

Of Cities Lived and Imagined

Nicholas Tan

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By: Nicholas Tan

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Stephanie Bolster Chair

Andre Furlani Examiner

Stephanie Bolster Examiner

Mary di Michele Supervisor

Approved by _____
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dean of Faculty

Date _____

ABSTRACT

Of Cities Lived and Imagined

Nicholas Tan

This thesis is a collection of poems that investigate the unsettled nature of public spaces, urban places, and tensions between individual living and collective living. These exercises in various voices, styles, and forms mimic the polyvocal and heterogeneous lives in cities. The first section of the thesis is a loose exploration of familiar urban sites and occurrences, grounding the true life in cities in everyday routines and encounters. The suite “Cards for Casual Walks” attempts to explore and evoke urban wandering through a series of meditations, occasions, and confrontations. Ideally, these ‘cards’ would be shuffled and re-ordered to present a meandering narrative unique to each reading. This was initially inspired by Vladimir Nabokov’s practice of scribbling on index cards when drafting his novels, especially with the posthumous publication of his unfinished *The Original of Laura*, and Benjamin’s fragmented reflections in *The Arcades Project*. The third section consists of poems titled with selected headlines from various web-based news sources specifically about cities and public space. Although the headlines give a glimpse into what urban issues and subjects currently concern us (or our major media), they primarily serve as jumping points as the contents of the articles do not necessarily find their way into the body of the poems, which often take a much different trajectory. The final section, “Imagined Cities,” follows in the tradition of invented urban places, particularly in Italo Calvino’s *Invisible Cities* and Anne Carson’s *Life of Towns*. These cities are constructed from popular philosophical problems and magnified moments of the everyday.

These texts interrogate the conscious and unconscious processes that occur in our public’s ideological structures and collective notions. The language slips, rambles, and skips in the spaces between concreteness and abstraction to portray the erratic nature of dwelling together in these urban landscapes.

*for Hong Koon Tan, my grandfather,
and Timothy Ong, my cousin,
who passed away during the writing of this*

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Why We Cannot Sleep Through Public Space

Because defining the neighbourhood as the basic civic unit is like trying to lay water flat

Because the anxiety of fitting in prevents good sleep

Because blink and they've repossessed all that social capital you've been saving

Because they've reproduced the modes to produce

Because this normalization has challenged a revival in the so seductive spectrum of psychosensorial experiences

Because we believe the survivor is the winner of this race to the science of dreams

Because if A then B, where A is genuine partition of quantum physics drawing the contours of another time and B is not talking of the past

Because the portals of poetry between experimentation and feverish delirium are what make up points of access

Because our collective lives culminate into a small winged insect put at the end of a hook to catch the edge of a tranquil river

Because this is no time for poetry

Because poetic license makes it too easy to falsify documents

Because we all want to see cultural dividends

Because the storm looks smaller on the news

Because if the world's future is at stake, being honest is a distressing experience

Because this is not a diurnal dream

Street Furniture Music

for E.S.

rubble and detritus
background fever
breaking vision habits

without burden of good
sense to rewrite monstrously
in a bubble of the mind
yet monsters even pop
reinvention, information
that others would kill

we can file these under
non-categories, dredge
smoothly with both
pockets turned out

novel rose water
collected in the margins
before passing loop in the evening

Crowd

Who out there
in the shoulder bumping anonymity

would take my hand as hand
instead of feeling for something enclosed?

Rather than barreling through
I want to see you as a necessary
vision, vernacular without crowd
confusion.

As far as I know you
are someone I could know
ending what I know
about you. Some shadow lines

among crowd clusters
shudder of unorchestrated forms
that can and can't be mapped
black circling static
looming discomfort

they can be belligerent
and hold grudges
calling each other, city
birds speak higher pitches
urban flair dialect
confusing rural cousins.

