

Topographia

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

Topographia consists of two distinct sets of poems that use different rhetorical, formal, and contextual positions to reframe place, space, and the human relationship to nature. One set centers upon a character, Skia, and her relation to place. These poems deal with the restrictions place exerts upon the human body and the limits of place as boundary. The other group of poems uses a U.S. state, a mapped place, as a reference point, but deliberately transcends that reference in an imaginary expansion of space framed by formal restriction—the majority of these poems are boxes, quadrangle shapes that evoke the geo-political boundaries of states while the content engages with history, memory, image, and language that move beyond those place-centered limits. The opposition of the formal strategy to the content works as an analogue to the difference between a geopolitical map and an experiential one.

The intersection of these two sets, the Skia and state poems, provides the reader with two distinct views with regard to space, the undefined expanse, and place, the delimited territory, while echoing the theoretical tension between those concepts. The project, thus, invigorates the discussion of place and space in ecopoetry and offers new possibilities about how to imagine the human relationship to the environment.

AsK

You come in when the peaks poke up
through the clouds, their rise violent.
The glaciers dominate the image—
pushed back by oncoming footsteps
and summer. This is a landscape still
in motion, refusing to sit for its portrait.
The rivers shift so you can't guess where
their curves will take you. When you reach
the mountaintop, you keep walking into the sky.
You set out in pursuit of bears, but hear them
looking for you. You know what it means
to be part of something—a mountain, a road,
a glacier, a ferry, a river. You learn how
to shift like the rocks' displaced memories.
You touch the glacier, the mountain. Where
do they leave you—these trains and trees?
You carry your talismans, tickets and turnagins.
You wander the saltflats while the whistle sings
to the tide and the sunrise. You begin to recede.

COntinental

Places are more temporal than people. A red rock postcard is not the same red rock. Snowfall hangs in the divots differently each winter. Nothing is stable. The stones the path is made of roll beneath your feet, show their edges, twist away. The place memory holds, a place which can be returned to but cannot be returned to—one can go back there, not back then—here is the shape as it once existed.

fLAw

On the surface, the faces. Along the façade, the river of faces.
You walk as if on a river. You float as if on a face, immersed
in the pass of pulses, the throb of trumpets, the bridge of legs,
arches like eyebrows and faces like masks held before the eyes.
Wanderer, how far does this water flow from its oracle? How
did you predict its pale path? When you stop walking and face
the water, all other heels will lift. Their arches will crease with
the pressure of your reflection. Your provenance is etched
under a cheekbone, a chin. Your origin is marked on your face.

a longing for—

I.

The path here steps. The path here gravel. The path a smooth wash
among the needles and debrided floor.

Skia loses the path and scrambles
in the boulders and foliage. She suspects mountain lions hide in the hollows,
hopes they're asleep rather than waiting for her to slip.
The dry air steals moisture from her nose, her throat.

She becomes a navigator.

Skia runs into the sun—her motion starkly contrasted against the subtle growth
and erosion of the mountain she climbs.

II.

The color sage grew there.
Skia reached for the knob.
Outside that door, wood
flaking peach sand.

Four walls translated to
four imaginary
topographic lines.

She lived in boxes indoors
and out. The cement there
shaded and red, vertical,
jagged even in stamped
measured squares.

This sidewalk could appear
only there. The walk's square
an echo of state lines: the borders
even, the middle marked by
an uneven split—the rise of the range.

Push, her brain commanded
her shoulder and circled
palm. The door opened.

Even the air moved
to change the spaces.
Inside to out:
only an exchange of borders.
Light weighted those rooms—trembled,
trebled, one mote a distinction.

III.

hail slings like dust pelting gravity
all these outbursts repressurize
forget your red veins
thrush as a verb
take up your stones and cotton
pick up the paces
space allows for movement in time
calcite not as porous as socks
somewhere tongue and water rhyme, not here
stratus creatures

IV.

Passivity in nature fails: all things are selfish and take what they need, without conscience.

Acrobatic red dust in her scuffing.

The sunshine spotlights the lengthening hairs on her legs. A reminder. Up. Upward, her knees pulled ever closer to her chest. The path presses horizontal again, and her knees form obtuse angles. Particulate. Particular. Part—Particle. Words like skipping.

V.

Colorado reddened the rock dust, creasing Skia's shoes, in
palm prints on her shorts, dark sweat along her cheeks
where surfacing blood releases heat like the rocks' red heat.
Her climb a cadence:

*I am building you out of red dust as you have built yourself
of red dust, as they have lined you with this dust, as you are dust.*

She slides to the divot in the vertebrae, unbuckled
sinews growing sticky and gathering sand under the sun;
paces, pacing. She goes through
a chipped white door, expunged.

MarinE

Tumbled. Shaled. Paleo-edged.
The fallen rocks along the coastline:
steps the titans used or the way
the whales descended from land,
wading their limbs in a grass sea
until the leaves rhythmed to waves,
and their new fins slapped the water
over the lowest step. The tide would
drown you. Whales can't bellow
back their pedestrian selves: no
handrail can help them ascend.

