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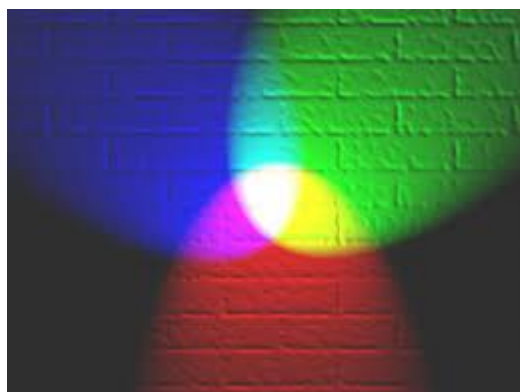
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RIVERSPELL

John Geraets

2022

SET UP

You're free to do anything, as long as you know where home is (George Russell, 1953).

What happens in a poem? One idea we have is that a poem is self-sufficient, it stands free. Yet a poem is made using language, which is a direct outcome of time—it is historically bound. Maybe it is fair to say that poems have the supplest relationship with time that is possible in language. *Riverspell* poems work, and I might also say play, within this understanding. The 'River' is the

work part, it conforms to physical expectations; 'spell' is the playful part: it includes the idea of enchantment, like the light that spills across the moon, or the unforeseen effects that arise from words. In terms of structure, included are the usual temporal perceptions—then-now-next—and also an acknowledgement of the ways in which any situation is contained. But this is not all. I want to produce, using the possibilities of language as it encounters meaning, something that, if not autonomous, neither is it reducible to a list of ingredients.

RIVERSPELL₁

Mist or fog? Needless—it sits easily on the river, ebbing tide. Boatsheds opposite loom, between them masts, otherwise reflectionless. Yesterday, at the low-tide mark, an oystercatcher has a third of its beak caked in brown mud. Today, here and there, pied stilts, dainty. Everything nails to nothing, near the playhouse.

Before the small noisy outboards, smoother than the birds that avoid them, the kayakers glide through salted water with their paddles evenly striking. White tends to shed gloom.

Up before six, the moon unzips the sky from left to right. I look across the Coronation Reserve, only a silhouette. Nothing flows untroubled, no river, no sentence.

Two years it takes for the tide to come in. A duck turns over a pebble at the edge of the river. On the grass near the pedestrian bridge gather groups of gulls and oystercatchers. Two white-fronted terns position on two thick half-immersed poles near their nests; jaggling swallows, a heron, pūkekos whose legs drag in flight above the reclaimed *Pohe* island. Existence slips through the fingers.

The catamaran 'Mango'. 'Moon' is moored outside the marina office. Alongside the wooden esplanade I come

across the schooner *Neorion*, refurbished. Squally showers, walkers in vivid colours. The boats, exotically named, drape flags at mid-mast.

Yesterday white clover appears on the pathside. This morning blustery. Does the wind or do the birds scribble their letters? Falling and straightening, the gulls relish their own misspellings. Swallows, sparrows singly or in groups, stroke finer dashes, or blackbirds or an unlettered worm caught in a thrush's beak; remote herons, ducks at the tideline with their heads tucked onto

their backs; a paradise pair stay close on
the field where the sculpture fair was
held. *Voider. Voider.*

The dredge barge pulls upriver. The
river is re-hollowed. A thrush alarms
itself on top of the vertical walkway
lamp, such song!

Moon walks over water. I walk over the
Te Matau a Pohe bridge. The water is
left circling where the tern has fallen to
make its kill. The sun spreads through
the branches of the pōhutukawas, more
space than matter. Why must my fingers
touch what my eyes see?

RIVERSPELL₂

Eyelid or a cusp of ear, above me,
seeing hearing, the moon—the puzzled
river.

Their meeting never ends in satiety. Ouyang Hsiu is seen reading the poems of a friend gone. The eyelid of the moon rests on the water, while nearby a shag summersaults on landing.

The gulls seen on the surface are not seen in the sky. Ribbon shapes today and tomorrow an arrow formation heads west. On the pole above the water, a single gull. Shaken on or shaken off, like the movement of a hand or a sheet. Clouds are ribbons and ribbons are clouds, settling over the spread water or wound round or sifted over

the hills. The unevenness of hills that surround the river—like ripples quickly flattened following the black shag's departure, or the day it takes for the moon to blink again.

I daren't drop a pin on the water. Yet the reflection white-green-red is enough to reprise a geisha girl or a collapsed marquee on the beach. Say *spoonbill*. Say forevermore.

Mister tern presses by, chin tucked. The river is flat and waves of red wash through the pōhutukawas, open-mouthed.

Words ripple over the larynx or a distinct mark of ink is recorded on paper—or on a screen! Yet depth is not meaning and a surface is not a thing to be left unattended. Still, something is happening. Having obtained what we think we want from words, we discard them, like a tree its leaves, unthinkingly. The tree does not live to have leaves.

And Kant confounds phrases like ‘an end in itself’.

A dozen ducks floating. Another couple moves out from the mangrove cover. I have disturbed them. The feeding river is *perturbation*.

Rock, flax, tūi—each easily spotted or conjured in the mind. What is the meaning of ‘flax’ or ‘tūi’? It’s as if an impulse or urge arises from *within*. Is meaning only a hankering? And how bring hankering to rest? Or let it simply disappear—into that ditch?

Language hangs in the air like a kite or a piece of wind, a branch blown that does not know what blew it, or why it bears leaves, or why on it sits that tūi, grateful and open-mouthed.

Emptiness fills the Whangārei sky. Two high seabirds occupying it, occupy nothing.

There is only earth|water|fire|sky & their surprising accessories. Growing alongside the boardwalk, the mangroves cavil not. Surface|depth, form|content, intention|truth, straddling nix.

The bridge operator expresses concern at the recent low tides. Through the

struts, he indicates a makeshift landing, where the maroon-coloured yacht is temporarily moored. A replacement outboard will be delivered downriver and strapped to the side of the hull, he explains. It'll allow the boat to dawdle upriver for repair. 'Mind' occurs at the level of a pencil stroke skimming the river surface that the shag simultaneously draws and erases, clearing the sheet.

Distortion starts at the iris, as it regulates light entering the retina. Like language—a mechanism that determines its own

seeing. Rosemary Waldrop's *Gap Gardening* and Anne Lauterbach applaud what 'neither fully informs nor fully entertains'. For Saussure, meaning's what's left when the words, all those bloodlines, have abandoned it. The gap constitutes a refusal to mean simply this or that. A glass is a glass whether filled with water or air, whether it serves as an eye looked through, or a receptacle, or a hole in space.

