

aerograms from the by&by
Derek Owens

And how do *you* cope,
ghost with outstretched hand?

*

We root seedlings in teacups
of peat and parents' ashes.

Pinch snails off pieplant leaves
safe inside our circle of stakes.
Milk of Magnesia bottles
hanging from the thorn fence,
throwing cobalt flash.
(Protection against duppies).
We miss black pepper something awful.

*

Duchamp made us do this.
Compose with bare buttons and ribs,
tissues and coriander.

And inside this egg from the cutaway end
a mean little fairyland: daisy sunsplash
under burnt sugar skies; paper moth eclipse
behind Queen Anne's curtain.
Lemon balm and lavender,
self-seeded and seeding. Shining wasps,
iridescent beetles, the lawn ahum
with pollinators.

*

Today we saw a chipping sparrow shudder, come to life.
A flower released from its capsules.
I'm rather certain there's a new kind of time here.

Every leaf and flower, even the pen
in my hand, and these lines I'm
writing to you, surrounded by haloes.

Everything moves so slowly now.
Seems to take a day for a single bird to cross the sky.
Begins as a shabby little sparrow

transforms into an extravagant creature
plumed and ribboned like a lyre-bird.

*

On the darker days even mud itself will seem unworldly.
Chickadees, spied through field glass, fat as turkeys.
Horizon men transformed unto giants,
their horses enlarged into monsters.

'Twould seem there'll be no single end
but rather a wild excess, every gauche outcome
and option queued up at the ready.

Whoever awaits our news at the edge
of time is going to get an earful.

*

DJs and architects will tend to our decay
offering syrup of poppy,
dried mushrooms, and death angels.

Sleepwalking children in the parks.
Dreaming mothers and fathers
embalmed in their homes.

Waiting to be woken
from the present into the infinite realms
of their time-filled selves.

It might all fall suddenly to nothing, for little cause.

*

Yet what other earth might boast such oily blues,
ochre greens, such silvers
and siennas. Unstinting details
and antiquities, ever baffling.

Stay here, sink down, go to sleep.

*

Future's there, looking back at us.
Trying to make sense of the fiction we'll have become.

And then here's us, us and our

crystal ball scrying.

Now we know what the gardeners meant
when they said *be careful what you write*.

Said: *depend on memory*.

Rearranged world in which we find ourselves.

*

Wheat rust in the soil.
Spiky mulleins and sumac.
Pots of cornmeal samp.
Wild crocus, iris, evening primrose.
Asters. Queen Anne, always.
Inevitable ailanthus trees,
onion grass ground cover.
Fuzzy lambs ear, stands
of goldenrod.

*(Black walnut trees mean good fertile ground.
Bull thistles, burdock, and ragweed too.*

*Dock, pigweed, lambsquarter, purslane, ragweed =
good organic soil, well-drained and fertile.*

*Sorrels and fennel—i.e. mayweed, dog fennel, chamomile—
these things say: acid soil, low in humus.*

*Buttercups, ferns, Joe Pye weed, loosestrife, and Creeping Charlie
all point to fertile soil but a need for drainage.*

As for mosses, lichens, and poverty grass: that's sick dirt.

*Reed canary grass isn't as palatable as alfalfa hay
by any stretch of the imagination but your cows won't complain.*

*One cereal rye plant can produce 3 miles of roots per day.
That's 387 miles of roots and 6,603 miles of root hairs per growing season.*

*Re: compost, a living sponge-cake is what you want.
A casserole, layered like lasagna.*

*When your back tells you to stop, remember
that a double-dug bed now means a lazy bed tomorrow.)*

*

For every seven or eight good bugs there will only be one harmful one.

Bees love blue.

And if a mouse has eaten it, you can probably eat it too.

seed material:

Atwood, Margaret, *The Year of the Flood*

Ballard, J. G., "Myths of the Near Future"

Baudrillard, Jean, *The Illusion of the End*

Butler, Octavia, *Parable of the Talents*

Crace, Jim, *The Pesthouse*

Gibson, William, *Pattern Recognition*

Hopkinson, Nalo, *Brown Girl in the Ring*

Kunstler, James Howard, *World Made By Hand*

Jeavons, John, and Carol Cox, *The Sustainable Vegetable Garden: A Backyard Guide to Healthy Soil and Higher Yields*

Logdson, Gene, *Homesteading*

Misha, *Red Spider, White Web*

Mollison, Bill, and Reny Mia Slay, *Introduction to Permaculture*

Rux; Carl Hancock, *Asphalt*

Saramago, José, *Blindness*

Smith-Stewart, Amy, *Beth Campbell: My Potential Future Past* (Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum)

Weisman, Alan, *The World Without Us*