The Fabric Described by Buildings

by

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Philadelphia isn’t as bad as Philadelphians say it is

- Elliott Curson
**Introduction**

On May 13th, 1985, at 5:35 a.m, the police commissioner of Philadelphia, Gregore Sambor addressed the members of MOVE, a radical, predominantly Black back-to-nature collective living at 6221 Osage Avenue in West Philadelphia. Over a bullhorn, Sambor announced: “Attention MOVE! This is America! You have to abide by the laws of the United States.” Sambor gave the MOVE members 15 minutes to surrender or to turn over their children to the several hundred police officers assembled outside. The street had been evacuated the day before, Mother’s Day, to prepare for the impending confrontation. When none of the MOVE members came out of the fortified compound after 18 minutes, Sambor ordered his officers to begin firing. Over 90 minutes, they fired 1,000 rounds into the house. They drilled holes through the walls from the abutting row houses and inserted tear gas. They worked under Sambor’s direction while Mayor W. Wilson Goode watched on television, first from his home in the nearby Overbrook section of the city, and later from his City Hall office, as he had been warned by a police officer that he would be killed were he to arrive at the scene. Sambor’s officers kept firing, yet still no one emerged.

Osage Avenue residents had spent two years filing complaints with the city about MOVE, until finally Sambor, Mayor Goode and Managing Director Leo Brooks formed a plan to extricate MOVE from their compound. Residents said that

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2 Ibid., 116-117.
4 Anderson and Hevenor, *Burning Down the House*, 126.
MOVE generated unsanitary compost that included raw meat that they allowed to rot outside their house.\textsuperscript{5} Residents said that MOVE let their children run naked, that they did not send them to school, and that they fed them only raw food. Residents said that MOVE members broadcast the teachings of their founder and leader, John Africa, by loudspeaker in the early hours of the morning and late at night. Residents said that they had been threatened by a MOVE member, or had been harassed by a MOVE member. The residents of the 6200 block of Osage Avenue complained for years, until finally the city took action.\textsuperscript{6}

MOVE had previously registered in Philadelphia's collective consciousness in 1978 after a confrontation with police at MOVE's former home at 309 North 33\textsuperscript{rd} Street in the Mantua section of the city.\textsuperscript{7} During the August 8\textsuperscript{th}, 1978 confrontation, the police brought in bulldozers and began to demolish the house on the MOVE compound. MOVE member Delbert Africa was publicly beaten, and Police Officer James Ramp was shot and killed. Mayor Frank Rizzo, a former police commissioner himself, was questioned about the beating of Delbert Africa, which was caught on tape and aired on local news stations, but legal action was never taken. Officer Ramp was killed by an unknown gunman in his last month of service after 23 years on the police force.\textsuperscript{8} If Rizzo's cops killed Officer Ramp, no one is telling; however, nine

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 56-57.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 22.
MOVE members (now known as the MOVE 9) went to prison for his murder, serving 30 years to life. One of the MOVE 9 died in prison. The other eight are all still there.\(^9\)

Through protests and demonstrations in the late '70s and early '80s MOVE consistently voiced their opposition to the stringency of the Philadelphia police and to the status of Blacks as an underclass. MOVE wanted the MOVE 9 out of jail. They wanted the cops to leave the members of MOVE living in West Philadelphia alone. They wanted the rights that, as they saw it, any other citizen had, to act as they pleased in their homes, and to abide by their own way of living. They objected both to their treatment and to how the city policed, monitored and otherwise tracked its residents.\(^10\)

The police force at the time bore the character of former commissioner Rizzo, who was known for his curious bouts of brutality, his generally aggressive demeanor, and his ability to extrapolate potentially lawful behavior into grounds for punishment. On November 2\(^{nd}\), 1971, when Rizzo won his first mayoral election, Rizzo’s people carried a casket through the streets containing a mannequin with its feet sticking out. The mannequin was wearing argyle socks, the trademark of his bested opponent, Thacher Longstreth.\(^11\)

Both MOVE and Rizzo strongly believed that they had the right to play by their own rules, and furthermore, that their rules, even if they compromised the rights of other citizens, were implicit in the structure of the law. When Rizzo, as a beat cop, routinely shut down Center City nightclubs that catered to gay men and arrested

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\(^10\) Ibid

those men on the grounds that he found their conduct personally offensive, that behavior was within his rights. When neighbors of the MOVE compound woke up with their walls covered in bugs, or with MOVE's dogs eating their garbage, that behavior was within MOVE's rights. As both MOVE and Rizzo saw it, Philadelphia operated by means of an implicitly flawed regulatory system – which was, in Rizzo’s eyes, not stringent enough, and in MOVE’s perception, far too stringent.

In 1983, Philadelphia's implicitly corrupt political machine elected a mayor who was a Baptist deacon and who had formed his image on his singularly clean political practices and his dedication to his faith and to his neighborhood and faith communities. W. Wilson Goode established his political identity by serving as the head of the Philadelphia Council for Community Advancement, and later as a member and then as the chairman of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission.12 On January 2nd, 1984, Goode was sworn into office as Philadelphia's first African American mayor, the leader of an increasingly failing, increasingly racially divided city, convinced that he was going to turn things around.13

This was the state of the city when Commissioner Sambor stood outside of the MOVE compound on May 13th, 1985, trying to figure out how to employ his backup plan, as no one had expected the 90-minute barrage of gunfire to fail to stir the MOVE members from the house. Sambor had previously charged Officer William Klein with constructing a bomb, what Sambor termed an "entry device," to blow off the bunker that MOVE had built on their roof. Although the porch of the house had

13 Ibid
collapsed in the shootout, leaving portions of the second floor exposed, Sambor said the police needed to blow off the bunker in order to direct tear gas through the roof.14

At 5:27 PM, Lt. Frank Powell of the Philadelphia police dropped a satchel containing an explosive device from a state police helicopter.15 The bomb, filled with roughly 3.25 pounds of Tovex and C-4 – military grade explosives – did not dislodge the bunker.16 It did start a modest fire on the roof of the house. Sambor decided to let the fire burn until the bunker fell in through the roof. Mayor Goode, seeing on television in his City Hall office, 4.7 miles away, that the fire was not being fought, called Sambor and gave him explicit instructions to put the fire out. Sambor asserted that he heard Mayor Goode’s instructions. He hung up the phone and proclaimed: “Let the bunker burn!”17 The fire burned on.

