



N I G H T
P A L A C E

by Mount Ferrie

Night Palace

Huge Fire

Breaths

Swallowed Alive

My Canopy

Broom of Wind

I Walk

(soft air)

Empty Paper Towel Roll

Wind & Fog

Wind & Fog pt. 2

Blurred World

I Heard Whales (I Think)

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I Spoke With A Fish

Myths Come True

Non-Metaphorical Decolonization

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Myths Come True pt. 2

& Sun

Writing Poems

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Stone Woman Gives Birth To A Child At Night

Demolition

I Need New Eyes

*painting by Indigo Free
released as ELV052 in November 2024*

*P.W. Elverum & Sun
p.o. box 23
Eastsound, Wash.
U.S.A. 98245*

bio:

How much does an artist's biography matter? Do we need to know anything about the person to get what they make? Shouldn't the thing speak for itself?

I'd like to not refer to myself ever. I'd like to disappear into these things and simply send them out into the world on their own, self-evident as a ringing bell. But someone rang it, and in this case it was me. So I write and make and waver back and forth forever over the role of "me" in this work. I have to be true, I have to write what I know, and so I'm left with the task of digging down here where I am and hoping something beyond this little self gets found, dug up into the light. I do this with writing, with pictures, with songs and music. It's my vocation, my work of life, the thing I plan on doing until my body refuses to cooperate.

The biographical facts of my life are that I was born May 26th, 1978 and raised by two young parents in a semi-rural, not-very-much-money-having, back-to-the-land-ish, vaguely countercultural, supportive and improvising family household 6 miles outside of Anacortes, Washington. I explored the forest and swam in the lake with a neighborhood of similar semi-feral friends. When my hungry teenage consciousness found the breadcrumbs thrown by Nirvana leading deeper into the local underground, I followed. The "darkness in the woods" of *Twin Peaks* was not a TV fairytale. It was right out the door, ringing with feedback. My friends and I fully immersed in the early 90's Pacific Northwest underground music world and clung to whatever we could find from K, Sub Pop, etc. through zines and word of mouth. We built whole identities around those scraps. I played drums and wrote meaningless lyrics in my first bands, then discovered scrappy DIY recording and was immediately totally devoted, all in. My first tapes of recording experiments weren't quite songs, more just raw sound trials, my 10,000 hours of effort. Eventually I knew I should *say something* so songs with words gradually crept out through the tape hiss and distortion.

I moved to Olympia for five years, from 1997 to 2002, and released records as "the Microphones" on the K label. During this time my devotion to the Art Life only deepened. Everything else fell away but the ideas and how to make them, how to bring them out into the world. That boulder is still rolling.

For years my main point could be summarized as: a person is insignificant beneath the big impermanence of life on earth, in the infinite universe. I had a lot to say about this. From my teens through my twenties and thirties, I sought new ways of saying *don't get used to it* over the course of many albums.

Then came an abrupt crash of actual non-metaphorical impermanence. In 2016 my partner, Geneviève, died and I didn't know what to think anymore. The fact of fleetingness was proven so obviously true it became alien, too close, cold, drained of resonance. As poetic as a brick. Trying to make sense of this short human life felt like a silly ideal in the face of such conclusive senselessness. I shifted my focus to writing about the nuts and bolts, the acorn on the ground, the clock ticking. No symbols, no poetry, no wind. I parented our baby daughter and avoided zooming out. I resisted my mind's occasional flirtations with mystical interpretation of whatever happened in my days. A *crow looked at me*, I said bluntly, and meant it as just that. The bird is just a bird. Yes, it looked at me. Whether or not there was significance and legend between that bird's eye and mine was no longer my concern. That's what I told myself.

For a while I tried to reject my life's work. I thought it was perverse to claim to seek understanding and create beauty out of the ambiguities. I guess I was just fucked up from the near death experience, and from the shock of being a new parent alone next to a gaping hole with all new uncertainties. Plus this was right when the country where I live elected an extra-psychotic president and the authoritarianism and

selfishness inherent in our malnourished culture bubbled even more obviously to the surface. Of course I walked around with my baby in the backpack muttering, "What even matters?"

Love matters of course. And surrender. Belief in loving surrender never went away. My songs from this time never got totally drowned in nihilism. I embroidered my notebook pages with insignificance and care. I raised the kid. I narrowed my gaze on the present moment (*Now Only*). I thought if I grounded myself exclusively in the real, the uninterpreted concrete, then I was at least being responsible with how I used my little human brain in its blip of time here alive on Earth.

Of course, the unknown unreal was never totally gone. On *Crow pt. 2* I sang that I saw the lost Geneviève in "the myths that used to get told around the fire / where a seal's head pokes up through from underwater / crossing a threshold between two worlds, yours and mine." I meant it. This seal's head poking up is the seed that stuck with me, lodged deeply, incubated into what is now fruiting as *Night Palace*.

Gradually I relaxed enough to open the door again. In 2018 a really crazy thing happened. In a flash I upended my whole world, gladly, and dove all the way into a dream of transformative love, in full abandon. I willfully ignored whatever shreds I had left of parental caution and moved my two-person family to the big city to be with a new person in a new world. It was a dream. I was not myself, but in my spinning pendulum swing I loved being whoever this other character was. I have kept that time private and I still will, out of respect for the people complicit in the delusion. When I woke up, I found myself homeless, scraped raw and crushed.

We'd loved poems together, and in my stunned negotiation phase, not yet fully understanding what had happened to me, I made songs braided through with love, devotion, symbols. I welcomed poetry back in and made it a home. I made songs as a vote cast toward fearlessness and honesty and against the cautious heart-guarding that can keep so many of us from what's actually ecstatically possible. (*Lost Wisdom pt. 2*) It didn't work. I am embarrassed.

Eventually the flailing of my turbulent life calmed some. Love, birth, death, loss, love, salvation, rejection, annihilation, and finally I landed somewhere solid. A new island with all new people, just me and the kid, building from zero on ground that felt right. She started at the Montessori school, I began working toward getting our house built. We made a few friends. Every day I doused the smoldering coals of my last few years and made room for the simple fresh air of the present. I went on endless lost forest walks while she was at school. Mumbling in the woods, I indulged the simply autobiographical. I spooled out a long song about my own belly button, not sure what it was for (*Microphones in 2020*). In the clearing smoke of my life, I took stock.

Peace waits while ashes fall from the sky. We settled with the ashes and grew there. For a couple years I didn't think much about my alternate life as a singer who travels around arranging merch tables. There was a pandemic and the skies briefly quieted. Delirium escalated in the big world coming in through the news on the radio. To cancel it all and get small and local was the obvious move and that's what I did, gratefully.

Where I now live there is a lifetime of work waiting in basic forest maintenance alone, and I am lucky to have it. I have pushed my art life a little to the side and put on different work clothes. I've tended countless bonfires of crisped overgrown understory brush dragged into piles to hopefully slow the someday cataclysmic forest fires. I drank the rain, I huffed moss.

While catching my breath by the coals, I rolled around vague ideas that the next record I made—if I ever made one—would be about “motherhood.” The idea grew from the recognition that many of my favorite songs since adolescence came from mothers singing about motherhood. Sinéad O’Connor, Julie Doiron, Sade, Björk. Maybe I could be allowed in the side door of this cool club with a special single-parent exception. People would text me, “Happy Mothers Day,” and it felt true. In my little house I’d expanded into the space of both parents. The conspicuous absence of a mother in our micro family still felt electric and potent. The void shimmered. I knew I was not her, but I knew I was not *not* her.

This uncertain overlap asked to be explored. Sensitive to overstepping into the sacred maternal lineage of women, I thought deeper about the undercurrent in the motherhood idea that had pulled me toward it. In *Petit Poulet*, Sinéad O’Connor sings to her child, “I am the sun up in the sky / I am the moon also at night / I am the ground under your foot / I am holding you.” I can relate. The total encompassing devotion of the love for this kid, beyond even the limits of my earthly body, opened back up for me the connection between the mundane and the infinite. My impulse toward an idea of motherhood wasn’t about uterus stuff, it was about a much bigger expression of a universal nurturing interconnection.

Still catching my breath by the bonfire, I began to notice this connection showing up all over the place, flooding back in. Smoke rose and hung in the branches before the next breeze dissipated its gray shape (*Huge Fire*). Rain kissed. I responded to bird squawks (*I Saw Another Bird*). I remembered the seal head poking up, puncturing the veil between two worlds, the permeability of all certainties.

Living without ambition beyond food and shelter and caring for my small household was the destination, I thought. That’s enough, I thought. But there is another world inside this one, and no equilibrium or peace will last forever. Don’t get used to it, they say. Right as I was performing this “permanent” contentedness, out of nowhere, a new person showed up. Indigo, full of disruptive ecstatic love and billowing fresh air. An unforeseen sky opened and now we laugh in our unity. We are together.

Once again, what I thought was solid melted away. The castle I thought I’d fortified chunked off into the crashing waves below. I noticed that this time the transience felt fine. It felt good. I’d been tossed around enough maybe to finally get the idea. *Nothing lasts forever but right now love is here*. I got better at just relaxing and going along with the seething interplay between fogged-in solidity and refreshing tumultuousness (*Wind & Fog*).

