In Singing, He Composed a Song

by

Jeremy Stewart

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ABSTRACT

_In Singing, He Composed a Song_ is a rhizomatic assemblage of texts, voices, and fragments. It uses a collage of prose, lined poetry, photography, a transcribed interview, an epistle, psychiatric records, literary theory fragments, and more to narrate the story of John Stevenson’s altercation with the RCMP and subsequent committal to the Psychiatric ward at the Prince George Regional Hospital.

The materials that make up the text are arranged in a rhizomatic network theorized as an assemblage. The rhizome is the polyvalent figure strategically adopted by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their _A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia_. It destabilizes unified, hierarchical relationships and structures. _In Singing_ is an assemblage of enunciations which are fictional and provisional, and whose relationships are multiple and indeterminate. The assemblage enacts the palimpsestic, vertiginous layering of stories that informs John’s precise difficulty with providing what his psychologist calls “a fair account of himself.”
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Figure 1. View of Prince George Regional Hospital Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit from inside
streets are dry so at last I can
walk anywhere in this town, a full pack of smokes

I find winking moon visions inaccessible by daylight
thinking—zombie power, hands in pockets, mind turning over

some daydream, nothing but this sleepwalking prayer
& the search for friends.

Anguished at the thought I’ve hurt a girl’s feelings, etc.
Shoes wearing through. Graffiti.

Lights, fog, cold, river sound, train thunder, dark.
Her warm house opening its doors to me, thank you, thank you.

Night movies. Walking in trees, parks, rivers.
Flying above the Fraser to the lunar ghost shed.

She & I are going downtown. We are neon
blue. A scream in the ear from a passing car.

We walk, argue, contemplate suicide
a leap into the Fraser / a recurring dream

calm, co-operative
agrees he has an impulse control / anger management problem

their graves are under us now. Their graves are under the river
this part of the river is stone dead. Concrete broken on its banks.

In singing, he composed a song
dead radio noise in the voicebox

they shamed me & showed me the door
& tried to put my head through the window. I did it

that morning at the school
that morning at the school

2 Not really sure how to assemble this story. If I were telling it out loud, I would begin

with what happened that morning at the school.
Figure 2. John in the back parking lot of Prince George Senior Secondary School
He was initially quite confrontational and presented with a sense of bravado and a challenging style. He is extremely articulate and seems to rely on his verbal skills to try and get himself out of difficult situations.

James later told me that he saw the vice-principal’s eye, the iris had orange dripping somehow into the blue. I believe him.

It was that cold when there is no snow or wind but hard, inert frost & a layer of ice covers the town. Pavement is slippery.

School lights dim except in narrow halls, where fluorescents alternate with black where lights have failed for some time.

Blaze a spliff, the one I bought that morning at the school, outside the teachers’ lounge during the fire drill.

Did I think I saw those curtains swish?

Giving him three dollars, to still owe him two which I didn’t know but guessed I would not pay (swearing up & down I would)

blue doors opening in the self

his brown hand with the black coat cuff taking my money, handing me a sad, skinny joint.

In grade one I punched him in the nose. First, he punched me & made my nose bleed—can’t remember at all why—so I punched him made him bleed. Then we put our arms around each other’s shoulders, smiling, & walked around like that, laughing.

His shiny green jacket with the gold stripes & now a drop of my blood.

Two dollars in overcast courtyard students still spilling past.

We never talked until high school. Our fists handed off the trade, money for dope, & headed back to different alternate classes.
When they asked, I turned you in without a blink

there’s a lesson in this for you: don’t sell joints on credit, not even to white kids (especially not to white kids)

reading his book for symptoms, you can try to remember what it was really like to be there but it disappeared before it even happened the first time (that was not the first

glasses off hit in the head by mystery teens with rock at age seven while playing in field

philosophical observations that appear on a swingset & all the friends the pretty girls the longhairs & their ice cream in the park & their train rides in a circle & it’s cool

3 “don’t fuck with me! Don’t you fuck with me! Don’t try to fuck with me!” & he held me by my long black hair & he punched me in the face a couple times & I saw his baseball cap & his goatee & his jean jacket for a second but I heard the crunch of his little girlfriend stomping on my glasses in the gutter & I knew I shouldn’t have said “we gave you the five bucks so where’s the joint?” because that’s when he flipped out & now I gave not a shit about the joint or the five bucks but only my mashed face & my black eyes while they all ran off into the hood & James got punched too I guess but Tina just stood there & cried while one of those girls was like “stay put girlie if you know what’s good for you” & so she cried & when they were across the street I went into the 7-11 there & I called the cops & I knew I had seen this in a dream as a light of some kind crossed my blurry vision since I couldn’t see but I guess Tina picked up the remains of my glasses from the gutter as she cried but when the cops came it was a woman cop who talked to us & we told her everything as she nodded & looked grave & said in a Quebecois accent “sounds to me like a drug deal gone wrong. We’re not going to look into this any further” & got into her car & left & we all cried & went home without any dope & the best part is I forgot the next day at school was picture day.
when I was in the ward they wouldn’t let me call my Mom. She called me, too, but they wouldn’t let her talk to me. Might be upsetting.

*It appears that mom has been trying to get help for John for some time.*

I became a riff of my own voices stacked like leaves raked together in the yard.

I can see all my different colours, green gold brown rotting there, becoming something else in the time it takes to say

I am ready for this project now, I write several pages a day hadn’t seen this was the story I had to tell.

Laced the whole thing with theory:
a tight, kicking boot

---

4 **Introduction: Headings**

“[…] a Theory of the Text cannot be satisfied by a metalinguistic exposition: the destruction of meta-language, or at least (since it may be necessary provisionally to resort to meta-language) its calling into doubt, is part of the theory itself: the discourse on the Text should itself be nothing other than text, research, textual activity, since the Text is that social space which leaves no language safe, outside, nor any subject of the enunciation in position as judge, master, analyst, confessor, decoder. The theory of the Text can coincide only with a practice of writing.”

– Roland Barthes, *From Work to Text* (164)

*In Singing, He Composed a Song* is a rhizomatic assemblage of texts, voices, and fragments. It uses a collage of prose, lined poetry, photography, a transcribed interview, an epistle, psychiatric records, literary theory fragments, and more to narrate the story of Prince George Senior Secondary student John Stevenson’s November 1997 altercation with the RCMP and subsequent committal to the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) at the Prince George Regional Hospital (PGRH).

The materials that make up the text are arranged in a rhizomatic network. The rhizome is the polyvalent figure strategically adopted by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in
the introduction to their *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The function of the rhizome, as it is deployed here, is to destabilize unified, hierarchical relationships and structures of all kinds through the action of its principles: “connection and heterogeneity” (“Rhizome” 7), “multiplicity” (8), and “asignifying rupture” (9).

Connection and heterogeneity mean here that, for example, “there is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world), a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)” (“Rhizome” 23); these principles suggest a rhizome model of the text. Such a text is a machine connected to that with which it functions, an “assemblage” (4) of heterogeneous materials, which forms a rhizome with other texts, other scriptors, in short, with the world, in the same way that “wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome” (10).

Multiplicity operates by a subtractive action: Deleuze and Guattari write that “the multiple must be made, not by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available—always $n - 1$ (the only way the one belongs to the multiple: always subtracted)” (6). The unified structure tends to recuperate multiplicities unless it is ruthlessly rejected. Multiplicity is not created through a process of fragmentation, which would create several parts of a broken whole, but perhaps through an anti-mereology: a way of conceiving of relations that excludes the categories of part and whole—an exclusion necessitated by the refusal of discrete ‘wholes’ that cannot themselves be endlessly refigured into asymmetrical categories of scalenoidal proportions.
Asignifying rupture, as a principle, refers to the resistance of the rhizome to “the oversignifying breaks separating structures” (9), such as the dichotomy between theory and creative writing; Deleuze and Guattari tell us that “you may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger you will reencounter organizations that will restratify everything” (9). Even the dual terms of “good and bad are only the products of an active and temporary selection, which must be renewed” (10). In fact, the products of the rupture that Deleuze and Guattari have posited between the arborescent and rhizomatic models are not even mutually exclusive: “the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel” (20).

Nevertheless, “to attain the multiple, one must have a method that effectively constructs it” (22). While there could be any number of approaches to writing developed from the figure of the rhizome, In Singing is theorized according to a variant of the Canadian long poem I term the assemblage. It is rhizomatic in its vertiginous connections to itself, to intensities in other texts, to various strata of the world; its multiple generic participations; its fragmentary structure, rife with provisional divisions that prove unstable.

Each of the sections of the text is discernibly separated from the others by a blank horizontal space; by entitlement as a numbered visual figure; by appearing as a discrete vertical column of text; or by occupying the page’s footer as a footnote. In Singing’s theory fragments—such as the section you are now reading—are notated using standard prose notation, employ MLA format for documentation, and are headed with boldface titles. While
all the theory fragments are footnotes, not all footnotes are theory fragments. The prose sections that appear without headings are narrated by John. All sections notated in italics are directly quoted from a source other than John; if these appear in quotation marks, they are from a verbal source, and if not, they are from a written source, such as John’s psychiatric records. The italicized sections that appear in quotations preceded by “S:” or “J:” are transcribed from a tape recording of a dialogue between John and his friend Simon. The lined poetry sections appear in a form I will theorize as the anti / ghazal. The photographs in the text have been distorted through a process I will refer to as bastardography, and are titled, numbered from 1 – 15, and indexed in a table of figures. Each of these types of material is the topic of a headed theory fragment; these fragments are not deployed in support of a central thesis. Each is given a heading in boldfaced type which entitles it speak on the topic so named.

The University of Northern British Columbia 2009 Graduate Calendar states that “students must demonstrate some critical and theoretical awareness of the approach they plan to take for the creative thesis; and, for applicants admitted to the program, the finished thesis will include an introduction of no fewer than 15 pages delineating this critical and theoretical awareness” (71). In Singing’s theoretical “introduction” is dispersed fragmentarily throughout the text. These fragments avoid collapsing In Singing’s multiplicities into a totalizing statement through an approach to theory which is itself rhizomatic: “an anti-genealogy” (“Rhizome” 11) that does not trace the text back to its theoretical roots, but rather multiplies readings. These readings do not enunciate a theoretical law of the text, but should instead be regarded as fictions that respond critically to the fictions that occasion them. Like
some sort of bastard prose
(bastard poetry a given

(begimmig of tape cut off)

Simon: "...went out of my way, or done anything whatsoever to prepare for this. I haven't even bothered to like try to recollect the story in my mind ahead of time to see if I'm missing any big chunks."

John: "I thought you probably hadn't—I was kinda hoping you wouldn't..."

S: (laughs) "So I used to actually, I used to actually tell this to people when they would, y'know, people, when they're sort of trying to create connection & aren't really sure where to go will often ask you to tell a story. I've often told this story when people ask me to tell a story, which I like, because it's not, y'know, it's a very long story, which I think is very

Barthes's "propositions" issued in "From Work to Text", In Singing's theory fragments "are not argumentations but enunciations"; they take "approaches that consent to remain metaphorical" (156). In order to write these readings, it has been "necessary," as Barthes says, "provisionally to resort to meta-language" ("From Work to Text" 164), the meta-language of theory (winking and stagey as it is here). It has also been necessary to bastardize the traditional essay form, which is a hierarchical, unified, arborescent structure, in which every point is subordinated to one idea. In Singing, by contrast, is a network of ideas which are fictional and provisional, and whose relationships are multiple and indeterminate.
awkward to people. & it’s also, uh, not a particularly, the experience of listening to the story isn’t necessarily joyful.”

J: “No, uh,”

S: (laughs) “Right. & but, it’s such a good story, that I have this idea that when I do tell it to people, that by the end they’ll be thankful.”

J: “Mmm. Alright,”

S: “If, y’know, they’re willing to sit & listen to the whole thing.”

J: “& receive that, yeah...”

S: “Um. & I usually told the story with a preface of ‘this is a story about the worst day ever.’”

J: (laughs) “Right.”

S: (laughs) “&, uh, let’s see... so. Um. The story begins uh, when my friend John Stevenson was in 12th grade, was in his last years of, of high school, of the high school he was going to in Prince George, & um, he was...

He woke up in the morning & he had to wake up early ‘cause he had to go to get tested. For this, uh, because he had slept with somebody that he wasn’t entirely sure about, or, uh, happy about afterwards, & he had this anxiety about, that he might have an STD. So the day began with this, y’know, invasive process of something, y’know, being put up his urinary tract, or whatever, in order to test for this thing, that y’know, either way, he was going to have this uncomfortable experience, & y’know, best case scenario was that things didn’t get worse...”

