Time

from *Fragmentos de un libro futuro*, 1999  José Ángel Valente

This empty, white, extensive time, its slow progression
to darkness.

It neither hears the voice
    not sings.
A figure does not engender another figure.
A bird does not fly.

    It hides
in the dark folds of the night.
The light does not come as it used to.
The air does not awaken me to more happiness
but only follows its long flight.
There is neither before nor after.
    We walk to never arrive,

oh never, where.
I stop myself.

    Ephemeral,
I construct my stay.
I make an outline of a large circle in the sand
of this desert or time where I wait
and everything stops and I am only
the point or center not visible or tenuous
which a slight wind would carry away.

ESTE tiempo vacío, blanco, extenso,
su lenta progresión hacia la sombra.
No se oye la voz.
    No canta.
Ni engendra una figura otra figura.
Ni vuela un pájaro.
    Se esconde
en los, oscuros pliegues de la noche.
No viene a mi la luz como solía.
No me despierta a más ventura el aire
para solo seguir su largo vuelo.
No hay antes ni después.
    Andamos para nunca llegar,
oh nunca, adonde.Me detengo.

    Efímera
construyo mi morada.
Trazo un gran círculo en la arena
de este desierto o tiempo donde espero
y todo se detiene y yo soy sólo
el punto o centro no visible o tenue
que un leve viento arrastraría.

{Tiempo}
**Invitation to Readers in the Audience**

As part of the concept of our issue Literatura Sin Fronteras we are extending an invitation to any and all of our readers to participate in the issue by also writing for it. We ask that you choose one piece from the issue whether verbal or visual, and write or make a response piece. The only requirement is that your response piece take a different form than the original piece.

**some clarifications:**
- if you choose a short poem you could write a poem in response, just not a short poem.
- if you choose a prose piece the same condition would apply.
- if you choose a visual piece, such as a photo, submit anything other than a photo.
- if it is a design, anything other than a design, etc.

furthermore, if you happen to notice that the piece you choose is part of a literary or visual form or genre such as elegy, lyric, memoir, sonnet, personal essay, short story, theatrical work, didactic poem, portrait, landscape, etc., we also kindly request that your response piece would be written/made in a different form or genre.

**response pieces do not have to be elaborate, and spontaneity is highly prized!**

response pieces (or any questions you might have) can be sent to either pennydreadful.57@gmail.com or browne.tf@gmail.com depending on interest all work received will be published as an addendum to Literatura Sin fronteras in pdf format and print.
fleeting moments, Sharmaine Browne

Fleeting moments, in
and out,
reside, and breathe themselves.
Such tiny knotholes of memory?
Each day, they emerge, inhale,
Then spill into shadows;
take form on the shelves.
Haunting pantomimes, ludicrous jest
While their contexts, strewn about,
come to life too wide-eyed,
dusty, worn, ... anxious,
dissembling.
Watching
Thin sketches of hopes following the steps of
reflections dimming shadows in darker mirrors
Tugging at the curtains of mind, of consciousness Such
phantoms cast scenes in blurry relief
Too cold to the touch, too intense a warmth in each
They watch, we watch, I watch, I
We walk
passed the dusty trails
dead dreams glittering in gritty smoke
longing for ghostly time’s release
For a slower pace that rewinds our fate
But the hand moves in one direction, and I with it Until
I, like them, am I,
memory.
Momentos huidizos, dentro
y fuera,
residen, y se respiran.
¿Tan pequeños huecos en los nudos del recuerdo?
Cada día emergen, inhalan
se derraman en las sombras;
toman forma en los estantes.
Pantomimas de aparición, ridículas se burlan
mientras sus contextos, esparcidos,
toman vida con ojos demasiado abiertos,
polvorientos, gastados... ansiosos,
desarmándose.
Observando
delgados esbozos de esperanzas en pos de reflejos
sombras que se apagan en espejos más oscuros
tirando de las cortinas de la mente, la consciencia
fantasmas tales proyectan escenas en borroso relieve
demasiado frío al tacto, demasiado intenso el calor en cada uno
Observan, observamos, observo, yo
caminamos
más allá de las sendas polvorientas
sueños muertos refulgiendo en humo arenoso
anhelando la liberación de un tiempo fantasmal
un ritmo más lento que nuestro destino rebobine
pero la mano se mueve en una dirección y yo con ella
hasta, igual que ellos, soy yo,
recuerdo.
“Longstop”
By Joey Abate

They are my responsibility
She knew then
What she must do.
The rasp of her voice
Over a radio
Diverting her team away.
Through the mud,
The reeds.
The dew-smelling blades
Tainted by the must
Of exploded concrete
And gun powder.
She dropped the arms-
Extra weight-
Keeping with her
Only pins
On which fire of
Fragmentation
Sat.

My comrades
Elbows sank
Into the grime
And pried free
Just the same
An agonizing pattern
All too familiar.
A soldier, she was
A woman, she was
And strong because of it-
She would prove,
Though already had.
Solid ground
Up ahead
To her feet
She rose
Metal boots
Scraping pavement.

And my conscience
Up she hoisted
Her body
Of proof
That she was
Every bit
As good as they.
Three pins slid,
Three frags dove,
From her fingers
And into
The enemy vehicle.
Jump to cover-
She did try-
But was snagged
On jagged metal
The vehicle
Protruded.
Shit.
And with a blast,
Her team ceased speech
While her daughter
Very present
Via radio,
Shook with ache
That her mother
Did prove:
We can do what
They can-
But would not
Come back
From a Tango-Four.
“Pausa larga”
de Joey Abate

Son mi responsabilidad
supo ella entonces
lo que debía hacer.
Lo áspero de su voz
sobre la radio
alejando a su equipo
por el barro,
los juncos,
las hojas de olor a rocío
manchadas por el mosto
de asfalto explosionado
y pólvora.
Dejó caer las armas -
peso extra-
y se quedó sólo
con anillas
donde el fuego de
la fragmentación
se asentaba.

