

Passages: Annotations

Extracts from Work Book 2001-2009



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cover photo
by Annette Willis

making things with words
the difficulties and dangers in doing any such thing

I imagine myself through
a slew of time
returning sounds of rain.

I'm urgent for something
drenched
in the race of the moment.

Connected after something
fast with cold
sings me through the wash.

My right foot is under
the second star
a heart formed in stupid heat.

*

Signs point elsewhere. To the place of ghosts. On the road to nowhere. The lost radiance. On the journey you pick a lot up however. And that is the journey. To not end. Even if nowhere. Always with the empty inside that is yours but along the way, the stops and potholes, rims, shoulders, shatterings, asphalt flowers that are the tradition of the road, and the company.

Backyard poem

A poem is muddy

The children sing
tirelessly

It's a hard act to follow

*

It is finally raining in Sydney. It doesn't amount to a lot of rain but over the last few days the gardens are drinking, at least. Maybe it's because rain can be rare here that it gets into my lines, the wish for that smell and splash which gets sounded out in words. These are often the lyric moments, material evidence of the weather, how air touches you, heat and cold inside and outside.

this morning

fog
that sits
on our houses

*

Vestiges

poet wanders the page
imprint

chasing a trail through poems
fugitive ghost
phantom presences aura

what is noise in the poem
the subjective relation to others

what is important in a poem

at the edges

Roadside shadows

Shape-not-shape and
other shape, move
with wind, mind
the argument between
ground, grass
leaf and cloud.
Thought percolating
into thought, the air's
material, dust and sound
changing direction
passing wheels
a hand wave
that motion.

Flinders Ranges, September 2008

*

That a poem is a landscape, not a hierarchy.

A day is never dull, even under clouds.

Smoke of the street passes my mouth, exhales its chattering.

My sight recedes with the road
into the hills, a straight line always
ahead of itself and behind in
the last curve of the earth.

Adelaide, October 2008

*

everything is broken –
systems, gods, engines
perhaps against method
the importance of wings
the lake, rock and sand
on the pink sexed skin

a landscape like sound
drips from my edges
asking questions
how the pieces don't fit
debris alters meanings
are we at the end of

'the body' and 'nature'?
is time disappearing into speed?
where are the new senses?

Just before the curfew

noise
over head
this city cries

lateral
the road
lies down crushed

boom
boom ba-boom
the valley heaves

birds
hide in
the window shadows

come
let me
love you now

*

Walking, slow, itinerant, across terrain, temporal process.

Writing as experience. An ongoing disclosure of beings.

That language is extravagance in the body.

(Overheard)

Within a symmetry strange
here come all the high achievers
from their committees in glowing pants.
It's so hot hot inside the drama
the ecstatic ordinary jungle
chiming with their dares
all their lovely paper tigers.

*

If experience is continuous, how can you break the breath into each of its takes, in/out. But *is* continuous continuous? I think of Zeno's arrow and points plotted on the arc of flight. Of life broken like the line. Of parts like stanzas (rooms) where, in each room, there is air and space but also doors and windows, legs of furniture.

The writing moment – so many of these. A sounding in the head. The pencil or pen scratching. Typing, delete, return. Cut and paste. That may take an age.

Material quivers ever
something away
underneath
dark clangs down
patterns breeze
place
unravels moving

*

and then the ongoingness

a trace
at the point
where

a poem
differentiates itself from
flux

of experience
the fragmentary or
incomplete

becomes

a poem is
as
it passes

*

Been There, Done That?

If artists once thought they could make
one with the universe
what happened to that? Drowned in the stars?

What one, what universe - the cop out, yes?
Scared of beauty and guts
(oh verboten, verboten).

All around me, a strange kind of bitterness.
But in the grid of language,
what surprise!

indefiniton

I = wandering new trails

*

thrall

*

the question of memory
to transmit marks

*

to shout towards outside through the painting

to sharpen green wakes, to register
duration, traces that carve poetry
lichen on wood, cemetery
the forgotten, exposed to sun

Stewart Island Cemetery, Oban, Rakiura, Dec 2005

*

... the way that the things called things are often not themselves or in themselves,
they are abstracted, as they are daily into songs and advertising copy and code.
Wouldn't it be nice? They are games, and games you want to win. Everyone's a
winner! (Is that a fact?) With poems playing up a storm that crashes clouds as
thunder chords, or is it an aeroplane? The emotion of the plane is so much different
and it goes in ways a storm cannot.