NeVer

Sand: evidence of erosion, time.
Cover it up, it slips out the sides.
Dig it up, it undermines. Buy it,
it buries itself. Pile it somewhere,
it slides back down. Shelter it,
it blows in circles. Wet it down,
if you can find the water. Eat it,
it makes you heavy. Burn it up,
watch it glow. Own it, it shifts.
Here is something beyond your
control. How long can it obey?

brOKen

Can you wait? Can you bar the break? Experience the shades
green cast in the deep seed? Can you breathe it? How the roots
taper to grow thin in the dust and grave faces? Are you made
patient so the passing never comes? Can you stand here with
your back warming in the sun to the long shadows changing
your height and weight with the breath in your lungs and the
space a body fills capably and fixed by the wind in the spring
of ease? Drawing water within the space of you, you vibrate,
sing the atoms. Can you wait here and not be changed by the
shawdows clinging to the carbon chains that make you real?
Will you pull your atoms close and mark your synapse seen?

DEstination

Stretch out. One leap
into the water is all
that's possible. If a
front door could sign
egress as well as entry.
If a light could bring
novelty. Along a hwy
people prefer to just
pass right on through,
watching a narrow
mirror to see what
other mistakes lie
out there, beyond.

Where the land rises in great half circles: stone stitches in a desert plane

Skia wanders among sandstone dwarves

carved like so many statues.

She dusts their orange clothes as she passes.

Sometimes the path leads her through the limns

of their ruined homes. Sometimes the stones

weep at her touch—

the silk of skin after centuries of dry erosion.

Skia ducks under wind-tunneled arches,

looking for the dwarves' lost caps.

Rocky shutters hem the light.

The low sun bleeds orange-purple into the seams of abandoned rivers.

The pictures freeze in their stone frames.

She crosses over and finds

the same sand on the other side.

When she looks back, shadows hang like

laundry in the scrub brushes.

eMpTy

Reach up your long fingers and out with your toes;
lean forward or sideways—stretch out; grow. The sky
is exhaustive, desperately blue. The land golden and
speckled, squared for use. A gray seam of road points
ahead and behind; you follow it carefully to the bent
line. There's no one around for miles and miles. If
you slip off the path, you'll be stopped by barbed wires.

ID

It's always snowing at the pass, even when it rains. You're up that high.
The pressure strains your ears. Your brain shrinks to hold knowledge in.
You see yourself in a picture and name it your twin. Present yourself.
Separation anxiety, the detachment of fiction—the person in the picture
no longer exists, having tossed chains on the tires to run up a mountain,
eaten pancakes at a topside diner, breathed crystals into super light air.
You are constantly altering, but for stability's sake, you present yourself
as singular and static—an undiminished center—and know it an ongoing lie.

aILing

There's a challenge here for
what rests between your ears.
Gray leaks from the folds,
sprawls along the bones, reaches
out for the borders, taking the space
of its container, like a fog that hangs
densely just overhead, so you wonder
how close to earth you can get. You see
the waves spit into the wind. Dull patches
splinter in the dim din. Close your eyes, hold
your breath, and try to keep the gray in.

uNMapped

You are nowhere. There is nothing to see.
No draw to this place but a smooth cement circle
marking the intersection of imaginary lines. If you
were on a grid, this joint would hold it all together.
But this is ordinary ground, and this point marks
absence clearly. After you have passed one limb into
each marked quadrant, you feel that you may never
be whole again—you have paid a quarter to each
and lost your essence to the null node before them.

On a cloud

Skia taps her way to the top to lean out over the edge.
The wooden boardwalk bows beneath her,
its slivers gouging the bog moss.
Little fogs dance around her feet and hang
low like slippers.

Dense with droplets,
the air beads on her skin. She is
wreathed and wrapped in water—
scented chlorophyll and crystal,
clean damp earth and a hint of sea salt—
each breath a bite blooming.

To relieve the heat, Skia gorges on strawberries
and tangerines, then presses the print
of each finger to her thumbs,
testing the stick.

She reaches flat palms and easy fingers toward
her sunglasses, her granola bar wrapper,
a nearby cairn, the sun on the peaks ahead,
wielding the tack of her force field.

In her mind, she closes the gap and
watches her particles
aerate in an exhale.

eNDs

What moves is lost; what stays changes,
slowly. A dark cloud on the blue, a red
car overturned in a field. An ear of corn
planted and grown in a year, a hundred,
becomes larger, sweeter, longer, yellow.
You know about clouds and cars and corn
—each object on its own timeline—
how their pace depends on the weather.

UnTil

Corollas open like dolls' eyes. Sun pierces
petals or leaves; a costumed bumble bee
hovers near the anther—black masks and
pollen. Platelets of dew reside in the split
blades' lineage. 10 million years ago even
these scraped against the edge of a star.

gAZe

partition painting panel
hill building blind sign
wall hedge veil cubicle
embankment capitol car
door drape curtain screen
sculpture person tree mesa
steppe shutter truck dune
monument mountain house
fence horizon the curved
earth: more than one thing
that breaks your line of sight.

aMouNt

At the sight, you threw down your tools and gave up.
It inspired terror. Not a raft of lashed logs or an arch of
metalwork. Beauty only occurs after mastery. The gap
was so wide, ground down between hills by glaciers
and gravity. To escape, you searched for a narrowing;
you remembered when the whole world drowned and
wondered if this evidence showed the deluge recede
or advance. There was no crossing you could survive,
so the waters changed you and scattered the rivulets
of droplets, puddles and pools across the other side.