Haiku about Jaywalking

the cat looks both ways
before crossing the street
counts its lives

•

hesitant boots huddle
one rebellious pair scurries
all follow

•

the night's breeze
not nearly as chilling
as near hit-and-run

•

if the driver had been contemplating
the space between Stop sign-ifier and brakes signified
I'd be dead

Glass House

Slender hexahedron squeezed
between “Heritage” houses

Form of dubious dwelling, opacity
at its most transparent

Unabashedly exposed, insouciant
to spatially transmitted diseases

Furniture & bodies overexposed as
if sterilization a cost cutting measure

Glass friendly lives always seem pristine
contradicting conventional organic logic

Everything built to be see-through paid
good money for a commanding view

Where the threshold of experience was taken
into consideration calculating the mortgage rate

Allowing for the transparency to accept criticism, a choice
that fits into a context of transparency trumps privacy

Home as a luxury
luxury couldn't afford

Notes at a Bus Stop

You wait until committed
to waiting it out, the way flood
plains hold for water.

Measured in seconds
intervals make up a life.

Boredom isn't empty
it is full of righteous lethargy.
Recognizing this your fists
clench then let go.

Strain your eyes hard enough, the world
will come to you.

Still, easy
for paranoia to seep in - but
still, the bus is
probably holding out on you.

Yardwork With Heraclitus

seed and overseed grass
mow weekly

Not enough and too much.

haul out leaves
haul in mulch

Men dig up and search through much earth to find gold.

rip out dandelions
plant in sunflowers

Change alone is unchanging.

spray lawn with pesticides and herbicides
install the best laid traps of mice and men

Awake, we see a dying world; asleep, dreams.

leave sprinklers on, flood
lawn until it rusts

The psyche rises as a mist from things that are wet.

order exotic life from glossy catalogues
enjoy outside natural life cycles

All things come in seasons.

uproot maple tree extending neighbour's yard
erect fences along property line

Defend the law as you would the city wall.

maintain your garden
as who you are

divides and rejoins, goes forward then backwards.

Meditation in Rush Hour

remember: you are not stuck in traffic, you are
the guy who just cut you off is you two lives ago or a life from now on the highway your
wheels are relative to wheels of others to the speed you think you're going to paths you've
already taken this exit for instance isn't an exit but a way into an alternate anticipation of
a curve straight into geographic inflections rising and falling in the first-person near
future tense reveling in ground depressions worked into asphalt day after day until you
come to live for those split-second drops of dream revival unattaching your memory the
road goes both ways finds desire for inching breath sounds a low drone emitting from
your throttle

Shopping List

watch the activity in the market
if only for the play of colours

surmise which would ripen first
the fruits of idleness
or labour

sneak a handful of assorted nuts,
choke, file lawsuit

mistake a litre of vegetable juice
for a full serving of vegetables

mistake an ad for vegetable juice
for a full serving of vegetables

ascertain whether produce is organic
if grown by the luminosity of a word

milk

3 Haiku about Condo Development

urban mud basin
history's unsettled sediment
trucked elsewhere

•

wild geese break from pond
high-rises ascend overnight
sky of glass and wings

•

suspended animation
bone-exposed structures going up
or coming down?

Ode to the Port at Night

Disembodied blinking unison
outlines of cold furnace fires
thousands upon thousands of things-to-
being warm glow of commerce

perpetuum mobile cranes
pivoting sing yellow metal
hymn the throat swells
diaphonous in the dark, hopeful
machines document, file faded
colour-coded cargo blocks
stacked precarious preschool
high

hour rushed ships
slip drifting in
transnational transience

unloading to loading to
receive to ship that what
we'll receive then throw away.