Mayor Goode continued to watch from his office. As the fire collapsed the bunker into the building, he believed he saw arcs of water from fire hoses begin to put out the flames. But it was not so. With Philadelphia years behind other cities in coordinating cable television service, reception in Center City was notoriously bad. So as the mayor watched on his snowy office television screen, he mistook the static in the image for the water no one was projecting at the flames on Osage Avenue. The fire burned on. By the time it was brought under control, 61 houses had burned to the ground, leaving 253 people homeless and 11 MOVE members dead, five of them children.18

14 Anderson and Hevenor, Burning Down the House, 141.
15 Ibid., 146-7.
16 Ibid., 144, 148.
17 Ibid., 151.
18 Ibid., xiv.
One adult and one child survived. The adult, Ramona Africa was convicted on counts of conspiracy and riot.\(^{19}\) She served seven years in prison. The child, then known as Birdie Africa, was taken in by his father, who was not a member of MOVE. Birdie, renamed Michael Moses Ward, grew up well outside of the city.\(^{20}\) On May 14\(^{th}\), the day after the bombing, David Letterman opened his television show by asking: “I just want to know one thing. Does this mean that MOVE won’t get its security deposit back?”\(^{21}\) and the city became, in the national consciousness: "The City that Bombed Itself.”\(^{22}\)

A series of hearings ensued, referred to as the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission, or MOVE Commission hearings. The commission found that while mistakes were made, and while Goode said he never authorized a bomb to be dropped and Sambor said Goode did, no city official was sufficiently at fault to be charged with a crime or held otherwise personally liable. Birdie Africa was paid a settlement by the city. Ramona served her jail sentence. The houses were incompletely rebuilt, with the contractors stealing from the city’s construction funds, and many houses on the block have remained boarded up to this day.

In 1987, when former Mayor Rizzo ran for re-election (the last campaign he would live through), his campaign slogan was, "Philadelphia needs leadership before things get worse.”\(^{23}\) One of his campaign’s television commercials profiled several

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 196.
\(^{22}\) Ibid
people who said they were planning to vote for him. One potential voter was a young African American woman who said she voted for Goode in 1983 (he received 98% of the African American vote), but after what happened with MOVE, she was planning to vote for Rizzo, under whose leadership, she said, such a thing never would have happened.

Though Philadelphia was once a leading manufacturing center, Philadelphians today do not have enough work. Philadelphia currently has about 40,000 vacant lots. As of March 2009, more than 52% of Philadelphia’s adults who were of working age, about 550,000 people, lacked the basic skills necessary to effectively compete in an increasingly knowledge-based economy or to complete a post-secondary degree. The Philadelphia public schools fail to prepare young people to get jobs, or even to leave the city, so many Philadelphians stay, as they have for generations, with neighborhoods turning over to gentrification, or to poverty, and the buildings rotting out of their Gilded Age foundations, or sinking into the ground.

In 1969, media consultant Elliott Curson championed a campaign designed to get Philadelphians to once again see their city as a commercial hub. The slogan was: “Philadelphia isn't as bad as Philadelphians say it is.” The slogan was not especially well received, and was replaced by a series of slogans including, in 1997, a figuration

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of the city that billed Philadelphia as “The Place That Loves You Back.”

Philadelphia has, for many decades, had a difficult time representing itself. In the 1950s, Mayor Richardson Dilworth called the thick ring of largely white, comparatively affluent suburbs around the city the “white noose” around Philadelphia's neck. Social services have deteriorated along with the tax base, with much of the money made in Philadelphia going to property taxes paid by suburban residents. Now, with a sizeable nonworking constituent population, Philadelphia is known for its high crime and general inability to enforce a state of lawfulness, which were brought to national attention by means of the bombing 26 years ago, and which, even though the bombing has been largely forgotten, continue to trouble the city.

As far as what happened to cause the series of events that resulted in the tragedy of the MOVE bombing, no one knows the whole story. No one knows what Goode knew or what he authorized, or why the house burned for such a long time, or whether the MOVE members had guns. No one knows whether they died in the shootout or in the fire, or how police officers thought it acceptable to put civilian lives, property and well being on the line before risking their own, or to what extent the cops who were still loyal to Rizzo and his style of leadership thought Goode was politically ineffective because he refused to engage in Philadelphia’s backhanded political currency. No one knows if Goode's life really would have been in danger had he been on the scene. Now that the bombing is collectively forgotten (although many individuals remember it well), it is unclear whether it codified Philadelphia’s

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29 Ibid
identity as a national embarrassment, and whether the rapid completion of the industrial decline that had been afflicting the city was sped up by the way the city managed the final confrontation with MOVE.

Philadelphia may be well on its way to becoming an example of the circumstances under which a city may default on its responsibilities to provide the basic resources in order to function for its constituents. Even so, if each of those 11 MOVE members and children had been shot in the street, their deaths would have most likely gone unnoticed, especially if they happened one at a time. The 1985 confrontation between the city and MOVE is remarkable not because of the deaths themselves, but because those residents who died were killed by the city.

My parents were living in Philadelphia when the bombing occurred. For a long time, they believed that Philadelphia could turn itself around, that it could, even in the years after the bombing, under Mayor Ed Rendell’s administration from 1992 to 2000, overcome its debt, manage its massive industrial losses, and reinvent itself as a new American center. My dad arrived in the city in the fall of 1980, to take a job as a copy editor at the Philadelphia Inquirer. When my mom came from the Binghamton Evening Press for a copy desk tryout in August of 1981, my dad walked her back to her hotel. She took the job later that month, and on May 13th, 1985, when the bomb was dropped, my parents were in a motel room in Lincoln, Nebraska, driving across the country on their honeymoon.

My parents edited the news stories about the aftermath of the bombing and about the MOVE Commission hearings the following year. Neither of my parents is a Philadelphia native, but like many transplanted or native Philadelphians in their age group, they came to the city as young professionals, found it amenable and quirky and
hurting but perhaps fixable, and they stayed and raised a family there and tried to make Philadelphia better.

When I was born, in January of 1989, my mom was 40 and my dad 36. My mom, disenchanted by the distance from the community at which newspapers operate, became first an adult educator and later a director of adult education sites and programs. She worked for several years at the Center for Literacy, then located at 48th Street and Baltimore Avenue in West Philadelphia in a converted turn-of-the-century Victorian house. Many of my first memories take place in that building and in that neighborhood, creating in me a myth of West Philadelphia, and of University City, the neighborhood within West Philadelphia in which the University of Pennsylvania is situated, as an ideal of everything that's a disaster about Philadelphia and everything that has been foundational to the American imagination in which Philadelphia figures as the site where the constitution was signed, and where America first came into being. My early experiences in West Philadelphia generated in me a curiosity about the tertiary world in Philadelphia that comes out of the meeting of that epic American past and that fated, disastrous present.

