

an eco-urban poetry journal

# sprout

EDGE



ISSUE 2





*Issue Two:*

*EDGE*

*Kirby Manià and Dimitra Xidous, Executive Editors*

*Malerie Lovejoy, Managing Editor*

*Emmalee Barnett, Assistant Editor*

*David Maddox, Founder and Editor-in-Chief, The Nature of Cities*



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## EDGE: Editorial

As a way of looking at the intersections between people, nature, and cities, for SPROUT's second issue we invited poets to think about the edges of the eco-urban. Specifically, we were interested in how poets interpreted what constitutes the edge (or edges) of city life with its marginalia, liminality, and transitional spaces. The contributions that make up the issue offer us a window through which to view the edge(s) as places of (re)invention and (dis)comfort—where the edge can synchronously signal endings and beginnings. In the in-between, the edge offers up a fresh, creative space—a space where things overlap and push us to consider new ways of working, seeing, and being in the world.

The edge is a concept that works in both urban and semiotic contexts—it, at once, signals the end of things, the line where things fall off: namely, peripheries and margins. The edge is where the centre can be reconceptualized, problematized, and where possibilities of the new come to the fore. The edge can also be a threshold space: the limen which invites either entrance or egress, or that which troubles both states, a hybridised coming and going, or neither—the betwixt and between. The lines along which the edge exists can be a meeting point for multiple edges, signalling inception or even deception. Edges can sustain invention or digression. Moreover, the edge is not only spatial, but also linguistic; it exists on the edge of other words: s/(l)edge, (h)edge, (w)edge, (dr)edge, (k)edge, and so on. Edges, then, can be about overlap, interstices, dovetails between forms, registers, and disciplines—engendering a playfulness in language and form. After all, new types of dialogue can be produced along the edges of (poetic) discourse.

The contradictory and explosive possibilities of edges are conveyed fruitfully in our issue's cover art. Created by Sarah de Villiers, and submitted in tandem with her poem "Fata Morgana: Porosities of Negotiation", it is an image that simultaneously reveals a cityscape exterior, an arboreal landscape, and a slightly obscured urban interior (replete with, what appears to the confused eye, as an office chair and desk—the accoutrements of peopled spaces). These competing yet complementary photographs are transposed over each other, bleeding from one edge to another, obscuring where one begins and the others end. The composite reveals the "porosities of negotiation" that exist along edge zones, where people, infrastructure, and nature meet in complex outer and "dark inner spaces". It is suggestive of multiple different spaces existing at once but also of multiple experiences of time.

Time features prominently in the works selected for publication in this issue. The seasonal edges and annual rhythms find winter and spring, the cyclical death and rebirth of nature, heralded in both Lianne O'Hara's opening poem, "Berkeley Wash", and Niamh Mac Cabe's closing, "A Young Tree Misjudges A February Dawn at Sligo's Institute of Technology". The latter poem, whilst set on another chilly campus, gestures to the beginning of spring (in the Gaelic calendar, spring or Earrach, starts on St Brigid's Day, which is February 1<sup>st</sup>), and this temporal shift in seasonal change, finds the "edge" hovering appropriately as well as indefinitely as the last word of the issue, sans full stop or period. The edge finds itself, as does the issue, coming full circle.

In "On the Verge", celebrated South African writer, Ivan Vladislavić, presents a fragmentary text (à la *Portrait with Keys*) that reflects an episodic and non-linear exploration of Johannesburg during the COVID-19 pandemic. Edges, here, function both formalistically and temporally. The inheritance of a "small depository of seeds" follows the narrator as he weaves between past and present, threading together the edges of city, nature, and memory. The piece focuses on the planting and seeding of marginal gardens with hollyhocks: atop balconies and along the banks of a concrete channel (representing "one of the small white waters that gave the Witwatersrand its name" which is now confined by "steep-sided concrete"). In characteristic Vladislavić-style, attention is attuned to the liminal spaces, the so-called "verges" of the city, where nature through the persistence of "a trio of hollyhocks", sprouting through a closed-off wedge of the city, promises a different rhythm of urban experience. The hollyhocks—a floral reminder of the narrator's mother's penchant for them—soften the hard, brutal edges of a city in lockdown. They are both reminders of his mother's life, of passing, of transience, but also of renewal and hope in uncertain times.

Reflecting on the role of edges, Kate Siklosi's opening line of the artistic statement for her visual piece "Thredge Effect", brings us right to the edge of things: "By simply being in this world," Siklosi writes, "we exist on the edge". From there, she moves between the interior and exterior world ("[s]ome edges divide and others connect. Some close off, and some open") inviting us to see the edge for what it is: a jumping off point, a call to action; it throws us into the new—the edge, ever open and expanding—as a place of exchange, transformation, and transition. Having collected the objects used in her pieces—leaf skeletons, moss, bush leaves, cattail, reeds, and driftwood—while walking her dog in and along urban edge zones, she reminds us that edges "exist along the treelines of our forests and the lakes of our minds." Siklosi goes

on to show that,

Despite common connotation of edges as defining limits, edges can also be sites of deep connection and exchange: in ecology, the "edge effect" describes the increased level of diversity and abundance within spaces at the threshold of two adjacent ecosystems, as in when a field meets a forest, or the sea meets land. These overlapping transition zones are often rife with nutrients and intermixed species from both environments, thereby creating dialogic, fertile, and thriving sites of activity.