Running errands in a rainstorm

I.

Outside, Skia tumbles into puddles, watching
whole worlds submerged

in the shallow water.

Slow drops collect in the divots. She tempers the edges
to smooth the portal, distill a reflection she can lean into.

She watches green hands reach up toward the surface,
their veins arched and dry.

The karyote slough marks the breach:
something happened here.

Her fingers trace the tapered concavity.

They wander thinly, along the nodes and red tunnels—
evidence of space and time, evidence of anxiety.

Skia matches her palm to the green one. The leaf's edge
collapses into itself

with every note she hums.

From beneath the spotted fronds, the branches block the sun:
immensity—the press of verdant matter

against breath.

To reach through would be to trespass. To beckon
would be to rise up quickly. Skia uncrosses her legs,
presses down on a knee and stands

with a half-spin.

The sudden light blinds her.

II.

Skia wanders through the supermarket's fluorescent aisles
looking for poets or bearded angels.

She reaches for confetti cake mix,
searches behind the pink packages.

She moves to the drink aisle looking for thirst—
her fingers pluck at her throat,
her fingers reach
into the slats of her gray shopping basket.

Skia buys six eggs and an orange juice. She considers a watermelon.
Underneath it all, she appreciates the conveyor belt,
the scanner on a barcode.

To pass through the automatic doors
she raises her greened palm and hums the only magic she remembers.

IN

Positions can be faked for archetype:
You stand on your mark and wait
to be recognized. You feel responsible
for all the broken padlocks and their
missing combinations. When one door
hinges open, you see beyond the flour
only chickens and other foul. The pantry
has become a barnyard. You used to jog
on Tuesdays. You used to sweep and
count your savings, wash behind your
ears. You scan the cereals for pardon.

GAmbling

Full up of discord, you are looking for a tune outside your head,
searching through cement and rubble for a note of Spanish moss.
There's ghosts among the dust but no nature yet. You'll wait
empires for one tree to burrow up a strong crack in the sidewalk,
but a garden will grow more trees in winter than you can uproot.
It's time that doesn't play well with the band. The birds sing fine.

TeXtual

ciel d'or
cellar door
seal your
sealed lore
sea lured
shell mover
stay moored
sail shore
sealed ore
swell more
yes his lead or
yes her sword

WAter

You the weight of fruit
tethered and vined. You
the reclaimed floodplain.
You the cast of shadow
on the crested hilltop.
You the second moon.
You the flint-chipped shore,
the vanished meadow,
the glacial *u* of valleys.
You the rocks and seals
and cities. You the sprawl,
the markets: silver, jams,
tea, cheese curdling in vats.
You the gnarled limbs and
bridges vaulted over chasms,
parks under highways, islands,
paragliders, gridlock. You
the cocktails in evening shadows
and wooded paths in heavy rain.
You the harvest of apples, three
kinds of mint, cherries, lemongrass.
You the trails alongside the water,
the locks, the search for the sea.
You the demagnetized compass.
You the lost stretch of blue.

The day Skia turned 30

She covered herself with morning—
a wrap of dull clouds
over a jumpsuit creating a glare.

She made a paper chain
easily destroyed
by applied
flame or tearing.

She dashed into the open spaces
to repair her sense of confinement.

When she wanted to make echoes,
she gathered feathers, tan and white.

Half her face shone against
the river bathed a fish and a pebble

erased all color.

From somewhere she's returned to herself,
somewhere.

Sometimes something opens:
a knot in a tree, a geode, an unexpected
pocket that can't be
sealed again.

FLight

One tall tree stands
still beside the sea.
In its branches
perches an osprey,
wings hunched into
the stroking storm,
a monk cowled in
his dark feathers.
The wind bobs the
bird, a diver on
a springboard,
a floater on
the waves. His
talons strip the bark
within their grip,
clamp down and
tether him in.

eNJoy

In a little room walled with orange wood, in a little blue house with a whitewashed boardwalk leading to the street, in a little neighborhood on the water with a pirate ship and a bakery and a flower shop and four perfect squares of beach homes, you stand facing the tilted mirror, your hands behind your head learning to plait backwards: twist, switch, add, twist, switch, add, pull tight, twist, switch, add. In a little while, you will remember the sun and run down the white boardwalk past the flower shop, the bakery, and the ship to show your expertise to the ocean.

mailCAI

The brown cardboard box is familiar in its oblong rectangle, its papery sides like bark smoothed by a century; the grains, still so easy to grab hold of, peel away like sunburned skin. The clear plastic tape holds the edges without obscuring their meeting, its tack drawing in lost hair, eyelashes, the detritus of all the air it has ever passed through. The names and addresses are written clearly so the package could reach this destination, and the barcode marks the postage paid. When you open it, slicing a knife shallowly along the seam, you smell salt sea, hear a breeze escape. You feel sun warming your cheeks and lightening your eyebrows. Waves tumble onto the shore of this box: you glimpse something golden.

HI

This is a small place.
People just give you things.
Here's a bed; you can live here.
Here's a sky; you can breathe here.
Here's a hill; you can grow here.
Which *you* do you need?
Green from desire for you,
blue from constancy,
yellow from seeking you out.
Everything more brilliant since
you dipped between two trees to
toe the ocean home.

turnKeY

You run wild over seven hills, inhaling yellow tobacco leaves or corn husks. You have seven barns next to seven ponds where seven herds of cattle graze within seven bluegrass fences. Your seven chickens lay eggs in the morning. At night, your seven daughters capture fairies in empty mason jars. You stitch seven quilts that hold together for seven score years. Then they build a subdivision over your foundation and reduce yours to a seventh minor key.