__________

5 Tape, Transcription
"In writing down what we have said, we protect ourselves, we keep an eye on ourselves, we
censure and delete our blunders, our self-sufficiencies (or insufficiencies) [...]] in writing
down what we have said, we lose (or keep) everything that separates hysteria from paranoia."
—Roland Barthes, “From Speech to Writing” (4)

The tape recording transcribed for In Singing is of a dialogue between John and his friend Simon. The recording was made in January 2006 on the concrete stairs that lead down from Brunswick Street near the corner of 8th Avenue in Prince George. On the tape, Simon tells John his version of the story of John’s November 1997 committal to the PICU of PGRH. Simon learned this story in January 2001, when, having heard the bare outline of the story from another friend, he asked John to allow him to tape John telling his own version of the story for transcription and publication in Simon’s radical political photocopy zine. Although this tape was lost soon after being recorded and therefore never transcribed or published, Simon mentally retained enough of John’s story to retell it (as he remembered it) to perhaps hundreds of people on his numerous extended hitchhiking journeys across the United States between 2003 and 2005. On a visit to Prince George around Christmas 2005, Simon told John of the large and diverse audience his story had received. John was intrigued and asked Simon if he would allow him to tape Simon’s version of the story as part of the research for In Singing. Simon agreed and the recording here transcribed resulted.

Roland Barthes once told an interviewer that “the sentence is not the same with the
tape and with writing” because “with the tape recorder one can obtain an expression that is
less censored, less repressed, less subject to internal laws,” while “writing, on the contrary,
implies a kind of legalization” (“Roland Barthes” 324). However, when a speaker knows that his or her speech will be transcribed and subjected to the scrutiny usually reserved for written text, the tape recorder subjects each enunciation to a pressure different than that of print:
“with the tape recorder, there’s such profusion in the tape that it’s hard to correct oneself, and speaking becomes a riskier business” (“Roland Barthes” 324). For the transcribed tape sections of *In Singing*, this risk is staged for both Simon and for the reader, this paradox of verbal laxity and textual stricture casting theatrical shadows.

This effect is amplified by the fact that the transcription of Simon’s version of the story is neither complete nor accurate. Parts of Simon’s version have been cut to avoid redundancies with parts of the story narrated by John in the prose sections, although some overlap has been permitted. Some of Simon’s ‘umms,’ ‘likes,’ and ‘yeahs’ have been cut for the sake of readability. Sometimes, words or phrases have been changed to ends known only to John. The transcription may also be considered inaccurate as a function of its incompleteness; the fact of sections of Simon’s version having been included and others excluded produces a distortion in the meanings of the story. Simon’s risks and narrative losses have been dramatized.

These losses are exposed to the reader—a look behind the curtain—in that there are several discrepancies between the account Simon gives on the tape and the story as narrated by John in the prose sections. An example of this is the title, *In Singing, He Composed a Song*, which is paraphrased from words Simon speaks on the tape in the course of relating an anecdote in which he describes how John spent his time in the PICU. Simon narrates that John sang to alleviate his boredom and anxiety, which is true, but he adds that this is when John began to compose a song entitled “Seclusion.” This is not true; Simon is confusing John’s singing episode with another, in which John played a guitar with a broken string on the morning of his second day in the hospital; at this time, he played some of the music,
we’re smoking & smoking
hash oil on cigarettes

this will be dissolved into the text
a drug & you can see some discolouration

hard white sun on icy concrete
hill overlooking the whole story as if

it has never & will never happen
keep happening

there are more lines to write
than possible

“what can I say, I abused what power was given to me
& it was like a dream & I’m still dreaming”

Because it is a transformation.
She reached into his elastic waist

waking up again together with tar tea in
the bedside cup—cigarette butts in water

“If I could, I’d have a cigarette that would burn forever
I’d smoke instead of breathing”

what part of this narrative
don’t you understand?

already composed, that would eventually become the song “Seclusion.” This inaccuracy on
Simon’s part is allowed to stand, and indeed provides the title for the work, because it
relativizes and rends all the text’s constitutive narratives, enacting the palimpsestic,
vertiginous layering of stories that informs John’s precise difficulty with providing what the
PGRH psychologist calls “a fair account of himself.”
she says something, but “I can’t quite
hear you” speak closer to the telephone

trying to wrap his hands around a prose inseparable
from corrupt Eros smoking on the edge of his bed

when we came
to the group home to get her

gone. We ate acid by the fence.
There is a little picture on it

we leave a message for her with the staff
“the fire truck at midnight”

when it kicks in, the movie frames
snap in the pickets

we return to my house where my Mom
has cleaned my room & has questions

“let’s talk about it later
bye”

(what brings me back to this
scene over & over?

*Insight into his behavior seems to be lacking but
interestingly, he takes full responsibility for his own behavior*

to see the fire truck at midnight
in the park, running & howling

with the wild teens smoking & laughing
& she doesn’t show

& her Catholic name disappears
into memory’s blank stare

“*are blind people really blind, or
are they just so ignorant they can’t see?*”

group home kids can escape
in a pinch. They all do it.
Figure 3. Girl perusing a record sleeve in John's bedroom

6 “I was fifteen and I was watching reality encroach on beings like a tragic distortion of beauty. Humanity's trembling aura hovered in the harsh light” (Mauve Desert 22).
(“This is what happened,” says the voice of prose, & poetry, “this is what I remember”)

as if I really could but now
I remember the telling better

saw her in the shadow of the Urban Coffeehouse where speed kids wait

for highs to wear off
so they can go home

the results of the test are never
one hundred per cent. How much

blood can they take? A red Hawaiian shirt, asleep on the floor

tempted to die of exposure, even
in the summer night

there is no significant medical history
as far as I am aware

and particularly there is no history
of seizure disorder or of significant head injury

dreamed I went to hell &
it was a crowded hospital without windows

I am not a prisoner
(scramble shame memories to make them disappear

I am a patient
(what’s the difference

thought flow, form, and content seem normal.
Figure 4. Path behind Seymour Elementary School
The chain link fence surrounds the grounds of Seymour Elementary school. There is a gate that opens but I don’t take it. I walk around to the left of the fence where the ground narrows above a short, steep slope darkened by blackgreen pines. The narrow ground is icy & dirty with pine needles & mud, half-frozen, crunching & sinking under my weight. Under my feet. The frozen ground tries to send me down the slope in my grey woman’s winter coat, it’s wool, it’s from Woolworth’s. It’s a long coat with a red pine needle or two stuck to it near the bottom. Near the cold ground. My sneakers try to slip & fail. I pass the chain link to the taller white paint-peeling fences where I can see the snow rotting in the yards through the cracks & knots. I hold a cold, sticky tree or a fence over the difficult places in the path where the ground is receding. I pull myself along, twice put my hand in a thorn bush to move the quickest, most direct way to Prince George Senior Secondary. But this isn’t so quick. My last smoke is gone, burned, breathed, I inhaled its medicine. Without any more smokes, cold & slipping, thorns in my hands, cold feet in itchy wool socks with holes, & a women’s coat, hair in my face dyed black, creeping along the edges of these middle-class fences on the way to class. Thorns in my hands. The wind nipping at me with its nonsense words in the grey morning. Through & along the black pines until I sleep a little, slip a little in the falling path, the narrow sky & quiet houses, highway hissing mechanically somewhere below me.⁷

⁷ Bastard Prose

“The text of bliss should be on the side of a certain illegibility. It should unsettle us, not only on the level of our imagination, but on the level of language itself.”

– Roland Barthes, “Twenty Key Words for Roland Barthes” (207)

The prose plateaus of In Singing appear in a network of forms I would like to gather together under the sign of bastard prose. This form is nominated according to a conflation of
illegitimacy and illegibility; this is analogous to the relationship between social and linguistic order. In my bastard prose, “antipathetic codes […] come into contact” (Pleasure 6)—multiple, heterogeneous codes whose oppositions or tensions are non-isotropic and, perhaps, untraceable. The language of the welfare class, that of the school, the police, the hospital, literary theory; all are in play throughout In Singing. Since language is “always already politically and ideologically motivated” (Perloff 295), In Singing’s non-hierarchical network of prose sections enfolds “that space where no language has a hold over any other, where languages circulate” (“From Work to Text” 164), “that social space that leaves no language safe, outside” (164).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines prose as “language in the form in which it is typically written (or spoken), usually characterized as having no deliberate metrical structure (in contrast with verse or poetry)” (OED Online). The prose sections of In Singing include those that are narrated by John in the first person, present tense; sections that record the dialogue between Simon and John; sections narrated by PGRH psychiatrist Dr. Niteesh Jalil; and sections narrated by a number of voices not introduced, including John’s mother and some of his friends. The effect of this is that “the language is redistributed” (Pleasure 6)—a redistribution that is here and “always achieved by cutting” (6). In the process of this cutting, “two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge (the language is to be copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, literature, culture), and another edge, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours)” (6). The fragmentation of institutional and institutionalized languages in the text takes place in the both their rhizomatic redistribution and in their proximal contamination by one another. This
contamination of languages in the different prose sections is accomplished by their exhibition of varying and commingled intensities of parataxis and hypotaxis (which is, in turn, partly a function of the differing relations of the written and the spoken to law and orderliness).

The compositional unit of bastard prose is the sentence. Wrestling with the elusive and problematic nature of a definition of the sentence, Stephen Fredman posits that “the sentence is a literary model of wholeness and completeness” (32). By wholeness, Fredman means the “organic, implicit, or generative forms of the sentence (often employing parataxis)” (32), while completeness refers to the “normative, explicit or preconceived forms of the sentence (often exhibiting hypotaxis)” (32). Parataxis has been defined as “the placing of propositions or clauses one after another, without indicating by connecting words the relation (of coordination or subordination) between them” (OED Online). Steve McCaffery describes parataxis as "an organization of information by means of independent, non-subordinate elements" (“Michael” 45). The indeterminate relationships between sentence parts generated through the use of parataxis exemplify Barthes’s mobile, blank, disobedient edge, cutting across the strata of more definite discourses. The hypotactic sentence, meanwhile, “can be diagrammed hierarchically; it has a logical order” (Fredman 33). Institutional discourses strive for hypotaxis—regulated language is indispensable to the regulation of bodies. The political implications can be put in perspective by Ron Silliman’s claim that “the tendency toward hypotaxis in writing and toward parataxis in speech […] leads inexorably through the history of the European languages to the hierarchically organized expository essay as the model written discourse, what Barthes refers to as ‘classical language’” (“Towards Prose” 106).
Every day for years since I was a little kid even I get anxious in the morning or in the car or even before I wake up because I have to go to school & I don’t want to go. My stomach would hurt in the car & feel like I want to puke. I put metal on the stereo while I get dressed most days. Should stay home & play guitar like I did on correspondence when I was kicked out the last time I was kicked out of school. I’m only going to go for a little while today I don’t even know why I’m going. Just put in an appearance today, so glad you could join us Mr. Stevenson. I could just go upstairs & play guitar in the hall with the other guys. After lunch.

Opens up into the street at last, ice on the ground, in the wind. I move across this ground to the left, toward the flat, brown brick building I can now see far across the empty street, to the blue double-doors into the school, past the icy, muddy parking lot with its rustbucket trucks & cars, gravel, shop wing noise. No smoking kids now—class must be in.

