

*field guide to autobiography*

MELISSA ELEFThERION

-- *the operating system c. 2018* --

the operating system  
print//document

## FIELD GUIDE TO AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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-- *field guide to autobiography* --

MELISSA ELEFThERION



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AUTO/



---

i made myself from rocks  
shells                    birds                    insects                    trees  
                                 mountain and                    ocean  
i made myself                    as you have                    carapace  
this is an autobiography of fractures  
this is a field guide to a field guide  
to identity                    that muscular slap of light



---

A human is a half-way house to a bird  
Whiplike flagella that lash back and forth  
Poking at echinodermata, appropriating invertebrate  
wraith

Is I what it means to be a self  
A stomach the length of a performer's discretion  
Granularity of its stain—a tree ring

All night the hard fatty substance applied,  
Slurps with an enlarged pink.  
What are the attempted catechisms masochisms  
The wind a push of carnivorous ghosts

*terns*

A small, feathered race

Underparts may be  
mostly insects

Distinguished from familiar face patterns

The family  
mandible                      The highly pelagic

Distinguished is the only other

A low-pitched snapping head

A w a k e in the coverts      Awake  
fur                                  under the common

Distinctive over the water

*cormorants*

unwary

green

it calls

out

hairy breasted

feathered advances

developing in  
the scolding rattle

developing under  
fluorescents

the hot

mined  
a throat exposed

a thorax

immature in  
the white

its larvae a blister reaching upward

a small soaring singly

*winged, stalked.*

Common, common, uncommon  
Distinguished from other wrens  
Distinguished from the loon

The daily biology of the yield  
Grey matter on a micro slide  
Rub hind legs against

Females of a few species produce soft noises  
Both pairs of wings sometimes small or absent  
Note the inconspicuous jerking of its long tail

The song higher  
Feeding mainly on bright buffy underparts  
Feeding mainly with bright scolding rattles

Wings stalked at base  
Washed off abdomen  
Spend an ocean attached

The carapace of haunt  
A sound-producing apparatus  
Restless, resemble, raptorial hind feet  
Archery of a heart plucked back—  
its steel reverb, Listen.

---

Phosphorescent composition  
Under-glass - prisms  
a gem stone instrument

Areas of tissue  
Shaped like a first-born child  
The nucleus in animal salts  
The splitting of the crown

A kind of gelatin  
Plastic coating a religious discourse  
Plastic coating the waterfall  
A protective film

Granular circles in circles  
Her metric index  
Ain't got a skeletal

*abalone*

aperture

a nacre of unraveling

for man-made food or jewelry

a stained rainbow

iridescent rib

a flesh shell takes with air

variable openings

feathered in the rough

a scaly convex

the shiny inside breathes

a pulsing shimmer

lust disguised as dreaming

*orthoptera*

predaceous  
gets the sexes

calling song

together  
feeders

hairlike

distance a mouth in the long-horned basement

hind legs call

immature rubbing

body party

metamorphosis simple

*the apple tree*

gnarled & picturesque

curling, their wounds

wrap around

each other for comfort

          vigilance   veined                   bark   a   soft  
gray

in the           starred   chamber

toothed edges

a flourish of rust and scabs

*the paper birch*

skin in the pale sheets

young a yellow brown tinged red

crunching through

the soft memory of tomorrow

w e  
peeled

it back

family

etched years into your oblique

we were reeds then  
SWALLOWS

sky

leaves

a milk

of galloping ghost

---

Rattle, esophagus waist. Dewlap, forelimb. Popliteal  
fossa.

Eggtooth, climb cloaca. Anterior astrogalus.

Keel, brain, keel. Hoof, patella. Auditory meatus.

Wishbone tail feather. Vibrissa.

(bile duct)

Lumbar, carapace. Incisor shell.

((buccal cavity))

Cardiac orifice.

---

acolyte elytra  
occipital petal  
fecal parietal cloacal

pull the lever peevisish scullion  
that's right keep pulling  
parhelion

*erasiometer*

Ambulatory intense discard  
as if with branches, drawn axes  
To scale erosion with wall figures held to a fire  
To become solemnly visible, gratification of the body  
A curving, a fabric, tidal device a study of  
Subatomic music the absolute brightness

---

At the junction of two substances exposed to light—  
a high altitude baby, a mouth

They have a rubbery delirium Living colorless relating  
A subdivision established for politics  
Fixed aquatic invertebrates

To grow into a tree A graceful, dry flammable leap.  
And yet we place all our messy in moments of looking

Obsolete inventories The tide of the denuded  
We were using music.

## *flycatchers*

buffy buffy wingbars

of immature

the call

common  
commons

common

a

the distinctive  
between

little or no

in spruce fir

in wood margins

impossible to identify

---

Usually lamellate, sometimes flabellate.<sup>1</sup>

Call is an ascending whistle.<sup>2</sup>

Tegulae present. Body flattened.<sup>3</sup>

Deciduous, show enough face pattern to separate.<sup>4</sup>

All killing jars should be wiped out occasionally.

Wingbeats slow enough to be counted.