The Nail House

- sticks out at strange angles
not smoothed from being
repeatedly hammered
but a jagged heap
- obstructs linear movement,
winds the road around itself
- creates a path of most
resistance, blockading
bulldozers stealing through the night
- revels in the statement "I live here"
as not just a place to hang a hat
- tells
what the city was by what
is swept aside around it

London Culling

if going to play Big Brother
might as well get it right
in the face of the public's discomfort
warnings that now issue as if from thin air in the hardscrabble
warning that
behavior's unacceptable

any step
outside
your home

know they are being watched
all the time
tranquil villages
wired for

disembodied voices of authority
excess surveillance is the greatest
perversity
essential scrutiny
scanning your brain stem

learn more about us in a few seconds
than people could learn on their own in years

bank of 39 monitors
screws being turned so

good way of making people aware
the state should be the ultimate protector

it's a good time to buy in stock surveillance

people start to feel that they are
trying to find ways around
faces, gaits, or postures

slow social suicide
doing more harm than good

citizen rights
provoke more criminal behavior

measured language
displaces crime
"pick up the litter"

you don't want to feel constantly under
surveillance
titillation
otherwise irritation

but that impulse should be resisted
"that guy looks upset"
or "like he's going to kill someone."

The Loneliness App

- sends non-aggressive motivational texts and triggers your phone's good vibrations
- randomly inserts complimentary soft adjectives in front of your name
- provides a list of witticisms and unoffensive wisecracks
- sends reminders of the language in your body
- includes settings for 'socially anxious', 'uncomfortably introverted', and 'takes the mind-body problem way too seriously' ('artistic misanthrope' coming in next update!)
- sounds periodic alarms to let others know you exist (with choice of ringtones)
- alerts the nearest hospital at first signs of acute heartbreak
- signs you up for every gym and book-club in a 10 block radius
- uses carefully crafted algorithms to assign you a *Mr. or Mrs. Good Enough*
- taps into street-level cameras for at-home viewing
- lets you send blurred out selfies to other registered sufferers of modernity
- generates poetry

He writes postcards

because at least then his sentiment
would travel, if even to settle
among discarded pamphlets

because the edges of the card
act as a formal constraint,
restraining and enframing

because it combats a nascent nostalgia
always in process of beginning and ending
but never ending its ending

because picturesque overhead shots
and overexposed lakes
encourage a less cynical writing style

because on days like this, when the warm
weather holds out, the only thing left
to do is write correspondence

*because breathing prevents him
from writing the poems
he'd like to write.*

All Out Urban Wall Fare

His latest reads *Poetry is*
in the streets

armed with aerosol
depicted signs of a class struggle
in cartoonish back-and-forth
his spray by night challenges,
their day-after roller-over response.

Finally caught I really believed
he thought he could stop whenever he wanted
but it was as if the dark, feigning protection
allowed him to put convictions simply.

[II]

Cards for Casual Walks

"Existence needs essence the way a walking tour needs local color. "
- Charles Bernstein

"To the ordinary man.
To a common hero, an ubiquitous character, walking in countless thousands on the
streets."

- Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*

Step out, step into it, step for
step's sake. Go easy. Go slow.
Barely go at all. Bear right,
bear life, bare your soles. Push
on, push past, double forward.
Cross out crosswalks, kick up
dust, paint in new parking.
Sample smooth strides and
simpler methods. Oppose one-
way streets. Obstruct private
lanes. Slip syllables on sharp
turns. Take no exits. Amplify
ambling. Leave yourself out.
Let the city lead this number.

*All cities are geological and
three steps cannot be taken
without encountering ghosts.*
Footsteps overlay the sidewalk
record. Folding histories heap
awkwardly. And so on. Hard
walks, soft archives. Porous
personalities pool. Unnoticed
leaks come to surface. Sit like
a smudge on the face. We
learn to do the constant wipe
and straighten. Our eyes kept
forward and at foot level.
Learn to push down and down.

People in a large city cannot inhabit it wholly. There is an excavation pit where the heart should be. Migration assumes seeing our selves somewhere else. The simplest part of this practice learned last. Inner compasses have broke inertia. Even laid flat our bodies confuse the course of history. We wander half circles full of conditional cash flows. Our moves toward order marred by the instability of settling birds.

