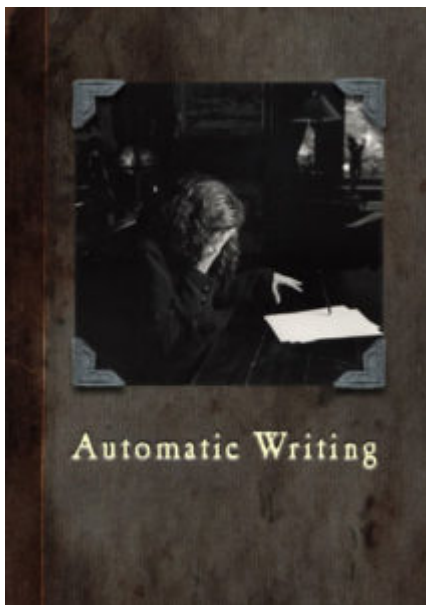


Automatic Writing and Group #1



Automatic Writing

If, as the scholar claims, a photograph is a sudden death, if the historian's citational practice is cousin to the photographer's, is citation a form of dissection? We can easily picture history's body on the autopsy table, but such metaphor allows us to stop short of mortification, the conceit a kind of body bag shielding us from the corpse. The historian, however, holds in her hand the blade beneath which perforations emerge, each image or fact a spillage issuing from a tissue of forensic interest—proof of what, exactly? An earlier era would have made of the corpse a moral lesson, "its being laid in the dark and silent grave, there putrifying and rotting and becoming exceeding loathsome and being eaten with worms an image of the misery of hell." But we prefer to figure the historical not as corpse but as ghost, saying, with the scholar, "there is no word or image that is not haunted by history." We believe such hauntedness

saturates the present and affects the living, and in this sense perhaps all historians are Spiritualists, each asking the material for access to another realm, one outside the archive. Such mediumship is called *sensitivity*, its crucial question not, *Is there life after death*, but where does the outside commence and how do its boundaries touch our own? History now not only behind us, the question allows us to speak of our death long before our death, the photograph a cup held to catch gossip at the parlor door. With it I put my right ear to the archive and hear Martha say: "Mr Billings sends much love to you all, and so does Mrs B says she is very much obliged to Abby for those little socks, they are the prettiest she ever saw—"

Discursive Glance

Photography's Expanded Field

its spine a hinge
between the twenty first and nineteenth centuries

the book in the archive
opens

where history
would have poetry reflect on itself

ghost-image of the frontispiece
kissing its progenitor

through tissue
I write this

not as a lyric subject
but as one subject to another time

faint stain on my countenance
an ink

a logic
like the concept of conscience

continually returning to haunt itself
I mean I am most myself

not as the original
etching

or as the accident

transfer made by age on the title page

but as the tissue
the transparency

that enables history
to make the book a mirror of itself

when its covers close
it touches its own image through me

I can't say it sees
the philosophy of sleep

fatigued soul
partially withdrawing itself

from physical structure
gathering inwardly

a history
of history reading itself

a willingness to make inroads
into the invisible

evidence
not readily apprehended

by established categories
less a question of the veracity of another world

or time persisting
than of the desire

to visit it
when I close the book

it goes to sleep
touching itself

and begins to dream
pictures

not language
who can say another's desire is false

tissue between
text and image

each of us enmeshed
with its other

Return

an entire day given over to
headache a kind of pencil

pierced through the visual field

at the lake in the park an egret

next to the sculpture of an egret
like the rhyme of *sight* and *sign*

one by one the passersby say
“what the hell” because

I heard my dead father talking

on a cell phone on the path

behind me the old man also
wearing his cologne proves

rhyme is uncanny one word
haunted by another sidereal

migrainous aura I’m crying

rhyme the concept of the other

in the same another world in this one
I can find words for only a fragment



Group #1

Dearly belated—we err, we errand where the photographic & the transcendental meet in time & thought. A picture is there even when we can't see one, the image in the world like the soul sojourns in the body, all the stranger for its latency. Dim at first sight, pleasant in miniature, the woods look subliminal. Pines' trunks as brown stippled black as the ground of needles is soaked ochre & pricked with green, we turn to stronger light & find the fugitive spirit embodied. The longer we look & the brighter, the more the image seems ours only, a mirror with a memory. The trees, too, seem dearly copied, clear and distinct, but unreal where touched by another. Perhaps it's there the image most remains to be seen, or it waits there to be developed—it's hard to say. Perhaps this feeling of monopoly, love, in its selfishness, likes in likeness. Perhaps its grip stains our image of this world.

Discursive Glance

Photography's Expanded Field

My body on its back—

asleep and yet
not my body

it seemed I was in the world
I was not

Gradually my senses opened

Calm and happy and deeply interested

I was a traveler
and death only a circumstance

I couldn't see

a road steep into pine country
snow on the ground

white and untrodden
I lost my way

but a stranger directed me
Afterwards I found

the direction wrong
but I'm as sure someone spoke

as I would be if she'd spoken the truth
Incredulity proves nothing

whether recognized or not
whether understood or not

A fact is true
it exists

a piece of the universe
Then it was over

I came back
They brought me up the faded steps

red-patterned with roses
I saw the hat-tree with my old coat

and I listened to their feet
I did not notice or think

I had been left in the cold
and had come back

spasmodically
and in fragments

The windows of my room were open
wind washed in

vast accumulating waves of thought
They say the senses fear death

but I was a mind against matter
Lord-

I had said

Give me solid fact
noise I can hear

motion I see
Move these substantial objects

A table
stir it

A cabinet
open and close it

Let shake
the atmosphere

and earth
As a farmer in church has

his special prayer for rain
so give me

something solid
and I will believe

to be born is the door
to die is the hinge

Open the liminal
and I will go in

Not in This World To See His Face Again

because I tired of what I know
& my manner of knowing it

I looked in at the photograph

outside the window
travel smearing the fields

it is always hard to tell
where the image lies

between departure and arrival

little napkin of smoke
laid over the face of it

I looked in at his sleeping face

history toward which we carried
flowers made of his hair

oh mother how tired I shall be
singing

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A former National Endowment for the Arts fellow, Brian Teare is the recipient of poetry fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, the American Antiquarian

Society, and the Headlands Center for the Arts. He is the author of *The Room Where I Was Born*, *Sight Map*, the Lambda-award winning *Pleasure*, and *Companion Grasses*, forthcoming from Omnidawn in 2013. An assistant professor at Temple University, he lives in Philadelphia, where he makes books by hand for his micropress, Albion Books.