The Rooms In Which We Existed

Jake Berry and Peter Ganick

Argotist Ebooks
Introduction

It's really a matter of living outside your skin. You hear the call and you answer.

For some time Peter Ganick has been posting his drawings online in the social networks. They range from asemic scribbles to layered forms to abstraction in the literal sense of images abstracted from actual forms in the world around us. All of them are engaging, curious, provocative, fascinating.

Seeing them day after day it felt as if I had entered a gallery of his work. As I walked through the rooms studying the images I began to hear words responding to them. So I took a notebook from my pocket and wrote what I heard. Over the course of two weeks or so, I spent many hours in those rooms, studying the images and writing the words that rose in response.

What you have before you is the combination of those images and those words unaltered as they happened in that imagined and very real space. They are the rooms in which we existed now made available for your existence as well – as if there is ever any division between us.

Jake Berry 2.15.18
The Rooms In Which We Existed
Sleep without redemption

If we meet in the antechamber
I will pass you the ring

upon it
the dragonfly inscribed
will sing out of the
scattered debris of silence

This is the filigree
the particle
the weapon
opening an orange
out of character
coiled in the newspaper
a day without surfaces

a steady wager
against the pit

and all those voices
discovering their mouths

staggering into the light
clothes tattered

this is what the plow leaves
married to electricity
We cobbled together enough
for the day
but left the begging bowls in heaven

three days in the mountain
three days out of any Monday
you might find yourself
staring down the tracks
expecting the flock to return

kaleidoscopic
in a burst of joy
suddenly remembered
in their genesis
Trace above the hollowing

the hollow eyed
gone liquid

and settling in pools
inside the relic factory

Even if it were forbidden
I would follow you
snow blind
cankered and laughing

for a settlement
beyond the last
razor wire cradle
Open time as a creature
whose skin is its language
whose parameter is its children
whose decline

is a hollow
a house by the spring
and the maple trees soughing

The year is incalculable
without the music
of the boilers
shuddering up the vent
without the odor
of varnish on the floors

and the twisted men
who have no purpose
except to inhabit
the rooms we delete
Out of clime
waiting for a trigger
every eye falters

and wailing
into the sea
glimpse the faith
borne into shuttering

as the dead limbs rise
toward some nimble agency
gloaming
lichen in crosscurrent
bound, hide and soul
in every splendor

falling to pieces
and caught in slim observation
of that quanta
from which I spring

nonetheless we turn
and are returned
to a nest, a rest
a dream without limit
the ribs
expanding
in some vaster animal
the spoils of a creation
run amok
and gathering in a word
as if the dancer
is forever in the arch
the pleasure
of falling
Out of the planets
(some impossible)
a cacophony

a war among
the interbred gravities

distributes a figure
come weeping
toward rapture

This season
is no lament
but the vacuum
of sheer delight
Swept along
in delicious confidence
toward the barricade
the pinnacle

not the eye of Horus
or the chain gang
in his wake

but a fractionless moment
taken for the object itself
until the serenade begins
The breakthrough
The lingua franca of paradise
in trembling cuneiform

like a gyroscope
casting stars
into the caterwauling fabric
of isotope and frenzy

but only another day
hard at the stone
and the gravel in your mouth
In Mexico I remember
the smell of her hair
like an idol

Why recoil
at these sacrifices
when the curve
of a thigh alone
can summon god
from the labyrinth?

Drink long and deep,
the geography is bleeding
A coil in the limb
confessing

what rain does
in the imagination

If it is a harp
I can find the unknown chord

If it is the coastal ranges
I can calculate the music
possible in any weather
Along the road
at the edge of the desert

someone you’d never meet
is in your room
half undressed

laughing on the bed
reading a letter
written in your sleep

If only the antenna could transmit
everything that follows
There are spaces where genes describe

oblivion and wonder

I removed the hands from the clock
She performed a pas de deux
at the top of the stairs

both of her splintering
as she descended

The aftermath
was pure calligraphy
All I remember of that day
is the moths
appearing wings first
out of the diaphanous curtains
mother made for the living room windows