I have never been a full-time West Philadelphia resident, although it has been my home in many ways at many different times. I attended preschool at the Parent Infant Center from September of 1989 to September of 1994, just over two miles from where the bombing occurred. Many of my first memories were from walks around West Philadelphia. A year after I completed preschool, my father moved to West Philadelphia when my parents separated, and he remained there until six months before I graduated from high school. West Philadelphia has never been my only home, but it has always been my home.
The following collection of poems grew from the intersection of West Philadelphia, and of University City in particular, as the first landscape that I associate with home and a series of questions as to how Philadelphia got where it is now, what Philadelphia means to Philadelphians, and what kind of future the city might have. This project expands from a focus on West Philadelphia between the bombing and the present day to cover a geographic and temporal framework that includes the city of Philadelphia and its history in the second half of the 20th century.

As a collection of poems, the project represents both an extended engagement with the history and present reality of Philadelphia as a space, a home, and a civic body and an extended engagement with the study of poetic craft. I believe that the world of the poem, even to the newest reader of poetry, can build its layers over and within itself to mirror the construction and movement of the urban neighborhood and the unit of the city.

During the summer of 2010, I was given both a Davenport Study Grant and an Olin Fellowship to conduct three months of research and interviews, and to write a preliminary set of poems. I interviewed 36 current and former Philadelphians, a full list of whom can be found adjacent to my acknowledgments page. Many of these interviews informed me about experiences and perspectives that I had not considered, took me to buildings and neighborhoods I did not know well, and reminded me of some of the common elements of Philadelphians’ conceptions of Philadelphia and some of the major differences. These interviews informed many of the poems in this collection and helped me guide and imagine its structure.

These poems use the MOVE bombing as a central event to build outward to the greater history and present structure of Philadelphia and inward into my own
history growing up there. The poems that are primarily concerned with my own experiences are important because they link the lived to the civic. The poems that theorize about the racial climate surrounding the MOVE bombing and about policing more generally are important because they link the civic to the lived. Poems that deal more generally with place, urban experience and human experience are designed to consider the inner layers of the framework of civic spaces – from the municipal to the domestic, and everywhere in between. This is a collection that is designed to be as much about Philadelphia's past as about its future, and as much about the patience and reverence that loving a hurt city builds as it is about the events that are most damaging to the city.

A number of poets and writers about Philadelphia have influenced the writing of these poems. The work of poets Terrance Hayes (notably his collections Hip Logic and Lighthead) and Harryette Mullen (particularly S**P*eRM**K*T and Muse & Drudge) have been effective teachers, in terms of how they fuse the personal with the systematic and the civic with individual acts of intuition. Ed Roberson’s and Muriel Rukeyser's treatments of public space were also helpful. Fred J. Hamilton's biography of Rizzo, Wilson Goode's autobiography, In Goode Faith, and former University of Pennsylvania president Judith Rodin's 2007 book The University and Urban Revival were useful in understanding approaches to writing about the recent history of Philadelphia, as was Jane Jacobs's landmark book The Death and Life of Great American Cities. The Philadelphia Inquirer archives, particularly the reporting of Craig R. McCoy, proved especially helpful as well.

No one knows how and why a city publicly bombs, shoots, smokes and burns out 11 city residents. It is likely that some damage was done to the leaders of the city
as a result of the MOVE bombing and its fallout. In the year that followed the bombing, Goode's Managing Director, Leo Brooks, and Commissioner Sambor both resigned.\textsuperscript{32} Goode refuses, currently, to talk about the bombing.\textsuperscript{33} There is very little literature on the topic and very little forthcoming information.

The purpose of this collection is to encourage readers both within and outside the city to explore the circumstances and effects of the MOVE bombing, to engage with questions about what makes a city operate, and to think again about both MOVE and the bombing as a reconsideration of what Philadelphia is and what it can be. The reader might also reconsider what Philadelphians and urban residents everywhere bring to their cities, how those cities inform who they are, how our identities as urban residents are affected by the urban landscape itself, how we use the spaces we move through to constitute ourselves and how that constitution, that relationship between environment and use, in turn, constitutes those spaces.

\textsuperscript{32} Anderson and Hevenor, \textit{Burning Down the House}, 176-177.
Arterials
Snapshots for Looking at Summer of ’91

My dad bought a copy
of a dry felt-covered
“Three Little Pigs”
at a yard sale

a week before Frank Rizzo
republican candidate for mayor
died, on July 16th

Cardinals, throngs and carnations
haloed “Frank Forever” at City Hall

daylily season was over
we got a full crest of
golden raspberries
from the bushes in our yard

We read the book
and when we got to the pig
in the brick house
my dad asked
what’s the pig doing?
and I said: that pig is
reading the newspaper

We’d sit next to those bushes
and Cyprian, our cat
would look at us
through the screen door

Spectacor, which owned the Flyers
said, in June, that it would build
a new stadium to replace
JFK in South Philly

In the summer of ’81
my dad saw the Stones
there and my mom says
he snapped his fingers
until they bled

The people who came out
to City Hall were mostly old
Rizzocrats, cops in the ’60s
when he was Police Commissioner
Once the pigs developed
a following in me
we’d sit in the grass or on
the concrete steps and read
that book every evening

When my dad asked what
that pig was doing
I would say that he was
reading the newspaper
and when my dad asked
what’s he reading about
I would say: Frank Rizzo
Snapshots for Looking at John F. Kennedy Blvd

As an independent corral
30th Street Station vaults
the Amtrak Silver Star
up from Miami, hours away

The wheels of each regional train
taxi over the ground that keeps still
while they’re moving

The annex, a new building
has both an escalator
and two flights of circular stairs

It’s got a shoe, and its partner in the railway

A box full of meteorite candy
cinnamon quarter red gum
that I lapse on
for the arcade pinch
your hand had
coming in for mine

and the track along the river
holds that tension – a stream
between the engine and its moorings
a dominant line drawn taut
The Second Mile Empire

It’s hot enough to talk temp
in the parking lot of the 7-11

On the block of halal falafel,
the chicken park (a playground,
formerly a coop)

The Second Mile is four stores
for towels, toasters
plastic Tiffany glass

for public changing under a big skirt
toy keyboards, Candyland

Further west, they like a
white boy better if
he’s over 25 or under 10

I fold up my pants
I’m five feet six inches
I can be either

People say hello only when
I’m with my borrowed dog
or on scorchers, or on my steps,
in the shorts I slept in
Options

Occurrence, a part
of an infinite series

George Oppen

There’s a search on for two working dogs
whose locations are missing
as though those dogs ran through water

From each commercial window
I’m drawn to see them
drinking from their bowl on the walkway

People touching them
in order to get their
hands on the door

Arrivals and departures we put down
as we move between them

If we sent out another working dog
to follow the dogs that we lost,
how far could he pursue them?
at what point would that next dog lose their smell?