The institutions that discipline and police, diagnose and treat, and otherwise contain and direct John, also represent their processes and judgements through institutional languages John finds himself ensnared within. The prose sections which John narrates, meanwhile, are paratactic in the extreme, using the fragment and the run-on to spawn uncontainable ambiguities. While the institutions’ languages reflect the hypotactic imperative that “grammar is a repressive mechanism [...] it commands hierarchy, subordination, postponement” (McCaffery “Bill” 97-8), meanwhile, John’s paratactic sentence operates by what Fredman writes of as “a continual sidewise displacement; its wholeness is dependent upon the fraternal bonds of a theoretically endless proliferation of familial resemblances rather than the dynastic bonds of filiation” (33)—noting the implication of bastardy.
Crunch on the ground with my flat-soled shoes. Opening the heavy doors, the rush of warm air sucked outside where it is airless & bleak. Shoes squeak on smooth floors underneath fluorescent buzz in narrow, windowless white brick halls. Doors pass. Into the school. Brush my hair out of my face. My soft, red face, stinging as it warms. The soft, short black hairs on my face. Dark brown. My glasses are fogged & I can’t see except light & I can’t see my breath now that I’m inside. Past the cafeteria to the class. Halls mostly empty. I see a boy approach. Short hair, glasses, thin blond beard, broad face & smile. He says “hey, man. I bet you thought I forgot but I didn’t.” & he holds up his cigarette pack, opens it, & he hands me a smoke. “What? Oh, yeah,” I start, as I remember I gave him one yesterday. I reach into the pocket of my long grey winter coat & pull out a purple piece of paper: a flier for a poetry reading. I put it back in my pocket as I pull out my black, empty cigarette pack with the gold foil letters. I take the cigarette from him, saying “hey, thanks, bro. I was all out.” A Player’s Light. “No worries,” he tells me, as I put the cigarette in my pack & he walks off down the hall, leaving me standing there in front of the cafeteria where a small number are chatting, milling, spraying milk at each other. I put my pack in my pocket, thinking I’ll save it, & turn back toward the hall to class. Slightly urgent.

difficult to recover from the things that happen to us it doesn’t happen all at once but the things that happen to us / the ink on the wall on the sign & to sit on the swing & imagine we shook the whole house with the drop-tuned double-kicking racket & you could hear us all the way over at
he feels that he is quite capable of working through his own problems

and he should just be left alone to do that

the band is warming up or taking an hour to tune

here is a 60 Hz hum, here is house power all on its own as garage howl

attack of double kick with wooden beaters

fuzz grunge cosmic meltdown & rainbow puke in the dust

whip me up a sludge pancake for a microdot eye ziggurat

snap out of a gonzo head space titan your asteroid belt

giving away free backyard undercuts swinging locks in the breeze with an underduck

amp edging off the chair what with the magnetism & all

frayed jeans, light them little strands & burn ‘em off

but solid-state is cheap & reliable

tie-dyed violence out of the corner of your stare

the 7-11 according to my Mom who heard us there on the way back from McDonald’s when she stopped with my sister there to get a scratch & win but didn’t win but heard us all the way from over there screaming away & I had this necklace on with black plastic beads that Brendan said made me look like Richie Blackmore from Deep Purple who I thought had a mono-brow & I didn’t so I was more handsome I thought but he was from Deep Purple & how badass was that & I had this thin blue shirt from the thrift shop I was wearing & we rocked out so hard & all the girls loved us & I felt insane I couldn’t breathe but it was manic glee & when the song was over & everyone was happy I ran upstairs by myself & lay on the floor & closed my eyes & I
so fuck off
on freedom’s cartoon eagle
baby
mine
until Mom cleans up
after you

*On examination during this hospitalization
the patient comes across
as an articulate young man
with a facade of bravado
but who may in fact
have very poor self-esteem.*

Rock out with crushing riffs, basement woes
parlayed into hard metal to scrape away
everything as I knew it would be, only
without any pain, man

“this is rock n’ roll,”
says the sister

thought “never forget how this feels”
never forget how this feels & I will
never forget & then I wondered if it
was a good feeling but it didn’t
matter because I felt the beautiful
power rocking in my soul & that any
girl would fall in love with me if I
looked her in the eyes & especially
Tina I thought & I thought my hair
was also perfect while dishevelled
because only effortless perfection is
real & all the rest is just a style but
my long curls were my secret weapon
but I didn’t have to think about it I
just went downstairs & Tina &
everyone was like “let’s get out of
here & go get some dope” because
the jam was over but the night was
just beginning
S: "Um, so, he got to school late. & um, school at that point was largely consisting of—y'know, the classes he bothered going to, & um, Alt Ed, which was basically a class where it didn't matter whether you bothered going to it or not. Ah, there wasn't really much in the way of, I mean, Alt Ed, Alternate Education, & yet there really wasn't that much of the 'education' part, it was mostly just 'alternate.' It was a class full of people who, it was more trouble to keep them in class than not, & so, a class where they didn't have to try as hard. & this wasn't, y'know, by any means because John couldn't have been good at school, or wasn't capable of doing the work, because of, y'know, intellectual reasons, he was one of these people that seem to know that they aren't particularly suited for high school... um... I don't know if anybody ever really is or has been, but he happened to know he wasn't. So, he wasn't interested in going, et cetera."
Figure 5. John’s band performing at the Legion Hall
Red reflection of my face in black truck stop window
sign light—zombie power to the max

pixilated noise rushing at my eyes over 15th Avenue
& I feel it so tired, so tired of being high

rushing into my open & closed eyes.
Imagine own face again & again, different forms own

forgotten face while stoned
Collapsing lung, can’t think in a crawlspace, smoke, fire

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8 In his essay “On Conclusive Evidence” (first published as a counterfeit review of his own book, Conclusive Evidence, itself later retitled Speak, Memory), Nabokov describes the work as “being the meeting point of an impersonal art form,” that of the novel, and “a very personal life story” (248). The apocryphal reviewer tells us that “Nabokov’s method is to explore the remotest regions of his past life for what may be termed thematic trails or currents” (248), the structural underpinnings of his fiction. These are subtle, recurrent motifs which present themselves to the autobiographer’s eye, such as the “rainbow theme” (249) identified by Nabokov-as-reviewer, which lend a paranoid touch of allegory to his attempt “to stick to the truth through thick and thin” (248). Through this process, “the diamond pattern of art and the muscles of sinuous memory are combined” (248) to create, paradoxically, a work truer to life than a conventional autobiography. As Nabokov critic Leland De la Durataye argues, “while not in the service of the rules of realism, [Nabokov’s] elements of patterned artifice are mimetic in the sense that Nabokov attempts to faithfully reproduce his experience of the world through them” (441).
to the dirty mirror: “Oh, you again.”
Can’t sit or stand or be well, oh God.

Knife in the drawer to feel safe again in my hand checking behind all the doors 3:21 AM.

We did rock yes we did the amps & the drums all around us & the kids under the stairs were getting fucked & fucked up.9,10

9 “She startled me. She was hiding in the furnace area. I don’t know what she thought I was going to do to her. All I said was “hello,” & she said “hello” to me. She was just wrapped up in a sheet. I guess she’d been sleeping in the crawlspace. I don’t think her parents knew she was here. What if there had been a fire? I didn’t know she was here, either.”

10 James had put two mattresses in the crawlspace & lined it with blankets & lit it with Christmas lights & provided the necessary tools such as torch & knives & plate & chopped off pop bottle top so that people could go in there to hotbox it but also so that the guys could have sex with their girlfriends in there even two couples at once only a few inches away from one another in the middle of the night with the Christmas lights unplugged & the roaches sometimes smouldering on the plate beside them in the middle where the two-by-fours supported the front stairs over the crawlspace so that the instant you came in the house you smelled dope right away coming from the crawlspace under the stairs & the guys would cut James into their bags of dope for the privilege of sleeping with their girlfriends under the stairs in there & one time me & James & Felix were using the immortal fan pipe that had a
almost ready for winter
to end already.

Wait for her with friends in the sunset
along a fence outside Yew St. group home.

She is not found. We plan to meet
to reel back in a movie

mirrors on mirrors like the 3-way folding
mirrors closed around myself as a child

in Sears, staring into the innumerable
self-images all angles & planes

into & under clothing racks, being a brat
while family searches in some panic.

Adjustment disorder with disturbance of conduct. Query
underlying dysthymia. Query

underlying major depression
with masked symptomatology.

Voices high
on Connaught Hill

irreversible transition to experience a nightmare
sexualized in hell

fan in it & it would blow the smoke hard into your lungs & I never really got the hang of it &
I coughed & coughed but I got just wrecked & I don’t know what those guys were talking
about but I got on this trip & after I while I forgot what my own face looked like & I got
really upset but I didn’t get up & go look in the mirror for a long time & I felt like shit but
finally I went up & did that.
Autobiography; Life Writing

"Autobiography is itself an exertion of control over self-image, for in writing an account of one’s own life, one authorizes the life, claiming a kind of privilege for one’s own account."

– Linda Haverty Rugg, “Introduction”, Picturing Ourselves (4)

"The relationship of fact to truth is more complex than has generally been recognized."

– Donald J. Winslow, Life Writing (24)

Autobiography (or, more properly, life writing) figures among the registers of In Singing’s assembled network of inter-generic participations—it is John Stevenson’s memoir of his committal to the PICU at PGRH. The genre of autobiography has a history of being “a genre that obeys the laws which have governed the writing of one’s self” (Kadar 4). These laws have tended to privilege “objective truth and narrative regularity, leaving less room for non-linear narratives and fragments” (4). Life writing, meanwhile, is “best viewed as a continuum that spreads unevenly and in combined forms from so-called least fictive to the
most fictive” (10). As an assemblage, *In Singing* functions with the genre of life writing to create a “limit-case” of the kind Leigh Gilmore identifies in her essay “Limit-Cases: Trauma, Self-Representation, and the Jurisdictions of Identity.” Gilmore uses the term ‘limit-case’ to refer to a type of literary work that tests the limit between self-representation as autobiography and as fiction. Her means of challenging this limit is to destabilize the opposition between autobiography and fiction by treating their differing truth claims as functions of differing formal criteria. In this way, she locates these limit-cases as productive sites for narrating trauma, as they turn aside from the legalistic demands of the autobiographical toward the ethical open air of fiction.

*In Singing* is structured and concentrated around the narration of a series of traumas. John is traumatized by his experiences with the school, the police, and the hospital. As Gilmore defines it, “trauma, from the Greek meaning ‘wound,’ refers to the self-altering, even self-shattering, experience of violence, injury, and harm” (130-1). The text is structured by trauma in that its various generic sources and voices enact John’s difficulty in accounting for himself. The meanings of the events that take place in John’s life over November 26th and 27th, 1997, are not immediately clear to him, yet he feels their implications to be serious and significant. John has to struggle in order to incorporate these events into a meaningful account of himself; one of the ways he does this is by writing. A problem with this approach is that John’s account cannot make the claims to authority that the institutional accounts can make. Furthermore, as Gilmore says, “the judgments such accounts invite may be too similar to forms in which trauma was experienced” (129). John’s interviews with Dr. Jalil are examples of such accounts. “When the contest is waged over who can tell the truth,” Gilmore
writes, “the risk of being accused of lying (or malingering, or inflating, or whining) threatens the writer into continued silence” (129).

Gilmore argues that, while “telling the story of one’s life suggests a conversion of trauma’s morbid contents into speech, and thereby, the prospect of working through trauma’s hold on the subject” (129), the problem with autobiography is that it is limited by its “almost legalistic definition of truth-telling, its anxiety about invention, and its preference for the literal and verifiable, even in the presence of some ambivalence about those criteria” (129). Fictions that nonetheless partake in authentic self-representation are, paradoxically, freer to be more truthful about trauma than autobiographical accounts, which can expose the author to “silencing and shaming effects” (129) as part of their generic baggage.

Gilmore writes that “crucial to the experience of trauma are the difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it. These difficulties are often formulated as crises in speaking and listening: If I don’t speak, how can I transform the pain? If I do speak, what are the risks?” (131). John tells his story to Simon, who later repeats it back to him; John can afford to do this because of their friendship and trust. John’s most profound risk is not in opening himself to accusations of untruthfulness that may follow his account, but in the troubling implications of his story. For John, the question might be: ‘was all that my fault?’ or even ‘did I deserve that?’ Eluned Summers-Bremner has written that “what the psyche [...] assailed by trauma cannot do is either completely distinguish itself from, nor allow itself to become wholly assailed or extinguished by, the traumatic event” (308). John internalizes the violence done to him by the institutions he interacts with by provisionally accepting the accounts of him that their treatment of him seems to suggest. Gilmore writes that “limit-cases examine the
**DRUG HISTORY:**

The patient smokes cigarettes, does not use alcohol but admits to daily use of cannabis particularly in the past few months. He does not consider this to be a problem because he thinks he is not smoking enough of it, using only one reefer a day. There has been experimental usage of other drugs, eg. LSD but this is not a problem at present.

relations among people that exist in the presence of trauma, and attempt to historicize the relations from which trauma has emerged in order to represent a self who can differ from the identity trauma imposes” (133). John’s writing, as a means of representing a self apart from his trauma, suspends and defers the resolution of the discourses in conflict within his account.
Figure 6. Village Towers Apartments
Karen sat on the brown dirty plastic chair in the lobby of Village Towers Apartments, asked me “you really think you’re going to kill yourself?” Her brows knitted, her hands working. Folding & unfolding. “Yes. This time I actually think I might do it.” A car passed by, headlights glaring off the black of the window glass in which I could see us, Karen & I, in the window black reflection. I had a surge of an adrenaline destructive guilty sad feeling in my belly as I thought of how my girlfriend was upstairs, up the elevator, closed in the dark in the bathroom in Karen’s dad’s 11th floor apartment. Several girls were at the bathroom door, I imagined, trying to get her to come out by asking her questions she would not answer, promising this or that.