As I aged and mellowed and stabilized I finally got regular about meditating. It had been decades of squeaking by as a dabbler. I loved my exaggerated solo excursions into the mountains with a trail-worn zen poetry book and the insights that jabbed through, but somehow I never totally took the instruction to *just sit* personally. I said, “Thanks Dogen, just the poems for me, I’m good.” Until it clicked. The elusive pre-dawn world finally became the place I started my everyday days, like I’d dreamed of for years. It became no big deal to get up in the black blue gray, get a fire going and sit on the porch just breathing and clearing out space.

In this fresh emptiness, ideas crowded in. I fleshed out the notebook jots, I got out the recording stuff, I tuned the guitar. I remembered that recording songs is fun and actually very meaningful to me and decided that my years of squirming against identity could be simply finished.

From there the dam was broken and it all poured out. I spent months polishing the fragments of ideas I’d collected in the notebook into songs with chords and plots. This

happened at the recording desk but with everything turned off. Paper and pencil and eraser. Tape and scissors.

Now I’m old enough to know which parts of this process to guard. I can sense the delicate boundaries of my own attention when I’m trying to find the heart of an idea and bring it to life. There is a constant presence off to the side, waving and calling, “Hey! These songs you’re writing will be heard by us, an amorphous ocean of other people. What will we think? Consider us!” I notice when my thinking drifts that way and more quickly shut it down, return inward. I feel the integrity in not considering other people’s reactions to what I’m doing. This counter-intuitive push-away feels wrong in so much of life. In the enclosed mind the unformed becomes clear, while outwardly I give off weird vibes. In this tender nest where creation begins, denying the community is an essential act. When it’s writing time, the wheels turn and ideas ooze, the work takes place in the wet mud of the mind. Only the body is at the grocery store not saying hi.

Some of these ideas are more rooted in the concrete world of society. I often write about my personal experience as a bridge hopefully to all people experiencing their lives everywhere. Where I live, there are particulars. I live on a beautiful island with a radical wealth gap (*November Rain*), in a country crusted with non-acknowledgment of its genocidal history (*Non-Metaphorical Decolonization*), callused in delusional greed around ideas of private property (*Co-Owner of Trees*). While much of this writing reaches inward, some of these songs stand on a soapbox and look directly into the eyes of strangers.

I overuse blunt elemental symbols like wind, fog, rain, cloud. I know by now they will never leave me. I know language like this might unintentionally create an escapist ambiguous “nature” for rattled suburban youth to find soothing and disengaged refuge in. I don’t want to soothe though. The stakes are too high. My hope is someone out there will hear past the distracting nature picture I keep accidentally describing and get prodded by the ideas beneath. These weather words recur, I think, because I am reaching for some vocabulary universally outside of myself. Something that blankets all human experience without slipping into the abstractions of the non-concrete. There are felt realities we all share, now and since forever, and I want to re-enter this old stream that flows from beyond the pre-human, together.

In these songs, the autobiographical continually burbles up and carries along, like a raft, the intentions of something more spacious. Yes, I am a person with a life full of circumstances. Yes, I wrote these things. So what? Don’t look at me.

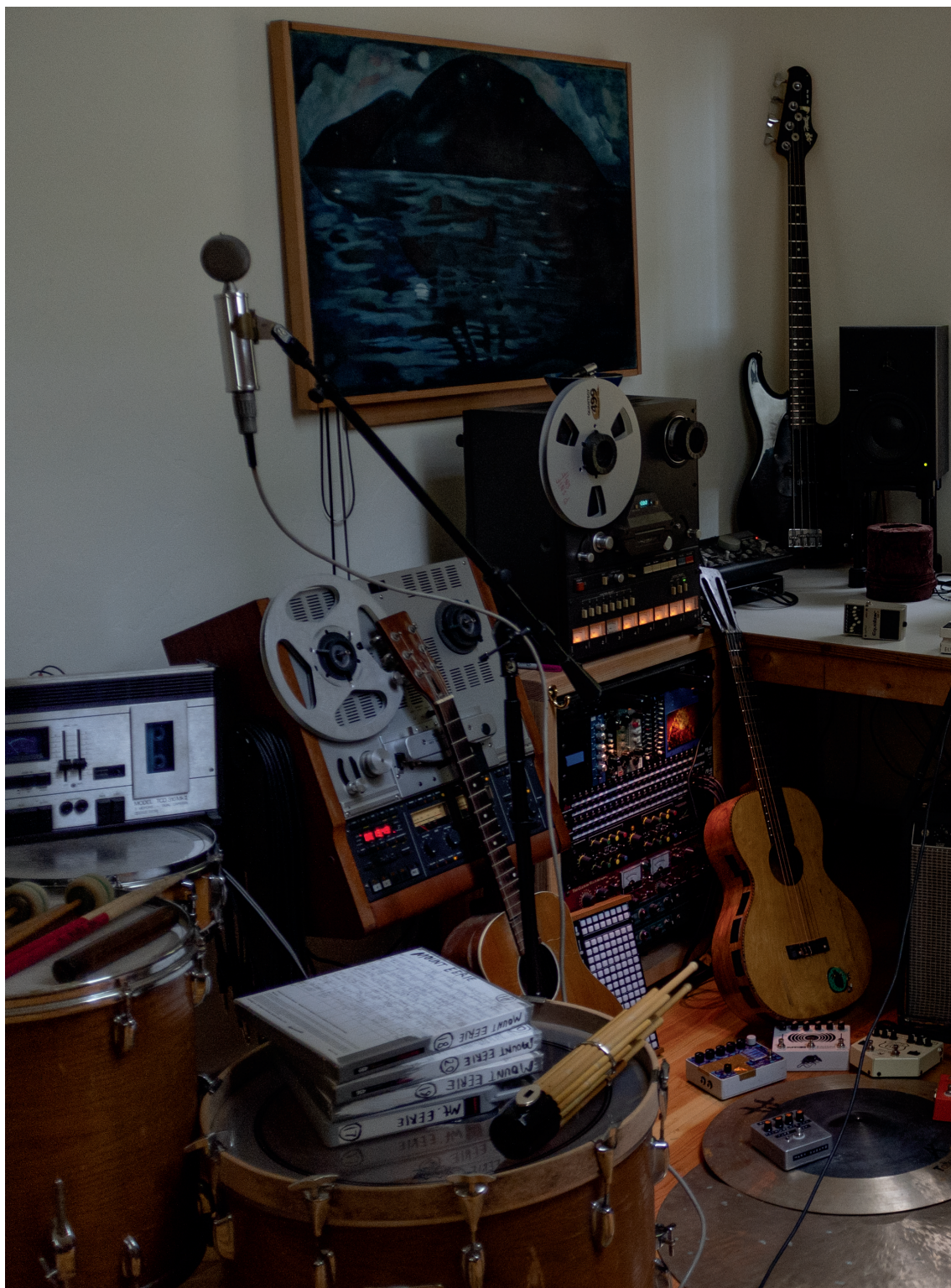
These songs point at a moment of release, of peace found in a non-intellectual lightning strike after long waves of turmoil and surrender. I tried to give them all they needed to go out beyond my little story independently. I have traveled through decades of fluctuations, swinging between the concrete and the mystical, between attachment and annihilation, between certainty and dust, now washed up on a shore in what I’m pretty sure is an authentic state of peace. The desperate reaches toward belief and the recoils of aversion have calmed. A raven loudly flaps through the branches above me and I say hello like it’s no big thing.

Here. On this ground, in this flashing moment, I made songs. *Night Palace* opens and orients: “a spirit world found / out past where belief blows away.” That’s where we are.

Phil Elverum
June 2024

recorded

mostly December 1st, 2022 to May 11th, 2024
nowhere:



This is a recording project. I learned to make songs through the act of recording them and that's just the way it's always going to be. If I have shows, I might learn to play and sing them later, in reverse, or often not at all. Recorded music, though, is a statue of a waterfall. All these pieces of sound are just quickly grabbed, half-remembered simulations of an idea that, in real life, whipped by in a flash.

Here's where I went back to tape. For the past few records, since 2017, I had to record on the computer just because of the slimness of my working windows in the single parenting life. I had to be quick and small. But I always missed the slow screenlessness of recording on reel to reel tape and the constant accidental discoveries that come from clunky limitations. Fortunately I'd held on to a few of my old obsolete, bulky pieces of analog equipment through the moves. I set it back up in the living room and began.

Nerds, here's what I used: ATR tape on a 1/2" 8 track (Tascam 38), a couple old Neumann mics (KM86 and CMV563), a few different tube preamps (Altec, Lola, Burl), an ADR CompEx compressor, a Culture Culture maximum distortion box, a Studer 10 channel mixer, mixing down to a 1/4" 2 track (Studer A807). All analog!

