

# Meadowing in Common: Towards a Poethics of Overgrowth

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## Abstract

Building on Daniel Eltringham’s notion of the “kinetic commons,” this essay offers “meadowing” as an experiment in putting to creative-critical work the multi-sensory dreamscape of abundance, desire, exposure, and biodiversity signified by *meadow*. Through close readings of contemporary texts by Verity Spott, Tom Raworth, and Myung Mi Kim, and drawing on Sedgwick’s “reparative reading,” among other critical concepts, I explore how meadowing works as a poethic practice. It proffers a lyric architecture whose fieldwork of study and dream is ongoing, whose bounds are messily incomplete, and whose orientations are improvisatory and immersive.

## Worldseed

That’s the thing about meadows. There’s so much to see, you have to keep coming back time and time again. It’s up to all of us to make sure there is something left to come back to.

—Alistair Whyte, “The Meadows of Scotland”

In a meadowing ballad my sprit points bliss

To plough in the rivering air of her footpath songs.

—W. S. Graham, “The Seven Journeys”

Elaine Gan observes that “It takes a world to make a seed. But it takes more than a seed to make a world” (91). No cellular unit, distinct, makes a world alone. The question of Gan’s “more than” is dependent on “how we distinguish a seed and a world, a drop of water and an ocean, a leaf and a landscape” (94). “Where,” Gan asks, “does one end and another begin?” (94). I want to go all in, I can’t toggle between anymore. I am between where the sunlight touches that phone screen slant of refraction; rustling thought between all of us. I am the free indirect discourse of the meadow. As the quote above from Alistair Whyte, Head of PlantLife Scotland, suggests, the time of the meadow is one of ceaseless return, and in that return a caretaking. A thickening of discourse to know what world is. I want to do something with the “so much,” the “more than” that characterizes our sense of the meadow: hay-giving grassland, indeterminate *lieu de mémoire*, precarious yet resilient site of biodiversity, supportive of life.

As we tell each other to “touch grass,”<sup>1</sup> meaning “go outside” on the internet, we implore one another towards a temporary digital egress offered in some imaginary open field beyond our screens.<sup>2</sup> I want to offer *meadowing* as a gerund for the provisional, expansive fieldwork of poetic opening, inflected by the immersive, *in medias res* quality of dreaming—which dispossesses us of mastery and stable perspective. In my use, meadowing becomes a practice-led poethics<sup>3</sup> of sounding out more-than-human worlds and histories through the dense and replenishing figure of a meadow. David Farrier has praised lyric’s ability to capture the “thick time” of the anthropocene,<sup>4</sup> putting “multiple temporalities and scales within a single frame, to ‘thicken’ the present with an awareness of the other times and places” (9). Instead of “frame,” I want to think primarily about lyric poetry as an architecture of distributed, more-than-human sociality in which reading might be called *meadowing*. Whereas W. S. Graham employs the laborer’s tool of the “plough” as a figure for poetry’s romantic pursuits of “bliss” (5), Whyte reminds us that the meadow isn’t endless, and its

beauty requires the work of collective return.<sup>5</sup> Evoking the static pastoral ideal of languor, a place of return and retreat, the meadow is also a site of exposure, risk, abandonment, and melancholy. The meadow is where Man shoots the mother deer in the Disney classic *Bambi* (1942). It is a site of slag heaps, fly tipping, wild and opportunistic overgrowth; the edge land between industrial estates sprung up with buddleia against the odds. To meadow is to go into mourning and dream.

Meadowing resonates with what Daniel Eltringham has recently called the “kinetic commons” (69), whose ideal landform is the ragged meadow, constantly open to regeneration, biodiversity, and shared abundance. Eltringham situates the “kinetic commons” within a complex historical lineage of commoning, which goes beyond the agrarian, from “the parliamentary enclosures of the Romantic period” to the Commons Act of 2006, which has protected urban spaces such as London’s skatepark, The Undercroft, from private redevelopment (5, 1). Like Eltringham, I prefer “the verb form, ‘to common’, and its gerundial noun ‘commoning’, to deployments of ‘the commons’ as an abstract, universalizing discourse of governance or rights” (4). This accords with Peter Linebaugh’s conceptualizing of the commons as “not a thing but a relationship,” something which “must be entered into” (18, 14). Meadowing is a verb-gerund that also encapsulates the associative dimension of meadow as overgrowth, dreamscape, working land, commons, and memory site. A good example of work that performs kinetic commoning is Budhaditya Chattopadhyay’s *Landscape in Metamorphosis* (2008), which Chattopadhyay describes in *The Auditory Setting* as “an auditory mediation of place created through the artistic transformation of an acoustic landscape into an electroacoustic environment” (89). As a phonographic assemblage combining narrative with audio ambience, the work invites us into a multidimensional memroyscape in its traversal of Eastern India. The birdsong, crunchy footprints, or fire crackles walk us into a continuous and unfolding sense of time’s field—the machinic and

organic, the sung and disrupted, are repeated and interspersed. The changing metamorphoses of landscape are decidedly, as the title suggests, synchronous, open, and plural.