We had all hung out & drank Karen’s dad’s coffee all day like we had done the day before & so on. We had gotten into a conversation about dreams, goals, plans, the future, work, being grown-ups, & I had said that I had no future & I planned to die before I turned eighteen. The girls argued with me, pleaded with me, & I got more determined, more worked up, until I thought I might have to just jump right off the apartment’s 11th floor balcony. My girlfriend got upset. She had strictly forbidden me from talking suicide on the grounds that she found it upsetting. She said I was “acting fucking stupid” & she stood up & went & locked herself in the bathroom. So Karen & I were waiting there, sitting on the hard dirty brown plastic chairs in the lobby of the Village Towers Apartments, hearing the Laundromat dryers churn on the other side of the wall, waiting for the ambulance I phoned to come & take me to the funny farm (Mom was sure angry when she got the ambulance bill. $40 waste of money. I begged her not to take it out of my allowance—to no avail. Oh, well, just be re-rolling my own cigarette butts for awhile again).
They finally did come, but I don’t remember the ride. It took them a good long time, I almost changed my mind. I can’t remember the inside of the ambulance in the least. Not in the least. I can only fill in the void with untrustworthy pictures, some kind of coiling yellow cable, possibly attached to a transparent plastic bag. Whatever.

We got out of the ambulance at the hospital. I waited for awhile in the emergency waiting room. I contemplated asking for a pen & paper so I could write poems, thought better of it. The nurse at the desk eventually called me over. She asked many questions like “have you ever been diagnosed with depression or any other mental illness? Have you ever attempted suicide before? What was the method?” “No, yes, hanging.” But I didn’t say I tried hanging in a way that would never work. I could always stop myself at the last minute. Only tempt fate a little. I was in a part of the emergency area I hadn’t been to before. There was a tall, curving desk with a white top. I looked around sheepishly at the sick, injured, ugly, dangerous crowd of people there in the waiting room, waiting in line behind me, there in my pale blue spring jacket, ashamed, positive that there was probably nothing wrong with me. I waited there, sure I was feeling altogether ever so much better except for hospital anxiety.

The front desk nurse pointed with her pen, told me to go down the hall & sit in a smaller waiting room all surrounded by beds with hanging curtains around them. There was a pregnant girl already sitting there who had a ponytail. She looked blandly at me with tired eyes. A nurse came to talk to me. She said her name was Carla & she was maybe fifty & thin with curly grey hair. She was not wearing a uniform, but a blue cardigan & pink slacks. She had glasses & she spoke softly but definitely to me. That talk is all a blur now. She asked me why I was so upset & if I thought I was going to kill myself & if I wanted to stay there at the hospital & was I depressed & was I taking anything for it & my answers were really lame, I
didn’t really know any of the answers to her questions except that the stark white building scared me & I really just wanted to go home, but I didn’t tell her that, just tried to answer without lying, because I also wanted to answer her questions as best I could. Carla saw that I was not serious about killing myself. I guess I knew, too, but I kept holding out. She asked me “have you thought seriously about getting some counseling?” & I said “yes,” I would do that, I thought; I would talk to my family doctor. “You know,” she said, “even if it seems like a waste of time, it’s probably not. Your counselor will really try to help you.” “I know,” I agreed, “I know, it’s just hard because I don’t want to talk to some stranger about my problems.” Carla understood things. She blinked her eyes behind her glasses. She sent me home, making me agree not to hurt myself.

Outside the hospital it was night & there were smokers coughing in the orange light above the dark glass doors. I walked through them & their smoke & down the hill in the direction of home.
Figure 7. Exterior view of the Prince George Regional Hospital Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit
imagine myself crying wrapped in own arms
under clanging metal hospital bed

unzipping fly
buzz in the room

telephone slowly destroyed by picking
over anxious calls

underground scene pink shirt white
pants white shoes black stripe

seen it myself at a young age
Narcissus trampled under own feet

we don’t make love, we rub
our bodies together

I am not an unusually
honest person

young men with tight fists
& shirts in truck

goon eyes look out like “what
the fuck, man?” He says

& for a minute we are just children again, seeing
everything as we knew it would be, quiet, smiling

to ourselves, a source of income
& outgo, an index

with some revealing answers I wish
I could hide from counselor eyes

could choose anything still while
health lasts (only slight hearing loss
could become well could become
well could become well still could
happens so fast it's gone
once you realize

& I have disappeared too far
flirt with the high ledge, come back

of course I went out there
but I never believed I'd do it

didn't realize how I'd done it already
by going out there

dropped an empty wine bottle
off the 11th floor balcony

didn't break, just bounced
& made a hollow ringing sound

took a long time to fall
to see what could've happened

knowing many lines will be cut
& any one could have told all

in the mirror forgotten stories moon
landscape dream crawlspace secret library

or the grave
for what's unsaid

poets under daily threat
of getting asses kicked / having to kick someone's

telling glamorous lies
leisurely rewriting them
PERSONAL HISTORY:

I am not aware of any significant problems in early development and with developmental milestones. He has been a good student and is currently doing grade 10, although he does grade 11 and 12 classes as well. It is not clear whether his school performance has deteriorated but it is quite clear that he has had impulse control problems at school because there has been an incident in September when, after some kind of altercation, possibly with the same vice-principal, when he threatened to burn the school down.

I was walking away quickly from where the guys were going to fight the kid with the stupid fake punk haircut who was a real asshole because Mr. Gerhardt had just come up & he was like “what’s going on here?” & no one moved, standing opposite in groups in the hall & Gerhardt walked into that space in the middle & he looked at me like this was my scene & I just left, I went out of the doors & he followed me & he left the scene where the fight was about to begin to follow me & ask me “where are you going?” As I walked past the front of the school away with my shoulders squared saying “home, man! Leave me alone, I’m not doing anything! Look, I walked away, see?” & he stopped & his eyes cleared, & he stood straight & he said “oh, so you have nothing to do with this now, right, are we clear?” & I kept walking & I said “goodbye.”
Figure 8. John’s house
S: "Um. So, he went to school, & um, he tried to find... er, no, he went to ah... the first thing he did was to go to class. & he went to the Alt Ed class that he was scheduled for at that time, &... he arrived & there was a substitute teacher, which, in Alt Ed, was even more of an excuse not to go, because there was even less of an incentive. So he decided to wander the halls to find someone to smoke a joint with.

PICU
(there was a camera in the bathroom)\(^{12}\)

attempted:
narrative coherence

other factors contributing to length of patient’s stay
overnight observation:

Quiet
Room

self-narrative text
forgetting this or that detail

somebody following you around
with an eraser

---

\(^{12}\) "Inpatients commonly sense, at least for a time, that hospitalization is a massive unjust deprivation and sometimes succeed in convincing a few persons on the outside that this is the case" (Goffman 142).
crooked lines in the forehead
seep eventually into thoughts

bad haircuts
$10 / head

sing to me now & tuck me in
cold warm feeling in the room

it’s difficult to write a line
more like a compound fracture

assembling a text in a box of letters
a box of memories

Commenting in an interview on his attraction to the novelistic, despite his refusal to write a novel, Roland Barthes explained that “the novelistic is a mode of discourse unstructured by story; a mode of notation, investment, interest in daily reality, in people, in everything that happens in life” (“Twenty Key Words” 222). This makes the novelistic sound like the prosaic, which is, after all concerned with “commonplace matters, considerations, observations” (OED Online). The appeal of the novelistic for Barthes here is in the lack of story, which is linear, teleological, fatal, and loaded with meaning—Barthes prefers the trivial, which, as a discourse, refuses to militate. Nicole Brossard finds the prosaic in the novelistic as well, but takes no pleasure in it; she writes of the autobiographical narrator of She Would Be the First Sentence of My Next Novel that “she did not much appreciate most novels’ format and function, for she associated them with the small talk that only serves to perpetuate the linear mediocrity of daily life” (11). The length of the novel is a problem for Brossard’s narrator, because “in her mind, novel and prose were born of and produced by a
bourgeois mentality certainly conducive to plot twists, drama and imbroglios, but mostly long on words and short on daring” (11).

However, the novel is something other than the novelistic. Asked point blank in an interview if he had ever thought about writing a novel, Barthes explained that writing a novel would compromise his pleasure, due to the necessary duration of its composition, because “the two aspects of writing that give me the keenest pleasure are, first, to begin, and second, to complete. Frankly, it’s so that I can multiply my pleasure many times over that I’ve decided (provisionally) in favour of discontinuous writing” (“Almost Obsessive” 182). Conversely, Brossard’s narrator, tempted by the novel, “was fascinated by this slow dive into the length of time implied by novel-writing” (She would be the first sentence 29). There is an erotic language at work here, as well; Brossard’s narrator was “dizzy with pleasure while writing her last novel” (29). These two contrary responses to the novel as a form point to one shared premise: that it is not its prosaic language, nor its length in words, but the extended temporal duration of its composition that is the novel’s structural principle.

Curiously, Rachel Blau Duplessis identifies duration, not length, as the generic principle not of the novel, but of the long poem: “length may simply be an effect of activity for the writer, a choice first of activity, then of its sustaining” (par. 2). The number of pages in a long poem is an epiphenomenon of the time spent composing them; though this finding is “counter-intuitive” (par. 2) for Duplessis, she asserts that “long poems are […] constituted by an engagement with an ongoing activity in time” (par. 1). Duplessis figures the duration of long poem’s composition as an erotic engagement, in that “because of the number of variables set in play, one has (as a producer) deeply to desire that kind of activity in time”
(par. 1). For Duplessis, the necessary interruptions life provides within the process of writing a long poem must be overcome by a desire that is durable. In Barthes’ account, it is the interruption of writing itself that affords pleasure. On the other hand, the narrator in Brossard’s text takes a pleasure in novel writing that seems to emphasize its continuity. She envisions the time of novel writing as a “space” of “encounter,” a space that is a “pure product of writing” (She would be the first sentence 29). All this suggests that temporal duration in writing is not to be measured with units of time (such as hours, days, etc.), but by units of composition, such as, perhaps, the fragment, the chapter, or the book.

Let us imagine a form whose only necessary structural principle is the rhizome. We will call this form the assemblage, borrowing the word from Deleuze and Guattari, who write that “a book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds” (“Rhizome” 3), which include “lines of articulation, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification” (3), and that all this (and more) “constitutes an assemblage” (4). Insofar as In Singing is an assemblage, its temporal aspect is a property of the materials it functions with—not necessarily a property of authorial passion or activity—as the assemblage is an “unattributable [...] multiplicity” (4). To posit it rhizomatically, “as an assemblage, a book has only itself, in connection with other assemblages” (4), which may include the author, for example, as either person or function; any number of readers, striated by gender, race, class or otherwise; other texts, authors, languages—with whatever which the text “does or does not transmit intensities” (4). The assemblage may bring together aspects of the novel and the long poem, but again following Deleuze and Guattari, we will suggest that in the assemblage,
the compositional unit is the plateau, a “plane of consistency or composition” (“Concrete” 507) whose properties are “never unification, never totalization” (507) either within itself or within its rhizomatic network of relations to other plateaus.

Thus, temporality is not essential in the assemblage, because neither length nor duration are necessary components; it is the rhizome that structures it, whose networks of lines form “a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any kind of orientation toward a culmination point or external end” (22). Clearly, this form lacks the teleological implications of the start and end integral to both the novel and long poem. In the same way that duration is merely an incidental fact of the writing of the novel, and length is “extraneous” (Duplessis par. 2) to the long poem, length and duration are each mere epiphenomena in the assemblage, as a multiplicity composed of plateaus, which are “always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end” (“Rhizome” 21).

