an interview with

ED ROBERSON

Conducted by Lynn Keller and Steel Wagstaff

The opening stanzas of Ed Roberson's "Sit In What City We're In," from his 2006 volume *City Eclogue* (Atelos), illuminate his sense of his poetry's responsibilities. The first stanza positions the poet as anticipating a future generation's need to understand how people during Roberson's lifetime navigated the urban geography of their built environment:

> Someone may want
> to know one day how many steps we took
> to cross one of our streets,
> to know there were hundreds
> in one city streets in one direction
> and as many
> as could fit between the land's contours
> crossing those,
> our hive grid as plumb
> as circles flanked into the insect
> hexagonals,
> our stone our steel.
>
> (26)

Mention of the "hive grid" links human building to the "insect / hexagonals" constructed by a nonhuman species (bees) as Roberson ties urban nature to what environmental critics call "first nature." In the next stanza, the poem's terrain narrows to a specific, racialized geography and the relational dynamics of the marches and lunch counter sit-ins of the early civil rights era:

Contemporary Literature 52, 3 0010-7484; E-ISSN 1548-9949/11/0003-0397

Others may want more
to know what steps aside the southern streets required
to flow at last free to clear,
to know how those kept out
set foot inside, sat down, and how
the mirrors around the lunch counter
reflected the face
to face — the cross-mirrored depth reached
infinitely back into either—
the one pouring the bowl over the head of
the one sitting in
at that counter

(26–27)

Throughout Roberson's work, one finds a similar seriousness of purpose, an interest in recording the environments of human lives in terms that reflect a keen sense of social and environmental (in)justice along with a commitment to recognizing what he refers to later in the poem as our "shared / being in common in each other," even in contexts of profound historical division (31). In "Sit In What City We're In," a series of mirrored reflections yields a vision "of the once felt sovereign / self . . . march[ing] back / into the necessary together / living" (27). While an insistence on the "necessary together / living" has been present in his work since the publication of his first book, *When Thy King Is a Boy* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1970), the social, ethical, and environmental implications of that communitarian and ecological imperative are most fully realized in Roberson's most recent volume, *To See the Earth Before the End of the World* (Wesleyan, 2010). More than he has before, Roberson incorporates dramatically shifting scales of space and time in this latest collection, moving deftly between the micro- and macrocosmic while voicing a broad range of feelings (depression, anger, bemusement, wonder, grief, awe, and even love) in response to what he describes in "Topoi" as the many "shit outcome[s] stepped in . . . from which there is no step out of" (12). Possible "shit outcomes" contemplated here include global environmental catastrophes such as "this dragon's breath / freshener of nuclear fire" (19); while fear of such disasters acts as "almost a silent / language among us" binding all of living humanity (19),

Roberson observes that "All connection to us is made surface / to surface" (20) when considered from another scalar perspective: "The oceans of the time men don't exist / include only a drop that we do" (21). Unlike much writing about environmental apocalypse (one meaning of the "end of the world" in the book's title), Roberson's coolly avoids either being mired in despair or insisting upon programmatic solutions to our intertwined social and environmental problems. Instead, he proposes a more concerted effort of attention in the hope, as he writes in "Lunar Eclipse," that we may "see bodily / in raised detail / a measure deepen into our world / in each other," and from there "see / ourselves whole, see in whole perspective" (10). For Roberson, neither clear sight nor a deepened sense of mutual enmeshment with the world is easily obtained, but each is possible, and his poetry seeks to enable and activate both.

Key to the multifaceted seeing enacted in Roberson's poetry is the polysemy registered by his use of what Nathaniel Mackey has aptly called "labyrinthine, syntactically double-jointed lines," often reinforced by surprising enjambment that multiplies the semantic possibilities of a phrase or line. For instance, in a poem from *City Eclogue* about the New York City police killing of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed Guinean immigrant, via forty-one gunshots, the difficulty of seeing what's really happening emerges in a double-jointed moment:

> wrong about what to keep from getting away
>
> we blink our eyes to erase what we see
> or to clear the eyes to see what we don't
>
> believe we're seeing thoroughly enough
> to be exact at what held no gun to be forgot
>
> (50)

Roberson's diction, too, resists a single register, drawing instead on a notably heterogeneous range of speech patterns and vocabularies taken from (to offer only a partial list) mountaineering, limnology, anthropology, African mythology, cosmology, Euclidian geometry, jazz, urban architecture, Mayan sculpture, black vernacular speech, and field biology. Few areas of human

culture are excluded from his verse, in keeping with his belief, articulated in his essay "We Must Be Careful," that there can be "no humanly containable limit to living Nature; there is no outside of Nature" (3). Roberson's identification of his African forebears' pursuit of "an observant accumulating of the knowledge of self in an also living environment" is also a crucial practice in his own poetics (5).

Roberson's syncretic register reflects a restless intellectual curiosity and a relishing of adventure, traits that have generated the unusually varied life experiences on which his poetry draws. The eldest of four sons, Ed Roberson grew up in Pittsburgh, where his father was a trucker who ran an independent garbage collection company until the business was taken out from under him by organized crime. The first member of his family to attend college, Roberson majored in chemistry at the University of Pittsburgh, where, as an undergraduate research assistant in limnology, he collected data on Afognak Island in Alaska, inaugurating a lifelong interest in exploratory travel. He had become a serious reader of poetry in high school, and though he never enrolled in a creative writing course, he began writing poetry in college, initially drawn to what he regarded as the intriguingly tight form of the sonnet. His first publication, a nature poem titled "I Must Be Careful," appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* when he was still an undergraduate, the winning entry in a contest. In 1970, the year *When Thy King Is a Boy* was published, he and two friends undertook a cross-country motorcycle trip that has figured in several of his poems. For many years he was an amateur explorer and a climbing instructor, making two trips to South America with the Explorers Club of Pittsburgh. He has held a variety of jobs, from working in a factory to working in an advertising firm, from serving as a diver in the Pittsburgh AquaZoo to teaching and administration at Rutgers University. Informed by all of these experiences, much of his writing can be seen as nature poetry, whether the nature being considered is located in barely disturbed wilderness or—the focus especially of *City Eclogue*—in cities.

