

## Postcards From the Volcano *The Line*

**I**  
~~Among twenty snowy mountains,~~  
**The only moving thing**  
~~Was the eye of the black bird.~~

### SCENARIO

*In the corner of the room by the reading lamp, framed oil (a kitsch alpine scene) and decorative cheese plant is a vast collection of cassette tapes. It is evening and the lamp is on illuminating the board. A dim pool of yellow light falls onto the scene, painting a soft corona around the tapes, reflecting off the glossy leaves of the nearby plant, imbuing the neatly stacked shelving with a green aura. There is a sprinkling of dust on some of the cassette cases though not enough to warrant an outing with a feather duster. In the periphery, a curl of smoke sings the air with its blue-grey smoke and a stale glass of water sits on the sideboard, accumulating crabs-eye bubbles below its surface.*

### OBSTRUCTION

I am the raindrops you cannot see in the stream.

### ACTION

Here is a stick.  
Hold it.

*[the creation of a transient line in nature  
made by repeatedly walking back and forth in a grassy field]*

### CIRCUMFERENCE

I pass my finger into the water and out again - breaking its meniscus - resting its tip on the rim of the glass. A droplet of water has fallen, as if it did not care for the music residing in my fingerprints. I run my finger over the rim until friction causes the glass to vibrate. The glass' voice cascades into the world.

**II**  
~~I was of three-minds,~~  
**Like a tree**  
~~In which~~  
~~there are three blackbirds.~~

### SCENARIO

*What we have before us is a neatly shelved collection. Around 2,000 tapes. The cassettes are stacked with width rather than height - to reveal a name, a title, a record label; sometimes a logo, or catalogue number. Should we remove a cassette or two, we shall see that each tape has been etched with a stylus. In spidery handwriting we read:*

*HARKEN AND ENCHANT*

### OBSTRUCTION

A whisper would never be heard here.

### ACTION

Here is a stick.  
Scratch your name into its bark.

*[a recorded physical intervention  
within the landscape]*

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## OVERHEAD TRANSMISSION

Overhead transmission line vibration and galloping have been a design and operating problem since early years of last century. The three forms of wind-induced conductor vibrations are Aeolian vibration, galloping and subspan oscillation. Aeolian vibration is caused by an alternating wind force, which arises from a pressure difference associated with a regular formation of vortices behind a conductor. Galloping is a low frequency, large amplitude, wind-induced vibration of both single and bundle overhead conductors, with a single or a few loops of standing waves per span. It is caused by moderately strong, steady crosswind acting upon an asymmetrically-iced conductor surface. Subspan oscillation is produced by forces from the shielding effect of windward subconductors on their leeward counterparts. It is particular to bundle conductors.

## III

~~The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds.  
It was a small part of the pantomime.~~

## SCENARIO

*So that each cassette may be looked over, removed and played with ease, a database of titles has been created for public consultation. This archive of sorts has its own means of retrieval, not dissimilar to the Dewey system. Each cassette is neatly labeled like a supermarket grocery: a label is placed on its spine with a number and sometimes a letter. This is the accession code and tells of location and genre. Sometimes these codes might give information about the record label or the artist.*

*The accession labels are always hand-written, and in a peculiar, fairy-like hand. One might entertain the idea that this ritual has been inspired by the dusty accession marks one sees in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, where shrunken beads nestle by voice disguisers, the original Parker made from seal gut and votive offerings.*

*Like the museum's curious artifacts, the tape archive contains its own great treasures and peculiarities to be explored.*

## OBSTRUCTION

Like the homing pigeon, she took the route she loved.

## ACTION

Here is a stick.

Wrap its end with red wool.

*[walk backwards and forwards until the turf you have flattened catches the sunlight and becomes visible as a line.]*

## CONTOUR

Show me the way. Show me how to know you. How to picture your body when you are not in my sight. Show me the line that connects the senses to the memory. The hair to the limb. The iris to the breast. The nose to the hip. Show me the way. The line the crow flies. The crumbs to find my way back. The old ways. The well-trodden path.