Like the hived maintenance of doorways
some dormant, some untrackable
some buildings homes for no one

Like the game where my father
is in the convenience store
and I count who exits
betting he’ll be the seventh one outside
**Bicycle Giants**

Bicycle giants, we turn,  
you’re on the handlebars, and we’re  
conducting a study in hearing,  
calling out passing cars, trucks  
by the depth of their engines

Streets that pull back to a central lake  
girls on the sidewalks  
in the shirtsleeves no one reasoned for

Who walk on fueled as by looks  
from a step or a storefront  
that affix to the clock tower  
crown of the head

Who pick themselves up  
the way grocery parcels hang,  
a wet weight, liquid in liquid

and green as the cold water  
you think of alligators preferring

We’re in the best room in the house –  
temperate, patient, facing  
the white car, parked

A carbon monoxide detector  
going off in the basement

The street visible and far away

A short gesture  
a thigh in the flux of touching  
a muscled yawn

The basic abundance of breathing  
or some other silver noise
Strays

What lines an avenue? and
What had to change to make that shine?

Cole Swensen

Dead pets are nameless on the radio
a stray cat is a fact of the avenue
a stray child likely had a parent

On Monday, ninety units burned
in the 4800 block of Walnut Street

Those people slept in a high school

The removal of snow returns the road
(a density map)
back by hours to one balance

Another weight, a crush of people
looking at the fire
Reading Wolfsuit

I

She starts: “The night Max wore his wolfsuit” and the forest gets quiet

The night to Max is an axiom – Max the asker of the night to come, the night belongs to Max, to lovers, we’re in the car, sleeping

She’s driving, she reads “the night,” and it awakens for me, for Max

II

She, the authority of the car isn’t in the car when the branch flattens it

Wolfsuit-suitable mischief Max and I don’t make in the night

III

Max goads me to throw a stick at a passing car

The driver gets out I tell him I live in the blue house

My house is tan My room right above his car, where Max splits his suit with the force he uses putting it on
Our car a salad in
the snow, the other car
mad and scratchless

IV

We’re in the road, under
the snow that outstretched
the limb’s limits

Max wears white
in the weather I like
to wear boots in

We weigh less than
the ice above the
tunnel, wait for night

To home its own
liquid in the thick sky, red
again, and tempered for snow
Domes

To be human is to be exceptional
and to be exceptional is either to accept
the loneliness that it carries
or to be undone by it

Buoyant by the grace of your bravery

Exact as a hue of flat wash paint

You register the split of a sphere like
the snapped dome of a hatchling

You gather in the span of its folds

You unfence your memory

You realign the nose of the craft that holds you, level, to the crest of its point
Snapshots for Looking at Farnsworth House

Today a juice glass
broke in my hand
from the heat,

The plastic bag
you were carrying
split and you put
it into your basket

There are lizard birds
or hatchlings,
before feathers,
living in that tree
outside of your office

We’re so tired;
we went to buy
teriyaki sauce once
after ten, the
grocery store so
uncomfortably
full of light

This lightning
makes the bike
the safest
place to be

In the all-
deciduous skyline,
a couple of tires
will absorb, will
let you be out in it

Your steps suggest
coming to a stand
the causation of the end
the edit, of a stride

There are photographs
of you taken on the beach
locked leaning into a sit
in this wind, this
wind we’re in
No coffee after 4 PM
no monsters in an
office with no closet,
your first workplace

I’m sorry to study
the language
in which you
are beautiful

I would rescind this
look another way,
but this is what
I can see, what
I’ve taught myself
to do
Snapshots for Looking at Sumac Street

A Philadelphian had the patent for handcrank ice cream first

The peach tree in our yard flowered if it fruited we used it

The hinges in my highchair the most interesting because they were metal and could be rusted like a washboard over time

The map of the fruit drawer the handcrank the radio the cement steps our cat wouldn’t go beyond

The front room paneled in wood and dark under the door glass in my father’s first house

One flavor for every day of the month, for me one flavor ever

In the ‘90s the Breyers factory was the last one to leave

We ate so much Vanilla Bean ice cream then

Because I was small because it was made here, or because I liked to eat it
River, Bridges
Children’s Hospital – Driving

I

Cops get so good
at backing their cars
out of parking spaces
they make their streets slick,
their headlights full

you sit upright, flush
in the carseat and slide
the windowglass down
into the cavity of the door

II

You can direct the car
between the park drives
over one river bridge
and back across another
the yawn of your
vehicle in the treelight

a garage under
the hospital

mobiles shaped like
antibodies hanging from
the clear ceiling

you can’t let loose a balloon
in the waiting room, a kite

no helium in the breathing-
sensitive wings

enough speed to
get there is
enough to be stopped

to keep the heart,
the hearts on beating
Children’s Hospital – Memory

(double dutch)

the bust of the fuses in a shootout
a shirt for the boy in the squad car

selective concessions to ruin,
delays, amplifications on
whose houses you burn down

whose body exempt from use
as a skin-grade waterway

who gets their temp settlements
who gets televised,
who gets up in arms

(double time)

30 to life killing a black man
life killing a white man
death killing a cop

the blacktop hot behind the house
a tunnel of gunfire in the alley

a fight for the life of the fire
a trial for the fired rioter
no trial for the firers of riots

some bloodlines cops will sever
when they want to inflict the civic
Map of University City Eclogue

I

The intuition of the zoo gambled on
how captive animals like to live
America’s first

Where University City holds
along that riverbank,
water remakes
the curvature of its stance
guiding this way
over the Schuylkill, this way west

II

Some University Cities stop
where students won’t go at night
others see the bike cops on their walk home
and go beyond them

III

There’s an anchor density
of dusk sitters on Locust Walk

There are standard behaviors
and fallen trees in the storm

IV

A swing of pedestrians under
all those extra streetlights throws
a shadow, another shadow

Colorado Springs cut their lights
by a third this year, but University City
turns them on, over and over
block after block
Go Back and Add Up

