



TOM SHERMAN

MARSHALL NEEDLES MOSQUITOES
PERFORATION FLOWERS REFLECTED LIGHT
THE LIGHT OFF THE WATER NEGATIVE IONS DIZZINESS
INSTRUMENTS ELECTRIC CARS AND ELECTRIC GUITARS
CITY CEMETERY FULL SKELETAL REPLACEMENT
VIDEO SPIDER ANNE WEHRER TINY BUBBLES FEATHER

for **ROWAN**

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01

MARSHALL

I dreamt I was having a conversation with Marshall McLuhan.

He was sitting close to me, just to my left. Someone else was off to the right at a greater distance. A couple of meters. Marshall was very engaging. He listened and commented on observations I was making (I was imagining virtual shoppers, fabricated hordes of shoppers for dead malls). He was open to what I was seeing, and he was generous in his responses. Playful, he was soft spoken, but his intellect was there, his language precise.

His face was altered with a prosthetic set of eyes, or 'eye' I should say. He was wearing a set of animal eyes, my first thought was deer eyes, but they were not much wider than his face. The unnerving thing was one of these eyes, the left one, was missing. There was just an empty socket. This socket was smooth, bleached skin, no fur. The whole set felt like glasses, except the good eye was almost impossible to meet. It had lids and lashes, the pupil

dark brown, the white of the eye was clear. But I couldn't stop looking into this empty socket, a monocle with nothing behind it. His nose and mouth were regular flesh, and he didn't appear to be elderly. This meeting wasn't recent, but seemed millennial, around 2000. Since McLuhan died in 1980, it was as if he had been brought back to life to see into the future. He seemed very comfortable with what he saw, open to change and enjoying himself immensely.

02

NEEDLES

Some people do not like needles.

I don't think anyone likes them. Some feel they are sometimes necessary and welcome. My skin is being jabbed and things are being injected into my flesh. It doesn't hurt if I look away. Until later. Antibiotics. Vaccines. Vitamins. Genes. Drugs. Sting. Drip. Blood draw. Poke. Poke. Pricks. Politics. Perforation. Pin cushion. Thinning. Bruising. Grip. Energy. Injection. Crawl. Diffusing. Electricity. Conduction. Wire. Trickle. Snake bite. Leeches. Spiders, scorpions, and bees. Insects. Jellyfish. Sting. Ticks. Tingle. Infection. Disease. Break the skin. Bandage. Ink. Thread the needle.



03

MOSQUITOES

I usually have a banana every morning, but the mosquitoes are so bad this summer I can't afford the smell of a banana.

Bananas come right through the pores of the skin whereas carbon dioxide comes only from the nose and mouth. CO₂ really attracts them. I've been holding my breath when I go out to put things in the recycling bin and moving as quick as I can. I bring a small cloud of mosquitos back in the house with me. It is so bad we thought they were breeding in the sink, the toilet and bathtub. They breed and hatch continuously, on a six-to-ten-day cycle. We've got a salt marsh across the road, and they are thick in the grass, worse after a rain. We are surrounded by our yard and with the mosquitoes inside, we were so desperate we bought an electric trap with a UV light and a fan that sucks mosquitoes in where they die. It is ineffective but gives us some psychological relief between that relentless high-pitched whine. The bites itch and burn bad. The toughest mosquitoes seem to survive

to hunt us in our bathroom. I was standing taking a piss and a female looking for a blood meal landed on the shaft of my penis. I brushed it off. Five hours later that mosquito was still waiting by the toilet. The females are a little bigger, they are almost furry. I'm afraid to go outside, they are inside too. We were having a feed of lobster. The shells were bright red-orange and hard, but the meat was white and sweet. I was cutting up a tail getting ready to dip it into melted butter and a mosquito landed on a piece the size of a quarter then tried to bite it. I just killed it with my thumb. It did not try to get away, which is rare.

04

PERFORATION

Speaking of telephones, smart-phone addiction has its costs.

I've noticed that people who check their phones constantly have lost their interest and ability to engage in live, in-person verbal conversations. They can't stand the intensity and sustained demands of live conversation. They can't resist interrupting the flow for relief from the attention needed to sustain a conversation. The voices in a room are perforated as the phones permit a change in time and space. Poking holes in an unmediated face to face conversation is akin to attacking a television program with too many ads. Today's phones are instruments of perforation.



05

FLOWERS

Listen to flowers everyday with your eyes.