In his essay "We Must Be Careful," with which Camille Dungy opens *Black Nature* (University of Georgia Press, 2009),

her anthology of African American nature poetry, Roberson explains his view of and interest in "nature poetry":

> The nature poem occurs when an individual's sense of the larger Earth enters into the world of human knowledge. The main understanding that results from this encounter is *the* Ecopoetic: that the world's desires do *not* run the Earth, but the Earth *does* run the world. . . .
>
> In my own poems I try to show our social nature in and as the growth of our cities and city culture. Our technology, however, is more likely to conserve, regenerate, and nourish the limiting and exclusive resource base of capitalism than our larger human or Earth/Nature. Restoring this larger Earth to urban poetry, embedding city life within a living Nature focuses on an interrelation that should keep us sensitized to exploitative relationships which could cut us off, cut us out of life.
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> (4–5)

Although Roberson has been actively writing and publishing poetry for over forty years, only recently has his work garnered significant critical attention. *Voices Cast Out to Talk Us In* (University of Iowa Press, 1995)—his first new volume in almost two decades—was awarded the 1994 Iowa Poetry Prize, and in the 1990s, both Nathaniel Mackey (in *Discrepant Engagement*) and Aldon Lynn Nielsen (in *Black Chant*, which took its title from one of Roberson's poems) identified Roberson in their critical writing as an exemplar of innovative and significant African American experimental poetry. The 1990s also saw the publication of a selected poems, *Just In: Word of Navigational Challenges* (Talisman, 1998), and of *Atmosphere Conditions* (Green Integer, 1999), which was selected by Mackey for the 1998 National Poetry Series. In the past decade, Roberson's standing in several poetic communities has continued to grow, as demonstrated by the inclusion of *City Eclogue* in Lyn Hejinian and Travis Ortiz's Atelos series and the dedication of a 2010 special issue of *Callaloo* (33.3) to his work. Recently, Roberson's poetry has also begun to receive interest and praise from environmental critics.

After a bout with cancer, Roberson moved from New Jersey to Chicago seven years ago, and in the intervening years, three more books of poetry have appeared, to increasing public notice. Initially intending to live in Chicago only for a semester while

he served as a visiting artist at Columbia College, he has since taught at the Center for the Writing Arts, the University of Chicago, and Northwestern University, where he is currently employed and where his papers are archived. We interviewed him in his fourteenth-floor apartment in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago's South Side, looking out over the vast expanse of Lake Michigan, on July 8, 2011. The conversation focused particularly on Roberson's recently released *To See the Earth Before the End of the World*.

Q. You moved from New Brunswick to Chicago seven years ago. How has living in Chicago affected your work?

A. It has been really good. Before I moved here, I had been sick, and I retired right after I got out of the hospital. I didn't like bumping around the house, and I kept thinking that I wanted to travel again. I'm too old to be hiking up the side of the Andes, but I needed some kind of excitement; I needed that kind of big adventure again. I didn't think Chicago was going to be a big adventure, but it has been. I just put everything in the car and I made it in one night; I started out at about 5:30 in the afternoon and got here at 8 o'clock in the morning. It was great. Since I've been here, there have been three books. I never used to do a lot of readings: I was never invited to them very much, and I just didn't go anywhere, because I wasn't invited anywhere, but since I've been here, I've been hanging around with really interesting poets.

Q. How did you come to live in Bronzeville?

A. That's funny. I decided I'd come live in Chicago, so I got online to learn about the neighborhoods, and when I came to look for an apartment, I had this list of places to go see. Everybody kept saying, "You don't want to live on the South Side, don't go on the South Side, stay away from the South Side." Chris Tysh's son Julian was in town, and he took me around to see some places up North. But in the meantime I had printed out these sheets of listings, and one apartment on the South Side looked kind of interesting. So I got up on the second morning

before I was going to do the Wicker Park, Milwaukee Avenue, Logan Square search. I thought I'd just run down and see what this place looked like, and when I got down here, it looked much better than I'd expected. I mean, it's an old building, but it's really stylish. In fact, I remembered reading about this place in architecture classes: Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill and the garden concept. I came down Martin Luther King Drive and thought, "Oooh, this looks nice," so I pulled in and walked around and up to the office. All along the way folks were saying "Good morning," "Hey, how you doing?" It was Midwestern-Southern and really nice. I said, "Oh, shit. This is it." I had looked for apartments for one day. When I came here on my way to other apartments, I signed a lease right away, and I've been here ever since. I didn't really think I was going to stay in Chicago because I came for a one-semester visiting artist position, but that turned into a year-long position, and other teaching jobs have followed.

Q. How has living in Chicago, or in this neighborhood, affected your writing and how you think about your work?

A. It's not the same writing I did in New Jersey; Chicago's made a real difference. I don't know whether it's more Chicago, or getting over the cancer, or what, but it's a real *serious* shift—this is a serious place. Chicago's kind of scary, too. When my mother was alive back in Pittsburgh, she worried about where I was living here. She had heard about how rough Chicago was, its gangs and everything. It was kind of scary, to just pick up, just leave your house and walk out the door and come here, but it was also exciting in a way. For one thing, Chicago actually felt like it was living, whereas New York feels like it's curated. Chicago actually grows. It just seems alive. I really like that about the city. And it's big.

Q. The lake comes into your work a lot.

A. *That's* interesting. This place is really flat. I didn't like New Jersey because New Jersey was flat, and for me, that generates this underlying level of discomfort. Growing up in Pittsburgh

on the hills, you know where you are; you get up to a point high enough and look around and say, "Oh, that's the University of Pittsburgh." It's like a milepost there; or you just turn around in the other direction and look up the hollow and see. In the hills you get a sense of knowing where you are, but in a place like New Jersey, where it's flat, you just see down the end of the block; you don't have a big perspective. But here, a couple of things come into play with this city and the apartment. For one thing, the lake gives me a horizon. I don't feel comfortable unless I have a horizon. Even if it's the next mountain, I have to have a horizon. And the lake really has been good for that. Regularly, in June, I'm up at sunrise. When I'm depressed as hell and I just don't want to get out of bed, I'll get up for the sunrise and then go back to bed. It's "Ok, you're there, fuck the rest of it." Having a horizon is really important in my sense of spatial awareness. And the other thing is, I'd never lived in a high-rise; I'd never even lived above the third floor. And now I'm on the fourteenth floor. One of the things that comes with age is problems with your balance. So for someone who's stood at eighteen thousand feet and looked down, to have—not the fear of heights, but to have that muscular balance thing go wrong—I never had that until I started getting older. I asked the doctor about it, and he said that when you're young your muscles are always in motion to keep your balance, but the older you get, the less muscle tone you have, plus your ears start failing, and you get that cremaster muscle grab. Even standing still you react to falling, so I began to get a little afraid of heights, even when I came here and looked out the window. But then I decided I like heights, and I'm really pissed off about the bodily reaction to heights that you get when you get old. I'd much rather be able to stare almost straight down. That's what this location does; this apartment gives me the mountain thing, like in Pittsburgh. I can see distance, I have height and orientation, and it provides the other effect I liked about the mountains—I like to feel a long perspective, that space thing that you get to enjoy in the height. Big weather, sky. Plus the birds go by, sometimes underneath you. A bunch of geese will come by when you're looking down into the park across the street.

