sed Rate (ESR)	9		0–15 mm/hr
BUN/Creatinine Ratio			
Urea Nitrogen		23 H	6–20 mg/dL
Creatinine	1.23		0.70–1.30 mg/dL
BUN/Creatinine Ratio	18.7		10:1–20:1 Ratio
eGFR (MDRD)			
eGFR	65		≥ 60 mL/min/ 1.73m^2
eGFR (Afr. Amer.)	78		≥ 60 mL/min/ 1.73m^2
Complete Blood Count			
WBC	6.5		3.8–10.5 $10^3/\mu\text{L}$
RBC	4.71		4.2–5.8 $10^6/\mu\text{L}$
Hemoglobin	15.0		13.5–17.5 g/dL
Hematocrit	42.4		38.8–50.0 Percent
MCV	90.0		82–100 fL
MCH	31.8		26–34 pg
MCHC	35.4		32–36 g/dL
RDW	12.9		11.8–15.6 Percent

<u>Test Name</u>	<u>IN Range</u>	<u>OUT Range</u>	<u>Reference Range</u>
Platelets		148 L	150–450 $10^3/\mu\text{L}$
MPV	11.2		7–13 fL
Neutrophils	59.4		43–77 Percent
Lymphocytes	30.7		15–46 Percent
Monocytes	7.9		2–14 Percent
Eosinophils	0.8		0–6 Percent
Basophils	0.9		0–2 Percent
Immature Granulocytes	0.3		≤ 1 Percent
Neutrophils, Absolute	3830		1650–8500 $10^3/\mu\text{L}$
Lymphocytes, Absolute	1980		1000–3850 $10^3/\mu\text{L}$
Monocytes, Absolute	510		30–850 $10^3/\mu\text{L}$
Eosinophils, Absolute	50		0–600 $10^3/\mu\text{L}$
Basophils, Absolute	60		0–120 $10^3/\mu\text{L}$
Immature Granulocytes, Absolute	20		< 91 $10^3/\mu\text{L}$
NRBC%	0.0		0.0–0.7 /100WBC
NRBC Count	0.00		Not Established
T ₃ , Total	103		80–200 ng/dL
Urinalysis			
Specific Gravity	1.008		1.003–1.030
Color	Colorless		Straw-Yellow
Appearance	Clear		$<$ Turbid
pH	6.0		4.5–8.0

<u>Test Name</u>	<u>IN Range</u>	<u>OUT Range</u>	<u>Reference Range</u>
Leukocyte Esterase	Negative		<1+(75 Leu/L) Leu/L
Protein	Negative		<1+(30 mg/dL) mg/dL
Glucose	Normal		<1+(70 mg/dL) mg/dL
Ketones	Negative		<1+(10) mg/dL
Bilirubin	Negative		<1+(0.5)
Blood	Negative		<1+(.06 mg/dL)mg/dL
Nitrites	Negative		<1+
Urobilinogen	Normal		<1+(2 mg/dL)
White Blood Cells	0-5		0-5 /hpf
Red Blood Cells	None		0-5 /hpf
Squamous Epithelial Cells	None		None-Few /hpf
Bacteria	None		None-Few /hpf
FTA Ab	PENDING		
Lyme Ab, Total (IgG/TgM)			
Lyme Ab	<0.90		<0.90 OD Ratio
Rheumatoid Factor	<10.0		<14 IU/mL
Anti 68kD (hsp 70) Abs	Negative		Negative

*** END OF REPORT – PARTIAL ***

Westside Family Medicine
535 West 110th Street
Suite 1E
New York, NY 10025-2788
Phone 212-280-474 Fax 212-280-4743

LABORATORY REPORT

SEX	PATIENT DEMOGRAPHICS	DOB	AGE
M	Louis Bury	3/1981	40

RESULTS PROVIDED BY

Quest

SPECIMEN INFORMATION

Specimen ID: CZ566362A

Collection Date: 3/31/2021 12:52:00

Received on: 4/01/2021 09:17:23

Reported on: 4/01/2021 06:19:00

Fasting: No

ORDERING PROVIDER

Birju Rao, PA

NAME	VALUE	NORMAL	FLAG
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LUPUS ANTICOAGULANT EVALUATION WITH REFLEX

- Lupus Anticoagulant	see note		A
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NOTES ON 'LUPUS ANTICOAGULANT':

A Lupus Anticoagulant is detected. Lupus Anticoagulants (LA) may be associated with thrombotic events, recurrent abortion, or may be asymptomatic. A bleeding history requires other coagulopathies be excluded. Since LA may be transient, international consensus guidelines suggest waiting at least 12 weeks before retesting to confirm antibody persistence. (J Thromb Haemost 2006; 4; 295).

NOTE: Direct oral anticoagulant therapy may cause false positive results. This interpretation is based on the following test results:

NAME	VALUE	NORMAL	FLAG
- PTT-LA SCREEN	72	<=40 sec	H
- DRVVT SCREEN	78	<=45 sec	H
- DRVVT MIX INTERPRETATION	Positive		A

NOTES on 'DRVVT MIX INTERPRETATION':
Results are consistent with an inhibitor.

RPR (DX) W/REFL TITER AND CONFIRMATORY TESTING

- RPR (DX) W/REFL TITER AND CONFIRMATORY TESTING
Non-reactive Non-reactive N

HEXAGONAL PHASE CONFIRM

- HEXAGONAL PHASE CONFIRM
Positive Negative A

DRVVT CONFIRM

- DRVVT CONFIRM Positive Negative A

DRVVT 1:1 MIX

- DRVVT 1:1 MIX Not corrected Corrected A

THROMBIN CLOTTING TIME

- THROMBIN CLOTTING TIME
16 13-19 N

BEFORE COVID, GIVING UP FLYING WAS TAKING OFF. WE NEED TO GET THAT MOMENTUM BACK

NY Otolaryngology Group and Facial Plastic Surgery
 at Murray Hill
 36A East 36th Street, Suite 200
 New York, NY 10016
 (212) 889-8575

Patient: BURY, LOUIS

Age/Sex/DOB: 40 yrs M Mar-1981

Results

Lab Accession #: R51857188

Ordering Provider: HORN, CORINNE ELISABETH

Collected: 04/04/2021 4:09:00PM

Resulted: 04/05/2021 1:25:00PM

Performing Location: Lenox Hill Hospital

MR Head w/ IV Cont

<u>Test</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Flag</u>	<u>Reference Range</u>
MR Head w/ IV Cont				

EXAM: MR BRAIN IC

PROCEDURE DATE: 04/04/2021

PROCEDURE: MRI Brain and internal auditory canals with and without contrast

INDICATION: Tinnitus right ear; SNHL hearing loss right ear with restricted hearing of left ear rule out acoustic neuroma

TECHNIQUE: Sagittal T1 and axial T2 and diffusion images of the brain were obtained. Axial and coronal T1 and axial 3-D FIESTA images were obtained through the internal auditory canal. Following the intravenous administration of 7.5 ml of

Gadavist, axial and coronal T1 weighted images of the internal auditory canal and sagittal 3D BRAVO and CUBE FLAIR images were obtained through the brain and reformatted in the axial and coronal planes.

COMPARISON: None

FINDINGS: The MRI examination of the internal auditory canal demonstrates no masses or abnormal enhancement. The T2-weighted images demonstrate normal hyperintense signal within the inner ear structures. However, the postcontrast FLAIR images demonstrates hyperintense signal within the right cochlea especially the basal turn of (series 102 image 56). There is no hyperintense signal on the T1-weighted images to suggest hemorrhagic products. Hence, this may represent proteinaceous fluid and may represent an acute inflammatory process and may represent a potential etiology for the patient's tinnitus. The mastoid air cells are well-aerated.

Evaluation of the brain demonstrates the ventricles, cisternal spaces, and cortical sulci to be appropriate for the patient's stated age. There is no midline shift or extra-axial collection. The FLAIR images demonstrates a single punctate focus of increased signal within the left frontal subcortical white matter (series 102 image 1:30) this is nonspecific.

The diffusion-weighted images demonstrate no acute ischemia. There are no Hemorrhagic products. There is normal vascular flow-voids.

There is scant mucosal thickening within a right ethmoid air cells. The rest of the visualized paranasal sinuses are free of mucosal disease.

IMPRESSION: No IAC masses. Findings suggestive of labyrinthitis involving the right cochlea.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the care of this patient.

BIDYUT PRAMANIK MD; Attending Radiologist

This document has been electronically signed. Apr 5 2021
2:46PM

630. This book has just passed its midpoint, in terms of chapter count.

629. But what constitutes its middle depends on what's being counted and where that count begins.

628. The book's sentence count midpoint, for instance, occurred way back in chapter fifty-one, when I wrote the 1,278th sentence out of 2,556 total.

627. Here's the math: $(71 + 70 + 69 + 68 + \dots + 3 + 2 + 1)/2 = 1,278$, with the one-thousand two-hundred seventy-eighth sentence appearing fourth from last in chapter fifty-one ($71 + 70 + 69 + 68 + \dots + 53 + 52 + 51 = 1,281$).

626. Expressed as an equation: $(\sum_{n=1}^{71} n)/2 \cap \sum_{n=51}^{71} n$

625. This book's emotional middle, on the other hand, might be described the way Jorge Luis Borges describes Blaise Pascal's conception of nature: as an "infinite sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere" (1964, 190).

624. Either that or it might be described as out of sight, out of mind.

623. All these fancy poetic quotes and numbers and lists are like the credits in a double-entry accounting ledger whose debts are coming due.

622. The midpoint of my statistical life expectancy passed several years ago (thirty-five and a half), even though I've only just reached an age (forty) that most people consider middle-aged.

621. The US Census, the American Psychiatric Association, and multiple leading dictionaries define human middle age as taking place between forty-five and sixty-five.

620. In the US, medical advances and heteronormative demographic shifts (older average ages for marriage, childbirth, and home ownership, along with the increased education needed to enter many sectors of the job market) compounds the sense that adult life now begins — and, thus, middles — at more advanced ages than in the past.