I'm not on a record label other than my own fake one, so as my own domineering Svengali, this time I gave myself plenty of space to just record on no particular schedule and see what came up. This is not necessarily a good thing and can be risky. Yes, I did record many extended abstract guitar feedback explorations, and yes, I taped over them. With no timeline and no big thought of what any of it would become, I followed the ideas. Songs kept coming. One guiding thought was the joke of making a record of 100+ very short songs, as a follow up to the previous record of one extremely long song. Ha ha. I love Maher Shalal Hash Baz and their



reorientation of what constitutes a “song.” Ideas can be as striking as a smack, no need for returning gratuitously to a chorus. I tried to make a record of songs that stuck to just the spark. Yes, it might be long. Consider it in these chapters:

1 - 8: finding ourselves in the big world, the occurrence of a person amidst constantly changing matter

9 - 12: looking outward, connecting with others

13 - 16: connecting deeper, beyond the human

17 - 19: non-metaphorical decolonization where we live

20 - 23: waking up in the big flow of history, multi-generational memory loss, trying to write it down

24 - 26: with clear eyes, living in reality with integrity



mastered by JJ Golden at Golden Mastering, Ventura, Cal.



vinyl by Cascade Record Pressing, Milwaukie, Ore.



this huge poster printed by Foster Printing, Santa Ana, Cal.



distributed by The Business Distribution, Anacortes, Wash.

1 Night Palace



fissure eruption in the Krafla fissure swarm, Sept. 8th, 1977
photograph: Sigurður Þorarinsson

SIDE ONE

I saw lightning last night
but heard nothing

the whole half of the sky flashed a couple times
but no rain no sheet metal rolling

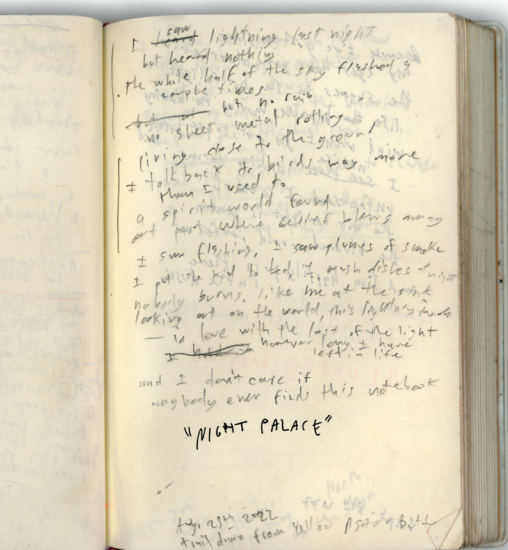
Living close to the ground
I talk back to birds way more than I used to
a spirit world found
out past where belief blows away

I saw flashing
I saw plumes of smoke
I put the kid to bed
I wash dishes in the night

Nobody burns like me at the sink
looking out on the world
this lightning inside

I'm in love with the last of the light
however long I have left in life

(and so what if no one ever finds this notebook)



Idea: Aug. 25th, 2022, Yellow Aster Butte
Recorded: Feb. 1st to 8th, 2023

The title *Night Palace* comes from a poem by Joanne Kyger, held in my hand on the cover of *A Crow Looked At Me* by Mount Eerie. The idea of that poem got explored, but not the title. The words "night palace" have stayed with me for these past 8 years, unclear and waiting. A whole world was opened up with those two words and I was led forward. Finally I found it, the night palace, on a short solo backpacking trip, sitting in the extended twilight watching weather move below to the east in the last of the light. I saw it. I noticed the fire and wonder that rolls back in, that a surrender had happened. My parent life and the world beyond joined.

I set up 2 cranked mics on the Silvertone chord organ and put them through maximal disortion, so even the air in the room roared and crackled. Just testing this sound, playing unplanned intuitive chords and whistling along, the song happened. The shape was then built in reverse with *gagaku* in mind, bass sliding like the silent thunderclouds over the foothills seen from above, lightning rolling. I got a sho and tried.

² *Huge Fire*

Trying to see from in this room where it is blinding
learning to breathe beneath the surface
of all the wrecked up¹ things I haul with me around

I heard singing at twilight
trailed by belongings, I crawled forward into a clearing at dusk
and got a huge fire going
it grew, night fell
I kept throwing whatever I could pick up into the flames

nothing but me and all this shattered wood I've been pulling
into a heap of flames and smoke
this is my life

by now I've lived long enough to know
nothing is stronger than the blow
the whipping wind, the way it tears

the sparks are full in the sky yawning open
breath only very rarely song

You were singing at twilight with your fingers moving
I'd heard the same song in a dream
I sing it now to myself
I carry it into the night
I walk, and there's a fire, but it's at my back²

three days of heavy rain
there's still coals

Idea: Dec. 7th, 2022

Recorded: drums in Nov. 2020, song Dec. 6th to 8th, 2022

Words written intuitively following some chords chosen visually by hand shape and played with the clean-ish reverb'd jangle of Cocteau Twins in mind. The drums had been recorded years earlier in 2020 in a previous house. They'd been mic'd up for another thing anyway so I played an unplanned rolling cymbal and toms thing with the plodding bass from *Anonymous Collective* by Stereolab stuck in my head. Who could hear the connection? The bass is just trying to follow the toms, up and down the stairs. Distorted chord organ appears at the end playing the role of the searing-est embers, everything sledgehammered in compression.

My real job now is not anything music, not anything on the computer or that makes money, it's not playing shows or making books. It's not being a parent. I do these things, but my real job is now circling around in the forest by the house rearranging dead wood. This mountain was logged maybe a hundred years ago and then left to regrow, Douglas Fir too close together, "dog hair" choking itself into frail scraggly middle age. The young trees die and stay standing, hung up on each other. Fallen cones sprout into hopeless saplings and then die in the solid shade of the thick canopy on this north facing slope where a century of stressed out settler homes and wildfire suppression policies have made the whole west coast into a long pile of dry kindling.

In the 2020's I arrive in grubby clothes to shuffle around on the forest floor like a human insect, pushing down dead standing snags and dragging them to a bonfire, feeding it endlessly. Rain falls, smoke rises. I tell myself this work is necessary to mitigate and slow a potential spreading forest fire someday, hopefully not soon, on this sweltering globe, but the truth is that I am no match for the apocalypse. I do this work for personal reasons. It is ecstatic. Meditative and exhausting, carcinogenic and primitive. I am on no timeline but the seasons and their sheltering rainfall. The fire gets indulged and heaped up, the flames lick wet boughs above,

falling rain evaporates before landing. My participation in this ancient reshuffling is micro and unnecessary. The wildfires will get it all done in a blink someday, my house included.

For now I feed my mind and heart on this ash and sweat and the transcendence that steams out as I lay panting on the ground after awkward armloads of entangled branches dragged down steep unreliable slopes.

In this moment a window opens. The life of accumulation that trails behind me I see now as just belongings. What I am burning is not forest wood but my own used up self, the recurring bad dreams, the clutter that I haven't seen as clutter until finally now, old skin sloughing off.

I hear singing at twilight, or do I? I am way out here. Is there a song on the wind? Is the memory of a beloved person who has died actually embodied in any of the living world around me? Birds or ghosts? Does she sing? The sparks rise into a yawning sky. Constellation, I remember you alive, singing, fingers moving. The distinction between the dream and the now blurs, and here I still am, carrying your living song forward, our child. The coals left unextinguished burn down to mineral in the days and days of rain, burrowed in ash, warm forever. I walk, my back to the fire, into what is not yet lit up.

1 - "wrecked up", is that something people say even? I had it in my head from the Sinéad O'Connor song *The Lamb's Book of Life*.

2 - *How Poetry Comes To Me* by Gary Snyder (1992):

*It comes blundering over the
Boulders at night, it stays
Frightened outside the
Range of my campfire
I go to meet it at the
Edge of the light*



Mount Saint Helens, May 18th, 1980
photograph: Tom Adamson

3 Breaths

in a snow fall
I stop my working for a second

in the little space between my breaths
I heard a small sound down beneath the blood rushing
crouched, buried away
in the basement of my life¹
I go downstairs in the dark
cold wind in the face
incomprehension
between each breath I breathe out
there's a little moment of death²
everything hangs

and then I draw air in again

In this constant coming back to life
a flickering spark jumps sharp in my eye

I scan the horizon from this spot where I stand
nothing returns
I give this and the next and the next and all following
breaths!

Idea: Dec. 19th, 2022

Recorded: piano and seagull scraps in 2002, drums in Nov. 2020, song Dec. 1st, 2022 to Jan. 1st, 2023

This song was the first one recorded. It was an experiment in *just doing* to push through any creeping hesitation blockage. The snow outside was deep and inside the house was barely visible in winter's dark blue noon. I moved the couch and set up my recording stuff on a slab of wood low to the floor, crouched on a miniature stool to reach the buttons. In the long winters where I live a person's mind goes dormant, close to actual animal hibernation, and the sluggish world of dreams and song is all there is. It can be hard to open your eyes. In this seasonal sleep I thought about what might be found even deeper down, between the breaths.

I started with a reel of tape that said "Piano, Phil, March 16th, 2002, 6:30 pm". It was me in the old big room of Dub Narcotic studio in Olympia filling scrap tape with chords and room sound just to have. I wanted to make the air audible. I wanted to make a drum sound like an organ, a rising gasp.

1 - From *A Flower's Is Mine* by Adrian Orange (2007).

*All my thoughts and dreams are
blanketed by a soft darkness / like a candle
in the basement burning slow and jubilant*

I return to this candle in the basement constantly.