People should spend as much time as possible looking at flowers, cut flowers if their local environment does not support the growth and vitality of flowers prospering in gardens and the wild. Looking at flowers is very good for the mind and is an indulgence in listening, a focused attention on silent but alluring visual objects. While it is true that cut flowers don't last very long and are expensive and considered by many to be a luxury, keeping them in fresh water and cool, out of the warmth of winter's window light or away from heating vents or radiators will prolong their vibrant display.

Listen to these flowers with your eyes. The sounds they make are unfamiliar. From other worlds, the distances are formidable, and the voices delayed and stretched beyond legibility. Their accents are squawky in super slow motion. Tiny explosions that last forever. Sharp in attack in a previous time and



painful to the core, grounded in such spherical finalities. I put them in the fridge overnight both to quiet them and make them last longer. Why shorten their lifespan while we're sleeping?

Listen to these blue violet flowers. They are Dutch irises, and they are irresistible to insects, birds, and people. They chirp subtly in colour opposition with their fine maize-landing strips punctuating and penetrating a calming purplish-blue hue overall. Ultraviolet light barely amplifies their attractiveness. I've tried to tweak their vibrations without much boost. Whereas all quiet things have trouble attracting and holding attention, once these irises arrest my gaze it is game over. Transfix one full stop — an imaginary breeze breaks the freeze-frame with a whisper of animation.

This protea sings like a jet engine. A private jet as witnessed from inside its fuselage. The turbine is shrill, a pressure tickling the inner ear. I barely resist probing the guts with my fingers. I worry of ripping off my nails. I want to lick the fuzz until my tongue is dry. Eating a bird feather and all. I keep trying to pry inside carefully, not to do any permanent damage. The oligarchs

penetrate forbidden air space.

Ivan the Terrible got the ball rolling. After a back-to-back winter of COVID-19 isolation, Vladimir was ready for the role of mad czar. I doubt Vladimir is into cut flowers or any flowers for that matter, especially horizontal networks of flowers, their blossoms like transponders trading beauty for nutrients through stems communicating water. I wonder if they trade in light? A bouquet of flowers is like a collection of severed limbs. Cut flowers are still alive but they depend on nutrients and oxygen to continue breathing. Even trees, as vertical as they appear, are horizontal networks. They communicate through water and air and light. I would bet Vladimir admires the verticality of trees even as his army knocks them down.

Cut flowers never last long enough. Ageism is real.

06

REFLECTED LIGHT

Follow the light on the water to the horizon and above.

The moon migrated in to illuminate the Bay — most nights it's blacked out. The vertical frame, popularized by the phone, is here called for by the moon's lofty display. I prefer direct sunlight on the ocean, but at night reflected light will have to do. This is a color photograph of a nearly colorless scene. It felt yellowish when I was shooting. Why didn't the camera record this tone? Around midnight. A remote coastal region of Nova Scotia. I contemplate the planet and its only moon, a night view ordinarily more cosmically undernourished.



07

THE LIGHT OFF THE WATER

Light from the sun hits the water at light speed.

Light coming off the water mesmerizes the viewer who locks onto the display of light undulating off the surface of the ocean.

The viewer's perceptual system, while impressive, operates slowly compared to the speed of light.

The surface of the retina is light-struck resulting in impulses, electrical impulses that traverse the optic nerves to the brain.

The light off the water finds its way into the brain through the human

apparatus of sight.

The light off the water. That light that is not absorbed by the water finds its way into the brains of those who gaze into the light.

The light illuminates the surface of the ocean. It bounces off the water's undulating surface at the speed of light striking the retinas and traveling as bioelectrical impulses through the optic nerves to the brain.

The body's visual sensors, the eyes and brain, sense the light with a time-lag, locking the brain into sync with the shimmering surface, slowing the light down, absorbing the energy and converting the undulating patterns into engagement. The eyes and brain are transfixed on the light coming off the water.

The light off the water challenges us, arrests us, absorbs us into sensing the delay between the impact of light on our retinas and the conveyance of the resulting electrical disturbance running along the optic nerves to the visual cortex of the brain.

The image received by the retinas, in this case the patterns of light reflected off the water, are conveyed by the optic nerves in a series of rhythmic bioelectrical impulses to the brain.

The electrical impulses passing the image along the optic nerves are rhythmical in that they are encoded in a series of clustered rapid pulsations and the frequencies and dynamic range of this silent chorus of nerve rhythms varies with the intensity and color of the light seen.

When such an intense and complex light is absorbed by the apparatus of sight, the amplitude of the electrical disturbance rises along the pathways of the optic nerves, then dips, then rises again more gradually, forming a curve or wave of electrical sensation. The second rise corresponds with the phenomenon of after-vision, a micro-memory-based timing element in the optic nerves and the visual cortex of the brain.