Someone had died, a relative
or an old family friend

His face appeared
on every moth as it entered the room
and spoke so clearly
that everything else was erased
The first crocus in January is the most vivid
It’s light almost unbearable

a crosshatch of bitter cold
and the promise of a life to come

They say his hands retained the marks
That the fig tree returned to life
with wild abundance
enough to feed a generation of finches

But the heart has a manner of cognition
the mind can never anticipate or measure

Beneath it all the savage grasses wait
The street exploded
It rained neon for a week

Occasionally a crack in the cloud
revealed a streak of blue
which could be read
like an obscure hieroglyph

The wild animals were amused
and could be seen dancing
at the edge of our confusion

For an instant
we knew the birth trauma,
the staggering agony at the end of all sleep
one trope meta
the head emerges
from the fate line
across your palm
as you study the juxtaposition
of the cabinets and oven
Outside it's raging autumn
one more time
but coffee is all that matters
At last the quincunx evolves
out of the grass
out of the stones
found assembled every morning
in an uninhabitable region

This was not the play of starlings
or the mischief
of a drunken painter who lived
in the shanty below the waterline

When the histories were written
nothing could be said
and everyone in town
took an oath of silence

But the lines continue to grow
Even the sky seems frightened
As father is a carpenter
and his father before him a farmer

we have seen the claw
leave its mark on every barn
and rearrange the city

When the tracts were charted and sold
the auctioneer lost his voice
and the entire process was settled
with paper and pen

It’s a matter of fact
silence lies beneath every ground
Where to roam
when the fishery is depleted?

We once slept
near the orchid cages

but the eels have returned
and brought an earthquake with them

Now daylight feels like an angry imposition
on the dismal clarity of the video
into which we recline

lose the signal
lose the name
and the orchestra convenes
near the gazebo
weapons in hand
The scree
The mandibles that work it
to bring the gospel home

Gone blurry now
but at first the perfect diffusion,
the stillness (and us cold awake to it
waiting for dawn)
describes the distant future
if the math is right
and not a gimmick only

from which the day began
Are we done with reckless supposition?  
Are we done with the shape of the house inside?

Against the parabolic source  
the children refused their food  
They tore the trees apart  
until they were exhausted

Sleep has become a construction  
from which the debris of such violence  
hangs in a tattering wind

Who would ever want to sleep again?  
Who would desire such knowledge?

Give us the cherubim  
with a flaming sword  
to keep daylight burning
her back almost broken
and bent to the wheel

frame by frame
we see it all at once

and wait for the child
Above the cradle
a lamp shuttered
making twilight
sing across telephone poles
leaning toward the harbor

Until the giants arrive
ol' Finn will be sleeping
and even then his wife
will cover him and lie
to send them retreating

In the end
it's the fish who gather
and chant the old hymns
Scanning the ridge
beneath satellite shadow
(it's scrim and bleak hue)
the ship lurches out
and the gods along with her

A massive face
cut into the chalk
weeps when the soprano rises
from her seat and summons
the sea and all its sublimities

before the desert
before the horsemen
before the bellicose naming
Rough terrain for days.
Water is scarce.
Daniel would have died if we
had not sacrificed some of our reserve supply.
His small hands grasped at heaven
as he drank.

Occasionally great winged creatures,
like giant mayflies,
come in swarms.
They draw a calming wind.
Within an hour the sky is cloudy
and we get a light rain
which we collect in every available container.

We retain confidence that we are nearer
the city every day. But as yet we see no sign
and greet no other human.
Surrender to the incision in time
where the voice once cried out
for a word singly lit

a dawn that never ceases.

Inside that scar
the script uncoils
that reveals several dimensions
superimposed.

Decipher it and lose all traces
of identity. You can never return
but Mnemosyne will carry you.

The lamp is waiting
inside every weary eye.
Between the two
as they struggled
muscle to muscle

a third rose
and spoke to them

"Your violence made me
and as long as I live
you will suffer the tension
of being cut off from itself."