## IV

~~A man and a woman~~

~~Are one.~~

~~A man and a woman and a blackbird~~

~~Are one.~~

## SCENARIO

*When a cassette is removed from the archive, a black cassette box is put in its place: a void before the music.*

*Typically, it is the most beautiful music in the collection that remains in the void: a purposeful hole for the covetousness of others as for the owner of the archive, who lends tapes out periodically, it is the empty space, and its silence that screams the loudest in remembrance.*

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### {INTERLUDE}

*I once overheard an argument about the relevance of the mix-tape. Apparently the "mixie" as it's diminutively called could never go out of fashion. Even when the first, second, and third generation of lovers grew up and forgot about them there would always be nostalgia for nostalgias sake. And anyway, those too young to even know what a tape player is let alone have a clue about what it does will still covert the mixie as cultural relic, and artifact of cool anachronistic.*

*Its cute size, customisable box and labels, the fact that tape itself comes with restrictions - tape length, for example - as well as freedoms - it could be used and reused and used again - and, of course, the fun part: how it might be cut and re stuck together to make one-offs: slick cuts with no silence; tacked together to remix juddery song made out of spit, mass-produced guitars and pound shop mics; stretched or partly erased for the fun of it.*

*In a post-internet age much about the analogue is still considered whimsical conjecture, however what is known is that the mix tape is a pseudonym for many thing: it is communication and conversation; it is diary and confidant; it is social commentary and political statement; it is taste maker and scenester; it is art piece and love token; it is reliquary and rite of passage. Most of all it is a visceral connection between space and time and people and ideas.*

### OBSTRUCTION

Eighteen steps were taken with the eyes closed; blinded by the sun.

### ACTION

Here is a stick.  
Take it to a shady place.

*[intangible presence;  
corporeal presence]*

### A SUBJECTIVE LIST

Beautiful words in current usage within the English language:

*Assemblage / Bucolic / Chatoyant / Denouement / Evanescent / Forbearance / Gossamer / Halcyon /  
Insouciance / Lassitude / Mondegreen / Nemesis / Opulent / Propinquity / Quintessential / Redolent /  
Sumptuous / Talisman / Untoward / Vestigial / Woebegone*

### V

**I do not know which to prefer,  
The beauty of inflections  
Or the beauty of innuendoes,  
The blackbird whistling  
Or just after.**

### SCENARIO

*The night before he stopped sleeping in his first love's bed he recorded her sleeping soundly on his old cassette recorder.*

*He has placed the recording in a file that is wrapped with garden twine and has Sellotaped edges. Inside are things that belong to her. Or remind him of her. He cannot bear to listen to it. But it gives him comfort to know it is there if he might ever need it.*

*Years have passed since this time.*

### OBSTRUCTION

Today the camera lies.  
It likes the light.

### ACTION

Here is a stick.  
Burn its end.

*[trace; bodily action]*

>>>

## CONNECTION

When you first met me I was bent double, installing a sculpture within the rabbit warren of room that is the Barge House. It consisted of an upturned chair with every blemish on its surface covered with neatly printed rectangles. The rectangles were printed with the same word. The word was 'Centred'. From the word sprang a string and from the mass of springs, a web. A web that brought one and one together; that brought you to I, and I to your question.

## VI

~~Icicles filled the long window~~  
~~With barbaric glass.~~  
~~The shadow of the blackbird~~  
~~Crossed it, to and fro.~~  
**The mood**  
~~Traced in the shadow~~  
**An indecipherable cause.**

## SCENARIO

*Here, the cassette per se is an inexpensive portal to a new world; a different time; an unknown life; an exotic culture. Unwrap. Open up. Place the tape in the cassette machine. Press play. Sit back. Become transported.*

*C30, C60, C90 – go!*

## OBSTRUCTION

One can only bend the line at speed.

## ACTION

Here is a stick.  
Dirty your fingers with its tip.

*["a sculpture by walking"]  
- Richard Long: Selected Statements & Interviews]*

## STRIKE THOROUGH

~~The words were written by a distinctive hand. Neatly ordered, spacially aware. Self-aware of the reader to come. The words were crossed through with a distinct line. A hurried smear by the left hand. The ink was Indian in origin and still wet. Glossy. And yet it appeared blotchy across the surface of the page; highlighting the nots and blemished across the sheet; across the weaknesses where it had been rolled, and rerolled. The ink had incised the paper. Cruelly bisected the flow of the font. A spider caught in a web of its own making. The line gleamed in the faltering light. A ruler-straight tear of obfuscation.~~

## VII

~~O thin men of Haddam,~~  
~~Why do you imagine golden birds?~~  
~~Do you not see how the blackbird~~  
~~Walks around the feet~~  
~~Of the women about you?~~

## SCENARIO

Title: *Compilation Tape – Rock*  
Accession number: *03*  
Date created: *c.1995/6*  
Technical information: *TDK IEC1/Type1 Normal Position D60]*