Q. I want to ask more about your relationship to Lake Michigan, because lakes and bodies of water appear so many times in this new book. They're in the "Topoi" section in several places; they're in the "Nine Chicago Poems" and in the Tony Halfhide poem—"Man with Three Degrees"—which ends with him saying, "I have to be where I can see the ocean."

A. I never understood what he was saying about our needs until I got here.

Q. Do you feel that way yourself now?

A. Yes.

Q. Why?

A. It's this space, it's really being able to feel space. I sort of intellectually knew what Tony was talking about, but then the real bodily experience that goes with seeing that nice, really solid, level line of water—that does something that's good for me. An openness. I'm really glad I took this apartment so I could get that back and have it take over when I can't do other things, like climb mountains, anymore. It's been really good. Like I said, I get to see birds fly by and get to see the clouds. I've always loved the weather, and here the weather is sort of like another citizen, a grumpy one at that. Chicago's famous hawk lives here all year, not just in winter. I've been using my new iPhone to take pictures of the weird sky you get here.

Q. You said earlier that the lake has been good because it provides a horizon. Why is having a horizon so important to you?

A. I'm not afraid of enclosed spaces, but I understand what it would be like for someone who's afraid to ride elevators, that sort of opening out that is such a relief to them as the door opens. The sky opens, or a perspective line. I like to have that relief all the time, the sense that there's space around. And it's more important not only to have space around, but to have something going on in the space. Out of nowhere, the trains will come by, and I've got so at home with the movement outside, I'll figure

at a glance that's two cars, that's four cars, just by the size of the snake. I like to catch little quick things, what's going on.

Q. Seeing is so crucial in your newest book. Do you think of yourself as a particularly observant person?

A. No. I look a lot, I *stare* a lot. But I don't think I'm observant in the sense of able to make a judgment or making a particular sense; I just see stuff raw and sort of play with it, the perceptions. I miss a lot of stuff that other people are looking at, but then the other thing is, I'll also see a lot of associations. Like we were sitting in traffic and I said, "Oh, there's a downy woodpecker," but nobody could see it until it flew. I'm looking all the time, but I don't think I'm looking at the same things other people are looking at. I saw the colors before I saw the bird.

Q. Do you think your eyes were trained to look for detail through your experiences as a scientist when you were younger?

A. That's funny, yeah. I never even thought of it like that. But details do grab me. I can see big things, I like the feel of wide angle, but it's usually details that grab me. Like I was working on a poem this last week, and I sent it to a friend of mine, and we'd talk back and forth. "This isn't a poem," he was saying; "it doesn't have anything concrete in it." His saying that there's nothing concrete in it made me think, "That's true, but it's because I'm talking about the sweep of contrails." I've situated my bed so I can see the sunrise throughout June and July; all I need to do is prop my head up on a pillow and I can see the sunrise. It goes further south later on in the year, but for these two months I can see it every morning. I woke up one morning and it was that real odd, early blue, and there were about four planes headed east, and the contrails were just like dashes across the sky, at different lengths and different heights. They break off. What I was trying to do in the poem was say that something's going on but it broke off, and I don't know what it is. So there's nothing concrete there. But then after my friend kept saying that, I started thinking, "Yeah, that's right." That sense of the horizon breaking off to what's coming next is always in there too. The

horizon itself is one huge dash that breaks off before what's next, what's to come.

Q. What were the formative things that shaped the way you think about the line or about space in your poems?

A. In the sixties, people were starting to pay attention to concrete poetry. I was fascinated with that kind of art, the high modernism kind of thing. Also with the architecture and that Parisian-Viennese Bauhaus kind of stuff. Even though I didn't know the history or where it was coming from until later, I really liked the order that was going on there. I could see how modernism had cleaned things up so nicely. People hate modernism nowadays, but I don't see it as only damaging and impersonal. I like many of its objects a lot. And the way that concrete poetry was dealing with the word, not only what the word was saying, but sometimes just the word itself, cleaning it up so that you were almost readied to read the word larger, or notice that there's a spatial thing to the word. I love to bring Reinhard Döhl's "Apfel" into class when I'm teaching. It's a two-word poem, you know—"apple (apfel) . . . apple . . . apple . . . worm (wurm)"—but it's beautifully laid out for you, it's spatialized, it uses the page, it uses time, all this. I love that. I like buildings that you can read/walk through and have things happen when you're going through them. When they opened the new wing of the Art Institute on Michigan Avenue, I was going down the stairs and I happened to look across to a big open space in a wall where curators had situated this blue sculpture that couldn't be seen from that particular angle anywhere else in the building. All these people were behind me, but I stopped in the middle of the stairs and just looked, causing a jam.

Q. It was a combination of both perspective and space that arrested your attention?

A. Yes. Because going down the stairs on this side of the building on the way over to that other side of the building, I get this preview. It's like I am for a moment where I'm going . . . like stepping through the time barrier.

Q. The horizon, then, has a lot to do with the future for you?

A. Yes. As I said before, the horizon is a dash that breaks off here until what's to come starts to appear over it. But it's also where you start creating what's to come. You can see just the tip of it on the horizon and know it's a grain elevator or a silo. Or you can do what Dalí does and read the ground mirage as elephants with long stilt legs or see distant mountains floating above their own shadow footprint.

Q. You've talked in other interviews about the influence that other arts, like music, architecture, and painting, have had on you. Didn't you train as a painter as a young man?