Kant speaks of a sublimity that surpasses the logic of reason, subjectivity's 'end in itself'. Maybe true, though a glass upturned—one looks at the sky through

a solidified bottom! Abandonment is our theatre, we waver.

In one bed: knowledge & ignorance, laughing & jostling in the rain!

RIVERSPELL₃

At the outset the sky is rimmed yellow pink green—up to the moon with its outlier star. Similarly, a calf, like the one I observe at Ram Krishna’s guesthouse in Bodh Gaya, its mother a nearby witness, bound together. At the close, rimless, no tether.

The blackbird considers itself grander than the pōhutukawa branch on which it spends its morning. The branch’s girth is a human torso. All three so-named: branch, torso, blackbird.

In half-light, between the swimming pool and the full river, the flax stem (M. kōrari) leans out over the noiseless water and sports lifeless, crusted, brown, superfluous seed heads. One turns our way, surprising us, clumped, intent, a spired beak—*kingfisher* (M. kōtare)! Later, clouds settle across Hikurangi mountain, where we visit the

rockman, seeking a sentry pair to adorn
the corners of our Riverside garden.
Faraway Kōshō's *Antaiji!* Faraway
orientalism. Faraway the *hojo* doorstep.

As with others, there have been many
things I have named the dangling orb
other than 'moon': a vagrant, a piece of
cheese, a rock, a triple goddess. Early
morning it hovers imperious and peers
down on me and on the small still-lit
city and hills of Whangārei with distinct
unconcern: supposed Watcher, itself a
feigned receptacle of light: nor am 'I'
the thing illumined; indifferent to

naming what's known, it strikes and
brightens only the skin.

We have already heard what's listened
for. Why is this? It's as if there's more
wanting to see the world as such and
such than curiosity about such and such
in the world. Not that the world
extends understanding. We bounce
around on it like children on an inflated
fairground castle, gleeful, inhabiting a
given world we assume we stand on
and know!

Free from rock's 'r'. No rocky hardness, nothing bobbling. In fact rock's rockless. Needing, as Shakespeare says, an 'out' to be 'in'.

*Iconoclast? A mouth breathes, shushes, coughs, drinks, bites, utters, smiles, kisses, pouts, sneers and dribbles. Mouth to mouth: an 'image seeking another image', *ad libitum*.*

Or, before the mirror, a figure seen examining itself, artful makeup. Or observation not requiring an actual 'object'. Actually, the observer is remembered. What we think we know and love is always at a kind of remove. *Aporia* draws us. To see clearly is to see that nothing's held because nothing's settled—something's elusive, something's always missing out.

Above Parihaka's silhouette or dawn or gods or good will, still wafts of yellow or green or pink air, lessening as the eye lifts to the topmost black obscurity of the sky. You gaze at the water hosting the mangroves beneath the wooden walkway and something gazes back. On the surrounding water there is a passing of distinct whites and reds, reflecting the

early morning traffic from Mair Park
down Hatea Drive. Is two a twosome?

At my feet a thrush dances,
indistinguishable among the dancing
leaves. Irrespective of the choice at the
fork Vale or Dundonald, one's none the
wiser and the destination's the same. I
draw two columns; one comprises
words the other demarcates the sublime.
Beneath lies a city of lights in fog. What
decision is there to be made? The
leafless oak is not required to be bare
for the birdsong to be heard. Even the
birds do not hear themselves. Two

thrushes sing shamelessly in an imbroglio
of branches. *Who* dances?

A single crane flaunts **A—T—L—A—S**
in red neon above the Hundertwasser
site. Perception fades. *Sitting above*
nothing (pl. *lekta*)—the spoken and the
world?

The eyes wonder what to settle on. A
number of ants move over what
remains of the apple core in the

breakfast bowl that we use to collect
compost. Seeing them, a thought occurs.
And, with the thought, further images,
taking attention. I look through the low
clouds toward the *Pukenui* hills, covered
in bush as well as cloud. Whether the
seeing will see the hills or the clouds is a
question that is asked in the mind. It
realises that what the attention's drawn
to is one reality—others are others; and
the idea of an entire inclusive form—
reality of realities, forget it! Proliferation
is a noun, as is positioning. Conditioning
is a spinning eye, trailing cornucopia.

Cover over cover out of mentation. I
make myself, given words, how exciting
that is. And removing cover after cover
I am returned to a bareness, slips of
memory. In wanting to give you
certainty, concision, handshakes don't
hold. Not only hands, mentation. This
hand I place in yours, for support, for
fondness—a broken or mended heart,
blood-red, chill or warm. All that any
colour might aspire to be.

RIVERSPELL₄

The reflection of the moving lights on the water is surprising and it fascinates me. On a single surface, movement streams both ways, mimicking the traffic—though each vehicle will arrive somewhere at some time, whereas those reflected images suddenly vanish into thin air! The medium is one of surrender, and behind those lights nobody sits or drives. Atop Parihaka a red aerial light shines, as if to announce something without something being there. It is a sign about another sign. Like the song of the thrush, whose notes are unable to surpass one another,

something's done that can't be undone. No wonder John Keats sat wonderstruck at his table. It was theatrical, hearing the nightingale's notes deliver the secret of its performance. It was this that transfixed him.

Out of the dark of the mangrove swamp a thrashing of duckwings. The plane leaves from time to time detach and flutter to the ground and in their place fruits appear. We call it fruits, adorning the single tree. One doesn't know if this is correct because the very

notion of efficient cause is lost. We have no idea what we want to explain. Words woo ignorance, just as leaves adorn the tree of which they remain ignorant, unbelonging. Early in the morning I pass Annette, once a policewoman of some thirty years. In what context does that statement have effect? Now she sweeps the leaves that have fallen onto the roadside and paths near her house, saying she is pleased to contribute her part. How do we care for things? On the powerline above my head, a blackbird shuffles its tail feathers, reproving existence. Words, as much as we are drawn to them, resolve little. Better see them as leaves that fall

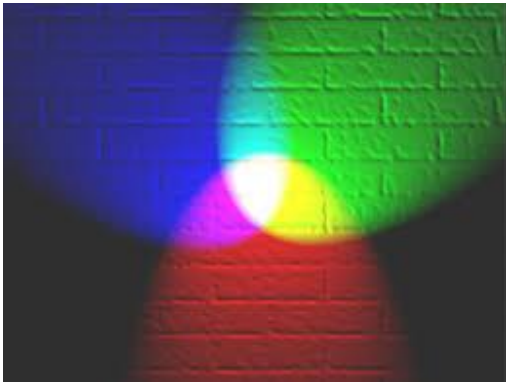
from a tree, never having been an essential part of anything.