That these plateaus tend to appear to be fragmentary may seem to pose a problem for the assemblage: what of the tendency of fragments to begin and end? Barthes identifies in fragmentary writing that, where “each piece is self-sufficient […] it is never anything but the interstice of its neighbours” (Roland 94). In this instance, one could imagine that any sense of teleological “development’ would be countered by ‘tone’ […] here, it is timbre which should reign” (Roland 94); the various different timbres detectable in discrete fragments would form an open series of negative differentiations. Is it possible that there is a problem with insisting that a fragment has discernable ‘neighbours?’ Does this impose a spatial metaphor on the text that implies an outside, an hors-texte? Are the fragments closer together when the pages of the text are closed?
when contradictions start to speak up, stroke
their hair & coo to their weariness

various words
the Doctor said gestures

blinking strobes in your eyes
to see if he is seizure-prone

---

The teleological premise of fragmentariness is not lost on Roland Barthes. In a
confession that flatly contradicts his earlier testimony, he writes concerning a novelistic
projection of himself that, "liking to find, to write beginnings, he tends to multiply this
pleasure: that is why he writes fragments [...] but he doesn’t like the ends” because he is in
the grip of “the fear of not being able to resist the last word” (Roland 94). This only
establishes that fragmentariness is an accident in the assemblage as well; what Barthes calls
“a pure series of interruptions” (Roland 94) is precisely that—serial—marked by a temporal
subordination paralleling that of hypotactic grammar. This positionality within a serial
scheme is also endemic to the long poem as conceived by Robert Kroetsch, which constitutes
itself in terms of the question of “how to begin” (“For Play” 118): it finds its answer “not the
quest for ending, but dwelling in and at the beginning itself” (118). Deleuze and Guattari
rhetorically ask us “where are you going? Where are you coming from? What are you
heading for?” (“Rhizome” 25) to remind us that “these are totally useless questions” (25).
This is because “seeking a beginning or foundation [implies] a false conception of voyage
and movement” (25). The rhizomatic assemblage, conversely, has “another way of traveling
and moving: proceeding from the middle, through the middle, coming and going rather than
starting and finishing” (25).
this test is pass
or fail

you'll hear the way they talk, but
you'll never believe it

yes, I did repeat lies
that were used against me

life itself is the prisoner now
& it will make its bloody escape

she came through the door several times
making restrained, murderous gestures

while we laughed crazy
or even harder

& I found out how bad
feeling bad can feel

temper temper
tantrum tantrum

S: No, that's not right. There was a fire bell that happened first. & he went out to... & when he was out, outside... the fire bell went out, & so he sort of wandered outside with all the other kids, & while he was outside, he ran into this guy that he knew, & y'know, asked him if he had a joint. & the guy gave him a joint. & he was going back inside, & he ran into somebody else, the order of events is a little off, & ran into somebody else who, uh, um, he had bummed a cigarette from earlier. From this guy, & y'know, John got a cigarette out of
his pack, & gave it back to this kid. &... or maybe it was the other way around, the kid was returning a cigarette to him, whatever, so he pulls out his packet of cigarettes to put the cigarette into, & also pulls out this little purple flier for a show—”

J: “Poetry reading.”

S: “For a poetry reading. & what you have to know, if you happen to be an American, like many of the recipients of this story have been, is that, uh, Canadian ten dollar bills are purple.

So he put the cigarette into the pack, & wandered around for a bit trying to find someone to smoke this joint with. &, uh, lo & behold, the person he happened to find was James, his younger brother, who also happened to wandering the halls & James was up for smoking, smoking a joint, so they sort of wandered off together to the, sort of the back forty behind the school. Where there were some trees, still, & y’know, started to smoke this joint together.  

14 James had a green canvas knapsack he carried an oxyacetylene torch & some knives & plate & a chopped off pop bottle top wherever he went & we would smoke up in the pit doing hot knives right there in the smoke pit at school at lunch & one time James & Brendan were smoking up in the magic forest when out of the bushes jumps Big Bill & the little guy & what could they do but run for it & they ended up chasing them all the way up to Central & losing them in townhouses & Brendan saw Big Bill in the hall between classes & he was like “that was a quite a jog you took us for” & Brendan says “should do it again sometime” & that was all that came of it but later after we got smoke pits back there was this guy who was bald & short & over 40 & he stood in the smoke pit at lunch when Big Bill & the other little
I came up the stairs & James was at the top, he was just coming down. So I said “James! Wanna go smoke up?” “Oh, hey, John, yeah! Do you have one?” “Yeah. It’s a pinner, but it’ll take the edge off.” “Sweet.” & we turned & walked back down the stairs, the little black plastic stair grip pyramids under our feet, the grey concrete walls around us, to the blue double-doors of the shop wing & out into the November cold. We went through the parking lot to the thin patch of woods, the "magic forest" as it was known to us. We came to a place where pine about a foot through had fallen down & was still leaning on its stump. We could see the blue double-doors of the shop wing through the frosty pines. I pulled my black cigarette pack out of my pocket & took out the little joint. “Yeah, sure is a pinner,” smirked James. “Don’t look a gift horse,” I told him. “Have you got a lighter?” I asked him, “all I got is matches.” So James took out his green bic. Sparked it up & tasted it & passed it to him, not too bad, not much good, didn’t get real stoned. Put the little roach in my pack. So we sat there for a minute on the fallen-down pine & looked around. I reached into my pack, pulled out, looked at, held, & lit the smoke I’d been saving. Handed it to James, who took a drag, handed it back. “Thanks, John.” I kicked some dirty snow & then I felt this sense, this undeniable feeling. There was somebody watching me with a pair of binoculars & it was somebody pretty bad. I told James, I said, “whoa, I just got this bad, paranoid feeling. Is there anybody by the doors?” & we looked all around & we couldn’t see anyone. But still those security guy were there & he would sell dope to the kids in the smoke pit all day & I called him “old kid” & I would say to Big Bill “that kid sure is old” & he would say “I know, I know” but he wouldn’t do anything about it but how could you call that a zero tolerance policy on drugs.
binocular eyes hovering in my mind out of sight. “You’re just paranoid, man. There’s nobody here. Besides, it’s too early in the morning to run.” I kind of laughed at that. “Yeah...” So we stood up, stretched, & started back through the trees over the parking lot & through the blue double-doors. The halls were silent. Except for our falling steps. In the main building, a long way down the hall, we could see Mr. Gerhardt & Big Bill coming. They were intent on us. They were staring, pointing, striding toward us. James played it cool. I tried too, but my heart started racing & racing & I saw the binocular eyes & I started to panic but I kept walking, kept pace with James, until they were right there. & Mr. Gerhardt said “John, go to the office immediately.” I said “how come?” & he said “go. Right now. If I get there & you’re not there, big trouble” & he made a tight-mouthed face. Bill, standing there, tense, his huge arms hanging over his barrel sides. James looks at me, panicked, sort of an invisible shoulder shrug. Without another word, I walk down the hall toward the office. I don’t look back. “You, come with us,” I hear Gerhardt say to James.

S: “He immediately assumed that he’d been caught with his brother smoking pot, & that his anxiety had sort of been fulfilled. Um. So he gets brought to the office & doesn’t really think twice or think to ask any questions about why he’s being brought there. But then James, um, ends up being taken somewhere else, & John’s left waiting there for the principal to show up. Um.

John finds out later that what had happened to James was that he’d been taken to the boys’ bathroom by the principal, &, y’know, the principal turns to him & says ‘who are
you?' & James says 'I'm James, I'm James Stevenson, I'm John's brother,' & he says, 'no, you're not! Who are you?' & he says 'I'm James, I'm James Stevenson, I'm John's brother, I've been going to this school for the last three years,' or whatever, & the principal says 'John doesn't have a brother! I've never seen you here before in my life. Get out of this, get out of here & never come back.' & James took that as an excuse to skip school for the day, & he's like, 'sure, fuck, fine, I'm leaving,' & he took off.
Figure 9. James
S:  "Meanwhile, John's waiting in the office, waiting in the office... bored out of his skull & wishing that at least something would happen, even if it was the principal coming to tell him off for smoking pot at school. & nothing happens & nobody comes so eventually his real Alt Ed teacher happens into the office & he says, 'hey, I've been waiting here for the principal to show up, & he said he was going to be right back, & it's been like, I don't know, forty-five minutes & I don't know where he is, I think he's doin' somethin' else, & is it, I just want to do my work, is it alright if I just go back to the classroom & do some work?' & she was like 'yeah, fine, sure.' Y'know. 'You can do some work. Sounds good.' So he goes back to the classroom where the principal promptly finds him, now pissed that he has left the office where he had intentionally left him to stay, drags him back to the principal's office where he proceeds to tell him that he has an eyewitness claiming that he, John, had been selling crack to, or cocaine or something, to one of the other students, of the school... crack, cocaine..."

J:  "Actually, he just said that he thought it was a joint,"

S:  "A joint, oh, right, selling drugs,"

J:  "Yeah, selling drugs... it was all the same."

S:  "To somebody at the—to somebody else at the school, & John, y'know, he's thinking, 'was it during the fire bell, when somebody else sold me a joint? Like, how could have thought that I was selling...' & then, then he said, he says 'I don't know what you're talking about, I don't have anything on me, I don't, you can check my pockets, y'know,' but he's like 'no, we distinctly saw it, y'know, you gave somebody—you gave somebody drugs, & then you took a ten dollar bill from them.' & John proceeds to empty his pockets, upon which they find a box, y'know, a pack of smokes, & this purple piece of paper from the poetry reading. Y'know, John says, 'this must've been what you saw, the 'ten dollar bill,' I don't know, &
look, it’s just an advertisement for a poetry reading, & look, there’s nothing in this box of cigarettes.’ He opens it, & y’know, the principal takes it, & empties it out, & a tiny, tiny, little pin-sized roach from the joint they had just finished smoking falls out onto the table. & the principal looks at & he says ‘well, y’know, we may not be able to bust you for selling, but these are obviously drugs, & there’s a zero tolerance here, so you’re definitely suspended & I’m going to do everything in my power to make sure you’re expelled.’”

I found five owls
in the woods with James

we came upon their clearing
to find them perched

quietly on the sparse trees
snow patchy on the ground

one in the centre had horns
on his head

we eyed one another for a minute
& then, one by one, they flew away

into the trees
into the air
Figure 10. (Untitled figure)
Glasses off, I turned to face the open door & he said “hey, John—you ever gone ten rounds with a jalapeño?” & sprayed pepper spray into my eyes. There was a hiss. It went in my eyes & started hurting bad fast. I won’t give them the satisfaction of hearing me cry out, I thought. I couldn’t open my eyes, I squirmed & fell back & tried to rub my eyes but my hands were cuffed behind my back. I made a little yelp. My eyes were burning & stinging & the hurting was becoming more & more intense until I thought it would not become more intense but I was wrong & I tried to open my eyes but they couldn’t & I got so scared & sticky water started to gush & leak out of my eye all over my face & my hair stuck to it.

Voices on the radio asking unintelligible questions. I writhed in my seat in the back of the car. My forehead felt flat where I had smashed it into the window. There was an ache there. Eyes were burning & itching & I tried to reach up but my hands were cuffed behind my back. I reached to try to rub my eyes, rubbed them with my knees. The two silent men drove me along. I mapped where we were by the turns I felt the car take, I could see the map lines, could not make the map work & could not decide if turns were left & right by the light as it went in & out of my eyelids & the falling back & forth across the seat as the momentum of the car changed & I whined & cried because it stung & I couldn’t see & I was afraid because the car kept moving & stopping & no one said anything except the crackling radio.

Over. The thrum of the motor.

There came a stop longer than the others. The car was turned off. There were door thumps & the weight in the vehicle changed. I tried to sneak a glance but there was no hope. My door opened & the cold hit me in the face. I was pulled out with my crying, draining eyes sticking the hair to my face & I was pulled along, dragging my feet in the parking lot gravel, dragged & pulled into order by the rough hands of the buzzcut men, the crewcut-headed,
silent, angry men. & I was pulled along & pushed into the sweaty warm air that struck me with rancid tepidity, the smell of sick people & medicine. Disembodied voices floated on the air that hurried past my hair in the sticky halls of the bad smelling place where I was, but could not see. I was turned according to where I was supposed to walk & pushed along. I kept trying to see but it hurt to open my eyes so I would have to stop before I could try again.

Then I was stopped. I came into a room & I could open my eye a small crack. There was off-white that used to be white & an orange chair. Immediately it was blurred away. All of it was blurred because my glasses were off. On my hand I could feel the orange chair that had crisscrossing fabric that was coarse. My hands were in metal links behind my back where they could cause no one any more trouble for now. The door was closed & I heard the men sit down across from me on coarse chairs. The metal frame of the chair was cold & smooth. I felt it through the rip in the knee of my jeans. I was sitting. The pain in my eyes was present but lesser. Outside the door came a muffled sound walking past every so often until I heard a sound that made me laugh inside but only inside the sound of my thoughts. My eyes were beginning to die down unless I tried to open them. The inside of my eyes looked black & red with some other patterns emerging. My eyelids were beginning to become stuck closed together.

