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Made Entirely of Vapor: A Poetic Unwriting

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Made Entirely of Vapor: A Poetic Unwriting

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
Sophia Luna Fangman

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
May 2022

To all the professors at Bard that inspired me, whose classes planted seeds not only for this project, but for the way I will write and think forevermore—

Michael Ives

Tim Davis

Maria Cecire

Susan Rogers

Nate Shockey

Cole Heinowitz

Farah Al Qasimi

To Kris, my biggest fan through it all, who sat on Facetime with me for hours pushing me to keep pushing and always believed in me no matter what.

To Alexi and Kevin, who read so many fragments of this thing so many times and offered only the kindest words and motivation.

To all my friends who will read this now that they don't have to work on their own senior projects, hey! Now you finally know what it's about!

And of course, to my advisor Alex Benson. Thank you for putting up with every step of this process with so much patience, kindness and enthusiasm. You have helped me believe in the importance of my thoughts and words, and this project absolutely wouldn't be what it is without your guidance.

Meeting my eyes to yours is interrogation: probing and expectant. My own words will rise like vapor from yours, when my cold air meets your warm pond and they become the splendid fog. I claim this, because I must. Else my cold is just bitter. It hurts and stings, freezes ears and reminds how far a finger is from the heart. Do you ever see yourself in the reflection of someone's pupil? The eyes are the window to the soul, but really all I see is a canvas of black and me, warped and stretched in a tiny mirror.

I search for myself in you, and I find a poem.

∴ ∴ ∴

The Poetry Foundation website offers what feels like an endless database of poems collected throughout space and time into this one all-knowing collection of words, phrases, lines, stanzas. They converge in the search bar. "Search by Poem or Poet" it says, blinking expectantly before the first letter. I don't, quite. I usually search by word. "Quiet," I tell the search bar.

"Quiet" by James J. Ryan

"Quiet Grass, Green Stone" by Dean Young

"Quiet Zone" by John Dickson

"Quiet Time" by German Plisetsky

Four poems, four poets, spread across 83 years, gathered here on PoetryFoundation.com to whisper to me... *hush*. Although their titles are formatted parallel to each other in the same font, bold and brash above the author names, they do not know each other.

We sat alone and my eyes fed

Upon her lips. We were so still,

says James.

I love when out of nowhere

replies Dean,

On streets where the earth shudders on its axis

says John,

I am a crowded station. I realized it.

joins German.

Their voices merge to a quieting singularity. Their I's align to become a single entity, a new meaning beginning to form across a new, collective work: "Search Word: Quiet."

We sat alone and my eyes fed

upon her lips. We were so still.
I love when out of nowhere,
on streets where the earth shudders on its axis,
I am a crowded station. I realized it.

Here is the beginning of a found poem. Here are the building blocks. Made up of only first lines of the poems offered to us by PoetryFoundation.com, in the order they were offered, with almost no intervention from me, they speak to each other (Almost no intervention other than a few authorly urges—commas, lowercase letters, two first lines from James J. Ryan to better lead into Dean Youngs’—when the constraints are self-made, they must sometimes be broken). In this small found poem, there is alone and crowding, there is a we, a she, an I. There are streets and a crowded station to orient readers in space, but there is also nowhere. It is a poem that was never written, but that exists suspended in the algorithm of this website. Found by way of search, by way of constraint and direction, it has been discovered.

It has been found? It is a found poem? It is a discovered poem? A directed one? A sought-after poem? A lost poem? A re-found poem? Uncovered? Unearthed? Exhumed?

In a dusty desert tomb, I sweep my small, gentle brush across the wall of the room extended out in front of me. It uncovers mere particles with each sweep, but eventually it will reveal the shape of a king’s grave.

∴ ∴ ∴

Search Word: Find

The dead say little in their letters;
you find it when you're tearing up your life
The woods are the book
Under dust plush as a moth's wing
My mother's mother, widowed very young
Near dusk I find her in a newly mown field, lying still
If I could forget — not the dark backward
I woke this morning from the uneasy
I have come a long way to find the lion
For months I would wake you up
When I was like you I crossed a street
It takes a peculiar vision to be able to detect
that utter amazement
It is quiet. It is a place where
I find no peace, and all my war is done.

Search Word: Search

Wandered tonight through a city,
I am torn because I cannot find on earth
the news
it could have
I am searching for signs and wonders
every night since you disappeared
Some labyrinths curl round like a sea shell
The searchlights over London,
nude bodies like peeled logs
Did you say
in the beginning, was it spring or summer?
Will death be like this? Like waking from a long dream
It was dusk for kilometers and bats in the lavender sky
oh my, oh my, I lose myself
The city at 3 a.m. is an ungodly mask
it's all foreplay, really-this walk
A silver watch you've worn for years
under the gervais st. bridge,
Ten years on, I came searching for
Over time, you picture them
Not less; only—different. Not

wrapped in gold foil, in the search

I stop my hand midair.

So, because you chose to follow me into the subtle sadness of night,

we called off the search

The cities dissolve, and the earth is a cart loaded with dust

Search Word: Discover

While clearing the west,

painting a picture of the same shrimp boat,

here where beech buds have outgrown

But can say —

the truth flies hungry, at least and otherous

Buildings blend

Day is carved in marble, a man reclining

The huge scar-pocked palm leaf

The blood-smear across the knuckles

We are both strong, dark, bright men

A board. A slab. A draught. A frame strewn with sand for the

cogs & cogs that cannot turn

The monoliths, sandstone
like finding a bar of aluminum wedged in a bull's jaw. Like
suddenly discovering in the eyes of the very beautiful
The dragons on the back of a circular bronze mirror
as an archaeologist unearths a mask with opercular teeth
A woman in the shape of a monster
The sea and a crescent strip of beach
The evening darkens over

An axe angles
Under the fire escape, crouched, one knee in cinders
Once again, someone falls in their first falling—fall of two bodies
In a seaside desert port
Fog swaddles the

Here

These brown discolorations on a faded black

Sometimes

Think of our blindness where the water burned
Two-headed monsters, ghouls, torrents of human blood,
That silence again

∴ ∴ ∴

Contextualizing, decontextualizing, recontextualizing. To decide what to find, how to relate one to the other. Related by place, by time, by a single word, by the hand forming them, the mind thinking. To find cellular meaning in the places it isn't offered. Discover what it means to find, find what it means to look for, look for what it means to happen across. Harmonize the marriages of those who would never meet, will never meet again, a kiss of nearness. Contextualizing, decontextualizing, recontextualizing in the way that only a mind of many minds could. The conscious choices of the subconsciouses, the voice and the self and where the author emerges from to do its work—solidified, crystallized, made entirely of vapor.