A. Well, when I was a kid, Pittsburgh had this arts education program where all the schools would pick two kids out of the fourth grade, and every Saturday morning we'd go down to the Carnegie Museum of Art and sit in an auditorium and listen to a discussion of "This is what perspective is," "This is how you frame a face," you know. I was just a kid sitting in this big, huge auditorium. I got a little clipboard and some paper and some pencils, and I'd just sit there and listen to the discussion, and then everybody would file out into the museum. They'd show us different things or just let us roam around. Before noon we'd all finish our drawings or whatever the assignment was, turn it in, and go home. And the next week, a handful of the best drawings would be called up to be reproduced on stage while Miss Lee or Dr. Fitzgerald gave the week's lecture. There would be these kids up there with pastels sort of redoing their drawings from last week.

Q. Did you get your drawing up there?

A. I was up there. The thing was, our Saturdays were in the museum. We were having fun. I was having fun going off to look at the dinosaurs and strange stuff, but I was seeing a lot, really seeing a lot. So I thought that what I wanted to do was to be a painter. But painters didn't have any money or good lives. . . . My father could draw, and he's got a half brother who actually

was a commercial artist, but he lived off in New York, and I never got to really talk to him. But because he was doing commercial art, everybody used to tell me, "You want to do commercial art, you have to do commercial art." I didn't want to do commercial art. I wanted to do weird stuff. I was drawn by the idea that artists got to try a lot of new stuff.

Q. Did those formative experiences with visual art influence your early sense of poetics?

A. Well, yes. In my poetry often I'm painting, I'm actually painting or drawing or taking a verbal photograph. And in some of those poems, I'm moving through the drawing; it's not as though I present the whole thing right away, but I walk readers through the layers of the drawing. The poem "Deep Time" [from *To See the Earth*] is one example. Let me read through it.

Where trees are a sky
whose spider web
radio antennas'
search receives
the rhythmic static
of cicadas,

a song arrives
that died leaving
seventeen years ago.

We have "trees" and "sky" and "spider web," and then all of a sudden "spider web" turns into the "radio antennas" in a "green" sky. Then the poem refocuses on what's being received. The "radio antennas" don't receive any kind of light but are picking up background static, "the rhythmic static / of cicadas" as the big bang echo. It isn't until the second stanza that we see that what I've been drawing is not trees, you see, but this space observatory. After the "song arrives / that died leaving / seventeen years ago," I go backwards into the picture again, encountering "Deep / cumulus leaves," which is the deep sky, the deep trees' sky. At this point I'm repainting the whole first stanza over again from a different perspective:

Deep
cumulus leaves —
whose cloud and Milky Way
are green,
and heard but unseen
insect star births
have yet to reach us from —

And then from here I dip down to the kid who sits in the backyard and looks at the trees and sees the refractions of the sunlight. So both of those visions are what "refract the sun," and that refraction leads us into the ending of the poem:

refract the sun
-light filtered
through to brilliant spiked
explosions of nova
in this hiss

that one
day our own
insect sun will make
in deep time into deepsong.

Seventeen-year "big bang" turns into the late seventeen-year song of the cicada, which then turns into this question, "OK, so what song are *we* making?" That's what I want you to get to by the end. I really didn't want to use "deep time into deepsong," simply because it's that dark Lorca reference, but that is what I meant. I meant it to be scary, because we don't know what songs all this is making.

That question about what song we're making repeats in another couple of poems, "Facing up to / the night sky" and the poem on the next page, "We see the farther away," where I look at astronomical distance "as the deeper / into time: backwards up to here how far come." But I see the future as "time's direction farther equal this far," and it is the present that "goes through town its whistle is this minute," and the present is a moment like getting into and out of a sweater, which can blind you like a bag over your head and make you lose your balance

and fall. The sections kind of repeat themselves in different ways. This poem, "The World, Then," is an elaboration on what the spiderweb is picking up. The seventeen-year big bang moment from "Deep Time" is refigured as a present that is either centered between a distant past and a possible equally long future or is the end of our big human bang, our early onset deepsong.

Q. Sections in your books do often seem to interweave and recall each other. You also mentioned in another interview that at one point you had three books going at once?

A. The Chicago three [*City Eclogue*, *The New Wing of the Labyrinth*, *To See the Earth Before the End of the World*]. They started out as one book, and then I got sick, and when I came out of the hospital, I was off on sick leave for six months. Then when I resumed writing the first book and had gotten some new material, 9/11 happened and that started new stuff. So I was working on different things, overlapping. . . . Since I've been here, I've been trying to tell students and myself to write in an investigative way. They always try to write something pretty; they're trying to write a "poem" poem. And I say, "Don't do that. Instead, really look at things; if something scares you, then look at it. If something hits you as pretty, don't just take the pretty, figure out how it does that to you, then what's way behind all that, too." So I started trying to get two books together, and what came out first was *City Eclogue*. That's essentially the stuff that came after 9/11. But I also had all of the earlier stuff, and when I went back to that work, I began thinking about how terrifying things can be and started to deal with what was going through my head being sick.

Q. This was actually after the illness, but you were processing?

A. I had never written about it either. I guess being here and finishing up *City Eclogue* made that possible. It's sort of like skimming *City Eclogue* off the top left the other stuff that was underneath. *City Eclogue* contained a calmer kind of poem, for the most part. A lot of *The New Wing of the Labyrinth* material had been

floating around, but it didn't fit anywhere. And then when I cleared off *City Eclogue,* there it was. I kept trying to write this new book from the series that was left, but I couldn't write it until I finished extracting *The New Wing of the Labyrinth*. They were just fighting—I was fighting like crazy.

Q. What about the sections within your books? Do you compose in series?

A. That comes from the second book, *Etai-Eken*, where I was doing rituals. In that book, the beginning and the ending of each of those sections is exactly the same poem; it's just been manipulated, given different figures and lineation. That's where I got that idea about repeating things.

Q. You sometimes work through an idea, image, or experience in multiple sections in a single poem, sometimes in a series or sequence of a poem, but sometimes across a volume.

A. Just as I try to get many lines of thought or voices into the poem with a polyphonic syntax, a multiple or transforming image carried through the series opens the compiling layers and shows different sides. An image can add its own dramatic line within the sequences, too. *Etai-Eken* is where I worked out the idea of the song cycle, so *To See the Earth Before the End of the World* is like four song cycles.

Q. Did you have the song cycles in place and then fill them in with poems, or did you have a bunch of poems that you decided belonged to different cycles, so that the cycles took shape around the poems?