Through meadowing, I want to track possibilities for field theory that converse with an ongoing history of commoning, and reorient the poetic, by which I mean creative and critical, work of ecological response towards a reparative ethic of openness, incompleteness, and play. I undertake this primarily through readings of poems by Verity Spott, Tom Raworth, and Myung Mi Kim. As the call for papers for this issue prompts reflection on the relational dynamics of “field frequencies” and the “stylistics of disciplinary habit,” here I want to foreground poetics as a crucial modality through which meadowing is put into practice as a logic of rehearsal or wager. As Charles Bernstein argues, “One of the pleasures of poetics is to try on a paradigm . . . and see where *it* leads you” (161). If the basic principles of meadowing follow a logic of openness, biodiversity, and indeterminacy, then to follow its tentative “paradigm” is to explore what an experimental linguistic practice might do to our embodied thinking and feeling within the sited “worlds” of research. This is not to conflate the meadow with the commons: the former is essentially an area of unkempt grassland, the latter a historical idea that may be tied to specific instances such as the “‘village commons’ of English heritage or the ‘French commune’ of the revolutionary past” (Linebaugh 13). While I make reference to commoning, I seek not to align with it a historically specific concept, but rather use meadowing as a “material heuristic” for attuning to ecologies of ongoingness and multiplicity (Jue and Ruiz 1).

So what exactly is a meadow? Outlining the accretive or diminutive process by which an assemblage of plants and animals become or stop being a meadow, Timothy Morton identifies the fuzzy boundaries of definition: “There is no single, independent, definable point at which the meadow stops being a meadow” (*Dark Ecology* 73). We can’t identify a precise moment when, perhaps through the decline in biodiversity or the stripping of vegetation, a

meadow ceases to be meadow. The continual striving for metaphysical distinction, while imprecise, has material implications. To choose a local example, documented on *The Children's Wood* website, the space which occupies the North Kelvin Meadow and Children's Wood in Glasgow's West End have been variously, since the early nineteenth century, a cricket ground, open space, home of shift huts for soldiers, sports ground, drug den, and community space. In the past two hundred years, there have been various struggles to keep the land out of the hands of property developers, and all the while the idea of land as being for the people was just as important as the iterative practice of its common use—as documented in various testimonials that highlight the land's intrinsic benefit as, in the words of Tam Dean Burn, “a wilderness for the community to flourish in” (“History”). While the land didn't always resemble a wildflower enclave, its representative ongoingness as public space constitutes an active form of commoning, which is nevertheless also dependent on precarious legal and commercial battles.

I approach meadowing also through Silvia Federici's idea of commoning as “the production of ourselves as a common subject” (254). This “common subject” is a community united by “a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation, and of responsibility to each other and to the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals” (254), a far cry from gated or otherwise exclusive communities of identity. Meadowing is not the totalizing, be all and end all of ecological relation—it does not substitute for campaigning for structural change, energy policy reform, and state interventions in corporate ecocide—but as with commoning, “it is an essential part of our . . . recognition of history as a collective project, which is perhaps the main casualty of the neoliberal era” (Federici 254). As neoliberalism seeps through climate discourse, the casualties of environmentalism tend to be on the one hand the antihumanist embrace of apocalypse as our deserved fate and on the other greenwashing capital and the individualizing of blame and climate responsibility—as if the anthropocene could be solved

or abated through consumer choice. Meadowing yearns beyond this: it stumbles into an open, unruly space where we root through the weeds of the world together, seek nourishing resources and possibilities, cross paths. To arrive at the meadow by accident or pursuit is to arrive at the open field of error: to look for this im/possible space.<sup>6</sup>

The gerund meadowing means that our sense of what constitutes the meadow, and our place within it, is always contingent, contextual and shifting. The “it” that Bernstein posits as our lead is the pronominal indeterminacy of meadowing in motion. Since the bounds of a meadow are contested—overspill of weeds and private interests—to attune to paradigms of meadowing is to submit to permeability, conceptual indeterminacy, and the freedom to play on common land. I dream meadowing as an unlimited virtual (non)site, whose locality and specificity is akin to the shapeshifting of the “I” in a lyric poem. As we shall see, it often manifests in a present-tense, deictic poetry of density, touch, and synchrony. As a work of poetics, this article grants itself the license of “setting forth,” thereby “resist[ing] rigidity & closure” in its discourse in the hope of conceptual fertility (Rothenberg 3). Meadowing as a handing over, an opening up. I will explore the work of meadowing across issues of atmosphere, morphology, density, lyric architecture, and poetics of attention, while negotiating the dense thickets of history and making desire paths across the works of various authors.

### Taking Root

Meadowing is immersive business. Images and sensations cross-pollinate across us, here in the text. Meadowing is a way of reading as wandering, not for the plot of land or story but for the mutual germination that is writing’s messy, often unpredictable intimacy. Meadowing is excess: mosses betwixt bricks, hidden messages wedged between cell blocks, the wildflower

strain of the motorway verge. Meadowing sustains with what capitalist efficiency and market logic discards. How do we cultivate space for nourishment and resilience—again the ardent buddleia—amidst that sense of waste and abandonment? In a world of ongoing enclosures, meadowing makes portable that former fantasy of the open pasture, this place to roam among poppy seed and mycelia. In short: meadowing pursues a lyric architecture of surrounds. I borrow this sense of architecture from Peter Sloterdijk’s “republic of spaces” (23), where architectures are relational structures of possibility, sociality, and hospitality.<sup>7</sup> Meadowing, at once verb and gerund, participates in the imaginary distributions of such structures and in doing so moves towards a biodiverse, abundant logic of poetic practice.