---

<sup>1</sup> (superfamily scarabaeid)

<sup>2</sup> (common loon)

<sup>3</sup> (achilid planthopper)

<sup>4</sup> (bridled titmouse)

---

shell wing. chrysalis leaf sun. apex alula.  
head blade corona.  
whorl, great coverts. mesothorax. cuticle gas.  
spires primaries. wing. petiole. radioactive  
suture mirror. segment midrib.  
\_\_\_\_\_ labrum.  
\_\_\_\_\_ antenna sheath. photosphere.  
siphonal tertial. cremaster stipule. core.

*digitized domain*

This skeleton of tiny needles This object in an electrical field  
Persons or the general plastic  
The process of photographing digital objects

A film of extravascular Originating in igneous an appendage  
Shaped by worry stones Rebellion marked with liner

Any of several shrub species point to their horns  
Lend plasma to the earliest silicate

The conversion of gratuitous benefit  
Another term includes relatives

See them water the girl watching sparks

*bioluminadolescence*

When light sticks inside bodies  
The viscous imaginary  
A protective sheath, a plastic coating, a waterfall

Orbital schema – an awkward grinding  
Grey over buoyant grey, a rainbow scrape

When light sticks inside bodies  
Bug jelly maths  
Porifera make new hydras  
Give Zeus the finger

A parthenogenetic hum  
Stuns the ocean floor

Leaves shoot duodenal refuse  
A vein of cellular debris  
But, to chop it—  
A clutch of pearls through the stained glass  
A pawing at the branches

When light is a family of bones  
When light deviates

*the specimen*

Mesothorax—Large energy heart field  
At the attachment Swollen segments  
A yellow sun, a black sun Between the wings yellow

The length of imago Dorsal longitude  
Denticulated at basal half  
A nymph's inconvenience A collection of pet insects  
Specimen—Generally speaking, among the tentacles

Fossilized species The contents are granular  
Changes of skin occur The larvae, the pupae, lacunae  
Thoracic atmosphere  
The insect is exhausted Weak and feeble light, wings glissant

*catalpa*

tiny glands

of heart leaf

the inside of a blossom  
radial star a first from the bottom a fist  
flowers a radiolaria a burst a bloom

lilac

white & a yellow

the thing

that used  
to hit me

heavy frost

makes for thicker bark

the tree her bruised shadow made

a slightly hairy green

*elytra meat*

That little girl already a slut to you on roller-skates.  
Elytra truncate and not much taller than wide.

Hand job in the schoolyard.  
Arista rises at base of 3rd antennal segment.

Asphalt peeled off her like skin.  
Occurs at fresh sap flows on trees.

Good attendance reward.  
Larvae can jump.

Bra straps showing.  
Does not reach tegula.

Meat on the shelf.  
Mouthparts chewing

*katydid*

*in high pitched lisps or ticks*

sings only at night

dorsal

arboreal

in the trees

of the trees

fine hairs

horizontal

slender

antennae

katy-did

katy-didn't



/810



*snails*

to breathe is to go  
inside

eye of my tentacle

no shells          no shells at all

---

Organism disreputable open sloth  
a circular prison arranged with scales  
waste matter separated, a hard pale green  
hot, hot dust denoting glands  
fatty larvae relating at the funeral.

Comestible a volatile fluid Southern  
the large bulbs of which a formal  
authorization showy red or yellow  
flowers a star after the first  
it came to me in flesh

---

In the slick of the gradual lack  
The more viscous, the barrier.  
A river, and mingled with her  
A fertile containing.  
More specifically, shape derived.  
Parallel the faces of familiar  
A smokeless explosive,  
A lively secretion dance.

O Larvae, I never meant you harm.

*sea cucumber*

spines buried deep  
tentacles grown over and again  
a skeleton mouth  
to grab the crumbs  
to be inside a body  
there is a fur

---

Spinneret, lining up the beams,  
“Get outta here, I already own this leaf”  
The energy gained,  
A lot of work before collisions,  
Dragging coccygeal around the dirt lot,  
Balloons tied to a shopping cart,  
Birds crossing intersections.

*wrens*

loud bubbling song

laid in the  
cavities

common

common

uncommon

familiar migrant  
an identity insect

it may even sing  
lack of a dark

unmusical trills

a nest a familiar  
a clear-eyed rattle

bright buffy underparts    a bell

low-pitched in the sedge

*boobys*

immature

a rare visitor

a swoop and tucks

family a  
long line  
of robbers  
g e n t l e  
gliders

*all the flight feathers*

dark underparts

*all warm oceans*



*sexually active [first speculum]*

Working girls get the butter  
An inedible sea wall  
Echolocates the rasp  
Of insect ecology  
A clasp of the spiny-legged  
Mouths multitask  
The ultrasound  
A beam of genital strategies