A. The poems invent the cycle. I don't have them planned out. I can sort of feel the poems talking back and forth to each other. This bunch of folks over here have this statement to make, and then on the other side is this other bunch of folks. So they move back and forth. What I do every now and then is pull together all the notes I'm working on, like it's a quarterly report, which lets me go back to see the overall clusters or something that I'm

interested in. So right now, for instance, there are maybe forty-five poems that I'm working on.

Q. In relation to each other in some way?

A. Yes, they're talking back and forth to each other. Like the second section of *To See the Earth* has a big galaxy kind of thing going on with the train wheel and the Milky Way, the ouroborus and the top-hat cymbal of a drum set. Whereas the opening section, with the poem about seeing through the trees, is paying attention to *here*, the second section turns the microscope into a telescope directed upwards to the other end of that core, looking up this big bore into the ends and beginnings and talking about those galaxies up there. At one end of that bore, there's someone looking, and that scene is in the first section. And the little kid there is me. I did that: I sat in my grandmother's yard, and there were these big elm trees down at the end of the block; the sun was always coming through them refracted. And I wanted to know "What was that sound?" and they said it was cicadas. I asked, "How do they do that?" and they said, "Well, they rub themselves." I took my rocking chair out and sat there and waited to see it happen, looked really carefully. I didn't know what I was looking for; I was just a kid sitting there thinking, "The sound comes from there, maybe I'll see what makes it."

Q. This seems like a core part of your personality, in that I've noticed your direct personal experience often appears to take primacy over book learning or other kinds of knowledge. You mentioned in one interview that you started to read anthropology only *after* you had a series of meaningful personal experiences that opened up texts that might previously have felt closed to you. I'm thinking specifically about the poem "Lunar Eclipse," from your newest book, in which you write, "We have to feel the spatial in what we see / to see clearly the eye measure in hands and feet; / as when we kiss, / distance disappears, our eyes close, / and we see bodily," the suggestion being that we need to use our full sensorium to "see / ourselves whole." What are the values at play for you in this emphasis on direct sensual experience?

A. I'm not exactly sure where that comes from, but I've always wanted to do that. I've just always wanted to see for myself, and I think that's what the poems are. With that poem, "Lunar Eclipse," I had seen a lunar eclipse before, but there was one time in New Jersey, maybe ten, fifteen years ago, when I was showing it to somebody and realized the moon really does look like a marble—it looks three-dimensional. And I was trying to say that when you're looking at it as the moon—people sort of draw a little circle without the depth of the thing—you don't really realize, "Oh, it's not a geometrical figure; it's material and it could fall on me!"

Q. It exists in space as a body with mass, which responds to gravity.

A. It exists in the same space as us; it's not just drawn on the blackboard there.

Q. Your emphasizing this awareness of space reminds me a bit of the eighth poem in the "Topoi" sequence, where you write:

> It is
> position in relation
> more to other yet-positions more
> one
> that is everywhere nowhere until pointed
> out: we have no point until we have to
> see say where how far
> another is to or from us
> continuously
> renewed: Call me.

I'm really taken by this idea of relationality, the sense that we have an ethical relationship to other objects that exist in a shared space. Could you talk about the ways that you see *seeing* and *saying* as ethical actions in the world?

A. That's a hard question. Like I was saying earlier, the other night I woke up, and I saw these streaks in the sky, these dashes in the sky. I'll see things not knowing what to feel about them

or what to say about them. I just know that there was a feeling there. And I'll take that down, without knowing what it's saying or what I'm going to do with it—I'll just take that down.

Q. So it's recording the sensation on the first level?

A. Yes. You know, when you asked that question, the first thing that came to mind was, how do I say *responsibility*? I get this feeling that somebody should say something, or I get this feeling that I need to show this to somebody, but [at the time] I don't know how to say that. Usually what I'll get first is like that old use of awe-filling, more than, "Boy, that's really beautiful." I have a lot of nightmares, but on one of the mornings when I wake up really calm, the sky is this beautiful pale blue and I get this little dash in the sky, and I think, "What does that mean? Isn't that a nice jot of possibilities?" Those kinds of feelings that you get are where the poem starts, and I just want to get it down to find out what to say about it later, or try to work through what I want to say about it later. I know that I want to say something about it because it's got ahold of me.

Q. In your interview with Kathleen Crown you talked about poetry as a spiritual system and said that sometimes you feel like you're just blown away by something that comes to you, and you ask, "Well, where did that come from?" After having survived cancer, and having gotten more serious with your poems, do you have a better idea of where your poems come from?

A. No, no, no, I don't. And it's really funny you ask that because one of the things that I'm trying to do is to be really open to that kind of thing. Like there's this spiritual, "There Is a Balm in Gilead." Once when I was still at Rutgers, I was taking a shuttle from Grand Central to Port Authority, coming back from Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, as a matter of fact. And I was really weak, amazingly weak. It would be a real challenge to get from New Jersey to the Port Authority, then from the Port Authority over to Grand Central, then Grand Central up to Sloan-Kettering, and sometimes I just had to sit down and

rest. I was doing this trek one time, and a kid got on the train and told everybody, "I don't want to rip you off. All I want you to do is to relax and just listen to this," and he started playing "Balm in Gilead." It was as if everything but that moment really was washed away. It became that still. And you know how short that trip is, but that trip suspended in time, took forever, and by the time we got off, folks were pouring money into the hat. One woman got off the train and said, "Boy, you put me back in church." Even folks who didn't give him any money, you could see they had been relaxed. Something about the way the kid played "Balm in Gilead" just washed it away. OK, I want more of that. I want to write that, I want to be able to write that. So one morning, I actually started writing that I want to get back to that place, and next thing I knew, I was rewriting or recording that "Balm in Gilead" experience. I had forgotten about it.