∴ ∴ ∴

I'm going home. I turn the same corner I always turn onto my street, expecting, as one expects, the same scene that always greets me. But today, additional to the standard tableau, a table—on its side, one drawer hanging off its hinges unflatteringly, sitting on the edge of the sidewalk. I quicken my pace towards it as if someone will take it away before I can investigate, or like it will disappear as quickly as it appeared. Its corners are beaten and battered, remnant details of the work of past foe—door frame, ballpoint pen, glass of water, toddler head. I run my finger over its scratches. It was beautiful once, but now it is by the side of my road, abandoned and imbued with curious wonder.

I *found* this table. I *discovered* it. I *happened upon* it in the normal trajectory of my day. It is exciting in the mere fact that I was not *searching* for it. It might have felt even more magical if I hadn't seen it at first at all, if I had instead been buried in thought and tripped over the table as if it had materialized into my world out of nothingness. Exponentially less magical if I *found* the exact same table at a used furniture store, where I was *looking for* a table. I would have found a table, but I wouldn't call it a Found Table, I don't think. I wouldn't put it in my front entryway and answer when guests asked about it, "Oh that's my found table!"

Have you ever discovered what you mean to write as you write it? Like the idea was held in the page and not actually in your head when you sat down? It's like that, if the page was already full of written words.

Have you ever forgotten a word, even when you're so full of the definition, and asked your friend *What's that word?* and they make a wild guess but it is exactly what you were thinking of? Or an even better word? It's like that.

Have you ever found something on the beach that felt special to you even though it was dirty and sea-mangled and worthless? And you took it home and put it on your desk and it became something that was yours, even though the excitement of it was its unrecognizability? It's like that. It's when you transfer yourself to that old glass bottle. It's when you shatter, splinter. The edges of sea glass are worn down by the

waves and they no longer fit into each other, they have new soft intersections, and
the puzzle pieces shift.

∴ ∴ ∴

dream of black [

you come roaming and when sleep [

sweet god, terribly from pain [

to hold the strength separate [

but I expect not to share [

nothing of the blessed ones [

for I would not be like this [

toys [

but may it happen to me [

all [

∴ ∴ ∴

Sappho's poems are fractured by time, memorialized only on papyrus manuscripts held together by memory and imagining. Ripped, torn, scattered. There is only a single poem out of nine books that has survived 2, 500 years intact; the rest, shattered to dust. In *If Not, Winter*, Anne Carson grapples with the missing pieces with brackets. The lines that exist no longer are bracketed into the imaginable space of the page, merely implied, as the rest of the poem unfolds inexorably into meaning.

Even though you are approaching Sappho in translation, that is no reason you should miss the drama of trying to read a papyrus torn in half or riddled with holes or smaller than a postage stamp—brackets imply a free space of imaginal adventure.

(Carson, *If Not, Winter*)

all night long] I am aware

]of evildoing

]

]other

]minds

]blessed ones

]

]

There are multiple versions of the poem coexisting on the page: the lost poem, the poem written never to be known by us. The poem written here in black ink, which becomes poem by virtue of being sequenced language on a page. And the found poem of the mind, which the reader composes with Sappho's work as a backbone of words and brackets strung down the page. Many scholars focus, understandably, on Sappho's original lost, unreadable poems, her voice and embodiment of authorly intention. But Carson's translation allows for the other potentialities of Sappho's to come forward, non-written poems, the internally-written ones as reader.

An ironic twist, then:

I like to think that, the more I stand out of the way, the more Sappho shows through. This is an amiable fantasy (transparency of self) within which most translators labor.

(Carson, *If Not, Winter*)

Transparency of self.

Self as silkscreen.

∴ ∴ ∴

If Not, Woman

Of the beautiful and good, you
unfold centrefolds of nectar. Today,
the brightest aching slit
has folded all the valleys in,
protects the horizon
which we would devour.

Light: lifted, I stretch my brief body.
Now it's one hour before birth
,or not raining,
and the noon's new fury
rinses the sky of its featureless blue

A tang of salt in the creek waters of my blood,
river on her tongue,
light that shrivels a mountain
like a faint line in the center of our foreheads,

I seek no favor.
I reach for the taste of today,
never reaching the mouth

Without my tongue and almost blind
and roses, but alive in my eyes, my breasts,
safe on the raindrenched land
my chest burning, my throat dry with the songs
of gold arms:

Someone will remember us
even in another time.

∴ ∴ ∴

The silkscreen is mesh, ink to be filtered through its gaps, it is covered in black ink,
pushed through to stamp a shape on the paper, but stains everything else black, too.
Colors gather in stratigraphic layers, the print becomes a muddled, filtered gray.

∴ ∴ ∴

Writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing
is that neutral, composite oblique space where our subject slips away, the
negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body
writing.

(Barthes, "The Death of the Author")

Do you hear *me*? I am screaming, my mouth is numb, my lip melts over my teeth.

I don't think I am making noise. Are they words or voice? My scream is raw sound.

Is this an exorcism?

∴ ∴ ∴

To own combinations of language is an impossibility of logic and a necessity of self. Language is limited by vocabulary, syntax, and grammar in ways that make it an undeniable fact that there are limitations on the amount of viable combinations of words. They are bound to be repeated across authors, across centuries. This also depends on the length of the fragment, though, and that is a line impossible to elucidate. It is merely instinct. Can someone own a combination of two words together? That seems too minute. Three words? Four? Can someone own a sentence?

In intellectual property, there is no word count at which the unique combination of words can be said to belong to one author. Copyright infringement cases rely on the idea of *transformation*—an author has copyright over derivatives of their work, but only up to a (subjective) point that the derivative has enough added artistic value to be considered transformed. One cannot own any combination of language word for word, but they can “own” an entire work, or a recognizably unchanged section of it.

