

Field Notes: HJA Forest, May 10 – 22, 2018

M.K.Sturdevant

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Interesting research is research conducted under conditions that make beings interesting.

—Vinciane Despret

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Ed is 500, give or take. I am quiet approaching Ed, suddenly overcome by its size, its being, the lush scene I've entered. I think I should ask him, or her, it could be Edyta, after all,

do you mind? if I climb you?

I get in my harness. I understand now, after a tutorial, that this will be more like shimmying up the air next to Ed. Right next to her. I confess: at first I thought, well, it will be a tree, all the way up, some nice exercise, there's really no surprise in a tree, just a lot of beauty. And that will be nice.

but no, you can't imagine—

I shimmed up, shimmy shimmy, rest. I am doing a kind of work, a kind of research, I guess. Good research is world-making. World-leaving. Pull, shimmy, rest. I leaned in. I climbed out of the Holocene, I left my apartment, I hovered above Chicago, I pulled myself out of the tunnel between the Red Line and the Blue Line where it has always stunk like hot sugar and feet. I climbed out of the iconic beams and lines of a 20th Century city and breathed, dangling in a smell of Fir, an air of cedar. I rested, and realized that I left a few things on the ground. I am suddenly in Oregon. Shimmy, shimmy rest. I had been in my city, then I was on a plane, now I am in a tree. What am I doing?

Maybe a third of the way up, I touched the bark. This bark was here when Spinoza was grinding lenses. I was not. This bark was here when Descartes cursed Queen Christine of Sweden for making him wake up so early. I was not. I am now. *Here*. This place existed. You can be in it, this *was* that world.

obviously— I told myself, shimmying.

A little higher up, I begin to think, how is this not the top? Even higher still, I touch a nodule, a branch-s snag. I think, if I were a bird I would perch here. I feel the end of it with my fingers. For a moment I want to kiss it. I feel a bit like someone has a crush on someone. I think I am laughing at my thinking, or, my heart is racing. I look again, catching my breath, and the wind gives my ropes a little shove.

There was a day, of course, when there was a flourishing branch here, whole cohorts of needles recruiting and greening in the rain. The branch may have been here on a spring morning in the mid-19th Century, when a poet took out a blank sheet of paper, and confirmed:

*I am alive — I guess —
The Branches on my Hand
Are full of Morning Glory —
And at my finger's end —*

It will amaze you to know I was only half way up. I shimmied faster. Finally, triceps weary in a good way, smile unfaded, I made it. Near the top of Ed, was Sara. I rested, dangling, thinking of Emily Dickinson's poem, thinking of nothing, hearing a sound of air moving in a way that was new. How long can I stay? I asked them.

Looking down, like looking on clear, deep water. I'll need wings, I'll need to get to know this place. From here it becomes clear that there is a quality of brightness below us. Even the levels below have their own light, their own green, their own temperature. These depths— I can see now that there is a world up here. The ground is only one kind of world. Worlds within worlds. Time travel. The old-growth forest makes both possible. Rather, it is only possible to be in the forest by traveling worlds, traveling time. Now I can see it.

I touch the bark of the tree before I descend, (me: winged, new). *500 years!* While my fingertips still trace the bark that was once a sapling, I am being touched, barely young.

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A Nine Mile Walk

Vocation: calling, calling with, called by, calling as if the world mattered, calling out, going too far, going visiting.

— Donna Haraway. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Experimental Futures, 2016).

Yesterday, May 11th, the poet was leaving. We had just met. He had a nice face, and he gave me some things to burn in case I was feeling fiery. Then we talked while he swept. He was proud of his sweeping. We unfolded a map and he showed me around. I was arriving. In truth, he was a very good sweeper. And I was in fact feeling fiery. He measured a road with his hands, using the legend, or so we thought. It looks long but it's probably only a mile or two, he may have said.

This morning, May 12th, I packed. It was beautiful while I was packing but I prepared for the worst. It was only a mile or two, we may have agreed, and yet Socrates was nagging quietly, reminding me of the many merely noble things poets say. I prepared for more. I packed a radio. I signed out in the office. I posted my ETA as 3pm. I considered the bear, I imagined the cougar. I went anyway.