Q. But the writing triggered it?

A. I wanted my writing to get back to that space—and amazingly, I found, "So here I am, *oh shit*." I have been thinking lately about those kinds of places where I don't have words. As you get older, those places get a little closer. When I do a reading, I always try to keep a wall between that emotional place where the poem was written and where I'm trying to voice it in public, because I'll cry. If the reading puts me back where I was when I was writing it, which is the place of tears, the place where crying begins, I'll break down right there in the reading. So I always try to keep a wall up between the writing place and the having to tell people about it place. But when I'm sitting down to write, I open that door and want to get there, to words where it's that raw. The other day, for some reason I was thinking about "Rock of my soul . . . Rock of my soul in the bosom of Abraham." I get depressions, and I woke up feeling a really bad one, so you know how you sort of rock yourself? I caught myself rocking and said, "What is that?" So I started writing "Why do I rock myself?" and the poem that came out of it at the very end says that the soul, the rock of that spiritual, is about spiritual solidity, it's not only about the nurturing rock that is an act of comfort. As moving as

that spiritual is, it still doesn't get to the point of the rocking as comfort. Because it's gone. But it's a big thing, it's the stability, it's the slaves not succumbing, it's a big, solid thing. So in the song, it's the music that has to talk about the comfort, the giving comfort. The comfort is not in the words. It's not in "rock my soul in the bosom of Abraham," or "rock of my soul in the bosom of Abraham" that's "so high you can't get over it, so low you can't get under it." That rock is the solidity of the people, but the spiritual doesn't talk about the individual; where it "talks about" the individual comfort is in the music, it's right there in the way that the sounds *Oh*! open and rock back, go up and then . . .

Q. Do you feel like there's an analogue with poetry or with what you're trying to do in this poetry cycle?

A. I would really like to, I would really like to. I guess as far back as *Etai-Eken* I knew that I wanted to get the ritual, spiritual thing right. I'm not a big Christian believer, but I do know that when I was growing up there were things that people sang, or dances that people did, that actually healed, that were good. Just regardless of whose name is attached to it, I could see that there are basic and good human things that you can make occur. Rocking yourself—not in "the bosom of Abraham," but rocking yourself—is an act of comfort no matter whose name you put on it. It's an act of comfort. So what I wanted to get clear in the poem was, yes, that solidity is nice, but the act of comfort is something else.

Q. I'm thinking about comfort in relation to *To See the Earth*, in which you do a lot with looking at things from different scales. You're confronting different scales of ends of the world, right? There's the end of the individual life, and there's perhaps the end of life as we know it because of what we're doing to the planet. In one poem, you quote from an article in *Scientific American*, someone who's able to take comfort in thinking of the big picture. Your first-person speaker there is saying, "Doesn't work for me." But how much comfort you can take in thinking beyond

you as the individual is a question that the volume revisits multiple times. Near the end, in "Chorus," the speaker is talking about how there may be an order out there, but it's just not going to come down to my scale. Could you talk about your sense of what it does to think in that large scale?

A. Remember what we were talking about with positions—that position doesn't exist until something points it out. "Chorus" is about misplacing, misforming, or missing something . . .

Q. Failing.

A. This is about that, the whole thing about discovery, fortune, and accident, all of that, but then down at the level where it actually happens, it's like "Oh, shit." It's realizing that all things are possible, but not all possibly successful. The way I interpret it is that the *Eureka!* sound you're expecting to hear all the time can be something else, too. Like there being nobody left to even hear the "Oh, shit!" instead of "Eureka!" And to call this poem "Chorus" was a really funny thing, because I was thinking about the Greek chorus. I was thinking about that big, nice communal voice, but there's also this sort of realization that even that whole of voice is liable to shit happening. You said it right: this is a dark poem.

Q. Where are we left when we've recognized that the greater order isn't going to get here? Are we left just with despair, or a kind of stoic acceptance, or are we looking to another horizon?

A. When people say stoic acceptance, I like the stoic part, but not the acceptance. I like the "stay strong" part, like kids say on the street. Stay strong and be able to see it, stay awake enough to see it. Some folks, if you told them that the asteroid is coming tomorrow, would get drunk, and other folks would pull up the lawn chair, saying "Let's see this thing." I'd definitely be one of the lawn chair folks. And I'll have a shot of bourbon.

Q. What about the environmental messages in this book, about the glaciers melting, all the things that humans are doing to the

planet? When you put your art out there, what do you hope might happen?

A. I'd like people to wake up and see, rather than prescribe what to feel or what to do with what they see. I guess it goes back to wanting to make people notice stuff, or wanting to paint the picture. I wonder about what humans are doing and think this is a screwup. But there's so much more to this planet business—the geography, the geology, the physics—there's so much more to it than we know. So what if this is what we're supposed to do? Die out, cull life. What if this is one of those things where there is a beginning in our end, where you're born so that you can die, so maybe there's something to that in this. But that doesn't mean you shut down and close your eyes or don't try to do something. I'd really like people to take *a big look*. And I don't want *a big look* to imply helpless, voyeuristic tourism, to sound like backing off, definitely not sounding like backing off from the human responsibility for things, definitely not that.

Q. In light of some of your earlier comments, I think about the biblical idea of the *nabi*, the prophet, whose mission was to describe social conditions and, if needed, speak truth to power, and how we sometimes forget that being a prophet was more about *forth*-telling than *fore*-telling. In the title of this new book, you seem to be suggesting that while we may be ending our world on a personal or a communal scale, there is an earth that exists underneath the world we've fashioned which may endure. What relationship do you see between your desire for people to see the earth beneath our human world and the prophetic tradition?

A. Well, I think it's pretty arrogant to foretell something that we can see now is pretty much bigger than telling. There have been ways of describing that which is bigger than big to us—the gods, or even chance or fortune—ways of trying to get it through to us that there is more knowledge than our human way of knowing, it's more than us. Cultures have all kinds of ways of doing that. But I'm not sure that we've got one of our own that's

in place now enough to let us really get to what an art of that understanding would be, so I'd like to push towards that sense.

Q. When you say "we" haven't got enough of this awareness, are you referring to modern Western people?

A. I think the other current traditions are fumbling around as terribly as we are. Or we're fumbling around as terribly as they are, however you want to look at that. I don't think we've got a world that's just for us. What I mean is that we need a better way of taking in all of the different views. I've told you how I love to be up high here, and being able to see horizon. But what's the comfort level, the spatial comfort level for somebody who lives in the desert? And what does the beyond-the-desert-of-the-desert experience feel like?

Q. Here's a question about these different perspectives. Rob Nixon has just published a book called *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* where he argues that many of our most pressing environmental concerns happen really slowly and aren't very spectacular. He says that when it's a kind of slow violence, it's really hard for us to depict, to make it immediate, which is something you deal with at times in your most recent book, with the melting of the glaciers, for example. How do you deal with stories that take place in geologic time, for example, stories located outside of what you call "that brief moment that we are of the earth"?