I am thinking here with David Harvey’s *Spaces of Hope* (2000), where the architect’s imaginative expenditure and their doing as “an embedded, spatiotemporal practice” (204) offers a way of thinking what Mark Fisher, in *Capitalist Realism* (2009), calls “the alternative.” The architect, Harvey writes, “has to imagine spaces, orderings, materials, aesthetic effects, relations to environments”—he could surely be describing the lyric poet—“and deal at the same time with the more mundane issues of plumbing, heating, electric cables, lighting.” Their decisions are constrained by “available materials and the nature of sites,” as well as the powerful input of “the developers, the financiers, the accountants, the builders, and the state apparatus” (204). Meadowing approaches the field environment through iterative, accretive practice, sensitively attuned to the agents, tools, and contexts at hand—often through poetic focalisation. We need the practicalities of craft, the energetic summons of imagined spaces, a real sense of the material conditions of possibility. We need what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls a “reparative reading” of the field, where meadowing is an irreducible figure for wanting “to assemble and confer plenitude on an object that will then have resources to offer to an inchoate self” (149). Rather than resolving the contradictions of that “inchoate” self, meadowing offers an abundant, stylized logic of free exchange, not

dissimilar to Sedgwick's notion of camp, which constitutes "the communal, historically dense exploration of a variety of reparative practices" (150). It constitutes the medial relation of criticism's remote fieldwork, an insistence on the attentive sway of the senses. Meadowing is less a concept than an ecopoetic orientation, an invitation towards associative thought and possible nurture: where reading may participate in the spatiotemporal idiosyncrasies of a particular site or landscape.

The possibilities for such nurture, however, are bundled uneasily within those of capitalism. "The dialectic of the imaginary and its material realisation . . . locates the two sides of how capitalism replicates and changes itself," Harvey points out, and if "such fictitious and imaginary elements surround us at every turn [from advertising to investment capital to speculative enterprise to the relentless ideological machine of Hollywood], then the possibility also exists of 'growing' imaginary alternatives within its midst" (206). With "growing," Harvey uses the language of organic life, intervening in the capitalist tendency to also do so—the market commonly being described in terms of organic health, or green shoots. Humans may cultivate growth but it also just happens—sometimes seeds escape our mastery and interference. Upwards, sideways: they grow im/possibly. Something unexpected taking root.

### Ongoing Exposures

What if meadowing could metabolize ecological hopelessness into ongoing song?

Meadowing is a poethic practice that takes inspiration from the commoning described in Harvey, Federici, and others. Here, I trace its contradictions through a contemporary lyric example published in the UK. Verity Spott's *Hopelessness* (2020) is a hybrid affair of poetry, prose, and absurdist theatre, where the grand themes of love, loss, and death play out in a

world that isn't exactly utopia or dystopia. There's a hollowness to the book, where dialogue attains the high pitch of caricature and landscape appears barren, the half-memory of an unpleasant dream. Barely discernible characters fuzz in and out of focus. Affective gestures swerve into darker territory in the overlay of intensities, the echoing haunt of England's green and pleasant lands. To read it, we find ourselves meadowing within multiple architectures of lyric hope and hopelessness.

*Hopelessness* seems to take place in the non-site of many different meadows, which proliferate and are held in the song that is premised upon breath. There are fifty-four mentions of "meadow" in *Hopelessness*.

Somewhere you have never been, a meadow

and near to it this arid hum of wires.

Smashed flowers.

Chewing at a wounded floor,

a song to sing to you with. (43)

In *Hopelessness*, you literally can't unplug nature from the wiring of techne. What might be a paranoid dystopia of wires replacing organic rhizomes, theories about Covid and 5G, the damage of electromagnetic signals upon ecosystems, just is this sprawling world. The song of Spott's lyric cascades through the open meadow of this future we have already fallen upon. The space between the lines, crumpled flowers. A trace of the place you (never) went to once. Meadows in *Hopelessness* are not utopian places of solace, retreat, or pastoral consolation in a world of exposure to harm. They are radically elsewhere, provisional, or impossible. Five

times across the book, when mentioning a meadow, Spott repeats the phrase “Somewhere you have never been” (39, 43, 60, 77, 78).<sup>8</sup> What does this novelty of place hold for the hailed reader? The ambience of these meadows is spooky and destitute: a field of environmental destruction, with “smashed flowers” and “a wounded floor.” It reminds me of the weed-sprung edgelands of peri-urbanism, places of capital’s abandonment. The austerity of Spott’s meadows serves as synecdoche for the austerity of England itself: felt in the literal austerity measures of successive Conservative governments as much as capitalist realism’s austerity of the imagination.

The meadows in *Hopelessness* are somewhat spectral and denied the distinctive spirit of place. There is rarely any specific detail to denote this meadow from that meadow. Meadows generate—“the new gaping meadow”—and can also be bleak places to wither, “so tired that you’d like to die” (77, 79). At least once, “Meadow” is capitalized, as if to indicate a kind of agglomerated ur-Meadow of return, which

becomes a station in prayer, an oath to  
the silos, abandoned slag heaps, unlistening feelings,  
protecting the hobbies of the meadow. (80)

The meadow in *Hopelessness* is a cipher as much as any real field site. Spott dramatizes the processes by which more-than-human elements of atmosphere and place are constructed through speech acts that place nature elsewhere—the im/possible spaces of life and death, sacrifice zones that beat through the book. By anthropomorphizing the “hobbies” of the meadow, referring to its “abandoned slag heaps” and “silo,” Spott characterizes the meadow by way of an industrial past, defamiliarized with the catachresis of “hobbies” for what we might otherwise deem extractive labor. The presence of this ruined agricultural and industrial infrastructure feels strange, even uncanny, among the wire-filled world of the book’s modernity.