Why are there barricades in the desert
where there is nothing to protect?
Trellis of the eidolon
out of which the animals flow

Come forward
and take each one in your hands

When they tremble
chart it as a moment
in the choreography of making

Each motion is a thing unto itself
but only as a leaf or beak
or word whispered

before the play ignites
Lumbering up the back
of a horse designed by Dali
in that ravaged Spanish south

Moors and rapacious papacy
crawled tooth and spike into a box
that gave us zealous pork

and that resplendent Grenache
you served last night
outside the barn
inside the welcoming dark
When we began
we knew nothing of our feet
or the machinery that might carry us
into some brave oblivion
hidden in our arteries

As if a skull
could be made from aluminum
and still bark
the tribal codes of rationality
But what is rational
is convex
and playful

as a tree
from whose branches
broad pens have been suspended
to catch the wind's response
Minus the neuronal filter
nothing can be said

of the old man
taking the church steps
one each day

while the prism waited
for the isolateell of light
that makes the molecules ring

and the hand sets to work
at the equation
or bringing the heifer
out of the weather
so the calf could be born

or the islands disappearing
one each year
for the sake of a Chinese boy
up all night
learning to read
Late in her pregnancy
Io built a house
made of plexiglass and steel

When labor began
the walls expanded and contracted
to the measure and intensity
of her screams
and the sweet broken melodies
of her weeping

The moon had become
an irritating thing,
a Babylonian relic
trapped on the screen
while the bio-pic uncoiled
in waves of ennui
like a calendar that refuses to die

Pain, forever the anchor,
refuses to take shape
until the tide
hears her cry
Window light
into the ribcage of a floating carcass
gargantuan above the transformers

An inevitable explosion
reverse engineered
to defeat the intention
articulated in a clock

The procession each day at noon
out into the field
for lunch or a kiss
or a solemn libation
only a feverish body can erode

as the stars descend
and evaporate us one by one
we will discover
the savage amplitude of blood
12 days in the gallery
with the wind coming on

No one knew
only the specters have eyes

and kept the rooms empty

The books record nothing
but the traces of what we might have seen
if we had ignored the careful images
and turned to see the face behind us
Leave the fishermen to their drink
and what they recall of the sea
appearing each day in the twisted faces
hauled up in their nets

I cannot live for you
I can only pour these salvific whiskies
and wait for them to do their work

If they leave you dreamless
you will know that compassion
has found your veins
and left its chrysalis there
The old dirt road
that winds through the underbrush
and into the deepening wood
leads to a cave
out of which we have invoked the pulse itself

I cut the ignition
step out of the truck
pull my eyes from their sockets
and toss them into the sky
where the crows take them

to see and be seen
If I may speak
against the crescendo
of chaos planted
with the invention of the map
flat and coiled in a scroll

The doorman hovers
waiting to describe the perfect ape
to a crowd of tourists
who cannot afford
the vaults of heaven
but will break the bank
for a glimpse, a frail gesture

from a bony quivering hand
spread across the ocean
to seize its moment
educate the masses
and leave nothing
but a delicate gleaming fossil
Moses was cast against himself
haunted by a voice
rising from the skull
of every longhorn steer
cast across the desert like diamonds

Living on the marrow of reeds
and a tincture of tears and clay
while the invisible herd circled
out of the stratosphere
and he grappled with the price
of ontology and chickenwire
and the daily chores to keep the family peace

muscle and ghost
and golden thread
for the high priest’s robes

The contradictions were overwhelming
They left him speechless

but it was nothing a good fire couldn’t fix
So then evolution
is a crisis of shoulder joint
where a wing once spread

and a tinderbox oscilloscope
firing waves through the
anointed valves buried in a hen’s nest
two millennia ago

With every bright new species
religion is born
and the naive eye explodes against itself

through the mirror
through the screen
through the twilight
until mother calls us in for supper
We are rising
above the arc of days
and the star that calls
cought in the hedges

Turn them away
if they have not learned how to kill
how to breed a feisty rat
that can give us 12 good hours on their feet
without a meal