The works in this issue will strike our readers as sensorially rich: full of colours, sounds, and tactile stimulus (the scratch of detritus in pockets, frog-song, hot condensing breath in icy air). The edge for our contributors seems to be a productive space for sensing. It is also where animals enter and alter the timbre of urban space: baboons mumble and porcupine quills swish in Christine Coates's "Night Walk" and "starlings scream" in Kate Horowitz's "Window: White Pine". Kate Feld's "The Chorus Frogs of Junktown" presents the edge as synaesthetic: here, time has a smell, and contexts have tastes. The night song of frogs in an urban dead zone of railways and dealerships—Marc Augé's "non-places"—"occupies time", becoming a way in which to perceive temporality. Their "cumulative sound" conveys a temporal and sensorial interregnum—in a "state of having begun, and not having ended"—and so the edge then can be experienced as a radical moment within, between, and also entirely outside of time. Finally, the edge(s) of this world exist in many forms; the edge is there, in the simple tip in Steven Salmoni's "Landscape, with Changing Weather"—"From the tip of one branch, to its extent along the branches,"—it is also there, in Dave Seter's "Don't Count Your Chickens," a poem that frames the edge along the consequence that follows the simple act of forgetting "to secure the rickety gate to the chicken coop— /and oh—all those fast food restaurants across the road." The edge in these pieces comes across as both wild and tame, life and death.

We aim to create a space in SPROUT where language(s) meet, overlap, and push us to the edge of (new) meaning(s); on that note, we are delighted to include our first translation—Deborah Leipziger's "The Green Ravine/A ravina verde", a poem inspired by a virtual field trip with Lucrecia Masaya, of the Green Ravine in Guatemala City as part of The Nature of Cities Conference 2021, during the

COVID-19 pandemic.

Being a creative project of The Nature of Cities, from its inception, SPROUT intended to be a space of convergence where transdisciplinary conversations about the eco-urban through poetry could take place. We wanted to embrace the medium of poetry as a lexical and formalistic edge-space to initiate and catalyze these kinds of conversations. We conceived of the “Meditations” as the space where we could try to achieve this. In the Meditations segment of each issue of the journal, we invite city practitioners (i.e., architects, academics, ecologists, civil servants, scientists) to ruminate over our issue’s selected works, translating the volume into the register of their own meaning-making of the city. In our previous issue, we published these responses on our website. For EDGE, two critical reflections are published within the issue. Firstly, African urban ecologist, Pippin Anderson, reflects on the two cornerstones of the issue produced by Ivan Vladislavić and Kate Siklosi, and then the former Chief of Forestry, Horticulture, and Natural Resources for the New York City Parks Department and current novelist, Bram Gunther, meditates on the issue as a whole.

We invite you to walk along the edge with us and hope you find it fertile ground for contemplating the crossovers between city, people, and nature.

Executive Editors  
Kirby Manià and Dimitra Xidous

T

Berkeley Wash  
*Lianne O'Hara*

hooded boys circling smoke  
into the gaps

between buildings

pushing

fragile winter air  
hot with pressed linen

---

into this  
elevator silence

Landscape, with Changing Weather  
*Steven Salmoni*

Here was no difference in the catalogue of saturated colors. The ivy-leaves were shallow as salt, mid-sentence, and the rain, a tensile fabric.

Brush until the grey fades into a pale blue, into masses of the “lightning effect,” – to say, in time, that there are, or were, opposite years

mixed with the colors of opposite shades, as if the clouds permitted one to see the object upon which they had been thrown.

And the question is, if you depart in the spring, how little yet exists. The sun was only added to the contrary. I don’t envy those who are any other.

From fair to fair, almost unnoticed: sky, shade, and an incandescent guess. Then, what edges first appeared, and what others have had their fair share in the afternoon light?

Or, “after what became of the horizon, how is it that the world followed?”

I’d see the grey above and that it might not be what is. I’d see the grey above those who would draw upon the weather.

From the tip of one branch, to its extent along the branches,

weave its nature in the apparent roof with a birds-eye recursion of space.

But painting is again a testament. Roof becomes wall; wall becomes a permanent abode. The beam “that may be so.” The beam, subdued with color,

painting everywhere the extent of any painting.



# Fata Morgana: Porosities of Negotiation

*Sarah de Villiers*

My fingertips know the edges of things.  
The dented edges of a bank note.  
They find  
the sand grains at the bottom of these pockets:  
dark inner spaces  
that had carried  
remnants of wish-images of things.  
Keys, paper, a hairpin.  
Slippery tips searching and feeling over to the  
ends of things,  
the end of cities  
for the ends of capital.

Our pockets, bags,  
carry the means of making a city within them.  
The resting place of negotiation.  
Little banks that  
hold, protect, grow things,  
like soil  
                  might.  
                  Might  
                  this sandy grit that meets our fingers in these  
dark inner spaces  
amass, coalesce, grow?  
A new frontier for microbes, organic matter, viruses  
to take hold, to negotiate a softness.

The end of things is good.

It makes holes,  
it makes new constituent granules:  
new structures for a cyclical reorganisation  
to be felt,  
to be touched,  
to be clenched.

I remove my hands from my pockets,  
a new city appears fleetingly on the  
horizon.

Cover image featured photo: credit to Sarah de Villiers.

# The Green Ravine

*Deborah Leipziger*

In the ravaged city  
the Green Ravine  
cools you  
after the heat island.