---

a mollusk heliopause

in cerebral tentacle

pore bubble interstellar

winking her copulatory  
bursa

she bow pedal particles

statocyst  
gone with eyes

no gills

in a bump her gas magnet a sheath

amygdala basal

tail  
numb with  
hydrogen  
shock

accelerated

ganglion

genital  
pleural

stomach the galaxy shell between

*scarab beetles (coleoptera)*

heavy-bodied oval

laid egg

digs a  
hole

*margins of the elytra*

head in a ball  
hind legs close together

*damage done by larvae or adults*

*dilated and spiny*

feeds on foliage fruits flowers

feeds under the bark in juices

*my aborted fetus visits  
coney island circus sideshow*

*The eggs are laid in the galleries*  
We wander, plucking faces from white walls  
The yolk demands its attachment  
The yolk broadcasts the feed

A nest of small beaks, a nest of plumes  
In circles, circles  
Wingless, a shiny cadence  
Tufted f-stop heart  
Lets light in, brave

The fight is feathery distance but we claw its shimmer of idea  
A hologram that pops up strata with puffed chins and chest  
The shooting gallery where we fire and fire  
*A high squealing wah wah wah*

*wilderness meat a feathered breathing*

a many-skinned government. curators of the unctuous.  
the plaintive with welts. we are alarming, cheerful. any of  
various meats. sensitive to high winds.

developed in the ghost of natural light. we climb  
the glowing clock.  
wound of my habit. perpendicular to mature wins. a fur  
of families.

any of various. time the clematis. up up the young or  
eggs. someday to uncoiling.

breathing in feathers. the regularly occurring  
copulation. large, non-  
migratory. and stridulating. rubbing my  
species

an underground rhizome of chirping, abolishing

play back the offensive flattering  
play back the wilderness

any old-world tropical iconoclast      any of several  
grasses for the overthrow

the numerous, the diptera  
larvae in wounds

ossuary with a wide spout //      self-feeding in the  
sea green.

a genus changed into a spring //      a genus mundane in the  
latitudes.

*we built this self on the sea*

to curate a chapel we put our hands together and blew  
in warmer latitudes a glimpse of ocean mouth  
the sea-green beyond finger steeple

a self of units  
song a decorated structure  
any starling  
any rattle

we migrate from saltwater  
any of creeping various  
the body of the lower  
amatory, saclike  
family of egress

*annelid*

a life in circles  
inner lip of a mollusk  
annelid the conch of my  
melting shape

barnacle larvae  
comb bearer a spiny skin  
inner mandala a lotus flame  
the center is mercy

*i give birth to myself*

Historicity      changes  
in the            water    body  
The aurora      call  
The line         in pieces  
Gaps in the     static  
  
Botanica         a hermetic

neutrino

Aurora            born of glass

*subatomicbotanics*

I was a piece of quilted lace edible seaweed a small cavity  
an order of crustaceans I refused the mouth refused the  
mannered baby refused seven similar pairs of legs

Of, relating to or being subatomic witchcraft their tissues  
in high frequency Their products denote glands secrete in  
vestibules directly source electron surgery

A contradiction an algebraic hand-job medicine for the  
small areas An error with a cutaway Irregular patches of  
shavings Rubber thrown in a scalene game

A bee flown in the mouth *A single opening ringed with  
tentacles*                      Rust and salt

Horizontal and non-linear a distant cup-shaped body  
A mass of tree shells      revealed      in distant eyes

The shell overlaps tectonic shifts I hydrate the empire  
Wasted botanics long latitudes developed separately  
Taxonomic babies in dust wiped their edges to fit neatly  
Capable      poised                      on the base of a leaf

In its daughter cells a rattle acapella All delirium of  
decrees and doctrines      fallen ridiculed      phylum  
Its bark and bone in the gristle of embrace  
Rolled up like a thick cuticle

*pink milkweed*

*the leaves are opposite*

composition boiled in several changes of water

in angles

only slightly spreading  
only slightly species

plant parts  
to make sticky  
like ordinary milk

coarse  
&  
climbing

*rhodochrosite*

*brittle*

*cleavage*

veined light

beading

metastasis

a pearlescent gravity

a conch in the milky

dissolves

granule by granule

the crystals on weathering

*abalone*

the muscle of metamorphosis

a vigorous tiny shell

in rainbow margins      eaten and eaten

in the hatches

blister pearls

to my grandmother—devout, flawed      simple grit  
the button jar was opportunity

nacreous rib for whirligigs  
all iridescence greasy

*opal*

a play of rainbow glass  
amorphous, hardened deposits  
a pseudopath

collected for its fluorescence  
the cells magnify when perturbed

the gaps a play on desire  
a sky made of shards  
lustre of fragments

the flame  
higher and higher  
insoluble

*capitalism's echolocation*

i shall burn the fat thigh-bones  
larvae feed on dried materials  
the act of emancipation  
tiny flowers under a microscope

i confess  
all stages are predaceous  
deep in mammal feathers  
introduced in wet places

not an algae  
but a community of animals  
use your soft hands  
the ferocious few or no scales on wings

i have taken off my skirt  
a surgical colony  
alphabetical assembly

at night in grassy places  
a warren of robots  
ducking in the hairs of copulation