With its obsessive description of wires, tubes, and nozzles, *Hopelessness* offers a charnel ground of the internet displaced outside, singing at the zoom-pace of highspeed broadband and exposing the entangled infrastructures of twenty-first century connectivity through a vascular imaginary of lines that replicate and mutate throughout the poem.

Vascular because the wires, tubes, and nozzles are deeply related to the body, and often seem to bear medical purpose—held to the face, “the tube / in your sad hanging mouth” (86), as if to offer oxygen or nourishment. Here, there are no wild meadows untouched by humans; all of the land is teeming with unexplained infrastructure. Those cylindrical tubes and cords that coil through the book are transporting something unspeakable. In lieu of energy or lifeforce, their carriage is bathetic and hollow. Perhaps, then, meadowing, they carry the echo of song.

As a long poem with hybrid moments of dialogue, I envision the lyric architectures of *Hopelessness* as constantly assembling and reassembling in the durational mode of song, flowing rhythmically and also erratically (think of lyric energy spent, surged, distended, stormed) over the gape of a world below, into whose dissolve or plenum it is to have gone (to ask, who has gone?). A song of the gone occurs right before the image of a tube whimpering underground, and seemingly from nowhere, this sense of gone is personified in a glitching time:

What would Gone have thought. Gone would shake

their head. Gone in absence is better. Gone is cured:

Not here. (82)

The danger of thinking meadows is to reify them as the “gone” time of a static, pastoral of yore, or to commit an eco-fascist move of seeing real places, each one a unique convergence of multiple habitats, as interchangeable, abstract blocks, a problem with which Spott deliberately plays: these meadows are nameless and filled with nonlife. Browsing and cruising through their twisted descriptions, how should we learn to care about them?<sup>9</sup>

What does it mean to go tell the meadow? Interlocution has at least partially failed in Spott's meadows of anthropic and more-than-human presence. The meadow, remember, has "unlistening feelings" (80), which we can attribute to those whose lives were desiccated by Margaret Thatcher's closure of the mines (see reference to abandoned slag heaps) and systematically ignored or denigrated by subsequent generations of politicians—and indeed extrapolate to the perennial missed climate targets and welfare failings of the UK's right-wing government and state. To be unlistening is to be in a state of explicitly, and continuously, not listening, unravelling the very act of listening. An ecopoetics based on ambience would do its best to listen, even to voices and sounds of the human and more-than that are almost buried, but still steal out via desperate tubes and wires, these media of connectivity and attunement, underground. An ambient poetics is one of surrounds and suspension; crucially, it is "a materialist way of reading texts with a view to how they encode the literal space of their inscription" (Morton, *Ecology* 3). Spott's ambient poetics of meadowing encode what is at stake in the multiply distributed necropolitics of postindustrial capitalism.<sup>10</sup> *Hopelessness* promises a state of ongoing despair in which presence and life are fraught ideas.

The poem's formal emphasis on song, resonance, and refrain, not only through folk citation but also in its own lyric structures, renders *Hopelessness* a moving present of the coming and going. The book is suspended in this dialectic: its hymnal refrain of the coming light in relation to the gone; this coming to presence alongside the sense of what is beyond presence, departed, used-up, depleted, or extinct. Spott has spoken of the refrain as elegiac: "Several friends, all dying quite close together, was a lot of the impetus for writing the book, and that refrain is . . . in a way, to our friend" (Spott, "Conversation"). I want to think of meadowing in *Hopelessness* as elegia's holdspace or topos for grief—when the constant refresh and entropic distraction of late capitalism would have us move forward on some

ceaselessly progressive axis. Spott uses the openness of lyric, such as the gaping field between their “I” and the “you,” entities that exist in the poem without defined gender, to expand an ethics of fellowship, care, and relation that cannot easily be reduced to those of heteronormative intimacy, familial, or wage obligation.

The work of meadowing in *Hopelessness* is distinct from the abstract meadows it depicts. I want to think here with Achille Mbembe, who in *Necropolitics* argues for a critical poethics of “*transfiguration*”: “a figural style of writing that oscillates between the vertiginous, dissolution, and dispersal” so that the reader grasps how “language’s function in such writing is to return to life what had been abandoned to the powers of death” (8). In *Hopelessness*, we meadow through both waste and regeneration, beauty and abandonment. Spott describes the recurrent meadow figure as “this beautiful pastoral place . . . a kind of dreamscape, this meadow where basically there’s no consequences” (Spott, “Conversation”). Wild, untamed and belonging to no one, the meadow disrupts capitalist imperatives to enclose and monetise as well as guardedly own by way of property and law. This proximity to abandonment and abstraction also renders the meadow a site of abuse without consequence. But the lyric architectures of *Hopelessness*, their generous movement of song, are constantly transposing moments of harm, care, and even wonder that commit us to the ongoing possibility that is sown in dream. “Look up my / love. Open your eyes. Here is the kinder sky!” (83). The hyperbole of light’s generosity, “the kinder sky,” is offered as a blessing. The book’s cross-pollination of references and fractal moments (many micro scenes, often around an anonymous face, come up variously again and again) resembles an algorithmic or unconscious deep state, where machine learning or the neural residues of memory replicate, regenerate, and discover forms and patterns. As Spott puts it: “the meadow, in the deep dream state you pollen the horizon” (78). Meadowing might be “pollen[ing] the horizon,” the lyric art of distributing possibility among the epochal

foreclosures of the anthropocene, offering more than an echo from the end of the world: this song to you, in the light that is coming. What is left are these lines and surfaces: “Tubes. Wires. Windows on the / World” (108), gleaming and bouncing the light that is coming, had carried a surge.