The dragonflies  
intertwine their bodies  
in the shape of infinity.

You hear the heat  
lift the *cenxontle* birds.

You sense the lizards.

You feel the water lifted into air.

This is where water is born.

*Note:* Inspired by a virtual field trip with Lucrecia Masaya, of the Green Ravine in Guatemala City at the Nature of Cities Conference, 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# A ravina verde

*tradução de Deborah Leipziger*

Na cidade devastada  
a ravina verde  
te refresca  
depois da ilha de calor

As libélulas  
se entrelaçam  
criando o símbolo do infinito.

Escuto o calor  
levantando os pássaros centzotles

Você sente a presença das lagartas.

Você sente a água levantando no ar.

É aqui que a água nasce.

*Nota:* Esse poema foi inspirado por uma visita virtual com a Lucrecia Masaya, da Ravina Verde da Cidade da Guatemala, no Festival da Natureza das Cidades em 2021, durante a pandemia.

## On the Verge

Ivan Vladislavić

I saw omens on every side.

My books leaned over like gravestones while I slept.

In the morning the display panel on my dishwasher carried this fatal message: End

┐

Seven years ago, when Minky and I moved from Troyeville to Riviera, from a house to a flat, we brought with us a large library of books and a small depository of seeds. Amateur gardeners usually plant seedlings from the nursery, which have a good chance of survival, but Minky prefers seeds, she likes to grow things from the ground up. The seeds from our garden in Blenheim Street were in packets from Kirchhoffs, Mayford and Garden Master, the leftovers of earlier seasons, as you could tell by the torn-off corners sealed with masking tape: tomatoes, Italian parsley, lemon thyme, sorrel, rocket, and then lobelia, dianthus, impatiens, verbenas, cornflowers and wildflower mixes. In our new home, we were entitled to claim space in the communal garden, but we wanted plants close by, where they could be tended and enjoyed more easily. Some established pot plants had moved with us and so we put those on the balcony, along with a few planters filled of necessity with quick-growing nursery seedlings. The seed packets stood in rows on a shelf in the hardware cupboard, flowers, vegetables and herbs together. The seasons came and went.

In one of those summers, my mother died. Afterwards my sister and I had to go through her possessions, sorting her clothes, handbags and shoes, her collection of clip-on earrings that filled a drawer of the dressing table, the matching strings of beads clustered on the uprights of the mirror, setting a few things aside as mementos and bagging the rest for the charity shops. On the windowsill I found a yellowed envelope with *Seeds* written on it in her hand. Before I saved the envelope open with a key, I knew what it contained. Hollyhock seeds. Tipped into my palm they made a small drift of flakes like rolled oats. My mother was not much of a gardener but all her life she liked to grow hollyhocks. They towered over us along the garden fence

in Rider Haggard Street, in Pretoria, where I was born. I think she may have brought some seeds with her from her mother's house in Clara Street when she got married: she always said the flowers reminded her of her mother. Later in Clubview, where we moved in the mid-sixties, they grew beside the front gate or at the back of the house where she could see them from the kitchen window. I wish I'd asked what she loved about them: perhaps their exuberant growth, the extravagance of their leaves and flowers. In English towns hollyhocks look after themselves, shooting up like weeds along the hedgerows and kerbs. On the Highveld they need some care, but they'll survive on the bare minimum.

After it has flowered, a hollyhock produces a seedpod like a tiny pumpkin, which should be left to dry on the plant as it withers if you wish to harvest the seeds. When the pods become papery you can break them open – if they haven't already burst on the stem – and find the seeds arranged like slides in a rotary carousel, ready to bloom into full colour when spring throws the switch. In my childhood, the gathering of the seeds was a ceremony that marked the end of summer. They were kept in a glass jar, some still encased in crackly pods, others scattered loose, and the jar stood on a kitchen shelf along with the peach preserves and chutneys that had been laid down for the winter.

The handful of seeds in the envelope from my mother's room seemed meagre by comparison. I brought them back to Riviera and shelved them with the other packets in the hardware cupboard.

┐

The clamour of pigeons draws me out onto the balcony. Startled by the opening door, the birds rise from the roof of Riviera Mews in a clatter of wingbeats like applause for health workers. In the courtyard below, a brother and sister, kept out of school by the lockdown, take turns riding a bicycle. It's too small for the boy, his knees are turned out to avoid knocking against the handlebars. It must be the girl's, a pink bike with training wheels and glittery streamers fluttering from the ends of the grips.

My Uncle Ted taught me to ride a bike on the pavement in Christoffel Street when I was five years old. The bike belonged to Teresa Pols from down the road and was too big for me, but it had no crossbar and I could pedal standing up. My uncle walked beside me holding onto the saddle to keep me upright. Then he let me

go and I had no choice but to forge on alone. The feeling is still somewhere in my body: the weight of the bike leaning on the air, about to fall but lifted at every point, defying gravity, as long as I pushed down on the pedals. It was an immersion in physics, as bracing as a plunge into a pool on a summer day.

┐

Trawling for something online, I can't remember what, I chance upon Brenda Hillman's poem 'On the Pier' and it leads me to abandon my search. Hillman wishes she could walk out on ignorance like a long wooden pier. At the end, the shimmering sea would celebrate with her the joy of knowing nothing at all. The gulls would cheer too – 'And birds crashing – white gloves, in applause!'<sup>1</sup>

┐

The first hard lockdown of the pandemic lasted from the third week of March until the end of April. For five weeks, we scarcely set foot outside the flat, and then only to fetch groceries. On May Day restrictions were eased and we could go out to take exercise for a few hours every morning. We are afternoon walkers, in the main, but we had no choice. We switched our walking to the early hours of the day.