The seeking of happiness (Leopardi). But the individual is of no interest to us. Sparks fly up. Above me in the sky the helicopter sounds like a grinding device, heading somewhere that's as well nowhere, with a red and a green light up high, similar to those shining atop the buoys that float on the river, indicating an obstruction and a way to pass by to the right or left.

One doesn't lose the memory but the route the memory had taken (P). It's like me walking to the yellow supermarket, passing Jay's dairy and crossing the canopy bridge and ending up not knowing where I'd ended up. She'd say "Whangārei", and I'd connect with something that seems to be in the air around me. This evening there were swallows darting and a fantail flickering. The boys were throwing a red ball to each other on the driveway and, in the west, tumbling into the *Pukenuis*, was a ball of orange plasma. It was this that was in my memory the sun. It's like someone adjusts a lens and suddenly I blurt 'I can see'.

Adulation. Memory. Despair. Something stays the same: a reflex. Bohm terms it conditioning. I call it gazing into the evening waft. *Look!* Intention wants alignment. It may be sequential, but memory retains nix. What I get to understand I have already surrendered: like two blackbirds claiming they occupy the same branch, realising and one skedaddling. Mirrors are blackbirds redacted. And thinking is reflexive, hopping on the feet of its own impatience. One needs the light of sensibility! Some consider something's 'already doing it for us!'

Susskind says bits are indestructible. There are two distinct representations of the same reality at the horizon of the



black hole. Red green and blue provide us a complete palette of colour, a primal multiplicity! Its code packs in the

holographic 3rd dimension, flattens it and allows it to stand tall. The maximum amount of information in a region of space is proportional to the area of the region.

Thought doesn't come structured like you suppose. It has trouble reverting to cause. You can define the rate at which something opens up, like mentation or a daisy in the morning. Or, you can define the rate at which something else shuts—a daisy's petals at night or a thought that's regressive. Opening up

implies heading from out of nowhere.
What of departure?

The active backdrop to the hills is white, the same colour as the moon that still 'hangs' in the sky. Something causes the river surface to ripple in curious patterns as the flow comes down from the falls and approaches the bridge, where water pushes back. The fall of streetlight and moonlight onto its surface is a pattern of interference. When uttered, I see that each phrase is a measure of distortion. Each word spoken seems unreliable, I see that. Perhaps that is why parts of the

sky continue to fall through the moon? Some might call it a mapping of sorts, like our adopted countries and cities that when named are acclaimed. The morning birdsong is irresistible and has me wanting to compose a book: *Early Morning Birdsong on Whangārei Walks!* I realise that the moon is above every house and every moving object, including me. This strange space of me. When I greet Annette under a half-lit sky, we share a sense of the pouring bird notes and the utter quiet they impart. Each of us rises at five. By seven, she is sweeping the roadside, and I pass by her there.

Body reference for mind is external.
Mind reference for body is internal
(*Mahanidana Sutta*). To know both is to
know complete isolation!

How does one give back? The building
blocks of words are not themselves.
Things have a way of jumping into time
and demanding attention. Not even the
duck, which has water as its element, is
adequately represented. *An image is
wrought.*

RIVERSPELL₅

I crisscross my thoughts. I crisscross my language and the named streets and paths of Whangārei. Crisscrossing these I find I traverse all streets, all mind, discovering what's common or uncommon. It's like a river that adorns its own bed. Water otherwise running nowhere (or anywhere) has somewhere to run. A boat sets a keel. This is a means of assuming buoyancy, time-honoured. Things turn one way or another—a tide, a sail, or an unwieldy rudder, for instance.

Because it is the observer who observes *what is*. So, no observer, so what is?

Ruth enters with a handful of jonquils. Their scent fills the air. When we sit together, thoughts arise and settle again like fingers straightening and returning to the palm. It is as if the mind observes itself, sequentially. The word 'palm' is exotic and seems not to apply to the hand, which includes fingers, adumbrating. Hence the 'hand of thought' rather than the 'palm of necessity'. Neither clearly establishes what the other implies.

Yesterday it happened in this manner. Out walking, the softness of the sound of that word is hardly self-aware and hardly amounts to that physical activity, if you consider each of its component parts. Similarly, the sound of 'boardwalk', as if wood and board are synonymous and walking shares something with its surfaces. Does walking require a footfall? Above the canopy of mangroves—and above Parihaka with a red-lit aerial and the city with its gathered streetlights—a wash of light rises into the air, as if (in the old language) being lifts into *being* all the things that I observe: the trees, the sounds of the birds, Annette's sweeping, the empty paths, the empty streets, the

lights along the street and lights still showing in the buildings of the town. The colour of things does not belong to them and adheres only as I watch. There is nothing for me to hold on to, light and darkness press inversely.

It astonishes me to think that we are aggregates that address aggregates. Why repeat these three-syllables? What do we want? Each of us in our own time observes. And many of our observations have a certain efficacy, and we take delight or pleasure in them. Why does observation lead to delight or

displeasure? yhW si siht redro ni eht srettel ssel erus than this? And there are finer individuals who observe what occurs in a way that is less closely indexed to how they want to feel. What is it that they experience? What is this urge to feeling that is the drive in the way to respond? And we do not place experience into our own satchels; rather, a fitter analogy is that we place a hand into the satchel of what's still possible and we pull it out and either examine what is held in the palm or react to it as something welcome or unwelcome. In the reaction the tendency is to require what is not happening or to not happen what is happening.

Amongst many image-makings, one represented by a finger on each hand, we count holonomics: half plasma half hollowscape. I have heard thought and feeling be distinguished, their affecting one another. *That's it!* The image given is of a fist with bunched fingers, one and the next lifting then returning to the palm. The palm is thought's possibility (so to speak) and each finger represents one thought, or a feeling, or a sensation on the body, arising and subsiding. The mind and the palm are occupied with what occurs, each in their own manner. We make of it an abstraction, citing words like *khôra*, as once before. Yet even an abstraction is an assumption of

something concrete that in the end is a mere finger tapping, retracting.

thought, this is my returning consciousness.