The smoothness and regularity of these electrical waves are disturbed further by a greater number of small oscillations in a chorus of neural fire.

When there is rhythmic continuity in the external image source (the light off the water) there is a corresponding rhythmic continuity in the internal image, the bioelectrical disturbance in the optic nerves and visual cortex of the brain. There are rhythmic electrical sub-visual, silent standing waves delayed but in parallel to the light hitting the retinas.

The deceleration of light in the retinas, optic nerves and visual cortex of the brain give the light weight and heat. The rhythms in the visual pathway are moderated by the mesmerizing topology of the surface of the water. The effect is more relaxing than a strobe.

Locking the lobes of the brain up with the flux of the patterns of the shimmering surface, slowing the light, the eyes and brain sense the light with a time-lag, absorbing the energy and converting the undulating patterns into the temperature-less heat of consuming light directly from the surface of the water.

The light is inconceivably quick until it hits the retinas where it is slowed

down in the head as it is absorbed by the optic nerves, making its way by impulses into the brain converting the undulating patterns into the frictive heat of consuming light directly from the surface of the water.

The free light is inconceivably quick until it hits the retinas where it is slowed down in the head as it is absorbed by the optic nerves that transport it into the brain by bioelectrical impulse.

The light off the water—that light not absorbed by a body of water finds its way into the brains of those who gaze into the light reflecting off the water.

The eyes and brain sense the light with a time-lag, locking the lobes of the brain up with the shimmering surface, absorbing the energy and light coming off the water.

The light lays on top of the water until it jumps into sight.

08

NEGATIVE IONS

Big waves from Hurricane Earl have been whipping up a negative ion-rich mist off our deck on the South Shore of Nova Scotia.

The salt spray is saturated with negative ions as air molecules break apart from moving water. Oxygen-rich, we inhale them with joy.



09

DIZZINESS

I wondered if Dizzy Gillespie got his name because he was plagued by dizzy spells.

I've had some personal dizziness lately. If I tilt my head quickly to the left, it's like a silent carnival ride without the diesel smell. The spinning is clean and exhilarating, always clockwise and climbing on a diagonal. I enjoy it if I'm lying down and feel safe, but when I have a dizzy spell, I'm afraid to stand up. I worry about falling. I don't want to find my face pressing into the floor or grass, or worse gravel. After you go down from dizziness you just must figure out how to get up without falling again. Don't bother searching for the reason you fell. It doesn't matter. It's too late. Time to get up, to stabilize. I did some research on Dizzy Gillespie. It turns out he didn't suffer from dizziness. He used to carry his trumpet to gigs in a paper bag, things like that. He was eccentric, a little different. When I get dizzy, I'm not eccentric, just dizzy.

10

INSTRUMENTS

Instruments allow us to take the pulse of environments bigger and more complex than we are.

They help us connect with others who understand the same world.

Instruments cut through the fog and give us the goods. Through instruments we find our roles are cut out for us. We become one with our instruments through our instrumentalities.



11

ELECTRIC CARS AND ELECTRIC GUITARS

Electric cars and electric guitars.

Electric cars are automobiles, vehicles governed by computers. Soon electric cars will drive themselves. They will appear to be autonomous. Electric guitars are musical instruments. Electric guitars are for playing, for making music. Like electric cars, they can take us places. Electric cars and electric guitars.



Traffic on the street or road is still noisy, a rumble and din. But that will begin to fade as electric vehicles are introduced to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and let computers take over the streets and roads. People will no longer be responsible for driving their cars. They may sleep on their way to work or play their guitars when they are going places. At first electric cars will be driven by people. In the future people will let the cars drive for them. They will turn over the keys to computers and machines will learn to drive safely and efficiently. The people being driven around by computers can sit back and relax and do other things. Blind people will be able to drive. People too old or too young will be able to drive. People will be able to go places without breaking the law. The rules of the road will be enforced by computers.



Electric cars will be quiet but deadly to pedestrians and cyclists. People

walking or riding bicycles will be run over by electric cars because people will not hear them coming until it is too late. Electric cars will have to be smart enough to warn people on the street that they are coming.



Watch out and get out of the way when electric cars decide to cross your path. Electric cars will accelerate and decelerate with transmissions that have no gears. They will not indicate that they are speeding up or slowing down. They will not sound dangerous.



There is a subconscious pleasure in driving a responsive vehicle. The artificial intelligence humming underneath a network of autonomous vehicles pushes us to look inward for a sense of velocity and progress in our journeys.