This weather, on this day, was the most perfect weather, all day.

A day like this.

On the way out of the Andrews, I was nearly hopping down the road. Across from the Andrews I paused to watch some anglers. I went halfway out on the bridge to Mona Campground.

On the east side of the river, the shadows of the roadside trees on the water's surface allow me to see down into the depth of the water. On the shimmering, sunny side of the river, there's a jeweled surface, an emerald sheet of water bordered by mountains. Trees on both sides, this bridge. Remember.

Down the road, recreators. A sharp left. Up I go.

I take the 1506 road confidently. What's a mile or two?

It's a quiet walk. Maybe only a car or two passes. On the edge of the road, my shoes only barely crush the gravel. What do we think about while we're walking? Alone? For hours.

I thought of cougars again. I have a cat at home who has nearly taken the socks of my feet by surprise. I'm glad I brought the radio but what good is a radio without arms?

I thought of my groceries. I thought about my sunscreen. I snapped a stick under foot and the road curved, the landscape caught my eyes, pulled my gaze up, in. To what? An object is a strong draw, it pulls the eye. But it is less an object than a color seducing me, a quality of air that takes on yellow, subtle green, a stroke of light that makes a halo behind the moss. I move at a pace that is panoramic, cinematic, slow-mo. Farther down, a nurse log, an altar log: an old-growth stump that rises proud and presents on its top a table of moss out of which one, holy, silver alder is rising up in a shaft of sun. Black and white, a silent film. Silver, the shine on the leaf-surface in direct light, suddenly bright, which casts the depth behind it in a shadowed black. In the next scene, as my feet carry me with the road curving now the other way, ferns dominate a slope, highlighting single strings of web in the passing sun as I walk forward then shrouding them again in the past.

As I walk, I laugh once or twice. I don't know why. Another step, it feels serious, sublime. I respect something like a ghost. I think of the names of a few people who have died in the last few years. I wonder if it matters whether I'm here. If the forest is an organism and not an object filled with objects, then we must be encountering one another. I entertain a different idea: there are more things than just encounters. Nothing is noticing me.

Unnoticed, I stop altogether, resting at a short driveway that goes up to Watershed 2: a flood-disturbance study-site over a stream. Time to get organized. To tinker with out-of-date distinctions. To play.

Things made by humans	Things made by nature	Things made by both
The road	The water	The shape of the pool
The white concrete buffer, which resembles an earthwork, which behaves like a small section of the salt-crust walk of Spiral Jetty, hardened, holding effluence in place.	The little, smooth, nearly black bird tottering in the shallow water over the spillway	The texture of the road
The chain holding a log in place under water	The greenish bed at the bottom of the still pool between the dam and the spillway	Propane, in a way.
The dam	Shafts of light, some of which thread themselves through the water and illuminate pocks on the bottom, some of which do not, (some of these latter having been caught by upturned palms of maple, others asleep in whorls of unbloomed rhododendron).	The algae, considering.
This chart		The direction and flow of the water
The propane tank		In a way, this rock that is clearly a doorstep for the entrance to the shed.
The PVC piping on the other side of the stream bed		Solar energy, utilized
The red shed	These two water striders: now fighting, or mating; what is by many accounts the same.	The wood of the shed, as boards.
Jokes	Solar energy	Laughter. <i>"This is what happens in laughter: Blood coming from the right-side cavity of the heart through the arterial vein suddenly and repeatedly inflates the lungs, forcing the air in them to rush out through the windpipe, where it makes an inarticulate, explosive sound. [...] And what we call 'laughter' is merely this facial expression together with the inarticulate and explosive sound that we call 'laughter'."</i> René Descartes: Passions of the Soul, (1649)
Heroic restoration projects	A tweeting sound	
The solar panel	Crushing intimations of the magnitude of time	
The sound of my shoes on the road	Blue sky	
Names of plants	Wood	The sad affect resulting from the perception of one's finitude
The wrapper of this granola bar	The desire to communicate	The desire not to communicate
Questions	Rocks on the road	Political communities
Punctuation	Granola <i>qua</i> granola	Attitudes of indifference
Economies	Horsetail shoots, bursting up hard enough to cut winter once and for all, ready for sun.	Me
Written reflections regarding the passage of time		
Experiments		
Poems		