In place of a school,
in place of what churches
used to make
a chain, a channel

Where she rides
the elevated wires link
start a curve away from

as the brass casts of Eakins’s hands
the thrum of the banks he stood on

The city a system for fixtures
hands, finger pads
bigger than age

You took her at 18 months
to the Laundromat

where she deposited quarters
like flipping a lever in a voting machine

You identified the people
she can cross the street to

the neighbors who ask on the block
who devise her a region to carry
who say that she’ll know it
**Harryette Mullen Lecture on Philadelphia Fears**

Weaponry defended me a gangsta birth, a legislative fix who’s lingo bright, he’s got reptile sweats and when the zoo loses its cage angels, he’ll be an airborne escapee, a bird line, shit, man, a canary legend

All you can do is augment the corner store selections, add an apple, a couple of cups of cut up fruit – pump open the space of the radio waves to carry comestibles, pitch a television fit, stick this digestive itch in with the houses coming down, the library lie ins, the folds in the synapse factory bucking the legend trend, what the newspaper conditions you to behoove, when to fight by burial, at the waiting pavement, the last civil platform

Independence Hallows flies a havoc flag on the visitor strip, my little fuzzcicle could perch there, down set, and have a Philadelfrolic getting a nest together

While someone waiting for the city to catch him, to send him around, to *step*, will watch until they can’t help but, right where they’re standing, make a live-action lake
South 49th Street, Mira’s House, 2007

A boy who will say temperature is a vertebral question
A boy who has an algorithm for spiders

A boy who has a story about crayfish
    about egg wash
    about polyglots talking about a nap

A boy who likes the chart of the relative heights of presidential candidates and their successes, despite the fact that since 1900 the shortest candidate has almost always lost

A boy who makes shadow puppets
A boy who gives physical challenges
    – do this one without using the last two fingers on your left hand

A boy who asks after your paper cut-out alphabet
    after trying to buy implants from an ad on the radio
    after googleing them
    after the retiring of the holding of hands

The boy with the blue-eyed semiotic for howl
    with kinetic thoughts about the weather
    with highlighter sneakers (like yours)

A boy who can reset a plastic-backed kitchen drawer in its hinges
Circulate

I

The anchor in this room is a six-blade fan
through those crank windows
the currents working on open

Four Philadelphians die of
heat exhaustion inside their homes
their windows sealed against the heat

Live points on a data map
heart parcels in rotation

The breeze keeps an even beat
for everyone’s head to suggest on

II

On the grounds of the old seminary
there were monkey bars
tires in the play yard for climbing

There were children with tennis balls
rolling them over the wooden rails
and along the bridge

In October ’91, we dressed me up as a clown
the smallest scarecrow in the woodchips
huddled under the second largest tire
a transverse road, one arc to another
Other Hunters

To complete the act
of a balance of hearing
is to do up a little epidemic
to hover on your front steps
the open light golden and rung

Your street a clinic in sleep
abided by those who hold a dial
deceptive or resonant
the dream a common language
your body tapered as a balustrade
forms another turning word

You lineate your block with
an oak marker, a traffic one
cone or continent of light

You’ll cross one bilateral
cross again, web yourself in –
segment your base
your boundary
bounded by these lines

chalk them around
to your northmost street
your eastern
where you won’t go
your landmarks within it:
this is your city
**Children’s Hospital – Mobiles**

A teal antibody
that’s lofted in
the atrium of the hospital
a big model that makes
looking an activity

like a bird watch,
an indoor hunt
that expands the
volume of the lobby

what stop and look
to a child seeking
treatment means to
drive healing to
distraction

acroatic: flat,
windless, the air
an aquarium

a colorstruck
process to identify
a glider

a look up
to amp the blood
the cylinder of blood
that’s sent from the heart
**Children’s Hospital – Balance**

*for Margot Boyer-Dry*

an arena of daylight
a warmth between doors
the radiator valves would close
remember you to standing
and the house would get quiet

if a car pulls up behind
    yours in the driveway
if eventual men
    eat cereal in your living room
no one asks after them now

a tether between
    what your hands control
    and what they offer
a boundary to play at

we had breakfast
over and over again
where you stood
as if at the start of an incline
you ate that way too

one room its own ochre
hemisphere for folding in
some other gravity there

a rope your jowls could tug
at the circus of their operations
at each of the points, where
they make that friction-born heat
Broadcast
Attention MOVE! This is America!

John Africa blacklist. Five-o-clock shallow, warp the wisps of this story – in the cat of the epoxylisp even out of reach speakers beleaguer water to whine, goad the home, no one caught them

The kids’ lips stuck with sleep and spit, you gasoline basted the case to its joints you can push in ten thousand rounds, target blackfist, boast important, appeal of the daycarries all kinds of sounds to shoot out, no neighbor said “burn the house down,” make baby paste out of MOVE’s junior units

Opportunities for who’s movement, whose burst offendments slight, to channel tear gas use your neighbor’s roof, a bunker, little holes for big digs, a chopper caboose for tools

If the law says: I can call 311 for a wronged chrome fender, a barking dog, a man on a mission to itch his cult cred in the dozing jaws of our digs, a man to make our block into his mandible planet, then another dawn broadcast – that’s fighting fire with fire
Redux (MOVE Commission I)

A trial to think through
shoes on the stairs
holes in the hipbones
drop a bomb on a problem

Osage nation
of thin palms
against the thick
fist of the civic

Junk the stoops
the boxed petunias
lick your own stamp
of punitive approval

Where there’s smoke
there’s liars on
what the commissioner
saw, when he caught it

You have the blight
remain violent
pull a gun on
any loose-lipped goon

Wilson’s kitchen district
hits its legislative limit
a phone call, a stray “yes”
at the reception end

A goode sport
cooks what he skewers
bloodless, bones dry
other lungs open for smoke
**Axiomatic (Anagram I)**

A governance of lemons isn't toxic
by itself, a bomb a mix
of blessings, coax
an iota
of control, ax
the adage of entry, max
the tape of the flames, taxi
the camera over the moat
of smoke and IMAX
that shit, that coat
of alarms, take it as axiom
**Plexiglass (Anagram II)**

Safer than sex
is asking for edits, slip
a girl a manuscript, a lax
interest in the axis
of another set of eyes, other legs
on the text. A pass
like a plas-
tic grocery bag: spill-
proof, durable, less
amenable to ass-
kicking, or leaps
into accidents, what it contains, gasp-
worthy only if it is
Multipronged (Anagram III)

What's dumpier
than a "this is" tour
of an airplane? a grounder
the pilot won't sit in, mint
to the tip
of the wings, the air inert –
even my dog
can't come inside, a lump
of aviate technology, the gerund
form of flight, no plunge
no risk of plunge
the co-pilot proud
to argue with no one
to have total rights over the grid
Mundane (Anagram IV)