From the cabins of our vehicles we invent the geometry of our mobility. The

cityscape swirls around us through windows and mirrors. We no longer have to worry about hitting someone or cracking up.



When we are walking we know which way our feet are pointing. Heal to toe, our body's gait unfolds in our walk. When we drive or are driven our feet are fixed on the floor. It is time to dance in our autonomous electric cars.



Artificial intelligence is the system governing vehicular traffic. AI takes driving beyond subconsciousness. We will no longer wonder where we have gone while asleep at the wheel. We will dream about coming and going places in our transported brains. From point A to point B via straight lines and curves, stopping and starting in circles and squares and ending in vanishing points on the highway.



Electric cars and electric guitars. Autonomous vehicles go wherever they

are told. Internal combustion had quite a throaty run. A mobile phone ad on TV made me think about texting. Texting is the transmission of data about our bodies Completely free and disembodied... Texting is the connection of disconnected, disembodied bodies.



The problem is we cannot transmit our actual flesh and blood bodies with radio waves or quantum entanglement or any supernatural scheme we can seize upon. We are stuck on this planet as animals imprisoned in our skin and bones. We wrap our bodies in metal cars and speed around in our illusions of immaterialism. Eventually our cars will have to fly. Flying cars will be governed by artificial intelligence and gravity.



Electric cars, like petroleum-powered vehicles before them, are little houses on wheels, mobile homes. These rolling houses contain the sound of their drivers and passengers who mix their music with those on the street by rolling down their windows or stopping and opening their doors. Passenger vehicles, controlled autonomously by computers, are vehicles for delivering

and mixing sound inside out as an act of transportation, as a means of getting somewhere, concretely.



Don't waste your time driving around when you can make music and have a dynamic conversation with the environment. Today's transportation systems are articulations of mobility and location. Try playing a song that tracks movement and creates inner and outer space. Performance is critical. Nobody wants to drive a pedestrian vehicle for any length of time .



Before we were relieved of the responsibility of driving we could only listen to the radio and sing along. Or use our phones. In autonomous vehicles we can play our guitars or drums or wind instruments in our mobile studios. We can program our instruments with our very nervous systems and improvise and exercise our heart and lungs and limbs. We can rock our bodies to the forces generated by our rolling vehicles.



Soon we will all be passengers driven by our need to be with others. We use our cars to be with other people. We can send our cars out to shop for groceries themselves. Autonomous vehicles can go out to have their brakes and shocks and steering checked without us. Their batteries drive the system. They are happiest taking a good charge. They are essentially batteries that keep them alive. Lithium ion batteries are the heart of electric cars. They crave electricity to be alive and moving.



Cars are meta-musical instruments driven by lithium batteries. Cars are electric devices for working and playing. Lithium is a soft metal, a white powder extremely good at holding and releasing electric power. Lithium loves electricity and electricity makes the world go round. Playing with electricity makes us happy. A powerful lithium battery is a beautiful thing.



Electric cars and electric guitars are the sound of the city, a sonic diagram of our desire to be with people, to signal each other, to realize how we feel and tell others, to draw pictures with velocity and conduct stops and starts at visualizing music through windshields and windows, expressing sound with motion in traffic as we tell others we are alive.



12

CITY CEMETERY

We were walking in the quiet of a cemetery on a warm and sunny winter day.

I was thinking about remembering the dead when an SUV came quickly around the corner and drove right past us with its sound system blasting. I could see the driver wearing simple silver-rimmed glasses through an open window. The interior of the car was dark in its shade and the closeup of the driver passed quickly. This shockingly noisy vehicle parked immediately behind me on the left side of the road and the driver swung open the door and stepped out on the grass after turning off the ignition without cutting the music which expanded dramatically in volume and radically enlarged the affected area through the wide-open door. The driver was a middle-aged

woman with a stocky build of average height. She stood defiantly, glaring back our way for a moment before walking up hill through a low maze of gravestones. The city cemetery was jam packed. She had a thick single strand of braided hair running down the back of her winter coat. She walked with directness toward the grave of a loved one, her departed. I turned, and continued my way before she stopped at her destination. The music was stylish rhythm and blues, popular music, not gospel, sung sweetly by a female vocalist. The car's sound system was powerful and clean, the base line was rich, the mix's mid-range was clear, and the highs matched the intensity of the early afternoon sunlight perfectly. It was the end of February with just a hint of Spring, the melting snow was flooding the graves at the lower edges of the road. I wondered if the music was creating a cinematic scene for the woman to pray within or if the music was amplified for the pleasurable reception of a loved one now in the ground. I wondered if a decomposing body still had a visceral appetite for sonic vibrations and if this gave a loving presence to the visitor who flooded the graveyard with the gift of such a cool sound. It was a full moving body sound, and it strolled through its chords beautifully. I thought about our friend Ralph who was