I admit, I just wanted to see whether there was something here that was making itself. Or rather, whether I was experiencing *charisma*. And anyways, it's a weakness of philosophers, to confront the unknown with a conceptual framework, and only ask about the merit of the framework on the morning after. What are those two water striders *doing*?

I'll try phenomenology. What is this subjective experience like, for me? It's a long walk. The map suggests I'm not even a third of the way there. The mileage on the fitbit watch suggests that Socrates was not entirely off base. And I love the poet for this, that otherwise I might not have come into the path so childlike, spry, with an easy hope. It's my responsibility to know how far I'm going. Irresponsibility never smelled so sweet. I am smiling by myself, to myself.

I just feel good. I have nowhere to be, rather, I'm here. There's nothing wrong, not a single concern. I pause on this, then walk faster, because it feels good. The pause I'm quickly carrying up hill in my brain is feasting on how good it feels to not have to do something, to have nothing hurting, to have not even a rain system condensing. I know the danger of depoliticizing. I know what's in the news. And I happily forget what day it is. I think I am alive, a person, on the planet, being. Is this how good the Earth can be? Have I ever been free before?

Freely, I keep going. What's the temperature? Whatever number most lends itself to human flourishing and well-being. I could take a layer off, leave one on. Pleasant.

No cars have passed for a long time. There's just this one woman, me, walking. Another mile is counted on my watch. I pass a large wall of boulders that each wear a sash of moss. The pattern is remarkable, but still shaded. I decide to take a picture on the way back when they'll be in the sun. I walk and think of philosophers, bears. As for the latter, does it really matter what you read on the internet about wild animals? At least, I'm on the main road, I'll try not to surprise anyone. And I've tried hard not to smell edible.

How much father is this place?

As for the former, I wonder if teaching Margaret Cavendish achieved the goals I had hoped last semester. What did I hope? To make them crave the assurance of a speculative critic of experimental science. The critique is not an affront, but a rejoinder to begin and end all experiment with an observation of the way in which the object of one's study belongs to the whole, is the whole. I am not convinced that objects go into objecthood without remainder. I wanted my students to lose sleep over this question. Maybe they did, maybe they did not.

Walking by yourself on the green earth, for hours: walking alone, breathing. I do not know at some point that I am walking. I am continuing, while my eyes feast on the intricacies and textures, the scene, all around me. Walking has become being. I'm no longer going anywhere.

After another hour or so, the road is a high, narrow black road with green trees leaning in on both sides. Here, it reminds me of the lush walk on the road above Kilbrittain, following the farm's edge at mid-day, Irish roads overtaken by hedge and leaf; a world of green, dark, bright.

I continue tunneling through the trees, their canopies casting an economy of sun, then thinning, rising. I cast my own shadow, she walks quietly.

Settled into the rhythm of myself, I wonder. What things do I usually think about? Where have I been, and what have I forgotten?

Across a bridge, I check the map. I'm near the experiment. I'm close to science. The walk has taken me through moods, epochs, light-puddles, memories. Some are not mine. The steaming ferns spilling over the berm behind me reveal the foot of a brontosaurus as it softly murders the ground-cover. I can hear her selecting branches from some unseen canopy and grinding them in her simple, muscled mouth.

Around the brown gate on the grassy side-path, down the soft green carpet, to the experiment— today— what humans do.

My first thought: it's a good spot to tinker.

Science is like play.

The logs are mixed with non-natural colors, flags, a giant nail, tarps.

This is what my almost-4-year-old son's toys look like after a long afternoon playing in the yard. Has he been doing science?

I'm comfortable here.