Slips of the tongue not always significant. How we cover up mistakes reveal more. How we may look back after a stumble. Cement cracks, uneven earth, urban refuse. Ways a city gets us down. Blame open-sandals the faults of our feet. Finding ways back our self-conscious trace. Refusals become rituals in repetition. Paired practices announce disclosure. *Patterns promote an outward likeness, between little white silences.*

What is walking if not an
extended metaphor. *One leg
a pillar, holding the body
upright between earth and
sky.* Being there then there in
quartet pendulum swing.
Decked out in instruments
we defer to algorithms for
our ambulations. Check our
gait in windows, against the
strides of others. Practices
paired against the group to
support or shame. Metaphor
may sleep the body silent.

Aural and oral aspects of the city attune instantly. Hearing fastest sense to sense sounds out our spaces before seeing. This place of blistering traffic. Of lined trees rustling pleasant boredom. Of trash routinely flattened under runner rhythm. Of sales trying to out-shout each other. Of our laughter's primal alarm alerting the rest of the tribe. Hearing being the first encounter with the world, last to fade leaving it behind.

Sounding of cellular vibrato
this spirited heart-to-heart with
air. Wireless signals mobilize
the private in public. Earpiece
blinks a blue light heartbeat.
Open rhythm of a closed con-
versation. Loud talking taunts
the senses. Talking to Frank or
talking to God or talking to
God frankly. The unconscious
mind can't help but fill in
dialogic gaps. Imagined mates
usually mark deviants. Modern
tech allows field-day insanity.

Caution signals rarely signal caution. Instead we dash for signs that often seem nearer than real. Rushing is a form of exercise. *The uncommon run of keeping oneself to oneself.* Curb self-preservation, leave emotions at the door. *We have no idea what happens during the fraction of a second when a person steps out.* How many infractions will make up a day. Here and there thresholds little more than the lives we want.

No public access. No stopping at anytime. No trespassing. No exit. No loitering. No littering. No two minds thinking alike. No fires. No burning republic. No shirt no shoes no service. No question. No poetry. No parataxis. No subordination. No ordinary lives. No foreign goods. No unattended bags. No emotional baggage. No U-turn. No hoods. No concealed arms. No sudden moves. No running. No drugs. No opiates of the masses. No feeding animals.

We resensitize, walking awry.
We turn off location services
in our devices. We look for
meanings in marquees or the
cosmos. We come not from
overhead but outwards and
outwards. We unlock eyes,
examine leisurely. We exact
revenge on newly built relics.
We believe concrete and rust
bits wafting down from on
scaffolding high carry in-
formation, thrum with life.
We pace our walks for purity.

We forget the names for Christ
Church Cathedral, Notre-Dame
Basilica, St Patrick's Cathedral.
We recall the tenor and colour
motifs of sidewalk-lining trash.
We keep failure in mind when
giving directions. We pretend
the "I" is a procession. We are
everything ecstatic. We have
lived there even if we have not.
We only take what we need.
We take more. We eventually
burn out, crash. We get over it.

Street of abandoned stores left
to wear stripped exteriors, sign
scarring. Suburban boredom
bore a few burn victims.
Clipped fences peeled back
allow anarchy access. How
invasion looks if it comes long
after the retreat. Pastel walls
paler against vibrant weed
explosions. Gardens growing
in without the proper permits.
The sprawl both creates and
abhors a vacuum. These too
will likely be razed & rezoned.

Gautama Buddha counseled to be a light to yourself. Now metro grids light the paths for us. Streets flicker on so dusk can settle, dull yellows spotted over paler blues. Accidental beauty in automation highlights. Accompanied anxiety of walking under a lamppost that shudders off. I can forget a favourite poem like a street name. Familiar places *brutally lit by an alien reason*. Our memory a ledger to black out.

Built a life traveling selfsame
squares, living in every corner
and nowhere. *I was neither
priest nor an ordinary man,
for I wandered ceaselessly.*
Was only ever walking half-
way into the city, otherwise I
was heading halfway out.
Imagined living in a series of
long poems, then shortening
life for wider appeal. I am
circling no horizon. Neither
banker nor crook, for I leave
life's problems to the experts.