2 - I can't find the citation or remember exactly, but in an instruction for Zen meditation someone, my hunch is Shunryū Suzuki, said that at the bottom of each exhaled breath, consider that you are dead for a moment. It all hangs. Then you inhale and the wave comes in again. But at that moment before the inhale, no thought of the past or future, it is not a given that the next breath will come along. This song is that breathing, the constant coming back to life in each moment, and the constant total giving up again of each exhale.

4 *Swallowed Alive*

Recorded: drums and Agathe Elverum screaming and speaking, Nov. 2020, music Jan. 25th, 2023



Höllenschlund, Heilig-Geist-Retabel Werkstatt des Wolfgang-Retabels Nürnberg, Nadelholz, 1448/1449
Detail of Jüngsten Gericht

5 *My Canopy*

Some affection is mercurial
I've gone in and out of favor with no footing

but my love for you, my child,
is as permanent as sky
breathe forever
beneath the canopy of my life
while you wait through winters
coals illuminate your night
salmonberries will return
you are always in my eye

I love you.

Idea: Jan. 13th, 2021

Recorded: Jan. 29th, 2024

Swallowed Alive and *My Canopy* go together. They are my insistent contributions to the public collection of songs about motherhood, about overwhelming, cathartic, devoted care-giving.

Soon after Agathe was born, life got really crazy all of a sudden. Though I did pretty well at maintaining a placid high-functioning atmosphere in the house, there were days when full torn-brain flailing was needed. Some time in there I was given the record *Mama* by Endon. At first I'd put it on to masochistically match the intensity of the screaming baby with my own internal desolation wilderness, but soon it became a celebration, straight up joyful in a demonic abandon way. *Swallowed Alive* aims for this same kind of formless maximalism.

Since I am not the screamer in the family I set up the mic for Agathe and played drums while she cut loose, age 5. Her words are improvised and perfect. We did get swallowed by the lion and we did live to tell the tale.



Redwood chainsaw carving: Kenyon R. Kaiser
photograph: Bob von Normann



⁶ *Broom of Wind*

Sweeping with an old broom
whose straw keeps chunking off
for me to sweep up

When my life is worn to a nub
I too will be swept up eventually
by the same thing I once came from

I too am a chunk broken off
from the broom of wind¹

but for now I pass across the land
like everyone, a piece of wind,
a little confluence

only the occurrence of a person

Idea: March 29th, 2023, Fishery Point, Ch'x'eni

Recorded: Dec. 4th, 2023 to Jan. 19th, 2024

An old broom is the perfect exemplification of a small scale self-sufficient Ouroboros recycling program. I swept the floor and created dust to sweep. This was my one job in a minimal sangha communal retreat mind bubble. Looking down, ignoring the others, starved for thoughts, I saw pieces of my kelly green sweatpants sheddings glinting in the salal along the trail from my early morning and late night shuffling. This sweatpants debris turned up in my dustpan too. Me and the broom, chunking off together. Another translation of "chunking" is "sloughing", as in a snake's old skin or a person's worn out views. In my chores I had my big moments.

Writing this now, I periodically step out and swing the splitting maul. It doesn't necessarily help reveal the words, but it does

cycle blood into my extremities and back to brain, and the blood probably knows the words. I lift the firewood rounds onto a bigger firewood round for splitting. At the end, I'll split and stack the big base one too. The wooden handle of the maul could be split up and burned too. Then the furniture. Then me. In the long run, all of us will disband and re-form elsewhere.

¹ - From *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer, I've carried for years this image of the wind as a cosmic broom, talking about Patagonia:

...near the southern tip of South America, where the wind sweeps the land like "the broom of God" - la escoba de Dios...



⁷ I Walk

walking away
shedding slow the generations
the towns dissolve
in my drumming footfall
discarded clothing on the ground
but I still carry it all the air cool and blue
the livelihoods, the expectations
the cities of never stopping thoughts
so I just still walk

dragging through stone
piled alive with associations dream remembering
since all time a snake that crawls through
trailing behind me back into the mist all old skin sloughing off
I walk until it's all fallen away

coming into a clearing
there's a pause between the breaths

I look up:

Mist kissed face vast grass shuffling
treeless place expanse encircling
the sky on my lips fog pulled in slow
until I too dissipate
find me blinking at dawn



Vinter ved Sognefjorden, 1827, by J.C. Dahl

Idea: Thanksgiving 2021

Recorded: Dec. 4th, 2023 to 8th, 2023

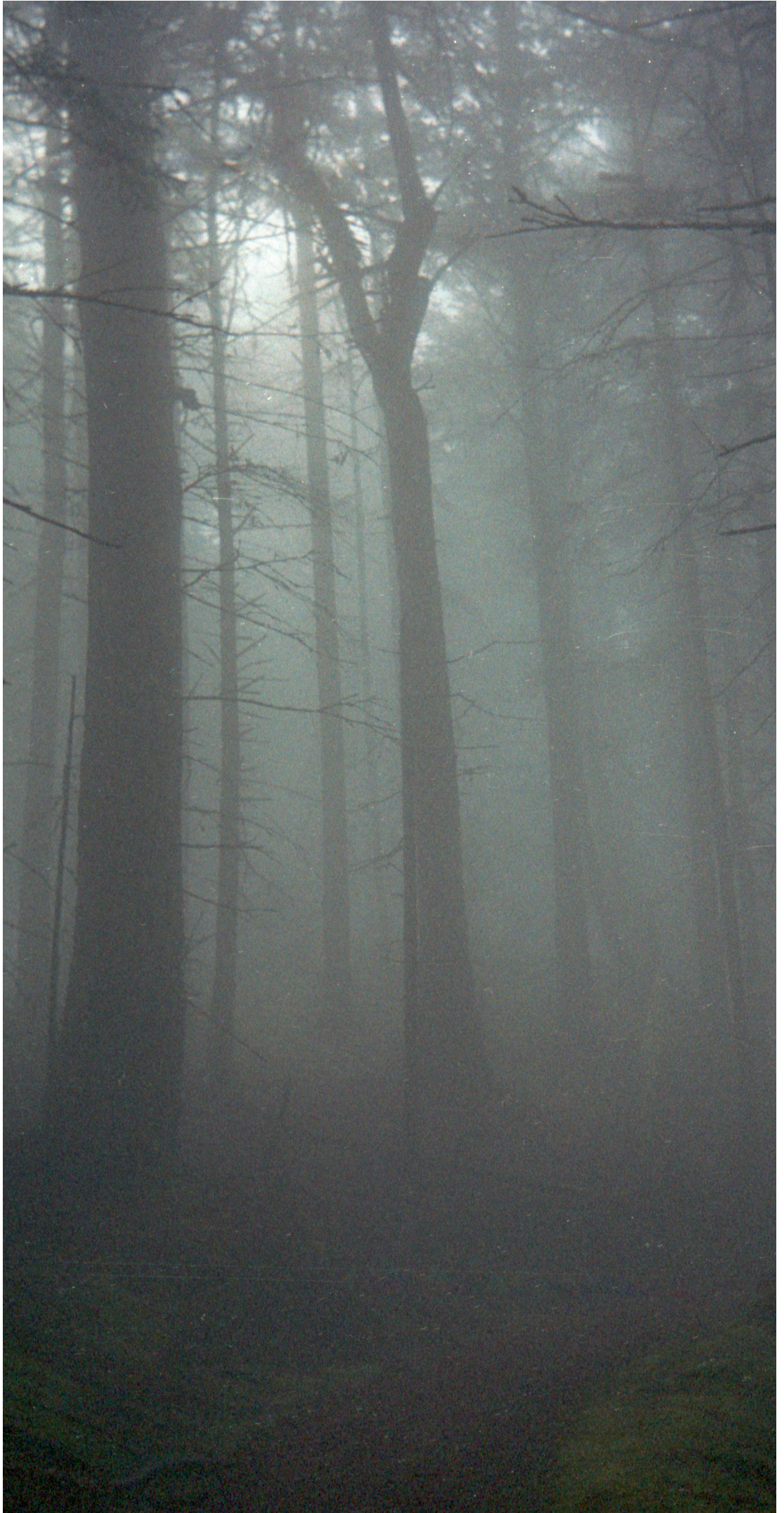
I walked out the door at Thanksgiving and immediately the new air flooded me with perspective. I saw myself dragging a stone age wooden wheel-less sled forward through history loaded with my own inherited ideas and traits, the evolutionary weight of all the weird efforts that led to *this present moment*. To drag the past through stone and aspire toward load-free lucidity are two different things, at odds with each other.

I walk to erode the load. It falls away and accumulates at the same time. I build and nourish new attachments while I reach for empty air. Coming into the occasional clearing, the light changes. Someone was here before and raised a

stone (see painting) to commemorate the skyward yell and it's momentary ecstatic vision. The top of the stone barely touches light this late in the year and in that pink blush is where the unburdened moment is found.

The musical model for this song is *Treasure Hiding* by Cocteau Twins (1996), the slow oceanic part one and then a catapulting coalescence into part two. The wind (later also appearing in *Demolition*) is a tape loop I made from a section in the Akira Kurosawa movie *Ran*, the part with the king gone nuts wandering lost in the tall grass. That wind is musically overwhelming and verbal so I borrowed it, with thanks.