And yet, “blessed ones,” I attribute to Sappho. Although anyone else could have paired those words together, it is also true that she did. Having it on paper is a reminder of Sappho’s body in space, her unique translation from internal thought to external language.

The intellectual property laws around owning language don’t align with how it *feels* to write. It *feels* personal and unique. I’m not sure that it would be possible to commit anything to paper if I thought that everything I wrote could exist without me (even though on a phrase level, I’m sure it could). It feels deeply personal to translate thought to word, intimate and aligned with everything that defines my self. Isn’t my turn of mind unique? Is every sentence I write a reflection of that internal language? Are only the more interesting or unique ones?

I don’t know if my written voice is detectable in a sea of words. They are the same words that any other writer of English is using, the same standards of language. I often wonder if I would be able to point out my own turn of mind when presented with a list of sentences. Is it recognizable? Would I be able to find my own words? Myself?

I lose myself in the sea of shared language, but constantly I beg to be remembered. To attribute. To be attributed. To have some small part, a detectable voice in the crowd.

We are like painters who, from as far back as can be remembered, would all have to dip their brushes in the same immense can in order to thin out their paints.

(Ponge, *The Voice of Things*)

Ironic, as I quote an English translation of Ponge's French words—immense cans with slightly different hues of muddled gray, perhaps. Stretch the borders of languages to widen the collective water source. We are all just making sound, after all.

∴ ∴ ∴

There is a certain corner of poetic excitement that hinges on the confusion of syntactical expectation; that undeniable, unchanging infrastructure that creates expectations of reality that most often lie dormant in the use of words.

the sun sets
 thick skulls
 rough edge
 writhing pain

What words are used as noun, verb, or adjective? What characteristics of a thing can be smelled versus seen versus heard? There are words associated with each other as based in the embodied world—the truths of what one sees, hears, feels. But despite their trueness, these phrases rob the words of their meanings by way of expectation. We all know the sun sets every night, so no one considers the various potentialities of the word “set,” like if it described the sun hardening from liquid to jello. To use “writhing” to describe not pain, but “writhing dusk,” “writhing glory,” “writhing fragility,” would reanimate the descriptive word with the descriptiveness it lost from syntactical and sensual expectation.

In poetry, when every word is precious and weighty, the words beg to be more. The imagining done in the space that these linguistic boundaries are crossed is the embodiment of this poetic excitement. It is possibility.

sodden dark

the wetness of its glare

arthritic pines

rasp of sun

To put a name to it, these combinations of words are phrase-level metaphors, that do the abstracting of a metaphor with only two words and their sensual, syntactical expectations. Instead of “the darkness was a sodden towel draped over the night,” “sodden dark” encapsulates all of that into two words (and I, as reader, am inserting

the towel from my own syntactic assumptions that something sodden is most often a piece of cloth, and a towel is a cloth that is expected to get wet... and also that the dark would be night, and that the experiential soddenness of a dark would be an encapsulating, embodied darkness like the night). Instead of needing all that to be said, the imagery is held suspended between only two words—sodden and dark. When paired, the two words' implications can breathe and intermingle, creating something entirely new that rests upon the reader's previous understandings of how those words are expected to function. The phrase-level metaphor epitomizes the poetic necessity of intentionality in every word, and the way that words in a poem must glow with meaning without expository syntactical set-up.

pine boughing

squirming tunnel

sun-soft smile

guttering stars

And are they, also, shining moments of literary originality that lend themselves to recognizability, personal and unique? Is the distance from syntactical expectation part of the instinctual evaluation of owning language? We value originality, and in turn, shun plagiarism. How? How, when so much is shared? Our paint can is muddied, our paintbrushes never scrubbed clean.

∴ ∴ ∴

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all

poems,

You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns

left.)

You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through

the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,

You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,

You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

(Whitman, "Song of Myself")

∴ ∴ ∴

I sit here listening to a poem already written—over and over again, in a steady and calm woman's voice that I am forcing to repeat the same word 100 times over. It was pleasant to listen to the first time, maybe the first few times, but begins to grate on my ears as I force myself to listen to her words over, and over, and over. I lean my head to the desk, its edge lined up along my brow bone, eyes closed, trying to let the poem inflate enough to fill my brain all the way to the ears. *Don't think about anything else, just sounds. Inhabit that mind space when you mishear the lyrics to every song you know. Don't think about how interesting it is that the meaning of a song can be shifted entirely with just one wrong word, especially when it's a pronoun, like the distance between 'I' and 'we,' or 'you.'* I really have noticed that

I often switch I to you and you to I when I sing along to songs, and what's that all about? There is a huge distance between those words, even if they are all so small, one-syllabled and rhyming. Ame ni, a-meni, a meni, a mini? A many?

In front of me is my laptop, near death after its many repetitions, its speakers as tired as my ears and thoughts. It plays a video with Japanese characters that cross a screen of sunset-flecked, gentle waves. Each time I rewind the video, the waves jolt back in time. The gentle voiceover reads to me a poem by Japanese author Kenji Miyazawa, "Ame Nimo Makezu." I'm trying to find a poem, another one, buried in this foreign one (and also in me).

I rewind ten seconds again. *Ame nimo makezu*. Ame ni, a mini, amity? This process feels like unfocusing your eyes to make everything a blurred, amorphous blur. In that realm, you can imagine color and shape to be anything.

It's hard to even remember what are English words anymore, like when you say a word over and over and it begins to feel like just sounds. I guess this process is the opposite, beginning with sounds and moving towards meaning instead of vice versa. But it still happens, the dryness of repetition that sucks all meaning from something, even the potential meaning. I have to catch the word in the point of its repetition just before it goes over that hill, when it becomes familiar but still imbued with meaning. Many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many,

many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many,
 many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many.

∴ ∴ ∴

Ame Nimo Makezu

Many more may kiss you, kiss anyone but you

You kill me, not anymore than I kill you

Though cars now slow on my street,

you could knock. Stay nearby

Even if She is more kind and dear,

which me can my young heart take?

