

THESE THREADS
A SOUND

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“... it was the first American city where the streets were messy they said there was a reason but I do not remember the reason but I remember the streets were messy. We did not stay in the town they said we would be better in a hotel outside the city, well anyway there were pleasant people one of them and she said she wanted a distraction and I said why not improvise on the piano I do. And she said what do you do and I said you never want to use anything but white keys black keys are too harmonious and you never want to do a chord chords are too emotional, you want to use white keys and play to hands together but not bother which direction either hand takes not at all you want to make it like a design and always looking and having a good time.”

— Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*

Transference

Hong Kong

In mothball swelter, grease lathers
ducks midair. Hooks suspend

questions or featherless wings
unperched. Plastic take-away bags

balloon banyan trees. Surrogate
fruits. Your sigh spreads red

incense or hands in prayer.
Ficus roots bricked to keep them

standing. This is how one thing
becomes another, you think : A box

of cherries, overripe bruises.
Sockets plump. How your eyes

search, swollen. You count
the city : Above, a bouquet

of toilet brushes. Below,
sweetbread perspires glass.

A dirty tarp snaps bamboo
scaffolds. Wave laps tread

car tires. They all promise
shoals. You are sure you see

yourself in black crate grids
or the mesh wired mask

of a street fencer.
And how the light just lies

there. Alley dog bones
flush, uncovered.

Bridge Demolition

Again, we awake to chatter
of teeth hitting a concrete
heartbeat. Heard within
my ear. A tractor begets its face
of garden trowels to dig
the rusted out. Wet birdleaf
plumes brandy cedar and shavings
scent my hair. All bodies
torn from water.
Rumbles thunder
our words pushed back.
Punched sheetrock chalks
the river in chunks.
Islands splatter, but then what?
No longer a path,
pine needles brown
ants I count
to know a future. Even
means life, odd, the other.
A nod rips
yes and hammers
agate *no* no longer.
Bridge enamel now teeth
fillings all knocked out.
A pulse mouths sounds
and what heats loosens
to make us. Sand
falls back to sand.
Again, what returns
in metal shudders
to finish our bodies
is smaller, more
exact.

A Desert Sounds

Escalante Canyon, Utah

You beckon my echo semicircle :
Canyon slot rock walls redden

all that becomes nearer.
Each exposure a history :

Sudden rain sketches veined
patterns in the thick of it.

Sand sprawl wind
written only for sound. Now a veil,

a wet sieve grows downward
unrelenting. Piñon pines swell

up to meet them. Sage dampens
frequencies forward.

Creaks twist a juniper
bone claw upturned to demand

naming. You argue but cacti
bloom saffron one day a year.

Call them pear, hedgehog, or
fishhook as really a voice

in your mouth. Not their
yellow cupped petals but

the space around them.
Is it your or our :

Cottonwoods resemble wind
funneled sea rush.

Riverbed crickets brush
foxtails, leg-spine stubble

chirps in unknown glow.
White t-shirts

flag snap the hitching post
dry. Denuded, iron heavy

skin sweats salt into air.
Tree stumps anchor

rocks, redden
sound in what is closer :

The rain abandons us,
but really no one.

Dawn

I embraces aught, unknowing, a summer.

Hotel palaces rendered from field weeds.
Water's fringe. Between quiet foot imprints,
mud routings, not the wooden toys children polish.
I woke, walked, revived by sepals' violet wind
tides. Sounds I reasoned with a dirt road.

Naked feet promise enterprise, in the sense of
already being a place. Phrases blemish my face, spoken
to no one : to reeds I can't name.

Allowances. I lean in, votive, in the going, in
streetside raw agate. I denounces the red and
green codes. Old town fumes shine street clocks
and church domes with diesel. Fog currents mediate
the marble arched train station. I chase myself.

Mystique

Paris

Street posts or talons angle their tourniquets.
Arms and robes in the lane. Dimmed carnage.

Little flames beneath juniper lean, summer's
medallions. Under city terraces, we arrest
a piñata, a parasol. Death in the vendor's model
boat. Little pigeons' screeching filaments.
We rearrange ticket stubs passengers
scattered behind. Orient asphalt.

Lies become irises starred skyward. Their faces
lit tapers. Like bread, opposed to facts. Reams of
blue and gold dissolve, await consumption.