Except for that bit down the way, except for those blue tarps tucked in over the fat logs, or whatever 6 ft mounds lay underneath. That's a rescue site. That's a plane wreck they couldn't reach in time, victims still scattered, an accident site they aren't done cleaning.

What happened here?

What happens here?

Science plays with the question, plays with the tools. Breaks toys, asks for new ones. What, then is left for art? I am looking at the Log Decomposition Site, and I am thinking of the artist Pamela Rosencranz, speaking with *Art Review* at the 2015 Venice Biennale. Her conceptual installations have been said to create the kind of push and pull which reveals the inner life of objects in ways that in turn point to a realm of experience beyond just human experience and perception. Regarding the play and complexity of her piece 'Baby Skin,' she says, "It seems to live, then again, my team and I try not to get it 'too' alive" [...] "an artwork develops its own kind of audience because of the independence it develops." (*The Venice Questionnaire 2015 #9*: artreview.com)

What is inspiring me now is this experiment, old, laying around, new, not yet even close to completion, an entity unto itself. What am I doing here? To what extent has this experiment surprised its scientists? I like the gray areas between things, I tend to feel immediately the relations between things, and they seem to me to be paramount. Here in these luminous fallen logs, is neither Death nor Life, they foster an obscured scale. But what is the long-term-ecological-research response to the question of whether objects indeed act, interact, make themselves, and have experiences beyond the anthropocentric assumptions of human perception as singular? If yes, then what is left for the models and hypotheses that characterize experimental science? Words, words, words. (Hamlet, II.2).

We want to know: what is a log's breath like? I breathe at the site. Am I noise in the data?

*The Carmine — tingles warm —
And if I hold a Glass
Across my Mouth — it blurs it —
Physician's — proof of Breath —*

*I am alive — because
I am not in a Room —
The Parlor — Commonly — it is —
So Visitors may come —*

Sometimes, only poets know how to say things.

At least I can handwrite in my moleskine: *Decomposition is one way of viewing composition. We can only take perspective.* I believe this experiment knows this, knew this at the outset, but was shy of admitting it had a gut feeling. We research the signals exhaled in continuity and regeneration, we examine resurrections in minutiae and chronicle the shared line. We know we're dying, but we're alive, we guess. How do I know? The LTER at HJA has pointed out that a fallen, "dead log" can contain more life within it than a standing tree. How much life do I contain?

I'm sitting on this stump, my butt where a tree was. Looking. Doesn't matter— the time, the day. I look as long as I want, at the green fuzzy fallens. The bits of pipe sticking up. I come to see that any mound, any swell on the forest floor was a log. Is soon to be ground, soon to be a tree. They are like ghosts, the ones farthest gone, barely recognizable as wood. The forest is haunted therefore, by a kindness of trees. We know they breathe but do not require words. I require words; in words I lay my history bare.

A tiny white and gray butterfly with ruffled wing edges has met against my knee.

What thing is this?

There is no rain on this day. Not even the leftover drops of previous rain, or the mist of future rain.

At the log decomp site today, dry gold flecks flicker down from above, against the jade depths of air, softly disappearing into the logs, logs quietly disappearing into the saplings, saplings stretching up, slowly outliving us.

*"As I have mentioned in my former discourse, that I do verily believe all or most natural creatures have some certain kind of respiration, so do I also find it most probable, that all or most natural creatures have pores. Not empty pores, for there can be no vacuum in nature, but such passages as serve for respiration, which respiration is some kind of receiving and discharging of such matter as is proper to the nature of every creature." (Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, 1666: 5,10)*

This experiment is a mess. In 185 years, another writer and thinker will verily come here to this site, might come exactly here to this seat. This stump might be here for their butt. I will say now that the mess is smart, strewn, these tools do not demonstrate how they have made themselves. They are materials, collaborating with me. I am confident that there is no such thing as an individual. I confirm

another thing: empiricism is useful. My watch corrects poetry: it was 4.5 miles just to get here. This is going to be a long walk home. But without poetic estimation, there would have been no walk.