—my distraught—scorch your own

Tapped, obeyed

Higher you could

come join in missing me,

you could kiss and cut me

So stay distant

No hero no, not you no, higher no gain, no

free sun nor freezing on your candlelit decay

He gasped She got no booming or

changes, my shining me

If she needs half hate arising

Disconnect from me, we

Meaning She's so notorious here

inside

Quietly yield to me

Keep cupp-ing so tight you

smell my chimera inclination

Here I lean touching, named no shame

Some sun on my not-sunned

tongue must not keep

My name is cutting my pride

Who makes my day sink?

Cutting my day sinking

So you, mon ami

What day should we meet?

∴ ∴ ∴

As Reader, I see myself as Author. In the case that I was not choosing how to translate *thought* to *word*, the subconscious Author has emerged, ready to write something it hadn't yet been allowed to write. As Reader, my phonetic translation of "Ame Nimo Makezu" is a glaringly obvious transcription of my breakup. I can see every word's genesis in my mind, the way my subconscious scaffolded this poem off of the original Japanese.

Higher you could
come join in missing me,
you could kiss and cut me
So stay distant

I curl up between the toilet and bathtub, porcelain pressing cool into my skin. It's not comfortable. I would much rather be in bed under the covers, but here in the darkness with two doors between me and anyone else, it feels safe to cry. Even though I know how thin the walls are. I am lost. In the darkness, the tile and porcelain make this room feel like it could be an alternate reality. A world where even my skin isn't warm, where I shiver and the only light source is my phone, ringing ignored where I threw it. Here I lean touching, named no shame. I press my feet against the bathtub, hard, as if I can overturn it with enough force. Below it will be a portal, and I will escape that way. I will escape, and I will be lost in a new

place. I will get far away, far enough away to miss myself. My phone keeps buzzing. I will not pick up. I do not want to talk. It's done. What's done is done.

You kill me, not anymore than I kill you

∴ ∴ ∴

The secret: the suppression of self-expression is impossible. Even when we do something as seemingly “uncreative” as retyping a few pages, we express ourselves in a variety of ways. The act of choosing and reframing tells us as much about ourselves as our story about our mother's cancer operation. It's just that we've never been taught to value such choices.

(Kenneth Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing*)

∴ ∴ ∴

To try to turn off self-expression entirely, to be only translator from Japanese phonetics to English words. No meaning created, no sentences, no ideas, only words frolicking in their auditorial bliss:

Ame Nimo Makezu (again)

A-minimize my cage zoo

Customize my cage zoo

You kidding moat

Not sue off sunny-moo mucky no

Though urban Caribbean mochi

You could knock

Catch steak narrates

Eat some more sheets, Quran Beirut

Itchy itchy knee

Kay my-young-photo

Me so toe

Squish your sigh-ahhh tabby

Hiring you cut toe

Tribune conjoin messy knee

Joke you Wakiki she walk hurry

So stay silenced

No harm no, matzo no,

I ashy no, cog gay no,

cheese and a kayak

book no leased that cannot stay

He got sheen on the Nokia Co. due more baa

And the camera stayed still, E. Bee

Niche nor scar ratan

Ha ha! Aruba

And disavow tambors, you hear

My name is shiny on torn paper

It says, core attack not to heat to me

Kick me canker sore, sure ripped

Smear on ice like married to him

He dared Toshiba,

named Annie and gushy meat

Some sun nuts too wahhh

Or or a new key

Mean nanny canoes over balustrade

Homer may not know it

Curry may not know it

So you moan at me

What dashing home want a night

I know that this second transliterated version of “Ame Nimo Makezu” is still not objective. It never will be, filtered through my head. The suppression of self-expression is impossible, even with the most mundane of tasks. Somewhere in these words is my bias. In my interpretation of the consonant combination k-d-g as kidding, or m-t-s as matzo, I am there. My experience, past and present. Present, in that even my current self is not objective. I might translate them differently in a different room, or if I had had a different breakfast before writing this, or if I was listening to music instead of the hums of the library. If there wasn't a rock stuck in the heel of my shoe, if my pillow hadn't fallen off the bed this morning, if the coffee was a little more bitter.

Self-expression is the overwhelmingly singular self, but it is also utter subjectivity, in flux, changing. An undeniable, mercurial, internal constant.

On the usual view, the work arises out of and by means of the activity of the artist. But by what and whence is the artist what he is?

(Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*)

Even when I sit down with a blank page (Coleridge's organical form where the poem discovers its own limits, as opposed to the mechanical form), there is collaboration. It is memory, a visceral sensation of the body's place in space... translated into language for a reader to understand. It is collaged inspiration

synthesized into light. I can hear the inflections of the books I am reading—each time I sit down to write, there is a different approach. The literary sheen of these authors hazes over me. I am molded by them. I filter myself through them. Am I replicating the rhythm of the song I am hearing as I write? Am I influenced by the crunch of my roommate's chips? Does the dying light of the day settle itself between my words? It is 7:21 pm, the light is just barely faded.

I am vacuum and magnet, mirror and lump of clay.

∴ ∴ ∴

My thoughts are un-wordlike. The moment of writing is a moment of translation—disembodied thought becomes readable word. This belief is one of the downfalls of my writing practice: I want the word to represent the thought as I felt it. Although I have experienced discovering an idea in the process of writing, I still often get stuck with the blank page. *I've thought it all through*, I've said many times about these ideas, *it just hasn't made it to the page*. But I don't think they ever will. I think the language of thought is one that will never truly be translated to the page. Every word I write is an approximation.

The translator's task consists in this: to find the intention toward the language into which the work is to be translated, on the basis of which an echo of the original can be awakened in it.

(Benjamin, “The Translator’s Task”)

We are all just echoing, echoing ourselves and each other. To echolocate a poem—
 Within a neighborhood in Cambridge, Massachusetts, there is a poem bounded by
 space, by the people who have traversed its streets, tripped over its curbs, cursed at
 its streetlights. Dust for fingerprints, a poem is there. (Is there a poem written in
 every place?)

This poem was made in the depths of JSTOR from book chapters and journal
 articles using the search word “Porter Square,” but it also hangs heavy in the air
 around the T stop. Go find it there.

∴ ∴ ∴

Porter Square

This is the next chapter of the descent,
 the same level of invisibility
 subtracting something.