619. In fact, even before the pandemic, life expectancy among working age US adults has been in decline after decades of steady increase.

618. The stereotypical midlife crisis, while less common than imagined, on average descends in one's early forties and lasts between two and ten years.

617. When I began writing this book in my mid-thirties, I would joke that I was getting started early on my mid-life crisis because it was my last chance to be precocious.

616. This book isn't about mid-life crisis in the stereotypical sense but in the cosmic, zoomed out sense, that is, as the crises, plural, you find yourself in the midst of by virtue of being alive.

615. Upon checking the ledger, this book's middlemost sentence turns out to be a line item on my cv:

12.10.17 * "The Cultural Work of Play," The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing, NYU (symposium)

614. Maybe the way to say it is that there are multiple middles — multiple intersecting timelines — each skidding toward conclusion at its own tempo.

613. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Climate Crisis

612. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Intergenerational Trauma

611. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of White Supremacy

610. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Late Capitalism

609. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Landfill Remediation

608. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Opioid Crisis

607. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Democratic Backsliding

606. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Declining Life Expectancy

605. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Writing a Book

604. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Pandemic

603. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of the Spring 2021 Semester

602. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Sudden Sensorineural Hearing Loss

601. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Week 12 of the Spring 2021 Semester

600. The Aesthetics and Ethics of Teaching Writing in the Time of Deep Time

599. And so on.

598. Georges Perec once admonished himself, at the end of a list: “Don’t say, don’t write, ‘etc.’ Make an effort to exhaust the subject, even if that seems grotesque, or pointless, or stupid” (1999, 50).

597. But as Perec knew, no subject can be exhausted, in the sense of completed, and “etcetera” can be a kindness to oneself and others.

596. Etcetera.

5.2021-8.2021

In the past year, Ethan and I have spent substantially more time together than typical, and we used to spend a good amount of time together pre-pandemic.

In March 2020, soon after relocating to my in-laws' house, Shari didn't feel well (with what a tele-doctor misdiagnosed as pleurisy, and what was later discovered to be gastroesophageal reflux disease) and stayed isolated for weeks, with Ethan and I only poking our heads in to say hello or bring food or medicine.

When I had free time, and even when I didn't, Ethan and I would go out for daily exercise: bicycling, soccer, or hiking in Staten Island's Greenbelt, a system of contiguous protected woodland that forms the second largest public park in New York City.

My high school track team used to do its cross country training runs in the Greenbelt; twenty-five years later, I still remembered most of the main trails.

Ethan and I dubbed one of our favorite trails the "mud trail": a long, waterlogged dirt path that you had to traverse by tiptoeing across logs and rocks, and even still you couldn't avoid getting your shoes muddy.

When Shari felt better, we took her to the mud trail, whose sloppiness and difficulty Ethan and I had been talking up, only to discover its mud had dried out and the trail now appeared so much like any other that it took us a moment to figure out we were in the correct place.

Much like the mud trail, it's disorienting how certain pandemic hardships have already been assimilated, half-remembered and half-forgotten, back into the indistinct texture of quotidian life.

So many happenings (the field hospital tents in Central Park; the George Floyd protests in 450 cities; the fatigue-clad dissidents who brought zip ties and gallows to the Capitol) feel disconnected from the recent partial returns to business-as-usual.

One former business-as-usual habit I feel clear I can no longer resume is regular air travel.

Pre-pandemic, I'd already been scaling back on the non-essential flights I took, for environmental reasons, and I can see a time in the not-too-distant future when I'll have committed not to travel by plane at all.

Should I go through with this personal resolution, I don't think I'd mind the resultant limitations so much as I'd mind the feeling that the sacrifice, while ethical, would be comically inadequate to the problem's scale.

In other words, I'm reluctant to do what I believe to be the right thing because doing the wrong thing is not just more convenient and pleasurable but also so thoroughly normalized as to appear preposterous to contemplate in earnest.

At the same time that us public life has felt more conflictual, private life during the pandemic has felt more monotonous, both of which forces (social media; social distancing) make it hard to grasp the actual scope of change taking place.

Unfamiliarity can lead to exaggeration (as when non-natives mistakenly believe New York City has become stricken with crime during the pandemic) and overfamiliarity can lead to blind spots (like going on a diet and not being able to see day-to-day differences in the mirror, or raising a child and not realizing how much they've grown).

The exaggerations have an outsized influence on the material conditions of public life (an increased police department budget, say) and the blind spots have an outsized influence on the psychic conditions of private life (an inability for some to see or register the insidious effects of increased policing).

Knowing that you have a blind spot is different from knowing its contents, similar to how knowing your pet is hungry is different from knowing its hunger.

Ethan and I have also played a lot of video games together on his new Nintendo Switch, typically in the evenings.

I remember picking up Ethan on the last day New York City public schools were open for in-person learning, March 13, 2020, telling him I had a surprise for him, and going straight to Best Buy to pick up the Nintendo I'd ordered earlier that day, his first video game console.

As if the Nintendo was a disaster readiness supply, like all the canned goods and toilet paper we'd been stockpiling in boxes.

As if a small stockpile of food and medicine could be anything other than a thin safety blanket in a prolonged crisis.

As if we hadn't already been sleepwalking through the many prolonged crises we were fortunate to be mostly insulated from, such as the US's world-leading per-capita incarceration rates and health care costs, in the years and decades prior.

Whenever possible, I'd set up Zoom or Facetime calls for Ethan and his friends to chat as they played online video games together, that way he could socialize remotely with peers, but it was also fun, and logistically easier, for him and I to play together, so video games became our default form of living room relaxation.

I like the American English term "living room," perhaps because compared to its British and Australian counterparts ("sitting room," "drawing room," "lounge room") it implies, with characteristic US optimism and vigor, that relaxation is an active state of being.

Some linguist or anthropologist somewhere has no doubt done a comparative analysis of the different terms used for "living room" and what those terms indicate about their respective cultures.

Suffice to say, if we take the activities performed in a living room as representative of living, then repose predominates our lives more than we might imagine, without even considering the bedrooms in which we sleep six to ten hours a day.

While these chapters' nested sentences aren't particularly dynamic as writing, all their points and subpoints are nonetheless useful as an audit of my quotidian life, as an account of how my pandemic habits have already shaded over into rituals or ruts.

This book's chapters comprised of found documents and catalogs perform a similar bookkeeping function.

Boris Groys, from "The Loneliness of the Project":
 "The process of documenting something always opens up a disparity between the document itself and the documented events, a divergence that can be neither bridged nor erased" (2002).

I should add that for over fifteen years Shari has worked in regulation and compliance at an accounting company, in a role I jokingly, if inaccurately, describe as "meta-auditor," that is, someone who audits other auditors.

Whatever their post-hoc justifications, these documentary chapters provide me a change of pace from the other chapters' lyric intensity, similar to how video games provide me a change of pace from the churn of work and current events.

I love games of all kinds, as does Ethan, so playing video games together was a natural habit to fall into once we owned a console and were living through quarantine in a borough where we had no friends, family, or acquaintances.

I enjoyed playing video games so much that I even developed the habit of doing so by myself after Ethan would go to bed.

In the recent past, I would have used the free time at the end of my days to catch up on books, movies, or TV shows.

But now those activities, once relaxing, felt like yet more work ("catching up") at a time when I already had too much of it.

Part of what drew me to solitary video gaming, similar to what once drew me to poker, was the permission I was giving myself to “fall behind” on books, movies, tv shows, and everything else.

Part of it, too, is that I most enjoy movies and tv shows when I can discuss them with friends and strangers, and I had fewer such opportunities that quarantine spring and summer.

My enjoyment of books is less dependent on discussing them with others, more of a private pleasure.

While people tend to engage with the aspects of culture that provide them intrinsic enjoyment, they also engage for extrinsic reasons (social, professional, medical) that needn't be mutually exclusive.

I used to weightlift three or four times per week, for instance, until I tore my right shoulder labrum in my early thirties, opted against surgery, and switched to practicing yoga and, for a time, ballet, instead.

Engaging with cultural activities that might not be your first choices only becomes an issue when the balance between duty and inclination tips too far toward the former.

Part of maturing as an intellectual, in a work-smarter-not-harder way, consists of better discerning your actual duties from your perceived ones.

For me, art writing hits the sweet spot between duty and inclination because, even when it starts to feel like a chore, it requires me to go see new things, get a bit of exercise, and be in conversation with friends, ac-

quaintances, and strangers, all of which activities are welcome changes of pace for a writer who would otherwise be at his desk too many hours each day.

The way I play games has an involved relationship to duty and inclination.

On one hand, I find games enjoyable for how they create a fictional world whose terms are well-defined and within which the players have the agency to try to shape the course of events.

On the other hand, I go through phases where I play a particular game almost as though it were my job, a legacy of my poker days and a function of the way many digital games today are designed to incentivize daily commitment if not addiction.

Most online games are now structured to reward players for logging in every day, and for completing tasks that help you progress in the game, such that to remain competitive players must either make a substantial daily time commitment or fast-track their progress by spending real money through micro-transactions.

These recent innovations, combined with the incorporation of so-called “loot boxes” (randomized, rather than pre-set, in-game rewards) are behaviorist traps designed to tickle the part of the human brain that seeks out a dopamine rush well past the point of diminishing returns.

When I become fascinated by a game, I don't just want to play it a lot, I also want to study its strategies whenever I'm not playing.

I enjoy reading books but rarely anticipate doing so in the way I anticipate studying and playing games; what I look forward to with books, even ones I adore, is the time when I will have already read them.

When it comes to games, on the other hand, I enjoy figuring out how to win more than I enjoy having won.

My favorite part of learning is when I recognize just how much I still have to learn, what psychologists call the stage of “conscious incompetence.”

One tricky thing about parenting is that so many of your competencies have become subconscious, which can make it hard to grasp how much you know and your child doesn't in certain situations.

For example, when we relocated to Staten Island, Shari and I felt comfortable being temporarily isolated, given the circumstances, without fully realizing what effect that isolation might have on Ethan.