ARrangement

A train pulls into a station at midnight.
Waking the passengers sleeping deepest,
icy water pours through the luggage racks.
There's no one to complain to. The swimming
pools are closed. So are the hot springs. The water
makes diamonds so small and shiny, the dry
beds look like glass. At the hotels, the staff
provide new sheets to all the guests, but,
baby, you got to make the bed yo'self.

MiSsing

Down here you wait for the stickiness
to peel in white sheets. You pull cool
pitchers from your history and serve
sweet sun tea. In the afternoon, you
might go for a swim or lean in a bent
willow rocking chair. You wonder if
others find it hard to leave. The wind
passes through the trances of the
white-pillared verandah. The fainting
couch is too tired to catch anyone.
After a little while, the road closes up.
Its gravel turns inward and shows its
edges. After a little while, only ghosts
are thin enough to pass through.

MAtter

Three pillows stacked on a bed frame sit
like quiet children, fat with their newness
and fresh-scented. Their yellow and blues
vibrate with the sunlight through the window.
They are expectant, expecting, the evidence of
anticipation. How do you know when someone
is coming? How do you wait for them to arrive?

TiN

You place a can beside a tree,
label-stripped to its gray ribs.
When the earth shifts beneath
its metallic circle, the horizon
bows to it. The wind sweeps in
to hear it speak. All the long
grasses wander to the dripline.
The sprawl is changed, takes
shape, and organizes this place.
The too-bright glint of yellow
sun on the corrugated sheet
claims lanes of passage, streaks
of framed and distant nature.
You choose one ray and follow
away from the surrounding into
the still strange wilderness.

WIsh

You still; you blush.
You raise one finger
to your lips to sign
hush and when you
blow, all the lights
in the town go out.

The fiction of writing squares

Skia rises up

in a blur of absolute dawning. The fierce light
through her window casts its weight upon the pillow. She gathers up
the post-pictures and instruments of scripting.

Skia writes to people whose
names and addresses she keeps
in a pocket full of handshakes and hope.

She never signs her name.

Skia fills each white square with layers of sediment,
peeled cuticles,

scraps of microwaveable food packaging.

She scrawls palimpsests of blue and black ink, words

like “rotund” and “dubious,” words like

“effervescent” and “unparalleled.” Her crossed

language

becomes alien, new. Skia’s hand

smudges the ink where it rests on the page.

She marks and marks until her words blur, until

only the ciphered vision comes through.

The remnants bleed between the lines—

Skia writes 6100Δ . (*blood*)

Skia writes $\phi(\sqrt{-x})(1/2\prod\Delta)\phi1\Sigma$. (*circle*)

Her original strokes lost

in accumulation, the shadow of dark ink.

Skia marks each square with a square for flight,

drops her pictures to the wind, and walks

into the sun, hoping for an antidote.

WhY

The one hole in the fence lets everything through. Skylines, shorelines, horizons best seen from a distance are distorted by cameras. Soap parses itself into sandstone. Symmetry is beautiful, but perfect symmetry is horrifying. Mirrors never show the truth but often speak it. Four letters coil our lives. Blue is not green only in some languages. We drape netting and build scaffolding to capture chips of the tallest buildings. White noise sounds like precipitation. How much hair loss is reasonable for one day. It's hard to remove all the flies from a house—another one's always buzzing around. Hot water preheats, but cold comes on strong. Leaves in a breeze sound like singing, but one leaf tapping drives you crazy. The desire for what's underneath—floorboards, calderas, catacombs.

imMOBILE

You trace the outlines of other people's lives and then
try to pack yourself into the aperture, regardless of its size.
You cut your shape out of paper and hope the dolls become
real so you won't have to. You wait for staples, paper clips,
glue or tack, anything that might hold your slivers together.
They don't look real without a magnifying glass, and that
just sharpens your shadowy reflection to a delicate smolder.

locAL

The tall folks move away. The small folks stay
creeped up inside their tents and woody cabins.
You wonder how many walls they have built
to stall each other, how much a circle costs to
enclose the sprawl. You keep falling into their
open traps, their airborne cages. You keep
calling out their names and getting lead ropes
hung in the high branches for answers.

manIA

Rutabaga is a good word for food. Write “parallel” in cursive: its loops are fun. Crazy is what you can’t get enough of. Here you can tilt at all the windmills you want. We applaud ingenuity; we carry it out. We know how to ride one airplane wing across a landscape. Loop-de-loops. Put a spin on it and there’s enough space for anything you can think of. Machines can be beautiful, but we are saving our hills for other possibilities. Come with us. We’ll drive until the sun goes down, but don’t forget to stop once you reach the other side. You’re too valuable to this experiment, and we always want to hear you laugh.

SCarce

Potential only lasts as long
as you're living. At the end,
the impossible can be true.
You enter into a timeline.
You enter the picture
frame. You become and
become and become, then
you're done—every impression
a portrait of place, a moment
of memory written in space. Your
marks are only elisions, how
your body glides through time.

Echoes of water condensing

I.