### Side A:

- 1. Smoke on The Water – Deep Purple*
- 2. Free – All Right Now*
- 3. Kiss – Crazy Crazy Nights*
- 4. Lenny Kravitz – Are You Gonna Go My Way?*
- 5. Stiltskin – Inside*
- 6. T-Rex – 20<sup>th</sup> Century Boy*
- 7. Pear Jam – Daughter*

### Side B:

- 1. Pear Jam – Glorified G*
- 2. Alice in Chains – I Stay Away*
- 3. Therapy? – Nowhere*
- 4. Red Hot Chili Peppers – Under the Bridge*
- 5. Alice in Chains – Rotten Apple*
- 6. Sound Garden – Black Hole Sun*
- 7. Reef – Naked*
- 8. Reef – End*

>>>

## OBSTRUCTION

The sun bleaches colours; melts all to obscurity.

## ACTION

Here is a stick.

Guise your face with its charcoal.

*[the artist is not present]*

## TRAJECTORY

An empty clear glass jar is filled with a damp wad of cotton wool wrapped with kitchen towel. Secreted within are three kidney beans. The jar and contents are placed on a sunny yet protected ledge, away from draught and scorching sunlight. The contents are kept warm, and moist but not sodden. After some time there will be a change, a magic agitation. The beans will begin to move, to judder, to vibrate so as to shed their jackets. Soon a tail will point to the ground and two arms will rise gracefully to the sun: a direct trajectory to quell UV craving.

## VIII

**I know noble accents**

**And lucid, inescapable rhythms;**

**But I know, too,**

~~That the blackbird is involved~~

**In what I know.**

## SCENARIO

*On a lazy day, one of those stiff Sundays, when the bones are aching from the accumulated malaise of a busy week's work, tape no. 17 was collected from the archive. The cassette was selected at random (as one might select lottery ticket numbers) in the hope that upon listening, whatever the sounds might be, they would either soothe or excite the neurons.*

*The clear tape*

*of anticipation.*

*The white rectangle*

*of transition.*

*The snake*

*of metallic tape.*

## OBSTRUCTION

Complacency (or that beautiful word again, *insouciance*.)

## ACTION

Here is a stick.

Walk with it.

*[to and fro, to and fro, to and fro]*

## THE LABYRINTH

It came upon them

as snowdrops and jumping brittle branches.

Sinuous creature smells the air with its tongue.

Flick flick. Tasty morsel. Flick flick.

It came upon them

with a black and glossy eye.

An amalgam of toxins to shut down heart and lung.

They did not struggle.

It came upon them

as a moonlit mamba.

Choked their bodies with calcium inhibitors.

Paper-skinned zombies, they walked its back.

>>>

## IX

~~When the blackbird flew out of sight,  
It marked the edge  
Of one of many circles.~~

### SCENARIO

*When I was 14 I made my first tape loop. I was so pleased with myself that after I'd finished it I wrote the date, time and location of its manufacture on the cassette box, just to cement the fact that it actually happened. I had bought some special stickers from the local newsagents to decorate the box. A sheet of glittery robots. I thought they were cool at the time but soon got second thoughts, so I pulled them off. The glue left a sticky residue that made the tape look old, like it had been buried. Which made me think that burial was a good idea: the sound of soil and the holes worms make in the tape got into my dreams that night.*

*I kept the loop – made from an old Aswad single – under my bed with the other precious things I owned at the time: my tennis racket; some foreign coins from Jordan, Romania and Spain; a badge that changed colour with heat; a Valentine's card from Lindsay; and some cats'-eye marbles.*

"Don't turn around  
'cause you're gonna see my heart breaking..."

### OBSTRUCTION

Ritual one: draw a perfect circle.

*"When a man in a forest thinks he is going forward in a straight line, in reality he is going in a circle, I did my best to go in a circle, hoping to go in a straight line."*

- Samuel Beckett

### ACTION

Here is a stick.  
Draw its line.

*[round and round the garden like a teddy bear,  
one step, two step...]*

### OUTLINE

The body was drawn around in its stillness.  
The last breath could not be captured. (Edison's vibration.)

## X

~~At the sight of blackbirds  
Flying in a green light,  
Even the bawds of euphony  
Would cry out sharply.~~

### SCENARIO

*Dad always said, "It's best to listen with headphones. That way you can listen to the inner world, the outer world and the Purgatory you create in the middle without placing your misery upon anyone else." That's probably why when he'd go to the pub for a darts league game, or in the summer when he'd meet work colleagues for a bike ride, I'd go "ears free" and crank up the volume on the speakers in the cubby room, playing my favourite songs on repeat until the walls would quake. Well, I liked to think they did. In reality, I'd get told to turn it down by my mum, or my brother would come in like a stealth and sit on my chest until he'd get his own way and I'd have to play his poxy electronic music.*

### OBSTRUCTION

A palimpsest called Limerence.