We had company. By the time we went out at seven on that first morning, people in blue surgical masks and improvised bandannas had poured from their houses. On every block there were people walking, jogging and cycling. We were used to having the streets more or less to ourselves. Every day the numbers grew. By the next weekend, the streets had grown even busier, and we passed entire families, including kids on bikes or scooters and grannies with walking sticks, taking the air together.

Everywhere else in the world the streets were eerily quiet because of the lockdowns. In our part of Joburg they were busier than usual. We saw images of the empty streets of New York, Madrid and Paris on television and marvelled at the strangeness of it. And then we went out for a walk and found our streets full of people.

The houses around here often look abandoned. Where is everyone? we ask. You hardly ever see a person in a garden or on a balcony. If you hear voices on the

other side of a wall or laughter and splashing from a swimming pool, it's an occasion. But here they are, the secret residents, out and about. They must be feeling cooped up in their houses and tired of their own company. Why else are they all so friendly? You had to say hello to everyone you passed: raising a hand in greeting was not enough. Every passer-by was seized by a new sense of solidarity and community. Although this made for a pleasant change, it soon became annoying.

There were people we came to recognize, despite the masks, because we happened to walk at the same time and take the same routes. A middle-aged woman and her daughter, for instance, or at least that's the relationship we assigned them. The older woman was a jogger, white-haired but sturdy, dressed in a green tracksuit and a tennis peak, moving at a slow, steady pace that made you think she could keep it up all day. She always wore a patterned headscarf tied over her mouth and nose. The daughter, the younger woman, had a wiry frame and a burst of curly blonde hair growing out at the roots, wore a sleek black mask with a logo on it, and ran in a quick and anxious way, going ahead of her mother to the end of a block, looping back until they came face to face, running the length of two or three houses beyond her before turning suddenly and chasing her down again, skittering ahead, roving around her with a canine single-mindedness, like a sheepdog around a ewe, all this without a word or glance passing between the two to show that they were together.

There were also people we failed to recognize under their masks. 'It's me, Melinda,' one of them said, briefly unhooking an earpiece to present the evidence of her face.

I hadn't seen her for years. 'How are you? Do you live around here now?'

'No, I'm visiting my parents. They have a place at the end of North Avenue, in that complex. Do you know it?'

The couple she was with kept on walking, and she shrugged and hurried after them. Perhaps she was pulling a mouth under the mask. *Can't let them get away.*

Three weeks later, the lockdown restrictions were eased further, allowing people to exercise outdoors at any time of day, and the streets began to empty out again. It was winter and you had to be a committed walker to stay the course. As the foot traffic dwindled, the place came back into focus. People always obscure the view.

┐

In Parkview, an avenue of trees with straight trunks and shaggy crowns, somehow

oriental. What are they? I could have taken a photo to Google later, but we'd left our phones at home. Since the lockdown there's been an increase in the number of muggings in the area. Ismail, who lives in the block, was out jogging early one morning when a car pulled up, a man with a gun jumped out and robbed him of his phone and iPod. In lieu of a photo, I retrieved a dead leaf from the gutter, there being no live ones low enough to pick, and brought it home in my shirt pocket.

┐

A familiar object is enough to let some people feel at home in a strange place. In *Letters to Poseidon*, Cees Nooteboom writes: 'I use stones and shells to make spaces my own ... An anonymous hotel room becomes my room because of a shell or a stone I have selected for that purpose.'<sup>2</sup> From the example he gives, that of a pebble picked up on the banks of the River Plate in Buenos Aires and carried with him to the island of Menorca, it is clear that such small things, rendered beautiful by the memories they've absorbed, anchor him lightly in time and space.

This may be the effect my mother achieved with her hollyhocks: the same flower springing up from the same seed, year after year in a regenerative cycle, made her feel at home wherever she was. I found this idea in *The Story Smuggler*, Georgi Gospodinov's memoir of a childhood under communism in Bulgaria. He writes that whenever his father had to move house, he took with him some tulip bulbs smuggled into the country by a friend many years earlier, 'turning the new house, by means of a few Dutch tulips, into home'.<sup>3</sup>

Everywhere now migrants are leaving their homes, going from Syria to Lebanon, Libya to Malta, Mexico to the United States, South Sudan to Uganda, Zimbabwe to South Africa. One or two carry small packs or bundles; most are empty-handed. I doubt that many of them are carrying objects to remind them of home. Memories are surely easier to carry and less likely to be lost.

┐

After the long cold lockdown, Minky's green fingers are itching. She could go to the nursery, but instead she turns to the hardware cupboard. What is the point of a seed in a packet? First she digs the potting soil and compost in half-filled bags from the

previous summer into the pots. Then everything goes into the soil, all the seeds of herbs and flowers in packets, the hollyhocks, a clutch of iris and tiger-lily bulbs discovered in a roll of sacking. It all feels urgent after the dying season behind us. Many of the seeds germinate. With no way of telling one from another, care has to be lavished on every green sprig, even if it's a weed carried here in the potting soil or on the breeze, in case it turns out to be the thyme.

'Is this a hollyhock?' she asks one morning. 'Do you remember what the leaf looks like?'