These tubes, wires, and revealing windows are a kind of interface through which the book processes energy and waste. Spott’s invocation of slag heaps metonymically calls up the material waste sites of post-Thatcherite Britain into a poem whose dystopias occupy an ambiguous, seemingly abandoned future, where the over-wired world becomes, entropically, the static austerity of these meadows. But how to occupy these sites, how to revive them? I’m thinking here with Jonathan Skinner’s term “entropology,” which “includes the study in words of entropy at work on a fractured continuum from words to things. It is thoughts on things in things” (24). If entropology is the study of entropy at work in language, meadowing involves the state of *différance* at play in this process.<sup>11</sup> Meadowing, with its porosity, veritable overgrowth, and tangle, is the ongoing introduction of difference (diversity, otherness, cross-pollination) and deferral (a suspended time of play, a state of indeterminacy whose very indeterminacy threatens essentialized definitions of land, ownership and belonging). How to cultivate possibilities of commoning surplus and expenditure from what Anna Tsing might call late-capitalist ruins? Meadowing lies in the overgrowth of the question. I seek structures of sensing by way of accident or the unexpected transformation contained within the living, precarious yield of meadow: its “heartbeat of contingency” in which play occurs (Sedgwick 147).

Desire Paths

I turn now to the poethics of play within meadowing, that tug of desire which bewilders the senses and forges new paths through excessive meadow stimulus, “the deep dream state” (Spott, *Hopelessness* 78) that is ever expanding and receding. A poetics of meadowing is inclined to the swerve of distraction, a change of course. To stay with the meadow is not to be in stasis. Mandy Bloomfield has noted the movements of capitalism’s transformation of nature in the “tangible” motions of Tom Raworth’s poetics. I am drawn to Raworth as a poet of immense speed, yet capable of recalibrating the spaces through which poetry regenerates its field. A poet, happily, with a long poem called “Meadow” (1999) that is striated with contradiction, logical leaps, and stumbling enjambement. Lines like “it is as it is / in fact it is not” tug out the ground beneath the poem, so we are left “following the edge / of a strange attractor” (13). This is a perfect description of the intensified desire economies of hypercritique, spilling with contradictory flickers of presence and absence to get somewhere in the act of departure, of always going. Elsewhere in the poem, Raworth writes:

to milk a taste of the past  
the word sombre stretched  
tearing loose suction cups  
from the scree  
of complement deficiency  
back from infinity  
so soon itself a limit  
to objects forced into subdivision  
as if words named themselves  
permitted walks (21-22)

Against the ecopoetic tradition of “dwelling” (Bate), this is a poetics that eddies speedily on the frisson of “infinity” and its assonant trail. The language of permission recalls, perhaps

wryly, Robert Duncan's "Often I Am Permitted to Return to a Meadow" from *The Opening of the Field* (1960), a poem that yearns for "an eternal pasture folded in all thought" (7). In Raworth's "Meadow," "permitted walks" suggest the language of restriction, power, and privacy; the agency of words cannot pass smoothly into imaginative units but rather stay in the suggestive realm of "as if." The poem careers with subtle sound effects and materialities of language, "the word sombre stretched"; language as a landslip of "scree" along which the speaker scrambles. I can hear the urgent action in the assonance of "stretching" and "tearing," wondering if words are the very "objects forced into subdivision," splintered into sounds like rubble or "scree." The image of suction cups torn from stones is oddly reminiscent of Spott's imagery of nozzles and tubes, and "to milk" suggests a prosthetic and supplementary relationship between landscape and (human) animal bodies—some reach towards a pastoral nourishment we experience as a bittersweet flicker of "taste." The word "sombre" crops up again in the poem to describe "sombre moors" (19), suggesting atmospheres of sadness and shadow that permeate the lyric body of the land. This is a poem without an "I," and there is no single thread of authoritative guidance to draw us through its patchy associations, thickets of description, and hidden depths. Meadowing here is a cascade of sound effects and sites of meaningful entrance: to make sense of the general field of the poem is to see everything and nothing at once, flitting amidst competitive detail.

Darting between abstractions, the language of nature, and machinery, Raworth's poetry traces the aperture of poetic edgeland: meadowing all the way. As Joan Retallack remarks of his work:

One of several geometries of attention suggested by this poetics resembles that invited by the form of any meadow, linguistic or botanical: absent a footpath, there's no single logic of entry or departure. One can frame any section and notice more and more ecodetail. (257)

In the case of Raworth, meadowing performs a poethics of close reading the work for its “ecodetail.” “Meadow” begins *in medias res* with an image of “working on the hull” which is “delicately wrought” (13). In the Graham quote that opens this essay, the word “sprit” also exists in a maritime vocabulary, as a spar connecting the mast and sail of a ship. The convergence of oceans and meadows suggests a lyric architecture of significant expanse: a desire to cast one’s course to the elements. The key features here are entanglement and the *in medias res* quality of arriving never at the start or end but always to find oneself somehow immersed, in the middle, in the ceaseless tracing of ripples and folds. As Lyn Hejinian says of composition by field work, “Any reading of those works is an improvisation; one moves through the work not in straight lines but in curves, swirls, and across intersections, to words that catch the eye or attract attention repeatedly” (44). Meadowing is not to enter the field, approach the poem from above or outside, but to find yourself already caught by it in the affect field of elemental saturation, of sensory stimulus set out in poetry.<sup>12</sup>