It ended in the kitchen.

Skia stood there, only a
swath of cotton
between his words:

*I planted a tree
where your heart should be*

If she moved—her hand outstretched toward the refrigerator—
he would disappear forever. The countertops boiled with impatience.
The kitchen table bent one leg as a prompt. Ceramic floortiles
began to grout up her calves and shins as she held the pose. She knew

a twitch
in even one
fingertip
would end
their paralysis.

So, Skia swung the refrigerator door open
and stared into the cold air and artificial light.

He backed away, passed the threshold, took up the cement,
each step resonating at a lower pitch.

Her action
changed them both.

2.

Each time the clapboard vibrates,
she believes he has returned,

then recognizes the train cars
rumbling the squared shelves and stained floorboards,

the chain of them an asymptote
that nears but keeps away. Sometimes

she smells him in her memory:
wet leaves, peeled oranges, and cotton.

She recycles his still-folded newspapers,
rinses stains from his wine glasses, listens

for his heavy heels, his voice
like sawdust between the tremors outside.

3.

I am full of the lives of other people, Skia says
to stop the room's compressing.

He would have sung
to save her from collapse:

*When you press the disk icon
and the word save assists
have you ever thought, thank god
there's a button like this*

Outside,
the storm scatters violets along the surfaces of seawater,
and the palmettos cling to their leaves like clothing. She curls
back into the bed as if inside a snowglobe,
keeping warm beneath the flakes.

He left her there,
but his ghost comes back,
and they are safe
as long as they stay inside.

The world is full of broken people like fiberglass—
cotton candy full of bits—
waiting to cut
the ones who touch them.

4.

Between waking and rising, she hears him
strumming strange verses from books he's read,
his voice like the mist outside, the dawn
gathering in patterns on her bed beneath the skylight.

Skia listens, remembering his earnestness,
her own amused smiles when he sang:

*No more than a squirrel
resembles the slave trade
does your face resemble
the model I made*

For a moment, he is caught. The fog
lifts from the grass outside like
the ghosts of all their imaginary selves
rising and dissolving away.

She opens her eyes now
and remembers his words:

*the light
will recede with the moon.*

OR

You are standing on the corner when he goes by,
or you are standing there when he and she go by.
Either you were about to enter a jewelry store or
a bookstore. You were going somewhere or not.
Either you are standing there or he is standing, or
they are. Someone stands on the corner sometime.
Either you see him on the other side of the street
and he does not see you on the corner, or you do not
see him and he doesn't see you either. In any version,
he does not see you. In any version, you see him. He is
or he is not someone you know, or you don't know him
anymore. If it is you when he goes or he and she go by,
you act or you don't, you call out or you do not.
Behind you, there are children playing in a pool or
people eating lunch at outdoor cafes. You consider
your clothes, the heat, the street on which you stand,
or you consider your hunger, your age, the distance
you've traveled to this corner, now. Either you pass him
or he, they, pass you. Either you recognize him or not.
You wait for the light to change. Across the street,
a man you might know walks by with a woman.
You cross the street. You walk into a store.

adMinister

Your hand taut beneath brown leather extends
to press each finger carefully into each fingertip.
The creases crisscross your palm just so, keeping
the flex natural, easy, but without a trace of you
outside. You bend each wrapped finger slowly,
pressing it under your chin until it pops with relief.
You stretch each finger back until you feel the pull,
the implied snap, of your tendons. You tighten and
relax your fists in sequence, pumping the blood.
You try clasping your wrapped hands in stillness,
then stretch to test if the leather will break, check
your coat buttons, tug the cuffs of your sleeves, dig
into your pockets and wait for a warm heart to take.

KiSs

It gleans your arteries, scything platelets and pores,
patterning the cells into a sieve, so the chaff falls
out below. The promise of reform nets the stalks
in bundles and cures the fields. You are displayed
above these coverings, peeled back and arranged
on the exposed bed. The rows that brought you here
steal away from you and leave you in this field
layered over now with snow. You are free from
the shell that no longer seeks to hold you inside.

OH

You're startled or you've startled someone.
You don't know whom, or how—you just
heard a word, of surprise maybe; maybe
your own word, maybe another's. You
check yourself for dark bruises anyway;
you try to check others for theirs, but
their eyes send you away. They do not
speak to you. Speech depends on that word
unheard; so does action. Do you know
what word you heard? Convention.

By the light of the moon and the weight of the mountain

Skia believes in her peripheral vision; it captures movement.

From her mother, she inherited a mercurial nature.

She developed perspective;

to hover beyond and observe.

The moth flies toward the light, even in the presence of the moon.

The laws of nature are not laws at all. The spider web captures the fly
like flypaper.

Which phase of the moon came first

is not a question that needs answering,

but which will come last intrigues her.

From her father, Skia grew

roots and dug in.

She is weighted to the world.

Her maps are fault lines and sediment; her movement, the leaves in a breeze.

The stones on her path are the language of her ancestors.

Grey and flat for stability;

red and crumbling for danger;

purple for whimsy or pride;

pale yellow for humility and caring.

Her father writes her letters with every step she takes. Follow

the blue butterfly; memorize

how the meadow frames the mountain.

From her parents, Skia inherited a mission:

Erosion has always been part of a meteoric rise, but it must create fantastic shapes

that reveal its artistry. The land also lives.