Experimental research is a kind of performative journaling, an interactive time-capsule, and here, it is crucial to observe that we desired something from the outset. There were scientists here who wanted to play. The *desire* to know is alive here, and the sad end of science without art is that once we have our answer, our play dies. Long-term reflective research makes us interesting because it evolves desire beyond all answers, past all moments of clarity.

I have been playing outside all day.

On the way down, I am less well-behaved, I'm prone to crushing what's under my shoe. It's downhill. I'm happy, hungry, I feel like I've conquered the day. I'm liable to smacking something with my stick, just because. This is how my son walks around the block. I continue, reconnecting with my youth, after confronting my mortality. Is this the effect of old-growth? It will stretch the bounds of your thinking beyond its usual capacity, a breadth of thinking that marks sublime thought, for Kant.

On the way down, both sides of the road are sunny. I notice a red, dead salamander. Farther down, we curve around a guard-rail, and I don't remember passing this on the way up. This is the ridge, I can see now that the drop is fearsome. I pause and observe that there's an opening up here, an exposure to height, to wind that wrinkles the firs and moves them. I hear a wood-knocking sound where two snags dance and cross one another, high above the green.

What will I have to say to the 200th writer? To the writers and artists of the 2,200's? I am writing this, seated on a stone, alive. Perhaps not yet as alive as I will be. We early writers, the first quarter or so, will be nutrient density by then. What I mean is dead. All our sunspots, this one scratch on my knee, the surface of my brown eye, all our teeth, dead. All of us ground. Ash or sea. Compost. I suppose I want you to know we were aware of the direction in which things are headed. This bliss in the old-growth, in the thermal-refugia, the play and peace I've had today; will you be jealous? That it was still here? Still a reality? I wonder if you could sit on this same stone, and feel this complexity: a perfect day in the woods, full knowing the realities of climate change.

What do you see on the edge of the 1506 road?

Descending down again.

I don't know why I stopped my foot falls, but in the shade I paused and looked down. There was a neon-yellow, lightly neon-greenish spider in my path. I stop to look and it looks. Why do spiders stop when we look, how do they know they have been seen?

On this side of the road, strawberries, flowering but not fruiting. Orchids, purple. Fern scrolls, upright like the bass and cello seats in an orchestra, just before they tune.

A can of Negro Modelo.

The boulders wearing their sashes of moss. The sun is high. I take their picture.

I keep walking. There is a rhythm in my legs now. I've been walking for so long I don't think that I am walking, there is just a continuity in my thought, a presence. Scenery seems to be passing me by, hours seem to pass me by. I keep breathing. I enter and exit shadows, I am very content. I do not know when the walking will cease, I lack for nothing.

A stop sign emerges where the 1506 road meets Highway 15. I slow down.

A skulk of pre-teen boys on the bridge, winter bellies exposed, cheeks reddening in the first sun, are shouting, laughing, insulting one another.

Up the road near the turn into the Andrews, a small girl sits on the open tailgate of a truck while her father pulls a worm down onto a hook.

What have I learned?

I unlearned a few things I did not need, so as to see the core. My self as young, my self as old, a ghost, a zygote. In between, the walking and thinking reminded me of this day only. I was shown the forest: science, *scientia*. I was shown myself: *acquiescentia in se ipso*, I acquiesced into myself.

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5/14/18

I went outside to play again today. I swam in my underwear. It was 85 degrees. I goofed around in the river. I wanted to see the smooth stones, I was counting them, I was watching the weak flow make a pattern of sunlit ribbons on the riparian bed. I was entirely by myself. I shook dry. Pulled on pants. I hadn't planned on getting in, but there was the water, and the sun, and a soft little knee-high wading pool. After dressing again I walk on. The gravel bar is a fern bar. The ferns are my epiphyte experiment site. I do experiments on experiments now. Upon these ferns, I have been observing maple leaf decomposition. The leaves lay down on a frond of wood fern and transform themselves into eyelet, then lace, then more delicate lace, until all you will see is a pale colored dust on the fern surface— or so I hypothesize. I draw the lace. I decide to sit on a log. I do not know what age I am. I do not know what time it is. I think, I have become an earthling again.

