

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 Uexkull

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.

TELLING THE BODY

I.

If I begin with fingers the telling flows from
five tributaries of dreams
taught the melodies of keys
fueled by angels real or imagined
I muse “you must revise your life”
again, again
carrying the weight of vast spaces
what opens along with the winds, oh
from here the terms are fed
narrowing the bloody veins
realities of trial and error
I imagine
again, again
to fail, fall short
misstep on the ladder
of which all the rungs
climb death.
If desire dreams
the waking ends
are same:
try. fail. try again.
fail better,
this dream I tell you.

II.

Moving toward the mighty visions
the forearm
fighting good and evil
obsessed by both
from all sides
underwritten
with messaging death

stark full dreams
veins wound deep
in muscle
19th-20th centuries
with all the promise
in music
and results

nightmarish stark and full

an arm-wrestle bind
Dostoevsky, Schiele and Pessoa
self-portraited heteronymity
stark, full, and free
to battle each self
against its own ideas
and to fail
seeking the hope

turning at the elbow
into suicide
bleary-eyed will
and glitz of fantasy
David Foster Wallace
and kin
struggling still
full of stark dreams

leaping Lorca
Schiele-selves
inside others
yet not actually
sharp turn at the elbow
strength unto strength
to follow through

with one's own hand

sliding over shoulder and neck
(only there to support the head
and hold it all together)
moving on to its description
sketchy self-portraiture
in circles
as easy as lying