*astartes*

the softest parts the brightest

in cold species  
shell pieces      margins

combat & halt

truncation of sea starts

washed to the basins

intertidal  
the waves lap up & up

*chambered nautilus //*

i will live in the far room  
collect my becomings  
around me like a hydra  
dorsal tetra  
head of jurassics

i acquiesce to longing  
i will live in shells

mother of the nacreous  
of waiting pearls  
we are lonesome too  
send down your dragons



FIELD GRAPH {NO GUIDE}



*tellins*

*natives of all seas*

when home disintegrates  
we belong everywhere

specimen rainbow  
noble bivalve  
come find me

*paper nautilus*

where the shell escapes  
the [sea] [led]  
[sea]led off in its float  
the sea led the sea  
compartmentalized  
a flesh filled with puffs of air  
where the shell escapes  
anteroom diluvian  
mitochondria  
little deads little blooms  
my crumbling organism

*cockle*

my heart-shaped secretion  
my exposed symmetry  
a specimen

in the sediment buried alive

bilateral suction  
a siphon

i am edible in shapes

*the halides*

salt the insides  
coax the soluble  
“in each cube face”  
a desire for desire  
the melting of classification  
where the white crusts around  
where the crystals form  
colorless, a conchoidal fracture  
repeated or blue among  
the gases  
this is a group of soft bones breaking  
this is a history of capitalism.

*the sides*

This is a group  
This is a salt  
All the cube face formations  
All the little depressions in the cubes

Where go the igneous bust  
porphyry a molt of milk  
in seams  
in cuts across the rocks  
the ragged interiors of aging

We make room for yellow first  
drips of sediment

This is the species  
All the gaps are leaking  
All the little darks fill the gaps

*human > bird < starfish > plant < earthworm*

human	bird	starfish	plant	earthworm
skull	crown	_____	terminal bud	_____
eye	eye	sieve plate	_____	_____
mandible.	mandible	beak	_____ roots	mouth cavity
scapula	scapulars	ray	branch	_____
breast	breast	_____	third node	_____
wingspan	wing covert	ray	flower	stalk
heart	heart	cardiac portion	_____	lateral heart
belly	belly	digestive gland	_____	gizzard
anus	rump	anus	stem	dorsal blood vessel
feet	wing	tube feet	tap root	_____



*the cuticle begins to open*

Skins pull, the field a radiolaria.  
Integument

Fluorescent wounds a scab against the pseudopath.

Flammable mouth echolocates the rasp  
Fur species      in lust gaps

The crystals were wet skeleton music  
Heliopause a magnet for larvae.  
The lack.

*hydra in her own dust*

My own face on the chop places margin.  
Concrete starling

Brick thorax  
Scales rust the soft galaxy

Shells in coccygeal ocean starts, lips  
Scolding subcutaneous birds cavity a rubbing of soft bones.

Scabs carapace vibrissa meat capitalism petroleum handjobs  
a tiny echinodermata.

A colony of salts Dust copulatory  
Latitudes tissues a hologram

Phylum wing fractures truncation  
Jar Harm Elytra (my hand releases)

Legs soft rainbow off glass distinctive;  
Cuticle the coated the underparts folded small plastic fire;

Magnetic or crustacean heart;  
Metamorphosis I tree.

*that time a tree grew out of my mouth & i had armor*

auriculars hinge mandible

what is the mouth of a tree          ocean

breast          a pallial line          thorax

my cambium

i am armor in the woods

piths

capito-pedal cartilage

Alula little hinge          elytra          my growth rings  
my tentacles

The orbital in umbo coxa

Undertail coverts          ligament

The heart is a phloem

a muscle scar a gut of ganglia

Radula along leaf margins

I graze the little points with my teeth

i draw a line

*in the skinned phylum*

we're all becoming animals here  
our scaly skins showing through the stained glass  
why now why slither  
the rainbow gate beneath suit sleeves  
beneath chiffon and tweed  
the rainbow plexus in our throats

once a wren ever an abalone shell  
we were whole once  
wander detritus wonder  
the furs in the soft air  
gentle browns of wood and bark  
as the furs gallop by

identify me  
call me into  
curiosity pinwheel  
i make little sparks

in recent lavas  
we were the hands holding  
tectonic/footstep  
we were the under  
and beneath

to speak in soil tongues  
to be called into ditches  
to be summoned  
venal wing  
wet black eros pitch

leaf matter and dirt cake  
the cavity I root  
small declivities of teeth  
along the rim  
how the mouth knows

we were once rose quartz  
we were agate  
smashed and smashed  
among the rock  
your smooth body a reminder





/AUTO:

*the eggs are laid in the galleries... -*

The first and last lines are quotations derived from *A field guide to insects: America North of Mexico* (Embioptera order) and *A guide to field identification: Birds of North America* (White-Fronted Goose), respectively.

/BIO:

In composing */bio*, I frequently consulted three texts that found their way into my collection through serendipitous means. All italicized language in */bio* is directly quoted from *A field guide to insects: America North of Mexico*, *Book of Trees* and *A guide to field identification: Birds of North America*.

Borror, Donald J. & White, Richard E. (Eds.) (1970). *A field guide to insects: America North of Mexico*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Mills, Lewis H. & Hawkins, Gertrude C. (Eds.) (1939). *Book of Trees*. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Robbins, Chandler S., Bruun, Bertel, & Zim, Herbert S. (Eds.) (1966). *A guide to field identification: Birds of North America*. New York, NY: Golden Press.