⁸ *(soft air)*



9 *Empty Paper Towel Roll*

It's as if I'm looking at a corner of the sky through a cardboard tube¹
and I'm impressed
seems huge!
this is my idea of bottomlessness

too small a slice² of the night sky
through an empty paper towel roll
without even trying, I diminish infinity

knowing that wide winds find me
from a place I'll never know
I'm human. I know very little. I narrow my eyes.

with my life so far and all its conditions
I squint at the sky
from in my narrow tunnel vision,
my bruised up insides
can I abandon this position?
see beyond my little life

I sit and breathe slow at the end of the night³
and finally the sun cracks over the hill

a brief glimpse through wide open air

SIDE TWO



Idea: Aug. 25th, 2022, Yellow Aster Butte

Recorded: Jan. 29th, 2024

The place was picturesque. You're not really supposed to camp overnight up top but I found it difficult no to. The butte juts into the actual sky like a reaching appendage touched first and last by the sun. I set up my little tent just below the sore thumb summit, down the slope a little, and from in my focused sitting and reading I heard people hiking up for selfies and exuberance all through the twilight. "Oh my god there's a person right over there!"

Can an esoteric idea from Sōtō Zen be wrestled into the container of a pop-punk song? I thought I'd try to make these feathery wisps of perspective rip.

1 - From Dōgen's *Mountains and Waters Sutra* (1240):

Even if you see mountains as grass, trees, earth, rocks, or walls, do not take this seriously or worry about it; it is not complete realization. Even if there

*is a moment when you view mountains as the seven treasures shining, this is not returning to the source. Even if you understand mountains as the realm where all buddhas practice, this understanding is not something to be attached to. Even if you have the highest understanding of mountains as all buddhas' inconceivable qualities, the truth is not only this. These are conditioned views. This is not the understanding of buddha ancestors, but just **looking through a bamboo tube at a corner of the sky.***

2 - It's the ugly house on Kenmore. The one where you can see the KFC sign through their *front window*.

3 - the end of the night, the very beginning of the day, that cusp zone of twilight where sitting and breathing slow (meditating) is especially fruitful

10 *Wind & Fog*



Wind and Fog
one blowing one away
one coming back to crown the hill of our home

in their play
I hold you



11 *Wind & Fog pt. 2*

Wind and Fog will never leave me, I know by now
their come and go, always seething poetic crown

Now that I know you
I reach my arm, I touch your fingers
we marry the wind

In our home we test this shared dream while fog blows back in
so we air out the bedroom

What we build the wind is dismantling while we look on
It clears the eyes
I cup the candle, you can stay in my arms
I'll see you in the morning



¹² *Blurred World*

Because the turning of planets won't stop
my eyes have gone blurrier
I'm getting older still
prescription worsening

There are shapes in the sun-down half light
the wind is moving things

I go outside to piss into the night
just before sleeping

I notice lurching forms
unfocused, I absorb
the air tonight is warm
the blurred world performs

I'm just happily here in the dusk
myself just as blurry

Idea: Sept. 8th, 2022

Recorded: humming voices with Alex Mahan & Geneviève Castrée: June 29th, 2006, the rest: Feb. 8th to 10th, 2023

14 *I Saw Another Bird*

So what? I saw another raven.
I actually see them all the time
I hear their voices talking
 about what the rest of us don't know

I'm a fool on the ground below them
 on my phone beneath the sky
 but I know there's no one walking, really,
 through these dreams that I have

In the daylight I do all this work that needs to get done
 and I leave the mind of night

I can't remember having crossed a threshold¹
 between the dust and the alive
 so when a raven starts a conversation
 I just stand there and blank out

but I'm wrong!

There is another world inside this one,
 it shines:

 these birds trying for my attention
 and my wordless reply

Idea and Recorded: Jan. 10th and 11th, 2023

Out in front of the house I crunch around in the gravel moving pieces of wood from pile to pile between trunks of giant trees. I clank tools, I rummage in a cardboard box of nails, I slam a car door. I check my texts, I refold a tarp, I go inside for lunch. The human world, with me as its representative, slams around ungracefully in this forest clearing where a house has been made, my house. The cycles that went on here before me continue, and I sometimes notice.

Sometimes I feel like a participant swimming in the eternal, and other times I feel like an intruder with a breathing tube and imported food. The old chatter of animals and outdoor air here is unceasing and I swing in and out of inclusion. My house has walls. The door closes, the windows have glass. I go in and out. My thoughts crowd in and dissolve back out. Is someone other than my own projection really walking through these dreams or is everything just meat and dust?

Birds cross the line. They leap between worlds, from ground to sky, like laughing emissaries from gods. Or they *are* gods. They halo our own grinding wondering-time alive here in the dirt. They taunt with their easy access to the big perspective. It's been this way since forever, since we've had eyes to look up. The 17,000 year old cave art at Lascaux shows a dead hunter whose body has taken on a partial bird form, a beaked head, with a carved bird baton thing lying nearby, as if in death the person transformed into a being more suited to crossing over.

And it's ravens and crows in particular that have always spoken to us, with their rascal languages and bird cultures of clever manipulation. From indigenous North American ravens who created the world in all their different mischievous ways, to Odin with his two whispering spy ravens, to Shakespeare, to Poe, and on to now, and still going. These birds *do* walk through our dreams and waking lives, regarding us, commenting, voluble. They write our myths in the air.

When Geneviève died and I scraped the bottom of my ability to keep believing in the significance of the intangible, when I was in that *who cares* hole, I noticed the blunt presence of a crow. It looked at me. I said *fuck you* and wrote about throwing her toothbrush away instead. But the truth is that when a crow looked at me, I was also looking at it. The mutual gaze went

two ways and it never ends, two mirrors propped facing each other. The interspecies regard *is* meaningful, even when the dispiriting crush of life and death eclipses our more tender corners of awareness. I was freaked. My bullshit detector was haywire, too high strung. I posed dismissively toward the bird and wondered away for new springs of meaning drawn from something less ephemeral seeming.

Now my breath has slowed. I scratch around in the driveway doing my mellowed life work without a big stance to prove. Always, and I mean *always*, there are ravens watching me go about my tasks. Here in this forest, their home, I must seem interesting. They perch and talk at me. I respond in my English, usually with just "hello" and then they lift off. Their wings flap in loud whooshing huffs through the trunks, moving on to the next checkpoint. I love their breathing flapping. I think of them as neighbors. They probably think of me as a pet.

This frequent exchange we have is not ephemeral or poetic or mystical. It is boring. It's the rocks on the ground. It's a daily greeting. I stand there blanking out beneath these messengers from the other world and know that a quieter interrelation is being made clear, just like when I stand on the edge of the water and maybe hear whales, maybe hear the infinite mysterious. Or when I debate impermanence with a fish. We are fools on our phones beneath the sky, all of us, bumping against revelations while looking the other way. Nonetheless, sparks continue to leap between worlds while we glimpse flashing reflections.

The gods come and talk at me every day. It's no big deal. For me "the gods" is the breath and the food, the light falling and the seasons' churn. After "hello" and a bow, I reply wordlessly about the good fortune of finding ourselves in this laughing and broad interdependence mesh. I am grateful to be visited. While we chatter and gawk at each other, the world beyond and this one merge some.

¹ - this is the same threshold from *Crow pt. 2* by Mount Eerie (2018): *the myths that used to get told around the fire / where a seal's head pokes up through from underwater / crossing a threshold between two worlds, yours and mine*



Ásgárdsreien by Peter Arbo, 1872

16 *Myths Come True*

Returning home, Odysseus rides the ferry at night.
I finally return to the end of our long road. There's been weather again. There's debris on the mud beneath tires, clawed down by a sky unloading. I see a cutting reflection of something I don't recognize through the dark trunks. I go out into it to look.

Technology metal of an abandoned FedEx truck stuck in the mud where the stream overflows the ditch in storms like this. An empty omen left out in the rain¹. I walk back to the house with no headlamp. Just gravel and my animal brain.

Here it is again:
returning to the warm house from the wet night
I left one round light on in the top room
Insistent blunt symbols recur throughout my life
a glow mythology²
a cyclops walks across the sky³
one window glowing in the forest

Is there a song on the wind?

I must have made myself this beacon
I must have known it would be like this
Belief slips in to my thinking
and I'm familiar with nothing at all

Myths come true

Idea: Dec. 11th, 2022

Recorded: Nov. 29th, 2023 to Mar. 21st, 2024

This song and *Demolition* are kind of in a *haibun* form; a talking prose chunk followed by a sung poem.

It's true. In the darkest part of the year, returning from some errands off island, a glinting and eerie Fed Ex truck was abandoned in the ditch of our very remote driveway. The rawness of the world was turned all the way up. After bigger storms the tree debris on the ground is not from wind but just from the downward force of falling huge rain, clawing at solids, tearing toward earth. I wonder how long I would hold my shape if I were left out in that erosion car wash?

We parked, got a fire going in the house, unloaded the groceries, and I went out check it out. NBD. Returning back through the whooshing dark I saw it, rounding the corner: the illuminated house tall shining through thick night fog,

beaconing. All these "glow" songs of mine since 2000 were in that moment real, "towards the warm red lamp window". It's a tall narrow house and there is a single lamp at the very peak, cyclops-like, that glows out through the woods. I walked toward it, consummating my past.

The distressed music that plays in the background is made from some leftover room mic tracks that were on the tape reel where *You Been Fucking Indoctrinating Me Blues* by Adrian Orange had been recorded in 2007.