Mis camaradas
codos hundidos
en la mugre
y extraídos
igualmente
un patrón agónico
demasiado familiar
una soldado era
una mujer era
y por ello fuerte -
lo demostraría
aunque ya lo hubiera hecho.
Suelo firme
al frente
en pie
se puso
botas de metal
arañando el pavimento.

Y mi conciencia
alzó
su cuerpo
de prueba
de ser
en todo
tan buena como ellos.
Tres espoletas se escurrieron,
tres granadas descendieron,
de sus dedos
y contra el vehículo enemigo.
Saltó a cubierto -
lo intentó -
pero se enganchó
en el metal dentado
que salía
del vehículo.
Mierda.
Y con un estallido
su equipo dejó de hablar
mientras su hija
muy presente
por la radio,
se estremeció de dolor
por que su madre
lo había demostrado:
podemos hacer
lo que ellos pueden -
pero no
volvería
de un Tango-Four.
The hand reached for the glass of water, held the glass and brought it closer to the head, tilted it to drink. The specialist nodded, “good, good,” and noted under his breath and on his pad: *improved motor skills, less shaking*, though I didn’t have enough control left to tell him it wasn’t me grabbing the glass. I used to say *my* hands, *my* feet, *my* mouth, but shall I now say these are *its* hands since it has finally won the twitching struggle for control, or are they *our* hands because I retain enough sensation to feel the chill of the glass, though not its smoothness? It set the glass back on the tray, and though I wanted to read more deeply of the doctor’s subtle expressions, the head turned back toward my wife, fixed our eyes on her hint of cleavage as she swiped and scrolled at the screen of her phone, drawing from scattered knowledge and extracting phrases that the specialist waved away; his veneer of patience insisted again that he is not in a position to confirm rumors that my condition has any connection to the indistinct masses “circulating” in Earth’s lower orbit, nor to the “quakeless motions” beneath the tectonic plates. I still saw only the curve of her breasts, so only inferred the uncertainty of his eyes when I heard the slight quiver of his voice as he said, again, “in this facility we only study these intrusions into the brain, we can’t comment on any coincidence with external circumstances.” Her questions ceased, she set the phone aside and clasped her hands, bowed her brow to woven fingers and whispered prayers, because what had begun as a negligible sore speck in my skin had later risen like a tick at the nape of my neck, too painful to pluck, and finally grew to a walnut shell with rhizomes worming through my cortex, its tendrils barbed deep into my hypothalamus at the “inextricable” Stage 4.

The specialist tested the body’s reflexes as he put pressure on the carapace, that little skull attached to mine, tapped at the lingering sensitivity in those useless regions of the body like my chest and back, knew my positive response by any muffled grunt I managed from beneath its impassivity. I walked by my own intention as we followed the doctor down the corridor to view the latest brain scans, though I was only a witness to the motions of the legs, conducted by a rhythm of the body cooperating with the doctor’s lead and the root’s motor command. We three, or four, stood before the illuminated map of my mind, but it was only a configuration of materials, blue and yellow folds of brain interrupted by twining brown lines, when it should have shown a portrait of my truer face in that
frame of white bone, it should have revealed my weeping soul. How unjust, that this machine can’t display any visible sign that I’ve been pushed aside, it only adds this web that knots thicker at the base of its shell, a mass of pure vegetable matter with no nervous system of its own. Can it somehow think? Does it use our eyes to admire itself as I once turned before the mirror? Or does it only redirect the body that already knows its way? I can’t access my mouth enough to ask; I can formulate my questions in here, but can’t motivate the mouth enough to speak more than a moan. It stared at my wife in the dim light, the glassy gleam of her eyes and wet cheeks, slow shake of her head that repeated, “it can’t be, it can’t be,” and dwindled down to prayer. I reached for her, rest our hand on her shoulder, but I couldn’t comfort her. I pushed a few words toward my meaning, but they came out jumbled with nonsense syllables, and I heard my former voice ask, “doctor, can we have some privacy now?”

In my room she’d hedged and hidden in her search for a solution, sweeping through screens until its hands led her to bed, pulled away blouse and bra without attending to her expressions of sadness and fear, insensitive to her dry reluctance while I felt nothing more than her hands on my chest and the swinging weight of the body against her, landing harder than I ever had. It watched their sliding connection of genitals, glanced at her face confused with resistance and arousal until she gripped my shoulders and craned back with wide open mouth, uttered a guttural cry I’d never heard from her, and I would have stopped or fled but it numbly thrust until its final crush and collapse; a belated burst and flush of chemicals seeped lusciously through my corner of the brain. I lay back and left the eyes closed, though I can still feel her hand on my chest, and hear her panting like an animal. Open the eyes, you monster, it’s her gaze that means the most, the way she looks at me afterward, our soul to soul communion though you debase us to beasts, ashamed before God. I’m still a married man, though you take my body prowling the halls and garden, and my fidelity endures no matter how much you fuck the other women of this facility.

Day 171 – Stage 7

If I were made of a million ants, would I be any less myself? We’ve crowned their mother a queen though she exists in service to the workers, and I watch them scurry about their hole until the eyes raise again and I can see my wife pacing in the trampled grass, her gaze cast down and phone clamped to her ear. She pauses and frowns, holds the phone out with a futile glace to the mottled sky, as though she might discern the clump that has snared and snuffed her satellite; she grits her teeth to mutter, “I’m losing my mind….” Its hand pats the blanket to invite her back to the bed it’s laid so far from the crowded camp, but she shuffles under an oak
and waits, crushes an acorn under her pointed shoe, mashes its fivers against a stone until her phone catches a new signal and she can talk again. The head has swiveled away; it’s often taciturn or lethargic during these rare meetings with my wife, and I infer its disappointment since she usually refuses sex.