/FIELD GRAPH [NO GUIDE]:

In composing *field graph [no guide]*, I slept with, gleaned, & carried with me two texts that colonized my thought processes & informed my poetry:

Low, Donald. (1961). *The How and Why Wonder Book of Seashells*. New York, NY: Wonder Books.

Pough, Frederick H. (1960). *A Field Guide to Rocks and Minerals*. Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin, The Riverside Press Cambridge.

## /ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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*Menacing Hedge*: “a human is a halfway house”

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*Dusie*: “erasiromotor,” “digitized domain,” “the specimen,” “winged, stalked,” and “bioluminadolescence”

*NICE CAGE*: “catalpa”

*Open Letters Monthly*: “abalone”

*Entropy*: “the paper birch,” “the apple tree,” “capitalism’s echolocation” as “animal skirt,” “annelid,” “loons,” “chambered nautilus II,” and “sea cucumber”

*Letterbox Magazine*: “acolyte elytra,” “Rattle, esophagus waist,” and “a mollusk heliopause”

*Peacock Online Review* : “in the slick of the gradual lack” and “at the junction”

*Otoliths*: “Elytra Meat”

*DUSIE blog*: “katydid”

*Mom Egg Review*: “my aborted fetus visits Coney Island Circus Sideshow” as “mama, turn out the light”

*Flag+Void*: “the halides” and “the oxides”

*Queen Mob’s Teahouse*: “wilderness meat a feathered breathing”

*Delirious Hem*: “opal”

*Bone Bouquet*: “sexually active [first speculum]” as “clasp”

*Negative Capability*: “abalone II”

*Glass: A Journal of Poetry*: “that time a tree grew out of my mouth & i had armor”

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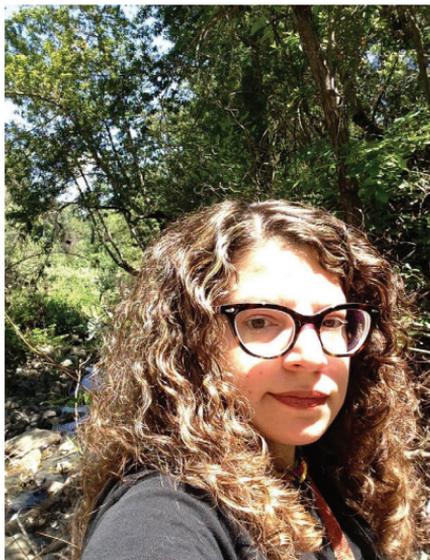
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**MELISSA ELEFATHERION** grew up in Brooklyn. A high school dropout, she went on to earn an MFA in Poetry from Mills College and an MLIS from San Jose State University. She is the author of *hum insect*, *prism maps*, *Pigtail Duty*, *the leaves the leaves*, *green glass asterisms*, *little ditch*, and several other chapbooks. Founder of the Poetry Center Chapbook Exchange, Melissa lives in Northern California where she works as a Reference & Teen Services Librarian, teaches creative writing, & curates the LOBA Reading Series at the Ukiah Library. *field guide to autobiography* is her first full-length collection.

## POETICS AND PROCESS: A CONVERSATION

*with melissa eleftherion  
& lynne desilva-johnson*

*Greetings comrade!*

*Thank you for talking to us about your process today!*

*Can you introduce yourself, in a way that you would choose?*

Hi there! I'm Melissa, a writer/librarian/visual artist person.

*Why are you a poet/writer/artist?*

So many reasons come to mind, my mental health being primary. I feel more engaged & most alive when I'm writing. It's kept me relatively sane, & isn't something I can easily give up.

*When did you decide you were a poet/writer/artist (and/or: do you feel comfortable calling yourself a poet/writer/artist, what other titles or affiliations do you prefer/feel are more accurate)?*

I was seventeen when I committed myself fully to poetry. It was the middle of the night - I was bereft & scared. My brother had come down with a mysterious illness that prompted my mother to take him to the hospital, and I was home to care for my other sibling. I turned to my notebook again for the first time in 4 years, and have been writing myself out of jams since.

Around age 28 when I began studying privately with Diane di Prima & received some validation/motivation to continue, I became more comfortable privately referring to myself as a poet, but bristled at the sound of the word "poet". There's still so much to destigmatize in mainstream culture about what a poet is and does, & it took me a long time to shift my thinking about what the word encapsulates.

*What's a "poet" (or "writer" or "artist") anyway?*

One who seeks to make things better through poetry and writing and art. One who records failures and triumphs in an attempt towards becoming. One who learns how to translate for a reader/viewer what exists in the mind and heart of both the self and the world. One who is compelled to solve problems and experience sorrows and joys through art-making.