What buildings have we seen that cannot be toppled—but the ocean

still waves at the seashore; the trees

still make their ascent.

Vasoconstriction

Tighten your beltway. Each notch a sphere without escape—
over a bridge and dropped back into the concentric circles.
If you create enough forward motion to escape the centrifuge,
you can skip all those pink-petaled cherry trees, head straight
for the ocean. If not, you get sucked into yet another white city
where every monument is a memory and a lesson in history;
but it's all someone else's, someone's ghostdreams of empires,
someone's long-drowned ship. The radials make you think all
roads lead to the center. You forget they stretch out and away.

exCepTions

Outside at night, you're all alone with the laments of empires,
constellations of city lights, and a sharp desire for revolution.
It's the stars that can't see you turning through the time-
gathered fog. Beneath your fingers, the land's all devoured
where you've dug in to mud, worrying that cosmic gravity
will outpace your own and tear a black hole in your fabric. It's
all you can do to pull yourself upright against the dizzy spin.
You will only be able to close your eyes when all the lights
go out. With each flicker, you count: One down.

Not Yours

dislocated, out of place,
continental, lost in space—
disperse, sweep, disseminate,
disassemble, mutilate—
knock down, overturn,
disorder, disturb—
rummage, scatter, relegate,
disentangle, extricate—
scramble, transfer, derange,
commute, transplant, interchange—
shuffle, tumble, immigrate,
transpose, expulse, segregate—
traverse, migrate, subterfuge,
absent, rupture, remove—
span, track, dissipate,
transgress, participate—
independent, halve, dismiss,
possible paralysis—
unhinge, upset,
locomotive, ambivalent—
dispossess, perambulate,
potentially accumulate

pRovIdence

“You can keep what you can carry,”
they said. “But beware, darkness and
danger lie out there in that wilderness.”
So you spread out, press right against
the boundaries of your exile, and seize
all you touch. Then you place one foot
beside the other and hop in a square to
determine the land of your lair. You map
out the corners with shoelaces, insist your
property reaches up to the sky, hope faith
is enough to survive. It’s not the size of
your body that matters; it’s how deep
your claim can burrow to take root.

If every place were home, she wouldn't long for someplace else

Unrolled maps take up space behind her eyes, their laminated edges tickling her inner ears and retinas. There are road maps, subways, hiking trails, stoplights; places she can name; directions she could give. She used to live there: a “you are here” on each graph.

Skia opens the map of her present to examine sidewalks—sedimentary structures stretched in concrete out to the horizon.

She thinks: *there's nothing to see here.*
This is not my version of beauty.

Shuffling the parchments and rebinding their cords, Skia stumbles, the white edge of one sole tripping on the red stone.

She catches herself,
limbs out wide for balance,
then runs her tongue along the ridges of her teeth
checking for damage.

She leans heavily against cement, rebalancing,
wonders how long before she returns to something beautiful,
like wood ships sprawling wave crests or songs played on a tangerine.
She can go back there
but not back then.

The marks on her geography all hold fast to the mountain.

SaiD

Rest area. A distortion rearviewed
by white dashed—marks of distance.
Gas station 270 miles. Windows
full up with all yellow and blue
horizon. The dry land colored with
dying, the air scented cinnamon.
Sad sod no soap can wash away.
Pass it. Passed it. Pass it. Past it.

naVigaTe

A white slip sifts across the glass.
Is it real, this momentary car blindness?
You slide in the gouge between mountains
as if sledding, even as they threaten you,
loom in shadows where the pavement ends.
Your speed in the collision will shape you—
pine needles, cold air, diesel, lumber.
The momentum and its inevitable cease
make the scents richer, breathing harder.
Between blinks, you catch the road
or the road spins you in a new arc.

No onE

Place-mat
marks place-
ment. Practice
not thinking; be
overly present.
You and you
and again re-
newed. Never
one whole place.
Firma-ment
meant fixed
in space. Center
yourself, then
open your wise.

PAtter

Rain is your evidence. It tests gravity in its descent,
tests solidity as it collapses in a crash—the stability
of matter in a vibrating hum. Magnetism
is all that holds you together. You project
fidelity, drawing outlines to remind your eyes
of what they see, to give names to their shapes,
to separate height from depth. Your pictures wear
tissue paper dresses and collage themselves in
hills and rivers, graphs of steel in the darkness.
If you listen, you can hear the rain being made.
Condensation is not so quiet you can't hold on
to it. Pull yourself in, then send your senses out
as if on a spindle. Tilt toward the weather and
see how close you can get without spreading thin.

The approaching storm

I.

Skia raises her hands against her enemy:
the boxes, the gray walls, the squares upon squares
that straighten the world.

There's a darkness in her that projects
like a tesseract into the spaces between leaf
and branch in the aspens around her.
She is shadowed,
shadowy like an exhausted breath,
like a burden buried by lifting a rock and replacing it
crookedly in its hole.

Some things are not learned from nature.

Skia tilts her chin back to gaze at the sky, a gray rock
threatening to cut its ropes and tumble down.

II.

A closet—a little room
inside a little room inside
a little home inside a big
home. As if storage signaled
giving up hope.

III.

Skia goes in the open door
then out a blue one, escapes

the stinger. Leaving is just going
someplace else. Throne rock.