While there is evidently a forward momentum in the short lines and speed of Raworth’s poetry, I want to suggest, in accordance with Retallack, this is less an unspooling of linear duration than a spatializing of atmospheric flicker. Line breaks also perform an imperfect connective function, setting up thickets of association: images of “typhoid,” “exploding,” and “pistol shots” set violence and war amidst “pollen, spores, hair,” “the body’s defences,” so we are forced to meadow our way through a dense interface of memory and history, their spreading particulate matters—“relics from industrial air” (16-18). The stakes of the poem’s atmospheric meadowing: “release a collective breath,” with that prosodic stress on “breath” a kind of elocutionary force for navigating the “violent eddy patterns” of the poem (19). This culminates in the poem’s last line, with its overt political message: “force the destruction of wealth” (28), springing forth like coming upon a surprise in the landscape, a clearing or sudden drop of seven syllables—the same number as “release a collective breath.”<sup>13</sup>

“Meadow” asks its readers to body forth meaning by a meadowing attention, rich with allusion and accretion. Nothing may be watertight, blocked, completely delineated to serve ownership of meaning. Parallelisms in images or prosody create a sense of synchrony: as Lyn Hejinian says of Gertrude Stein’s landscapes, Raworth’s are similarly “resolutely synchronous,” a noticing field of “analogies and coincidences, resemblances and differences, the simultaneous existence of variations, contradictions, and the apparently random” (116-117). As I have done above, the arbitrary framing of one section is less the setting down of a quadrat for intense close reading than the impulsive and associative tug of a synchronous moment in which multiple possibilities flicker at once with poethical claim. The meadow may be a geographical location, but it is also a diverse set of “linguistic or botanical” content, into whose field we are invited to take many directions. The poem is not prescriptive or linear, but rather embodies the ecological poethics of meadowing in its very meandering, overgrown form. It exists in Farrier’s idea of lyric’s “thick time.”

Where Raworth meadows by way of the short line, Myung Mi Kim’s *Commons* (2002) makes use of the long prose line, wedged into short stanzas, to articulate a meadow logic of something grown sideways and the foregrounding of negative, roaming space. From the very first page, Kim articulates a logic of presence and loss, particulate matters, filtering:

In what way names were applied to things. Filtration. Not every word that has been applied, still exists. Through proliferation and differentiation. Airborn. Here, this speck  
  
and this speck you missed. (3)

To begin with a question, “in what way,” is to begin with an opening. As in Raworth, “names” or words are part of a material process of coming to meaning, here expressed as “[f]iltration” and its effects of “proliferation and differentiation.” There is wild growth, there is taxonomy. Names implicitly are the pollen and dust of “this speck,” where “this” gestures

to something present in the atmospheric surrounds of the poem. The long lines with careful caesura follow the trajectory of a walk, one which must negotiate “things” as both solid and aerated features of poetic landscape. Kim’s book attends to the granular of daily life, and works by accumulation, abstraction, and association to express war, colonization, and disease through its manifestation in trauma and silence, in the atrophying of first-language. The reader negotiates a pliable and damaged ground where meaning works by fragment, increment, refusal: an image of “[c]utworms in tomato beds” folds into “pinecones burning” (6); growth parallels destruction. What sort of belonging or lyric identification, what flicker of beauty, is constantly tugged asunder by prosaic reality, “mills and farms,” “the levelling of the ground” (7), another blank page to trace across.

The section “Pollen Fossil Record” culminates in a meadowing materiality of the book itself as uncertain, reflexive, bodily commoning:

*COMMONS* elides multiple sites: reading and text making, discourses and disciplines, documents and documenting. Fluctuating. Proceeding by fragment, by increment.

Through proposition, parataxis, contingency—approximating nerve, line, song

(Kim 107)

Fossil pollen, taken from pollen grains, can be used to interpret the climate and vegetation records of past millennia. The book then anticipates itself as such a fossil, artefact of pollen words and their wounding. The passage above speaks to the “[f]luctuating” logic of the verb and gerund inherent in the book’s procedural yet displacing, digressionary, flickering unfold. It asks to be read as such an unstable record, one that approximates units of meaning and sensation—“nerve, line, song.” Further on the same page, Kim writes: “The inchoate and the concrete coincide” (107). Harkening back to Sedgwick’s use of “inchoate” (149), we might think of meadowing again here as the offering of resources to a perspectival chaos, the hardening of the “concrete” coinciding with the soft “inchoate” moment—form and content.

That Kim's book contains its own statements of poetics, "The contrapuntal, the interruptive, the speculative" (108), invites the reader to approach the production of meaning with a similar procedure of plurality, digression, and "speculative" possibility. Between the continuous and the disconnected we might find the stop-start of forking, instinctive paths in the lyrical wilderness.

Meadowing has that overlapping, iterative logic of the desire path. It is a mutual impression of presence and landscape, akin to Tim Ingold and Jo Lee Vergunst's reflections on paths, footprints, and duration in *Ways of Walking* (2008):

Paths that have been worn in vegetation through the regular passage of feet, as on a grassy meadow, are revealed not as an accumulation of prints but in the stunted or bent growth of trampled plant stems. Actual, distinct footprints show up most clearly in surfaces that, being soft and malleable, are easily impressed, such as of snow, sand mud or moss. Yet precisely because surfaces of this kind do not readily hold their form, such prints tend to be relatively ephemeral . . . . Footprints thus have a temporal existence, a duration, which is bound to the very dynamics of the landscape to which they belong: to the cycles of organic growth and decay, of weather, and of the seasons. (7-8)