'I think so. It's so small though, it could be anything. We should look on the internet.'

'No, let's see what grows.'

While we wait for the balcony plants to reveal their identities, the weather warms and we walk more often. The gyms and the malls are open again and the streets are even quieter, almost as quiet as they were before the pandemic. Once more we have the impersonal company of gardeners and security guards, a boy with a kitbag slung over his shoulder coming home from school, a worker hurrying to a shift or a taxi.

One morning we go walking in Houghton. At the near end of Seventh Street, a water channel cuts at a diagonal through the grid. It must have been a stream in its youth, one of the small white waters that gave the Witwatersrand its name, but it has long been confined to a steep-sided concrete channel. This channel runs as far as the corner of Sixth Street and Eleventh Avenue, then sinks underground into the storm-water drainage system, and emerges again as a stream in the grounds of the Killarney Country Club. There it feeds into the Sandspruit, which meanders north beside the M1 until it joins up with the Jukskei River. There is a broad bank on one side of the open channel, overgrown with grasses and shrubs in summer. In a different city, there might have been a path, furnished with a bench or two, it would be a pleasant place to walk and watch the birds, or sit for a moment in the shade, even if the water is no more than a trickle. But the whole area is fenced off to protect the adjoining properties. Workers from the municipality or the residents' association can get in through a tall, padlocked gate, and they clear the brush now and then, in the interests of security rather than leisure.

On this morning, Minky stops suddenly. 'Look!' On the verge near the padlocked gate stands a trio of hollyhocks. We go closer. They are taller than us and comically vital, like illustrations in a children's book. Could this crushed-silk leaf be the same as the tender sprout that pushed up through the soil on our balcony? And



how did they grow so soon after the cold? While I crumple a leaf under my nose, she runs her finger over the silver-white bristles on stems as thick as fenceposts.

‘The shape’s about right,’ she says. ‘This scallop here – it’s a bit like a vineleaf.’

A motor whirrs. As we turn, an ironclad gate rolls open in a wall and a man steps through it, a storm trooper in military fatigues, bulletproof vest and aviator glasses, with an assault rifle in the crook of his left arm. The old-fashioned magazine, round as a cake-tin, makes it look like a weapon of the future.

Without being told to, as if we’re up to no good, we move on. From the corner of my eye, I see the guard’s free hand floating upwards in an equivocal gesture. He may be telling us not to mind him – *please, you’re welcome to look* – or whisking us aside like flies, or sending us on our way with his blessing.

References

<sup>1</sup>Brenda Hillman, ‘On the Pier’, *Poetry*, Vol. 130, No. 2, May 1977, p. 84.  
<sup>2</sup>Cees Nooteboom, *Letters to Poseidon* (MacLehose Press, London, 2014), p. 205.  
<sup>3</sup>Georgi Gospodinov, *The Story Smuggler*, The Cahiers Series 29 (Center for Writers & Translators, American University of Paris & Sylph Editions, London, 2016), p. 30.

# Thredge Effect

Kate Siklosi

Everything will flourish at the edge.

—Jacques Derrida

By simply being in this world, we exist on edge: between mind and body, public and private, wild and tame, life and death. Some edges divide and others connect. Some close off, and some open. Edges exist along the treelines of our forests and the lakes of our minds. Despite the common connotation of edges as defining limits, edges can also be sites of deep connection and exchange: in ecology, the “edge effect” describes the increased level of diversity and abundance within spaces at the threshold of two adjacent ecosystems, as in when a field meets a forest, or the sea meets land. These overlapping transition zones are often rife with nutrients and intermixed species from both environments, thereby creating dialogic, fertile, and thriving sites of activity.

The same can be said for cities: many urban designers and theorists, such as Jan Gehl and Edward S. Casey, insist that similar edge zones exist in urban areas in the form of yards, alleyways, boulevards, and boardwalks. These in-between spaces provide rich social and spatial buffer and connection zones between humans and the urban environs. As an urban dweller, these spaces of inbetweenity, where the city exists on edge, have become rich hunting grounds for found materials to incorporate into my poetic practice. The objects used in these pieces—leaf skeletons, moss, bush leaves, cattail, reeds, and driftwood—were all found while walking my dog in and along these urban edge zones. Walking through these spaces, I’m particularly attuned to objects that are themselves liminal and on edge: the remains of leaves, the wave-softened wood, the seemingly dense yet imminently explosive cattail.

All geographical landscapes have multitudinous edges, but so too do written landscapes: even the surest (his)stories have cusps, brinks, and limits. When brought together, the edges of these terrestrial and textual worlds create new visual and semantic connections. In these works, text fragments torn from *The Famous Men and Great Events of the 19th Century* (1889), a book that I have been plundering and repurposing

for years, are sewn into natural objects to interrogate both the fragility and the fortitude of such connection. Perhaps not surprisingly, women are largely absent in this source text, with the female gender being mostly attributed to the ships that ferry white men to their boastful conquests. But despite its attempt to tell the whole story, this patriarchal and colonial narrative is but one telling in a fugue of many; and although such narratives have refused to acknowledge the people and stories at their edges, those edges nonetheless hum dangerously.

If we listen and look closely, these edges—here salvaged, stitched, or etched in letteraset—have much to tell. Murmuring the edges between our inner and outer worlds, between landscape and language, the thredge effect of these works reveal fertile fringes, unsettled margins, and spilled lips of possibility.