I remember how people stared at me, a mere outline

Bent over at the waist,

fallen onto the streets

unassimilated debris

Who buys flowers on their way to work?

Who dug and tunneled and blasted,

they looked too slowly.

Melting snow

her head was bent and

captive

her shoes didn't fit

her singing was clear and filled the lots with houses

In a single backyard,

mouthed its weary vowels in the 4 a.m. screams

is a junk room

The woman,

subtracting

vanishing

∴ ∴ ∴

To source a poem from a poem is a recontextualizing. The line is a pre-conceived unit by the poet, some small motion of intent. An encapsulated idea, that although it relies contextually on what precedes and follows it, has been set sail on the page alone. The poetic line is pre-fragmented. The poetic line begs to be re-shuffled.

Fragmenting prose is a whole other beast. A beast, in that the paragraph is a furry monster with teeth that claws back when you swipe at it. It takes much more force to fragment prose. More intention, more choices, more authorship. The found poet must be the one to create the small motions of intent (assuming the found poem is lyric). To source a poem from prose is decontextualizing. Words often must be ripped apart mid-sentence to create openings for creativity.

∴ ∴ ∴

The poetic line, or the moment after its completion

A blip of time, lost millisecond, stretched to the edge of the page
unreadable

There is no searchable word for

the apex of an arc, when a ball pauses in air between ascend and descend

I know because I searched for it

that intangible moment

hesitation and pause, expectation

The edge of the cliff

The peak of flight

Apex, apogee, anacrusis, deadpoint:

if the space just after my last letter's furthest point is the molasses

Vertigo: the kaleidoscoping of world when confronted with how much world there
is to fall into

Sends a sentence into swinging pendulums

The line begs for more,

divorced from the next word

paused

excruciating suspense

until allowed to tumble into its continuation

The end after the end

There is more to

come,

and must there be?

What happens what happens what happens what happens what happens

in a line?

What happens

after

∴ ∴ ∴

The width of the page dictates where my lines can start and finish, a secondary
rhythm to the sentence. The ends of these lines are invisible and unremarkable, like
so many functions of language must be, given no weight or meaning. They lack the

gravitational inertia that is the poetic break, the energy and the pause, the apex. The function of the pause is entirely different here than in verse. There is no falling off, no picking up speed and then slowing to an end. These lines are not set by me, but by the page; margins set in the code of this software (automatically an inch (computer's unreal inch)) subject to my whim, although this writing is for an assigned project and bureaucratic guidelines say that the margins must be an inch, so it appears that my apexes are decided by the guidelines, although I still have control of my commas, of course, punctuation must be there to control the speed of prose, to give the reader a moment to breathe we say, the apexes of prose although I think they have far less energy, for they are given less space to wonder, they are less suspended in air and more like a turn around a corner, you have to slow down but only for control's sake not because the gravity of earth necessitates it, really you could keep going and going without a comma it feels unhinged and like a tsunami but you can't do the same with a poetic line there has to be a break somewhere unless your paper has an endless width

∴ ∴ ∴

Control and indulgence—restraint and impulse—inhibition and frolicking. The desire (and pressure) to have total, minute oversight over every move made, every word combination, every page break, every punctuation mark. That everything is purposeful, and well-thought, and meaningful. I long to frolic. I love the moments of automatic writing that shun my over-analysis of the words before they even make

it to the page. Or when a found poem feels like I really wrote it, and it has something of me, even without dictating every word from brain to page. *That* feels like the frolic; the spark of authorship that overcomes anxiety, writing something somehow over my head, but through me.

Paradoxically, these catalysts for frolic are often constraint, a cousin of control. Automatic writing is often constrained by writing nonstop for a certain amount of time. The constraint is the frolic, maybe, that it is not allowed to stop to edit or question, or even erase. And other types of constraint allow for frolicking. For example, a poem written from only the first lines of poems that come up in a computerized search, in the order they appear. Prioritizing the restraints of first lines and order almost forces frolicking, by making it practically impossible to adhere to the standard conventions of language in how each line fits together to make a poem. Adjectives become nouns, endings become continuations, everything is flipped on its head. And although there must be very deliberate decisions made in found poetry, the constraints of it shift the control from the anxious mind to a definitive restraint. The onus is taken off the conscious mind and reassigned to the constraints, allowing language to reanimate itself, and frolic.

∴ ∴ ∴

I extracted or appropriated from page 99 of 99 books by 99 authors 99 segments to construct a story... The word count of each segment is to

indicate the number of words “appropriated” from each of [the authors]. My method was to scan an author’s text until a passage or a line I could use hit my eye.

(Walter Abish, *Conjunctions*)

∴ ∴ ∴

22: The New Meaning

8

After six years apart, and six months together

57

She dared not admit to herself that he frightened her, for fear that he might perceive it; his nearness, leaning against the side of the car, was ugly, and his enormous resentment puzzled her; she had certainly made him open the gate for her, but did he think of the house and gardens inside as his own?

21

The shutters were drawn and the undertaker wiped his feet—

He was aware that this sort of thing had occurred before.

21

Lifting the neckline of her dress away from her she blew gently into her bosom and looked at the pale wedges

66

He reached the foot of the staircase leading to the topmost flat, and stood with his hand on the banisters, pronouncing his wife's name. His voice trembled. He called again, louder and more firmly. The only sound which disturbed the absolute silence was a faint echo of his own tones, repeating his question under the great eaves. He nevertheless felt irresistibly moved to ascend the staircase.

9

I was curious again, and opened my palm voluntarily.

63

A mountain of rustling crackling paper remained behind in the room. Nothing had been made to last by these papers. I stood in a square in the center of the city, in a sharply outlined space lit by the sun in the middle of a crater of shadows, the pages of a torn newspaper fluttering across the main street in the gusty wind.

21

As poor Mr. Pitwick drinks endless pints of water, declaring himself "much improved," even though his friends "had not been previously aware that there was anything the matter with him."

3

has been decided

34

More often than not, characters seem to possess only the most tenuous control over their movements and actions as the fluctuations of immigration, accident, chance, circumstance and opportunity abruptly reroute the trajectories of plot.