She returns to the blanket, smells of her delicate Sunday perfume, and sits to show us a screen slipping along photos of our daughter, but it won’t look; it stares at the three vague strands tied across the sky, watches the tiny, distant pop of feeble rockets trying to clear them from the thermosphere; it feels the ground for that slithering at the core. I would turn to her, I would hold her and apologize and thank God for preserving our daughter, but the democracy of my smallest parts has elected a new ruler, the mob of molecules has rallied to the foreign flag of a colonist, this mindless mushroom on the neck that shows no more vital impulse than any other organ of the body. It sends the body to work with others of its kind, interjects more nonsense syllables in their talk, until at times the gibberish feels meaningful, and sometimes I enjoy the menial labors I used to avoid: clearing forest, arranging stone, serving in the food lines. I don’t know why I say the things it speaks aloud, only sometimes it seems I’ve chosen the words myself. I can no longer guess at the source of my own most deliberate, conscious decisions while every part of my body colludes with this other will, just as I’m sure that, if asked, every individual cell of my body would assert a belief in its own autonomy.

Though it won’t converse with her, she assures it she still loves me, sits close and whispers love and holds it. Eventually she consents to its touch, forces me to endure a reprise of this violation, another rapturous adultery that leaves them gasping while in my remote crevice I can’t feel any flicker of that release, only a seething shame. It’s left the eyes closed again, so I don’t know if it remains atop her or if it has rolled aside, but I hear her continued whispers of love, the soft steady assurance, though her falling sigh may have turned to sobs, an uncertain tone that asks, “are you in there…?” I don’t know if it has moved, only that the eyes stay closed. “I don’t know if you’re in there and you can hear me… I don’t know who you are…”

I don’t know you either. I doubt that I ever knew you, and now I can’t confess the truths I never told you, I can’t reveal the ways I’d hid myself from you. I’m not sure why I lived that way or did what I did. Were we ever close, or was there a barrier between our minds? How far away have we been even in our closest moments? I remember so many emotions, but I can’t remember why, and what did Love mean to our molecules? What has become of the purpose I’d chosen, of the path I trusted God to set for me? What has become of my faith? What has become of my childhood trauma, or my facial tic that used to flinch at the mention of sex? My eyes used to squint when we undressed, but now she’s shaken them awake, they’ve opened with a rocking motion until its hand stops hers; the eyes focus on the phone she holds above us, “look. I’m not supposed to show you this, but look…” and I can still use the eyes clearly enough to read the scrolling headlines.
that promise a new treatment, the “weedkiller” that won’t poison the brain or allow the roots to release their own toxins.

My pulse should race with this new hope, but its heart stays steady and it sits up. Cover her; cover yourself. What can you rooted ones do from your sprawling camps, your destitution? You’re powerless, and there’s nothing in the sky that can’t be wiped away, nothing reaching up from underground that can’t be put back down—but I’m mute, not even a grunt of goodbye as it walks away from my wife.

Day 338 – Stage 10

“…but, I’ve made a full recovery... improvements, even.....”

My wife’s attempt to smile only crumples her mouth, such useless pity in her eyes as her head shakes lightly side to side in tiny, nearly involuntary motions as she stands holding herself in the heat and sun, unwilling to enter the group house. Clearly she’s one of those who still think covering their skin will protect them, and I can see the sheen of a useless ointment on the back of her neck mixing with sweat. “It’s still there,” she whispers, “reach back, you can feel it.”

“That doesn’t matter,” yet her expression is impenetrable, she can’t share my levity as I tell her, “I’m back... I’ve got full sensation, full control,” twirling my hands as though she should somehow see it’s wholly me, though the process I’ve been through is entirely internal.

“But it’s not you... these aren’t your people, this isn’t your home,” with a brush of her hand that sweeps from the house out into our village. “They’re Godless. They worship that,” a sneering glance up at the shadow lodged mid-heaven, our conduit, and her eyes return to me again with the same futile pity: “my husband wouldn’t do this, it’s not you.”

We’re at the impasse of the old minds and the new, talking in circles, “you don’t recognize me because I’m more myself than ever. Maybe I never even knew myself before, but now...” what gesture can indicate this fulfillment? My upturned palms receive the world and bring it in to my center: “now I know exactly who I am, I know exactly why I do what I do.” She’s closed her eyes and turned her head. “We have a real purpose now. Before, I always knew I was somehow faking it. We told those stories of God, but look,” thrust my finger up to the sky, the jungles of the upper air, though she only clenches her eyes tighter, “you can see it, and we can feel it. We know it. It’s wonderful.”

She takes a deep breath and releases it without opening her eyes, and still blindly demands, “then explain it... how come none of you will explain it?”

“Jed bul, pe... lseldle nfen...” her eyes open to slits, mouth turned down at the sound of these syllables, so “you see? You don’t speak our tongue... the truth is just
nonsense to you. It can’t be translated, it’s not just a different set of words, it’s a
whole other grammar of thought.”

“It’s that thing,” her eyes wide open, voice tense with the first quiver of panic.
“You don’t speak that way, it does.”

“It’s just another part of me, it’s not some extraneous thing in control.”

“So let them get rid of it. The treatment is ready, it works. If you’re really you,
then let them get rid of it,” and I can’t tell whether her voice is at the verge of sobs
or screaming.

My voice is calm, and I want it to calm her as well, with compassion and
rationality, “why get rid of something that works for our benefit? Your intestines
are full of bacteria, other species, should you get rid of them? What would your
digestion be without them? You need them… and how do you know you’re not
taking orders from them? Making your conscious choices by their will? Humanity’s
biggest mistake has always been its illusion of control… Do you really think you’re
something other than your hunger? That it’s your hunger, rather than you being
hunger’s thinking machine?”

“But it’s me! It’s all me, in me! My hunger, my thinking, it’s all in me, from me,
but you… it’s not you, it’s from out there,” waves at the sky, a wider and wilder
motion, “and they’re thinking for you, they’re thinking through you.”