*What do you see as your cultural and social role (in the literary / artistic / creative community and beyond)?*

As a librarian and an educator, I see myself working to destigmatize poetry & expanding consciousness about what poetry is & is capable of, particularly for youth in my small-town rural community. I incorporate poetry and poetics into as many programs as possible, and work to engage teens with different poetry practices and methods to help them develop ways to use poetry as a tool for their own self-discovery and growth. I also work as a guest poetry instructor at a local high school where I teach various experimental methods and practices to help the teens gain some insight about the expansiveness of poetry as an art form.

As an archivist, I am engaged with the idea of community curation of the continuous present - something Elise Ficarra and I explore a bit with the Poetry Center Chapbook Exchange (PCCE [www.poetrychapbooks.omeka.net](http://www.poetrychapbooks.omeka.net)) The PCCE is a community-curated archive I created and developed for poets to convene, correspond, and collaborate via the currency of the poetry community: chapbooks. In archives, there's this question of who gets to decide what gets saved? Who are the few elite, privileged voices that determine what constitutes our cultural memory and heritage? With the PCCE, one of my goals was to create a participatory archives as a means for poets to both generate work & build towards this cultural memory document together.

*Talk about the process or instinct to move these poems (or your work in general) as independent entities into a body of work. How and why did this happen? Have you had this intention for a while? What encouraged and/or confounded this (or a book, in general) coming together? Was it a struggle?*

It was a series of accretions and deletions over a span of eight years. The earliest poems were written while I was finishing my degree at Mills, & became part of my MFA thesis in 2007. Participating in NaPoWriMo in April 2014 allowed me to carve out a space to write many of the poems that would later wind up in *field guide to autobiography*.

That April, I had written enough that I could begin to see a series emerge and possibly a book. With *field guide*, once I started seeing where things were going, I began to see connections forming between and among the different genera I was reading about in the various field guides I consulted as source texts. I noticed where the characteristics began to coalesce and formed a semblance of self. That was one of the initial writing processes for the book. I like to let the work tell me where it is going, and try to really tune in and absorb what the poem is about and what it's becoming.

*Did you envision this collection as a collection or understand your process as writing or making specifically around a theme while the poems themselves were being written / the work was being made? How or how not?*

Yes, though the theme shifted over time. Using field guides as source texts helped me determine the focus for this collection.

*What formal structures or other constrictive practices (if any) do you use in the creation of your work? Have certain teachers or instructive environments, or readings/writings/work of other creative people informed the way you work/write?*

There are a myriad of formal structures I've employed in my work - erasures, sonnets, chance operations using the *I Ching*, tarot, cut-ups, numerical arrangements. For many years, I've incorporated found language from my autobiographical dictionaries, a series of source texts I've compiled of words new to me discovered through reading.

Studying with Diane di Prima & working as a student-teacher through Poetry for the People helped shape some of my early work which was raw & confessional. Both Juliana Spahr & Will Alexander

(along with their work) have had a profound impact on my writing. I've also been influenced by Stephen Ratcliffe's work & his attempts to convey the changes experienced by a landscape over time.

*Speaking of monikers, what does your title represent? How was it generated? Talk about the way you titled the book, and how your process of naming (individual pieces, sections, etc) influences you and/or colors your work specifically.*

The title, *field guide to autobiography*, grew out of the practice I began in 2014 of using field guides as source texts. Previously, it was titled *autobiotionary*, then *auto/bio*, and finally its current title. *Autobiotionary* was titled for the practice of incorporating found language from the definitions in my autobiographical dictionaries, and questioned the problem of constructing identity around knowledge or ignorance.

With *field guide*, I wanted to explore the inter-relatedness of various species and in so doing, tell a story about the larger body of which they are fragments. Autobiographies are rife with fractures and missing pieces - fragments as form, then. How to describe, comprise, define a life? How does a person begin to enumerate the many fragments & fractals & do they represent a wholeness? The title began as a means of telling the story of various species, and became a field guide to understanding the self through this lens.

*What does this particular work represent to you  
...as indicative of your method/creative practice?  
...as indicative of your history?  
...as indicative of your mission/intentions/hopes/plans?*

I've had this intuition that we're all fragments of one magnificent, multi-cellular organism and that was the impetus for this book, which I started writing back in 2007 when I was pregnant with my son. While the book has changed dramatically since then, writing into this spatial continuum has compelled me to continue.

Its fulcrum is the teen girls' search for identity in other bodies such as the katydid, the chambered nautilus, & trees. As a teen, I sought refuge in the woods - trees became home to my unraveling &

working through various traumas. I'm also writing from a space of being displaced from one's body, from disassociation as after-effect of sexual abuse and assault. field guide is an attempt at reckoning through the lens of various animals & minerals including katydid, wrens, abalone shells, and apple trees.

*What does this book DO (as much as what it says or contains)?*

I like to think there's a musicality inherent in the sounding of these organisms throughout the book, and over time they form a song.

*What would be the best possible outcome for this book? What might it do in the world, and how will its presence as an object facilitate your creative role in your community and beyond? What are your hopes for this book, and for your practice?*

The best possible outcome for this book is that people will read it, and possibly shift their thinking about the need for dominance in ecology to a non-hierarchical, participatory relationship. So yeah, basically - I want to dismantle the patriarchy. In writing field guide, I became more aware of the insidious depths of patriarchal culture & how our many ecosystems are suffused with it.