43

A few yellow flowers on the table, some myrtle tied around the handle of the flatiron holding the door open for a breeze calmed her, and when Mrs. Garner and she sat down to sort bristle, or make ink, she felt fine. Fine.

8

Lorenzo smiled at the strength of her expressions.

9

“He must’ve told her no,” said the other boy

16

I had this other bag of things, books and things from my childhood and kitchen knives.

15

But the porch forced its way on

Acting kind of contented in the silvery wind

11

the act

of beauty

smiling at the

sigh of

art

awake

6

“Silence! This violence is almost repulsive!”

24

Originality is often defined by what it is *not*—not derivative, not arising from or dependent on any other thing of the kind, underived.

7

The viol, the violet, and the vine.

5

Legends of his dying friendless

39

The grainy black-and-white image of a man in a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves collapsing backward on a hillock, his right arm flung behind him as his rifle leaves his grip; about to fall, dead, onto his own shadow.

∴ ∴ ∴

Would be, will, did, was, is, are, going to be—the unconscious changing of tense is something that all writers have fallen victim to. One must be exceedingly intentional in referring to the past, present and future of the world of the text. And it is entirely about the world of the text. To create clarity, an author must be fully aware of the position of each thought and idea: Is this a memory? A hypothetical? A dialogue that happened a day before, or a dialogue unfolding in the present of the page? Tenses and time require a close handle on language, and vice versa. It's something I didn't fully understand until learning verb conjugations in high school Spanish class; although English conjugations came entirely naturally to me, I now had to learn conscious choices about past, present and future, and ask myself where my words needed to be temporally situated. So when gathering textual material from various sources for a found poem, tenses become a terrifying prospect (or an opening for frolicking). It is the question of fitting together jigsaw pieces with their

own temporal logic into a single entity that internally agrees with itself (or chooses not to). Within a line/sentence, for clarity's sake verbs must agree with the subject or verb before it. But one doesn't want to be chained to verbs to create a thought. Sometimes an adjective/noun pair is so striking that you must use it somehow, even if it relies on a verb before it that disagrees with the tense of the line. It begs the procedural questions: can a compiler pick and choose where in a line/sentence to break apart ideas? Can you steal just an adjective/noun pair? If you need a verb to justify it, do you go searching for somewhere that that verb in the correct tense is written, or do you just write it yourself and sacrifice the integrity of an entirely found poem? Surely it is a ridiculous idea to scour books for a certain conjugation of a word you want when you know it has been written somewhere. But just as surely, it is a slippery slope to assume what has been written, or to insert one's own conjured words wherever it makes the writing easiest.

∴ ∴ ∴

Is

My mother is keeping time by stamping her foot

And the shoes that I was wearing

Remember them, and my hands

And everybody after that

And soon enough, tomorrow, you learn a lot from them

I will remember your eyes

You're lying next to that body and feel bad

When you came downstairs, just awake

To the continuous pounding

And in the garden, cries and colors

Then I looked out at the morning

After the accident we had

I take this hour, this hour, I said

I always agree but the valley's soon cold, and besides

Wait, I just thought—what if this is not visible

Between the stasis of the burnished limb

And this moment as it happens

Silence dripped from the eaves

into the dark place, for you've already begun.

∴ ∴ ∴

There is a secret “corner” of the website of technology company Panasonic, untouched since 2010. I have only accessed it through Google search; I would have no idea how to maneuver to it otherwise. If a webpage could be the technological equivalent to a cobwebbed room, this would be it. The pixelized header text, the basic navigation buttons, the way the page doesn't resize with the window—

remnants of neglect through time like a dusty floor with no footprints. An appropriate freezing of time, because it is the online home of the official record of a time capsule buried at Expo '70 in Japan, 52 years ago, to remain untouched for 5,000 years.

The website is steeped in a certain kind of cross-cultural, timeless nostalgia—nostalgia for the current moment as it is imagined as a future's past. The sinews of time interweave here, it feels like a temporal refusal. Words of the 1970s, rewritten into a technological form that was unimagined at the time, that my own perspective views as doubly dated. The internet's seemingly eternal space, holding messages meant for people who will live 4,948 years (a time that I don't imagine this website-based record will be accessible, although the real one encased in the ground will be) from the moment of my writing.

It reminds me that my encounters with language are so molded by the technology I use. My information-finding is almost always Google-based, and so my found poetry also is. My finding is about search bars and algorithms, Youtube videos and the online JSTOR database. It is a way of encountering language that many of the writers I have appropriated would never have imagined. To find the record of this time capsule, especially the letters written to the future finders of the capsule, is to reach hands outstretched to either temporal end of this exchange. To read these letters now is to be forced into the position of being the future of the past, and the still-past of the still-imagined future. It is all so full of imagining.

I wish I could live again in your age. But I am quite happy now. I have kind parents and also a sister with whom I can quarrel once in a while. And there are blue skies and wide seas, all waiting for us. The world is full of mysteries. Our strength will pile up from generation to generation, and your age will arrive. I will do my best, too.

(Rin Masayuki, Time Capsule Expo '70)

∴ ∴ ∴

Time Capsule

Located here, designated Time Capsule Expo '70

The final opening date

has been set at

5,000 years after the year 1970 AD, that is,

6970 AD

A time so remote

as the material is pure

The electrical wiring leading to the thermometer,

and bending,

forming

An umbilical cord

The retention of this inert replacement atmosphere

In the position in which it is found—

a tiny garden viewed from the verandah

Stainless steel, concrete

Monolithic, hollow

at an intermediate point between present time and the very beginnings of recorded
history

Resistance to stress during welding,

resistance to rust and corrosion

Cross-section of the world

we cannot deny

Insects have been encased in resin

A mosquito and a fly

in a dormant state

Yearning for the world

Waiting for us

There are blue skies and wide seas

An amateur singing contest and a concert of classical music

Something to convey the atmosphere

Its triumphs

Tokyo on January 29th, 1969 is having one of its rare falls of snow

I wish I could

∴ ∴ ∴

I is bendable. Rotatable. Immortal. *I* is the one that contains multitudes, not me. *I* is every writer and reader, together and totally distinct. (You) can see it shift on the page. Chameleonic.

