

## The Engineer of Himself: A Poem

“Thinking is willing you are wild  
to the weave not to material itself”

*Susan Howe*

“a new music of verse stretching out into the future...”

*William Carlos Williams on Louis Zukofsky*

### I.

I have tried to tell this story time and time again.

I’ve set out to tell this story.

This *one* story. *This* one, apparently, mine.

This story takes all of my life, as do all of the stories that go deep in the mines.

Mole’s holes without boundaries – forward and back equal speed – ever the hunting,  
never the full.

We develop our routes in this way.

Creating patterns.

We forget so many channels and tunnels and homes.

Will I ever find the subject

When asked what I am writing?

Writing here

Subjects are subjected to such tiny worlds

There are objects too

That also serve as subjects

All we’re subject to.

I have this body, this is mine,  
It covers and fills me entire  
And then it reaches, reaches,  
Forages out and it moves,  
Colliding and grasping and pushing away  
I have this body, this mine.

With a mind  
With a mind to  
With a penchant toward action  
Toward distress  
De-stress, this dress  
Toward persons, places and things  
Toward world  
From within, without  
So without makes it in.

I mine there  
Mining without  
Without tools or fuels or jewels  
So I fashion, construct  
Supplying from within what's without  
And I'm borrowing here,  
Collaging weapons and stories and finds  
In this purely without of a mind.

Forging no need was illusion  
Drawing on nothing as air  
Fantasy, drama and dream  
Phantom limbs, phantom words, phantom truths  
and structures  
and patterns  
that never add up or complete  
only fail  
only lie  
without the whole story  
what's left in the mines  
what's already become  
something else  
without, me

## II.

“Each syllable an instance  
of ourselves bodied forth in the  
dimness...

---

...the voice which occurs all the time  
while everything else is happening”

*-Ron Loewinsohn-*

Here I am drawing on Zukofsky  
on Wittgenstein, Blanchot  
all the others too  
because language  
is that pre-fab tool  
that we fabricate  
for ourselves  
as it manufactures us

Help outside  
no help  
coming through, as it does  
inside, after all,  
helping to shape  
and discover,  
lending forms  
and definition  
to experiences

otherwise improbable

ineffable

unknown

remaining still

outside words' purview

but almost communicative

almost expressed

anyway, all ways

that come down to

into, as possibles.

Rearrange.

Bakhtin, semiotic Ecos,

Sebeok, Halliday, Firth and Peirce

not forgetting Uexküll

nor leaving him aside

in his thousands of worlds

circling our own

so Susan Howe and Lyn

Hejinian, Arakawa and Gins

add their genes

to my braiding strand

Creeley Olson Williams

that Wallace Stevens says.

Engineering himself  
with parts ready made  
collage and cross-breeding  
in chaos of happenstance  
accord.

What with friendship  
and love  
those I-Vs  
as in injections  
through slap  
and its waking  
like alien probes  
something happens  
and goes on  
no controlling the architect  
who is many  
and not yet done  
will be never  
without any plans  
just a tinkering  
of billions  
of metaphorical hands

like sky  
and crows  
and water  
and cells  
air-breath  
sorrows  
stew pot  
of whatever's  
alive  
and quite probable,  
then some

we call "context"  
"situation"  
the world enough  
and time  
we go down in  
and on

fecund.

### III.

If asked to say myself, what would it be that I might say?

I'd say "selfless" but not as altruism, rather stuck  
at a crossroad of enough sensation to feel responsible  
but not enough to seem of value yet.

I.e. I've never known the underwritten sense of being "good enough"  
or "good just as I am"  
rather ever the hunch that something's missing.  
or someone.

entity that might provide worth. Inherently.

A.k.a. "identity."

It seemed safer to keep to myself,  
which I have never found,  
perhaps stumbled across from time to time  
with no one to confirm.

From early on it's been piano and pen –  
attempts to confirm for myself

I have effects.

Or that I am and at least possess matter  
whether that "matters" or not

I can draw lines and shape letters  
that others might read...*really*,  
or punch holes in the air against keys  
resulting in sound as a response to such grasping



It's a striving for verification, really.

an undeniable act of "to be."

Thinking

that if I could see it, or hear,

perceptively in some way,

there must be a someone behind it,

in fact, a name that I've employed

for myself – simply "Someone"

among so many others, hardly

distinguishable, but not without

the grave desire so "to be."

Someone.

Which brings me to now

and surrounding effects –

there are spouses and children

and pages and friends

sounds and writings and pictures

various artifacts,

even skin I count now

and its pains

as evidence that I might

be here

now.

And have matter

that matters

to some.

never certain.

What's called "passing fancy"  
or "passing away"  
like seasons and bodies and grass  
so – how much?

Not very.

But still.

