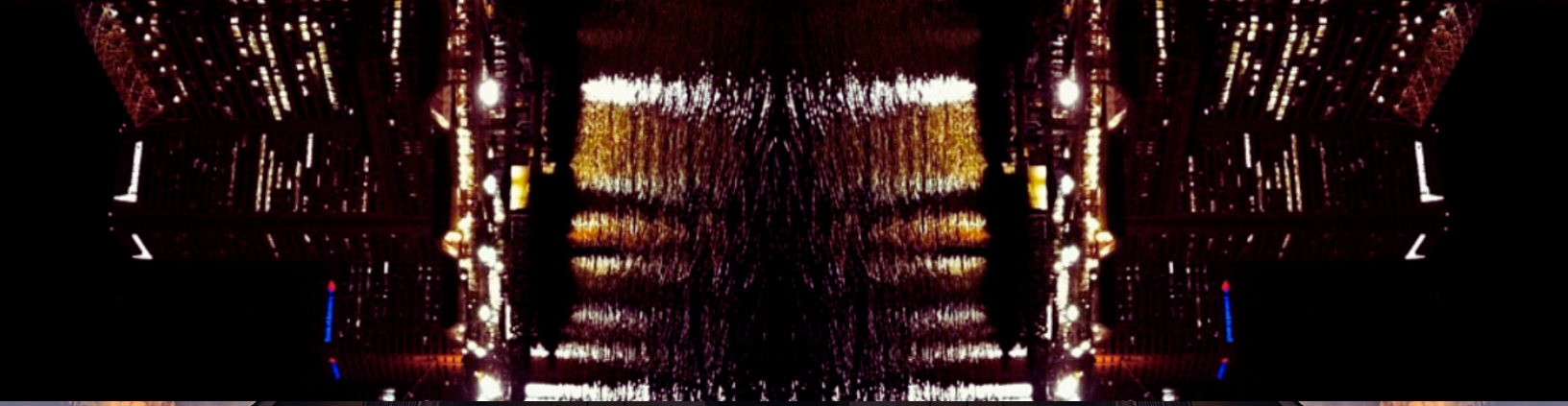




d i s t a n c e



o v e r



t i m e

Convalescence

it's too late, we're already born.
this occurs to me while we each
rehearse a careful death.
our bodies snagged on a lure—
from first your lungs, or mine.
I watch the trees from
the window above the deck
for the tell of a breeze,
for the same reason I
stare at the cats' striped bellies while they sleep:
to know they still breathe.

I don't know if you are too unless
I'm with you.
I'm with you when
you reel in the night,
your heart rushing ahead of mine.
I'm with you when
we both feel like we want to die, but then
remember that darkness forever sounds fine
until something cold touches you, and you
cry for the light—
I'm with you when
you reach a part of you
across sheets for
a part of me,
as if we, conjoined, are
dense enough to impress time.

but it's too late, we're already born.
the sun streaks across a September sky—
flint and copper—and the blinds stripe our
naked thighs. the wind chimes
voice the leaves while we,
hot-skinned, without guilt or desire,
feed days to a fire,
and breathe.

Measure

we're losing heat—her eyes are tearing up at the frost.
we're momentarily lost until we
find the right street in harbor east.
she shivers and I shake, colliding with the years
I'd been here, before I'd seen her shape.

that cold spell in 2012—six degrees, propelled, layered,
stepping out on a dare, with no intention
but to measure the separation between
me and a bar; my head, her heart;

the sidewalk and the sky; my hand, her thigh;

the air and the salt; a rooftop, the asphalt;

the spacetime I borrowed from me, unheard, unseen,

and a pulsar stranded in a

fraying galaxy, shining, echoing, on too

high or too low a frequency;

the shrinking distance between now and

history (*once more, once more*),

the numen of an

eternally

cascading

city...

the number unknown to me; the moments it took to answer my phone.

I never learned who called, while I wobbled home in the dark,
who whispered my name and said, "*look at the snow.*"
maybe it's me, a few minutes hence, leaving a message in the ever tense.
offering whatever helps, what doesn't harm—
measure again. keep her warm.

Observation

the garage is open
when I pull in
and so too is the door to
the backyard
framing a Rothko
a seashell patio
a sun-strewn acre
a secret forest in shadow
a seeker sky alight

I see you in the foreground
your back to me
praying over seeds
your cherrywood hair
up but falling
down

I feel as certain as the
spade in your hand
yet I am a myth, a man
who might be nowhere else
or speeding away

you do not see me collapse
at your generous gaze

Mercy

I remember a monolith. it looms slate grey and high over quivering cattail reeds, hostile to a hallowed sky. a monument to failure, founded on felony stone, full and fearsome in the light of eternity. in a parallel plane, I chase the prisonbreak thoughts of my fugitive brain, pleading this spinning sphere to catch the gears of time, and avert my involuntary eyes. yet this stoic spire remains, despite my velocity, resistant to distance—a parallax insistence. the present slows and refuses to recede, its speed dampened by those penitent reeds, wincing, cowering before a tolling tower that does not yield—like the fallow field that is my memory, bereft of peak or valley to obscure that which will not permit my leave.

but ahead of me, to the east, I remember

the open sea.

Timelight

on our last evening in the house,
after we'd sipped scotch aged as old as the walls,
a storm neared from the northwest.
it dealt only a glancing blow,
illuminating orbs in smoking clouds,
like synapses in my mind casting
found film upon a faded screen.

that week, they released the first pictures
from Webb; exhausted light—blue-shifted,
expedited—received at stellar speed, just *then*.
we couldn't see that it was all around us,
that even the youngest ray was still
eight minutes away...

and like that, present but aglow by the past,
I pictured the emerald swell in timelapse
over a decade and a half:
the thuja trees, nine of them—
we call them the Supremes—
en banc, linking, filling in the seams
like the roots of the Japanese maple
reaching under the lemon-shaped green,
unearthing the shattered stone path.
or the rose bushes in the back,
forming a gable-roofed cupola,
where we watched every summer supernova
detonate into sunset until it was black.
and briefly, we could see timelight, prismatic,
endlessly reflected and scattered,
exposing age as only the transfers of heat.
it felt like it would last, as if we could
catch the dusk in a sunlit glass,
and drink the sky, grapefruit and tangerine...

an airplane skirted the downdraft,
a rainbow framed a lightning flash.
when it thundered, we counted as the seconds passed,
and knew it was receding.
so we went inside.