*

Indifference as a strategy.

Clouds reveal me against traffic
the ash state dissolves my mouth.

Pelican rises over daily speed blink
the air stops inside.

We count in dead sentences
tick the box.

Or drift & our crossbows fail
waiting for the ministry to arrive.

August 2003, 10.55am, Surry Hills, Sydney

*

or thinking about
the way lines fall

intensity/ concentration
looseness / with space

what happens to/with the breath
the way mind changes

Vertigo

that things refuse to side
and ground walks away

*

But moments can only hold for so long. They move like split screen scenes, that's a kind of stop-&-go. It's how Miles set it up, late 60s, early 70s, or how Laurie says: *'you get to a place of calm in the inner area of the cyclone'*. Or Archie Shepp, *Howling in the silence*.

Don't howl but into silence
which is not
 into cacophony
day music around me.

fragile tears or strong enough falling
all
that's left
the uncertain lengths

there are possibles, rain on earth
lacunae
and lostness
but are everywhere

and to hear crackles of diodes
think
of a
few recovered scraps

ardent/ ears/ eyes the taste, skin
some future time
will think
?

acts in time along with leaves

(With a fragment from a fragment of Sappho)

*

flux
of sound, syntactical
manoeuvres, dictions

does the jingle in
the air fresh solitude un-
settle the coming thought

*

Unexpected rain last night. Just the merest of drops on my face before and after visiting A in hospital. Many kinds of tasks ahead of me over the next few days. All I can do is muddle through like a human. Woke up this morning, which makes it sound like a song, woke up early, unlike me, and out to the kitchen. Yes, there's been real rain, and the bricks are gleaming, that fresh smell on the ground and garden.

Morning
drops blossom
wet black boughs

(Playing literal with the image)

Ach, the poets are all insane, we've had a gutful
Of piddling excuses about how the cat
Swallowed the form delivered with as much éclat
As some ancient rhymmer trying to pull the wool
Over the pentameter, or some doomy wastrel
Murmuring by the hour in internet hells

*

Stevens said 'the poem of the act of the mind' but how does the mind act? Is it the same thing as thought? Has anyone seen a mind working? Rather, the working of a body that is thinking. Inside and outside, not just, say, 'inner processes'. Not to turn from thinking but to think of thinking in another way. Connections, from nerves to skin to others, and to stuff, things, world. Something like work, like labour.

And emotions (feelings)? They are some work as well, in and of the body. Of the same work.

stop explaining forget
backstory and
act

how
much fuel
do you need

to play free
with the
moment

(Note for 2006)

*

To be defined by what you do not have. Release from signs, from boredom, from signification and identity. This does not equal that.

Does experience need to be figured out?

Or a different attention to narrative – how hard are the threads?

This is not a category

it blows its blossoms clear
over the trees
and is done

looking up the ladders and the trunks
with someone searching
their packets for something
meaningful, at least
a map, a stereoscope
a fine landing

a syntax that isn't anxious about its sequences

*

I'm listening up after a big wide week. "Free your mind and your ass will follow, the kingdom of heaven is within" (*Funkadelic*) Or is it the other way around — free your ass and your mind will follow? I still haven't decided. Where is within? Where should I be looking? "I'm so confused about the whole thing."

on paper the scrawl and overscawl
yesterday's list

what was I thinking?

now enumerated with three
different colours of ink

of what was to hand
swelling as if thought
had become action

*

As though language began with the wind and the body song, a table or a window, a
tunnel as the sign, or surface.

Do the actions (verbs) or the pronouns act as the signposts?

*

My city slides around its harbour & splays across the plain in its forgetfulness.

This day is clouds and earth
in our crisp bitter bodies
not our usual knowledge here

journeyed from mountains to city plain
snowish wind and rain virga
a torn drape from cumulus

moist and dry meeting
evanescing into the halfway
what we need is blown

we see this wispy precipitant
virgin thought of rain
not arriving any time soon

Surry Hills, 1.45pm, 4 August 2004

*

How great is the distance, the orientation between the subjective and the objective – there's a slippage, sometimes erring towards the subjunctive so it is acting among possibilities rather than facts. Where you might be going, if you were. You are always going, even at rest. The body's blurs.