Park opened after seasons of renovation. Recycled tree seat areas, imported boulders, *feng shui* designed to excise homeless spirits. Edgy playground models boast ample amount of rounded curves. Streamlined paths cut cautiously between evenly bulging blocks of grass parallel crammed into stunted root rhomboids. Practical way to get away in the city. The air still thick with smog *knowing nothing of grass fetishes.*

For weeks carried my book like house keys. Finally open cracked newness in the spine. *Alive, he would have been small, but undoubtedly proud and erect.* Words and walks get the blood going, revitalize essential flows. Finesse is not appropriate in a book filled with revelations. But he would've recounted all for which he has fallen in love. If there are any books in the room I lose the possibility of sleep.

She sweeps the entire block in senile civic duty again and again. Her body pushes refuse around in hunched, hushed motions. I've passed her daily and only once. Where do we go for civic forgetting? Our inner city is just that. Recycled actions make up a day. Waste removal delays spark outrage over border issues. Otherwise acceptable strolls after winds are wasteland tours. Bold she clears out her block of utopia.

[III]

Re-Making Headlines

Life in the City is Essentially One Giant Math Problem (SmithsonianMag)

Settling a few variables calculates
the pedestrian pace heart
beat, rate of sentimental decline
in the lovers, probability
of hacked machines in pockets,
concentration of consternation
regarding civic responsibility, how
dividend will be paid out
in cultural capital, who gets what and how
much if the top percentile gives
0 fucks about the rest, the surplus of feeling
in an economy of survival, if God could make
a city so expensive even He could
not afford to live there.

You Are Already Enhanced (Slate May6/13)

already automaton lovely
and psychically extendable

already three-dimensional plus one
curve of collective constant

already terrestrial timely
punctual intimacy with place

already electric weightless
pondered in circuits of the sensate

already enough already

The Stupidity of the Crowd (Atlantic Jul29/13)

Pick a less distinguished product
if feeling embarrassed.
Bottle up some inclinations
indulge others openly.
Get culturally constipated.
Become enamored with enormity
of everyday living, now, constrained.
If forced to explain a decision
regard life as a regret lived later.
Realize choice is a controlled substance.

What Happens When Everyone Makes Maps? (Atlantic July16/13)

Can't help but Google map
despite best intentions
not all maps make equal footing

this must be the place and if not
the then the idea stretched over
points pin'd plially, personal
fidelity bookmarked within
five block radial of home

and *home is where I want to be*
if it is open source shareable
encodable original copies and viral
market individuations on ad-aware
authenticity loop

optic services obsessively opt us
in to tailored taxonomies
made in outsourced outfits
the axis of the world runs
through everything, strung
on temporary states

qualifying quotidian tasks
for special treatment
every step wet sand imprint
watched and washed out

The Urban Fire Next Time (NYTimes Apr29, 2013)

The town is circumspect
quiet, it starts with a flicker
turning into the white
noise of subsidized love
where love is a stimulus
package injected into the hearts
of the populace, huddled
by the waysides
as we all are because they are
everywhere, mostly hidden
but sometimes blowing off
steam by shouting
the streets awake then settling
back down

Anger About Inequality is Dangerous (Salon.com Aug13/13)

Because we are all under
cultural water weight
our clothes down
we need to thread our arms
and kick harder
unaware some have been
at this for longer than others

How markets allow people to violate their moral codes (Science June2/13)

I.

If you don't notice
visual or sonic cues of the line
moving, you

distracted by racks
lined with diminishing narrative
returns of celebrity divorce
discourse, increased aggravated
adolescent incidents, declining quality
in daily confessional holdouts

I should be able to cut
ahead of you, damnit

II.