I am really bad at remembering lyrics, even to the songs I have heard hundreds of times. Most often, I find myself mistaking whether the lyric is “I” or “you,” and no matter how aware I am of the phenomenon, I can’t remember who is who. In relationship to the song, I inhabit both *I* and *you*, so it’s really all the same. Whether I am my *I* or your *I*, your *we* or my *you*. Even if they are all so small, one-syllabled and rhyming, it is merely instinct.

∴ ∴ ∴

... an attempt to create from the disparate works of fifty authors the archetypal self-portrait of one... mythical self-portrait.

(Walter Abish, *Conjunctions*)

Self Found, You, Denied

One could never tell

That's how I'd begin,

"ring of bone" where

you were. You are

And when to the tip of this tongue of flesh

Of you where you are a blank

And I return down the slope of the mountain,

no snow (I dreamed the snow was you,

living) and I am the rain

with the smell of mud

and full of time.

If I say to you "To you I say," you have not been

For she or she or sure

To my room where the woman's body is heavy,

feeling for the bone inside the wrist,

a fist in my mouth. I was strident.

She had very nearly as much as had had

and piles them on the driveway: femur, rib, jawbone with a few

typed out and then erased—I cannot
it forth, let them touch the sleeve—I
I want the image even when I am it, or nearly it—
(I measure time by how a body sways)

Every morning you search this face,
before this fever of the almost cold
I grow old under an intensity
in the little mirrors of the slot-machines
You keep on writing till you write yourself away,
and now you are ours
and even after—when you're nothing—you still stay
Crumpled, disappointing substitute
There is no rhyme fit for my scream
Here is no water but only rock
You only, denied

∴ ∴ ∴

Meeting my eyes to yours is building blocks. I am searching for signs and wonders,
a woman in the shape of a monster. They do not know each other; even with the
most mundane of tasks they have new soft intersections that exist no longer.

I don't think I am making noise.

find my own words

having it on paper

I claim this, because I must.

I don't, quite.

All I see is a canvas of black and me, warped and stretched in a tiny mirror.

Appendix of Found Poem Sources in Poetry**(by line)****Search Word: Find**

(Page 4)

Finding a Box of Family Letters	by Dana Gioia
Finding the Lego	by Maryann Corbett
Finding the Scarf	by Wyatt Townley
Finding a Bible in an Abandoned Cabin	by Robert Wrigley
Find Work	by Rhina P. Espaillat
Finding My Mother	by Mari L'esperance
Finding Time	by Dabney Stuart
Finding the One Brief Note	by Maxine Kumin
Finding the Lion	by Sally Bennett Segall
Finding the Room	by Aleda Shirley
Finding a Lucky Nimber	by Gary Soto
Finding the Cat in a Spring Field at Midnight	by Pattiann Rogers
Finding a Language for Beatrice	by Arthur Oberg
Finding the Direction	by Stephen Dobyns
I Find no Peace	by Sir Thomas Wyatt

Search Word: Search

(Page 5)

Search	by Hester Knibbe
Search	by Richard Eberhart
Searching for Satellites	by Roberto Harrison
Search & Recovery	by Shin Yu Pai
Searching for Signs	by Alan Brilliant
The Search	by Bruce Guernsey
In Search of Man	by Brewster Ghiselin
The Searchlight	by John Rodker
Sonnet in Search of an Author	by William Carlos Williams
Didn't You Ever Search For Another Star?	by Alfred Starr Hamilton
Two Characters in Search of a Metaphor	by Elizabeth Spires
Variation 17: Like Waking	by Alice B. Fogel
Saguaros	by Javier Zamora
Dance, Dance, While the Hive Collapses	by Tiffany Higgins
Crossing a City Highway	by Yusef Komunyakaa
Encounter and Farewell	by Patricia Spears Jones
Some Slippery Afternoon	by Daniela Gioseffi
catchlight	by Kirby Knowlton
Kargil	by Sudeep Sen
Helicopters	by Colette Bryce

Lustrum	by Carl Phillips
Ararat	by Mark Doty
The Aureole	by Nikky Finney
Giving Back the Flower	by Sarah Morgan Bryan Piatt
And on the Third Day	by Andrew Allport
Desert	by Adonis

Search Word: Discover

(Page 6)

Discovered	by Shirley Buettner
Discovering Your Subject	by Pattiann Rogers
Discovery	by Mildred Whitney Stillman
The Discoverers	by Lisa Gorton
A Bird in the House	by Robin Blaser
Miami	by Ted Greenwald
A Poem Called Day	by Stanley Moss
Asked what it is	by Durs Grünbein
Occult	by Joyce Carol Oates
My Father and Myself Facing the Sun	by Lawson Fusao Inada
Abacus	by Sandy Florian
Mazed Interior	by Andrew Joron
Post-Modernity in Kayenta	by Hershman John
Coal Deliveryman	by Ramón Cote Baraibar
Pagani's, November 8	by Ezra Pound
The Redshifting Web	by Arthur Sze
Streamers	by Arthur Sze
Planetarium	by Adrienne Rich
'and Their Winter and Night in Disguise'	by George Oppen
The Evening Darkens Over	by Robert Bridges

Junk	by Richard Wilbur
The Desk	by David Bottoms
Sex, Night	by Alejandra Pizarnik
@Allah	by Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb
Stepping Out of the Light	by Forrest Gander
Whom Do We Thank for Women's Conferences?	by Ama Ata Aidoo
Age Appropriate	by Philip Schultz
The Rock in the Sea	by Archibald Macleish
After Midnight	by Ray Dpalma
We Are Saying Yes, But Who Are We To Say	by Khaled Mattawa

If Not, Woman

(Page 13)

Fragment 3	by Sappho
Woman and Child	by Judith Beveridge
Love Poem to a Butch Woman	by Deborah A. Miranda
A Gallant Woman	by Clara Shanafelt
Flores Woman	by Tracy K. Smith
Woman Unborn	by Anna Swir
Women Whose Lives Are Food, Men Whose Lives Are Money	by Joyce Carol Oates
A Woman Speaks	by Audre Lorde
My mother's body	by Marge Piercy
The woman with a tumor in her neck	by Wendy Videlock
Planetarium	by Adrienne Rich
A Litany for Survival	by Audre Lorde
A Woman Speaks	by Audre Lorde
Sisters in Arms	by Audre Lorde
Women in Labor	by Mary Ruefle
The First Woman	by Aleida Rodríguez
The Woman Who Collects Noah's Arks	by Janet McCann
Woman as a River Between Borders	by Sheryl Luna
Fragment 6	by Sappho

Fragment 147

by Sappho

Ame Nimo Makezu

(Page 22)

Nihongo, Yoko, and Kenji Miyazawa. “【Japanese Poem】‘Ame Nimo Makezu’

(朗読：雨ニモマケズ).” *YouTube*, 18 Dec. 2018,

<https://youtu.be/aZds4UrUuko>.