Providing for shadow

How do you read or understand a body? How you stand with someone, away or in. Just don't pack the party up to move it indoors. Let the wind fierce and the purple rain, graffiti embraced worldwide, as public as any penny, as you walk with a, with b, with a concern about blooms, or who rules. The sun rises up in your own northwest and a smile fades into it. It's hard to find that silver lining in the pour though you could get some backup facility running at a moment's notice, when storm clouds in and it starts to rain on Arabic television news. What's hidden in the moving text at the bottom of the screen? English characters or sets encoded, ASCII text, or a woman's secret language lost. Through the drought they stopped waiting for a lucky day. DVD reigns, though you've collected 745 books or magazines for self study. You might jib at it as relief while an obscure void inches wide beneath your feet. What of travel and holidays? When people speak as if being foreign turns English into a pale image of the past, repetition somehow alters the throw of policy's dice into its shadow.

*

So we're doing the rubbish and it's recycling week. We're rounding up the big box of paper and glass and I'm thinking, it's writing: castaways, remnants, a lot of recycling. As though each poem is the thing I leave along the way, cast-off, and go on further into language/s. Recycling is a good thing. So is casting-off. I never managed it in knitting (I never managed knitting full-stop) but I can do it in poetry.

Uncanny spaces

It seems weird to be talking about the process of words. I say weird because there is something of the uncanny in it, that words link to old things, happenings or lineages, maybe some thing you may have learned early, that someone may have passed on to you. But you don't remember – did they, how did that happen? It is about passage, just as with the dead, they need to be accompanied until they go over. We don't know what will happen but we believe the words and the shadows and harmonies, what resonances they leave. This says a lot about voice, but there's a lot to say about space, about where and how the words are placed. Words have been placed a long time, on walls, and surfaces that will take them. No surface is flat and to add words, adds dimension. Tenses have dimensions, it's to do with timing, not just the length of vowels and syllables, though that is an important part of it. There is also a colour that is hard to decipher. Though it's not really a code, but a way of looking, a scanning of the day. To stand and watch how the words develop between people, how syllables wait. The breeze comes before other weather, it is the movement that becomes syllables, the bus brakes on the night's avenue of bitumen, the way the lunar eclipse breaths up into the air that has been called the heavens. Some of this is empirical, you could stand and measure emissions, speech patterns, positions. These are at least graphable. You're never lonely with the moon, we are always looking up, even into the daylight and see its familiar strange layout. Just as we touch each other.

summer is an umbrella and trails a shadow as well as blinding light

*

The moment asks 'can everything be represented?' What of darkness, absence and thought? You can make signs of things, and the absent or the non-material. You can speak alongside them, in between them, or from a long way off, across a valley, say. Across the gap, the great divide, across the street like the chicken. (I've seen the chicken, one day as I was walking into Currie, the main town on King Island. I saw what it was trying to do. It was definitely trying to get to the other side. And it did.) I am making metaphors, or satires, or jokes. They are all to be mistaken.

Even when there's only an estimate of this beauty, there's silence in heaven for the space of half an hour. Unlike the vocal tributes and hallelujahs of so many sports fans. To understand through the gut magic.

There is silence and silence. We have to ask whether Cage comes to silence or if silence has turned out to be the hammer we all had expected (or rather, hoped for). It takes a few listens more to fall with the noose, to hear the delta calling. Will death eat itself?

If there's a silence in a room someone will try to fill it as soon as humanly possible. There are two ways in, addition or escort of the Blind Guardian. Silence can be as final as the exquisite score.

There is silence as I sit here staring at the screen. A struggle happened and so much has changed.

the birds: new holland honey eater, red wattle bird, spotted turtle dove, ibis, magpie,
wagtail, noisy mynah, a raptor high up
also in the sky: high jet trails, a red kite with two blue tails
white blossoms fall on us or blow down
jacaranda stalks

the sound of a kids' party, plane roar, traffic, someone talking to dogs, some doof
doof music in the street below

newspaper scattered around, last minute polling, who should bat at number three,
obituaries, nobel prizes
cheeses, bread, corn chips, olives, flat bread, water, wine
my bad stomach, A's bad foot, the world

can we bear to watch election coverage or czech movie preview?
still undecided
I'm tipping coalition by twelve seats
recalling someone said last night 'remember 1993'
the birds continue chorus and call and afternoon lies down in shade

An afternoon in the garden, October 2004

And regret

rien?