Casino Proposals

Las Vegas

Upsweep sun stubble. Pardon
language that turns back

on itself. From inside, gamble
red categories laid open. Draw

a ring around tabling.
Tobacco heavy, the word

notch a checkered truss
assembly. You don't trust such

enterprise, so you reverse
letters and make capital

good time. Dinner fiddleheads
gravy swallowed, whiskey

spells good spill and gets
some. Nickel dealers shine

crescents into lull slots.
Leather swivel ritual of one

to two then wet
sheets, nothing. Pine sticky, how

can any symbol manage itself?
A trophy life, but the sky

will branch bluer
with no stars to barnacle.

I responds to such circles
but you weds her to heresy.

Lemon rind thick
between tongue and cherry

lap. Test taste the role
reversal en masse.

Lit wishes born with
one quarter and a half wick.

Render

Mustard flowers wind sweep. Blind
edge the coldest water measured

two coasts. We walk sunlight
confusing lily from eye

from ocean; it's difficult
to see ends, but your camera

an open mouth swinging.
Winter orb reddens,

you weren't a stranger because
sudden as rain, precipice

a sea-cliff also opens
artichoke leaves,

rare winter glow.
You name them and I see

tiny bloom-arrows
mustard stem into

stem
wanting.

To Build a Ceremony

Seaside cornered.
Leafless aspen bone
arrows the blue
to draw us to it.

We wanted to alter
the darkly—
or pull the blind
introvert of day
— rut
into the root.

What is ever at the center?

Chainsaw rungs I climb
in larkspur and phlox
white pines, measuring
fell trees with my clothed
body. Thistles bruise
air and sharpen pinecones
around my brow. Sap
thickens dead trees.
Word nubs rub chapped
lips, unwording
your mouth, mine.

We furrow bark with car key
metal. Rent a chainsaw
to sever all afterwards.

Soft he said, stand
back
and rushed—

narrowed and cut
the tree between.

Cotton wind whispers
eggshells
on forest edge.

Feet tamper needle
beds peaking every vast
middle vanished.

We stole two trees
then, to rend
dry white shivers
in the quietly,
an arbor.

As if I could split
the ocean with my no
light arrow, or you could
sling back my *to be*
into the blue.

After the Parade

Asunder your small body between
iron rungs gating the botanical garden.

We broke in and beckoned; night worn
rain exploits desire and words I cannot

hear. Sense remains even in without; hover
cypress you named night laborers whitened

each crane hammers cement juniper.
They all become ours. I perform

myself in the dark: rime grass I think because
we can't see tree dahlias or lupine cords. But air

feels heavier where they lean silver whorls.
Sagebrush pistils. You only see in

reflection, in the next summer
you haven't known, blush

hand brush hand. I pretend I am
alone. Ice once a sepal, form that deforms,

fog wet plumeria, oil blotted weathervane,
incendiary; reason forgotten.

Eros

Provincetown

A sea settles a dock of breath
across summer. Invisible chimney heat
rises in unused bricks, thickening neat
New England hours. Our mouths arrest
light. Threshing dune grass sweats
your pale blouse blown out, dressed in cloud
crease and evening. *Does all such water allow
addiction? Or, is this where need begins?* In wave-crest
you construct a piano. Of ivory caps you demand
message. Wind performs seaweed strings, beer bottles green
we collect to whisper fog. Clam shells breach flesh. Sand
opens twin crab husks gutting voice lap.
Our white beach umbrella pitched by land-lean :
A dress flipped back to sea we'll never reach.

ALEXANDRA MATTRAW'S second chapbook, *in the way of harbors*, will soon be available from Dancing Girl Press, and her first, *Projection*, can be found through Achioté Press. Her poems and reviews have also appeared in journals including *VOLT*, *Cultural Society*, *Verse*, *Word For/Word*, *Seneca Review*, *Realpoetik*, *Denver Quarterly*, *alice blue*, and *American Letters & Commentary*. Alexandra's first full manuscript has been selected as a finalist by several presses, including Nightboat Books and 1913 Press. Her work was also nominated for a Puschcart Prize in 2012. A former Vermont Studio Center resident, Alexandra curates a writing, reading, and art series called Lone Glen in Oakland, California.

If you are interested in learning more about her work, please visit her on-line at alexandramattdraw.wordpress.com.