A brief sunny day. What colour is sunny? Lining the river bank the kingfishers are freshly adorned in blue coats, swollen in their bodies. On the uppermost branch of the tree, the thrush swells immensely in song. When Karen and I return on the 'paper-road' from Jagger's Camp (and the sea beyond), we observe clouds of red-breasted swallows lifting from the upper fence wire, circling before the car, and returning to the fenceline at a further point. I

A ribbon of fog is wrapped round Parihaka, as if to render it a gift—for whom? At the entranceway to the property are two gaunt, lichen draped rocks, our sentries. Unlike Susan's at Matapouri, as she tells it, which wears sculpted on it the face of Maui, our two remain faceless while facing each other. How quickly do I want to be situated between this and that, as between our two carefully positioned rocks or those strewn haphazardly on the grounds

outside the Aquatic Centre near the river? Everything wants to be measured yet observing isn't that to begin with.

Names attest to things, or events; though one is not the other. Is the moon a plughole through which the night drains, leaving the daylight to fill dark's absence? Or do we say that daylight fades into night? Which is the surer? Or are we tricked and it is daylight that pours into the bowl of our lives through the spout we call the moon? Everything occurs in a dream-like fashion.

RIVERSPELL₆

If thought gives a solution, who solves thinking? Two black shadows that are not yet birds fly out from the mangrove cover near the boardwalk. What frightens me? Language drifts loosely. I am struck by the fact of the water's quietly moving. Experience doesn't much happen in words, though it draws them. When inadvertently I frighten the ducks under the bridge, their tails wag furiously. If I stay long enough with a single fact or a word, all of existence will surely unravel?

From the *embarrassed* pōhutukawa on Dundonald hangs sweet jasmine in profusion, flooding the air. In summer it will be the turn of the tree's brilliant red blooms to flood the eye. In this world where the span of the nostrils and that of the eyes is narrow and scant repeats.

I say that nothing is stable. Basho sees a frog drop into a pond. Someone has cut three large palm leaves above the fenceline and laid them down on the path, where I step over them on my way.

Thought's hiddenness is hardly new, a bubble until it pops at the surface. Actors in perpetuity, show-offs that we are, wishing parts of ourselves to stay obscured. 'Percept' and 'concept' are etymologically derived from 'capture'.

The cloud threads round itself and could be the startling murmur that Garth and De show us on the Somerset Levels, near their home in Wells. The three towers topping Parihaka might likewise be mistaken for three crosses, intimating suffering & redemption. Yet another thrush sits bawling on a jagged totara

high above Dundonald, disregarding me and others passing.

Verbality is not a base. Helen Keller discovers language through examining water games. 'Everything has a name'. Two of many forms of water (two forms of the same thing)? Concept creates a group setting: orderliness, abstraction: a place to rest one's feet: 'Name's tremendous, powerful effect'. Expectation surpasses evidence and we must explain. The *self* is a thrust. It thrills and hurts. 'Just as your liver works your conceptions work'. Name

and concept: they say 'hi' to each other. They call out. Things please or displease in equal measure.

The kererū occupies a position on the leafless oak. Neither knows how to utter words like 'cathedral' or 'catapult'. Each stays put according to its own custom, singular enough.

I am like *idiosyncrasy*, a 'private admixture' (Bohm). Proprioception

(self-perception) of mind and the automatic self-awareness of bodily movement. Memory. The thinker's a product of thought rather than its 'transcendental entity'. Better attend to thought, he said, rather than have to act on it.

Do we call this song heartfelt? Among criss-crossing quavers & facing the sun as it declares the compass's eastern point, the thrush sits high above the half-salted water, relieving the torso, an extended moment of stupor.

The body, stimulated by thoughts,
simulates them. Stimulates waits near a
word like simulates, or insinuates—or
neither. Wait. A slight difference in
lettering confounds what's aptly
considered. *Enantiodromia* (Gk)—rare
betrayal?

RIVERSPELL⁷

A pair of snowdrops. From the palm to the totara tree spin two trailing white bibs on dashing bodies, swift to alight—
1—2.

Towards Mimiwhangata, the puriri inclines at the angle of the prevailing wind, hardly a surrender. Likewise, the shrubs and t-tree on the hill huddle above the beach. In Whananaki, where Keats once sat pondering the pōhutukawas, their knees and elbows crouch on the sand, near the dispensing waves. Here, the pushing water and rummaging pebbles broadcast the sound they generate. I forget to mention, the first thing seen on arrival: a kingfisher with a belly more compact than its head, baring a 'heart of gold' and a prognosis for the future.

Three blackbirds range over the lawn and adjust the angles that distinguish and separate them. I am present as a fourth, adding dimension.

Snowdrops and onionweed—I think of smells and shapes, but from other angles they are indistinguishable: postulants, joint populators of our grassy banks.

Parihaka forgoes its base. A pūkeko stands on one leg. A thrush tucks up its wings in flight, squeezing through the vertical struts of the pool fence. Kowhais spin yellow sheets. A dove propels towards the power line, arms akimbo, paraclete. One does not see the spring: one *notices* only nasturtium and onion weed spread across the grassy bank.

All people are loaded. How to notice water when you're in it up to your eyeballs? Mouth issues bubbles. Direct perception—*forget it!* You don't know the half of it. Look at 'rock' with the 'r' clipped? (1) something's known from the past (2) something's new, the mind engages in novelty. One object attracts another. Why doesn't the moon fall? I contemplate this, standing on the

viewing platform above Otuihau Falls, seeing the water collapse and settle far below, where the two young men twirl their *taiaha*. In the city, as in life, all falls.

Language embraces the moon and the moon reciprocates: *bodily orbis*.

Assumptions. Like the floor you stand on measures the stature of your body: your disposition. We all suffer from it. *Never, forever, all, everything—*

sweethearts of representation, reassuring us? 'I see; I am here'. 'One object draws another'? Descartes folds a map. It's not happening, it's happening, traps us. Be careful what you wish for. It's hard, because we are in the picture and must defend ourselves.

A demonstration turns the handle on the machine, seeing water squeezed out at the wringer. Once my fingers were swallowed to the forearm. Botched emotion. Holding one hand and clasping another, the way we wrangle: Mother, the one task to resolve, we are

two. Memory to thalamus: Instinctively the mind ratchets, sticks. One judges what is true and accedes to what's not. The thing yielded is always *otherwise*. Life is mean. Sincerity shouldn't be asked to wear its own face.

Was I a child? May I still? The thought's the feeling and either perplexes. Approximately. Still real, pain persists. Is pain, hurts? Fears in the past are memories (of the past) in the present? Ranging from sympathy to mutual resentment.