You could have made
a sandwich, and a mean
fruit smoothie – nude
even – no one needing the end
of the sliced turkey, no one giving a damn
about you, naked at the kitchen table or mad
about you using the last of the edam
no one calling your name
Civic Funk

I don’t think anyone under 25 years old can tell you anything about MOVE

J. Whyatt Mondesire

The rubber glove units
the men of the do it era
a past we got our hands in –

A killing built on the tear gas
at the turn, table a record
these red years the lynx
in the lynch-free cities

MOVE juice made the city sour
lit up the lethal features [onamove]
deposited that house in the ground

The fear of a black palate for igniters of peerless fires
bares out, the goode brother was running the city
a civic instrumentalist eating his people in the heat

Philly’s got 40,000 abandoned lots and buildings
blocks still missing homes
homes still missing joists
floors still not meeting the walls

the city that smells brothers burning
spells specialists, cops who bust up blocks –

that air ain’t taste the same melting
those clouds ain’t look the same flooded
those homes a clear line to the fire
that city in tantrum so stuck it just burnt itself down


**Schuylkill Punch**

officers ribs tickle
when they’re licked

pickled likes a brine
strain the river

what you need is
a bait to catch

a finger to signal
a little bone filter

a snapped rib
will float in halves

evident leftovers
a hair, a hairline

the reservoir sifters
find hands, animals

you too can lose a
shoe in the tubes
Reader’s Yearbook

The fear of poetry is the/fear

Muriel Rukeyser

Exact: a stop
a dollar, a jellyfish

an additional ferry
after the night one

a darkness
slid in under sleep
a station’s grace
in the language radio

Beneath: a stanza
where you can
turn the dial

beneath a hand
the topography of
a door handle,
a steering wheel

a thumbs down tremor
conditioned as steel
yourself to move it

Over it: drop
a closed space
all the stars

and this sky, ready
for weather
Charlie Knew a Red Haired Singer Named Bridget
Who Lived in the New MOVE House on Kingsessing

She had a firebrand
a whole whale of sound

She had the boathouse hips
of an excavator

She had a lion’s
active reasoning

The mean frequency
of an earful of rain

She had twice the equine shine
of the profile of a livid man

Plus, she had the
grace to lace the cadence

of her basement ache
with a stomp
Atria
Spruce Hill, August 2010

We had been making a mosaic
abutted by your bat mitzvah
mosaic of mermaids

You wished the friction
of a red living room
you in a black dress

And then you were living
three blocks away

I saw photographs
of a party you held there
each one as if in
a freshly illuminated room

I affixed my thighs
to my red bicycle
as if it were an ambulance
as if you were watching

You slept, possibly, in
that equalizing heat,
in a leaf canopy, a cave
of awakened fruit bats, in
that tan new year’s eve body suit
I had no grip on
Day Station, May 2004

The arc of the bridge
throws a shadow where
the rail construction hovers

Where the boy in the tracks builds
the boy in me a stack of rocks
to the waist of the train

He was stacking flat stones
fat gravel on the rails

He waits for the lights to bend
200 feet from the station
then gets back to the platform

You get ten points for a scatter
fifteen for a flat collapse

In November we blowtorched off
a fire escape on Germantown Ave
to use as steps for a stage set balcony

I thread new pipe thinking
I would be a train raiser
hold up my head if only for a ten
a clean scatter of stones
Pilots

Rukeyser pilots a bicycle
I do not figure out how to ride
in the unit of the sentence

A neighborhood hover to hover
an abandon of the limit
of the line to its length

South and west climbs the 13 trolley
linked in the lateral pair

Lying next to Spencer
he will not lick me
we are separated by his fur

That bicycle will get you your
strict contact with the atmosphere
halts between what we each remember:

The plenary tug of a map of our orbits
a wing cut from the tense of the wind for tunneling

A going inside of production
off the steps, and into the front room
all the windows open
Dogz
for Celia Hollander

Kids love a garbage yard
economics of scalables
the planet’s waist in
Mack trucks
end to end

A breakaway spot on the steps
improved by half a water-packed
ham and butter sandwich
the streetside half-silence

Afternoon produces three guys
Weber grilling ribs
in the yard of an
empty building across the street

Making the abject calculation of how far
a half-sunk city can sit back
on its legs, how healed
the back door courtyards
in the head can get

Every Philadelphian a skeptic

Teaching a sick dog is tricky, they say,
better to let him slide
Jane Jacobs Makeup
for Judith Rodin

The eyes on the street thesis
argues that the public
peace, the sidewalk and street

peace of cities
cannot be the mission
of the police alone

(necessary as the police are)
and that a police feel is
to the eyes on the street thesis

grounds for a university
and its digs to be baked cop-solid
in the quads, the police

(necessary as the police are)
can’t bump up resident commitment
thesize their eyes on the street

they can’t hand knit a statistic
or debeach the great blight
whale all by their police self –
they need that civic twist
In the Unit of the Skeletal

In the unit of the skeletal
there’s a legend of
design by observation:

A direction in which the sonic vibrations
in the ground register in the bones
and cause you to look up

A direction in which wind around the buildings
cools the hands, the face
and causes you to look up

A direction in which the eyes
shrink into their sockets
and cause you to look up

A direction in which the lines of construction
incline the plane of
the body backwards

The arc of your vision
is a bird, as over water
a glider coasting on open

Every parcel in this city
is a site of previous construction
there was a factory here
that was torn down
there was a house here
that collapsed, or was abandoned
its foundation shifting
into the earth it sat on

We could open the land
under the softgrounded homes
collapsing into the creek bed filled with ash

On some areas of the body, too
we lift a layer of skin, blow it off
and build from beneath it
Wishing Tree (Osage I)

One patient boy lifts himself up on a stump, his head down

A wish there makes its own generator, opens the crest of his narrow neck

When he descends the trunk flush with his palms will throw back the bloodlines and bounce them from inside his hand

Beneath that stump, the necessary ground spreads out, the waves of the surface bark lose their relief, his shadow over them, that same boy jumping up from the roots, and holding a kited hand out to another boy down the arterial

First, that running boy will put a palm on the stump, a reach for the standing boy, the light bigger in the island of the tree, and he’s wild for a squeeze, as around a cup, a number, that active anchor, that whole hand
K*tch*n F*xt*r*s (Osage II)

Every object we touch even a child, a law, a cop busting on a man, his hands behind his back, we could make cleaner. There’s lots to scour in the kitchen, lots of potential for dirt a firm grip on some soap, the kitchen participant, finding some use for his animal mandibles, grows big here, candid, and nourished

