

*California, December 2013.*

Crooked spine. Prone, bar stool propped. Just in time. Road-weary: awake, dry. Reluctant to eavesdrop (but eager for a drop). Bar staff mourn the city's decline, sporting team insignia, bright orange initials. Sibilant acronym, silhouetted skyline logo—architectural nostalgia, where old forms house new content. Time passes, time is called. I pass, seemingly unnoticed, into the raw silence after emollient music, into the nasal flinch from stock detergent. More audible murmurings of soft dissent. The cost of living, the rents! I still only hear the sound of tyre on tarmac.

Big wheel leaves abraded rubber on blacktop.

Replace when the tread is worn out.

*Hemlock Tavern, Hemlock Street.* A clumsy maieutic interjection or two have gone down badly; not a good time (or the right person, I admit) to mention the Natives. West of Ellis Island, anyone else is an immigrant. Just something—something just—I heard Derek Walcott say. Drink up then: the hour of departure has arrived. Although people seem incorruptible, or inured to corruption, these days.

Big Brother sweetens deal pre-revolution.

Resist temptation to opt out?

Stay between the lines. Camouflaged in cracks. Far from the clamour of metal, rustled paper, plastic tapping plastic. The new, compound contentedness within a city's hollowed outline. Fabled deal on napkin, close-up of clinking silverware on delicate plates. Panning shot, after the gold rush—the calm before the quake in a paranoid cinematic fantasy. Prophetic, celluloid. White-veiled bride for the chosen son-in-law, both bound by ring finger. Veiled bribe for the maitre d', blinkered by index and pinkie. It's impossible to get a table otherwise, unless you book months in advance. Extrapolate to the polity!

Big Chief didn't always need reservation.

Displaced after the space ran out.

So far west now, east is next: counter rotary. Toeing the oceanic medium. *Finis terra firma*, end of era. Coastal meridian tracks the crust, above an unstable mantle. Meanings shift beneath the symbolic lithosphere of orthography. An inheritance of lightning dissipated in liquefied rock. Fritz Mauthner suggested that certain deviations in the perceived definition of words could have devastating consequences. Unnatural disasters. Shuddering ruptures of the 20th century. And a new millennium washes down through history with compound ferocity. Cataclysmic tantrums. Accelerated cause, amplified effects.

Real risk of contamination at Big Sur.

Out at sea, tuna with traces

of radioactivity. At shore, hulls bobbed in the vestiges of a deadly wave that had room to wane. Masts bowed the horizon in a frantic crescendo—then settled into their relative parallels. Subtle tremolo. I drive north. The road oscillates, then buckles, yielding to the heightened drama of the frontier between land and sea. Space and time take their relative toll, factoring acceleration: numbness in the right hip, a burning sensation in the ball of the foot. It seems to be getting worse—on this particular leg, snaking along the Ring of Fire's perimeter. The sky begins its reverent, marmoreal display to mark day's departure. Peach and lilac gathering. Sea blue, coruscating golden to my left in blissful randomness. Earth bears brown wood and dark green needles to the right. A roadside clearing invites a

change of tack.  
Ponderosa pine.  
Towering columns of cracked  
lamina. Petrol  
fades into light vanilla.  
Hands on hips; bend.

Arcing spine—  
the arch of the back—  
articulated fault line.  
The rub: subduction  
of nature's *logos* under  
culture's archive?

I have a fragmentary account to log.

Fractal? Emergent? Hopefully.

Another high-mileage day.

Another slow evening.

*Anchor Bay.* From a perched cabin's glass panorama I rolled—through elusive, elastic time—across the lifeless firmament. Soft in the face of its seeming, Eleatic permanence. Pale in the distinction of its teeming, stellated pitch. Light is not alive. Gravity pulled me deeper into the craters of an ageing mattress, pulled my eyelids open on their supine curve. But let the mind slip momentarily—to hang, planetary, in wordless, numberless suspension. More time of elusive length passed. I watched a Charian Orion,

wounded again, reel and plunge into the ocean horizon:

seven meteors ignited the Pacific. The whitest

yellow, slow-motion blaze melted the morning swell's silver crests.

Day broke in a requital with Ephesian emphasis:

the exchange of fire for all things. Boiling water spat and hissed

against the cracked shoreline below. The scarred bluff lay half-submerged

like a prone, pre-historic carcass—stage for the breeding urge

of elephant seals to conduct its brutal and enduring

overture, opening wounds to vent blood's steam. At the threshold, detail dissolved in the blinding aperture's Coriolis torque—smearing land, sea and sky in its light-bending pull. Beyond, the outline of a sail appeared but seemed already there—abstracted by distance, motionless: neither leaving port nor returning home. Hummingbirds dashed across the foreground, spanning the wide window on their continuous circuits from flora to feeder and back. Their wings blurred into translucent fans, powering precision projectiles of iridescent torso. Behind that fanciful delicacy, and nectar's connotations, a tight-rope metabolism charts the journey's course—

a topology of survival's fragile composition.