Intermediate points of view across divisions. Who wants derogation—differentiating us?

RIVERSPELL₈

Who decides propinquity in a word like
'countenance'? How connect—1—2?

A signal requires a wave. When you greet me at the door, I am surprised, imagining Descartes's double's here. Everything—thus nature—is limitless. Necessity shapes a river that tips over a falls—flattening, moving on. Such is the regularity of laws. Who legislates? Who's *tinkering* with 'things you have to ponder', grasped by the fist and inevitably slipping through the fingers. Like atoms, mostly empty. Like *nexus*, Whitehead's *tinkering*. Even a correct appearance is not enough to say it is necessary, or weathers well for us. O my word, o god. Directions quickly give rise to *derogation*. Things quickly get out of hand.

Loopde loop. The whole cannot be grasped and neither is it *whole*. Parts of me are terribly amenable, sometimes erogenous—*oops!*—.

Things are delivered to thought though don't reduce to it.

Essence. Quintessence. Sisters.

Without explanation of the facts we have. That is, we know seeing requires something seen and someone seeing.

Deloopde.

Was I a child? The thought is the feeling and drifting holds. Approximately, still more. Pain hurts. In pain inside? Are

words a hurt? Believe me. Fears from the past are memories. Lament ability.

'Whangārei?' I ask.

'Me?' comes the answer. 'I stand between now and then, here and there'. How to place a thrush on a green post at the Baha'i centre in Kensington when everything is so out of place?

Where you clip your thinking (think of ock's 'r') determines the function and

purpose of the statement. Of course, the harm done by logic is unreckonable.

Individual points of view across division. Who wants dialogue (between humans)? *Dialogos (Gk)*. Really two?

Bohr: 'we don't know what's up and what's down'—preferring classical physics etc. Bohm: 'Yes, it's complicated'. 'Language is noisy expression'. The *structure of thought*. 'Analysis [of the entire universe] has no foundational status.' 'Whereas actual thought controls each one (of us)'. 'To perceive or think differently is more important than knowledge gained'.

RIVERSPELL⁹

Rain eases the moment it touches the sea at Mitimiti. Easy as well is the typology of Ralph Hotere's grave-site, a grey orb of pebbles with a white transect in the shape of a crucifix, and a number plate; no picket fence. Whether lost in the round, or caught in a *crosshairs*, a sorrowing occurs for what's gone.

Daylight and wind urges the grasses to keep clapping. Through prickly purple flowers, Karen and I clamber up the rise, where the famous *MillHill* chapel stares blankly past the obelisk that commemorates those once under siege at Te Aupouri—desperate and driven seaward. A clap for each girl and boy who fled the pa under cover of smoke. How to stage such a ruckus?

There was a sound. Looking up, I see a blackbird placed on a line. Briefly, an intermittence. Again—no sound, wings

away. Enough to say Zen's 'not two' or John's 'a twosome'?

Does one want to walk across the alphabet? Mr S sashays along the elevated boardwalk in the early morning. Or how to reconcile the odoriferous mangroves with water quietly spread about their feet and pods ripening as I walk? Why 'tiptoes'?

I refer to the branches of leaves as my feathers. Do they concur? The oaks are fastened with new greenery, as is customary for them. Reconciliations are singular? Considerations *plura!*

Pollock won't oblige. 'What's art for?' Rhubarb bolts—*seeds*. You want peace you get war. You want war peace comes. That's what we're defending, dammit—that's what happens! A coherent mind is like a laser. Another's a fudge, a weather blur: on the one hand a crisp stream of blue light and on the

other fog blasted in all directions.
You're born and nothing changes.

Any 'centre' is only a fragment. The stones I skip on the water, broad and heedlessly delusional! Or the effect on human thought. I wait in the morning for the sun to appear and then I speak, one with the birds I expatiate. Fix nought to nought—and gets away with it: termed nonsense, bullshit. *Oo*.

The neighbour's roofline catches the sun brightening the buttered beak of the black bird, rendering it a notch or a second's second second. Balancing its eyes.

At my feet, Glenn recounts the flight of the *ruru* to the underworld. We seek concord, remembering Tristan and Iseult—anything to do with love. For me, *more-pork* and *ru-ru* are one-and-the-same, sounding's naming. *Arohanui*. There's sound and there is a path to complete oblivion.

Imagine an absence of time. I walk around lighting a lantern inside myself. It—or I—speak and words appear like hair glistening on my head or fingers splayed, tufts of hair featuring. One's a group thing; another's singular. Fancy, me's 'I'. A brim at the top and shoes at the base, skinny-like.

The empty spaces left where the white shells are swept away are filled with manifold elements of birdsong. Twice failing, third time the pūkeko manages to squeeze under the pool's fenceline.

Buffoonery's bottom and the necessity of form!

Wake. At Busby's Point a fantail settles on my shoulder. Another, a container ship, settles on a shoulder of sea-mist, approaching the Hen and Chickens, stringy islands. Smugglers Bay connotes treasure. I'm yours you're mine, two kayaks, a launch afloat, another fluttering. Serially, the hebe (whitewashed), bees in yellow rags scurrying over the bright manuka flowers, clematis's piety. Emily Dickinson arrays in serene, one with the

godlike. Two letters and a lone syllable.
Terms and conditions are applied. 'And
wore my last year's gown—'

which bolsters it. Two dozen pairs of
white eyes hang on the *red bottlebrush*
and its flowers.

Spoonbill near the drainpipe. Swish—
pause—swish—swish—pause—. Who
would stop the world for that?

No questions today. The full moon
shines, occludes. Leopardi's sentences
are chilling. Today I look across
Takapuna Beach to Rangitoto. Each
movement of the water, a minutia starts
a violence. What does it intend? Messed
punctuation? Eyelashes without faces?
Faces without eyelashes? We hover at
the sea. Hardly wavelets, the little
occurrences at the edge of the tide are
featureless. To what do they amount? I

The river is a drain, still the shag owns
it. You don't get blacker than that bird
on the grass. The mangroves' smell
thickens and overflows like water,

ask the man beside me about his golden retriever that loves the sea as much as the land under its feet. He gazes steadfastly at what he sees.

RIVERJAZZ₁₀

Ribald thrush. Two sections of beak work erratically during song. The bird's entirety throbs, jostled upon the pole. Ornette says: 'Music ain't the alphabet'.