1 - *Left Out In The Rain*, poems by Gary Snyder

2 - *the Glow, the Glow pt. 2*, etc. by the Microphones

3 - the visual here is kind of the Night Walker from *Princess Mononoke*, plus the cyclops from *the Odyssey*, blurred with my house, looming in the night



Combat Des Chats, Nicasius Bernaerts, 17th century Flemish school

17 *Non-Metaphorical Decolonization*

the place I live has a name
but there's another one, older

Emerging through the mist
I saw where I was as it was
before we called it anything

Now we live in the wreckage of a colonizing force
whose racist poison still flows
so scared of a moment of discomfort now
we turn away from the obvious:
all we have is stolen and can't be owned

This "America", the old idea, I want it to die.

Non-metaphorical decolonization
beneath the one sky
Let this old world shatter
and transform

Allegiance to nothing at all
but the burning present moment
I cut the cord connecting then and now
and start again
I show the kid how to give up everything

Recorded: Mar. 15th to Nov. 28th, 2023

It can be aggravating to feel like you're looking right at a thing no one else seems to see. "There is an elephant in this room! Notice it!" Here where I live, on the Pacific west edge of North America, where I do this living and thinking from, the shallow topsoil of the dominant history barely conceals what was here before, and the genocidal brutality that our current lives rest on. We know it and don't talk about it. Even among my cool politically progressive peers, there's a lull in wisdom. It's weird. I notice it and it feels so obvious.

This might be what "Mount Eerie" means, by the way; the looming presence of a willfully ignored not-totally-clear force, a trembling blindspot. This is what happens when centuries of colonizers tell hateful, self-serving and wrong stories to each other down through the generations. The overt ignorance hardens and becomes subliminal.

If we can't be honest with ourselves about such a basic fact of our present circumstances, how can we survive and grow into an authentically liberated and enlightened future? We're tangled. This country sucks. It shouldn't exist anymore and it probably never should have. It grew from greed and desperation. We can do something different now please.

Who knows what's next, if we'll even survive? Non-metaphorical decolonization might seem like not the most pressing problem humans face at the moment, under the bombs and extinctions. But the habitually avoidant thinking that protects our uncomfortable blindspots will forever continue to prevent us from truly freeing ourselves and others from the inevitable endless suffering that's part of the deal of getting to be alive anywhere at all. Give it all away and say thank you!

18 *November Rain*

I can see the lights of the unoccupied second homes
that they keep lit up for no reason
reflecting on the barely moving water
on an inland sea where people park their money

I live year-round in a vacation place
I love the winter wind in my face
harrowing beneath trees this big and groaning
no echo loud enough above the blowing

All these absentee owners miss
the huge embrace, the pressing kiss
of this specific November rain in the long darkness
but that's OK
I'll drink all the rain while I trespass

they keep the outside light on though
I guess to let everyone else know
"keep away, this patch of night sky I also claim as mine"

but don't they realize
all our stolen wealth is built on screaming bones?

In their lights that dot the hillside
I see blinking eyes

Recorded: Nov. 21st, 2023

I live on an island in an archipelago where it's always been extra weird. From the first written settler accounts through to now, the superimposed culture has been comprised of an uncomfortable mix of rural workers subsisting however possible paralleling with a disengaged gentry popping by intermittently to briefly cos-play a nature romance before going back to grind for more money in the cities. I used to think of this kind of thing as a modern perversion because of tech money or something but it seems like it's been going on at least since white people showed up here about 150 years ago.

This ethically insulting "summer home" dynamic plays out in many beautiful places around the world. The school teachers and service workers wince and limp along while the land owners with too much laugh behind their locked gates for a couple weeks a year. When they leave, there are security cameras deep in the woods and threatening signs everywhere. These peoples' lives pass in a deep desperate sense of lack. They tip poorly. The wealth gap pulses and strains, the cracks widen. I have bitterness about it.

I wondered where this mental illness started so I read Marx's writing about the criminalization of gathering firewood in the 1840s, the "enclosure of the commons", but I know it's way older. There is violence and terror and famine on this roasting planet, yes. In this constant emergency, who cares about if some rich people are hogging access to a beautiful remote place? It matters because honest compassionate generosity matters. The village is gone, we are ants in an empire, that's true. But if we can see the sickness of alienated greed and name it, and invite the sick back to sanity, maybe a new world has roots here. These roots have to grow from surrendered recognition of the screaming bones that haunt this place. We can do eye contact and bowing and have no gate or moat. We can show up to live long in a place with offerings, not extraction, and breathe it year round, love it whole, and pay for the school teacher's house.

Meanwhile the sentient island mountain blinks and observes us going through our contortions, waiting it out.





19 *Co-Owner of Trees*

I wrote down some ideas, I made some records
 I sold some records, I got money
 I spent the money, to buy some land
 I own land, I feel funny

Ownership rears its head again in the weirdest ways

I trudge along the property line
 I hide from neighbors when they go by
 I speak a spell against their private property signs
 in our woods I ask aloud "what's mine?"

I burn this pile of branches, clearing forest fire fuel
 I give it back in rising smoke to the unowned sky

Nothing's mine, I draw a line
 a wind blows and says "nice try"
 I'm a passing through indebted fool
 borrowing air and firewood

Dreaming of co-ownership of everything
 beneath the trees that I share with the infinite

Dumb voice memo: July 7th, 2022
Recorded: Feb. 14th to 16th, 2024

This title grew from a page I'd remembered seeing from Geneviève's notebooks, summer 2009, where she'd been exploring the weirdness of having just bought our house, including the fruit trees in the front yard. *Posséder des arbres, possesseur d'arbres, propriétaires d'arbres...* I shared her weird wondering at that absurdity and I've never put it down. Looking at it all from the point of view of sky, I added the "Co-" to the idea, because yes, nothing's mine.

There is some musical guidance taken from *Mote* by Sonic Youth, the luxurious extended disintegration following a song. And of course Stereolab, always.





²⁰ *Myths Come True pt. 2*





Metabolism by Edvard Munch, 1916

21 & Sun

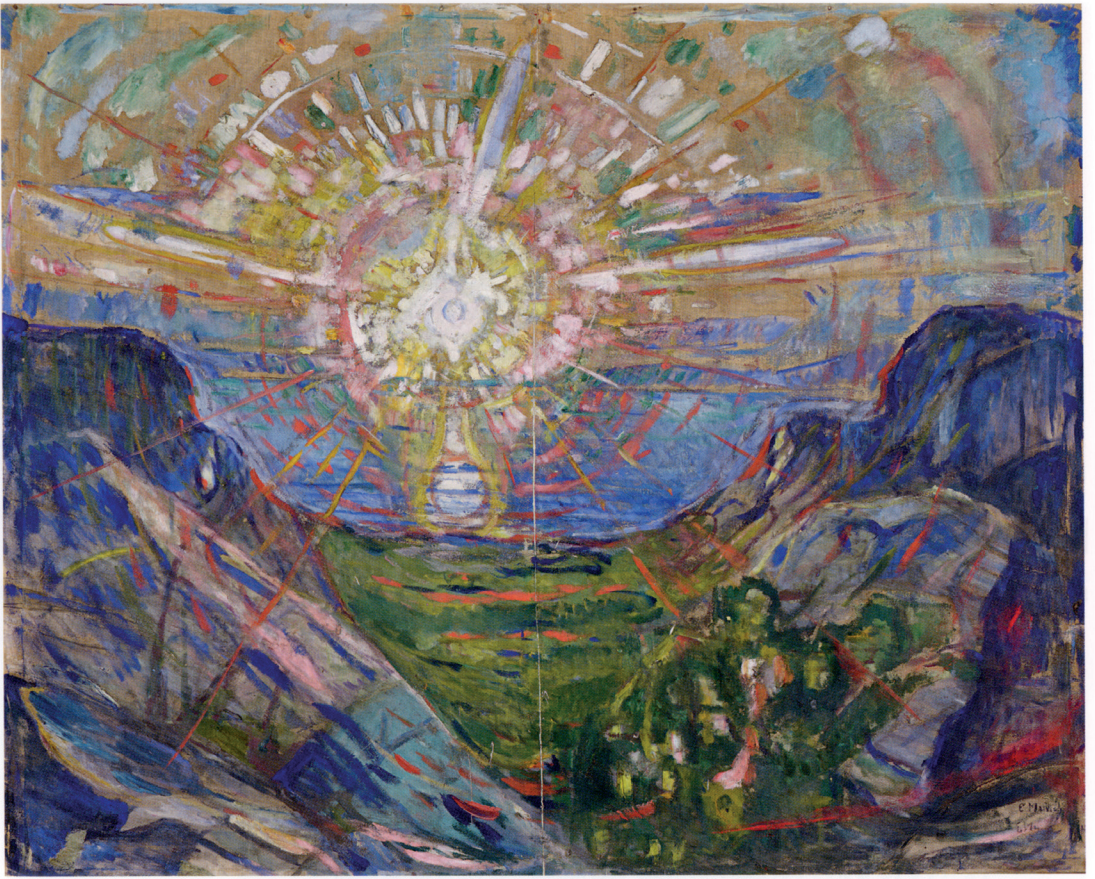
I see everything that has come before me
collapsing on itself in a fog of history
like Nirvana *Nevermind* on my niece's shirt

it's all decontextualized and remade each morning
on inconsistent ground

I have my footing and then I fly off again
I float in warm irrelevance
understanding nothing of what came before
adrift in the right now

but I hear you walking
I hear people speaking
the frost on the leaves is melting

the sun that shined on the ancients
is back up and binds me
for all time
to all of everything



the Sun by Edvard Munch, 1909-1916

22 Writing Poems

It's like the air from the wing of a bee that flew past right next to my eye:
a poem only barely says the thing halfway

I wake up early but the sunrise stays outside
interior walls stretching in reflected light

I write ideas down in pencil, I barely press the page
for every bone in the museum a million more have blown away

that's all I keep trying to say,
that the sun, burning there, burns away in finite space
but a poem only barely says the thing halfway.