### ACTION

Here is a stick.  
Trace your time.

*[sutures in the seam;  
bind the chasm; seal the line. scar tissue.]*

>>>

## **DOUBLE YELLOW**

Waiting restrictions indicated by yellow lines apply to the carriageway, pavement and verge. You may stop to load or unload (unless there are also loading restrictions as described below) or while passengers board or alight. Double yellow lines mean no waiting at any time, unless there are signs that specifically indicate seasonal restrictions. The times at which the restrictions apply for other road markings are shown on nearby plates or on entry signs to controlled parking zones. If no days are shown on the signs, the restrictions are in force every day including Sundays and Bank Holidays. White bay markings and upright signs (see below) indicate where parking is allowed.

## **XI**

~~He rode over Connecticut  
In a glass coach.  
Once, a fear pierced him,  
In that he mistook  
The shadow of his equipage  
For blackbirds.~~

## **SCENARIO**

*He watched a film about an artist who collected discarded video and cassette tape and reappropriated the material into AV installations. After that he could not leave his house without finding clumps of the tape stuffed in car exhausts, laying dormant under recycling bins, hanging limp from the branches of winter trees or flickering in the wind. He did not collect the material. Nor did he reappropriate it into AV installations. He did, however, think a great deal about what (mis)adventures had got the material to where it was found.*

## **OBSTRUCTION**

A flight of fancy perhaps: the shingle, it talks to you.  
But what does it say?

## **ACTION**

Here is a stick.  
Record your map.

*[which way is North?]*

## **LINE-BY-LINE**

Long ago I found a poem from Ono no Komachi, in English translation.

*Though I go to you  
ceaselessly along dream paths,  
the sum of those trysts  
is less than a single glimpse  
granted in the waking world.*

The poem appears as No. 658 in the Konin Wakshu, an old anthology of poems from the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

## **XII**

~~The river is moving.  
The blackbird must be flying.~~

## **SCENARIO**

*The music group pressed play at the same time.  
The music group pressed play at different times.  
The music group did not press play.*

[Note to self: the silence is as important as the sound]

## **OBSTRUCTION**

Early one morning, and under the linden, one is dappled with the crackling of deep green light.

>>>

**ACTION**  
Here is a stick.  
Mark your sound.

*[two simultaneous recordings are made  
on a bridge where a troll has been harassing goats. audio evidence of fairy tales:  
trip trap trip trap trip trap]*

**LINING OUT**  
There is a call. And there is a response.  
cuck-coo  
cuck-coo  
cuck-coo.

**XIII**  
~~It was evening all afternoon.~~  
~~It was snowing~~  
~~And it was going to snow.~~  
~~The blackbird sat~~  
**In the cedar-limbs.**

**SCENARIO**  
*My relatives could not speak the same language as I, nor I of them. The story behind this is far too long and convoluted a tale to tell right now. What I may say is that although our languages were equally unintelligible – to each other we were seen as strange and exotic shapes that emanated glistening clouds of verbal colour every now and again – we were able to communicate by way of music. Every summer we would visit each other, and when all else failed, we would offer gifts; carefully wrapped in thick wrapping paper, secured with beautiful glossy ribbons. Inside would be a cassette with our favourite music of the time. Some years it was Hungarian reggae, other years it was Romanian or Italian folk music. On occasion it was Euro pop, hip-hop or techno. We would smile, pull off the cellophane wrapper and learn more about each other than words could say.*

**OBSTRUCTION**  
After the storm a tree grows on its side.

**ACTION**  
Here is you totem.  
Hibernate\*.

*[a singeing line across the lid – lightning – petrifies the comet's tail; celestial snapshots]*

**SUNSET**  
*This world of ours, before we  
Can know its fleeting sorrows,  
We enter it through tears.  
Do the reverberations  
Of the evening bell of  
The mountain temple ever  
Totally die away?  
Memory echoes and reechoes  
Always reinforcing itself.  
No wave motion ever dies.  
The white waves of the wake of  
The boat that rows away into  
The dawn, spread and lap on the  
Sands of the shores of all the world.*

- Kenneth Rexroth, from *On Flower Wreath Hill*

**Barrier**  
Despite this, we will meet again.  
In freedom.

\*The song may end here.