Ame Nimo Makezu (Again)

(Page 26)

Nihongo, Yoko, and Kenji Miyazawa. “【Japanese Poem】‘Ame Nimo Makezu’

(朗読：雨ニモマケズ).” *YouTube*, 18 Dec. 2018,

<https://youtu.be/aZds4UrUuko>.

Is

(Page 42)

The Dreadful Has Already Happened	by Mark Strand
Crossing Jordan	by Langston Hughes
A Time Past	by Denise Levertov
Sometime During Eternity...	by Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Lucky Duck	by Sandra Lim
You Are the Penultimate Love of My Life	by Rebecca Hazelton
A Time Past	by Denise Levertov
The Vein	by Tom Raworth
Last Month	by John Ashbery
Last Night	by Hester Knibbe
After	by Andrea Cohen
Now	by Ada Hastings Hedges
My Mother Worries About My Hat	by Richard Jarrette
I Am Merely Posing For a Photograph	by Juan Felipe Herrera
From the Bottom	by Brian Henry
And then the sun	by Stephen Connolly
Last Night	by Margaret Julia Marks
Maqam	by Zeina Hashem Beck

Self Found, You, Denied

(Page 47)

Autobiography	by Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Autobiography	by Stuart Dybek
[I Saw Myself]	by Lew Welch
You Were You Are Elegy	by Mary Jo Bang
Me	by Amrita Pritam
You Were You Are Elegy	by Mary Jo Bang
Autobiography in the Year 1952	by Yehuda Amichai
You, Therefore	by Reginald Shepherd
To Myself	by Franz Wright
Autobiography	by Stuart Dybek
Autobiography in the Year 1952	by Yehuda Amichai
You, Therefore	by Reginald Shepherd
New	by Gertrude Stein
Autobiography in the Year 1952	by Yehuda Amichai
Rain	by Ian Pople
At the Time of My Birth	by Oliver de la Paz
New	by Gertrude Stein
My Daughter Brings Home Bones	by Jennifer Richter
[Were it but Me that gained the Height—]	by Rebecca Hazelton
[Were it but Me that gained the Height—]	by Rebecca Hazelton

God on the Treadmill	by Benjamin S. Grossberg
I Knew a Woman	by Theodore Roethke
Mirror	by Max Garland
Mirror	by Peter De Vries
Mirror	by James Merrill
Autobiography: New York	by Charles Reznikoff
Me	by Frederick Seidel
You Are Afraid of the Dark	by Kathryn Nuernberger
Me	by Frederick Seidel
Sentimental Reflection	by William Robert Moses
Bad Faith	by Kit Schluter
The Waste Land	by T. S. Eliot
The Giant Cactus	by H. Boner

Appendix of Found Poem Sources in Prose

Porter Square

(Page 31)

“Neighbors”	by Richard Hoffman
“Becoming a Mouse”	by Marge Piercy
“The City of Collective Memory”	by Dianne Chisholm
“Songs and Sorrows”	by Ben Brooks
“In the Wake of Recent Snowstorm, The Glove Cycle Cycles On”	by Olivia Gehrke
<i>In It for the Long Run: A Musical Odyssey</i>	by Jim Rooney
“Suburbia Real and Imagined”	by Ronald Dale Karr
<i>A Field Guide to the Ants of New England</i>	by Aaron M. Ellison
“Snow in America (Boston)”	by Claudia Keelan

Sources by Line

Neighbors

Becoming a Mouse

Becoming a Mouse

Becoming a Mouse / Neighbors (Line 4 is spliced from two sources)

Songs and Sorrows

Becoming a Mouse

The City of Collective Memory

Neighbors

Neighbors

Becoming a Mouse / Songs and Sorrows (Line 10 is spliced from two sources)

In the Wake of Recent Snowstorm, The Glove Cycle Cycles On

In It for the Long Run: A Musical Odyssey

In It for the Long Run: A Musical Odyssey

Becoming a Mouse

In It for the Long Run: A Musical Odyssey / Suburbia Real and Imagined
(Line 15 is spliced from two sources)

A Field Guide to the Ants of New England

Snow in America (Boston)

The City of Collective Memory

Becoming a Mouse

Becoming a Mouse

Suburbia Real and Imagined

22: The New Meaning

(Page 36)

<i>Outlander</i>	by Diana Gabaldon
<i>The Haunting of Hill House</i>	by Shirley Jackson
<i>Wasteland</i>	by T.S. Eliot
<i>Tar Baby</i>	by Toni Morrison
<i>Turn of the Screw</i>	by Henry James
<i>Outlander</i>	by Diana Gabaldon
<i>99: The New Meaning</i>	by Walter Abish
<i>The Conde Nast Traveler Book of Unforgettable Journeys: Great Writers on Great Places</i>	by Klara Glowczewska
<i>Zong</i>	by M. NourbeSe Philip
<i>Edgar Huntly</i>	by Charles Brockden Brown
<i>Beloved</i>	by Toni Morrison
<i>Song of Solomon</i>	by Toni Morrison
My Diary	
<i>The Tennis Court Oath</i>	by John Ashberry
<i>A Humument</i>	by Tom Phillips
<i>Jane Eyre</i>	by Charlotte Brönte
<i>Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century</i>	by Marjorie Perloff
“The City in the Sea”	by Edgar Allan Poe

Stolen Words

by Thomas Mallon

Regarding the Pain of Others

by Susan Sontag

Time Capsule

(page 45)

“The Official Record of Time Capsule Expo '70.” *Panasonic*,

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