If you can smell it
gone to crux
in a crop left to mold
or an alloy spread across the delta
you know what paradise means

All of it happens in a nanosecond
and disappears into some sweet
cul-de-sac of deja vu
I am looking out of a bunker
through a barricade
of razor wire and cobblestone

Grandfather’s 12 gauge is on my lap
and I am waiting

The foxes, wrens, seasons
and the full lifecycle of a cicada
rush into my face
but I never blink
no matter how cold the wind

because I have taken faith
against my bloodline
and left salamanders
and the ibex scrawled in the stones above me

The archaeologists will never understand
the smell of gunpowder year after year
and the deep carnality
of an uncertain god
At last the full luster
of the aorta spread across space
and all the pleasure it holds
as we watch it work

I keep the charts
in my briefcase
and study them with my coffee
while I wait for the ferry to arrive

And to think
we once called them gravity waves
or membranes of extra-dimensional physics

The old colliders did what they could
but the script was too vast, too intricate
too blindly obvious

This morning a dove
pressed his face into my eye
and I remembered
the last fragment of the equation
that renders math useless
When the play began
children filled the balcony
and began raining
fruit, coins and sherds of pottery
down on the audience

The actors could not contain themselves,
laughed and applauded wildly
and led the orchestra out of the pit and into the air
while it played Ives, Brahms, and Vivaldi
in simultaneous consonance

Who would write such a thing?
Who would invent an electron
or an old maple falling to pieces
while the ants had their way?

During intermission
while the paramedics did what they could
the director grabbed the proceeds
complete with sales of t-shirts and other propaganda
and made for the border

But he had forgotten the children
who never forget anything
After a thorough examination
the doctor explained
radio waves in a hip socket

and what music should be played
to restore that initial moment
when romance brought the dead back to life

Without that spark
entropy is pleasure to the point of holiness
and all that has been forbidden
for the sake our comfort, our very lives,
is overwhelmed in the tide of eternity

I take the stairs carefully
The essential failure lives
in every caterpillar weaving
As the windows
out of sequence with their houses
strum the months together

we discovered we were slaves
strapped to horses and taken
in a long caravan to the harbor

Only the sea can save us
and only if she disappears
leaving the rusting hulls singing
in a lunar wind

The sophistication of the masters’ devices
will be mere abstraction,
fragments of an abandoned creation
tottering, empty

Slip away quietly now.
Let him sleep.
Leave the poison by his bed.
It is no longer necessary.
About the Authors

Jake Berry is a poet, musician and visual artist. The author of *Brambu Drezi, Species of Abandoned Light, Drafts of the Sorcery, Genesis Suicide* and numerous other books. He has been an active member of the global arts and literary community for more than 30 years. His poems, fiction, essays, reviews and other writings have been published widely in both print and electronic mediums. In 2010, Lavender Ink released a collaborative book, *Cyclones in High Northern Latitudes*, with poet Jeffrey Side and drawings by Rich Curtis; and *Outside Voices: An Email Correspondence* (with Jeffrey Side) was released by Otoliths also in that year. *Phaneagrams*, a collection of short poems, was published by Luna Bisonte in 2017. He regularly records and performs his compositions solo and with the groups Bare Knuckles, The Ascension Brothers and The Strindbergs. *Mystery Songs*, his tenth solo album, was released in 2016. Ongoing projects include books four and five of *Brambu Drezi*, a new book of collaborative poems with Jeffrey Side, and a wide range of musical projects.

Peter Ganick has a degree in Music Composition from Boston University, and taught classical piano for 41 years. He was publisher at Potes & Poets Press from 1981–2000, which published A.BACUS. And with Jukka-Pekka Kervinen, he published Blue Lion Books and White Sky Books. And founded the blog, experiential-experimental-literature (or, ex-ex-lit). He is now occupied full-time as an artist, and his work can be seen on Instagram under the name @ganicoto1, and on Facebook under his own name. He exhibits with his wife, the artist Carol Ganick, and on his own. He has been active in the West Hartford (CT) Art League since 2000.