It’s a room that’s full of it – flaunt the volume in the sink, mallets, spatulas, spoons, under the tap, the human unit – hands turning in their hyperbolic crush to wash themselves good

Tape time tempstruments monitor the heat of the faucet water here, where before she stewed, she swam on from sea to kitchen issue, electing to clean her hands – the pipes exposed and going

In the kitchen all architecture fits in around the waterlines, the sink a spire from the anchorage the groundswell system of how far a city can go
Façade of an Unoccupied Building (Osage III)

In the currency of usage, this grid in prints, someone would stand here, someone would enter and walk up the stairs

How you read this edifice is expedited by looking, by asking; it’s dependent on what still stands, who to a room, how much tepid water, and that, in an abandoned building, there isn’t any water at all

You can hold out in front of it. This city lost half a million people the way even the Beach Boys were finally overlooked. The way the fear of capital melts off in the vacant blocks you call the cops to walk you to, and when they open fire on squatters or hit your unofficial stray dog, you hope you’ll call the cops on the cops
The Killadelph (Osage IV)

Hung up in the civic sleep, you lucid dream a bomb – a study in plummet. Instant spectators form around points in the city, and move, now that they’re seeing the television, and smelling the smoke. You’re unified by a fire that looks you up and down and that site becomes a landmark, a bigger footprint for what was

Philadelphia’s this country’s fuckup brother, kept for his seat in the historic, (An Amiracle Happened There) American founding. New York the American eye on the world; tucked 100 miles under it, kids can bust on each other in the killadelph with no surprises. The braver people run gunless, living out in the Philadelphia wild – one big civic misdemeanor

In the newsroom of the national, there’s no desk the city can sit at, no way it can shake off the affront of the pack, a hole, a green worm in its heart, a tessellation of bad ways to be

Like the surety that this dropped object will break – we measure our bets: an underlight to be stripped, scoped, hollow – an ambition, or a homecoming, to be that national green worm
Notes on the Text

Page 22:

Frank Rizzo was police commissioner of Philadelphia from 1967 to 1971 and served as mayor from 1972 from 1980. During his tenure, Rizzo was particularly well known for his bombastic approach to all facets of his mayoral duties, which was apparent both in his interpersonal communication and in his political decisions. When he died, in July of 1991, he was in the process of his final campaign for mayor. Rizzo’s funeral was covered by local television and ended with a motorcade that extended for many blocks, carrying Rizzo from the Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway in Center City Philadelphia to his final place of rest just outside the city in Cheltenham Township.

Sources:

Page 24:

30th Street Station is Philadelphia’s hub for Amtrak regional service, New Jersey Transit and SEPTA Regional Rail lines, as well as subway and trolley service. The station was opened in 1933. The Cira Center, a 29-story office high-rise next to the station, was completed in 2005. The station sits adjacent to the western bank of the Schuylkill River, which separates Center City Philadelphia from West Philadelphia.

Sources:

Page 25:

The Second Mile Center is a faith-based organization that helps individuals with a history of addiction, abuse or crime receive a job and job training in a series of four thrift stores, all of which are located on 45th Street between Walnut and Locust Streets in West Philadelphia. Some of the text in the poem is based on reviews of The Second Mile Center that were posted on yelp.com and include language such as the following:

“Rule 3: Wear a long skirt and a fitted top. Seriously? Seriously. There are no changing rooms but there are mirrors, and you can do an awful lot of questionable
public changing under a really big skirt. And of course, if you forget yours, just pick one off the rack in the "Queen" section. (And yes, before you ask yourself, I have seen men do this too.)”

**Source:**

**Page 26:**

This epigraph comes from section 1 of George Oppen’s book-length poem *Of Being Numerous.*

**Source:**

**Page 28:**

This poem recounts a fire that took place on January 10th, 2011, at the Windermere Court Apartments at 4800 Walnut Street in West Philadelphia. About 90 units were damaged, and over 100 people left homeless and in the temporary care of the Red Cross. Its epigraph comes from “A History of the Hand” from Cole Swensen’s collection of poems, *The Book of A Hundred Hands.*

**Sources:**


**Page 29:**

The line of text quoted in the first stanza comes from Maurice Sendak’s 1963 children’s picture book, *Where the Wild Things Are,* which chronicles the travel of a boy named Max from his bedroom, to which he is relegated after making “mischief,” to the forested land of the Wild Things. The land of the Wild Things lies over a sea, and grows from his imagination. He returns from that land to find his supper still waiting
for him, and warm, next to his bed. As an only child, and as an active and procedural reader, I grew close to characters in books. Because of his bravery, his independence, his irreverence and his ultimate gentleness, Max was a particular favorite.

**Source:**

**Page 34:**

In 1843, Nancy Johnson, of Philadelphia, was awarded the first patent for an “artificial freezer,” a machine used to make ice cream, which was powered by hand crank, and after which many later hand crank ice cream machines were modeled.

Breyers Ice Cream was founded in Philadelphia in 1866 by William A. Breyer. The company had occupied their 700 S. 43rd Street factory since 1924 until its closing in October of 1995. The factory was the oldest factory owned by Good Humor-Breyers, which itself is owned by Unilever. The closure of the Breyers factory occasioned the loss of 240 jobs and came in quick succession to the loss of several other prominent Philadelphia factories including Whitman’s Chocolates and After Six Formalwear. In the second half of the 20th century, Philadelphia lost hundreds of other factories, and with them both its financial solvency and much of its population, which decreased from 2,071,605 in 1950 to 1,547,297 in 2000.

**Sources:**

**Page 37:**

In the aftermath of the MOVE bombing, two MOVE members were found alive and taken to the hospital so that their injuries could be treated. One of those members was
Birdie Africa, who was then 13 years old. He was found naked in the alley behind the MOVE house, and a photograph was taken of him, unclothed and in the back of a police car on the way to the hospital. In the photograph Africa’s body language suggests that the terror of the experience of the bombing has not become a feature of his life, but the medium through which other things are felt.

In his book *Live From Death Row*, activist, journalist and death row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal explains the circumstances of his arrest and the charges that led to his conviction. He explains a disparity between the period of time for which Black and white defendants are sentenced and how those sentences vary in relationship to the occupation and race of the victim. Additionally, in his book, Mumia reflects on his relationship to and his hopes for MOVE in the years after the bombing.