Shari and I also need to socialize in person with peers, but a half-year hiatus from doing so was easier for us to endure and less consequential to our development and well-being, in ways we couldn't quite recognize until later.

I remember how reluctant Ethan was to talk with his friend Suraj when our families went for a bike ride the week Shari, Ethan, and I returned home to Manhattan from Staten Island.

A month later, after Ethan regained a sense of social normalcy, he and Suraj immediately biked

off, gabbing away, when our families met for another ride.

Another tricky thing about parenting is that you can grow so used to your child needing help or advice that it can be hard to recognize when they've grown more capable at a task, as well as when they're still incapable but need to figure out how to become capable on their own.

When I trained to become a parent soccer coach, the curriculum's most emphatic lessons were psychological rather than athletic, particularly when it came to the importance of letting kids figure things out for themselves on the field.

When I started coaching actual games, I discovered how few coaches, let alone non-coaches, adhered to that principle; even at the most casual levels of competition, and even when explicitly told not to bark out instructions, many parents can't help themselves from doing so.

The instruction shouters, typically men, tend to be hardest on their own children.

I found it easy not to be over-directive with Ethan and his teammates in part because, competitive as I can be, the stakes can't get much lower than youth soccer.

Instead of yelling instructions, I would make a mental note of illustrative game situations and ask the player or the team about it later, letting them articulate answers themselves.

The most satisfying thing about teaching isn't seeing a college writer or a youth soccer player improve their skills, but seeing them excited to have improved their skills.

Still, even if I didn't over-coach from the sidelines, as Ethan grew more passionate about soccer, I began to over-coach him at home.

During the early parts of the pandemic, setting up soccer training exercises for him felt like a necessary diversion, a way for us to stretch our legs together outside while doing something we love.

To expand my repertoire of technical concepts, I would watch YouTube soccer training videos, then try out different drills with Ethan and adjust based on what he found fun.

One of his favorites had the same rickety, DIY feel as the Fischli and Weiss-inspired cause-and-effect movie he and I made together years before: we drew 8-by-11-inch "FIFA cards" of professional soccer players, attached the cards to different areas of a goal, and used those cards as shooting targets to "draft" the players onto video game teams that we played with that evening.

But when youth soccer resumed in the fall, and Ethan received high praise from his new Red Bulls coach, I made the mistake of encouraging him to train the way I would train if I had his abilities and resources.

I encouraged him to try out for and attend the New York Red Bulls's Regional Development School (RDS), a supplemental training program for advanced players.

I constructed an agility ladder out of masking tape on our apartment's living room floor and used it to run footwork drills together.

I even allowed him to practice juggling a soccer ball in our apartment, given that the apartment beneath ours was unoccupied and we didn't have anything particularly valuable lying around.

At the time, I justified all this winter soccer (he was also practicing twice a week, outdoors, with players from his and another team) as one of the few ways to ensure he got regular exercise at a time when we were cooped up during the pandemic.

I also tried to incorporate non-soccer exercise into our weeks by having Ethan do some light yoga with Shari and I, or go for a walk, or play outside, weather permitting, with friends.

But I was equally interested in helping Ethan to maximize his soccer abilities, without realizing that the only way that can happen is if it's what he wants for himself.

I can now see that I was slightly confused about the joy I take when I watch Ethan play soccer, mistaking that joy as love for his skill rather than as love for him, whatever he's doing and however he does it.

I remember, when Ethan was maybe seven or eight, remarking to a fellow parent coach how much fun it was to watch our kids play, and the sadness of his response: “Not for me,” he shook his head, “All I can see are the things that need to be improved.”

Helping your child enjoy a sport and helping your child figure out how to improve at that sport needn't be mutually exclusive, but, as with so many things, the balance is everything and can be hard to find.

The frustrating thing about balance — when it comes to yoga, parenting, writing, soccer, whatever — is that just because you achieve it one moment doesn't guarantee you'll maintain it in the next.

The thing it's taken me awhile to figure out, as a parent, but have long known, as a professor, is when less is more.

A similar overcompensation is happening in these nested chapters, this shrinking book: in trying to account for everything, I risk losing sight of the essential things.

The irony of this book is that its contents expand as its form contracts.

At what point does a gradual, almost imperceptible series of small losses register as one larger, fundamentally transformative one?

One paradigmatic artistic enactment of this question is Félix González-Torres's heartbreaking installation, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991), a 175-pound pile of wrapped hard candies, situated in a gallery corner, whose mass slowly shrinks (until refilled at set intervals by the gallery) as visitors take candies from it, per the wall text's instructions: an allegorical portrait of the artist's late partner, Ross Laycock, who died of AIDS complications in 1991.

The irony of these nested chapters is they adopt a notionally systematic form to present thoroughly associative content.

This contrivance is a therapeutic structure pretending its therapeutic contents can remain at arm's length, an emotional response to crisis pretending to be a rational one.

I find it fun to learn a game because, unlike in so many other areas of life, its goals are simple and well-defined, which makes it easy to understand the terms of your choices.

Philosopher C. Thi Nguyen, on Twitter: "Games offer us *value clarity*. [...] We can know exactly what we're trying to do and exactly how well we've done. Games are a balm from the existential horror of the world" (2020).

The defined nature of game choices and goals also makes it easy for participants to determine how to maximize their chances of winning, as well as to decide how hard they want to try to win.

When it comes to games, I'm a maximizer by temperament, but when it comes to writing, I'm less dogged about trying to maximize the work's outcomes in the world.

So long as I can publish work I find meaningful, in venues I and others find meaningful, I'm content.

There are unquestionably degrees of writing success, as well as real-world stakes attached to those successes, so I'm not trivializing the importance of recognitions to a writer's ability to sustain a career and a life.

My point is more that writers have an unusual degree of latitude to define the terms of their creative goals.

When it comes to parenting, one place you see maximizing tendencies in middle- and upper middle-class families is college admissions, where from increasingly young ages children are steered toward developing a portfolio of academic and extracurricular achievements meant to position them to be competitive for school admissions and beyond.

Opportunity hoarding, sociologists call it, and I'm so naive as to imagine I haven't done it for my own child, even if Shari, Ethan, and I aren't maximizers in how we do it.

In my lifetime, credential creep, an increase in the minimum credentials required for a given professional role, has grown hand-in-hand with the US wealth gap.

In the normative US imagination, the opposite of opportunity hoarding is falling behind, the zero sum fear that others' successes threaten the odds of your own.

The funny thing about being a maximizer in the way you play games is that people tend to think you're overly competitive, if not a bit of an asshole, when in fact, done right, it can serve as a healthy outlet for those energies.

These past couple years, as I once again made playing games a daily habit, I've thought a bunch about what it means to be a gamer for Ethan and for myself.

When Ethan executes a fancy video game move, he likes to exclaim, "Gamer skills!" and I've started using the same expression when we play.

Thirty years ago, when I was around Ethan's age, I was a gamer but didn't think of myself as such, in part because it wasn't a mainstream identity category in the way it is today.

Part of me feels that this non-identification was a good thing, in that I might have found the label socially or academically limiting, but another part of me feels that this suppression limited my capacity for self-recognition.

Even if gamer wasn't a mainstream identity back then, I was aware, as a teen who went to keg parties on Fri-

day night and played Dungeons & Dragons on Saturday afternoon, that I was moving between two distinct social worlds.

When I think about it, I never quite stopped playing games as an adult, and I never quite stopped keeping that part of my life separate from most other parts, whether it was online poker as a grad student, pool bars as a professor, or Magic: The Gathering online (MTG) as a pandemic parent.

In the early 1990s, I used to play in my local game shop's weekly MTG tournaments for tweens and there was a strong sense of both competitiveness and camaraderie among the regulars.

As an adult, I play MTG exclusively on my home computer and barely have any IRL friends or acquaintances who know that I play the game, let alone who also play themselves.

I'm not sure what should worry me more: the fact that I see versions of self-isolating behavior in my father, myself, and Ethan, or the fact that we all seem to enjoy such behavior.

Emily once half-jokingly described the way I replace one side hobby with another as "substituting," the AA term for replacing one addiction with another rather than addressing the root behavior. "I can stop substituting any time I want," I half-joked in response.

The Wikipedia definition of a gamer ("a person who plays interactive games, especially video games, tabletop role-playing games, and skill-based card games, and who plays for usually long periods of time") notably does not include sports.

Like reading and writing, gaming is a durational physical activity not often considered as such.

Most professional gamers, including the YouTubers Ethan reveres, are cognizant of gaming's bodily dimension, evidenced by the ultra-high end office chairs on which they perch.

I remember how much less enjoyable poker became for me when I understood it as a job; this dynamic is why, money aside, I'd be reluctant to become a full-time art writer.

Also from Wikipedia: "In April 2020, researchers found that top gamers shared the same mental toughness as Olympian athletes."

I don't know how researchers define and measure mental toughness but I do know that in most realms of human endeavor today it takes an extraordinary amount of dedication to have a chance at achieving the highest possible levels of skill and success.

I only just recalled that Bonnie, my former yoga teacher who was fond of instructing students to turn up the corners of their mouths, was a former Olympic figure skater.

Googling her, I discover that she's worked as a clinical social worker for almost twenty years, with what appears to be great dedication and success, which means that at the time I was taking yoga classes with her she was already established in her primary professional field and likely teaching yoga at a New York Sports Club in order to gain experience in a seemingly unrelated, but actually quite related, secondary field.

Bonnie and I would make small talk here and there, but I remember feeling, in a way that now makes more sense, that she was empathetic in ways that went beyond anything we said to each other.

The stereotypical quality associated with physical and mental toughness is hardness: rock-solid muscle, an iron will.

But, to remain viable, Olympian toughness has to be leavened with softness, a bit of give, else all that strain will cause something to break.

Almost invariably, my favorite athletes are the ones willing to acknowledge their vulnerable side, as when Landon Donovan took time away from professional soccer in 2013 for the sake of his mental health.

Almost invariably, my favorite people at the gym are those whose gentle, even timid, personality seems incongruous with their hulking physique.