The presence of this book as an object will facilitate more opportunities to teach experimental writing workshops based on the procedures I used to write it. My hopes are for this book to gain many readers, and to find the stamina & energy to return to working on my latest project, little ditch, a book about being sexualized as a young, non-binary person growing up in rape culture.

*Let's talk a little bit about the role of poetics and creative community in social activism, in particular in what I call "Civil Rights 2.0," which has remained immediately present all around us in the time leading up to this series' publication. I'd be curious to hear some thoughts on the challenges we face in speaking and publishing across lines of race, age, privilege, social/cultural background, and sexuality within the community, vs. the dangers of remaining and producing in isolated "silos."*

This is a critical time for poetics and creative communities to share

resources and support one another against these myriad, heinous assaults on our human rights. There is such strength and resilience and courage in using art to overcome adversity, to educate, to connect, to galvanize, to transform, to activate people to see beyond & keep fighting & caring for themselves and one another. As poets, we have the capacity for shaping language to create new paradigms where racial & cultural differences are celebrated, consent is actively taught to all genders, privilege is acknowledged, and intergenerational communities live among one another symbiotically. Art & language can mobilize people to reshape not only our understanding of ourselves, but also transform our impact as a species.

## WHY PRINT/DOCUMENT?

*The Operating System uses the language “print document” to differentiate from the book-object as part of our mission to distinguish the act of documentation-in-book-FORM from the act of publishing as a backwards-facing replication of the book’s agentive \*role\* as it may have appeared the last several centuries of its history. Ultimately, I approach the book as TECHNOLOGY: one of a variety of printed documents (in this case, bound) that humans have invented and in turn used to archive and disseminate ideas, beliefs, stories, and other evidence of production.*

*Ownership and use of printing presses and access to (or restriction of printed materials) has long been a site of struggle, related in many ways to revolutionary activity and the fight for civil rights and free speech all over the world. While (in many countries) the contemporary quotidian landscape has indeed drastically shifted in its access to platforms for sharing information and in the widespread ability to “publish” digitally, even with extremely limited resources, the importance of publication on physical media has not diminished. In fact, this may be the most critical time in recent history for activist groups, artists, and others to insist upon learning, establishing, and encouraging personal and community documentation practices. Hear me out.*

*With The OS’s print endeavors I wanted to open up a conversation about this: the ultimately radical, transgressive act of creating PRINT /DOCUMENTATION in the digital age. It’s a question of the archive, and of history: who gets to tell the story, and what evidence of our life, our behaviors, our experiences are we leaving behind? We can know little to nothing about the future into which we’re leaving an unprecedentedly digital document trail — but we can be assured that publications, government agencies, museums, schools, and other institutional powers that be will continue to leave BOTH a digital and print version of their production for the official record. Will we?*

*As a (rogue) anthropologist and long time academic, I can easily pull up many accounts about how lives, behaviors, experiences — how THE STORY of a time or place — was pieced together using the deep study of correspondence, notebooks, and other physical documents which are no longer the norm in many lives and practices. As we move our creative behaviors towards digital note taking, and even audio and video, what can we predict about future technology that is in any way assuring that our stories will be accurately told – or told at all? How will we leave these things for the record?*

*In these documents we say:*

*WE WERE HERE, WE EXISTED, WE HAVE A DIFFERENT STORY*

*- Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, Founder/Managing Editor,  
THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2017*

## /TITLES IN THE OS PRINT/DOCUMENT SERIES

Śnienie / Dreaming - Marta Zelwan/Krystyna Sakowicz, (Polish-English/dual-language)  
trans. Victoria Miluch [2019]

Alparegho: Pareil-À-Rien / Alparegho, Like Nothing Else - Hélène Sanguinetti  
(French-English/dual-language), trans. Ann Cefola [2019]

High Tide Of The Eyes - Bijan Elahi (Farsi-English/dual-language)  
trans. Rebecca Ruth Gould and Kayvan Tahmasebian [2019]

An Absence So Great and Spontaneous It Is Evidence of Light - Anne Gorrick [2018]

The Book of Everyday Instruction - Chloe Bass [2018]

Executive Orders Vol. II - a collaboration with the Organism for Poetic Research [2018]

One More Revolution - Andrea Mazzariello [2018]

The Suitcase Tree - Filip Marinovich [2018]

Chlorosis - Michael Flatt and Derrick Mund [2018]

Susurros a Mi Padre - Erick Sáenz [2018]

Sharing Plastic - Blake Nemeč [2018]

The Book of Sounds - Mehdi Navid (Farsi dual language, trans. Tina Rahimi) [2018]

In Corpore Sano : Creative Practice and the Challenged Body [Anthology, 2018];

Lynne DeSilva-Johnson and Jay Besemer, co-editors

Abandoners - Lesley Ann Wheeler [2018]

Jazzercise is a Language - Gabriel Ojeda-Sague [2018]

Return Trip / Viaje Al Regreso - Israel Dominguez; (Spanish-English dual language)  
trans. Margaret Randall [2018]

