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Lifespans

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Lifespans

for Shannon [1988–2000]

Can one be possessed by the ghosts of a road?

[250–238 MILLION YEARS AGO]

Sediment

You don't think about how you came to be—not in the dawn of your being. Before you are fully formed and your edges are solidified, time doesn't move in the usual way. It unfurls and refurls around you in flares of orange and green and brown and blue. You are sensing this, which is to say you are feeling it, which is to say you are alive. It is a way of sense-making. Still, in this kind of time, what is to separate you from another? Brush from rock from flesh from feather from bedded-down dirt from the deep skeletal heart of you?

After a while, it does seem there are *others* who come every so often, lightly skittering over your surfaces, thinking they know you. But that place that others do not see—the cool white core you've felt for as long as memory lasts—that is what grounds you, and what ties you to me.

[1657–1669]

Trail

Sometimes we are defined by others, by their use of us. So an undefined space calls for skirting, calls for the laying down of laws and feet. You know what this means:

41°02'04.9"N 80°31'48.5"W in Mahoning County, Ohio, to 40°59'57.2"N 80°24'30.6"W in Lawrence County, Pennsylvania

In the quiet water of the swamps, layers of silt and clay and mats of thick vegetation (peat) accumulated. As the rivers changed course or the sea rose to cover the low delta areas, the sediments were buried by new sequences of peat, sand, and mud. (Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources)

Several times, the shallow sea rose and deposited marine clays and muds. As each layer was buried, compaction and cementation changed the soft, loose sediment to solid rock. (Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources)

When this region was first settled, the only roads were Indian trails, which generally followed the larger streams. (Durant)

that you will always be tethered to a *them*, to a timeline built not *by* but *for* you.

Time picks up, as they say. It handles you, molds your edges with its fingers. You let it happen—what else could you do but wear it all sweetly, as if made just to fit a place.

Now, of course, others can name you. This naming is a scraping, really. For instance: one of *my* earliest memories is a voice saying: *Girls left, boys right, time-out for anyone in the wrong line*. Boundaries must be drawn, they say, and then carry away the chaff of you—to better call you *you*. But what was the chaff, you wonder—or rather, who.

[1748–1760]

Bridle Path

At a certain age, there is a natural tendency toward separation from one's rooting. My mother's theory: Girls have a harder time in adolescence because of the sudden changes to their bodies. Mine: Mostly, it's the visibility that leads to trouble. The new body a path that says: *Here, take me*.

There was a flash of yellow that used to visit you, to sing circles somewhere just outside your being. Sometimes you could hear someone listening with you. It's thick like sap—the sound of someone listening. Now it's mostly the straight lines of men's voices—a thin sound like slicing, like ticking toward an end. *Do you take this woman?* Always an end for this new means called *you*.

Life becomes an adolescent pounding of hooves, a nightmare huff and thrum, sound of a conclusion that never comes—this is worse than you could have imagined. For years, the world is clamor and scuff and red and red and red.

The Mahoning Path west of Kuskuskies was also known as the Salt Lick Path, the Tuscarawas Path, the Sandusky Path, the Detroit Path—in fact, by the name of any place it may have led to. (Wallace)

Leaving the Great Path at Beaver's Town (Beaver), the Mahoning Path ran up the west side of the Beaver River to Kuskuskies (New Castle), and continued up the east side of the Mahoning Valley to Youngstown, Ohio. (Wallace)

By 1748, the upper Ohio Valley had been transformed into a cockpit of international and intercolonial rivalries that once more threatened the Indians living there. (McConnell)

In the forks of the path stand several trees painted by the Indians in hieroglyphic manner denoting the number of wars. (Smith quoted in Cherry)

Natives at the Kuskuskies, like their neighbors to the west, must have followed events along the Ohio River with dread. (McConnell)

[1840–1852]

Cross-Cut Canal Towpath

Dirt is much easier to carve into than skin—it lets go more easily. But the motion is similar: backward and forward, a slow bunch and pile, rifts made methodically. The indifferent scent of iron says: *It's all business.*

After I'd finished my own arm, stiff scars appeared like stretch marks to fill the spaces I'd made, proving emotion has no part in it, no parting. Just the business of growth.

But they don't start the cutting for you; they don't need to. They find your deep furrows, your fresh-laid beds, the slick channels you've made for your own right-of-way. There was always disaster rushing beneath, but now, finally, you can locate it. You can reach inside and pull your wail—cold and pink and dripping—into this world, which will try so hard to shush it.