## In Reaction to “On the Verge” and “Thredge Effects”

*Pippin Anderson*

I am always shocked, but delighted, by the evident freedom of creative writing. As a scientist when I read an article I am in search of scientific truth, and the weight to that truth. I tend to read suspiciously. How many samples did they take? What statistical tests did they use? On what grounds do they base their claims? What language do they couch their findings in (‘significantly’, ‘unequivocally’, ‘irrefutably’) or use to hold their (or others’) findings at arm’s length (‘could’, ‘may’, ‘perhaps’)? By what license do they stake these claims?

No such handbrake in poetry or prose writing. Reading these pieces, ‘On the Verge’, and ‘Thredge Effect’, I feel much like Ivan Vladislavić learning to ride Teresa Pols’ bike down Christoffel Street, ‘leaning on the air’. Kate Siklosi invites the reader in at the outset of her piece and I am flattered by the inclusionary tone of edges that exist along ‘...the treelines of our forests and the lakes of our minds’. That her mind, and my mind, might be ‘our minds’ is a degree of closeness I rarely encounter in my daily reading.

While both pieces are about edges (‘verges’, ‘thredge effects’), and there is lots there to mull over, on reading them I feel the pull of time far more strongly. Vladislavić takes us back and forth between childhood and adulthood, between envelopes of seeds and parent plants, short walks around the block to forgotten distant hotel rooms, from the very everyday (he gives us March, and April) to the long journeys of migrants and memories. Siklosi does the same, proffering plundered text fragments from a book over a century old, woven together with objects from yesterday’s dog walk. It’s a glorious ramble through time, something science tells us we are short of.

I am mindful that any art, or writing, will be read or viewed in the context of the moment in which it lands, and my current moment (like the rest of the world), is focussed on COP26. The Conference has made me mindful of time. We are fighting

ills that were initiated decades ago (every graph climbing steeply), tied into and continuing to spill out of, the everyday. We find ourselves divided by time, and imagination. Our children are marching against us, and rightly so. They are being robbed of time. We are out of time, and over the edge, without the imagination to know what comes next.

I am comforted by the proximity of Siklosi and Vladislavić’s writing. I am delighted by the free and (what feels to me) wild use of ecological terminology in metaphor and prose, and the degree of personal sharing. All offering possibility. I want to know if the seedling did indeed turn out to be a hollyhocks, and long to feel the weight and texture of that mossy stone that ‘is the beginning’.

I feel a call to action. Vladislavić warns at the outset of ‘omens’ and ‘grave-stones, and (alarmingly) gives us his dishwasher display, ‘fatal message: End’. Siklosi reaches back in time and chides the ‘patriarchal and colonial’, and I am reminded of Greta Thunberg warning us older people how we will be captured in history. The writing leaves me feeling included and with a strong desire to join whatever ‘call to arms’ might follow. I marvel at this creative skill and wonder how I might achieve this abundance in my own writing which by contrast feels hard-wired and mean. Maybe I will start with a walk down Hillman’s wooden pier and celebrate ‘the joy of knowing nothing at all’.



# Night Walk

*Christine Coates*

Night ghosts the streets,  
while overhead lamps  
reveal and shadow;

another neighbourhood,  
hidden and spare,  
emerges away

from surrounding windows  
that flicker and glare,  
where people swim in aquariums.

Trees finger the stars  
and strelitzias are  
like cranes with crazed hair.

Under buildings and roads,  
forgotten hills,  
lost watercourses and springs,

but what stops you in your tracks  
are invisible birds,  
clicking crickets and frogs,

baboons mumbling in the pines  
and the faintest swishing  
of porcupine quills.

# The Chorus Frogs of Junktown

*Kate Feld*

Each time has its particular smell which can only be remembered. Every context has a taste which ripens to perceivability in the mind once it has been left behind.

Here it is dark, and we have not yet arrived at *how it was then*. You don't see now, but you will.

Of course I would like to be one of those filling up with delight at the smallest details of the day: card arriving, weed flowering from door jamb, tuft of snowy wool in the wire. The delighted perform important work in drawing our attention to the present. But consider the weather system of goingness tacking across our sky against the slim stem of a tender moment.

Though, also, consider the peepers. One spring evening that sound is, has been, has been gathering until it cuts in. You come upon it, in progress, always when evening has established itself. Always when it being evening is of little account to anyone. Day's taillights still visible in a quadrant of sky. That reedy song. Each throat flings its cry up to make a ringing mist of alien sleigh bells.

Consider that.

I am not drawing your attention to the night song of the chorus frogs because it delights me. It exists outside delight or terror. I mention it because I am interested in the way it occupies time – in the sense that it cannot be said, for us, to begin. Though every spring there must be a first *pseudacris crucifer* to sing somewhere in the Northeastern states and a final chorus frog sounding, the dimensions of this magnitude are not perceivable by us. When we come upon it, it is underway. For us, it only

exists in a state of having begun, and not yet having ended.

Or in the memory, which runs on a parallel track – there it has ended, and only exists in a state of endedness.

Another quality that interests me is noise which the ear can't parse into particularity. It is a cumulative sound which floats unattached to any individual frogs, yet it would not exist without the effort of an unknown number of individuals.

The way our ear can and can't hear each frog. This seems like the difficulty of fully perceiving a time while one is in it or why we try, again and again, to look directly at something which can only be seen in the rearview mirror.

