

spacecraftprojects

we are all astronauts

transmissions
joe milazzo

Marjoe Gortner

The downward reveal
is the new establishing shot.
In its scrimping, the shallow history
we share dollies away into
distances of too-diligent summers.
Still our city rose unwalled
to give all the places where
harvesting bit too hard something
to flank. Still, innocence was forensic.
Still, the elements are idle
on their floured cloth
until they call the elders
to the table. I observe this only

because I've gathered myself out
of my own green preoccupations
to take a pass. The pharaohs aren't
remembered for being especially oracular.
Their stomachs are pits deflated, harrowed
thin with the kaleidoscopic remnants
of civilization's thoroughgoing compromises:
fratricides, -isms, the cottonwood's hairy motility.

Lazarus was a luthier. Now he's a laparoscope.
But I'm no nutritional anthropologist
and architecture's keyhole fetish is
my poorest fit. I can't tell a sextant's stern
from a teakettle, inveterate landlubber that
I am. For all I know, a breast stroke
can bail out a hayloft given the right trident.

Every day, I nod to myself, making footprints
in my own footsteps where they've stenciled
their loneliness over abandonment's blocks,

These broken domains. These princes usurped
by the diminutives (Hanks and Andys,
Johnnies and Dickies) that stupefied
their most loyal buyers of thumbnuts
and monkey blood. Yet there's no more
juice in these circuits, just cold feet.
Even the color-blind sunburst —
purple, white — of each weed pulls against
my work-ward step with a little retarding muck.
Moldering and its cascade
of shards: a limestone tide
that bubbles over every plat
in this breadbasket — except the ones
carved out for actual graveyards.

That's the slow version
anyway. In real time
(no one has to apologize
for filling a face with laughing)
“somehow” translates as “always.”
All of my favorite anthems
settle at the bottom of the playlist.
Unknown artist; unknown album:
these milk-carton kids trail me
everywhere, as if I were headed
to the top, that place nobody goes
except to shrink accustomedness
down to a geometry as slow as ribbon
candy — as deckle-edged as toy revolvers.
This new radio's algorithm is sure
to run me out of what's left of town.

Spend enough time as an archaeologist
of your own salad days and you'll come
to see how house-framing can't ever seem
to detach itself from the smokestacks'
antecedent erections. Fate assumes
the form of vertical offset. Another flattened
morning, another mateless shoe put on
one at a time. Another heart attack
coming off the assembly line with a D-shaped
handle and an 18-inch-wide plastic scoop.
Another walk that tilt-shifts into the thirds
that exemplify a subtle excess of headroom.
How is it coffee and tobacco both

smell clean when I know they can't be?
It must depend on some sameness —
the forgotten name of that lost art
of bending burning until it turns to astronomy.

If there were any desirable demographics
still standing around to ask,
they would grumble. "Is that
a hearing aid or a satellite dish?"
It's the open relationship my earbuds have
with atmosphere. But, look, no reader buys
one book over another just
because it flips more pages but because,
laid face down to save a place, its tent
(no big top) shelters more indifference.
And where's there more indifference, there's
less blame. It was guitar solos that cracked
the spokes of pioneering's wagon wheels.
Not that I impose this shapeliness everywhere
I go. No, the pattern — its peak, its vanishing
point — is too much one step ahead
of pedestrian me. The brass testicle
of the pole is frozen in an eccentric sorcery
over of the squatting institutions named after
loser commanders and clever functionaries. Flyover skies
make what's oddball about it seem more
exhibitionistic than it is, and with or without the flag
whose matins and vespers are both exaltation
and sacrilege for the civics students who now
apprentice in distraction on campuses
that resent their quads. Or how
the sides can't mirror unless they double.
Both worry and amazement are rivers but
only one has the dark wherewithal
to burst its banks, leaving the other
to pretend at pacing the berm. Whereas
water draining down the drain, and taking
with it everything unwanted about cleanliness —
that's a kind of "Om." There's something
to be said for going off the levee and stepping
in the same fiery foulness twice.

Even cozy with the memory of a mud room, I'm
never more homeless
than when I lose track of myself

in the strange routes to the haunts hanging on
in this modest sprawl of hometown scree.
Not even the proto-brujos whose mounds
preemptively mocked the remedial
perplexity of those who would square
the globe's obviousness could have envisioned
such repertories of the unnecessary. One with
a grain elevator's face and an imagination
brimful of the velvet dressing and mayonnaisey
adobe of a Pantages. Life under the influence
of this fair land's overdoing; it's too
lithic, even for me.