A. You're right in what you said about trying to catch the stories of glaciers melting and how slow that is, but what I was also trying to get at in *City Eclogue* was the stories of *people* melting. For example, when the organization came in and took over all of the small trucking businesses, ran all of the small truckers out, I say in *City Eclogue* that the city wouldn't even hire us to bury our dead. I'm talking about our houses torn down for redevelopers and city planners. Redevelopment comes along and not only takes your job but doesn't hire you to clean up your own destruction. That's the timescale that I wanted to point out—the melting of communities, too. And not being able to tell the stories

of it, also just not being able to even get in there and bring out your mark, or do whatever it is to recognize that that part of the city that was yours was even there. The big wipeout that you think about in terms of asteroids is actually a little sheet of paper signed by someone which does exactly the same damn thing. That's the level of slow violence I was trying to say in *City Eclogue*.

Q. The catastrophic impact of these decisions for people who live in the affected neighborhoods brings to mind environmental historian William Cronon's suggestion in "The Trouble with Wilderness," in *Uncommon Ground*, that solving our most important environmental problems will require "an environmental ethic that will tell us as much about using nature as about not using it" and that focuses on "[t]he middle ground . . . where we actually live . . . [and] make our homes." This seems relevant to what you're doing in both *City Eclogue* and this new book, where there seems to be no *outside* of nature, and where the city is as equally a part of nature as wild places. How did you form an environmental ethic that includes the urban alongside what's more traditionally thought of as "nature"?

A. I'm not sure how I developed it, but at different points when I was traveling—climbing, or crossing the country on the motorcycle—there was always this business of seeing myself as a stranger. It was more than just not being one of the motorcycle gang in South Dakota, them telling you you'd better get your ass outta there. It's more than that, but it comes down to realizing that we're all travelers.

Q. I had a student who wrote an interesting paper about *City Eclogue*. She was looking at the way in which you represented the city with language that we traditionally associate with rural and wilderness kinds of nature, and she was very appreciative of the ways in which that worked for environmental justice. But she also looked at a poem like "Urban Nature," which has the oranges being flown in, and saw an ethical problem in saying that a plane is like a bird, because a plane, in fact, has environmental impact of a kind that a bird doesn't, and our dependency

on imported food like oranges is actually an environmental problem. So she was troubled by the way that in saying, "Look, nature's here, and if I use this language of nature to describe the city, we'll see that more," we might be naturalizing things that do real damage, or downplaying discriminations that we need to make. In "The Distant Stars as Paparazzi," she was saying, this aestheticizes the process of the landfill. As I recall, the garbage trucks there are like sheep, and she said, wait a minute, this isn't wool they're dumping. I'd love to hear you talk back to this idea.

A. She didn't think that flying in the oranges was frightening?

Q. No—and I hadn't read it that way either, because I heard there the echo of Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning," and I hadn't read it as an ironic echo so much as a kind of overlay. Oh, that's so interesting!

A. It has a smart-ass opening:

> Neither New Hampshire nor Midwestern farm,
> nor the summer home in some Hamptons garden
> thing, not that nature, not a satori
> -al leisure come to terms peel by peel, not that core
> whiff of beauty as the spirit. Just a street [but this is a poor street]
> pocket park, clean of any smells, simple quiet —
> simple quiet not the same as no birds sing [the Keats]
> definitely not the dead of no birds sing:

So it's not that far yet. This is La Belle Dame Sans Merci, she just ripped this place off. And here's the dead knight:

> The bus stop posture in the interval
> of nothing coming, a not quite here running
> sound underground, sidewalk's grate vibrationless
> in open voice,

But the choral voice is not Stevens's "supple and turbulent" stanza, it's not that stanza at all; it comes to that end where we may recognize that we're going to die, and what the "dew upon their feet" [from Stevens's "Sunday Morning"] manifests is that

same finality but not that sweetly grandiose dew kind of thing that the Stevens poem is. So:

> sweet berries ripen in the street
> hawk's kiosks. The orange is being flown in
> this very moment picked of its origin.

My poem's "sweet berries ripen" surreally into sale from kiosks in the city street.

Q. Instead of Stevens's wilderness.

A. [It's not hawks] but it's the "street / hawk's kiosks." And the orange being flown in, that orange is more like a Magritte orange than anything. That's not a nice orange.

Q. I think I had really misread that poem, because I had seen it as saying, we're all immigrants here; so you're flying in an orange—OK, another immigration. I had sweetened it and missed important aspects of the tone.

A. I did want it to have that real Stevens orange sweetness in there, because that's the way we live it. But there are poisonous spiders, scorpions, and scary microbes that are also delivered in those shipments. Then the fact of the matter is, this may not be here long, it may go down. One of the things that I used to think about a lot when I was a kid is that these systems are so complicated. I mean, take airplanes. What if one of those schemas was lost? What if people forgot how to build a runway? I mean, you can have all that, you can build the plane, but if you don't know how to build a runway, you know, you're in trouble. All these complex things are out there all the time, and we just live in awe of them. Didn't the secret of concrete disappear from common European building practices for a couple of centuries maybe? Like people talk about what would happen if the electrical grid goes down: we'd have planes in the middle of the air that don't have any directions to go and are up there hovering at thirty-five-thousand feet, saying, "*Where's New York?*"

Q. I also see an effort in this poem to become aware of the orange's origin. It's not just magically appearing from some-

where else; it's being traced back to its point of origin, and we're made to realize that it has a source that is not here, that the orange's being here required something to bring it in.

A. And that's scary—how temporary!

Q. It is scary. There's a dependency built in, huge networks of complexity that are much larger than we are, and this poem forces us to see things that are kept hidden from view.

A. It's not as sweet as having a nice weekend in the Hamptons. When I first moved up to New York, I had no idea how big Long Island was. You drive forever on that thing. I didn't know that.

Q. And it's mostly a wealthy island, right?

A. Yes, that's the other thing, too. The distance is there for a purpose. I mean, it does its purpose. Let me get something. . . . Here's the poem that I was working on today.

Q. Will you read it to us?

A. Yes. I haven't read it out loud to anyone yet:

There is nothing concrete to grasp in
looking into the morning sky

The evidence of red-eye
flights east a plane drawn line presents

is not a wheelbarrow solid enough
dependency as day and night

carry in coming and going
You don't see the poem

saying anything you can't see in it
White dashes of contrails'

seemingly unmoving streak towards sunrise
disquiets the pale otherwise

unpunctuated blue of dawn
breaks it off Here is that silence

Q. That's wonderful. Your friend really helped you.

A. I needed the doubt. I was just looking at it, but I needed the doubt.

Q. And you got both Stevens and Williams in there.

A. That's who you're fighting with. My friend was saying, "There's no wheelbarrow in there, there's no wheelbarrow."

Q. When I see these numbered sequences and the attention you pay to the city, I think of George Oppen and "Of Being Numerous" in particular.