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5/17/18

A Walk to the Gravel Bar

The Forest Will Not Be Televised

There is a Doug-Fir just down the path from me, and it demands something, which I cannot suppress.

Commands rather, an attitude I haven't shored up lately.

What I mean is, it feels like church in here. Not just a chapel, I feel like I've stepped through the arched doorways that depart the vestibule and open up into the vaulted trusses of *Saint Germain-des-Prés*.

It does not matter what objects you reject worshipping or tend to worship ordinarily, the feeling of something happening here with requires your hush, is undeniable.

So after a moment of silence, I take out my camera. I'll show someone, I'll bring this home.

I look at the image in my palm: flat.

I look again at the altar, where the tree raises my eyes and commands me,

I try again. This church cannot be photographed. This forestation will not be televised. The lissome arabesque of the vine maple washing the feet of the giant with her leaves will only be witnessed *here*.

Or perhaps the light was wrong. Maybe I need to go panoramic.

No dice. The rectangle in my hand somewhat presents a tree, I guess, but I have to delete it and put it away.

All I can do is ask to be forgiven for this constant documenting insofar as it prevents presence. So I ask, then I close my eyes. I allow time to pass, contrite, calm.

I work to marry the image with its attendant sensations to my brain, forever, for me. When I open my eyes again, the same pulses and pollens hum, a perfect verdant afternoon. I can keep going now.

To whomever reads this, I say, there is no bone-deep feeling I can craft in letters that will be adequate to the feeling of that 500-year-old magnanimous, live being wondering what new thing has sunk down the mossy trail and dared to pass it by.

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5/19/18

Another Walk to the Gravel Bar

*Fern Talk*¹

[Me]: Hi, is this the Gravel Bar?

[A fern on a tree]: Yes, well, *we've* been calling it a Fern Bar lately.

[Me]: Oh okay.

[a fern by my knees]: Who are you?

[Me]: Molly. Who are you?

[the fern by my knees]: *Dryopteris expansa*. These are my friends, *Polypodium glycyrrhiza*, *Pteridium aquilarium*, (*she's everywhere*), and that's *Athyrium filix-feminina* over there, down by those rocks.

[Me]: Um...

[the fern by my knees]: You can call me Wood, this is Licorice and Bracken, and then that's Lady down there.

[Me]: (sitting down on a log) Thanks. Got it.

[Wood]: So what brings you here?

[Me]: Well, I'm here to reflect on this— Fern Bar.

[Licorice]: What's 'reflection'?

[Me]: It's when *homo sapiens* doesn't just engage the activities of the ordinary life world, but pauses to think about those same things, or about bigger questions and thoughts.

[Wood]: So, what have you come up with?

[Me]: Well I just got here. Reflection takes a while. Maybe you can give me some insights. What's it like to be you?

[Wood]: I'm glad you asked. I have three-pinnate fronds. Licorice here has two acute pinnae, and acuminate to attenuate fronds.

[Me]: (taking notes) Interesting.

[Licorice]: What do *you* have?

[Me]: Um, I have two hands. I research, so that I can know things. What else. Well, I'm often found in a library or a coffee shop.

[Wood]: I inhabit mesic woodlands.

[Licorice]: I'm often found growing as an epiphyte on deciduous trees.

¹ Fern voices adapted from "Mosses Lichens and Ferns" Dale H. Vitt, Janet E. Marsh, and Robin B. Bovey. (Alberta, Canada: Lone Island Publishing, 1988). Borrowed from the HJ Andrews Headquarters Library.

[Me]: (writing) Oh cool, that *is* interesting. Yeah I have a lot of projects I'm working on. Really mixed-genre stuff. Pretty experimental. I have stuff ranging from fictional, to comical, to actual scholarly research. I never really produce poetry, though.

[Licorice]: Well, no insidium is produced by me. And you know what? My veins don't reach the margins.