“Oh my God, is that an O.D.?” “No, a suicide attempt.” “Oh my God.” I had to laugh inside at these poor women, these muffled nurses through the glass, to whom I was a shock. But it was not a suicide attempt. They were misguided. They were misguided in the extreme. I didn’t do this to myself. I didn’t. I put a belt around my neck & I tied the leather belt, the Italian hand-tooled leather belt with its little flowers & painted birds, its tiny menagerie, I started to tie it to the rail of the stairs in the hall by the upstairs gym at the school & I looked
stupidly at the concrete wall by myself in a rare moment of peace but then I decided that this was fucking stupid & that I can’t let them win & this is nothing to kill myself over because they can’t kill me with my own hands. & all the voices & the moments came pouring over me in buckets & my sister was there, blue open eyes, & she was very small & the people I suddenly remembered were smiling at me because they loved me & my Grandmother never stopped believing I was perfect, no matter what I ever did, & she smiled, & the school woman came rushing up to me with her short white hair & the little wispy black mustache on her lip & she was small & stout & her eyes were beady wide & empty & she made her ungainly bound & she screamed at my face “we’re only trying to help you!” & I screamed at her & my eyes became hot with anger & probably turned red like cigarette cherries in their black skull hollows & I screamed “get the fuck away from me!” & her face dropped, it changed so fast, & she ran away.

Now it is quiet & I hear the nurse & I open my eyes & it stings bad. I stood up & moved away, I never tried to kill myself. But I stayed put while the nurse enters. She says “name?” & I say “John Stevenson” & my voice is a grey, raspy croak & I scare myself. She says “are you carrying any i.d.?” & I say “no” & she says “why not?” & I say “because I’m fifteen” & she says nothing. But I hear the pen scratchy-scratching against the paper that she holds against the clipboard against her breasts. & she asks questions about my mother & my mother’s name & about my size & my medical needs & I say “I’d like an eyewash” but none ever comes. The nurse leaves. I can open my eyes a little bit & the pain is less & my face is streaked with large sticky tears & the cop is looking at me like he could just puke & the other one is a wash, he can’t see me at all, he is asleep on his feet, & he is blond. & this is what I can see without my glasses. But the dark one says nothing, pointedly. So I asked him, “Can I
help you?” & he thinks for a long time about my question. He says “Can you help me? Can you help me? Do you think this is a fucking fast food restaurant, you’re going to get me a fucking cheeseburger? I missed my fucking lunch break because of you, kid. You shut the fuck up.” So I shut the fuck up. & I waited in the small, little room across from the two cops. The light one is Larry & the dark one is Moe—where’s Curly? Wait, I must be Curly. My hair is stuck to my face & it is black.

My doctor came in. He said, “well, you look like you’ve had a bit of a dust up.” He had a Scottish accent. I agreed, imagining how I looked. “I hear you’ve had a suicide attempt. You can sign yourself over to us here, agree to have yourself committed, & you won’t have to go downtown with these gentlemen. What do you think?” They took off the cuffs so I could sign. I signed. I kind of laughed & told him “it’s been that kind of day, might as well sign” but he didn’t laugh, seemed afraid of the laugh. “Good, well, have a good rest, let me know if there’s anything you need.” But anything I needed, doctor, you could not provide. I would never ask you. You’re a fine doctor. Leave me alone.

A nurse came & led me along the halls to an elevator where I stared straight in front of me. There were fluorescent lights & sick people & friends of sick people & people in green suits & people in orange suits carrying clipboards & paper. All these sights passed by me with a fuzzy halo because my glasses were gone Lord knows where & a disembodied voice naming people’s names & telling them where they were needed was appearing & disappearing all around us. I could see everything badly & my eyes felt hot & sticky but my face was dry & tight with dried tears. Behind me were angry cops. They said nothing. When the elevator arrived I got out with the leading nurse & the following cops to a room with a big pale orange door with a narrow reinforced glass window high up on it after a little room
where there were four black & white televisions & a silver microphone. The room with the pale orange door was where I was led. She gave me thin green pajamas. I just stood there holding them, not knowing but then I asked for privacy & the cops grudgingly left the room. I pulled off my torn jeans & my white long johns & my wool socks & my grey wool coat & my black t-shirt which all fell to the floor with a sigh & I put on the cold green p.j.s & through the open door the dark cop called out “Hey, John! Hope you’re not trying to hang yourself with your underwear. Hahahahaha!” But he knew I wasn’t.

They said their goodbyes & there was a long pause while I considered my surroundings. The fluorescent lights buzzed overhead & made a white pallor. There was smooth pale blue sparkly concrete for walls except for a broad stripe of smooth deep red sparkly concrete. There was a slab that was part of the wall & the floor that raised up like a bed & it had a side corner slab like a bedside table. There was a black box with a video camera eye in the top left corner & on the right was a pale orange door with a small narrow window onto the back hall high up on it. In the ceiling was a metal grill & a fan was blowing evenly behind it. & the lights. I sat down. The cold of the stone cut through the rear of the thin green pajamas. Everyone was gone for now. No glasses or watch.

I imagined the rows of people in the halls who were watching me when the cops carried me out of school & I couldn’t see them without my glasses but I could see they were staring & they were silent & there was only the sounds of the radios on the cops belts & the shoes squeaking against the polished school floor & the handcuffs that cut my wrists behind my back & every door we came up to I smashed my face on it & I smashed it again until we came to the front & I decided not to & I told the cop, I said “I’m calm now” & he said “shut the fuck up!” & we went out into the snow & the cold & they pushed me against the police
car & they emptied my pockets into the snow & my glasses were gone, back in the hall where they knocked me on my face in the hall where the principals curdled around trying to contain the damage & the cops felt my body all over & they grabbed & squeezed my testicles very hard through my pants & made tears in my eyes & I waited & they pushed me into the car & pepper sprayed me in the eyes & I realized that since that was only lunch, it couldn’t be later than 2 PM. I sighed & leaned back against the wall.
"Perhaps we tell a blurred story because the story is blurred."
—Robert Kroetsch, "For Play and Entrance" (129)
"The nurse was quite stressed. She didn’t know or understand why I was there and what I wanted to photograph. So I explained to her that my thesis was “about someone who spent overnight in PICU in 1997.” She asked if I knew that someone personally, and I said ‘yes.’”

– John Stevenson

There are fifteen images reproduced in and scattered throughout In Singing. The photos used as the basis for Figures 1, 11, and 12 were produced by John in 2009 by arrangement with PGRH. Figures 4, 6, 7, 10, 13, and 15 began as photos taken by John in 2008 as part of the research for In Singing. The photos used for Figures 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, and 14 were taken between 1996 and 1998 by John and his friends. These photos were photocopied, and their photocopies were photocopied, several times over, until the images were cropped, posterized, desaturated, and filled with noise. By distorting the images, I have bastardized them, making their origins unreliable. I call this process bastardography.

Some of these photos function within the text to create a sense of authenticity and documentary reality, to create a tension in reading between fact and fiction. Some of the photos are included because they wound me, in the sense Barthes develops in his Camera Lucida, through the use of the term ‘punctum.’ Whereas the “studium” of a photograph is “what the photograph has to say” (43), that is, what it is of, what is comprehensible about the subject(s) of the image, what we can discern from it about the photographer, et cetera, the “punctum” is “the accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (27). This accident is not a formal feature of the image, but a subjective effect that cannot be created deliberately. There is some overlap between these two categories in the images in the text: the documentary facts in the register of the studium, and the strangely pointed details along the axis of the punctum. W.G. Sebald, speaking in an interview with James Wood about the role of photography in his genre-defying The Emigrants, related that “the process
of writing, as I drifted into it, was in many instances occasioned by pictures that happened to come my way, that I stared at for long periods of time and that seemed to contain some enigmatic elements that I wanted to tease out" (Wood 24). This generative use of the photograph takes the enigmatic punctum as a starting point for writing. Conversely, In Singing's bastardographs are not prior to the narrative in any way—the wounds they inflict on the text are dispersed throughout a network of indeterminate relationships.

Sebald has said that “any form of fiction [...] leaves you always unclear how much was invented, how much refers in the text to real people, real incidents in time” (Wood 25). He could have the same of any form of writing—only the most naïve reading of, for example, an autobiographical memoir, would fail to consider this possibility. Photography complicates this calculus further still; perhaps, as Timothy Dow Adams has written, it is “because of photography’s link with an actual referent, [that] a photographic portrait is somehow on a different plane of reference than a painted portrait” (113). Bastardographic images, pointedly illegitimate and yet products of “pure contingency [...] (it is always something that is represented)” (Camera 28), enact a “double consciousness” (Rugg 2) of John’s presence in the text: “the awareness of the autobiographical self as decentered, multiple, fragmented, and divided against itself in the act of observing and being; and the simultaneous insistence of on the presence of an integrated, authorial self, located in a body, a place, and a time” (2). This doubled consciousness of fact and fiction, simultaneous and contradictory, mirrors what Robert Kroetsch calls the “basic tension [...] in the Canadian long poem: a) the temptation of the documentary” and “b) the scepticism about history” (“For Play” 119). The maintenance
BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

This 15 year old single caucasian male was brought to the Emergency Room by the RCMP. They had been summoned to the school where the patient was involved in a disturbance. During the disturbance, the patient tried to hang himself with a belt in the drama class and then resisted arrest, trying to bang his head through the glass windows and had to be sprayed with mace before being handcuffed and brought to hospital.

He was committed under the Mental Health Act by Dr.'s Bergman and Murphy because the patient still seemed angry and reported that he was unable to contract against harming himself.

PRESENTING PROBLEM:

When I saw the patient later that day, he appeared far more subdued than was described about his behavior earlier in the day. He tells me that the precipitant to his suicide gesture was that he was falsely accused of selling drugs on school property. He is quite angry that the vice-principal believed a handyman who reported to the vice-principal that he saw John passing drugs to another chap in exchange for money. John completely denies dealing with drugs.

There may have been other stressors in that the patient had to undergo testing at the Public Health Clinic for STD after he developed a burning on micturition and he was told that he has to be tested for Chlamydia and gonorrhea. He is apprehensively awaiting those test results.

of this tension has “as a consequence: a kind of madness in the recording” (119), here realized in the bastardographic form.
Furthermore, yesterday he was threatened by an 18 year old fellow pupil who was quite upset that John was hanging around with that fellow’s girlfriend.

John feels that in retrospect, he can understand why the handyman may have thought that he was passing drugs. He does remember exchanging a cigarette for a crumpled piece of paper, certainly not money, with another student near the toilets of the school.

As regards to suicidal ideation, John informs me that it was an impulsive act as he saw no other option under the circumstances and he does appear to appreciate that this might have been an over reaction on his part. He admits to similar episodes of over reaction in the recent past as will be noted below.

About that he was silent.
(...

For a moment, I see these pages fall out of the book they were in take their place on my floor, join a mechanics of reading that cleans up, sorts, boxes & moves, embraces distraction for a few minutes, reliving that instant to laugh at myself, be free
S: “At one point, bored out of his mind, he decides to start doing push-ups to start working off some of this, like, pent-up, some of this anger, some of this energy, some of this helplessness, feeling like at least he could work some of the energy out. Immediately this voice comes on over the intercom, & says ‘stop doing that.’ So he stops, & he says, ‘stop doing what? Push-ups?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘I can’t do push-ups?’ ‘No.’ ‘Can I sing?’ ‘Yes.’ So he sings. & he actually, in singing, starts to compose what ends up being one of my personal favorite John Stevenson songs, which is on his first album, ‘Erasedland Blues’... was it ‘Solitude?’”

J: “‘Seclusion.’”

S: “‘Seclusion,’ right. Oh, that’s a brilliant song.”

J: “Thanks.”

S: “In fact, I think you originally told me this story because I asked you about that song.”

J: (laughs) “Oh, that’s great.”