I started writing this series of nested chapters in May 2021 and it's now already August; next month, Ethan starts fifth grade, his last year of elementary school.

I started writing this book in 2016, around when Ethan would have been starting kindergarten, and though its contents have become loosely indexed to the passage of time, the finished book will be unconcerned with its own timeliness.

A lot has happened since 2016 — a lot has happened since the pandemic began — and even more will happen in the years ahead.

I accept that I can't account for most of those things, and I accept that it's worth trying all the same.

I keep forgetting, and will forget again soon, how helpful the passage of time can be, as well as how sad and startling.

Grief for the future is also a form of nostalgia for the present: nostalgia less for the specific way things are, which is often far from ideal, than for the general fact of their transience.

"The future is already here," quipped novelist William Gibson, "it's just not evenly distributed" (2003).

Whenever I describe this project's melting snowball form to others, they invariably ask if I know how the book will end.

Not much different from how it begins and middles, only shorter and more acceptant.

10.1.21

Dear Ethan,

This week you brought home from school an ukulele and watching you play it reminds me, yet again, how good acceptance feels. I was working in your bedroom, my makeshift pandemic office, when I heard you improvising chords in the living room. My first thought was that you were watching a YouTube video, given that you've only taken three lessons to date and never played another instrument — the chords sounded that pleasing. But it turns out you were making things up as you went, with confidence and glee. I was as dumbstruck as if I'd walked in on our pet fish, Goldie, reciting poetry from behind a lectern.

You looked so comfortable handling the instrument, I felt a twinge of regret that we hadn't encouraged you harder to try playing music years ago. But as you continued to strum simple, soothing plaints, I felt as content as you looked and the music sounded. Maybe parenting can elicit a sense of acceptance, opposite of yogic self-acceptance, that develops from the outside in. Maybe regret is good and necessary when it motivates you to find a better way forward.

with love and admiration,
Dad

10.4.21

Dear Ethan,

Your fifth grade teachers, Kazue and Andrei, have implemented a practice whereby students write weekly “kindness cards” to each

other: index cards, folded in half, with a brief note of appreciation and possibly also a drawing or doodle. One week, for example, your friend Jayden expressed, “Hi Ethan, I really like playing soccer with you and eating with you, playing football with you makes me better.” Another week, Dev wrote, “Ethan, You might be quiet but you are smart & open minded,” and illustrated the card with a rainbow, a soccer ball, and a video game controller.

My kindness card to you is equally simple and sincere: Ethan, you are one of the kindest and gentlest people I know. I’m grateful for how you continue to teach me compassion, and surprise me with humor, in all you do.

Love,
Dad

10.6.21

Dear Ethan,

As I’ve been writing these letters, I’ve been listening to YouTube videos of ukulele chord progressions: not, for a change, to figure out how to help you practice, but to evoke the mood of your playing. I’ve found that I don’t enjoy the videos where the musician sings along, even when they’re a good singer. The instrument alone sounds more than sufficient.

Ethan, I’ve mostly stopped listening to music when I write, as years of wearing headphones in coffee shops likely contributed to the hearing loss I experienced earlier this year. But these ukulele videos, soft and lilting, have been an easy exception to make. Similar to how you reacted when I read that poem to your second grade class, I hadn’t realized we had such tender music in our home, even if on some level I’ve known it all along.

softly,
Dad

10.11.21

Dear Ethan,

For months, I've been planning to write about soccer as a way to account for our respective injuries and anxieties last winter. But the longer I put off writing about the subject the less I found there was to say. Parts of our lives were a bit out of balance — so we adjusted. Your heels hurt from playing — so you rested and recovered and learned to stretch. I recognized my role in your overuse injury — so I learned to ease up.

Ethan, most of the time repression is a form of denial but occasionally it can be a form of kindness. Forget what you think I or anybody else might want you to do with soccer and school and all the rest. Figure out what you want in your own time and in your own ways. Similar to how I'm my own worst critic when I write, you tend to be hard on yourself in your endeavors, to treat small missteps as big mistakes. Just know that I'm working on being kinder to myself, same as you are, and we're already better at it than we were not long ago.

Always,
Dad

10.18.21

Dear Reader,

I try not to think about you much, because not thinking about you makes it easier for me to write. But when I contemplate you, I feel confident that you're kind, if for no other reason than that following this book's Rube Goldberg concatenations this far requires acceptance and generosity on your part.

Rube Goldberg's infamous machines were imaginary contraptions for performing simple tasks in complicated ways, published as single-panel cartoons in early 1900s newspapers. *Picture Snapping Machine*, for example, imagined a camera activated when the user sits on a whoopie cushion, whose expulsion of air causes a model sailboat to push a lit cigar into a balloon, which in turn explodes, causing a regalia-clad military dictator to believe he's been shot and to stagger backwards onto the camera's shutter-release button. *Simple Alarm Clock* consists of an even longer, sixteen-step chain reaction, precipitated by a bird landing on a bedroom window sill and resulting in ice water, as well as a cannonball, dropped on the sleeper's face.

All Rube Goldberg machines reroute utilitarian tasks through slapstick circuits of kinetic excess. But the original cartoon versions don't pretend to be plausible, whereas, in physically realized versions, part of the fun derives from watching the jerry-rigged chain reaction pan out, just barely.

Reader, my favorite artworks are the ones that operate in the space of that "just barely": Mary Mattingly's photographs of her bundled up belongings; Tattfoo Tan's homespun disaster readiness manuals and workshops; Mimi Park's catch-as-catch-can

kinetic worlds, for which the artist acts as both demiurge and maintenance staff. Feats of amateur engineering, fabricated from what's at hand, that understand continuity and disruption as two sides of the same coin.

Reader, Rube Goldberg machines are never necessary or efficient, from a pragmatic point of view, but in their own roundabout way they serve as reminders of both the miraculousness and the precarity of the tragicomic worlds our species loves to build.

with gratitude,
Lou

11.1.21

Dear Reader,

As I've been writing to you, I've been re-watching Fischli and Weiss's *The Way Things Go* (1987) and have been surprised at its anticlimactic ending. A weighted metal can rolls across a rickety platform and collides into a paint roller head, unbalancing and thereby toppling the platform, which in turn upsets the equilibrium of the adjacent table such that, as one of its ends flips up, the bag of trash atop it slides down onto a tire, the force of which landing propels forward a wooden plank, attached to a dolly, that tips over a metal bucket, causing the bucket to spill its liquid contents into a dog bowl, filled with powder, setting off a chemical reaction that releases a billowing cloud of white smoke. The camera zooms in on the undulating cloud as it dissipates, before the screen fades to black and the credits roll.

This ending does away with the utilitarian pretense of most Rube Goldberg machines. But what surprised me was that the film had an ending at all. As I remember the film at the Guggenheim, I could've sworn it played on a continuous loop, with no credits and a seamless transition from ending back to begin-

ning. Maybe the museum played a slightly altered version, but maybe I'm projecting my own values onto the memory. The way things go, I want to believe, is that they'll continue to keep going, in one form or another, world without end, Amen.

onward,
Lou

11.8.21

Dear Reader,

The other thing I've been watching as I write to you is the 2010 music video for OK Go's anthemic song, "This Too Shall Pass." The band's viral music videos are notorious for high concept hijinks, from a video shot in zero gravity to another in which the choreography takes place entirely on moving treadmills, so it was perhaps inevitable that they would build a Rube Goldberg machine as visual accompaniment to their music.

The OK Go Rube Goldberg video playfully updates the gritty industrialism of the Fischli and Weiss classic. While both films are set in warehouses and showcase oddball engineering, the former has more upbeat production values: brighter lighting, cleaner materials, flashier colors, as well as a cheery pop soundtrack. It's a YouTube aesthetic through and through, designed to attract views with concision and élan.

In comparison, the Fischli and Weiss film appears ponderous and creaky, unmusical in the extreme, an artifact from another era. I showed Ethan, now ten years old, "This Too Shall Pass," and he was amused in a way it would be hard to imagine him still being amused by *The Way Things Go*, before he promptly resumed watching his own, preferred YouTube videos, where groups of post-adolescent boys shriek and squeal as they play video games together.

Reader, I'm aware that obsolescence is the flip side of progress, disruption a necessary condition for continuity. I'm aware that I'm not so young as I once was, and I accept that, as I age, parts of the world will continue to pass me by, even if I don't love the fact.

Reader, years ago, I would have told you that the optimism of the adage "This, too, shall pass" was insensitive: What help is the reminder that suffering is temporary to someone in its throes? But today I'm convinced that pessimism ("Que será, será") and stoicism ("That's the way that the world goes round") are even less helpful ways to acknowledge the inevitability of change.

with cautious optimism,
Lou

at sixteen

One summer in high school, I trained with my friend Alvaro's travel soccer team. At the end of a particularly tough session, the coach, Owen, a short, grizzled man from Ireland who always wore tracksuits, admonished us for being tired. "You're fine," he sneered, "at sixteen, you're in the best shape of your life."

In the moment, I remember thinking that Owen could not be more wrong, that sixteen was just the beginning, not the peak, of one's fitness, at least if you were willing to put in the work. Now that I'm in my forties, I can see that I took his point far too literally, as though "best shape" were defined by your personal records for athletic achievement, rather than the all-too-brief period of time during which your body functions as well as can be expected.

by the end of their thirties

They say that by the end of their thirties every athlete will have experienced *the* injury, the one that, even when you recover from it, means your level of performance will never quite be the same. The emphasis starts to shift from doing what you want to doing what you can, from maximizing performance levels to staving off decline, and it's a shift whose implications you can never quite grasp until it's in a sense too late.

because I was young and active

Even though the labral tear in my right shoulder had only a small negative impact on my day-to-day life, the orthopedist recommended I have it surgically repaired because I was young and

active, in my early thirties, and physical therapy alone hadn't enabled me to resume weightlifting.

I didn't want to undergo surgery and extensive rehab for an injury that only bothered me when I lifted weights or threw a baseball; I enjoyed those activities but decided I could live without them. I made peace with my new limitations, took up yoga and, later, ballet, and began to bike commute more.