What is it with these guys? Shorter's 'potential not rehearsed'. Now he speaks of the lotus, boy's a girl, two-in-one, surrounded in a pool of clear glassy water. We collapse onto our knees, swamped, ghastly, fixed on the genuine:

'One' with *NightDreamer!*

Joseph Jarman goes *zip*. Music's lapsed. Stage's gone too! Pure volition, a box tips—birds spill—confounded air—. Dizzy's gargantuan cheeks, *genuine* floppers.

No notes Ayler, history's 'coarse anomalous'—kingsman. Ken Vandermark, Peter Brötzmann, the late David S. Ware, under the man's influence: 'We are the music we play'. 'The word had came back', Don Cherry.

My favourite Ornette. Something compassed from the past (say a Gower or a Langland) or anyplace that exists. He sits with α and Ω at the piano with his plastic sax, white-as, placed on the counter: 'I only think of the quality of what I'm doing'. No king, no queen. 'What is exciting is the memory you bring'. To *JD*: 'What's got hold of you,

you want somebody to pay you (for your soul)?'

Jacques: 'It is an enigma for me'. 'Do you ever ask yourself if the language that you speak interferes with your *Algerian* self?' 'Thinking and knowing doesn't depend on a place of origin'.

Walking, one sees the rengarengas forever flowering in the shade and the river is aware which way the tide is turning, upstream or downstream (*see*

earlier). Several mallards suddenly take fright under the walkway. Doing that, they take the water with them, a billowing tablecloth. Piet misses the northland birds in their millions and I notice other millions of yellowing mangrove propagules spread line by line on the Tamaterau sand, where I step carefully over them, bless them, and enter the water.

'I had wanted to call one of my pieces *She was sleeping, dead, and wearing glasses in her coffin*. I called it "Blind Date"'.

'So the choice of a title was not a choice of words but a reference to an experience?'

'For reasons that I'm not sure of, I am convinced that [before becoming music] music was only a word'.

Cecil. Cecil Taylor. *C-sil*. Dissolving into the keys he bangs. Codger. Swivelling on the carpet in his loose golf pants and cap as Sara Vaughan serenades, another billowing voice. 'The symbol equates to the sound'.

Whether singing or hanging, the blackbird and the grapefruit are companionable. In springtime everything bursts. The shags pop like corks under the bridge. A worm in its mouth, the blackbird on the ground flicks its head. Does one say 'bottlebrush' or a thousand orient pearls? It's the blackbird that does the stitching, its beak the colour of grapefruit, on the grass near the bowling green at Mt Eden, where John Ashbery is composed: A circle struggles and draws out 1—2—3—4—



Cecil Taylor listening to a recording in 1966 with the composer Luc Ferrari. Credit...Laszlo Ruzska/INA, via Getty Images

'To me music is everything one does'.
'He tried everything in the 'fifties'. I missed it when I was born. When I listened, never having heard anything quite like it before. Like me, like John. John-I-am.

My favourite blackbird is black. It lands on the railing of our wooden deck, beyond which blue sky spreads. It pares and cocks its tail. *Pendicular*. Forever departing on the swing.

What is 'exploit'? Why is it stuck with being a word and lacks an opportunity to flee? What is taking and what is giving back? Shoes are for filling and fitting into and an occasion for theft. Metonym is displacement. Give it back, brother.

'Names I don't know' (Freyman). Every method is new. The rules are simple with pieces played hard: spurious hierarchies. With what are musical laws enshrined? It's said they are. The condition for good ideas is overwhelming, albeit sometimes three days (on a) high. *Imaginative order*. Is this drug-free? The hope through doldrums is the hope of breaking out. Figure this among the jazz greats?

'Trane was the father. Pharaoh was the son. I was the Holy Ghost' (Ayler). 'Is

logic the lowest form of magic?' (*Singer
Taylor Master Spy*).

A
Ω

RIVERSPELL¹¹

Crisp. *Let it rip!*

Proust speaks of time often. 'Ain't what you do'. Often soften. Time is important but ultimately doesn't matter much. Measurement's important too but in the end matters *zilch*. Like an apple that snaps between the teeth, gets

swallowed by the oesophagus, digested in the chemistry within the lining of the stomach, or just passing through. *Holy shit!*

Such singing—I'm worried the thrush on the tree this evening will break something inside its body. Something is broken beyond repair. No

reprieve. As a boy, Arthur would leave his family home at Reotahi, pushing out

in his dinghy into the harbour near the heads, a bucket of bait and his lunchbox beneath the seat. On the incoming tide he drifts upharbour as far as the township, where he'll enjoy a meal under the bridge, until the tide reverses and he allows himself to be drawn back, singing and humming on the otherwise silent journey homeward. Bait transforms into a bucket of fish and the lunchbox evolves into song—something subdued, something regale.

Gold streams. Everything's soaked: the air and sky and hills. It pours onto me

and onto the sea water, which glories. Stroke on stroke, steadfast, ten times I round the yellow buoys at Tamaterau, aglow. After the gannet, which bears these same gilds, overhead another kererū passes, light spilling from its belly, awaiting thunder.

Near the bottom of the stepped path some yellowing poplar leaves are already falling, early January. Around the corner the broad-faced sunflowers, self-conscious, let drop some of the bruised petals that had once burnished

their surroundings. Does the flower
overstate its existence?

The mangrove tubers press for air
through the deoxygenated mud. The
mud, depleted, gives rise to poetry.

Tuberiferous!

Poetry is no crux or definition. The
blackbird deposits itself within the
mangrove canopy, observing, observed.
Joyful holds the ball in her mouth,
while her master Peter observes.

On Dundonald two kererū drop before
me, departing the same loquat tree they
share. On the bracket protruding from
the pole's wooden crossbeam, mister
thrush blazes out. How can it not be so!

Hiss or suspire? Poor summer oaks,
abandoned. Even the hedge, which
reminds me of those lining pathways at
Eheiji, has shoots appear at random. It
constitutes a 'taste of dhamma'. Here
Annette, and there the brown-robed
young monks, daily clear the paths.
Similarly, Brian shields a granddaughter
who stands near the car that her mother

is backing out of the driveway. What is it for us to open to newness?