Making poems is dripping
not straining toward some masterpiece

a day is followed by another day
there's a procession of new sounds always passing through:
metal garbage truck shear
hammers upstairs
dove coo

If masterpiece arises made of all this that the sky includes
a poem only barely says the thing halfway

Idea: June 19th, 2023, Copenhagen

Recorded: Dec. 4th, 2023 to Jan. 16th, 2024

"Poetry" is a loose word for a big idea. It's a half-joke, too narrow, too small a slice, to contain the vast practice that is free-form juice chasing. A song is obviously a poem. A poem is a flash of a gesture. A whiff of a memory-laden passing thought. The best any of us can do is describe the perimeter, the negative space, and hope that the thing itself can get hinted at a little in the hearing mind.

I was sitting in the front yard of our rental house in Copenhagen one morning drinking coffee and listening to the world. Weirdly, I found myself in the position of poet in

residence (*huspoet*) at Poesiens Hus, the poetry pumpers for all of Denmark. What? Me? OK.

I sat there thinking on what a poet does, what a poem does, sipping joe. A bee flew past my eyeball a millimeter away and I felt the wind of it. I realized "ah, this small and fleeting of a thing is where the heart of it lives."

Even with a sledgehammer of overt arm waving direct language, the true nugget of fresh experience can only be pointed at from way off to the side. All light is reflected.

the Gleam pt. 3

I take everything I've already figured out with me wherever I go
 mind like a moth-eaten blanket,
 wind whistling through the holes

I wrap up in its wool every day
 I walk, I drive, I say hi to the faces of the other parents
 I will forget who they are but for now I know

(when the nights fall a dark spring opens
 I dive entirely in to the holes in my sleeping mind
 I swim all night across a black ocean
 until day comes again)

Standing beneath a sky of airplane noise
 the sun on its wheel turning me old
 warms the back of my head
 death caress
 I look across the gulf

I have seen the billowy black¹
 these hereditary perforated minds dream off
 and they don't come back

I'll climb through this torn wool mind hole in my knowing
 to grandmother's house²

Idea: Dec. 16th, 2022, Sx'á7lex'

Recorded: Feb. 9th to 12th, 2024

Many years ago I had a dream where my maternal grandmother said to me "I have seen the billowy black, I've been blinded by the gleam and my sight came back". She and I were close. I would unload my woes with her like a peer at the kitchen table, we'd talk freely. We had an understanding. As she got older and her dementia/memory loss became more noticeable, I saw again how fabric gets thin, the air comes through. I made a song, *the Gleam pt. 2*, picturing her standing on a high bluff looking across the water, with much life already lived: billowy black, gleaming ocean reflection, exhaling atmosphere and breathing it back, the cycling of learning and losing what is known.

Years pass and she is gone. The sun on its wheel turns us who survive the waves old, death caresses. My own mind shows its frailty in occasional lapses. I drift along in the present. My mom now follows her mother more closely into a disintegration of structured thought, quirky forgetfulness devolving into something more oceanic. It's coming for all of us.

I climb my own hill now and look across the gulf. For now

I hold it together and function passably in my community, but I can feel the inevitability, as long as the other parts of the body survive, that all these fragments of learning it seems like I'm gathering will eventually pass through mesh and blow away. It's this place beyond understanding I think of now as "Grandmother's House". It could also be called "Night Palace". I will meet you there, and not know it.

1 - In *the Gleam pt. 2* by the Microphones it was my grandmother who has "seen the billowy black". Now it's 20+ years later and I have lived through my stuff. I've seen it. This phrase connects us.

2 - "grandmother's house" like from *Over The River And Through The Woods*, the old Thanksgiving poem by Lydia Maria Child (1844), but mostly from *The Old Graveyard* by Thanksgiving (2005):

*Will you carry this torch, grandmother?
 Through the trees and over the water
 And show the way to the shadows
 Back to your house and how bravery goes
 Meanwhile I'll drive this steamroller
 In the pitch black dark over the graves*



Stone Woman Gives Birth To A Child At Night

When I get back down to the truck with my backpack
I dig out my keys and here I am back in America

It was only one night in a tent alone on a peak
so quiet I might have actually been nowhere

I never meant to pretend there's another world
apart from this one we're in

but I was briefly adrift in a night sky
before being re-immersed in this endless et cetera

now I remember the news and the names
and who I am and where on the map I went

I could see the whole horizon
the Earth bending off forever

then I plugged my dead phone back in
the old cacophony rushes in

Awash in privilege
we hold our meditation retreats out of earshot
from the world's bombing and cries

This August is mercifully free so far
from the end of world smoke filled forest fire skies
I crouch by my truck's sideview mirror and look close
at the folds of my scowling face through the dust,
and I think "Am I just another in a long line of doomsday sayers
feeling this apocalyptic weight?"

Isn't an end and beginning
married, embracing, birthing,
clearing out space?

Last night I read a confusing sentence in my headlamp light:
"A stone woman gives birth to a child at night"¹

does it mean
an empty womb brings forth an empty child?

empty crying
empty night sky

and that baby is I

Idea: Aug. 25th, 2022, Yellow Aster Butte

Recorded: Jan. 18th to 23rd, 2023

1 - Dōgen's *Mountains and Waters Sutra*, section 3 (1240):

Priest Daokai of Mt. Furong said to the assembly,
"The green mountains are always walking; a **stone woman gives birth to a child at night.**"

Mountains do not lack the qualities of mountains.
Therefore they always abide in ease and always walk. You should examine in detail this quality of the mountains' walking.

Mountains' walking is just like human walking.
Accordingly, do not doubt mountains walking even though it does not look the same as human walking.
The buddha ancestors' words point to walking. This is

fundamental understanding. You should penetrate these words.

and section 7:

"A stone woman gives birth to a child at night" means that the moment when a barren woman gives birth to a child is called "night."

...You should understand the meaning of giving birth to a child. At the moment of giving birth to a child, is the mother separate from the child? You should study not only that you become a mother when your child is born, but also that you become a child.



25 *Demolition*

wind blows
 moving dark silver blue
 clouds showing moon¹

I wake up in the still deep dark, and in that moment pull thoughts back in through the open window to the ground of this beginning day. The floor by the bed is wood. From my feet to planks to plywood to posts to cement to bedrock, I touch ground and stand up. In the dark life becomes clear.

I'm almost 46.

I have so many hopes.

Behind me is turbulence.

I sweep the kitchen every night.

I fumble my delicate knowing, called back in each idle moment to the archive of smoldering old wounds, to run through them again.

I wake back up.

Is there a song on the wind?

Recurring questions nudge me along. People ask, and I answer that I'm a musician, but that's not it. Mother Night.² The self-evidence of birdsong. I sing my little songs in a burning time of nature and woman-denying authoritarian³ landlords, of numbed-out spectators glazing over the genocides⁴, privileged and healthy (for the moment) while seas rise. This place where I live is beautiful and troubled. They say it's *in* a nation but I disagree.⁵ The sloping hill curves around and the river changes course.

With decades of baggage, I moved a little bit away from the town of Anacortes where circling military jets roar their reminder:

"There's wars. This peace you breathe is flimsy. We rule."⁶

I bite the inside of my cheek and sidestep mere despair at the gnashing human world. I go downstairs in the dark.⁷

A stream finds the low place and glitters.

There is no other home but here and now. Here: on the paper thin west edge of a colonized continent, enclosed and named and sold and resold in multi-generational deep ignorance. I used to dream that my roots were strong and deep,⁸ then I dug down just barely and found cathedrals. Here: a long guest in someone else's home. I watch the islands over the water and wonder if maybe someday my daughter's grand-daughter will be old here,⁹ healed and grateful. The flat fertile sea between these islands holds everything, like I try to. Only 10,000 years ago there were meadows here, a short 2 day walk to what's now "mainland", bison bones in the kelp.¹⁰

Here on this thin rind of spanning time, I laugh at myself and this scrap of identity scraped from the thinnest soil or recent history. A few flashing decades of a hand-me-down homemade myth, a few more boxes of disintegrating poetry books from a barely cohesive mouse-eaten lineage¹¹ of white hippie west coast seekers on this edge, trying to get perspective through the fog of America. I shrug, laugh, and count myself in.¹² I kick and jump beyond this inheritance, this too-shallow view, from Back To The Land to Land Back.¹³

One year, late spring, I went to a meditation retreat on a very quiet island nearby. I arrived entangled in all these considerations. *Why to make a song? How to open the underworld? Who is thinking this even?* and the weird, alienating, looming, eerie¹⁴ blindspot of colonization, the ignored and informative wound showing the way through, the way the roots that held the tree down left a deep hole, now full of water, reflecting sky.¹⁵

I arrived weighted with all this, with my backback on the beach, one eye squinted, murmuring *who do we think we are to be doing this here, now?* I wriggled, but still I stayed. My precious skepticism got left there in the sand and I climbed the bluff into the woods and found my campsite.