[Me]: Oh gosh, wow. I'm really getting to know you. Yeah, my veins, well... I'm not old yet, but if my family history is any sign I'll probably have some crazy old-lady veins in my legs someday.

[Wood]: I have scaly and chaffy lower portions.

[Licorice]: I have pinnate to pinnatifid fronds with large, round, naked sori...

[Me]: (putting down my pen) Okay, that might be more than —

[Wood]: What are *your* lower portions like?

[Me]: Um, feet, I guess. Two ordinary feet. Size ten.

[Licorice]: And you know what else? I weather periods of drought by curling and drying up, reviving when moisture returns.

[Me]: (writing again) Yeah, it's crucial to know how to deal with stress. I usually go for walks, or escape into a novel. It's a pretty important ability, to cope.

[Licorice]: It's a *poikilohydric* ability, is what it is. What kind of ability is 'escaping into a novel?'

[Me]: Hmm, I guess it's a literary ability? It's probably an avoidance tactic half the time. I don't know. What about your friends?

[Wood]: Oh, Bracken? She's everywhere. *Everywhere*. Her fronds are annual, with coarse three-pinnate blades.

[Me]: Blades?

[Wood]: Oh yeah. Bracken's no joke. She has stories about this whole place. She tells me what it's like on top of the hills, next to the road, beyond that log over there. She just unfurls those blades and plants herself pretty much anywhere she wants.

[Me]: And Lady?

[Licorice]: Shh. She likes to just stay over there by those boulders by the edge of the creek. She has delicate, pale green fronds. She likes to wear those lacy, almost-see-through, fallen vine-maple leaves.

[Me]: Yeah, I feel delicate sometimes, too.

[Licorice]: Is that a reflection?

[Me]: Oh. No, just kind of talking out loud. Well, I'm going to go on down the path a bit. Thanks for this chat, it's been incredible getting to know you.

[ferns]: Sure, see you again. You know where to find us.

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May 21st 2018

Willamette NF Fish Technology

Deer Creek Restoration Project

“Grief is a path to understanding entangled shared living and dying; human beings must grieve with, because we are in and of this fabric of undoing. Without sustained remembrance, we cannot learn to live with ghosts and so cannot think.” — Haraway (2016)

On May 21st, myself and a musician were taken to the McKenzie Ranger Station to meet Mickie, a stream ecologist who would take us into and alongside Deer Creek to explore the current restoration project.

We were issued waders, we packed up, I was photographed in front of the McKenzie Ranger Station sign. I was so photographed because my uncle once worked there, and he was the kind of one who seemed more like a tree than a man: tall, bending, flush with secrets and layers: quiet to the bone, with eyes serene and cautious.

Mostly I wanted to know about the taxonomy project and the new philosophies of restoration. This is what I was prepared to take notes on.

But first I write this: *my uncle's ashes were laid to rest in the green current of Lookout Creek in 2012. And a few years later his only brother's ashes were let fly in the breeze crossing Lone Cone Mountain in southern Colorado. I too, have a place written down.*

I am standing here, in the stream, up to my breasts, the chest-high waders shrinking tight against my skin under the cold weight of the water as I learn about this place.

Uncle = your father's only brother, somewhat distant from your life, but somehow also a presence hewed close to the bone, a resonant power of connection that could not have been achieved through regular holiday small talk.

Stochastic = able to respond to disturbances

As Mickie talks, and as I pull my heavy body out of the deep pool I've been standing in, I think about disturbance, its regularity and its necessity. I think of crisis as the inability to change in response to disturbance.

Trash-rack = made intentionally or by nature. A large assembly of logs, sticks, river detritus etc.
An older engineering term.

Mickie says that the old philosophy of science in her specialty was one where projects needed to hit targets, metric targets. For example, a stream would have to show 100 pools per mile or whatever. Or, the proposal required some type of X for spawning.

But now, stream science allows more verse, more aleatory whispering, a hope constructed around the soft body of vertical complexity.