[1867–1879]

Disrepair

I know how silence lends itself to hardness—a calcification of desire, a little bone that rests at the edge of the throat as gravity threatens. Just what was promised, you can't remember. But it had to be more than this fossil of *potential.*

When the mind is porous, time can fall away like teeth from a skull—I've seen it. At my lowest, everything got in. This, more than what leaked out, was the problem. Darkness nested in the holes. Something as small as a parking ticket could pin me to the black bed, could press me, cheek breast and belly, until I fused to it. Eons were lost there.

The Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal (locally known as the "Cross-Cut") was privately built during the period 1836–40 as a shortcut from western Pennsylvania to Lake Erie. (Barnes & Feil)

The Pennsylvania and Ohio Canal was an important early influence on the industrial development of the Mahoning Valley, New Castle to Warren, giving special impetus to Youngstown where natural deposits of coal, iron ore, and limestone in the vicinity had already brought a blast furnace. (Barnes & Feil)

On the 25th of November [1852], a sad accident occurred in New Castle. Wm. Locke, the court crier, while walking along the canal towpath, just above the Jefferson Street bridge, by some means lost his footing and fell into the canal. (Durant)

In January 1863, the State Board of Public Works sold the stock owned by the State in the canal, being the one third of the whole amount, to the Cleveland & Mahoning Valley Railroad Company . . . by which purchase this road obtained a controlling interest in the canal, and thus sounded its death knell. (Brown & Norris)

The canal was abandoned between Youngstown and the mouth of the Mahoning in 1872. The portion above Youngstown had been abandoned some time before. The old bridges are fallen down or taken away. (Hopkins)

The "boatman's horn" is heard no more, and the sailorless hulks lie here and there, slowly rotting in the sun. (Durant)

[1881–1893]

Rehabilitation

Chunks of you are gone, and for this you are given the word *unstable*. But you want to become something solid, to stabilize with flintlike urgency.

Drained, your broken parts will be raked over, tamped down, and sealed inside a shell of something almost human in its stubbornness—much too hard to be earth. There will be a putting of things in their place, a repositioning. Youthful things—softness, pliability, sinking without sinking because you *are* and you are *of* your body—a kind of naïve buoyancy, let's call it, when touched—all these will be buried inside *you*, the best place, you now see, for burying things. You are ready.

[1908–1920]

Penn-Ohio Interurban Trolley Line

You are doing better, they say. Productive. And truly, you are *on time*, the years purring beneath your surface. They cluster and swirl through you, becoming an industrious colony. This is how time acts on space—it colonizes, moving through it, marking its place. Outside, everyone counts their oblivious minutes as the century churns. It must be easy for them to think you can't hear it.

But no matter—you make your own noise now, an acceptable murmur that says, moment to moment: *Here you are, here you whir*. Life merely a matter of passing back and forth between two states. Each moment a pure surge of courage. Each moment a lure fine as fur. Each moment a demure scourge. There are so many ways to entertain yourself when you live on the surface. Life merely matter.

I remember that on one drug, I liked to look at timetables. What a nice idea, I thought—a table on which to

The C & M Railroad sold the canal right-of-way to the Pittsburgh, Cleveland & Toledo Railroad in 1881. This became the Pittsburgh & Western Railroad in 1884 and was purchased by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, or CSX as we know it today. (Newton Falls Public Library)

In a sense the canal may be considered the foundation of a railroad system which penetrates every valley and reaches to every coal, iron, and limestone bed. (Williams)

In 1902 the New Castle & Lowell Railway Company was incorporated and its line constructed. (Hazen) *This line, known as the "Lowellville Line," ran from along the north bank of the Mahoning River and made a stop in rural Edinburg.* (Bales)

Little Girl Killed by Street Car: Grace Marie Miles Run Down While Playing Along the Track Near Lowellville Tuesday [1909] – Motorman Did Not See the Victim (Youngstown Vindicator)

In early 1920 the Mahoning & Shenango Valley Railway & Light Company was reorganized to become the Pennsylvania-Ohio Electric Company (Penn-Ohio). (Bell)

place some moments, to try and save them for later. Like a game of checkers with one player: here you are, here you whir, here you are, here you whir.