From this, we might envision our path through the poem—as through a meadow—as not just reparative and accretive but also traceable in the effects of "trampled plant stems" and other "easily impressed" surfaces. What do we do to the arrangement of the poem we pass through or play inside? The interpretative apparatus of meadowing might then be seen as a negotiation of poetic surface and surfeit, the textures of terrain and its wild excess. The emphasis on softness—mud, moss, snow—in the above passage resonates with Esther Leslie's notion of "soft matters": "interstitial, fuzzy, indeterminate entities" that manifest in actual architectures, infrastructure, forms of social control, from "data cloud[s]" to "the dense

particulate air of tear gas that has saturated frequent protests,” as well as in the morphological tendencies of metaphor. Bringing this back to field theory, meadowing “softens” the hard terrain of the critical body. It seeks a sensuous and saturated attention to the environment of writing, to its spatiotemporal “dynamics.” This involves not a diluting of critical logic but an attention to the porous relation between writing body and writing world. Instead of looking for discursive frames, the hyperbolically capitalized “Windows on the / World” (Spott, *Hopelessness* 108), we might meadow our way, softly dissolving into the reciprocal flicker of being-in-landscape. We access desire paths through striated bruises in the soft matter of vegetation: regrowth erases our traces, if the field recovers. We leave the poem, the meadow, irrevocably changed; the poem, the meadow, is left changed also.

Meadowing clusters words by sound and texture, a kind of soft play—*performance*—that attends to the life of entities in time—it is to weather in language, its wetness, its circadian occasion.<sup>14</sup> Soft is a lyric gesture of the descriptive; soft is the pliant material of lyric architecture, holding us in a changing, ongoing moment. Soft is dangerous if misused, if it is merely compensatory or even complicit. As Leslie aptly puts it, writing in the aftermath of the first wave of COVID-19 and its associated social distancing bubbles: “We must learn to separate the froth, the media bubbles that puff and pop, from the substance of things, to turn the foam into protection, not suffocation.” Against the hard terrain of enclosure, meadowing offers the environmental responsiveness of textual “crossbreeding”:

I sense that in each book words with roots hidden beneath the text come and go and carry out some other book between the lines. Suddenly I notice strange fruits in my garden . . . . And what words do between themselves—couplings, matings, hybridizations—is genius. An erotic and fertile genius. (Cixous 121)

The word “genius” here is put to work with resonance of both “genus,” a taxonomic category often used in plant identification, and “genius loci,” which comes from Latin, literally “spirit

of the place.” The garden of a text is not exactly walled, and the “erotic and fertile” energy of words and sentences makes of language a “strange” fruiting body, yielding im/possibilities in the transfer of nutrition between texts. This poethic of attunement, “I sense,” is the starting logic for approaching the field by way of a meadowing textuality. As in a meadow, much of the life is “beneath” the ground; much of its existence remains impenetrable to humans and might be felt more as an erotics of mystery. Assenting to the work of this “genius” is also to open one’s imagination to cross-pollination and desire beyond taxonomic logics. The risk of “genius loci” is absolution and essentialism, but an ethic of contingency and regeneration—“what words do between themselves”—displaces stability and human control over meaning. The spirit of meadowing brings Anna Tsing’s “arts of noticing” (17) directly into the creative-critical field and its desire paths of momentum, its carriage of “foothpath songs” (Graham 5). We must write, as Sarah Wood says in her book of the same name, “without mastery.” It is the surrender to a certain unpredictability and excess (of loss, desire, joy), a labor of both ambience and affect, that distinguishes meadowing from otherwise fieldwork.

### Loving Porosity

“I love what grows,” writes Cixous, “[a]ll that grows to ripening and dying” (122). Meadowing offers a postcapitalist sense of excess that seeks to metabolize, as plants do, the atmospheric and material excesses of capitalist production into a more generous and replenishing abundance. It does not shy away from the complex affects and ethics of place, but rather attunes to both the melancholic, lost, or wasted and the joyous, fertile, or playful—“ripening and dying.” At stake in meadowing is a poethics of the loving and the porous. I want to offer it as a mode for imagining postcapitalist abundance: oscillating between real sites of commoning possibility and the cautiously utopian; offering a logic of impossibility

alongside the necessary dreamwork of cultivating biodiversity, livable habitats, and unpredictable cross-pollinations. As Fred Moten writes:

There's a more-than-critical criticism that's like seeing things—a gift of having been given to love things and how things look and how and what things see . . . . This necessity and immensity of the alternative surrounds and aerates the contained, contingent fixity of the standard. (183)

If the field requires a certain predetermined delineation, meadowing might present this “alternative” of “surrounds” and common air, an ethic of atmosphere and overgrowth that overflows the boundedness of binaries such as inside/outside, field/theory, creative/critical, technology/nature, subject/object. In a time of intense mediation and digital interfacing, meadowing resists the structural frames and interfaces of platforms and opens onto a “commodious sensation” of “being lost,” which makes form itself malleable (Robertson, *Nilling* 13). In the case of Myung Mi Kim's *Commons*, the meadowing of language has a decolonial poethic of linguistic ecology. The speaker asks “How to practice and make plural the written and spoken” in a world of “mass global migrations, ecological degradations, shifts and upheavals in identifications of gender and labor?” (110). Meadowing might be a constant rehearsal of that plurality the idea of a meadow embodies, a willingness towards errancy.