“You’re no different,” I say, and apparently this statement has befuddled her
back to stillness. “Half your mind is out there,” though my skyward sweep of the
arm indicates the remaining satellites. “Even now you won’t let go of your phone…
how much of what you know is really inside of you? Which of your thoughts have
ever been your own? Are you really even here? That device scatters you
everywhere, and you won’t let go of it. You’re no different in that respect, just
underdeveloped.”

“But, no. But…” they can never arrange their thoughts clearly while their
instincts perceive change as a threat, “but I’m me, but you’re… Just come back
with me, let them give you the treatment; in a month or two you’ll be yourself
again—”

“—and you have some power to decide what is Me? When I thought I was
pushed aside, I was just one small part of me resisting the majority. This thing on
my neck can’t think, I think, and maybe I just couldn’t accept that that was me, I
just do some of the thinking for me, that’s all. That’s the position you’re in now.
It’s coming either way, and relaxing into it will help the transition go quicker, so
don’t fight it. Enjoy it.”

“No. You don’t get it. They’re coming, they’re going to inoculate you all.”

Her eyes are steady again, level with resignation, and “soon you won’t have a
choice. Come with me now, don’t fight. They know that you’re all preparing to
resist, but don’t, please, don’t fight.”

Past her, through the village, beyond the people and houses the horizon shows
no sign of invasion, but I can imagine trucks and helicopters pouring in. “Look
around our villages... we don’t have crime. We’re unified. The moment we became whole, complete, they turned us into refugees. They take away our tools so we can’t work on the Holes and Towers, try to keep us from training though we only want to defend ourselves... you treat us like we’re less than human, but obviously we’re more than human. All you do is feed and breed, and fight over the rights to feed and breed, and you don’t know why. That’s not a life we want to live, we live in peace. We have a real purpose; it knows what it’s doing. You don’t know what we are, so you’re afraid, and afraid that we might be better than you....”

She stares, still holding herself and sweating, “no, it’s too late. Understand this: you don’t have a choice.”

When I stare back, I imagine my gaze is more compassionate, but I begin to see the inevitable clash, because, “you will have a choice. The channel is open now, it’s been pulling spores through for two weeks. They’ve been in the clouds, the winds, they’re covering the whole earth, the population. You might have one by now, and within a few months you’ll understand; we’ll be together in a new way. How much of this ‘weedkiller’ can they make? How can they inoculate the world within....” Has my voice begun to quiver, not for my own life, but for everyone? She comprehends now, her face softens, saddens with this quick calculation of the duration of the treatment pitted against incubation and development of the roots, the margin it leaves for an era of violence, and to what extremes a little mind will go to defend itself from change.
Basil Lvoff

On Laughter’s Liberty and Tears’ Tenor

The great lesson of the twentieth century was that the tragic and the comic are mutually conversable (the ideas of the Russian Formalists, the art of the absurd), and that comedy is no less capable than tragedy of addressing the last questions of the human condition (the writings of Bakhtin or Pirandello). Why then do I feel a strong urge—when watching a movie, listening to music, or creating something of my own—why do I get this urge to draw a border between the comic and the tragic, as if to decide which is more important and on whose side I am? Hasn’t the previous century, noted for its reshuffling of categories and values in every conceivable way—hasn’t it taught us to see laughter and tears reflected in each other, and haven’t we developed a taste for the two of them mixed together, changing our recipe for the cocktail depending on the occasion? Or perhaps this was an antithesis necessary for the twentieth century and now it is time we asked ourselves again whether our epoch needs the borderline, however hazy it may be? This is a question a survey can’t answer, and, since there is no greater barometer of an epoch than the heart of its contemporary, it is my own that I look into, trying to understand: why do I care?

A joke from the times of the Russian Civil War comes to my mind. A Jew, led to an execution by a firing squad, inquires what day it is; “Monday” is the escort’s answer; “Oy gevalt!” exclaims the Jew, “The week’s off to a bad start!” It isn’t merely laughter—it is also tears that a joke like this may provoke, and which one it is depends not only on how one tells the joke but also on the one who reacts to it, a particular person with a particular background. Or, to use another example, if we are indeed ready to accept that Chekhov’s The Seagull and The Cherry Orchard, or Shakespeare’s Measure for Measure are comedies (with all the ifs and buts), why not consider Molière’s Tartuffe a tragedy? And what about Hamlet, or Tchatsky from Alexander Griboedov’s Wit from Woe, when the eccentricities of these personages are just one step away from Mercutio’s desperate jests, as Peter Weil and Alexander Genis have remarked?

Viktor Shklovsky—it was in his essay “Toward a Theory of the Comic” that I read Civil War jokes—Shklovsky tells the following story about the great Russian poet Alexander Blok, who staged Hamlet at his estate. Blok’s peasants, invited to watch, could not stop laughing at the grimaces of the Prince of Denmark, played by their master. Yet were they misguided? Shklovsky writes that, all in all, they were not. Suffice it to step aloof for a moment and forget about our duty bequeathed by tradition, the duty to feel compassion for the tragic hero, and we will find many of Hamlet’s actions and words amusing.
and at times ludicrous, especially if we refrain from watching the play backwards, by keeping its finale in mind. In short, to see Hamlet as funny does not necessarily mean to take him amiss.

Should this example not satisfy one, let us consider its opposite. Take another tragic hero, the Knight of the Woeful Figure, examine his origins, and it will turn out that he was not so tragic (see Shklovsky’s Theory of Prose and Nabokov’s lectures)—or it will at least emerge that Don Quixote was not tragic in the sense of the Romantics and later readers (for example, Dostoyevsky), who mistook Don Quixote’s odd escapades for saintly behavior. We often shed tears where Cervantes’s contemporaries burst their sides with laughter. Hence, the conclusion Shklovsky drew from the story with Blok’s peasants and from his analysis of Cervantes’s novel: whether something is comic or tragic is a matter of the major or minor key at the beginning of the musical phrase, not the phrase itself.