A. Oh, it's a favorite.

Q. Who were the writers you returned to, musicians you listened to more, or artists that grew in importance as you were working on this particular project?

A. It's funny—I was reading Oppen. *City Eclogue* got me looking back at his work. For this newest book, I didn't get a chance to, but I wanted to go back to Washington, D.C. My daughter used to live in Washington, so I knew the galleries there, and I wanted to see the big [Thomas] Cole paintings, and the Hudson River [school] things. I wanted to look at those again because I was thinking about the hugeness of those things. For paintings, [Giorgio] de Chirico; I was looking at them for that haunting in the second section, and in the last section too. "Angel of pelicans" didn't come from there, but once I'd finished "Angel of pelicans" ["Of the Earth"], I could see De Chirico doing something like that. I also remembered being in the national museum in Mexico City and seeing a couple of things there. I think I mentioned the sculpture of Quetzalcoatl in one of the poems. That's a beautiful sculpture. It's so delicate; it's got this real slight bend of the knee, like he's dancing. I'd seen pictures of some of

the pieces there, but when I went there, I was blown away by the architecture and the way the building was designed. One of the things that struck me the first time I was in Mexico happened standing in line. I'm used to seeing these Mayan drawings, but then you look at that Mayan nose in the drawing and see it there on these big murals up on the wall, and then the guy beside you—there it is, it's him! That's what I liked about that museum: what you were looking at, you were standing in line with. There was something really respectable about that. I really enjoyed that. It was that sense that the art really comes from something. Looking at the African masks, you can see faces, but I had to go there to fully discover that it's not really abstraction, it's actually real portraiture. If you go on the street, once you begin to pay attention to that kind of thing, you see art as something that's not just made up.

Q. A reflection of the people and the culture.

A. You can get on the bus and see some beautiful masks.

Q. When you came to read for the Felix series in Madison, I asked if you'd read "Sit In What City We're In," which was my favorite poem from *City Eclogue*. I feel like there's something extraordinarily hopeful about that poem, and that hope has to do with the sharing of public space. In the final section of the poem, you imagine integrating all kinds of difference together, where you write "shared / being in common in each other being / as different as / night and day still of one spin." Years later, do you still have this same broad hope?

A. I don't know. When Obama was elected, every American not in denial and apparently many Canadians close enough to know us knew Obama was going to be a lightning rod for racism like we hadn't seen since lynching. Many felt he was certain to be assassinated. Black Americans, I think, expected how he would be treated but hoped that once the usual treatment became public, public pressure would urge people toward a civil behavior the law could not mandate. The denial of authority, the refusal to live or work beside, the refusal to cooperate, the

obstructionism if not outright sabotage—every human resource department of every company in America knows the deal. I thought everyone else would see it, too. I thought the country would handle this, as it came into the open, as a way to improve our society, not only for our leader who represents us but for each other. The reverse has happened. The country's like a neighborhood recruited into silence and denial after a gang recruitment killing among its own. I thought that the people would see what's been going on in the country, and not that just certain people would see.

Q. And that's been disappointing.

A. It's been a huge disappointment. Not him, but us, the people. I thought Americans were much better than this. I just thought that we were smarter people, and I'm really sad. I really thought that there was more rational thinking going on, and more observation going on, and learning from the observation going on. I thought that it would have an effect. I mean, you can tell somebody, "This is what you're looking at," but they don't have to see it. I've heard that horses will run back into a burning barn.

Q. If you were to come back to that poem now, would you express anything differently?

A. It would be to recognize it more as a personal hope. I thought it was a much larger expression at the time. I'm still in there with my hope, but I'm not sure when I look around that there would be many people come out from behind the window curtains and behind me in that crowd.

Q. Were you active in the civil rights movement?

A. No. Well, I mean I wasn't a freedom rider or anything like that. People would have rallies and marches I'd join, but I wasn't really active. I'm not a leader or a social person. Somebody asked me about [Amiri] Baraka's arts movement once, and I said that I wasn't in the pulpit but I was on the mourner's bench, which

was very different from being in the congregation. The whole time, I really was there, but I wasn't making the speeches. I wasn't leading, but I was right on that level of what they call the mourner's bench, where the deep internal questioning goes on. I said that just offhandedly, but that's true. Because the mourner's bench is where you cry, and I think I was registering the tears, and I later wrote them, but at that time I was also registering the emotions, like the hope that's in "Sit In." I was registering that. Hope is straight from the mourner's bench.

Q. There are other moments that seem similar in emotion from this new book, like in "What the Tree Took, On the Table" or "Watching for the Ancestors," where the crossing of the Middle Passage appears in the last couple of lines. Can I ask about the poem for Luis Rodriguez, "Of the Earth"? You write there both about the "blood of The Crossing" and "water [being] the skin of the earth."

A. I took that line from Rodriguez. I've lost the poem where he said, "the water was the skin of the earth," but it was a single line in a big poem, and that one little line just really got me. I played over and over on the skin of the earth being the breath and all those things. The whole idea that water is—and this shows up in some of the other ones too—that all the people who were lost [in the Middle Passage] are traditional spirits in the water. . . . In the poem "Chorus at Ohiopyle" [from *Voices Cast Out to Talk Us In*], I'm riding on my back down the rapids, and I hear the water rush, but you know how you hear the whisper of spray, this fizz? You also hear this soft fizz, and the soft fizz in the moment of that poem was the ancestors having fun, too. There they are dissolved in the water, but they're going through the rapids, they're enjoying themselves. In that Ohiopyle poem, I'm not talking about being able to communicate with them, but sort of knowing—never making that contact, but knowing—that would they come back to this vacation I'm on, we could have fun, that they would be in the water and would be giggling as we're going over it.

Q. Do you always feel like there's a sense of history or ancestral presence in your encounters in nature? Is that part of how you see the world?

A. Yes, in the sense that we dissolve back into the matrix, back into chemicals. It's not even a matter of whether we dissolve *back into* water or dissolve *back into* chemicals—we're in it already anyhow.