[1931–1943]

Track Removal & Conversion

You:

meaning I

meaning us or we

meaning you

meaning all

a bridge to get away from *me*

a boat to carry *I* the whole way through

a cargo hold

a nail, a pin, a staple

a name or curse for any body

Ridership fell by 45% between 1930 and 1931. The main inter-urban line from New Castle through Youngstown to Warren was converted to buses during 1931–32. (Bell)

The evolution of the Indian trail into the bridle path, wagon road, and motor highway has been a slow, continuous process. (Wallace)

Here's the same old rub—why this physicality, this need to navigate the world by means of a vehicle called *containment*? With space, everything is *in* or *out*, *through* or *around*, the least interesting prepositions. Is it more wrong to hang them on your neck than mine? Ah, well, you don't have a neck—there's the same old rub.

This we share, though: you come to know containment through violence. The mundane kind that carries voices talking of lunchmeat and dentists. You don't even notice the prying until half of you has been chipped away. Then pain, and a sound like peeling back the sky. It doesn't seem to stop and the whole of your being becomes a scab made to tear off so time can flow through. *Just let me in. Just let me finish.* Just be an opening they can get through, it's all they ever wanted from you. This is the ripping—no, that's not right, it is a ripping *out*, a gutting—and it is the first time you truly know yourself as a container. Space just another thing that moves through you. Moved.

"Abandonment of service, however, is subject to six conditions set forth in the commission's order." Per usual those conditions included the removal of all poles and wires and the removal or paving over of all rails. (Bales)

[1965–1977]

Abandonment

You feel *out of time*. Ungrounded. And just like that, space goes with it—as it must. Or is it the other way around?

Wander for wonder was always a confusion that bothered me. One is to move and one is to be stilled. As in awe. An awl through the heart. All-encompassing. You the needle point held down to paper and your mind the pencil circling round and round.

I used to wander my small neighborhood, hoping to get lost. Once on a bike—*no hands*—I flew through that space for what had to be days, and when I hit the sidewalk I wondered at the stillness in my chest, emptied on impact. No air flowed through it. I wondered if I was dead, and if space would feel different this way—not a thing to move through or over or under or inside or around me, but just a thing, regardless of my body. That is, time and space would no longer regard me. *No hands*. How lonely.

And now you find yourself suddenly without prepositions, those little slats and switches by which we navigate each other, or ourselves. Where will you go, or how, you wonder. Who can take you now.

[1988–2000]

Stavich Bike Path

Resurrections are hard on a body—and from some points of view, you are different from a body only in length. The resurrection itself always feels worse than death.

You remember that when your new life first settled into you, it didn't hurt exactly, but it reached down farther than you thought it would. It seeped, hot and sticky, through parts you'd already given up for numb, spaces

On Sept. 19, 1977—a day remembered locally as “Black Monday”—the corporate owners of the Campbell Works in Youngstown, Ohio, abruptly shuttered the giant steel mill’s doors. (Aperovitz)

Within five years of the Campbell Works closure, a total of 50,000 jobs would disappear from the Mahoning Valley, but locals still point to September 19, 1977, as the day the death knell tolled for Youngstown. (Guerrieri)

If a bomb had hit this region, the scar would be no less severe on its landscape. (Zito)

Stavich Bike Trail was constructed on the former Youngstown–New Castle street-car line, along the Mahoning River and dedicated in June of 1983. (Lawrence Co. Government Center)

Twelve miles long and eight feet wide, the Stavich Trail is paved with street-quality blacktop and sealed to provide a smooth, safe riding surface the entire length of the Trail. (National Recreation Trail Database)

that used to hold what you could call a core. And from this heat you felt—you swore—a kind of longing that called, as longing always does, to your own longing, buried deep in your earth. Pliant and trusting, the two longings seemed to mingle for a minute like a century, before everything hardened all at once—and this hurt more than anything.

Softness locked away now, you become what they call *progress*, a vision of maturity, a container of nothing. You barely notice others, their determined pounding, their neon wonder, the lushness of someone listening. They come with offerings: an ear grazing your ground, a set of sharp sounds, a windshift like falling, chatter of nerves in the trees, water nearby—running, running. Sweetness or misery, no matter—none of these can touch you now.

In the future, this is how I will come to meet you, already numb. I will be looking for evidence of nonexistence, of a girl who lost some time. I will draw two lines in the silt at your edges, an equivalence that says: Place is to time as I am to my body—a problem of boundaries. A question of *in* or *of*. With which word do we survive?

The body of Shannon Leigh Kos was found about 5 pm Wednesday [2000] by someone walking near a ravine next to a bicycle trail in East Mahoning Township, Lawrence County. (Sharon Herald)

Several areas along the trail also boast colorful wildflowers and the beaver pond near the trail offers opportunities for watching birds and wildlife (turtles, beavers, snakes, fish, herons, ducks, and more). (Lawrence Co. Government Center)

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