To this, one could add that some works are constructed so as to be more tragic than not, and vice versa; this notwithstanding, it would do us good (if we care about truth, of course) to distinguish our perception of the work from its structure, such as its story, which some will play in minor and others in major key. Of course, it is impossible to tell one thing from the other definitively; in life, everything is so complex that a structure taken in one culture without any emotion, as a cliché, may have a special significance for another community. It shouldn’t be forgotten that a work lives not by itself but in our perception. This is a separate subject, full of innumerable uncertainties. The only thing to be said with certitude is that, when it comes to comedy and tragedy, the devil is the perception. His malicious intervention results in loosening and depreciating the borderline between the comic and the tragic—this, of course, if we abandon the rigid distinctions in the spirit of eighteenth-century genre definitions, but our culture, our history, has abandoned them long ago anyhow. Nevertheless, let it be conceded that, from a strictly formal standpoint, it is possible to separate pure tragedy from pure comedy (for example, Euripides’ Medea from Aristophanes’ The Frogs). A Russian Formalist by the name of Boris Yarkho even established this kind of separation based on statistics. Yet it is not essences we argue about; we know the difference between comedy and tragedy rather well, and the rest we may classify as intermediate species, of which biologists could tell us much. Indeed, we argue not about essences but about qualities, not comedy but the comic, not tragedy but the tragic, and what we really want to know is what implicit values in the recesses of our mind and body make this distinction important to us. What is at stake when we see something as tragic or as comic? That is the question.

My answer is hardly definitive (people vary); I should also confess a large degree of repetition of some of my predecessors, but excuses put aside, here is what my sense and sensibility whisper to me. They suggest that the
difference between the tragic and the comic is in the all-binding nature of that which is happening, or, to be more exact, it is in our experience of the events taking place as being compulsory for all. In other words, the tragic is the sign of fate. The tragic occurs when events unfold regardless of man; they are not his creation, like a tsunami, and like a tsunami, they tower above him. And in order to impart these qualities to particular events—so that the latter would seem as inevitable as possible—it is easier to pick unfortunate developments.

Yet happy events can evoke this feeling as well: after all, the very idea of happiness is latent with happenstance, something occasional, hence arbitrary, and when happy events abound as a result of an unreal concatenation of successful moments, one may not necessarily feel blessed. On the contrary, one may start to feel apprehensive because of one terrifying thought: what if I do not exercise my will, what if I am somebody’s pawn in this life?

However terrifying the all-binding imminence of fate is, it is this sublime feeling, and not necessarily that of compassion, that I value in the tragic and approach with grateful awe. Gratitude is my reaction to this terror because of the meaning the feeling of all-binding fate instills in me. The tragic is more meaningful than the comic, but not because the comic lacks ideas. Etymologically, “meaning” is “to hold common”; it is also the cognate of the Russian мить, which translates as “to think”; in other words, meaning deals not with the essence of something but with the way we see something. The terror of the tragic brings us together, making us see things in the same way and believe the eyes of the Other just as we believe our own. This gives us the feeling of unity and objectivity, for which we yearn so often in our lives. The tragic gives us the feeling that our lives are meant to be a certain way; it gives us the feeling of providence and of our lives belonging to some higher course of nature, thus alleviating our existential loneliness and assuaging our theological hunger. Eventually, it seems as though the feeling of some invisible presence that the tragic bestows upon us, no matter how horrible fate may be—it seems as this feeling were not only our defense mechanism against the catastrophes of this world but, possibly, also the result thereof. In sum, it is no longer possible to see the hero’s calamity and consider our tears as the distinctive feature of the tragic; the truth is that the tragic is primarily constituted by the bonds of shared, inevitable, destiny.

By the same logic, the comic, which is the opposite of the tragic, liberates us—as many have written. The comic restores the primordial chaos of

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1 One may object that comedy also brings us together. Bergson wrote about it most eloquently. However, when it is pure comedy, we are brought together by our adherence to some norm, from whose standpoint we laugh at a rigidity of some sort. By definition, there is nothing exceptional, nothing revelatory about a norm. Pure comedy, as a rule, should not cause the feeling of gratitude of which I write with regard to the tragic.
this world, and its whirlwind sweeps away the universal meaning of tragic fate. The liberty of the comic is that of a festivity—a carnival, as Bakhtin has shown—which is why the comic first endows us with the feeling of sheer gaiety but later strikes us with the feeling of emptiness—like post-vacation blues.

As for me, I prefer the works in which the comic and the tragic are mixed, with the ratio 1:1, and now the reason is clear. Comic irony prevents the tragic from lapsing into the pettiness of single meaning, while the tragic does not let the comic fall into the abyss of boundless relativity. Shaken, but not stirred.
Entretien avec S.

Elle ouvre les portes successivement sans urgence je la regarde opérer d'une salle à l'autre les fantômes sont figés empoussiérés statiques nous traversons les pièces calmement puis elle atteint au hasard des couloirs un sarcophage entrouvert duquel des mots surgissent et me blessent ces mots je les dis en décrivant la pièce et tout son contenu

voilà elle est entrée et s'en va elle a trouvé ces mots qui sont les miens excavés du tombeau de l'oubli où je les avais enterré pour mon bien c'est souvent ce que je me dis

un musée précaire et clos un long couloir de portes closes aux rideaux miteux aux miroirs ternes elle entre en moi sans demander et je ne peux pas l'accueillir j'y suis moi-même étranger

myriades de loquets de verrous de barrages où les flots de mémoire ont été refoulés mécanismes de défense activés

du double langage elle entend le chemin elle sait très bien où aller j'assiste sans défense à l'entretien elle connait les passages secrets

face au mirage d'une vie bien rangée nous nous accordons d'une forme d'être parfaitement instable oui mais honnête si les murs s'écroulent ce sera sans regret

mes frontières ces murailles que je ne sais plus escalader m'emprisonnent me tenaillent tu t'y balades à mes côtés

j'ai beau lubrifier le passage sans connaissance du chemin je m'égare extatique devant l'espace dérangé
où épuisé pourtant je m'allonge
enseveli
d'une couche infime de rosée
je suffoque sans songer
à l'oubli

transparaître irisé
disparaître irrité
ou brûler les restes
je ne sais plus où elle est

l'à venir
l'inchangée
le devenir
le passé
“talking to S”
Translated by D.E. Lucas