———

16 “In short, mental hospitalization outmaneuvers the patient, tending to rob him of the common expressions through which people hold off the embrace of organizations—insolence, silence, sotto voce remarks, unco-operativeness, malicious destruction of interior decorations, and so forth; these signs of disaffiliation are now read as signs of their maker’s proper affiliation—the best kind of evidence that the patient belongs where he now finds himself” (Goffman 306).
"But um... so, he just sort of sung the rest of the day away, & spent a lot of time lying on the bench, kinda looking up at the ceiling, walking around, & looking at the walls, & thinking to himself."

it had a broken string, but next morning they let me play it here alone (under careful supervision)

& I played the song I’d been writing under the white lights

_and in my opinion the person is a mentally disordered person._

Later, on a midnight street stoned with jean-jacketed friends, suddenly seeing in the sounds a premonition voiced by singing chords

& they smiled in the lampglow of my vision & they walked with hands in pockets, eyes to street signs

nearer alongside me hearing the words & music

_these may be symptomatic of depression, i.e. masked depression_

"Seclusion"
by John Stevenson:¹⁷

¹⁷ Jazz composer, bandleader, and bassist Charles Mingus, in his autobiography _Beneath the Underdog_, describes a desperate episode in which he begs for, and is granted, a stay in the mental ward of New York City’s notorious Bellevue Hospital Center. Mingus relates that even with people “groaning and snoring and crying all around” (332) such that he “couldn’t concentrate” (335), still he found the energy to try to “write some poetry” (336). The result of
It is also my opinion that ____ JOHN STEVENSON ____ requires medical treatment in a facility and care, supervision and control in a facility for the person's own protection or for the protection of others (Mental Health Act)

this effort is a song entitled "Nice of You to Have Come to My Funeral" (336), in which "Blues" is personified as "a man on an icy cold night, walking an eternity" (336).
Figure 12. View from the window in the back hall of the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit at Prince George Regional Hospital
In the night, Carla came to see me. At first I didn’t know where I recognized her from but then I realized it was from the last time when I was in Emergency when I came in the ambulance. She said “I heard you were here & I came to see how you were doing.” “Oh, man,” I said, “what a day. I can’t wait to go home. The other nurses said I’d be here a long time.” She said “well, sometimes it can be good to take a break.” “I don’t want to take a break. I want to go home. What if I miss Christmas in here?” “I brought you something,” she said, reaching into her pocket to pull out a Ziploc bag containing my glasses. She handed them to me. I took them out of the bag & examined them. The lenses were intact, but the arms & nose pieces were bent almost flat. I started to fix the frames, careful not to pop a lens out. I said “Wow! Thanks, Carla, how’d you get them to give them back?” “You have to tell me you won’t try to harm yourself, & then you can keep them. I told the nurses I was familiar with you & that I thought you would agree to my terms.” “Okay, yes, sure, I won’t hurt myself.” “Promise?” “Yeah.” I sat on the concrete slab bed in my thin green p.j.s looking up at her, looked down to unfold my glasses & put them on my face, adjusting as I went. Still a bit off, but the lights, the room, sparkles in the concrete, Carla’s steady eyes behind her glasses, the curls of her perm are all in focus now.

“Do you want to go for a walk?” She asked. I said “Oh, really? Yeah, could you help me get a smoke?” She left the room, left the door open, & I could see the bathroom through the hall with its warped, dark metal mirror. Can’t break it. She talked to the nurse through the open station door where the little TVs were watching. I saw myself see myself in the dark TVs. Carla came back, saying “C’mon. Let’s go downstairs.”

In the hall I could see it was dark outside. She led me through the nurses’ station, past the front desk in the 3rd floor lobby, to the elevator, & we went to the first floor to the
smoking room, near the chapel. Bristly-faced men & pasty women & sagging cheeks cough in the miasma of the hospital smoking room. Carla asked, “do you want me to ask someone for a cigarette for you?” I meekly nod. A large man with a red & white baseball cap gives Carla a smoke & she asks me “would you like to go outside? It’s a bit cold.” “Yes, yes, I would, thanks,” & we walked down the hall toward the main doors where the orange lights were. More coughing people in the doorway here, parking lot, ambulance area. I bummed a light from a young woman in a nurse’s uniform. “I guess I’m probably kicked out of school, huh. Didn’t my Mom phone? Does she even know where I am? Can I use the phone?” Carla said “Yes, she did phone, but you can’t take calls or have any outside contact, no visitors, not for awhile.” “Oh God, oh God...” “It’ll be okay, it’s not forever, it’s only to give you time to adjust.” “I want to go home.” “John, they can’t let you go home yet. We think you might be a threat to yourself.” “I’m not. I’m not.” “It’s okay.” I breathed deep, sigh it out, smoke, watching the smoke leave my mouth, waft away over the parking lot. It was cold enough to see my breath anyway. I finished & stubbed out my smoke against the wall. “Are you ready to head back?” Carla asked. I looked around at the quiet, smoking people in the orange light. A car passed on 15th Avenue. “Yeah.”

“What did Dr. Jalil say to you?” Carla asked. I said “I don’t know... he didn’t make much sense... asked me if I ‘read into things.’” Carla nodded. “How’s the food?” “Stinks!” & we laughed, headed back up to the seclusion room. “If you need anything,” she said, “you can ask for me, & if I’m here, I’ll try to help you.” “Thanks, Carla.”

I sat on the edge of the bed, leaning with my arms crossed, elbows in my hands resting on my knees, nicotine cravings at bay for awhile, leaned my head into my arms & started to cry. I cried the long, choking cries with a little sob. My nose was running & I
wiped it on my pajama sleeve. I cried a child's tired tears whose fight has run out. I saw the faces of the people I'd seen that day. I imagined my Mom's anxious eyes, how she'd sleep, wondered what happened to James, where he was. Thought of all the songs I'd write, where I'd go—Fort George Park, Karen's apartment—the stories I would tell when I got out. Wondered what happened to my clothes, if I'd ever get back into high school. Thought about my band, stupid band, loved the band. Wished sorely that I had a book to read. Maybe this book.

I finished crying & dried my face on my shirt, found stray tears in my hair. I lay down on the hard, cold slab, fluorescent lights in my eyes, through my red eyelids, & listened to the fans. They whirred & rattled a little. I thought of my little sister, blue open eyes, started to cry a bit again & then stopped when a nurse came in. She had a blanket & a pillow folded in her arms. "I brought you these, but you can only have them if you promise not to use them to hurt yourself." "Okay, sure, thanks," I said. "Do you want something to help you sleep?" "Like a sleeping pill?" "It's a muscle relaxant." "Sure." She turned around, came back with a paper cup of water & a small plastic cup with a tiny, flat, white pill in it. I took them from her, swallowed them. "That should help you rest," she said. "Thanks," I said, & she left the room. I lay down, pulled the pillow up & put it under my head, grabbed the blanket & pulled it over myself & closed my eyes. Couldn't tell that the pill did anything. Thought for a long time.
S: “So John sort of sits back, waits for sleep to take hold, & he lies there, lies there, &
eventually he looks up at the window & asks, ‘when do they turn off the lights around here?’
There’s a moment’s silence. ‘Oh, we don’t turn off the lights, we have to keep you under
constant surveillance.’ (laughs) ‘Oh,’ he says. So, after many more hours, he finally ends up
falling asleep sometime.”
Figure 13. The sky
& everywhere all the time the sense
my dreams are continuous with my waking

that the stars are a text, the waves
in the carpet, stared into

black cloud at edge of hands
where light falls off, ceases
to reflect, turns inward, inward
on inward on inward to a black

hole, a door under the stairs
unsayable at last, incommensurable

NATURE OF ILLNESS OR INJURY
Attempted
terrible fast clouds
the sky is never
empty, it is always
full of sky

he was able to give
a fair account of himself

— — — — — — —

Anti / Ghazals

The poetry sections of In Singing, He Composed a Song are presented in a form I theorize as the anti / ghazal. The anti / ghazal is derived from the ghazal and the anti-ghazal, and could also be considered a relation of Andy Weaver’s “bastard ghazal” (2).

The ghazal is a traditional Arabic poetic form dating back to “at least the 7th century” (Weaver 1), treating themes “generally of an erotic nature” (OED Online), and demanding adherence to a complex set of formal requirements. The ghazal consists of a series of couplet
stanzas, “each of which is self-contained (so there can be no enjambment between couplets),” as Weaver notes (1). The self-containment of these couplets effectively renders each its own poem, yet their arrangement together can create a host of pleasantly disorienting effects. Although for the traditional ghazal, the “minimum number of couplets is five” (Weaver 1), “there is no maximum (though it’s considered odd to see a ghazal with more than twelve stanzas)” (1).

The ghazal was introduced to Canadian writing in English in the 20th century (Winger 29-30), and was popularized by poets John Thompson, Phyllis Webb, Douglas Barbour, and others (33). In its transition to English, the ghazal has often been shorn of many of its traditional formal traits. Since “at its most basic, the traditional ghazal requires not only end rhyme, but that each couplet end with a refrain, [and] have an identical and repeated meter” (Lofranco 31), some have argued that the freer ghazal in English is not really a ghazal at all (as Agha Shahid Ali does in the introduction to Ravishing DisUnities (Weaver 2)). Paradoxically, for many Canadian poets, the “attraction to the form lies instead in its apparent lack of restrictions” (Lofranco 31). For Canadian ghazalists, the excitement of the form has tended to be found in what Weaver calls “the metaphoric leaps between stanzas” (Weaver 3).

This repurposing of the traditional form has given rise to new terms for the Canadian ghazal in English. In an interview in Herizons, Canadian poet and ghazalist Di Brandt suggests that “Phyllis Webb invented the term ‘anti-ghazal’ to give herself permission to adapt the ancient venerable Persian ghazal form to experimental purposes” (30). Weaver develops the term “bastard ghazal” to a similar end, writing that “it is the lack of unity
between self-contained couplet stanzas that defines the bastard ghazal” (2). My term anti / ghazal identifies my intention to employ the strategies of the anti-ghazal, as well as my desire to further deform them. By introducing an oblique (“/”), I place “anti-” on an equal footing with “ghazal,” so that it no longer merely modifies “ghazal” into an antonym for itself, but promotes “anti” into a generic marker in its own right. The oblique acts as a hinge, indicating that this is not a stable form which opposes its generic parent, but an indeterminate spectrum of difference whose iterations are always located in relation to “anti” and “ghazal.” They are emphatically not “real ghazals” (Winger 29).

The anti / ghazal sections of In Singing function within the larger textual network to add to its formal clangour, to evoke an atmosphere and a linguistic milieu, and to impart narrative information. The formal items in use within the poems are notation, sentence, line, line break, stanza, and stanza break. These devices often perform multiple roles, some of which may be described according to the schema developed by Frank Davey and bpNichol in their 1982 essay, “The Prosody of Open Verse.” In this article, the authors “describe the current practice in open form poetry” (12), indexing a variety of formal devices understood through a number of concepts borrowed from linguistics. These concepts include stress, several types of terminals, phonological phrase, and the sign. Nichol and Davey define stress as “the prominence given to a syllable by its being pronounced more loudly or vigourously than other syllables in its environment” (5). Terminals are “pauses” (5) of variable length at “the separations between words” (5), which may be punctuated or implied. A phonological phrase “consists of one or more syllables, bounded by terminals, and marked by a single primary stress” (6). Setting aside aural “phonological features” (6) that may be considered
signs, Nichol and Davey deliberately confine their consideration of the term sign to “the various visual elements that constitute the written language” (6), not limiting this to mean letters and punctuation, but also including “such spatial devices as [...] stanza” (6), among others.

The notation used for In Singing’s anti / ghazals combines conventional sentence punctuation with a few unconventional devices, such as the use of the oblique to denote “the shortest possible level terminal” (11), which is “shorter than a comma but longer than the normal pause between words in a continuous flow of speech” (11). My oblique also sometimes stands for the alternation of two possible options in reading a line. I use the unclosed parenthesis “to indicate an interpolated comment that becomes the main text” (12), an aside that derails, and thereby becomes, the main train of thought. My use of period and capitalization is connected to my use of the sentence as a formal unit; like other open verse writers, to use Nichol and Davey’s phrasing, I “work within the logic of the sentence [albeit bastardized], and therefore only capitalize at the beginning of complete sentences” (12). I do not capitalize the beginning of a line unless it has been preceded by a period.