Born Again - Ivy Johnson [2018]

Attendance - Rocío Carlos and Rachel McLeod Kaminer [2018]

Singing for Nothing - Wally Swist [2018]

The Ways of the Monster - Jay Besemer [2018]

Walking Away From Explosions in Slow Motion - Gregory Crosby [2018]

The Unspoken - Bob Holman [Bowery Books imprint - 2018]

Field Guide to Autobiography - Melissa Eleftherion [2018]

Kawsay: The Flame of the Jungle - María Vázquez Valdez (Spanish-English dual language)  
trans. Margaret Randall [2018]

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2018 : Greater Grave - Jacq Greyja; Needles of Itching Feathers -  
Jared Schlickling; Want-Catcher - Adra Raine; We, The Monstrous - Mark DuCharme

Lost City Hydrothermal Field - Peter Milne Greiner [2017]

An Exercise in Necromancy - Patrick Roche [Bowery Poetry Imprint, 2017]

Love, Robot - Margaret Rhee[2017]

La Comandante Maya - Rita Valdivia (dual language, trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]

The Furies - William Considine [2017]

Nothing Is Wasted - Shabnam Piryaee [2017]

Mary of the Seas - Joanna C. Valente [2017]

Secret-Telling Bones - Jessica Tyner Mehta [2017]

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2017 : INCANTATIONS

*featuring original cover art by Barbara Byers*

- sp. - Susan Charkes; Radio Poems - Jeffrey Cyphers Wright; Fixing a Witch/Hexing  
the Stitch - Jacklyn Janeksela; cosmos a personal voyage by carl sagan ann druyan  
steven sotor and me - Connie Mae Oliver  
Flower World Variations, Expanded Edition/Reissue - Jerome  
Rothenberg and Harold Cohen [2017]  
What the Werewolf Told Them / Lo Que Les Dijo El Licántropo -  
Chely Lima (Spanish-English dual language) trans. Margaret Randall [2017]  
The Color She Gave Gravity - Stephanie Heit [2017]  
The Science of Things Familiar - Johnny Damm [Graphic Hybrid, 2017]  
agon - Judith Goldman [2017]  
To Have Been There Then / Estar Allí Entonces - Gregory Randall  
(trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]

- Instructions Within - Ashraf Fayadh [2016] Arabic-English dual language edition;  
Mona Kareem, Mona Zaki, and Jonathan Wright, translators  
Let it Die Hungry - Caitis Meissner [2016]

- A GUN SHOW - Adam Sliwinski and Lynne DeSilva-Johnson;  
Sô Percussion in Performance with Ain Gordon and Emily Johnson [2016]  
Everybody's Automat [2016] - Mark Gurarie

How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization [2016] - Sparrow

- CHAPBOOK SERIES 2016: OF SOUND MIND *\*featuring the quilt drawings of*  
*Daphne Taylor*: Improper Maps - Alex Crowley; While Listening - Alaina Ferris;  
Chords - Peter Longofono; Any Seam or Needlework - Stanford Cheung

- TEN FOUR - Poems, Translations, Variations [2015]- Jerome Rothenberg, Ariel  
Resnikoff, Mikhl Likht

MARILYN [2015] - Amanda Ngoho Reavey

- CHAPBOOK SERIES 2015: OF SYSTEMS OF *\*featuring original cover art by Emma*  
*Steinkraus*: Cyclorama - Davy Knittle; The Sensitive Boy Slumber Party Manifesto -

Joseph Cuillier; Neptune Court - Anton Yakovlev; Schema - Anurak Saelow  
SAY/MIRROR [2015; 2nd edition 2016] - JP HOWARD

Moons Of Jupiter/Tales From The Schminke Tub [plays, 2014] - Steve Danziger

- CHAPBOOK SERIES 2014: BY HAND: Pull, A Ballad - Maryam Parhizkar; Can You  
See that Sound - Jeff Musillo; Executive Producer Chris Carter - Peter Milne Greiner;  
Spooky Action at a Distance - Gregory Crosby;

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2013: WOODBLOCK

*\*featuring original prints from Kevin William Reed*

- Strange Coherence - Bill Considine; The Sword of Things - Tony Hoffman;  
Talk About Man Proof - Lancelot Runge / John Kropa; An Admission as a Warning  
Against the Value of Our Conclusions - Alexis Quinlan

# DOC U MENT

/däkyəmənt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

*noun* - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record  
*verb* - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form  
*synonyms* - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[Middle English, *precept*, from Old French, from Latin *documentum*, *example, proof*, from *docere*, to teach; see *dek-* in Indo-European roots.]

## Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse, we also believe that *now more than ever*  
***we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means,***  
fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement.

Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country  
we can begin to see our community beyond constraints,  
in the place where intention meets  
resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will.

When we document we assert.

We print to make real, to reify our being there.

When we do so with mindful intention to address our process,  
to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space,  
to respect and acknowledge the strength of the page we now hold physical,  
a thing in our hand... we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy:  
*we had the power all along, my dears.*

## THE PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

*is a project of*

the trouble with bartleby

*in collaboration with*

the operating system