She opens the doors successively
Listlessly I watch her work her way
From room to room the specters
Are fixed and dusty and still
We calmly cross the rooms
From some corridor her random reach
Finds a loose lidded coffin from which
Floods a surge of wounding words
As words spell the space
And all that’s within

She entered and went
Found the words solely mine
Unearthed from the grave of oblivion
Where they’d laid buried for my well being
Or so I said to me

Closed, precarious collection
Closed doors of a long corridor
Dingy drapes and dull mirrors
She moves in me without consent
And I can’t welcome her where
I’m a stranger myself

Myriad locks latches and bolts
Hold back the flushes of memory
Defense mechanism activated

By two codes she finds the way
And senses well where to go
I witness this interview, helpless
Her feet familiar with the hidden path

Before a mirage of a life well arranged
We agree on a format of being
Perfectly instable yes but honest
If all the walls fall so it goes

My borders these stockades
I no longer know how to climb
Trapped racked
While you stroll just alongside
I strive to lube the way through
Clueless to where I wander
Ecstatically face disarray
Exhausted I crumble and sprawl

Smothered
Beneath a thin sheen of dew
I suffocate, wonderless
Of forgetfulness

Brilliant aurora
Fading vexation
Or burn the remains
I no longer know where she is

What’s to come
Unchanged
Becoming
passed
Conversación con S.
Saint Huitre

Abre las puertas sucesivamente
sin urgencia la veo actuar
de cuarto a cuarto los fantasmas
está fijos polvorientos estáticos
cruzamos las salas en calma
luego ella llega por el azar de los pasillos
a un sarcófago entreabierto del cual
surgen palabras y me hieren
y digo esas palabras al describir la estancia
y todo el contenido

Y ya entró y se va
ha encontrado estas palabras que son las mías
excavadas de la tumba del olvido
donde las había enterrado por mi bien
a menudo me lo digo

Un museo precario y cerrado
un largo corredor de puertas
cerradas con cortinas sórdidas con monótonos espejos
entra en mí sin preguntar
y no puedo recibirla
allí soy yo mismo un extranjero

Miríadas de pasadores y cerrojos
donde las mareas de memoria se contienen
mecanismos de defensa activados

Del doble lenguaje entiende el camino
sabe ella muy bien dónde ir
asisto sin defensa a la conversación
conoce los pasadizos secretos

Frente al espejismo de una vida ordenada
nos ponemos de acuerdo en una forma de ser
perfectamente inestable sí pero honesta
si los muros se hunden será sin pesar

Mis fronteras esas murallas
que ya no sé escalar
me aprisionan me atenazan
y tu mientras a mi lado vagas

Intento lubrificar la vía
sin saber el camino me confundo
extático frente al espacio en desorden
o gastado, me estiro sin embargo

por una capa exigua de rocío
me asfixio sin preguntar
por el olvido

transparentarse irisado
desaparecer irritado
o quemar los restos

ya no sé dónde está ella
el porvenir
lo inalterado
el devenir
lo pasado
The Lion and the Deer / el león y la cierva
h.v. gould

Winter is cold and lifeless, the
Sky brighter than ever, lit by Star
The landscape shadowed and ground still of
Life in the holy city of Bethlehem
A cool breeze crafted the eerie musical means
In the forest of crying atonement

The cries reach out past the sun and over the moon to Star
The invisible forces suffocate the cry of sound, the
Message is lost and the broken atonement
Cannot be heard by any means
But the deer cries on, her wails of
Repense echoing through air of Bethlehem

The rabbi calls out for the lion of
The forest and he roared through Bethlehem
His roars stretched and fought until the
Walls of Rome fell, but he felt no atonement
For the anger was all that was heard past the forces connecting planet and Star
The anger breaking the physics that kept the deer in her quiet means

The Roman travels to Bethlehem
His only guide the map of Star
His chest is light and full of
Confidence that every lion can be killed, but the
Roars of the lion are mistaken; they are frustration at the deer’s atonement
His terrifying exterior shadows his helpful means

But what are his helpful means?
An unlikely relationship of
Predator and prey, the
Lion’s acceptance of the deer’s atonement
Of fear are not communicated and Bethlehem
Remains restless this night in confusion under the sky of Star
The deer’s loud and musical atonement
Was caused by misjudgment, her fear of
The lion and his predatory ways blocked her from the
Truth that he too, was a son of Star
And her death by any means
Would be one that was holy in the city of Bethlehem

But she would not be the one to die under Star tonight by the lion’s means
For the Roman traveled to Bethlehem to be the demise of
The misunderstood roars of the lion and the deer’s confused cries of atonement
El león y la cierva

h.v. gould

El inverno es frío e inerte, el
cielo de lo más brillante, alumbrado por la Estrella
el paisaje en sombras y la tierra de vida
detenida en la ciudad santa de Belén
Una brisa fría fabricaba los medios musicales misteriosos
en el bosque de la contricción del llanto

Los lloros llegan más allá de sol y luna hasta la Estrella
las fuerzas invisibles ahogan el llanto del sonido, el
mensaje se pierde y la contricción rota
no puede oírse en modo alguno
pero la cierva sigue clamando, sus lamentos de
enmienda un eco por el aire de Belén

El rabino llama al león del
bosque y rugía por Belén
sus rugidos se extendieron y lucharon hasta
la caída de los muros de Roma, pero no sintió contricción
pues era ira ido lo que se escuchaba más allá de las fuerzas que unen planeta y
Estrella
la ira que quiebra la física que mantenía a la cierva en sus calladas vías

El romano viaja a Belén
su única guía el mapa de la Estrella
su pecho leve y lleno de
confianza en que todo león puede matarse, pero los
rugidos del león está errados; son frustración por la contricción de la cierva
su exterior aterrador oculta sus vías serviciales.