“To be a lunchpail
full of glue.
To fade up
from the false ending.”
I'm no poet; I'm bisected by repeating.
And I can't help it if this barometric pressure
has cluttered my inner ear with
the friendly growl of mondegreens.

I'm staring at a blinking picture
of an intersection on my screen.
Second by second, the whole
glow of it strings an overwhelming
ellipsis. I'm nostalgic for the steep
isosceles of the easy life. Peril, you see, adores
an expanse, one where the homogenous
can lay low in plain sight. Which is to go
without saying. Once scarcity chooses you,
you make your own best friend.
Maybe that friend is typing something.
The probability of an emissary,
a mediator golden around the edges,
hurries into what's scalable.
In these messy vacancies where
the reception feels the pinch, a review
would be helpful. Who else has
checked in about the lighter-than-usual
traffic in the area? Is this stone to be rolled
away or into place? I may be a fast
perfectionist but I'm still willing
to await further instruction.

Herbie Nichols

They told him he was dying,
so trivia became his hospice.
The dynastic lineage
of the guillotine trick. The names and dates
of every circumnavigator. Old Hollywood's
half-sisters and blood-feuds. Fanta
Nazis, Soviet Beatle x-rays, etymologies
and phobias by the gamut.

They laid him up
with pillows. He traded their downy
sentiments for the worlds' record annuals
whose posterity no library wanted
anymore: the superseded pets
of the overdue. Never before had he
appreciated an index, how like a spine
it was. Not that the factual could stop the shadows
from lengthening across his insides. He could feel
clouds accumulating in there, clumping like hair
shampooed too often. He didn't stir much,
but he ah'ed and clucked
into his magnifying glass, and sounded
even to himself as though he couldn't quite
remember the tune to some
song he knew he knew.

His eldest would bring him milkshakes from
time to time, and the smell of the burgers
and fries she managed in paper sacks. He complained
they'd removed his foreman's appetite
when they'd cleaned out all his ducts, given him
his gizzard. But he was too full
of new knowledge anyway.
Why do you do it? she asked
one day. Are you training for some pub
team with a randy name? You hate
classic rock. Between coughs,
he asked her, did she know that the white
sand of white sand beaches
— "as in: Florida" — it was actually
pooped-out coral. She imagined

her own daughters, their capacity to laugh, their

faces nearly set into the neutral antagonism
of people grown into their own compromises.
She imagined a sun, tired
of shining. It flipped
in her, how she hadn't
imagined anything
in quite a long time.

She adjusted his little reading lamp and snugged
the blanket it had thrown over
the engrossing columns of his current
book-mark. No, Dad, no. I didn't.

He shoveled with his straw. And you always
studied so hard, he said, you never let school
take a backseat. The vanilla slopped around
in his mouth like inexpert dental work, like
glue. My dear, I admit I didn't encourage
it but I always
admired that about you.

Later, after bedtime and the true unmuzzled origins
of razzle-dazzle had caught
up with him, she thought of overtime,
rethought it. She texted Brandon,
her right-hand, told him to handle
the close. Somewhere, one daughter was rotating
to serve. Somewhere else altogether,
she had lost track of what her other daughter
might wear. She started picking up
around their chairs, her's straight, borrowed
from the kitchen, his so very Masterpiece
Theater (his thing now) and hell
on his diverticulitis. In the bottom
of today's bag, underneath the useless
little tubes of salt and the barely
contained fancy of catsup
and mustard, she found a fortune
cookie. Wait,

this was today's bag
she'd brought? She looked

again. Like some coin purse
you'd get for opening your

Very First Savings Account
(1.01% APY), but Silly Putty-
fleshy — an imitation octogenarian
porridge-mouth, vulgarly
redress and a magnet for fingerprints.
It was a toy fortune cookie,
jigsawed rubber and authentically
whispered Chinese, "reusable",
hollowed of hokum for now.
(You inserted your own, that was
the gag. The bit.) A promotional
zaniness familiar
to the franchise in her
with a palm-to-forehead of bland vertigo.

Her father was leaving this life a kind
of genius, but, mostly,
she envied him how
backwards he might have been.