I would routinely bike five miles each way to and from work, then take a demanding yoga class in the evening. Other days, I'd bike to work in the Bronx, work a full day, then bike twelve miles to a party or event in Brooklyn, before riding another ten miles home to Manhattan. It was a sign of how young and active I was that I didn't think of myself as either of those things, that I saw all the biking and yoga as a diminishment, rather than an expression, of my physical capabilities.

foot surgery was likely in my future

I had no idea what a bunion was until, in my late twenties, I started playing pick-up soccer in the same pair of cleats I'd worn in high school. The first several times I played, I came home with painful blisters on my feet, until I figured out, with the help of a podiatrist, that my cleats were too narrow because I'd developed bunions in the decade since I last wore them. I bought myself a new, wider pair of soccer shoes, which allowed me to play pain-free, but not before the podiatrist informed me that, if my bunions were this advanced at this age, foot surgery was likely in my future.

that was your tendon

I told the podiatrist that the pain felt like I'd stepped on a neon yellow wire underneath my big toe. "That was your tendon," he explained, "It must have slid around and under the toe, before returning to its place on top."

I sustained the injury during a recreational soccer game for the parents of kids in Ethan's league. As I hobbled around on crutches in December 2018, I joked that I was such a goal threat the only way the other parents could stop me was by injuring me. The ensuing bone and soft tissue bruising wasn't *the* injury for me, but it was the injury where I belatedly started to grasp the cumulative implications of all my sports injuries. To this day, I have a bone spur, about the size of a nickel, atop my left big toe's lower metatarsal joint, which requires me to wear roomy shoes in order not to experience chafing and discomfort.

"Did you at least see my goals," I asked Ethan, as I iced and elevated my swollen foot on the couch. "I saw the one where you slid," he answered, a bit wary, "You always tell me and the other kids not to slide when we play."

who enjoy bantering in the group chat

In an effort to help Ethan learn another sport, everybody in our household took tennis lessons this past summer. Riding together to the courts on Sunday mornings (along the Central Park West bike lane, one of the calmest street lanes in the city) felt oddly luxurious, carefree, as if we were on vacation.

When the youth soccer season started back up in the fall, I invited the team's parents to play tennis in Riverside Park while our kids were practicing at a nearby field. The first week or two of parent games evolved into a core group of regulars, none of whom had much tennis experience but all of whom could do with a bit more exercise and camaraderie. A group of middle-aged, casual athletes, who enjoy bantering in the group chat about how sleeping funny on your shoulder means you won't be able to serve overhand that week.

Louis Bury
Fellowship Leave application
Hostos Community College

A. Duration and dates of proposed leave

Full year at 80% biweekly salary rate, Spring 2022–Fall 2022

B. Describe the purpose of the proposed Fellowship Award

I will use this Fellowship Award to complete my book-in-progress, *The Way Things Go*. The book is under contract with punctum books, which specializes in works of creative scholarship and publishes its books in both print and digital Open Access (OA) forms.

The Way Things Go is a mix of poetry, art writing, and life writing about anticipatory grief, or mourning someone or something before it's gone. The book is being written such that each successive chapter decreases in length by exactly one sentence, from a 71 sentence-long opening chapter, to a 70 sentence-long second chapter, to 69 sentences, 68 sentences, and so on down to 1. This shrinking form enacts the book's concerns with loss, climate change, and the passage of time.

At the level of its content, however, *The Way Things Go* is not fatalistic. The title comes from a cult classic 1987 Fischli and Weiss film, in which everyday objects such as tires, balloons, and ladders collide into one another in what appears to be one continuous, cause-and-effect chain reaction. This sense of the term allows me to explore both its negative and positive connotations: the losses and disruptions that occur as “things go,” as well as the continuity and functionality that remain. Ultimately,

the book suggests that this negotiation between optimism and pessimism with respect to the future reflects people's feelings of vulnerability, particularly people who are used to taking their life's stability and privileges for granted, in a world that seems increasingly damaged and precarious.

My record of publication bodes well for the completion and reception of *The Way Things Go*. My first book, *Exercises in Criticism* (2015), was also a work of creative scholarship, using rules and procedures to write poetic and autobiographical literary criticism. Published in 2015 by Dalkey Archive Press, the book was named to *Entropy Magazine's* "Best of 2015: Non-Fiction" list and described by Maggie Nelson, a prominent writer in the field, as "exactly what's needed in literary inquiry today." I have given invited readings and talks about *Exercises in Criticism* at colleges such as University of Pennsylvania, University of Virginia, and University of Calgary.

The Way Things Go also draws on my art writing expertise. I am a regular contributor to *Hyperallergic*, *BOMB*, and *Art in America* magazines, publishing over a hundred articles in them since joining Hostos, and I am a three-time finalist for the \$30,000 Creative Capital/Warhol Arts Writers award. My art criticism focuses on climate change and ecology, subjects that have shaped my understanding of the complicated ways in which people process loss, or don't, in their private and public lives.

My creative writing and art writing backgrounds inform my pedagogy and service at Hostos, and the completion of *The Way Things Go* will deepen those campus commitments. With the help of a WAC Writing Fellowship, I developed a version of ENG 204: Creative Non-Fiction based on the methodologies used in my first book. Similarly, when I return from this Fellowship Leave, I will develop a Special Topics ENG 250 elective, on writing in response to visual culture, as well as a version of ENG 202: Technical Writing, focused on professional writing for Digital Design majors. To complement those courses, I will develop arts

programming for the campus community, similar to how from 2015 to 2020 I founded and organized the college's "Close Readings" poetry series, which brought to campus poets including Adjua Greaves, Rachel Levitsky, Omotara James, Lo Kwa Meien, Ekere Tallie, and Lara Mimosa Montes.

In short, my professional experiences position me not only to complete *The Way Things Go* but also to help it to reach audiences in academia and beyond. I understand the commitment required to realize this book, and a Fellowship Leave at this time will afford me the necessary focus and energy.

C. Provide a timeline of the proposed project

punctum books accepted *The Way Things Go* for publication on the basis of a manuscript that is 40,000 words long and approximately 50–65% complete. With the support of this Fellowship, I will work on the manuscript during the Spring and Fall 2022 semesters, completing it by the end of 2022.

D. Describe any activities which you have undertaken and/or completed to date in conjunction with the proposed Fellowship Award

To date, eight chapters from *The Way Things Go*'s manuscript have been published in literary magazines, including *Seneca Review*, *Boston Review*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*, as well as in Columbia University Press's edited scholarly collection, *Posthumanism in Art and Science*.

Two manuscript chapters have also been published in art magazines, *Art in America* and *Hyperallergic*. The art magazines to which I contribute all have substantial readerships. *Art in America* has a print circulation of 180,000 subscribers and a Twitter account with 886,000 followers. *BOMB* online receives 1.5 million unique visitors annually, and *Hyperallergic*'s website receives over 1 million unique visitors per month.

These already published book excerpts testify to my capacity to complete the project, as well as the extent of the book's potential audience. For a bibliography of all published chapters, please see the Appendix below.

E. List the location(s) where the activities associated with the proposed Fellowship Award will occur

When *The Way Things Go* is completed, I will query literary, arts, and academic contacts to promote the book. Similar to my first book, I will pursue reading and speaking engagements (in colleges, bookstores, and art institutions), media coverage (reviews and interviews in scholarly journals and literary and arts magazines), and cross-promotional publishing opportunities (op-eds and feature articles on anticipatory grief).

Upon returning to Hostos from Fellowship Leave, I will develop ENG 202 and ENG 250, and pursue grants and fellowships that can bring arts programming to campus for our students.

Appendix: Bibliography of Already Published Manuscript Chapters

Bury, Louis. "Dear Climate." *Posthumanism in Art and Science*, eds. Aloï and McHugh. New York: Columbia University Press, 2021.

Bury, Louis. "The Immortals." *Seneca Review*, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2018.

Bury, Louis. "Gray and Green: Maya Lin at Madison Square Park." *Art in America*, June 17, 2021.

Bury, Louis. "Red Flags Are Flying at Rockefeller Center." *Hyperallergic*, Sept. 12, 2020.

Bury, Louis. "three." *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 2019.

Bury, Louis. "Tiny, nonthreatening, and supportive." *Gathering Space* (chapbook), ed. Aynsley Vandenbroucke, Brooklyn Arts Council, Spring 2021.

- Bury, Louis. "Un-Preemptively Yours." *Something Other Than Lifedeath—Catalyst: S.D. Chrostowska*, ed. David Cecchetto. Toronto: Noxious Sector Press, 2018.
- Bury, Louis. "What Poetry We Are Going to Write." *Boston Review*, April 25, 2016.
- Bury, Louis. "The World without Us." *tripwire* 15, 2019.

What if you knew?

Knew what?

What if you knew how much time you had left?

Until death?

That's the big one, but any personal or historical shift, like retirement, *the* injury, or a certain amount of sea level rise.

Well, what if I did know those things?

I don't think people would behave much differently, as individuals or as collectives, than they do now, because they already make decisions based on their assumptions about the time left.

But our behavior differs when we act on definite knowledge rather than assumptions and estimates.

Yes, but only in cases where the estimate is very inaccurate; when the estimate is realistic, your behavior will be functionally similar to what it would have been if your knowledge was exact.

Except you can't know when the estimate is inaccurate, and by how much.

You can't, but the fact that you're always making estimates and assumptions, even if implicitly, means you have a better idea how you'd answer the question than you probably imagine.

The question of what if I knew?

Whatever you're doing right now is your answer, based on your assumptions, to whatever version of the question you're posing.

Right now I'm reading a book.

And right now I'm writing one — I mean “right now” in the cosmic sense of whatever broad course of action you've elected to pursue.

And inaction?

Very much an action.

What about the possibility of change?

Change is always possible, though only within the range of available action, which may or may not be the type of change you want or need.

You're being abstract.

I just mean that some things are possible and others are impossible, and that, within the realm of what's possible, some things are more or less likely than others to transpire.

But sometimes we can't even begin to imagine what might be possible.