Pero ¿cuáles son sus vías serviciales?
Una improbable relación de
predador y presa, la
aceptación del león de la contricción de la cierva
por el miedo no se comunican y Belén
sigue inquieto esta noche en confusión bajo el cielo de la Estrella

La sonora y musical contricción de la cierva
fue causa de un mal juicio, su miedo del
león y sus maneras predicadoras le vetaron la
verdad de qué el también era hijo de la Estrella
y su muerte en cualquier vía
sería sagrada en la ciudad de Belén
Pero no iba a ser ella quien muriera bajo la Estrella esta noche por las vías del león
porque el romano había viajado a Belén para ser caída de los malinterpretados rugidos del león y
de los confundidos llantos de contricción de la cierva.
LA TIERRA PROMETIDA
Andres Piquer Otero
1
EJERCICIO DE REMO

A la orilla del Michigan
sentarse y llorar,
qué pretencioso,
qué poco original y hasta afectado.
Hay mucha gente que te mira
y empuja con el ojo y las agendas,
con el Financial Times doblado bajo el brazo.

Por este rompeolas tan absurdo,
repleto de armazones de viviendas
desecadas y antiguos mataderos,
en la vía del tren,
no puedes ser un lírico, ni hacer juegos
con nombres de otro palo y de otra esfera del
brindis y los yambos
o talladas
elegías.

Acaso como tú, que no te enteras
del tiempo que te pierdes ahora mismo:
octubre,
una balanza
y resta siete horas cada día.

Y tal vez es
la soberbia de Ulises quien te arrastra;
debes
continuar tu singladura,
que tu barco es demasiado oblongo y bien leído
para aceptar lo simple de un único abandono.

Ni escollos a la vista
ni gritos angustiados
podrán hallarse en lago tan gélido y tranquilo.

Pero aún
te preguntas si tu estrella
el sueño al timonel concederá
ahogando en paz tu barva
entre las voces
de niñas rechazadas por el mar que cantan siempre.

2
LA CASA

Una casa no posee un alma
-o tal vez demasiadas-.  
Puede una casa estar hueca o llena hasta los bordes;  
puede ser espacio o tiempo o los dos juntos,  
¿y acaso importa?  
Una casa es fría por sí misma,  
al margen de los meses y estaciones,  
y la calefacción central, los buenos radiadores nada cambian.  
Sin alma, demasiadas  
caras y voces mordiendo  
en el aire la única alma,  
entre espacio y tiempo arrinconada,  
¿y cómo de una vez contarlo todo?  
Cien espíritus para una única alma,  
mil espejos para una sola cara, y ahora como siempre  
esperas la voz cantarina de aquellos que se fueron,  
volviendo enardecida, saqueando con instantes  
más dignos de gusano y sanguijuela,  
el último hoy que no pudiste dejar completamente;  
jugar el juego en los pasillos,  
dejar notas  
buscando rostros familiares en una nueva  
ciudad más extranjera;  
encendiendo la misma luz noche tras noche  
en vigilia  
por la casa que dejaste y hallaste en cada esquina  
cuando la puerta se cierra y se entornan las ventanas  
y es la casa el conocido que te queda,  
como entre nube de niebla  
te sientes la única persona en este mundo  
-qué vergüenza-  
entre la masa de inquilinos,  
esperando
al uno para quien se alzaron estos muros
al uno por quien se alzaron estos muros.

Pero pasan
de largo y rumor de voces te despierta
y sólo el ruido viene a dar la hora,
y sólo ruido vano
cantando
en una casa llena.

THE PROMISED LAND

1
A ROWING EXERCISE

By the shores of Michigan
to sit and cry,
how pretentious,
not very original, perhaps even affected.
There are many people looking at you
and pushing with their eye and their agendas
with Financial Times folded under armpit.

At this absurd waterbreaker
filled with the carcassed of withered houses
and ancient abbatoirs,
by the railroad,
you cannot be a lyric, nor play games
to names from other suit and other sphere
of toasting and of iambics
or etched
elegies.

Perhaps like you, who do not quite realize
of time you're just missing:
October,
scales
and seven hours less every day.

And maybe it is
Ulysses' pride what's dragging you asunder;
you must
continue with your sailing,
for your arm is too curvy and too well-read
to accept the simpleness of a single surrender.

No reefs on sight,
no anguished cries
will be found in such and frigid and calm lake,

But yet
you ask yourself if your star
will grant sleep to the helmsman
and drown your boat in peace
amongst the voices
of girls rejected by the sea and ever singing.

2
THE HOUSE

A building has no soul or has too many.
A building may be empty or filled to the rim;
it can be time or space or both together,
and who cares?
A building by itself is cold,
the season of the year nonwithstanding,
and central heating, good pipes won't make a difference.
No soul, too many
faces and voices biting
in the air the single soul
between space and time forlorn,
and how to tell at once the whole story?
A hundred spirits to a single soul,
a thousand mirrors to a single face, and now as ever
you wait for the sing-song voice of those long departed
to come with a rage
to plunder with instants
-best left to feed the worm and quench the leeches-
the last today you could not quite abandon.

Play the game in corridors
leaving notes,
looking for a familiar face in a new
and more stranger city;
lighting night after night the same candle
in a vigil
for the house you left and found in every corner
when the door's closed and the windows are ajar
and the house is your only last acquaintance,
as in a cloud of mist
you feel the last man on this world
-how shameful-
amidst the mass of tenants
awaiting
the one these walls were made for
the one these walls were made from.