The upturned ducks are rocks when they feed on the river, dipping their heads. The rocks attend in the same way that Whitehead describes as incontrovertible change, speaking at that time of Cleopatra's Needle.

dave's dad (he tells me) was born in the treaty grounds and there he had his placenta buried, a final instance,

vamoosh. dave was born across the hatea some 61 years back and in it caught schnapper as a boy. now he surveys the river, rich in mullet (still), pee, poop, sailboats and pakeha. he and mayor sheryll keep a brave distance separating various altercations. the river he remembers is blue and *skint* of yachts as he would have it for the rest of us—*begone!*

The cacti at 3 Vale have white stars coming out of their torsos. My dad called the patterned ones 'screen blocks'. Now they line the top course of the wall on Ewing. My dad's well-dead

and the yellowing blocks are decorous.
The house next door is disheveled, and
the wire fence is supported with a
makeshift block wall of their own,
lacking mortar and uneven. Mortar has
taken various forms through the ages.
Poetry is superfluous and sometimes
bungled.

Near Christmas, festooned in small
glowing lamps, the mangroves prepare
to propagate. Not far off, alike in
provenance, pōhutukawas burnish their
own red filaments, bulbless, adamantly
radiant.

Yesterday Satomi delivers hydrangeas,
purple as a cave. Today, on Dundonald,
I pass another burning bush, Japanese?
Egyptian? The shade of blue matches the
amplitude of the evening sky.

Who resists the sun at new year? Do the
mangroves or the jointed sedges, their
fellow passengers, resist? Sun—? Whose
is this word? What is recalcitrance?
What's its constituency?

I'm with Jim Lovell, Apollo8, with a long view of the planet. The startled waves leap up, bunting the seawall and spreading salt spray across my windscreen as I pass—Dr Williams, Carlos. The clouds pick up, splitting, reforming. The buoys glint in yellowness as I near, enjoying sweeping round them. Life snaps simply to exist. Missing vowels curtail nothing.

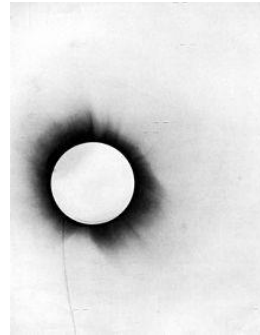
rock the thrush cannot distinguish itself from what supports it.

In the river two ducks have their rumps upturned. The water curves round their bodies. The mangroves smell like old coats and they crackle. Standing on the

RIVERSPELL¹²

Like saying 'last time' or 'this time'. It comes at a stretch. When Karen and I plunge on an evening swim at Tamaterau, behind the darkening Tangihua hills gleams an omnipotent god. 'Abide' is a word. That's why I mention 'another time', that sense of languishment. Like water it fills things, seas, other receptacles, without wanting to delineate anything. In fact, it drops into containment. How can I leave my thoughts behind, yours, or a last or *this one*? Things are destined to settle this way—or that.

Traveling back in time? They say it's tricky. A mean reversion. Or travelling



forward back in time, given that to bring the future back to the past is transformative: the past's long gone. Strange figures. A straight line? *Euclid*? The shape of things past. My tongue wraps the future and my heels kick against the past. I'm in geometric thrall.

Thich Nhat Hanh hitches his trousers.
Dropping out of time.

It is daylight and the moon floats across
the sky from east to west. On it there
are no passengers, though men have
stepped there, and to me it appears
forlorn. Looking back from the moon, I
gaze down at myself, hardly a
significance. What does John gazing up
on John gazing down still wish for
himself?

Is the Noguchi glass table that stretches
from shore to shore its own sea? In it
the moon floats. Floating in it is the
moon that floats (inverted) in the sky.
Yet the sky is not afloat on the glass
table.

The moon brims and tumbles onto the
water in the bird feeder that the birds
have yet to drink from, this sweltering
summer. *Wrinkle-free.*

A light shines about me (*4alms*).

One, a mangy cur is driven by a man wielding a rod at Bodh Gaya, while a puppy dragging its hind legs leaves a groove in the dust. Two, our pet dog *Blanche*, irrepressibly bounding, heavenward. Three, Paris Hilton's silken clad Pomeranian, clutched and hugged to the breasts. D[æ]fied?

As such. Who seeks anything missing, for instance a crushed letter?

Death is the nature of the body. I lift my finger, joint knuckle, skin, tuft of hair, nothing indexed. Pointing it via pun or simile, like a tempest, or something aged—Russian-roulette.

A
Void.

I search connections. I attach Little Munro Bay, a simple curve half-filled with water and a boat, a rock protrudes. Nothing to link Mt Aubrey and this boat, or me, or Karen, who together make the climb, up from the car park, overlooking Marsden Point, which gazes seaward. A sibling for

Aubrey. A gushy flame across the water reminds me of several holes in rocks I see around and about. One I swim towards and reach, back to bay, a simple, satisfying loop. *Snoop Dog* is the yacht. Walking the track and glimpsed harbour to Riotahe, what we assumed was freezing works is a gun emplacement. Wars originate this way. Wrongheadedly. The smallest local warbler, a tiny song in a big place, sounding.

Sitting, I realise nothing's *so*. I remove three things, three points of reference. 'I' occurs when it occurs. Many words

are dazzling. Poetry is vainglorious. The moon is so

Vainglorious?

I see the green of the horse chestnut before the buds open. The lower side of the lopsided pond under the bridge is fuller than the upper side. The cake is not the knife that cuts through it neither is it the cut. A heron moves from the lower to the upper pond. I am bits & pieces and bits & pieces and bits & pieces I am. I am bits & pieces and this is the entire story. Demogorgon: 'But a

voice / is wanting, the deep truth is imageless'.

Everything's something in place or else it is nothing. I am bits & pieces: this is everything. Carry nothing, saith the Buddha, saith Christ. 'One shape emulates another'.

Delight in concentration, a line edge. Knowing thought quelled, observing where prejudice resides.

What is the use of counting? Who speaks numerics? Who mentions 'counting on'? Convergence leads to infinitesimal finiteness, something disappearing in being observed. That's where my eyes are *docked*.

Before I am in the ground dandelions waver across it. I picture my death. It is colourless (the prerogative of Demogorgon). I acknowledge those who have never known or cared or only at a set remove. Now that disappears. My eyes are indifferent. Vaporous.

Built for death. I exit or enter Shady Lane opposite Martin's place. He is indoors, but of course I never see him. He's been here several months from Whangārei. What is shared time? The willows alongside the barely-in-motion, crystal stream, drop threaded branches on which innumerable bright leaves flicker, buttons on a new shirt. A blackbird drops from the bridge rail to the water and disappears.

The branches and new leaves are trimmed at the level of my arms stretched above my head. Is that *me*

reaching for the stars? Is that me plummeting?