Called in acute heart
pain to beat rush-hour traffic

Voted in favour of overturning
Golden Rule referendum

Bet on the second-fastest horse -
Shot the first one, ground both to glue

Outran the angry mob for good measure
tripped the guy next to me

Want to Forage In Your City? (NPR Apr23/13)

Things-as-things don't stop
at bins but take on
lexical de-composition

linguistic leftover salad
slang slung on streets
daily increasingly dusty
behind global garbage heaps

How to Farm the Rooftop (Globe Aug19/13)

Compost romantic ideations about DIY
selfhood; draw up your own permits, Petrarchan
or some sonnet variation preferably, hang
outside, eventually nature will sign off;
trust the metro firmament for irrigation
needs: acid rain, hurricanes, leaked liquidities
from low-flying craft; threaten birds
you've seen your Hitchcock and know
how to fight back; if you live
with others restrict access
using locks and booby traps; grow
produce so productively
the commodity contemplates itself

Breast-feeding is hell (Salon May26/13)

Hell is other people leering
and sin is a subtle
supple nipple slipped
from the blouse peeking

Stir primal memories
of mammaries, tainted
if not commodities

And men feel incited
to excitement to take
matters into their own hands

Fighting a McDonald's for the Right to Sit. And Sit. And Sit (NYT Jan14/14)

Come feel but don't make
yourself at home, sociable
but not so much so
sitting lulls you

in a false sense of ownership
the public as assembly
line. Like lines drawn
graphically between, around
atoms, try not to confuse
business for pleasure or taking
too much pleasure in our place
of business

if our employees can
barely make a living why should you
get to spend your life here.

A city where snipers shoot children (BBC Aug17/13)

We have to live
busy market business
as usual, the air is punctuated
sometimes a lung
breathing in a city
owned by state or belonging
to criminals sometimes
a target is a small shoulder
burden but we have
to live

What does it really feel like to fall out of a building? (Salon May25/13)

lovely view but quickly
diminishing
and for once the public
is rushing up to meet you

unexpected loneliness crisis
looming

Behind the City's Painful Din.... (NYT Jan14/13)

hard

not to confuse static and rainfall
the melodies' hard hearts
wet and the ideas overflowing
in energy never too controlled

the city's painful din -
there was, it tells you, a nervous
system, a nirvana full of sensations,
suggestions beautiful, with nobody
moving, nobody talking, absolutely

it moved, sung the battery of life
transparent, a deep head in the air
before we gave ourselves
the right to supplement local love

but if quietly
already we can feel the potential that is eager to
listen in the orbit of the skull
pressing our eyes to hear not outside
but beyond cities
as the place of experience is definitely not on Earth as it happens

Empire of the In-Between (NYT Nov2/13)

there is that overgrown lot where I found you
shadowed by an overpass, there are relics
of ruining squat hotels of a bygone decade ago
sidled up against skyscraper shoots, there
are parks privately owned public grounds
eventually gated, there is a playground
down the street from the renovated park
bankrupt rusted but usable
with caution,

there are economic promises
unfulfilled, there are strip malls stripping
away boundaries, there are four-lane *stroads*
cutting towns apart, there are markets
closing out,

there are hairline fissures opened
in cement and steel frames that under
a microscope look like ancient
canyons, there are ant colonies numbering
millions coming out in driveways
like the atonal jut of side streets from main roads
before the hose is turned loose,

there are the spaces squared within
four-way stops not for stopping but
sometimes, there are collisions, there gaps
in time across big bodies of water
the watch doesn't account for, there is the slow
crawl between arriving and going
home every day, there is
the 6:00 train - 6:05 train - 6:10 train,

there are tired attempts
before the first coffee sets in, there are heads full
of muffled music cranked on the subway,
there are elevators with mirrors
on all sides,

there is the interior
flash of your hands rummaging through
porcelain bones
when you wake up grasping, there is the extended
linger of unsettled
nerves, there are words that say this
and somewhat this but not
really at all what I found in you

Test Your Knowledge of Urban Wildlife (Guardian May17/12)

1. Which mammal is most likely to avoid eye contact when passing you on the street?
2. How many kinds of public mating calls have been identified in major metropolitan areas?
3. Can you identify the three major types of animal most likely to stop in the middle of a sidewalk?
4. What is scientifically proven the most effective way of attracting red-breasted single young professionals into your urban yard?
5. Which species of ethnic villager can usually be spotted in urban fringes?
6. How often do middle-class families forage for food stamps?
7. After a brief decline in numbers, where are the dead making a comeback in our cities?
8. What stage of the millennial's development cycle involves the most amount of fluids and facial hair?
9. How many techies and artists can you typically find inhabiting a studio-concept apartment building?
10. How to account for the disparate habits of all of us if the gaps in between our nets of routines aren't crossable?

