

THE LIVES OF THE POEMS

[SPOKANE—JANUARY 27, 2014]

This lecture is called THE LIVES OF THE POEMS & what I would like to talk with you about today are some poems I wrote between 2009 and 2013 – I want to introduce you to them, I want to talk with you about my experience of making them, their experience of being made, our experience of living together – how it all came to happen and of their lives and experiences since that time.

Yesterday, sitting in a cafe in downtown Spokane working on this talk with little piles of poems spread out on my table – the waitress walked by – she said without even slowing a bit for an answer, “haiku?” – so I should say, my answer, the one that almost came out of me was yes – not exactly because I think of them as haiku, or not at all because I think of them as haiku, but because I think of haiku – because the experience of making haiku of reading haiku is important to me – one I’m close to – the experience of the haiku poet as itinerant, and the experience of the haiku poet as daily practitioner – the constant presence of the poem – the poetry – that it can happen at any time – that it can happen in any place –

I met a haiku poet once and I didn’t know any Japanese and he didn’t know any English and we couldn’t have been together five minutes be-

fore I pulled out my notebook to write something down and he started smiling and pulled out a very similar one to show me – and from that point on (and maybe before that point without us knowing it) we were writing poems together – and the experience of haiku – its history is a collaborative one – it began as a collaborative form of longer linked parts that demanded a social practice, and even after it became the way we now commonly think of it, it maintained at its core a practice of sharing – of sharing one’s own and others’ together – of traveling and making with other poets – the experience is less isolated than most other writing practices – the number – the quantity – the constancy of presence in the life of the haiku poet of the poem of poetry – Takuboku (a tanka poet) wrote more than 10,000 poems before he died at the age of twenty-seven – and most haiku poets would write thousands over a lifetime – and what is important about this is the necessary relation such a process has to the poet’s daily life – saturated – and think how such a practice allows for the presence of language in its fragmentary vibrancy – a constant – (Okay, I should read you some of my poems now so you hear them) –

cloth

on line
and line from tree
on earth

limb shadow
silhouettes entertaining us
as we live

...

want
so strange
and big
in scape of
empty sky
(cut out)
moon-black pillars
resisting
opaque time

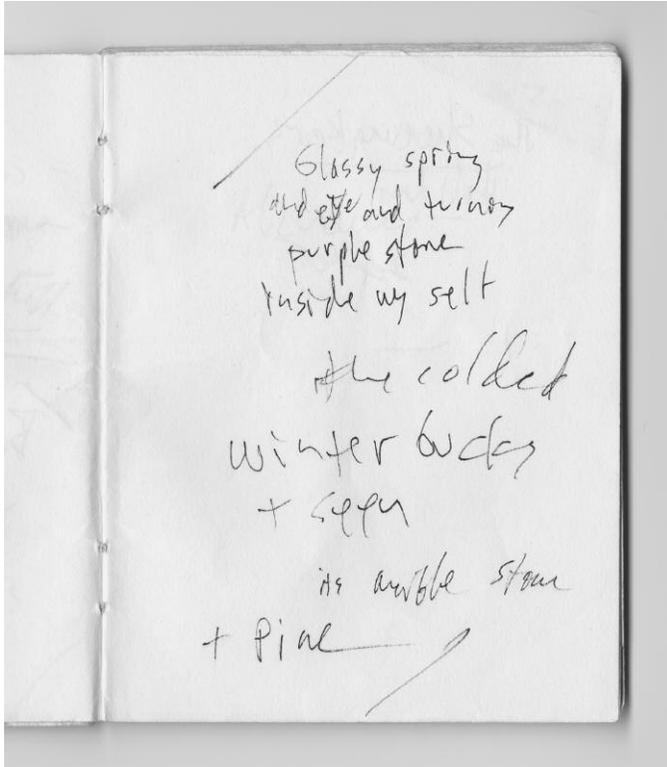
There is something inherently indiscreet about a meaningful poem – the poem, its capabilities in flux – the poet and the reader in flux – so that each encounter (as with a person) is different – even if in most ways (as with a person) it is familiar – and some would say the same thing about the other arts – and I’m talking – I’m thinking – about poetry – but just because something is the manifestation of the real peculiarities of something, it doesn’t mean the same thing can’t be the manifestation of the peculiarities of something else – no real actuality in art negates another – like people –

on my
lips smashed
where the wet rocks
make moss

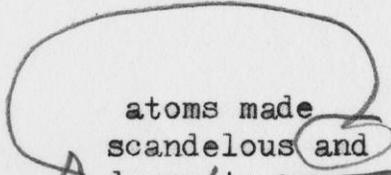
up from life
we spire in light

so the physical experience – the growing moving language – inside outside of me – ends up in this notebook – or starts in this notebook – or

first when it appears as words as written words appears in this notebook
– and that has been the case for nearly all of my poems for many years
– but now let me show you a little pile of papers and talk about *how*
these poems were made –



*[facsimile pages – talking about Paper, Typing & White Out, Carrying
them around / place, The physical making / a relation to each other]*



atoms made
 scandalous and
 dropy/in presence
 of bright
 open flower presence
 = my portait's of me
a cup

Sky
not some
cold rainy thing
but blue before
and turned away

A frozen gush
my fever
now full leaked
of summer

...

and some few had titles which would exist as underlining some word or group of words inside the poem – so the title might appear where it was found –

mountain's
silver side
by wind
in wind to shape
of winter
orchard
birds
hopping about
for nothing
beneath it
its shadow

and there were certain other organic innovations – and when I say that, I only mean innovations for us – me and the poems – everything's been done – everything's been tried – and that's not a challenge it's a liberty

– so that when those innovations sprouted they would get the rest of the poem messy with possibility – and sometimes I would see it and sometimes I wouldn't see it till later – & when I recognized them – when I recognized those innovations – it helped me see in ways where my human energies were – I would identify the time or place – they were abstract but they were very physical and real to me and I didn't want to separate from them – I didn't want to separate from the physical experience of writing them – so when a date appeared in the middle of a poem –

sunflowers
(September 17)
dead now
with sparrows on them
light
yellow
and pale
pulling something
with its mouth

the date is inside the poem and parenthetical and here a dedication the same –

sick
hurt
breaths
(For T)
gasping
and breathing
and falling
and fear

somehow I think the physical presences and constructive impulses are exposed – you recognize or feel the madeness – the oscillation of feeling and effect – as the balance of something coming into view – its recognition and surprise – there’s no purchase on it – it is spans of time re-animated – various particles of meaning constituting temporarily – the coming together of the organic intimate – that thing which disallows a real inquirer from accepting finite boundaries – you see the cloud you see it there you enjoy its form – you accept the unequivocal temporariness of it – and I want for a moment you to think of the poem as a temporary accumulation of resonances – and the poem in time the way music is in time – basically there when it is happening and not when it is not – not like a painting, which feels as if it’s making the same damn face whether the Louvre is open or closed – but like music – and the text is a score and the poem is that thing that happens when you animate it –

this head it hangs me up
like stoic falsish stones
that stare at walls
they prop
and fall
to sleep
for countless years
its iced-up roof
its planked and diamond
boards its twisted
guts of ashy smoke

. . .