I am here  
and I love  
I reach out  
and effect  
readily verifiable  
as pain.

Still undecided  
as "good."

#### IV.

There are things that ask themselves,  
are asked of you  
your selves  
we, an assemblage of language,  
of contexts invested, invented, infested,  
with meanings,  
with signs,  
with billions of shorthands,  
short-handed always  
for something else,  
it begs the question  
asking itself  
our selves  
where we come from

as if a nexus of webbing  
were stilled for a moment  
could be located  
but isn't  
it can't  
so no answers are given  
rather various strands  
at sundry intervals  
depending  
on the angling

of the web

we ask ourselves

it asks itself

through us

as if a part

of our machinations

were so simple

as to run

that way,

on questioning.

I ask myself,

engineering my selves

pretending to manage

operations

like instructions

booklets

pamphlets

fragments

of the origins

of stones

and cells

and butterfly's wings

whence also

my individuated (as in differing, deferring)

DNA

## **Do Not Answer**

is what the question is

being

just another way

to leave

a particular mark

- ? -

always shared in common

but variously inked

or stroked

or spoken

while walking

falling

singing,

standing,

positioning doesn't matter

and makes all the difference

in the world

if you're asking.

I am

## **V. in Appropriate Voicing**

He works at the only solution...  
what calculates being binary  
operations in two hemispheres  
He will attempt to inhabit between  
to increase the materials colossally  
And therefore to add  
or perhaps even multiply  
subtracting divisions en route

Working a solution  
without equation  
only a means of figuring  
what it is that might be here  
or there  
the wherever of whatever  
simply a matter  
of when

He writes  
scribbling a mannered matter  
extracting doodles  
impacting his geometries.  
The earth is round  
in an oblong way  
like all ideas of perfection  
so as not to fall

He slides  
working his hands into cracks  
in futile attempts to grab hold  
He won't  
having already shifted  
by the time  
his digits arrive

He will go on measuring land  
by feel  
a task for stitching the meanings  
together  
unwound in the act of threading  
ripped out  
by his dreams in the night

which work toward the final solution,

inevitably

a silencing of the two spheres

deformed so very anonymously

in the only way it ends

carrying on

toward

dis-solution...



## VI.

If I am here,  
it's as dispersion.

I am here.

I open out

What exists

through contact

I learn my boundaries

are sometimes shared

as margins

I sense

a threshold

for encounter

to disperse

in borders

commingled present

here, and now,

a kind of always

where I will be

Like a shadow  
or a field  
a range of action  
acted on  
therefore distinct  
and altogether  
the one and the other(s)  
textiling  
what is  
here  
now

I declare  
it makes no difference  
I am here  
is different from  
the declaration  
also here  
and in relation  
to

the one and the many  
indistinguishable  
and uniquely so  
in location  
and extension,  
duration  
and occurrence,  
the only here  
is we.

I create myself  
accordingly  
as I'm created,  
simultaneous construction(s);  
what is not  
identifies  
what it is  
and thus becomes  
it as well

I am a spectrum  
and dispersion  
and an othering  
at once –  
shadows within shadows  
of shadows in a field  
we become

## VII. What We Do With Who We Are

Seems a likely story in the making (of either the doing or the being)

Given the limitations

speaking of time

thinking of space

or energy – matter – duration.

We repeated: the stars burned out

hundreds of thousands of them

years ago

and the news

has yet

to reach us

i.e. things are relative

like we, one to another,

and all the possible rest

in terms of *potentia*

inactual

capacity vs. reality

and also such part of it.

“I remember –“

we sometimes say

concocting a story

toward what is needed,

an age-old habit

of recurrence

thus the doing

effects the being

in its reversals

and translations

or

where do predilections

spring?

e.g. nothing is left

to its own devices

and if it were

(if it could be)

would we have being

in itself

without an object

to act against

(without its *doing*?)

I wouldn't know

without a something

so I guess hardly.

As it were.

With a measurable body  
(apparent limitation)  
height and weight  
shape and number  
identify by more  
& you have a name  
not definition  
the truth is like that  
I often say,  
explaining nothing  
in vague depictions.

Even what's specific  
or precise  
is mystical and vague  
from variant positions  
called *perspective*  
another name  
limited by what senses

And what else is there?  
in the being and its actions  
than these limits  
of description?

One wants to wonder  
but can't go out  
or further on  
than where  
or what  
one is

When.

Which equals how,  
finally,  
a resolution  
of the doing  
of the being  
that interests me.

She'd call it "process"  
in the "system"  
of "relations" –  
their between –  
Gymnastic open language  
that I like  
but don't really  
understand  
being  
part of it  
during all  
and never  
after.

Which gives pause  
to cause reflection –  
a kind of  
recollecting  
toward the future –  
what we do  
with who we are.