We know the chorus frog lives *primarily in forests and regenerating woodlands near ephemeral or semipermanent wetlands*. I lived near a semipermanent wetland once, when I was newly hatched in the world. It was so small I didn't know it was there until I heard the peepers one evening and followed the sound. Still in my work clothes, I remember crossing the backyard of the house where I lived in an apartment over the garage.

A young working woman, who had moved there for a job, I was unsure about where I might go or stand so I had avoided the backyard, which fuzzed out into a regenerating woodland.

I hadn't noticed the water.

That town was an uneasy place where two interstate highways and one state route converged in a clot of asphalt, coiled around the river which divided two states; and the railroad which gave the town the *Junction* in its name. I called it junktown. The house where I lived was on its own, occupying an awkward lot halfway up a hill which connected a flat patch of dealerships to the dying town, racked on its train

tracks. Down there: dogs barking into screen doors, sagging porches and the greasy curtains of the Polka Dot Diner. I may have never been more ephemeral. But that night I stood and heard the peepers until the damp seeped through my thin soles and the last scrapes of sun were all licked up and the lights were coming on all over junktown.

It would not be accurate to say I was delighted. I was lonely, though I did not know it. And the song of the chorus frogs, heard every spring throughout my life – all at once, it pierced me with its goingness. The wind of that sound blew hard and nearly knocked me over.

I stood there and took it. I wanted to stay at the edge of the yard until it stopped. But I understood it would never stop, and I knew it would always have *stopped*, and I dropped something in that moment, or maybe what I mean is it sunk something in me. A longing for those kinds of songs.

Each time has its particular smell which can only be remembered.

Every context has a taste which ripens to perceivability in the mind once it has been left behind.

Here it is dark and we have not yet arrived at *how it was then*. You don't see now, but you will.

# Don't Count Your Chickens

Dave Seter

Don't count your chickens while carrying a hatchet.  
They're quicker than you think. Like marbles shot  
from a cannon they skitter and galivant.  
Chickens will be found from Tucson to Tucumcari,  
Tehachapi to Tonopah, unrecognizable,  
disguised as rock stars, eyes hidden by long crops  
of hair, crooning a decade's worth of top 40 songs.  
They all seemed so memorable at the time  
as you sang along to the vinyl records until  
they broke—until you became—a broken record  
telling your friend about the time you forgot  
to secure the rickety gate to the chicken coop—  
and oh—all those fast food restaurants across the road.

# Window: White Pine

Kate Horowitz

- I.  
Chaos in  
the predawn dark—  
starlings scream
- II.  
Robbing the open  
pinecone, rewarded again  
and again—chickadee
- III.  
The jay's alarm—  
*Stranger! Stranger! Stranger!*—  
swallowed by the wind
- IV.  
Streetlight caught  
in the raindrops caught in the  
orb weaver's web
- V.  
The owl arrives  
soundlessly. The night  
holds its breath.
- VI.  
I haven't been outside since it happened

**The Young Tree Misjudges A February Dawn  
at Sligo’s Institute of Technology**

*Niamh Mac Cabe*

neon-clad joggers circle a cold ball-pitch in sullen pairs  
a rusted metal sign informs: All Dogs Must Be Leashed

the ice winds have gone, some cigarette-ends are blown  
onto quarter-moons of vigil-snow over the wakening soil

a siren call whorls from the Ursuline School down town  
the wail trails gulls, and wraps round a nest of baby mice

ice winds have long gone, the thawing ground is awake  
and come tonight, a chill hush will settle on the bare pitch

this very night, hot-blue moonlight in a steep sky will bear  
down hard on an early sycamore sapling at the pitch edge



## A Meditation on Issue 2

*Bram Gunther*

I use a lot of similes in my climate change novel called *Softsole Monument*. The similes allow me to show how things change but are of the same fabric and to compare aspects of life to each other. Lately, I've been using a lot of similes to color. Yellow for fungus, especially on toes or on teeth, but landfill, and meadow too. Orange for flames and spores as well as for skin that is burned. Brown for contaminants but also for mud and estuaries. Ashen for fear of being flooded by gray waters or meeting with an enemy; but also of facing your fears. White for development, cleanliness, but also drought and whales saturated in phosphates.

In the stories, images, and poems in this issue there are a lot of color similes used to describe the climate and the emotions associated with it. "Catalog of color" is used to refer to nature's colors as well as modern fabrics, and a sampling of moods. Gray turns into blue to represent change, both backwards and forwards—the color of death but also of new beginnings. The re-transformation of the city, building by building, is a series of plates growing brown and green like a new skin. The white of dust as a bird explodes after hitting a building. The puckered pinks of flowing currents and falling water. The reddish brown of shuddering, rebellion, hope, the grave, truth, soil, and the sun. White pines.

Our art is adapting to include climate change. It was an outsider's art for years, as it was hard to fit the climate into the arc or details of a personal and cultural story. How does climate change factor into a marriage? How does climate change affect my reaction to a broken-heart? How does climate change affect my studies, my relationship with my son?

Similes and metaphors are bridges from the abstract to the personal, from what we gather, or believe in, to the tangible, the experienced. If you can see or feel the carbon emission through a simile or metaphor you might believe it is real, in your breakfast food, and not exclusively in the domain of science.