But they pass
and the echo of voices wakes you up,
and only noise comes to keep the hour,
and only empty noise
in a full house
singing.
Sky Poems

Summary and Description:

In 1987 and 1988, conceptual artist David Antin performed two pieces he dubbed “Sky Poems.” The first took place in Santa Monica, CA, and the second in La Jolla, CA. Antin employed a team of pilots who had developed a sky writing technique called “sky typing,” which involved flying in formation and releasing a series of oil-based “puffs” according to a pre-programmed code to produce dot-matrix style text in the sky. Antin disseminated press releases and other forms of publicity ahead of the events to alert the public of the time and place of these happenings. He programmed the sky typing computer to display successive lines of poems he had written for the occasions. In radio contact with the planes, he directed them from the ground, having them print each successive line over the same space as the previous line once it had fully dispersed.

1 “Sky Poems 1”

Antin also introduced odd spacing between some of the words so that they formed multiple syntactical units (poem, line, sub-line, etc.). The inaugural sky poem read, in full, over a two hour period:

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IF WE GET IT TOGETHER
CAN THEY TAKE IT APART
OR ONLY IF WE LET THEM
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Conceptually, these performances were imagined by Antin as part of a monumental (yet ephemeral) poem that would last half of a lifetime:

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So then I had this dream of an epic poem stretching across the United
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States over twenty or thirty years, three or four lines a year—at two thousand bucks a shot—gradually being written for people who would never see all of it. Which didn't bother me in the least. Partly because I'm not such a public-spirited citizen, or maybe because I have no very clear idea of what a public is. Though I suspect from the way it's usually treated by the people who appear to perform in its interest that the public must be a disadvantaged and somewhat retarded part of our population. (Antin 294)

In actuality, Antin only performed two discrete sky typing poems.

Research Context:

Antin's performative writing is performance art, public art, poetry, and a form of experimental or conceptual inscription. As such it is potentially of interest to scholars working in performance studies, art theory and history, literary theory, and technologies of inscription more generally. “Sky Poems” investigates the relationship between reading and writing, artistic practice and public space, scale and inscription, etc. It can be considered a public intervention, but also a public act of writing. Scholars who are increasingly interested in the media ecologies assembled by such works, which utilize public space (in this case the sky itself) for large-scale, time-based performative writing through technological protocols (here dot-matrix character formation), patterns of spectatorship and the movement of bodies through urban space, the circulation of information through publicity outlets, expectations within and without the art world, and established practices of textual consumption. Scholars interested in the materiality of text may engage the questions these pieces pose regarding the role of medium in textual reception, active participation in the construction of a text at the site of reading, and the relationship between distracted forms of reading and elite forms of textuality such as poetry.

Technical Analysis:

Several technologies and protocols are explicitly harnessed and reflected upon in order to constitute these artworks. The first is dot-matrix printing. Antin makes a lot out of the fact that he is working with a technical process based not on sky writing (which involves a continuous flow of exhaust; it is analog), but sky typing, which produces a series of discrete dots in pre-programmed patterns. Instead of a single plane reproducing the contours of the text alone, a rigid formation of planes produces many “dots” through a digital process. The process, and the effect, is identical to the dot-matrix printer in wide use at the time. What Antin is doing, then, is printing on the surface of the sky. This is an informatic process that transforms his text into discrete dots that are produced through an apparatus that includes poet, airplane, aerial formation, computer programming, radio signaling, and ground-based orchestration. This apparatus intersects with circuits of readership, public habitation of space, etc.

Several issues come to the fore when public space is utilized on a vast scale (each letter is 2100 feet tall) as an inscription surface for a printing apparatus. The first is the materiality of the space itself. As a medium, the sky and water vapor are not stable; they are constantly in flux, as becomes immediately apparent when the printed text begins to dissipate, eventually becoming illegible and blending in with the natural clouds. Here the technologically complex act of printing in the digital age (explicitly highlighted by the work) is contrasted with the ephemerality of the act of reading, or the reception of language in a poetic register.
These works, in engaging common space and an audience at least partially (probably mostly) unaware that a public artwork is being performed, prompts a series of impromptu encounters with the process of writing-as-printing, a process that occurs daily in the production of intra-and inter-office documents. Here the sky, as inscription surface, is "brought into the office," digitized, made contiguous with an informatic circuit that constitutes contemporary knowledge work. The sky, become surface, remains common even while it is informationalized. Another twist is introduced, however, when the emergent text turns out to be a poem instead of an inter-office memo or (no doubt most expected in a public space) an advertisement. "A poem's a commercial that isn't selling anything," says Antin. (295)

Antin's work also interrogates the notion of the public itself. (Quote) This public, which for Antin may or may not exist, is constituted as such through the collective act of reading. This is, then, an example of distracted reading, as Antin explains:

> I have a somewhat looser idea of the relations between writing and reading. I was counting on a certain randomness of interest among the onlookers. Some would know about the skypoem in advance and come to a central viewing place where they'd be waiting for it... Some might happen to be looking up while they were walking on the beach or driving on the highway. Some might pick it up in the middle or at the end, and some might leave before the end because they had to or because they didn't care to stay. And I liked it that way. I have a certain attraction to more or less democratic artworks that don't coerce your attention. (Antin 294)

On one hand, text on such a large scale, as novelty and as public intervention, commands attention. On the other hand, it addresses itself to the distracted reader, the communal reader. It is meant to be encountered in media res, is not meant to be finished. It's extended temporality—the text cannot be read “as a whole” without spending two hours of time—ensures that the act of reading becomes impinged upon by other stimuli, other (perhaps closer and more immediate) forms of media, processes and events located at much smaller temporal scales.

**Evaluation of Opportunities in the Context of “Bookwork After New Media”**

Sky Poems directly engage the notion of the digital; they exist post-analog and post-book. Antin defamiliarizes the material processes of printing in the digital age. Though his process is called “sky typing,” it is analogous not to typesetting, but to office printing, the translation of digital information into physical form. This work directly engages the materiality of print, imagining and enacting a text that is printed but unfixed, public but poetic (i.e. noncommercial), compact but temporally extended.

**References for Further Study:**


“PennSound: David Antin.” Web. 2 May 2012.
Stone Bridge, Trees in City - Tamara Browne