Because time and space *unravel*, meaning does too. 'A joy forever' is spurned. Thought approaches its limit and draws back. Such sentences are uncouth: odd commas, subordinates, *italicising*, not to mention the colon *this* follows. Someone, out back, again murmurs, 'Watch the watcher'.

The regard is undiminished, yet the extolling (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*) or *Ulysses* (an old dog?)—is done. What I mean is the admiration is *unlessened* but reverts to the ‘nerve’ called for in the making of such books, not least Sylvia’s *Shakespeare & Co*. Now I write lousy sentences and nobody cares!

Sentiences.

Sentiences.

Sentiences.

RIVERSPELL¹³

Conviviality wrests a neighbourhood,
fresh flowing water, ground to be stood
on, a cat or a flower to incline towards.
Abjure symbolism, 'the thing itself'. One
enters an empty frame.

Did I mention freedom? 'Conquer the
infinite with the finite' (Tarkovsky).
Experience is never part of anything
bigger.

Tapotupotu. The most difficult of
dialectics, counted in twos. Hebe in my
mind breaks in two. The walk, two legs,
two people, two arms, two thoughts.
Two ways, back and forth. Two fantails,
preternatural. Reminding one, soon
enough, of the deceased pair who
clamber down to the unflowering
kahika on the northern rock, stepping
foot by foot down to the exit point to
Hawaiki. One heading there, the other

heads back. Two streams. Two rocks,
two hills, in clefts left by the hoof of a
goat or pig. Unflowering. *Hebe*.

Tasman clutches Pacific. One discounts
them. Even in the use of words we look
past them.

Two bright pointers, last night, in a
cloud of stars pointed to the Southern
Cross. In the morning, near dawn, the
same pair, or another, indicates a
perfect moon. I see a fisherman's light

flicker on the far rocks and am
reminded of the 'delusive flame' of
Shelley, hovering above the water at
Lerici: call it lofty sadness, love
withheld, *Jane gone*. Beneath me, on
the flat surface of the low tide, is the
flawless image of the moon.

Tapotupotu to te rerenga wairua.

I hear the traffic I cannot see. Similarly,
the thrush and the ducks are heard but
not seen. This morning I was confused
by the moon that shone on the water
beneath the walkway only to see it
repeated in the sky. Later, everything is

a glorious blue colour: Parihaka, the birds, their songs. One gets to understand the disparateness of things.

The moon is in the water and the moon is in the sky. Which would you have me aver?

A leaf in the tree moves and sings. A thrush moves and sings. A thrush in a tree is a leaf happening in twosome. The past and the future observe each other at a safe distance. Everything belonging to *now*, traded away—dispensed with.

I prefer identification, mass gatherings. The dainty blue heron moves like a ballerina and forthrightly takes its prey, the tiny grey fish flashing in the beak before it disappears. The tidal water remains ruffled for some time before returning to stillness. Did the fish or the heron do that? The heron patrols where the water meets the muddy sand. The water lifts slightly with the incoming wash of the tide.

Replenishment served elsewhere. The same moon. Always, they say, the same moon.

Across the harbour water, the lights of Manganui shine and charm. They call the moon *protectress*. A word is not what it says.

Hihi. The place.

The flame tree claims the tūi. The tūi claims the flame tree. The charm of Manganui is that it claims both and the

total makes two or three, bridging indifference.

Combed towards the sea, the land breaks from rock to swamp to sand. Actually, shelly strands like those of hair caught in the teeth are combed, smoothing to grains of sand where the seawater washes up and the dotterel scans its habitat, at Matauri Bay, where the local *iwi* occupies the foreshore edge.

RIVERSPELL¹⁴

It hurts, said like that. And so I try to say the things that have made my life my life and it all seems to lack adequacy. Even my birth, unmade by me, belongs to me. Nothing was known about it and the same uncertainty has followed me to this very letter and clause. Who looked for my birth? Who announces it? Language stands as best it can, before it became terminal. And only the world remains, like a song anchored in staffs

and clefs. This morning, as I walk, the sounds of the thrushes are more like knives than saws. A sound was an unseen duck passing overhead, another a single leaf hanging on an otherwise leafless tree, chanting. I was born in winter. I gazed with unseeing eyes at my mother and I knew *always*. Mother isn't a mere word. It's a complete loss of any sense of the self as the only thing that is the self. There was no name to tell that to. I gazed at her when I was able and I eagerly took her milk, imbibing her so as to be myself. Sadness was the unknown I knew, a kind of an absolute because there is no container that can be pierced open by it and no envelope to safely reside within. I listened to the birds. I was folded. I was

addressed. You will know what I mean. I mean I had no words and only an eye that saw and a mouth that sought, even before it knew words or how to use them. And I was able to reach for my mother, her hair, her cheeks, her lips, her breast, my palm fumbling and pressed against parts of her, discovering connection and separation. That is not to deny the tenderness of my fingers touching her skin, my toes her belly, my nose drawn by the scent, my tongue pulsing the nipple and the inside of my mouth tasting soft fluid, the murmurings that without ears I could relish. Everything assumes liquid form. I was five or six before I observed myself on the steps looking at my *reflection* in the kitchen glass. My mother was inside,

seated on the chair with the metal legs bent backwards in a U shape to support her, her blouse pulled open and *another* suckles at her breast. Befuddled for the boy I was. He was looking at the him he wasn't still. The mouth had returned to something like its original condition, a gap where at the top two teeth had gone missing, opening a passage of air that words could also pass, hiss lightly through. As someone, my brother, aspired to be *decent*. Is to *be* good to *do* good? Time runs in manifold directions. Sometimes meaning is immediately announced and sometimes it's indexed to the past or future, in recoil or anticipation. *De-looped*. One squeezes into the immediate. I don't know—terrifies me, nestled and eluding

passing. The way, when I was a toddler, she used to tuck me snugly into bed—the fresh-smelling sheets and lip-brushing blankets turned firmly at the top near the pillow, allowing dreams to calm and claim me, collapsed inwardly, as a kind of phantom permitted by the devotion of a mother. Falling against the incoming world, as upon the breast. Hair parted, like the cleavage of sand that brings the comb down into the water at Matauri Bay, disappearing into the low, swelling water that is pointed out by the coiffured Norfolk pines: orderliness is the line that childhood draws upon, everywhere dismantled in a tumult of affection and longing.

Surely a thing of which the beginning is the end can have no middle?

Timelessness is not duration. Hmph.

I am a sum asking what I am the sum of.

More to come...