That's a question of imagination rather than one of possibility.

Sometimes you're impossible.

Possibly.

feeling put off by autobiographical writing lately

include book contract + Hostos Fellowship Leave application in the book?

attending CUNY workshops on how to get promoted from associate to full professor at the same time that I'm serving on a hiring committee feels like being an extra in a zombie movie and not knowing it's a movie

Jenny Davidson, "ghost scholarship": what would have been written had stable careers been available (2016, 715)

Stefano Harney and Fred Moten: "It cannot be denied that the university is a place of refuge, and it cannot be accepted that the university is a place of enlightenment. In the face of these conditions one can only sneak into the university and steal what one can" (2013, 26).

"Hope is an embrace of the unknown": Rebecca Solnit on living in dark times (2016)

use headlines from *Guardian* and *New York Times* climate email digests as footers throughout the book, similar to how the footers in Dale Smith's *American Rambler* function as his book's subconscious

nociception — human pain perception — how do we perceive pain when it's dull rather than acute?

jane bennett: “the slowness of objects is preferred to the faster, more visible rate of decay that characterizes human bodies and human-to-human relationships” (2010, 254)

the moment when you can see the collision about to happen but are powerless to stop it

this book’s countdowns are coping devices, ways to make the steps between here and there feel manageable

“what poetry *we are* going to write,” rather than “what poetry *are we* going to write,” implies an imperative rather than a question (73)

what if we understood our reliance on fossil fuels as an addiction, a civilizational habit whose long-term harms we understand, in the abstract, but whose visceral, short-term pleasures we can’t quit

restrictive (and insane) Texas abortion bounty law went into effect on 9.1.21 and it was mostly out of the news cycle within a week or two

include in this book my avoidance of discussing this book with my parents

it’s a very white thing to be writing a book about whiteness and not realize that’s what you’re doing until far along in the endeavor

therapy has helped me see that though you’re often one of the problems in your own life you’re also often one of the potential solutions

Emily: “There was such a delay in processing anything in my life at that time.”

Climate depression is real. And it is spreading fast among our youth. / Peter Kalmus / *The Guardian* (2021)

Jalal Toufic: after a “surpassing disaster,” the artist’s duty is either to “resurrect what has been withdrawn” or to “disclose the withdrawal” (2009, 61)

have had trouble reading books since grad school because I’m less willing to suffer

glad I had Ethan a bit young because even if I wasn’t quite ready for parenthood I was able to be physically active w him

Opinion / The End of Babies — *The New York Times*

This might be the saddest book about happiness ever written.

276. Félix González-Torres's pile of colorful, cellophane-wrapped hard candies, *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)* (1991), makes me think of those school fundraisers or county fair contests where participants try to guess how many candies are contained inside a jar.

275. The artwork doesn't resemble a jar but its mass of disappearing candies (an allegory for the artist's late partner, Ross Laycock, who passed away at thirty-two from AIDS complications earlier that same year) puts me in mind of guesswork and counting.

274. The work's initial 175 pounds of hard candies corresponds to Laycock's body weight when healthy.

273. Visitors are permitted to take and eat a candy and, as the pile shrinks, a gallery employee replenishes it back to its original weight at predetermined intervals, typically once or twice per week.

272. Jars pretend to be self-contained while piles know their contents were once arranged differently and will soon enough be rearranged again.

271. Between 1990 and 1993, González-Torres made over twenty edible "Candy Works," each an "Untitled" pile of sweets with a parenthetical subtitle ("A Corner of Baci"; "USA Today") specifying its subject or theme.

270. Each work's pile reminds me of the sand mound in Glenda León's *Wasted Time* (2013): a heap of tiny objects that seem to long for the container in which they were once held.

269. In the list of materials that accompanies each "Candy Work," the candy itself, whether Baci chocolates or Bazooka Bubble Gum, is described as being in "endless supply" (1990–93).

268. In the midst of the AIDS crisis, with any number of reasons to grieve, González-Torres found a way to make a bit of space for optimism, however bittersweet.

267. González-Torres himself passed away from AIDS complications in 1996, age thirty-eight.

266. Another of his best known works, *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1987–90), consists of two generic wall clocks, side-by-side; the clocks are set in unison but their batteries expire at different rates, causing them to fall gradually out of sync until the owner decides to reset them.

265. One definition of love might be that you don't need to be in perfect sync with each other, just capable of getting back into sync as needed, and one definition of loss might be the simple passage of time.

264. González-Torres's work specializes in depicting changes that can't easily be perceived as they occur, similar to how it's hard to perceive gradual transformations in your body by virtue of the fact that you see yourself in the mirror every day.

263. The question of when a beginning becomes a middle, or a middle an end, only makes sense if you accept the premise that time has a narrative arc and even then doesn't typically have a clear answer.

262. The plot of this book is the simple passage of time and one day I or someone else will look back at it and marvel at how little was known of what was to come.

261. Quantification tries to account for the slippages between what we think is happening and what's actually happening, while art tries to account for what the numbers can't.

260. I like how González-Torres's work never appears anxious or trepidatious, always comes off as tender and sincere.

259. When Emily's doctor told her that her life expectancy was thirty, it was as though he handed her a glass jar with more air than candy inside and my parents quickly and understandably tried to fill up the empty space with their concern.

258. Last fall, when I experienced a sudden sensorineural hearing loss and saw a rheumatologist to rule out lupus as a cause, the doctor informed me that Emily's life expectancy prognosis may have been accurate based on what was known about the disease in the 1990s but was inaccurate, by a substantial underestimate, based on what's known today.

257. The action in poker derives from the fact that it's a game of imperfect information: players don't know each other's hole cards yet must act based on the clues they're able to gather.

256. There's the air and the candies and all manner of vessels and containers but I've stopped pretending I know the boundaries between them, or which ones hold which secrets to which fates.

255. Emily thought she knew how much time she had left and for several years acted as though continuing to play the game anymore was futile.

254. González-Torres had more accurate knowledge with respect to his own and Laycock's life expectancies, but he also knew that

the best you can do is put your head down and do the work you believe needs doing in the time you think you have left.

2.16.22

253. For Ethan's spring break next week, we're taking a family trip to Washington, DC.

252. When I mention the trip to others, I like to joke that we want to make sure he sees the capitol while the US is still a country.

251. If I had to handicap it, I'd say it's likelier than not that by 2030 (four election cycles from now) the US won't be a democracy in the way we've known it, or will be one in name more than practice.

250. When one political party has to win every election or the other party will dismantle the system, things can't continue to exist in their current form for long.

249. When even winning might not be enough, when MAGA Republicans are openly plotting ways to reject unfavorable election results (with greater effectiveness than they could manage in 2020), you are on the verge of a crisis, if not already in its midst.

248. Approximately one in three US citizens and two in three Republicans believe the Big Lie that Joe Biden stole the 2020 Presidential election from Donald Trump (Rose and Baker 2022).

247. Conservative minimizations of the attempted dissident coup on January 6, 2021 — that it was bad but not that bad; that it was a legitimate form of political protest; that it was a false

flag operation — seek to sow anger and confusion rather than maintain logical or factual coherence.

246. This tactic has been honed for over a generation by the country's insular, propagandistic right-wing news ecosystem, which in recent years has grown emboldened by reactionaries taking or consolidating power.

245. Citizen militias, armed with assault rifles and white resentment, have likewise grown in number and size over the past generation (Steinhauer 2020).

244. The US has more than six times the gun violence deaths per capita than the next closest country in the world with a developed economy (Sam and Rupp 2022).

243. Civil liberties such as voting rights, transgender rights, and abortion rights are being eroded in states across the country, while the right to bear arms remains a conservative shibboleth whose baleful effects no peer country tolerates to such an extent.

242. Wealth and income disparities now approach Gilded Age levels of inequality, with the top 1% of US household incomes currently hoarding over 30% of the country's wealth, and the top 10% of households (my own falls into this percentile) enjoying almost 70% of it (Federal Reserve 2022).

241. The Supreme Court has a firm 6 to 3 conservative majority, one of which seats, Neal Gorsuch's, was filled through Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's unprecedented 2016 refusal to entertain any of Democratic President Barack Obama's nominees for the position.

240. The pandemic further frayed the country's fabric of social trust, turning medical and scientific expertise, marshaled with impressive speed for the public good, into political wedge issues.

239. The likeliest way I can envision this situation improving is through its first getting worse, through some sort of precipitating event or protracted crisis whose tangible consequences are profound enough to tip the scales of inertia toward positive change.

238. As these neo-nationalist crises deepen, the IPCC's recent Sixth Assessment Report, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptability, and Vulnerability*, was, unsurprisingly, the most dire yet, warning that the last decade was earth's hottest in 125,000 years, that the planet is losing 1.2 trillion tons of ice each year, and that the cost of inaction, in terms of global GDP, is higher than its opposite (2021).

237. Every day I wonder how I and others can live with this knowledge and every day I sit down to write and tacitly answer my own question.

236. Almost two years ago, working on this book, I wrote: "Writers sometimes say that they need to write their way out of a writing problem — that is, to continue producing work until the project's purpose comes into focus — but sometimes the desire to write is itself the problem."

235. And then continued to write most days since.

234. One definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

233. Maybe these countdown sentences are futile, in practical terms, but maybe they're an important part of the work that needs doing in the time I have left.