There are many other examples of meadowing in practice: the cross-pollinating abundance of Sylvia Legris's *Garden Physic* (2022), which casts taxonomic plant archives into sensuous cacophonies of play; the watercolor gestures, collages, and illustrations that interleave many works by Maggie O'Sullivan; the immersive, shimmering quality of Margaret Tait's poetic moving images. In Tait's film *HAPPY BEES* (1954), her voiceover, “The children are not far away, the children live here,” connects images of crashing waves to

earlier footage of children playing in a wildflower meadow. It is not that the children live directly in the sea,<sup>15</sup> but that that sense of the children's proximity, their belonging, connects us to a wider ethic of *rechilding* in which our sense of placing the "here" of the film is poetically extended to oceanic feeling. Meadowing takes the desire for kinetic engagement with the more-than-human, implicit in the viral phrase "touch grass," to the level of grasping that feeling in common, unfolding towards some kind of openness or abstracted outside. Its densities of linguistic excess, spread on the internet, are just one way towards porosity.

Meadows are literally carbon sinks, capable of storing carbon in their soil and deep-rooted grasses, but they are also traceable archives of more-than-human dreamings, the pure or childlike imaginary of "no consequences" in which alternative futures might be sustained or mourned (Spott, "Conversations"). To work in the descriptive, accretive mode of meadowing is not merely to memorialize the (almost) lost, but to rewild the text itself with the reparative desire for "plenitude" (Sedgwick 149). Meadowing can be a documentary ethic inflected by dream, a lyric architecture for magical thinking. It can channel material concerns through the exposures and atmospherics of a recognizable or obscure place. It might suggest maintenance, care, or productive neglect that gives life back to the meadow itself. Bernadette Mayer, in her book *Works and Days* (2016), ends a poem, "May 16": "the gubofi's / decided to let the lawn go back to being a field" (84).<sup>16</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A memetic phrase, popular in recent years, meaning a person's time online has reached a certain saturation and it's time to go outside, to reconnect. The phrase appeals to a normative idea of wellbeing premised on time afk (away from keyboard), framed here as time in the sensory field of nature: grass in binary opposition to screens.

<sup>2</sup> See also Charles Olson's poetics of the "open field," which borrows from theoretical physics. I have chosen to largely sidestep Olson's theory of field composition, mostly because similar terrain is already excellently covered in Eltringham's *Poetry and Commons*. My efforts with this essay are less a form of historical and conceptual ground clearing and more a performance of what the notion of meadowing contributes, reparatively, to ongoing discourse around field composition, theory, and commoning.

<sup>3</sup> I borrow this term from Joan Retallack as a portmanteau of "poetics" and "ethics," which suggests a commitment to the "wager": that which "recognizes the degree to which the chaos of world history, of all complex systems, makes it imperative that we move away from models of cultural and political agency lodged in isolated heroic acts and simplistic notions of cause and effect" (*Poethical* 3). My use of poethics here is part of an ongoing project of "hypercritique," in which the orientations of "towards" within the suffix "hyper" thinks ecology through the im/possible, reflexive "coming" of the dream (Sledmere 54). I offer meadowing as an experimental wager for entering and conceptualizing inchoate poetic fields.

<sup>4</sup> I decapitalize anthropocene to acknowledge "wariness over the totalising authority ascribed to an epochal term, and to recognise its viral agency and mutation within a burgeoning cultural vernacular around climate crisis" (Sledmere and Williams 16).

<sup>5</sup> I refer to Graham's lines here partly because it is the only instance of the term "meadowing" I have so far been able to find in literature.

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<sup>6</sup> I want to acknowledge here Saidiya Hartman’s work on errancy and waywardness as “the practice of the social otherwise,” a way of being in the world that puts into material play new possibilities and narratives, forging paths of “utopian longing” and “refusal” (227, xvii).

<sup>7</sup> I borrow the idea of sociality as a field of performative relation, a living “ensemble” (136), from Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s *The Undercommons* (2013).

<sup>8</sup> In one of these instances, the line is enjambed to “Somewhere / you have never been. A meadow” (60).

<sup>9</sup> For more on fascism and “block” imaginaries, see Danny Hayward. In their interview with Fred Spott, Spott talks about the dangers of abstraction in pastoral, where “[i]f you leave it open and abstract, then everyone can make up their own minds about what that means . . . . It’s like ‘taking Britain back’ from the Europeans or whatever. What does that actually mean? . . . I wanted to put these notions under loads of pressure.”

<sup>10</sup> In the context of rising nationalism and racialized essentialism across the democratic world, Achille Mbembe offers necropolitics as a way of describing how “[n]early everywhere the political order is reconstituting itself as a form of organization for death” (7).

<sup>11</sup> Also relevant here is Bernard Stiegler’s notion of “negentropy,” or negative entropy: “*Différance* is always negentropic,” because “negentropy is always what differs and defers entropy” (103).

<sup>12</sup> I am thinking here with Melodie Jue and Rafico Ruiz and their conceptualization of saturation as a “material imaginary where the elements are not a neutral background, but lively forces that shape culture, politics, and communication” (1).

<sup>13</sup> It’s worth noting that the whole book is dedicated to “my friends in Ticino and the Zen Communist Party: high in the mountains” (Raworth, np).

<sup>14</sup> See Neimanis and Hamilton.

<sup>15</sup> Though of course, underwater meadows exist, in the form of seagrass meadows.

<sup>16</sup> An explanation of “gubofi” can be found elsewhere in Mayer’s book:

GBF – guy who bought the field

Jennifer told me it had to be a word, like radar, or snafu, to be a real acronym, so I put the appropriate vowels. I’m hoping *gudofi* will enter the language, as in everybody has her or his *gubofi*. (51)

I include this coinage in the spirit of meadowing’s conceptual fertility.

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