Useless afternoon! Emotions
you sometimes need to efface

by digging
dirt & happy.

*

The day is teetering already, the sun cannot guard us against winter, there are no loud clothes. But, wait a minute! The imprint of rogue colour dazzles and one white billboard blank, edged with rust red sharp as a cymbal on the edge of the mix. It's not as though it's ready for your free inscription; this is all bought space and paid for next to the trees. And what if I made up a song out of nothing but half seconds, quartered time, a great tearing sound, as if the words went, all gone sound and this blinking empty board waiting, flexing the ink but I am whitened into day. What of tomorrow? Even if the weather changes and I find all that I am, still pale between the notes and beside signs.

the past always disappointing
its vapours and melt

clusters of verbs
tangle up in

memory blue drag
(if you call who answers

stares change hats
and hunger takes from breath

nasty saxes
fuel expensive colours

spirits can't be
explained

gone ...
wildflowering
ruins

sea shores taking breath
the hours
once fabricators

burdens thirst on the tongue

this
still in your face

burn down the villa
change all the doors

'even sing
then I would'

6 October 2004, Surry Hills, 5.25pm

(french
walking
and typing)

cob-
ble slips
rain ahead

stone
cement
blonde on blonde

la!
there and
there blossoms

dead
writers
live/script/on

books
books books
livres paris

dogs
doggies
dog shit slip

'a'
where 'q'
should be, slips

The moon is gravel
in my shy glance
which flickers out
to other sky
planet grit splashed
beyond the turquoise screen
of our civilisation.

It's way past landscape
pasted in day books
and logged on paths
to and from
the sexy grids
stuttering market spritz
which grabs history
shaking its booty.

16 July 2003 (after Sat 12 July) - in response to a poem by Kate Fagan

*

The information is the song. The attempt of song, the futility perhaps. And all the while living with the temptations of transcendence and transformation.

How do we know these things?
We don't.
We walk.
We don't.

The skin, lichens.
Dust in the mouth.

*

language asks for its limits
in the restaurant
who asked him to call her
'a fucking cunt', who asked anybody

but that's the bind, a river not free
of discharge
chemistry floats & dangles
catching at air
under headlines
half a dialogue on a phone, T-shirts, walls
'oz no more whing u next'
warnings, carry bags

the way not everything connects

a photograph floats in its bath
on a screen
brushes the tongue
mis-spells itself.

sky is cleared of doubt
clouds fall out of noon
tendencies and charms are crossed
the cool stays in the stone

ants heave up orange ground
the saxophone is full
time is being stretched out
it has the tongue to tell

hammer noises dancing
wind moves warm on hot
stops the path with dust
and flushes long the street

arches are the atmosphere
branches drop their down
ecstatic blue is brief
prepared for leaving then

1.45pm, Surry Hills, 5 November 2003

*

That world isn't simple. It's a wild artifice – complexity making itself/s.

To make a self doesn't make sense, and it keeps falling down.

I'm not sure I can understand my processes but they arise out of actions.

electric
dark extends
footsteps among secrets

*

In a dream swirl, the sleet of life.

A frost had grasped the glass.

Radar to alien, I am landing at last.

If my actions are flawed, this yawing kite.

My shadow, my mist, my doorway's constant companion.

I sleep next to my sole skin & below space.

brute autumn twins
red leaves & grey
in eddy each other
can't tell within it

of as of plays
green gold the others
feel eros muscle change
ground reek & savour

*

T. Bone Walker singing *Stormy Monday*. How cool is that. 'Lord have mercy! Crazy 'bout my baby.' And Little Willie John singing *Fever*. I don't have the blues, but the blues just is. A sunny day, still no rain. 'I Can't Quit you, Baby'.

Write slowly and compose in air
Your mind walks with ghosts on the ceiling
Stand as you move into your limbs
Love your fences and stone as you may
There's no reply that won't hurt you

*

morning
sweeping washing
bottlebrush is out

visitors
for Annette
photographers with cakes

dogs
won fireworks
in the valley

between
all work
is getting done

listening
new nick
cave is good

sound
and smell
of night rain

Each moment must be doubted. It must be doubted by being kept open. The poem won't finish.

*

Absence as presence
you feel it

elegy

When gravity sneaks up on you
then lets you down
what do you do?

I go for a walk.

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