lying in a grave about a hundred and fifty yards uphill to the North and wondered if he would mind this choice of music. He preferred European classical music when he was alive but never listened to his music very loud because he listened on a slightly tinny table radio in his kitchen. He hummed along to his orchestral music when he read. Ralph was buried, not cremated, but it was a few years ago and I don't think his fading remains would be sensitive to the vibrations from recorded music anymore at any amplitude. There wouldn't be much of a discrete body mass left. His bones might still be whole, I don't know. I wondered if it is better to be buried rather than cremated in terms of experiencing music after you're dead.

13

FULL SKELETAL REPLACEMENT

I was so cognitively revitalized by a full hip replacement that I have decided to have full skeletal replacement surgery.

These old bones need to go. Not just the joints but everything in between. The shoulder and neck joints and rib cage are replaced first, the knees and heels next. Elbows and knuckles and collar bones are a particular relief. The spine and skull remain undone, as well as the sternum. The surgeons go in the front and the back in successive elective operations. Internal bone mass is replaced by alloy injection. From behind the shoulder blades beckon.



14

VIDEO SPIDER

Don't mess with video, unless you want to be transformed into a filmmaker, a slave to the unworldly narrative stream.

Sidelined. Video has been a wrecking ball since it started to engulf motion pictures in contrast to the news, game shows and live sports. Television was briefly at war with movies before it digested them completely. Video then moved onto the individual to complement human consciousness. This video spider is in the hunting position, using the silk to extend its grip onto reality. Video has evolved far beyond symbolism; its' domain is electronically visceral and infinite.



15

ANNE WEHRER

I was asked by Andrew Lugg to push a dolly around a film set in Ann Arbor in 1971.

Andrew was shooting a short film that needed a 16mm camera to track around a seated woman who was speaking a scripted monologue. Two of us guided the dolly along an arc around the woman that was marked in white tape on the floor. The dolly was heavy, and we had to creep at the right speed to begin and end the single take at exactly five minutes, a steady, concentric pan as smooth and uniform as possible. It took a little muscle and a lot of concentration. I don't know how well we did as I never saw the film. Andrew seemed satisfied with our work. We rehearsed the sweep around the actor, Anne Wehrer, then we dollyed for two takes of the monolog about a woman having the barrel of a handgun put in her mouth and despite the threat she survived and complained about having a piece of hamburger in her mouth at the end. That's all I remember she said. I wasn't consciously listening as

I was preoccupied with the heavy perfection of the camera's movement. The next day I had lunch with Anne. This time I looked her in the eye and studied her mouth as she spoke. I was 22 and she was probably 40 years of age. I wanted to know about the scene in Ann Arbor. She knew everyone in the Once group and talked about Bob and George and Pat and John Cage and his thing about mushrooms. She told me that once John had asked her to join him for a weekend of chess with Marcel Duchamp in the woods at some cottage on Long Island. She was anxious about going because she was a novice at chess. But she went at John's coaxing and had a wonderful weekend talking and drinking and going for walks with John and Marcel. At the end of the weekend, she was relieved but surprised that they hadn't played any chess and worried that they hadn't done so because of her shortcomings. John told her they hardly ever played chess on their weekends in the country, their time together was too valuable. And besides, she had been such a wonderful guest, they had been swept off their feet. Of course, I was mesmerized with this story and probably had stopped breathing, let alone eating, so I could concentrate on Anne's every word. At that moment, Anne bent over and lifted her skirt so she could pin up her stocking on her wooden leg.

16

TINY BUBBLES

These tiny bubbles were photographed a few years ago on the bottom of a shallow pond near our house in Nova Scotia.

I was standing in the pond on a sunny day ankle deep in warm water, witnessing the creation of free oxygen by modern cyanobacteria, practicing photosynthesis similar to the process launched by their great ancestors at least 3.7 billion years ago. This mucky bottom is dominated by cyanobacteria, commonly known as blue-green algae. The oxygen in the fresh air I breathe is being replenished by the bacterial matt my feet are planted in.



17

FEATHER

This is a photographic image of a seagull feather made 1,572 years ago by a contemporary AI-image generator.

It rests on the flat surface of a white sand beach altering the shell sand's movement in a light breeze across a plane textured by rain drops already dry before cameras were even imagined yet made, 43° 57' 1.79" N - 64° 49' 7.79" W, late afternoon, no cloud cover, hazy.