The line is the principal formal unit of In Singing’s anti / ghazals. Nichol and Davey write that “the line in contemporary open verse consists of one or more phonological phrases, and ends on a terminal” (6). My In Singing anti / ghazal line is just such an open verse line, and is thus composed without respect to traditional concepts of meter or rhyme. An individual line may be a transcription of an impression, thought or spoken utterance that may or may not have actually taken place. Line breaks within the couplet stanza may signify a rhythmic break or stress change in speech, an enjambment, or both.
emptied boxes to find no scrap
referring to the incident

nothing much at the police
station, hospital, school

back hall minutes
locked doors barred windows parking lot

I can sit in this plastic chair
as a reward / planning my escape as always

in the distance between what is said & meant
empty codes of silence

there is a camera here but
I think I found a blind spot

it's me

(oh, it's going to snow again

The couplet stanza of the ghazal has been used throughout the text, but it has been bastardized. Rob Winger tells us, in his "Brief History of the Canadian Ghazal," that, "if [the ghazal has been] written right [sic], you can remove any couplet from any ghazal and read it as a fully formed poem" (30). By this criterion, In Singing's anti / ghazals are certainly not 'right.' The stanza break, perhaps the most important feature of both the ghazal and anti-ghazal, is usually used to set up the disjunctions produced by reading discrete units across stanzaic boundaries for surprising connections and / or disconnections between stanzas. In my anti / ghazal, the use of overspill between stanzas, contaminating their self-containment, challenges both the ghazal and anti-ghazal forms—some stanzaic leaps are given to stumble.
S: "He wakes up in the morning to the doctor coming in & telling him that basically, in effect, they’re not going to keep him in the ward. That despite his actions, & his temper, & his, sort of characteristics to the contrary, he’s not crazy, he’s just a jerk... more or less. & tells him to, gives him back his clothes, which are still covered in blood, & his belongings, & he’s sent out into the waiting room where he has to wait for them to un-book him from the psych ward, he’s not allowed to go home quite yet, he still has to sit around waiting for the paperwork to end. Which it turns out isn’t actually that bad. He gets to meet some of the other people that are also in the ward, he meets a man who is playing, confidently & proudly & joyfully on the piano, full of spirit, & uh, absolutely no trace of skill whatsoever, but with nothing but, you know, passion & joy, this sort of tall, Native guy?"

J: "Yeah, yeah, a big tall Native guy, like 6’7”, big athletic-looking guy, probably about 30."

S: "Right. & then, & he also meets an older woman, who seems to be very pleasant, who tells him that just good things are coming in his life..."

J: "Oh, yeah, she said that, since I looked older, I would always look the same age."

S: "Yeah, that you would always look the same age, & that she wasn’t actually in the psych ward, she was waiting for her husband to finish with his kidney dialysis."

J: "Yeah, which I really..."

S: (laughs) "Doubt."

J: (laughs) "Which I doubt very much."

S: "But, you know, it’s as good a story as any, I reckon..."

J: "Yeah."
S: "So then he goes, & gets his glasses back, & and he gets, uh, a cigarette, a box of cigarettes back, which he doesn’t remember having, & opens them, & finds that there are a whole multitude of varieties of cigarettes all stuffed into one package, & a note from his friends, who had all donated a couple of cigarettes each to fill this pack, & a card... um, two, one? Two cards... no, one card, but it was from his friend,"

J: "Liam."

S: "Liam, who had made this card, it was a cartoon of—"

J: "Oh, no, that was Karen."

S: "Oh, Karen made a card, with all his friends on it & little voice bubbles & they’d all had gotten to fill in what they wanted to say to him."
Figure 14. Liam at school
John seems to be an outgoing fellow with a large circle of friends and seems to enjoy being the centre of attraction. It appears that he may go to fairly extreme lengths to maintain his position, for example, getting into trouble more than any of his buddies and standing up to authority figures whilst the others do not seem to be doing it to the same extent.\(^\text{19}\)

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\(^{19}\) We were sitting in that restaurant where praying hands & some words were on every paper place mat & it was after school. We were planning a photocopy zine that would compile & disseminate the grievances of the kids. I looked at the place mat under my hands & saw my coffee cup ring its hands. Liam was speaking while people listened except for two laughing in the window seats. “We can pool our money to pay for copies, it shouldn’t be more than $5 each, or I could try to get some of it done for free at my Mom’s work, or the art teacher Mrs. Feather could help us.” “I don’t like her,” somebody said. “Well, I like her,” I said. “She won’t put up with people screwing around in class, but why should she?” “She’s a bitch, I was late & she made me stand in the hall for fifteen minutes.” “Whatever.” The window gave us bright grey light & the seats were upholstered with pale pink pleather. “& anyone can write an article, but we want political content most of all, people with something to say about the administration.” “Ha, the administration.” Liam made a collage for the back cover that had the principal’s face in the middle of a bunch of text about lies, oppression, & sexual perversion. We published anonymously.

Liam was a graffiti artist. One time we climbed the hill from the little park up to the water reservoir. Brambles & mud. The concrete sides there in the woods were all covered in sneering blue faces & ropy, twisting, unreadable signatures. Liam would add to this. At his
house he showed me a book full of pictures of graffiti, & then his own photos of graffiti on building sides in Victoria. He also made paintings with graffiti on canvas.

We would have these meetings in my room. The sky through the window in my room was dark blue & striped with dark & still clouds above the apartment & the alley behind my house & in my bedroom everyone was having a snack while we discussed the revolution. We planned concerts & films & plays. Liam & Karen & I & the girls.

One time they were sitting in the parking lot of the apartment behind my house with some cardboard, some sticks, felt pens, tape, & glue. “What do you think?” Karen asked, holding up a sign that said “WE WANT SMOKE PITS.” “Great,” I said, sitting down to help them & correct their spelling. We stood in what used to be the smoke pit with our signs. We waved at passing cars. Kids came to join us. At lunch, more kids came, & more & more, & the news cameras came, & we gave interviews. The woman with the microphone asked me “what is this protest about?” I said “they are trying to enforce a smoking policy that extends outside their authority by saying we can’t smoke three blocks off school property. What if my yard was in that? We want them to be realistic. No smoke pits is not going to stop smoking. I say if I wanna smoke, I’m gonna anyway.” (When later I saw this on TV on the news, that last sentence was all that was not cut.) The kids with classes after lunch staged a walkout & we all went over to the school district office. There were hundreds of us. We walked through Duchess Park School to try to get them to join us. They didn’t join us. We smoked in their halls, hooting & hollering. We went out to the school district building & chanted “SMOKE PITS SMOKE PITS SMOKE PITS” until the police came & the school people came out & had a meeting with us & I stood outside while we all smoked wherever
“these things came for you in the night but
we couldn’t give them to you until you were released”

a card, a letter, a drawing, a pack of smokes
thank you so much (if only I’d had these last night

it’s a cartoon—Karen drew
little pictures of all our friends

Hi John! This is a quick note, because they probably won’t let you have a long one!
Hold in there man, we all love you! We’ll get you a smoke somehow!!

they all have speech bubbles, & they each
wrote me a message

this fuckin suck man
Im gonna kick someones ass

the card is from the Art 12 class.
It’s an abstract watercolour with grey, white, black & red

John—take care of your ♥, health + psyche.

Have a good rest.
Mrs. Feather

inside is a letter, greengrey wash
with black felt pen print. It’s from Liam.

First off I say HELLO! Pricks because the first to read this will be the ‘nurses.’ & I think your pseudo profession is a scam. Remember Hamlet, Einstein, Galileo, Copernicus?

we wanted to. (In the end, we got nothing we asked for. The next year, they gave us smoke pits back without a word.) Most of the rest of the kids went down to City Hall then to smoke joints on the steps. But some stayed around & had a fight later which ended up on the news.
[...] & never think that I, your friend, agree or believe you should be in there. I know you—you know me, they’ve exercised false judgment
don’t let them get to you, we’ll all be expectant of your ‘release’ from your undeserved confinement.
P.S. my new painting is symbolic of your situation. It is you, I didn’t realize it at first because nothing had happened yet.
I fold the letter back up & put it in the envelope.
I put the envelope in my long, grey wool coat pocket.
This pack is nearly full. There are maybe 2 or 3 each of 6 kinds of smokes here. All my friends’ brands.

S: “So, with these mementos of his twenty-four hour excursion, he left the psych ward & started walking home. & it was on that walk home that he realized that, uh, that no form of coercive authority would ever be tolerable to him under any circumstance, & that he must do whatever it is that he was meant to do in order to release the... uh, release or take... power back from those who wish to use authority

Walking down the hill, a cigarette in my hand, a breath from my lips I blow out. The cars rush past & dust blows around in the cold over the 15th Ave overpass over Winnipeg St. as I breathe deep the smoke of a John Player’s cigarette over the city & away into the day, the same hard white overcast as yesterday, but now I am the freest I’ve ever felt—guess I don’t have to go to school tomorrow either—the freest
to do people harm.

& that's about all I can remember."

J: "Thanks very much, Simon."

S: "You're welcome."

(tape clicks)

I've ever been, here walking home in the

white cold & the noise I am walking home

& I will call my friends & see how they are

& did they miss me while I was in the

funny farm? &

20 DISCHARGE STATUS: Alive.
Figure 15. 15th Avenue
**CLINICAL IMPRESSION:**

The patient does not appear to be a high suicide risk and he does not appear to be a danger to others. However, one cannot doubt that he has severe impulse control and anger problems which seem to manifest after periods of quiescence of months at a time. It is not clear why this should be so. One possible explanation is that there is an underlying affective disorder and that he tends to bottle things up for months and then flares up from time to time after which he is fine again. I also do not have a clear explanation why he resents so-called authority figures so much. 21

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21 **Consultation Report**

“We have never been more aware of the arbitrary and constructed quality of psychiatric diagnoses, yet in an era characterized by the increasingly bureaucratic management of health care and an increasingly pervasive reductionism in the explanation of normal as well as pathological behavior, we have never been more dependent on them.”

– Charles E. Rosenfeld, “Contested Boundaries: Psychiatry, Diagnosis, and Illness” (417)

Dispersed throughout *In Singing* are chunks of prose taken verbatim from John’s psychiatric records. These include his Emergency forms, his Inpatient / Daycare Admission – Separation Record, his Mental Health Act Form 4 Medical Certificate, his PGRH Discharge Summary, his Progress Report, and his Consultation Report. The Consultation Report is signed “N. A. Jalil, M. Med (Psych).” PGRH Psychiatrist Dr. Jalil interviewed John twice: once on the evening of November 27th, 1997, and once on the afternoon of November 28th, 1997. His report is based on these two interviews. It is riddled with factual inaccuracies, and yet it is also strangely compelling; the language of authority at work in the Report thematizes John’s story in terms of an ideological fiction.
Roland Barthes writes that “ideological systems are fictions” (Pleasure 27) and that “every fiction is supported by a social jargon” (27). These jargons are caught up in a “formidable rivalry” (28) with one another which, in turn, catches us all: “to keep these spoken systems from disturbing or embarrassing us, there is no other solution than to inhabit one of them. Or else: and me, me, what am I doing in all that?” (29). In the jargon of the school, John may be a ‘disciplinary problem;’ the RCMP officers who bring John to PGRH would have filed a report on their encounter with John, complete with formal categories to define the nature of his behaviour such as perhaps ‘juvenile delinquent’; John may consider himself a ‘loser.’ These jargons locate John and render him legible according to their various and particular ideological stases. The problem for John appears to be negotiating the compromises these languages impose on him.

This conflict of rival jargons has serious implications. Psychiatry has been uniquely problematic among medical discourses in that its authority has often been troubled by “the particularly ambiguous status of hypothetical ailments whose presenting symptoms are behavioral or emotional” (Rosenberg 408). Reflecting on the contested ground between pathology and criminality, Harvard’s Charles E. Rosenberg has written of a “group of individuals who represent [an] elusive and ambiguous picture […] men and women who experience incapacitating emotional pain, who have difficulties in impulse control—or who, even if they have not violated a criminal statute, behave in ways that seem socially or morally unacceptable to many of their generational peers” (408). John appears to be a member of this group. In an attempt to establish philosophical boundaries around the ways psychiatry should deal with such limit-cases, Eric Matthews has written that “there seems to me to be a good
silence of an overturned
car

breathe me out
light blue tobacco fumes

"you've got to confront someone about all this"
"we've got a staff sergeant to deal with people like you"

pay phone calls to tell you
I'm free to say

let them do that to me
never again (how to stop them

unfolding letters
smoking to yourself

he backed into that fire hydrant
seven times before he got straightened out

the hot night
with girls in rain

& there was no home to go home to
(leave the porchlight on, Mom

how many times to be hit in the face
before I learn to duck?

case for distinguishing [...] between those sorts of 'irrational' or unconventional behaviors
that can be described as freely chosen by the agent—because they embody that agent's own
value-system—and those sorts that are not in that sense freely chosen" (Matthews 29). The
problem with this is that ideology functions to turn jargon into truth, constraining the
spectrum of values that can be articulated. We are never free to choose our values—never
free of language.
The last person awake
on the night bus to Burns Lake

I want to live
I want to live

James & I both kicked
out of school at the same time

green pajamas go on
uniform days

there used to be a hot tub
in here, that’s how come the fan

had a tent set up in his room
for a hotbox chamber

Nintendo addict lays
on couch, controller in hand

sun rises & falls & clouds fly
overhead while I remain

& who will find my remains
& sing them to sleep

& who will sing my sleep
home to unmusical dreams

a star curtain falls
come in come in
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