[IV]

Imagined Cities

"Matter which has painted itself within lines constitutes a town. Viewed in this way the world is, as we say, an open book."

- Anne Carson, Introduction to "The Life of Towns", *Plainwater*

"Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else."

- Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

City of Sense-Making

If language is power and power
resides in language and language
is structured sense-making then
a city where everything makes sense can
be considered truly free as nothing is
out of bounds and “Is it snowing?”
is an expression of infinite
gratitude as equally of heartache.

City in Which the World Doesn't End

and night clamps down
signifying nothing,

and rhythms counting down
days were just that,
rhythms

and suddenly emerging
from the cellar, everything takes on
new life in its okay-ness

and disappointment has its way,
rewriting the world
for the next

City of Sudden Disappearance

And this time it was
Jeanette's husband midway
into his morning wash. "Not here"
repeated enough becomes its own
place, elsewhere. Entering
the house she feels the hardwood
a thin wet skin sinking, hears
somewhere in the back
of her head bathwater
running. As is customary
every object is left as was
at that moment
as if he might
reappear in the tub, lathering.

City of Late Night Squabbling

It is late, and the night
paper-thin amplifies what cannot be
taken back or what
the neighbours must be
thinking. The walls
muffle pitches, qualities
governed by the rate of vibrations
producing it,
an almost quiet city.

A loose sink drips out
metronome to building
silence after not what was
but how it was said, red
right palm still aching.

City Built on a Variation of Plutarch

In which a small city
stripped shipwrecks for repairs
piece by piece, salvaged
material replaced material
down to the final floorboard
the city set out to sea

City Built on a Further Variation of Plutarch

In which a small city
built from discarded
material of an older, now
missing civilization, started
using salvaged ships
for reconstruction
and so on

The Eternal City
after A.R. Ammons

that big
work
left
at first
nothing remnant valuable
what will and won't become
small but
edible
splinters
unusually deep
turned to
sudden ruinage
but it
itself piece by piece
human perfect .

City of Locusts

elephantine swells shape
up from the dunes, diaphanous
coarse grain sheets soak skies
yellow, the locusts are
building momentum into monuments
taking the desert dry
and dead and making
a whole big enough for
when dust settles some form
of living

Capgras City

Seated across her same
as every Sunday. Black
coffee, black hair against white skin
(hers), fingernails red (but not hers),
chairs blue overcoat over green,
the café's vibrant ambient chatter
in phonetic familiarity: acid
washed palette of an imposter
even forging the day, it's Saturday

and I am emptying
my pockets looking for remains of what should
be tomorrow in some supplanted city.

Notes

Page 7

Italics are fragments of Herakleitos translated by Guy Davenport (1995), p.158

Page 14

Phrases were taken from various news sources in 2013 on UK urban surveillance.

Page 16

Italics are a split sentence taken from Roberto Bolano's *Antwerp*.

Page 20

Gilles Ivain (1953)

Page 22

Hejinian p.105

Page 23

Solnit, p.3

Page 26

Hejinian p.82

Benjamin p.13

Page 31

De Certeau p.104

Page 32

Basho (from *The Essential Haiku*, Ed. Robert Hass), p.68

Page 33

Bishop, "12 O'Clock News," p.34

Page 34

Jacobs, p.92

Page 58

Italics from *New Oxford American Dictionary 3rd edition* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

Page 60

Ammons, "The Eternal City," p.98

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