Days passed in quiet demolition. Gradually I softened into the insane meditation schedule¹⁶ and noticed a relief, like a sloughing off¹⁷ of all the extra winter coats. I slept the few sleep hours in total black, my tent loud with indecipherable night wind through the old forest. I dreamed, until a 3am demon with a headlamp and a wake up bell stomped through and tore the veil.

Middle-of-the-night-mind still unformed, I shuffled through the salal in the dark toward the glowing womb window of the one room cabin meditation hall where I sat back down.

the iron of the woodstove cracks
coals chunking down
first faint blue of day
breath slow in and out

Am I the ocean or in it?

single candle flame still

before the first bird and sun fingers through
one hot iron crack snaps

soft rain begins

Idea: May 31st, 2022, Fishery Point, Ch'x'eni

Recorded: Mar. 22nd to Apr. 26th, 2024

This non-song grew backward into its overgrown *haibun* form from the sung poem at the end. That early morning moment was first written illicitly in my mind during the meditation retreat (no writing allowed) and then put in the notebook when I got home. A year later it appeared in the first issue of Liz Harris' magazine *Presence* (theme: the Sea) with a different prose chunk on top.

Here, I felt I should give more context about who exactly is noticing crumbling embers too early in the morning with one candle going, and what histories radiated in the air there. I tried to include the whole *who* and the deep *where*.

The sound world is made of the in-between whiffs that graze by and don't quite make contact. Fingers near guitar strings, amp buzz, charged air, static. The wind is the same tape loop from *I Walk* again, a moment in the movie *Ran*. The digital bell at the end is recycled from my old song *Clear Moon*. The rain is live. This is not a song. Is it music?

Like the overconfident white boy that I am, I clumsily bulldoze over the line into the traditional modes and instruments of the Imperial Court Music of Japan (*gagaku*), an over-enthusiastic spectator who sings along too loudly and goes onstage.

While mixing I tried something I've always wanted to do: I used the hillside forest by my house as an echo chamber. I ran the main flute track to a guitar amp at the end of a long extension cord pointed deep into the gully and then walked around listening for the best spot to hear the resonance. A microphone there was snaked back in through the open studio window. It was a clear windless day without too many airplanes and you can hear birds and bugs and dripping sap.

1 - see cover painting by Indigo Free

2 - from the poem *Mother Night* by Jim Harrison (2006):

*When you wake at three AM you don't think
of your age or sex and rarely your name
or the plot of your life which has never
broken itself down into logical pieces.
At three AM you have the gift of incomprehension
[...]
"If you want to understand mortality look at birds."
Blue moon, two full moons this month,
which I conclude are two full moons. In what
direction do the dead fly off the earth?
Rising sun. A thousand blackbirds pronounce day.*

3 - phrase borrowed from *After Bamiyan* from *Danger On Peaks* by Gary Snyder (2005):

...woman-and-nature-denying authoritarian worldviews
that go back much further than Abraham...

4 - the chain of genocides doesn't seem to stop, but at the moment it's the psychotic annihilation of Gaza

5 - from *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn (1980), chapter one:

The pretense is that there really is such a thing as "the United States", subject to occasional conflicts and quarrels, but fundamentally a community of people with common interests. [...] Nations are not communities and never have been.

6 - The United States has a military base nearby, "Naval Air Station Whidbey Island", that sends out deafening "Growler" jets on practice runs circling above Swinomish, Samish, Lummi and others' land, as well as over the town of Anacortes. I grew up pausing my thoughts and sentences to wait for jets to pass, and in the past few years the base has scaled way up even further and louder. Life in their roar is soaked in constant awareness of the crush of the military empire that we live under. It screams at us. I'm not hiding, but for sanity I've moved to a quieter side of a tall island mountain.

7 - a returning thought to *Breaths* from this album, of reaching for deeper understanding, the candle in the basement

8 - *My Roots Are Strong And Deep* by the Microphones (2001)

9 - *A Song To Up The Hill House In Sinshan* by Little Bear Woman from *Always Coming Home* by Ursula K. Le Guin:

*House, this place, / house, this place,
I am getting old living in you.
House, these rooms, / house, these rooms,
my mother was young living in this place.
Northwest door, / southwest door,
maybe my daughter's granddaughter will get old here,
inside these rooms, / in this house.
Maybe I will come in sometimes after dying
by the southwest door, / by the northwest door,
of this house, this place, / into this house, this place.*

10 - These islands used to be connected by low marshy land bridges before melting ice rose the seas and created the island shapes currently poking through. Not long ago, 14,000 year old bison bones were found in a pond on Orcas with human tool marks. They must have walked here. The memory of their actual matter must still churn in the submerged meadows, now kelp waving in salt darkness.

11 - What is my culture? Americans, settlers in North America, United States subjects, we grow from thin cultural soil

compared to many other places on earth where people rest on deeply worn ancestral ideas and foods and languages. Nothing is new ever; it all grows from something else and toward something unknown, so I wonder what is the nascent thing growing *here* where I was born, raised by *these* people with *these* ideas, during *these* weird late years maybe of human life on earth? And, now that I'm a grown up and can steer somewhat toward my own chosen people, what is the subculture that I choose? Are these works that I devote my life to (these songs, the ways of doing these songs) in line with any coherent lineage?

The closest I can come up with is the few-generations-long thread of artists and thinkers who have aligned against the post-industrial forces of capitalistic empire, and specifically the ones who have done it with chaos and humor and darkness and beauty. The zen hermits to surrealists to beats to hippies to punks pipeline.

Localizing further, I am definitely *of* the freshly carved up North American west coast and must be some kind of descendant of these people. The 1960's enclaves of young people making clumsy and beautiful attempts at a new world with communes and failures. And if there are poets speaking from this northwest corner, this pocket of long winter cold sea murk islands, I am *of* them even more. I happily claim the cultural baggage of rejecting the way things are and peacing out to write a *No War* poem in the moss.

There was a brief blip of a group of dudes in the 70s writing poems and doing Asian-y paintings in a place nearby they called *Fishtown*. Are those my ancestors? Is this thing I'm doing grown from that? I kick and leap.

12 - I guess.

13 - All radical ideas can seem insufficiently radical, blinded, in hindsight. The boomers that tried to go "back to the land" are often embarrassed to acknowledge the uncomfortable stolen reality of that land. Can I grow from these inherited ideals of seeking beautiful, wise, poetic transcendence without needing to avoid the hard wound? All kids aim to surpass those who came before them. Me, I want to surpass my forebears with deeper honesty and a more loving reckoning with the full picture. The arc of history, does it bend toward somewhere new and good? I leap toward the Land Back movement and its boulder of truth.

14 - This is exactly the "eerie" that my band name intends.

15 - words from my old song *Summons*

16 - Seventeen hours a day

17 - "sloughing off of body-mind" (*shinjin datsuraku*) is Dōgen's sick wonderful term for sitting in zazen, or for enlightenment





26 *I Need New Eyes*

I spent decades going on about how nothing doesn't change
slow tattooing the word "impermanence" bold across my face
I lived examples. I found words to say it yet another way:
death and birth and changing weather
romance blown away

I just wanted to say something true
and complicate my youth
but now a new idea complicates my old age:
nothing arises in the first place¹

all this impermanence is just another thing my mind made
I was never here, and nothing goes away

In mystical ignorance, I've prioritized joy
I've chosen to see this and not that
I lay in the tall grass
I just watched the breaths fall and rise while this life goes by

The constant catastrophes pound on the wall
and who isn't my neighbor on this flaming globe?²

Now I'm staring at a boulder trying to tell myself
"this didn't arise"

I need new eyes

Idea: Aug. 12th, 2023, Hannegan Peak

Recorded: Jan. 23rd to 25th, 2024

Here is the edge of what I think I've figured out. Baffled, I crawl up to the edge of the cliff and look down. What am I looking at here? Nothing arises? What? I will keep sitting and breathing and sweeping and caring for my loved ones and see what happens.

¹ - From a footnote to section 10 of his translation of the *Diamond Sutra* in *Zen Roots* by Red Pine (2020):

*The sravaka (disciple) path begins with the realization that everything is impermanent. The final stage of the bodhisattva path begins with the realization and acceptance that **nothing arises in the first place**; hence, nothing ceases. **Impermanence is a fiction.***

² - From the substack essay *All In The Same Boat* by A.R. Moxon, Aug. 6th, 2023:

This seems to me no less bizarre or irrational a response than to think "If it doesn't affect my neighborhood, it doesn't affect me" in response to a cooking planet. It's a popular belief. It always has been [...] to believe that living in relative wealth means that you don't possess a human body the same as anybody else, or that the fate of other neighborhoods will somehow make your neighborhood immune to nature's laws. [...]

Who is my neighbor?

Who isn't?