Turn is another word
for askew. Stay in the same
place, but be different.

IV.

Who knows what lurks beneath
that murky water, dense with black
sand, warm silt, southern sun.

Float the mud bath leaves.

Small water collects in the rub spots.

Scuff and chalk;

scorch; erosion and décor.

The sidewalk shines

under ozone blue, and rain

drops from an aerial view.

Everything always climbing. Everything

else always tamping down.

Tectonic lift against wind and water, piled

leaves, basins' flood and refuse.

NotcH

The porch dug into the hillside or it stretched
out toward the view. The road curled to
the farm house or lost the rise of topography.
Maybe it's the pressure of outsiders that
steals your memories, disconnects them
so you see a road, a wood, a house shift
and double into another house, another
wood. The image fails to catch a trigger;
it fades on the edges, won't stand still.
It's lost its story, its white pine scent.
Is the house an inn or the wood a farm?
They won't let you remember.

WaVerer

The years are always dwindling, sealing themselves into your skin. You squint at dark birds, lift your palms to test for rain. You worry unless seeds are available, unless it's the season of spoons, unless you've buried your creases under a coal vein or in the softest fabric. Possibility opens and closes its dual eyes. It frustrates your language: words embed meaning, but answer to syntax. Look up and mine your voice from the mountains. Stoic, they confront the world. The tunnels you dig layer your eyes with excavation, so everything grays as everything withers when left to the sun.

uNCounted

Step out of the hourglass if you want to stop marking time. When the sand gets hot enough, it becomes its own container, smoothed and curved by the minutes it passed. You don't need to be its witness. The arrow points, however you try to measure its length.

ManDatory

What would you pay for all your lifetimes? Would you
give up your midnight runs? Your sun-stained strawberries?
If they asked you, would you tighten your belt and
expect to keep going? Roll in the flower beds to drink
honey but complain about bees and thorns? You keep
gathering all the petals to glue them back on their stems,
but that's not how it works. There's no trade for time.

When she sees lines, she spins them

In the border of her room, a wheel.
 Skia leans into its pine burls. When light
 twines the mist around spindled branches,
 all her lonely moments become an epilogue.
 She cannot speak through eternity:
 black holes stretch bodies
 into spun glass.

At this hour, the cloth hushes
 the city's glow. Awake, Skia spins
 a cloak of sediment to soothe herself.
 Her throat mottles with prints. She captures
 oranges, serpentine reeds, roots of willows curled
 along the banks, leaves like turned pages.

She sees the landscape closed in an arrangement—
 quilted squares, patterns like boxes, like bricks.
 There are no squares in nature.

This is how we know we built it.

One whole world—

Outside, squares.
 Inside, an apple.

VITA

JENNY MORSE

EDUCATION

University of Illinois, Chicago

Ph.D. in Creative Writing, Poetry, expected Spring 2013

Dissertation in progress: *Topographia*

Preliminary Exam Topics: "American Landscape Poetry of the 20th and 21st Centuries,"

"Spanish-English Translation with a Cultural Case Study of Pablo Neruda," and

"Perspectives of the Americas: Border Crossing, Travel Writing"

University of Colorado, Boulder

M.A. in English, Creative Writing, Spring 2007

Thesis: "Where the Air Shifts"

Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME

B.A. Cum Laude in English and Religion, Spring 2002

Areas of Concentration: Early American Literature, Religion and Politics

Minor: Spanish

Independent Studies: "Denouncing Divisiveness and Reinstating Diversity:

A Study of John Rawls" and "Keeping a Spare Key: Poems"

PUBLICATIONS

Poems

"After Patricio sailed." *Red Ochre* (forthcoming 2013).

"Just Past Wisconsin Ave. on 4th St." *Shark Reef* (forthcoming 2013).

"When she sees lines, she spins them." *Terrain* (forthcoming April 2013).

"Los glaciares," "Friends or Politics," "Lunchtime on Calle Fresia," "Inside a desert, Conguillio," and "The fisherman, the pirate, and la sirena." *The Writing Disorder* (forthcoming Spring 2013).

"San Pedro de Atacama in the desert." *Quiddity* (forthcoming 2013).

"Landscaping." *Poetry for the Masses* (forthcoming 2013).

"Inside the sand." *Seeding the Snow* 6.2.

"Four days off the coast" and "At least they didn't call me Gordita." *Petrichor Review* (Winter 2012).

"While he sleeps" and sections 8, 17, 23, 32, 42, and 47 from *Speaking to you. Xenith* (Fall 2012).

"Here are the Possibilities of Ears." *Stoneboat* 3.1 (Fall 2012).

"March 22nd" and "April 15th" from *Messengers are birds and speak each letter you or I say*, "To Julie at Washington Park," and "Grafting." *The Write Room* (September 2012).

"exCepTions," "Not Yours," "pRovldence," and "SCarce." *Wilderness House Literary Review* 7.2.

"Neruda's neighbor." *Vox Poetica* (August 1, 2012).

"Before the canvas framed." *Pure Francis* (July 2012).

Sections 27 and 28 from *Speaking to you. short, fast, and deadly* (July 2012).

"February 24th" and "May 2nd" from *Messengers are birds and speak each letter you or I say. Glass* (June 30, 2012). "February 24th" nominated for Sundress Publications' 2012 Best of the Net Anthology.