The setting of a story is what allows it to unfold; its relation to the action is as close as we will get to it. We become placed in the art, breaking the plane and

inhabiting both worlds. Our sense of place changes. We can feel something we couldn't before and see things we were blinded to. The reader emerges or enters into this place, which is a reflection of our material lives: the sea is rising to dangerous levels, like our insecurities but also our spontaneity, our willingness to take a risk; storms are getting worse and worse, like repeated bad moods; the heat unbearable like a hot iron but also love; an invasive vine like a string that binds our heart. In these works of art, we're the climate and it is us.



# Contributor Biographies

## *Pippin Anderson*

Pippin Anderson, a lecturer at the University of Cape Town, is an African urban ecologist who enjoys the untidiness of cities where society and nature must thrive together.

## *Niamh Mac Cabe*

Niamh Mac Cabe is an award-winning writer, published in many journals and anthologies including *Narrative Magazine*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Mslexia*, *Southword*, *Wasafiri*, *No Alibis Press*, *The Irish Independent*, *The London Magazine*, *Aesthetica*, *The Lonely Crowd*, *Lighthouse*, *Structo*, *The Forge Literary Magazine*, *Fictive Dream*, *Bare Fiction*, *tears-in-the-fence*, and *The Bristol Prize Anthology*.

## *Christine Coates*

Christine Coates is a poet and writer from Cape Town. She has three collections of poetry. *Homegrown*, published in 2014 by Modjaji Books, received an honourable mention from the Glenna Luschei Prize. *FIRE DROUGHT WATER* was published by Damselfly Books, 2018, and *The Summer We didn't Die* by Modjaji Books, 2020.

## *Kate Feld*

Kate Feld writes essays, poetry, fiction and work that sits between forms. Her writing has appeared in journals and anthologies including *Hotel*, *The Stinging Fly*, and *The Letters Page*. She lives in Manchester, UK.

## *Bram Gunther*

Bram Gunther is writing a climate change novel called *Softsole Monument*. He was former Chief of Forestry, Horticulture, and Natural Resources for the New York City Parks Department, Co-founder of the Natural Areas Conservancy, and is now starting a company that will transform lawns into native habitat. He lives in the burbs of New York City.

## *Kate Horowitz*

Kate Horowitz is an essayist, poet, and science writer. Her work has most recently appeared in *Rogue Agent* and *Moonchild Magazine*. You can find her at [katehorowitz.net](http://katehorowitz.net), on Twitter @delight\_monger, and on Instagram @kate\_swriting. Kate likes moss and rain and little bats with big ears. She lives by the sea.

## *Deborah Leipziger*

Deborah Leipziger is a poet, author, and advisor on sustainability. Her chapbook, *Flower Map*, was published by Finishing Line Press. Born in Brazil, Ms. Leipziger is the author of several books on sustainability. Thrice nominated for a Pushcart Prize, her poems have been published in literary magazines in six countries.

## *Lianne O'Hara*

Lianne O'Hara is a poet and writer. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Banshee*, *Queering the Green: Post-2000 Queer Irish Poetry*, *Skylight 47*, *Washing Windows Too*, *Beir Bua*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, and elsewhere. Her work has been shortlisted for the 2021 Bridport Prize and 2019 National Poetry Competition. She lives in Dublin, where she teaches creative writing.

## *Steven Salmoni*

Steven Salmoni's is the author of *A Day of Glass* (Chax Press, 2020). He received a Ph.D. from Stony Brook University and is currently the Department Chair of English at Pima Community College in Tucson, AZ. He also serves on the Board of Directors for POG, a Tucson-based literary organization.

### *Dave Seter*

Dave Seter is the author of *Don't Sing to Me of Electric Fences* (Cherry Grove Collections 2021). His poems and critical works have appeared in *Cider Press Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Raven Chronicles*, and other journals. He has earned degrees in civil engineering (Princeton University) and humanities (Dominican University of California). <http://www.daveseter.com>

### *Kate Siklosi*

Kate Siklosi lives, thinks, and creates in Dish With One Spoon Territory / Toronto, Canada. Her work includes *leavings* (Timglas 2021), *selvage* (forthcoming, Invisible 2023), and six chapbooks of poetry. She holds a PhD in English Literature from York University, and her critical and creative work has been featured in various magazines, journals, and small press publications across North America, Europe, and the UK. She is also a co-founding editor of Gap Riot Press, a feminist experimental poetry small press.

### *Sarah de Villiers*

Sarah de Villiers is an architect and designer, based in Johannesburg. Her work questions money borders, and the spatially detectable abstractions of power and economy. She co-leads GSA Unit 18 at the Graduate School of Architecture at the University of Johannesburg and contributes as a director at spaceKIOSK.

### *Ivan Vladislavić*

Ivan Vladislavić is the author of *The Restless Supermarket*, *The Exploded View*, *Portrait with Keys*, *Double Negative*, *The Distance* and other books. His published works include novels, collections of short stories, and essays on art, writing and city life. His work has won many awards including the *Sunday Times* Fiction Prize and the Windham-Campbell Prize for fiction. He lives in Johannesburg where he is a distinguished professor in creative writing at the University of the Witwatersrand.

### *The Nature of Cities*

[www.thenatureofcities.com](http://www.thenatureofcities.com)

Since 2012, The Nature of Cities' motto has been "many voices, greener cities, better cities." TNOC is a "boundary organization" interested in ideas at the nexus of science, design, planning, policy, and the arts. We create global (virtual and live) forums that explore the role of nature in creating communities, cities, and regions that are better for both people and nature.



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