232. Maybe I need to stop pretending I can know the difference beforehand.

- Russia's invasion of Ukraine: what we know so far (Henley and Visontay 2022)
- Russia's war in Ukraine: complete guide in maps, video, and pictures (Roth et al. 2022)
- Fears mount for safety of Ukraine's nuclear reactors amid Russian invasion (Borger 2022a)
- Global support for Ukraine continues: in pictures (*The Guardian* 2022)
- The first TikTok war: how are influencers in Russia and Ukraine responding? (Stokel-Walker 2022)
- More than 360,000 people have fled war in Ukraine so far, says UN (Connolly and Rankin 2022)
- "It's stomach-turning": the children caught up in Ukraine war (Graham-Harrison 2022)
- UN votes to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and calls for withdrawal (Borger 2022b)
- Researchers gather evidence of possible Russian war crimes in Ukraine (Sabbagh 2022)
- China signals willingness to mediate in Ukraine-Russia war (Ni 2022)
- Russia-Ukraine war: what we know on day 11 of the Russian invasion (McCurry 2022)
- Ukraine president condemns Russian strike on Holocaust memorial — video (Ukrainian Presidential Press Service 2022)
- They are "civilised," "European" and "look like us": the racist coverage of Ukraine (Bayoumi 2022)
- Ukraine: UN says more than 1.3 million have fled since Russian invasion began (Tondo 2022)
- Obsessed? Frightened? Wakeful? War in Ukraine sparks return of doomscrolling (Tapper 2022)

What Russians are being told about the war in Ukraine (Safi and Roth 2022)

Five of the best books about Russia and Ukraine (Figs 2022)

The world leaders pushing for peace in Ukraine, and their motives (Wintour 2022)

Shells rain down on Ukraine's cities despite "cynical" offer of safe passage (Beaumont 2022)

Russia-Ukraine war: what we know on day 20 of the Russian invasion (Martin and Chao-Fong 2022)

Ukraine war piles pressure on global food system already in crisis (Harvey 2022)

210. Every day that I get to write remains a good day but some days the act of writing feels frivolous, given its contents.

209. Sometimes the work that needs doing is figuring out what work needs to be done, and other times what's needed is clear but the will to do it is lacking.

208. James Baldwin: “Most people are not wicked. Most people are terribly lazy, most people are terribly afraid, of acting on what they know” (1998, 759).

207. Climate futurist Alex Steffen: “Because the ways we've learned to work in the world are based on denying externalities and ignoring risks—and on climate/environmental forces being ‘issues’ that we might need to consider, rather than the core context of all change around us—much expertise is now outdated” (2022).

206. Soon after Shari, Ethan, and I returned home from Washington, DC, Emily informed me that she'd resolved to separate from her husband, James.

205. Already, just a couple weeks after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I've compartmentalized my awareness of yet another distant tragedy to get through my day-to-day better.

204. Lately I've been feeling that I want to complete this book manuscript before something even more awful happens—one of my parents passes away; the Russo-Ukrainian war escalates further; the US balkanizes or descends into stochastic terrorism—which feeling is counterbalanced by the recognition that

countless awful things have been happening this whole time, I've just been relatively unscathed by them.

203. Because books lack the responsiveness of internet discourse, writing one can feel untimely, even indulgent, in times of crisis.

202. Some books need to be written as books and others are going through the motions of a dated form.

201. For better or worse, I seem to write books to dramatize the ways in which I can't see the forest for the trees.

200. I hope not to have to write any more books after this one.

199. One compliment I can pay Emily is that she's unafraid to act on what she knows.

198. This past winter, Ethan started watching OverSimplified, a YouTube channel in which world-historical conflicts from the French Revolution to the Cold War are distilled into humorous twenty to thirty minute-long cartoons.

197. The videos, all forest and no trees, are entertaining and edifying and brief, exactly the opposite of what it's like to experience historical tumult yourself.

196. As I sat in the Washington DC Marriott bathroom each night after Shari and Ethan fell asleep, doom scrolling for updates about Ukraine, I kept thinking about Eliot Weinberger's early 2000s poem, "What I Heard about Iraq" (2005).

195. The 10,000 word poem consists of a chronological news catalog, each entry its own dry informational paragraph, whose sources are left uncited, about the US-led coalition's 2003 invasion of Iraq.

194. Most of the catalog's two-hundred-plus entries begin with the words "I heard..." and proceed to report information about the invasion, such as: "I heard the Red Cross say that casualties in Baghdad were so high that the hospitals had stopped counting" (2005).

193. The repeated use of "I heard" situates the recounted information at an epistemological remove, conveys the speaker's estrangement from his country's depredations.

192. In February 2005, "What I Heard about Iraq" arrived in my mailbox in *The London Review of Books* Vol. 27, No. 3, a potent distillation of a remote-seeming war.

191. Today, the poem's social media timeline-esque form feels all too familiar: evidence of a culture that's afraid to admit to itself what it knows, let alone to act on the knowledge.

Gray and Green: Maya Lin at Madison Square Park

By Louis Bury

The most haunting thing about Maya Lin's *Ghost Forest* is how ordinary it appears. On the central "Oval Lawn" in New York City's well-trafficked Madison Square Park, the celebrated architect and sculptor has installed a stand of forty-nine bare cedar trees, resembling a dying woodland. The tall, toothpick-like conifers, pruned of branches at human height and entirely devoid of leaves, are meant to serve as portents of environmental devastation. But the quotidian park-going activities—sunbathing, picnicking, dog walking—taking place within and around these symbols of apocalypse suggest how easily people can adjust their baseline sense of normalcy.

The bare trees were relocated from private land in the New Jersey Pine Barrens that was set to be cleared owing to saltwater inundation; their pocked and stripped bark is encrusted with pale gray lichen, which thrives in moist areas. These details might foster despair. Yet the chosen transplants' careful arrangement (close enough together to form a recognizable grove but far enough apart to encourage sitting on the manicured lawn) and uniform scale (each is roughly forty feet tall) creates a sense of choreographed grandeur; like an evenly spaced choir, the trees reach their arms toward the heavens.

I visited *Ghost Forest* on a sunny spring afternoon and found the installation so discordantly upbeat that I returned again that evening to see how different conditions might alter the experience. On a clear, pleasant day, the sunlight streams through the

leafless limbs, while the adjacent elms provide extensive shade. The contrast entices visitors to linger in Lin's circle of light. In the evening, the installation's exposure to the darkening sky fosters a quiet, inviting mood. While other seasons, weather conditions, and times of day may well produce other, less uplifting effects, on balance the park environment detracts from the work's intentions.

Indeed, while many of *Ghost Forest's* aesthetic choices were influenced by logistics—leaving the soil grassless would have discouraged visitors from sitting, for example—cumulatively, they create a disjuncture between the installation's elegiac conceit and its more buoyant realization. Lin's temporary forest is intended as a prick to the public's conscience akin to Danish artist Olafur Eliasson's over-obvious melting *Ice Watch* installations of the past decade, in which glacial ice hunks were installed in public plazas as doomsday climate reminders. But *Ghost Forest's* spectral symbolism works best as an unwitting reminder that some forms of life persist even as others morph or disappear.

In this way, the installation accidentally echoes recent work that normalizes climate change—with irony or sincerity—to psychologically prepare audiences for its disruptions. The Dear Climate collective (currently composed of Marina Zurkow, Una Chaudhuri, and Oliver Kellhammer), for example, uses dark, knowing humor to suggest a paradoxical embrace of climate change, in works such as an illustrated poster enjoining viewers to “FLOW WITH THE FLOODS.” Artist Kelly Jazvac, together with scientists Patricia Corcoran and Charles J. Moore, coined the term “plastiglomerate” to refer to the amalgams of rock, debris, and hardened plastic that we might consider “unnatural” but that are being deposited in earth's sedimentary record. Lin's *Ghost Forest* derives from different premises but nonetheless presents a similar vision of our species's process of climate acceptance: by turns oblivious and wise—and already well underway.

Dear Emily,

There are the worlds we inherit
and the worlds we make
the things we can't change
and the things we can
the wisdom to know the difference
and the courage to act on it.

About your separation, mom said
"She brought herself through some difficult times
and deserves to have the life she wants"
then spoke about your addiction
as though it were a secret
just now being told.

Better late than never, I thought
sitting in my car next to a youth soccer field
staring out at the unblinking sky
for once unafraid of my phone.

Love, Lou

When are we?

When are we what?

When are we located?

Don't you mean "Where are we located"?

No, I mean "when," as in, what time do we find ourselves living through.

I don't understand.

Me neither, that's why I'm asking.

I'm saying I don't understand the question, let alone the answer.

That's the problem.

What's the problem?

That the question of when we're located makes little sense to us.

At least we agree on something.

We'd agree on more things if we grasped how late in the day it was.

Because you think the world is about to end?

Because the world has always already ended, just not in the grand apocalyptic sense.

In what sense then?

In the sense that tomorrow is a new day.

4.14.22
notebook excerpts

stopped calling any of these book chapters “pandemic diaries” when it stopped feeling like that’s what they were

Gary Kasparov’s early March tweet thread: NATO already at war with Russia but can’t yet accept it

“behavioral realism”: misguided belief that people won’t change their behavior for the sake of the climate so existing activities must be swapped for low-carbon duplicates, ie, electric vehicles in place of gas ones

going through reader comments on a *NYT* article about Supreme Court abortion cases: just because the writing is on the wall doesn’t mean everybody knows how to read it

“Distance to Empty” on the car dashboard

Bruno Latour: “The public does not fully realize that the issue of climate-change denial organizes all politics at the present time” (2017, 24)

a chapter that’s a cento of resonant lines from earlier chapters, only the lines are shortened?

I only ever fall asleep on my back when I’m experiencing a concerning level of shoulder pain, that is, when changing how I sleep is practically forced

my therapist telling me I was one of his patients sounding the covid alarm earliest and clearest in Feb 2020

when my father's mother, Helena, passed away, my parents found thousands of dollars in cash squirreled away in nooks and crannies throughout her apartment, as well as a kitchen cabinet stocked with a dozen large mason jars full of honey

when I look at the bone spur on my left foot, I wonder how I'm going to find dress shoes that fit comfortably for my parents' funerals

when I receive updates about my CUNY pension, I momentarily cling harder to fantasies of continuity and stability

the feeling of watching a home video and marveling at how little the people in it know about their futures: Roberson's skid

The assumptions of the previous generation never hold in the same way for the next generations but they've never not held like what some of us will experience

Wendell Berry: "I come into the peace of wild things/ who do not tax their lives with forethought/ of grief" (2012, 79).

the insanity and the necessity of business-as-usual

4.20.22

Boynton Beach, FL

120. I'm writing these sentences poolside from my father-in-law's retirement community, which we're visiting for the New York City public school spring break.