"We rode many boats." *Turk's Head Review* (June 17, 2012).

"On the last day of vacation." *Lowestoft Chronicle* (Summer 2012).

"Definitions" and "Song of Sol." *Blast Furnace* 2.1 (May 2012).

"How Summer Ends," "Erasure," and "Stratus." *Eunoia Review* (May 2012).

"Along the edge of the flood." *Muscle & Blood* (Spring 2012).

"Out of the Colca Canyon." *fortyouncebachelors* (March 2012).

"Ruta cuarenta." *Gloom Cupboard* 143 (March 2012).

"if then," "#11," and "Imprint." *flashquake* 43 (Spring 2012).

"February 12th," "March 17th," and "March 27th" from *Messengers are birds and speak each letter you or I say*, "The night I dreamed of thieves and murder," and "Tessolate." *Menacing Hedge* 1.04 (Spring 2012).

"On writing in my head in the dark" and "Lost poems." *Emprise Review* (February 2012).

"January 21st," "January 29th," "February 5th," and "February 8th" from *Messengers are birds and speak each letter you or I say. Notre Dame Review* 21 (Winter 2006).

"Sting." *Red China* 2.2 (Spring 2006).

"Going Home" and "2:46am." *Square One* (Spring 2006).

Essays

"Out of Place: The Eco-poetics of Dislocation." *Journal of Contemporary Thought* (forthcoming Spring 2013).

"Human +/- Nature: Toward an Eco-poetic Language." *The Ofi Press* 22 (October 2012).

"At the limits of the system: how novels of consciousness enact a world-system and reveal its borders." *The Montreal Review* (July 2012).

"The Eco-poetics of Space in Snyder, Merwin and Sze." *Seismopolite: Journal of Art and Politics* 3 (May 2012).

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Colorado State University, Special Faculty
Composition 150 (Fall 2012).

Pikes Peak Community College, Instructor
English 121: "Composition I" and English 122: "Composition II" (Spring 2012). Hybrid courses. Completed online training for hybrid/online courses: "Getting Started" and "Managing Discussions".

University of Illinois, Chicago, Graduate Teaching Assistant
English 210: "Introduction to Poetry Workshop" (Spring 2009, Fall 2010, Spring 2010, Fall 2011)
English 160: "Academic Writing I: Writing in Academic and Public Contexts" (two section Fall 2008, two sections Fall 2009, Fall 2011)
English 161: "Academic Writing II: Museums as a Social Force" (two sections Spring 2008, Fall 2010)

University of Colorado, Boulder, Graduate Teaching Assistant
English 1191: "Introduction to Creative Writing: Poetry, Fiction and Drama" (Spring 2005, Fall 2005, Spring 2006)
Graduate Assistant for Library Research Seminars. Program for Writing and Rhetoric and Library Reference Department (Fall 2006, Spring 2007)
Teaching Assistant. Film 3004: "Films of Alfred Hitchcock" (Fall 2004), Film 3013: "Women and Film" (Spring 2005), Film 1502: "Introduction to Film Studies" (Fall 2005, Spring 2006)

PRESENTATIONS

"Out of Place: The Eco-poetics of Dislocation," paper presentation on the "Space and Spatiality Panel," RMMLA (October 2012).

"Maps and Wanderers in *Topographia*," presentation, University of Illinois, Chicago (September 2012).

"The Eco-poetics of Space in Snyder, Merwin and Sze," paper presentation at "Forces at Play: Bodies, Power, Spaces" conference, University of Massachusetts, Amherst (March 2012).

University of Illinois Program for Writers Reading Series, poetry reading (Fall 2011 and Fall 2007).

Small Press Festival, poetry reading, Boulder, CO (Spring 2006).

University of Colorado Reading Series, poetry reading, Boulder, CO (Fall 2005).

Student Coffeehouse Series, poetry reading, Boulder, CO (Fall 2005).

Studies in Poetry Reading, University of Colorado, Boulder (Spring 2005).

EVALUATIVE COMMITTEES

Fulbright Teaching Fellows Review Panel, Fall 2011

Reviewed applications from University of Illinois, Chicago students for the Fulbright Teaching Fellows. Provided feedback on applications. Participated in interviews and evaluation of applicants.

Research on the Chicago Civic Leadership Certificate Program, Summer 2008

Read and evaluated student essays from a variety of courses in order to provide comparative feedback on the CCLC program.

EDITORIAL AND RELATED EXPERIENCE

Appendance.com

Freelance Writer and Editor, Fall 2010-present.

Smarthinking.com

Online Writing Tutor, Summer 2006-present.

Panama Service Project, Milwaukee, WI and Santiago, Panama

Assistant Director and Newsletter Editor, Summer 2006-present.

Program takes high school students to Panama to participate in homestays and complete community service with malnourished children through the Panamanian organization Nutre Hogar.

Packingtown Review, Chicago, IL

Copyeditor, 2007-2010

Student Organization President, Fall 2009-Spring 2010

Houghton Mifflin, Co., Boston, MA

Production Assistant, 2002-2004

Posse Foundation, Boston, MA

Writing Tutor and College Mentor, Summer 2004

Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME

Writing Project Writing Assistant, 2000-2002

Quill Literary Magazine, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME

Editor 1998-2002

Treasurer 2001-2002

LANGUAGES

Fluency in Spanish