More specifically, she says, as I crouch down close to a trash-rack of alder limbs, ground water exchange is being studied as something that can cool water temperature at shallow locations. Because water cools most in the exchange, she explains, you need a lot of vertical complexity. You need more exchange than speed or shadow, contrary to previous expectations about pool temperature. So, water that looks like it will be hot, if it has gone through an exchange, will be kept cool. There are also mixed elevations of river, she adds. I write it down.

*And lean – and view it sidewise –
And add “How cold – it grew” –
And “Was it conscious – when it stepped
In Immortality?”*

Mickie and her team might be artists. They make piles and racks in the river, in order to restore it. They create log-jams, in order to provide conditions for habitat, to return log-jams to the stream’s ecology. She smiled, recalling the D-8 Cat driver who so enjoyed hauling trees down and across the beds, undoing history, retelling the story of a stream that was cleared and straightened for logging.

I am compelled again by Rosencranz’s comments on her art installatios, “It seems to live, then again, my team and I try not to get it ‘too’ alive” [...] (*The Venice Questionnaire 2015 #9*: artreview.com). Mickie is clear that under the new philosophical paradigm, the restoration project only provides conditions, gives opportunity, removes obstacles. She adds: their stream restoration work does not try to re-create, they are not trying to mimic. And she is delighted, wading in familiar riparian territory, looking for signs confirming that an unpredictable but desired encounter has taken place.

Redd = a trout nest

Redds are made in half-moon mounds, with the female’s tail in about 4-10 inches of gently flowing, “laminar” current. Mickie gets down and imitates the mother trout’s tail as it constructs a nursery. *I will never walk in a shallow stream again*, I say. Well, says the scientist, don’t worry too much. The redds are made of gravel sizes that are big enough to be resilient to foot falls and disturbance, that is, enough water can move through. They can move and shuffle around but retain the half-moon shape.

In the warm afternoon, waders sucked tight to our frames under the water, we continue wandering, looking, finding.

Cadis fly = an indicator invertebrate; a builder and world-maker, an artist of earthworks, now squeezing its black head out of its rock-skin, then slinking back in, unimpressed with my palm.

*I am alive – because
I do not own a House –*

*Entitled to myself – precise –
And fitting no one else –*

The indicator invertebrates have a low tolerance for any kind of bullshit, I understand her to be saying. So, if a cadis fly spits mortar into tiny sticks or little stones and makes a skin around its body, and sits calm on a rock in your life, it's a good sign.

Salmon fly= huge, with long legs and smoky-quartz colored wings that lay back and nearly cover its whole body. The body underneath, the torso, is a shock of bright neon orange. About 1.5 to 2 inches in length.

The musician is dragging a hydrophone through the flow. I take a listen. Deer Creek sounds like windchimes and breaking glass at the surface. A few feet under, Deer Creek has a beat below the effluence of the dead that are merely returning to infinite materials, they cry out: "plink, drip, drop, plink."

Mickie explains the single-channel survey, and we continue with our wet habitat inventory, visiting the organism and the home that is Deer Creek, looking for chinook fry, delighted when we see the redds. Observing a presence of habitation, spawning, gives the scientist a lift, a spring, a spark of joy. I ask her, what unanswered questions remain? She says she is always curious about why and when the rehabilitation takes place after or even during restoration. What signals exactly are we sending out? She asks the water. An answer: "plink, plink, drip."

*And marked my Girlhood's name –
So Visitors may know
Which Door is mine – and not mistake –
And try another Key –*

*How good to be alive!
How infinite – to be
Alive – two-fold – The Birth I had –
And this – besides in Thee!*

— Emily Dickinson

*

May 12th

The dogwood glows, full bloom.
It's a dark afternoon, but the tree remains
where white petals cup the air
drawing from some source unknown to me, light.

May 19th

The dogwood blossoms show the slightest edge of brown, crisping like pages of an old book. Their old petals hover above the rhododendrons turning around in their green cocoons.

May 20th

Hot pink and purple flesh presses out.

May 21st

A rhododendron in the full blush of magenta makes everyone look.

MK Sturdevant