119. Our flight here was our first since before the pandemic.

118. I'd been enjoying the excuse to avoid air travel.

117. Waiting at the terminal yesterday, I tried to imagine LaGuardia Airport decommissioned and turned into a historical curiosity that future generations visit the way we do former plantations, tenements, and concentration camps.

116. Even before the pandemic, flying felt to me increasingly unconscionable given the realities of global warming.

115. At this point, it's a matter of when, not if, I quit.

114. The two things holding me back are that I want to be able to visit family quickly and I want to see distant parts of the world with Ethan while he's still young.

113. None of us are quite as young as we used to be, alas, and none of us have any shortage of excuses for behaviors we ought to know better about.

112. Scientist and author Vaclav Smil estimates that humans today have such unprecedented amounts of usable energy at their disposal (more than seven hundred times their ancestors in 1800), it's as if the average person in an affluent country has

approximately two hundred adults working for them nonstop around the clock (2022, 19).

111. I like the retirees who lounge on beach chairs like lizards sunning themselves on rocks.

110. The appeal of retiring somewhere warm is that each day feels so much like any other, your existence seems to stretch out in an infinite present tense.

109. The appeal of sitting out in the sun is that you could think hard about things but it's more pleasant not to.

108. Two ways to fool yourself: pretend you have all the time in the world or pretend there's never enough time for anything.

107. Anaïs Nin: "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are" (1961, 124).

106. The way everybody lazes around the community pool reminds me of a poker table.

5.2.22

Metropolitan Museum, age 4: A week after Ethan and I invent a game in which he advises me whether to keep or delete images of artworks in my camera phone library, we're sitting in the dark watching photographs from Wolfgang Tillmans's *Book for Architects* (2014) flash across a gallery wall, when he starts to blurt out "Keep, "Delete," "Delete," "Keep" based on whether or not he likes each image.

For a moment, I contemplate ways to monetize Ethan's judgments (#KeeporDelete; #4yearoldartcritic), before realizing that any potential windfall would go straight toward his therapy bills when he can access his share of the profits at eighteen.

Whitney Museum, age 4: "They should keep him as part of the installation," a stranger remarks, endeared, as I record camera phone footage of Ethan dancing happily upon the shadows cast by Paul Chan's *1st Light* (2005).

Guggenheim, age 4: Ethan sits transfixed through the entirety of Fischli and Weiss's *The Way Things Go* (1987), only standing up to leave when the looping film returns to the scene at which we had begun to watch it.

The cause-and-effect movie, we still call it.

Met Breuer, age 5: "His body looks like a crumpled-up piece of paper," observes Ethan, to my surprise and delight, about the leftmost figure in El Greco's *The Vision of Saint John* (1608–14), the folds of whose robe do in fact resemble crumpled paper.

New Museum, age 6: On the top floor of Pipolotti Rist's exhibition, *Pixel Forest*, Shari, Ethan, and I lay down on a bed together and watch dreamy underwater video footage burble across the ceiling.

David Zwirner gallery, age 6: As we wait in a long line to see three of Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Rooms*, Ethan starts to feel hungry so my diabetic friend and colleague, Thomas, generously shares his stash of almonds with Ethan so that all of us make it to the crowd-pleasing installations energized.

As Ethan grows older and less patient with galleries and museums, I let him take pictures with my camera phone to help keep him entertained and the trick always works a charm.

He mostly takes pictures of the art and of other people but always makes sure to take at least one picture of his shoes from a bird's eye point of view, grinning at me as he does.

Met Breuer, age 7: Ethan takes and eats a cellophane-wrapped hard candy from Félix González-Torres's *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, grinning as he unwraps it, and I'm so tickled by his faux-transgressive glee I'm not thinking about Ross Laycock's absent body or even the simple passage of time.

It's true that grief for the future is a form of nostalgia for the present but it's also true that, as with all grief, there comes a point when it's time to move forward.

Which habits will be carried forward and which ones will be let go is a question you can't answer right away but also can't not eventually answer.

Dia Beacon, age 10: On the Metro-North train to Beacon, NY, Ethan asks, grinning, if we can go inside the "burnt scallops" again, our family's metaphorical nickname for Richard Serra's

Torqued Ellipses, a series of hulking ovoid sculptures inside of whose rusted steel walls we frolicked on prior visits.

Which habits will you carry forward?

Carry forward to where?

Or to when.

Right, in the sense that tomorrow is a new day.

As well as the sense that apocalypse means “uncover” or “from hiding.”

I still enjoy reading — I don't think I'd want to give that up.

Reading in its fuller, embodied sense?

Which is what, exactly?

Whatever you do with your body, knowingly or not, while you read.

Even when on my smartphone?

Especially when on your phone.

Reading on my phone makes me feel part of the world rather than separate from it.

That hardly even sounds like reading.

- 78. A philosophy of the future written in the past.
- 77. A choice I kept making and calling inheritance.
- 76. The feeling of doomed freedom.
- 75. The words your lips refuse to speak.
- 74. The illusion of stability.
- 73. The simple passage of time.
- 72. A blind spot and its contents.
- 71. The space of that “just barely.”
- 70. The necessity and insanity of business-as-usual.
- 69. I keep forgetting and will forget again soon.
- 68. Content that expands as its form contracts.
- 67. Acceptance that develops from the outside in.

5.30.92

Third-grader wins writing competition

Student is one of 12 statewide finalists

BY ADVANCE STAFF WRITER

A third-grade student from PS 23, Richmond, is one of 12 statewide winners in the Imagination Celebration Creative Writing Opportunity competition.

The student, Emily Bury, is scheduled to accept the award tomorrow in Albany during a ceremony at the New York State Museum. Emily will be accompanied at the ceremony and reception by her parents, Wes and Marianne Bury, and her brother, Louis.

She will receive a \$1,000 U.S. Savings Bond as her prize. In addition, her poem, "Tomorrow's Possibilities," will be printed in an award book to be distributed to schools throughout the state.

The Imagination Celebration is a program co-sponsored by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, the New York State Alliance for the Arts and the state Education Department.

Emily's teacher, Mary Femenella, decided that her class would participate in the writing competition back in January.

Staten Island Advance 5/30/92

1.1992

Emily poem #2

TOMORROW'S POSSIBILITIES

Tomorrow's possibilities start inside your mind.
Tomorrow's possibilities might be funny to find.
Tomorrow's possibilities might be train trips to Mars, long hair
without knots, leaping over stars.
Tomorrow's possibilities might be flying beneath the seas,
no-stove, automatic-cooking pots, ostrich nests in trees.
Tomorrow's possibilities might be closets that hand you your
clothes or even a no-sneezing, no-allergy, no-blowing nose.
Tomorrow's possibilities might be ice cream that won't drip or
maybe people who don't trip.
In imagination, all this could come true.
But how do you know the future?
We only know it will be new!

How do you know the future?

Why do you assume I know it?

I mean how do you make estimates and assumptions?

A combination of inference and ignorance, like anybody else.

Sin bravely, in other words.

There's a thin line between bravery and foolishness.

We walk it all the time.

We're walking it right now.

That's one definition of writing, yes.

5.30.22
notebook excerpts

May 2: leaked Supreme Court opinion indicating *Roe v Wade* will be overturned

May 5: out of the blue text from my friend Ian: “How are you man? Just wanted to let you know I (finally) got a high school full-time teaching job in Santa Barbara and a lot of the decision making is traced back to our conversation in Central Park two days before the world went mad in March 2020. Just wanted to say thanks for your guidance and honesty and help.”

May 14: a white supremacist espousing the far-right “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory kills ten people and injures three others in a mass shooting targeting a supermarket in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Buffalo, NY

one of the deceased Buffalo victims is the aunt of Ethan’s teacher, Andrei

loss and change may be inevitable but our species often has the capability to reduce harm and time and again chooses not to

May 24: nineteen students and two teachers murdered, seventeen others wounded, in the Robb Elementary School shooting, Uvalde, TX

McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red*: “The collapse of the Soviet system merely prefigures the collapse of the American one [...] the ruins of the latter have not quite been apprehended for what they are” (2015, xii–xiii).

dominoes, they used to say of communist countries, toppling one into the next

Dear Emily,

I want to write the poem
that imperils my own
complacency, the poem
that wouldn't be a poem
at all, but life.

Always, Lou

6

6.6.22

21. The previous generations' wounds.
20. The places we call home.
19. The thing that my body does.
18. Self-protecting and other-harming.
17. Continuity and disruption.
16. Not nothing.

Do you know how this book will end?

Do you?

We've been figuring it out together.

Without even realizing it.

Only more acceptant each time around.

6.20.22

New York, NY

10. My parents are in town this week for Ethan's elementary school graduation.

9. I do sometimes wish Ethan could have experienced more of the time when our family gatherings were larger and closer-knit.

8. On the other hand, through soccer and school and everything else, Shari, Ethan, and I have created other, no less fulfilling, kinds of relation and community.

7. At lunch the day before my parents return home to Rochester, my father says he wishes he could stop time right here.

6.27.22

6. Shari was recently promoted to partner of her accounting firm; soon after telling me, she teared up at the realization she couldn't share the news with her late mother, Rhea.

5. In the early 1960s, Rhea Greenspan, née Shaw, hoped to join her high school's math club until its faculty advisor informed her that, no matter her straight-A grades, girls were unwelcome in the club.

4. Knowing that Roe v. Wade was going to be overturned didn't lessen its gravity when, on June 24, in Dobbs v. Jackson, the Supreme Court ruled the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion, thus rolling back US womens' rights in a way that, for much of my lifetime, seemed, to many, almost unimaginable.

6.29.22

3. Despite all my book knowledge, I only just this week discovered the work of influential labor historian Mike Davis because it was made public that he's entering palliative care.

2. It's unfortunate — if also, in aggregate, inevitable — to learn belatedly about someone or something but it's seldom entirely too late.

1. “Enjoy the holiday weekend,” I’ve been joking to friends and acquaintances, by way of goodbye, as the Fourth of July approaches, “the way things are going, you never know when it will be our last.”

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