As the MOVE site was cleaned up after the bombing, bones were found under the rubble of the destroyed MOVE house. Some of those bones contained holes from gunshots, which suggests that some of the MOVE members may have been killed by the shootout, hours before the bomb was dropped. Additionally, there are competing accounts as to whether some of the MOVE members may have been killed as they tried to escape from the fire by police gunfire in the alley behind the house.

**Sources:**

**Page 38:**

In 1997, the University City District (UCD) was founded through the impetus of a consortium of West Philadelphia organizations in order to focus on commercial revitalization, quality of life and public safety in University City. UCD was spurred by a series of community-based initiatives championed by the president of the University of Pennsylvania at the time, Judith Rodin, in the interest of improving both the relationship between the university and the neighborhood, and the neighborhood itself. Additionally, UCD now works with the West Philadelphia Skills Initiative to build “infrastructure to support systemic change in the relationship between major employers and place-based workforce institution.”

One of UCD’s programs provides unarmed Safety Ambassadors who patrol University City on bicycles between 10 AM and 2 AM and who are able to provide assistance with vehicle lockouts, aid for individuals who desire an escort service and outreach for homeless people in need of transport to shelters and hospitals.

In August of 2010, The New York Times reported on three locations that had drastically cut social services as they figured out how to weather the economic downturn. The Times featured Mililani, Hawaii, which cut school district funding that furloughed school programs on 17 Fridays throughout the year, Clayton County,
Georgia, which shut down its bus service and Colorado Springs, Colorado which shut off 1/3 of its 24,512 streetlights during the winter of 2010.

Sources:


Page 39:
This poem shares its title with a Paul Celan poem translated by Nikolai Popov and Heather McHugh and compiled in the collection entitled Glottal Stop.

Source:

Page 40:
This poem responds directly to the Terrance Hayes poem “Harryette Mullen Lecture on the American Dream,” published in his third book, Wind in a Box. It also responds to Harryette Mullen’s own particular arrangement of the relationship between a reformulation of idiomatic and colloquial language, a heightened curiosity and skepticism about American identity and its component parts and the process of creating a poetics in which both of these features may be articulated and reformed by experimentation with the relationship between the sonic play of a poem and its creation or synthesis of a political landscape, which Hayes explores, as well, in his response to Mullen.

Source:

Page 42:
On June 2nd, June 3rd and June 28th, 2010, a total of four Philadelphians were found dead in their homes of what were determined to be heat-related causes.

The Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership School (Penn Alexander) opened in fall 2001, beginning with kindergarten and first grade and expanding by one grade each year to eventually reach full K-8 enrollment. The school was designed to provide a community elementary and middle school for University City families in the interest of creating a stronger community of permanent residents. The school was built on the grounds of the Parent Infant Center (PIC),
which provides early care and education from children from six weeks to five years and serves as an advocate of affordable, quality childcare for West Philadelphia-area families. Through Pennsylvania’s Pre-K Counts program, PIC is able to provide childcare to low-income families in the Philadelphia area. When Penn Alexander was built, PIC’s playground was dismantled and another playground was built on the east side of the buildings that house PIC’s programs.

Sources:


Page 48:

During the Philadelphia Special Investigation Commission (or MOVE Commission) hearings, there were major discrepancies as to what instructions Police Commissioner Sambor received from Mayor Goode, and the degree to which Goode was aware of Sambor’s intention to use explosives (Goode says he was unaware. Sambor says that he told Goode of his intentions explicitly.) Goode also said that he was unaware of the exact type of weaponry that the police intended to use, the responsibility for which he contends he delegated to Sambor.

Source:
1. Anderson and Hevenor, Burning Down the House, 250-251.

Pages 49-52:

In his second book, Hip Logic, poet Terrance Hayes includes several series of anagram poems, which are collected in the named series, “A Gram of &s.” In an anagram poem, the last word in each line is assembled from some combination of the letters in the title.

Source:

Page 53:

This epigraph comes from Inquirer Staff Writer Larry Eichel’s 2005 article in the 20th anniversary of the MOVE bombing entitled “The MOVE Disaster: May 13, 1985;
Day that Forever Changed the City.” J. Whyatt Mondesire, quoted here, was the president of the local chapter of the NAACP at the time when the article was written.

Source:

Page 54:

“Schuylkill Punch” is Philadelphia slang for Philadelphia-area tap water, which is filtered, largely from the Schuylkill River, which is contained entirely in the state of Pennsylvania. It flows through the city, separating West Philadelphia from Center City and joining with the Delaware River near the Philadelphia Navy Yard in South Philadelphia. In 1812, Philadelphia became the first city nationally (and the second globally) to distribute clean drinking water to its constituents as a government service. The construction of the Fairmount Water Works (located next to the Philadelphia Museum of Art), beginning in 1815 enabled the city to pull water out of the river and into a reservoir for distribution.

Source:

Page 55:

This poem’s epigraph comes from the Muriel Rukeyser poem “Reading Time: 1 Minute, 26 Seconds” originally published in A Turning Wind.

Source:

Page 56:

Charlie Raboteau is a West Philadelphia resident and a member of the band “The Mean,” a Philly-area assemblage focused on a sound located in rock, blues and funk that is, arguably, reforming the lineage of where the sound of Philadelphia has been and where it is going. Originally from Princeton, NJ, The Mean is the ideal Philadelphia band – grounded in the history of the last 50 years in American rock, funk and blues, while refiguring those component parts to fit into a contemporary and specific sound.

Source:
Spruce Hill is a neighborhood within University City that is bounded by 38th Street to the east, 46th street to the west, Woodland Avenue to the south and Market Street to the north.

Source:

The phrase “the boy in me” appears in the “Night Museum” section of Major Jackson’s poem “Urban Renewal” which begins his collection, Leaving Saturn.

Source:

This poem engages with Muriel Rukeyser’s first book, Theory of Flight, which is motivated by, among other things, a series of flying lessons that Rukeyser took. Spencer, a shy, sweet, curious dog, was lent to me in order to conduct field research, by Cassie Pustilnik, his owner, who lives in the Cedar Park section of West Philadelphia.

Source:

Jane Jacobs was the author of The Death and Life of Great American Cities which, upon its publication in 1961 was greatly influential in its rejection of modernist urban planning, particularly that of Robert Moses. In the text, Jacobs advocates for a complex and seemingly chaotic urban vibrancy that, she argues, modernist planners were attempting to destroy. Jacobs talks in particular about the multiplicity of uses of sidewalks, designing the term “sidewalk ballet” to explain the ideal vibrancy of a fully active urban community. Judith Rodin, the 7th president of the University of Pennsylvania served from 1994-2004. During her tenure, she lobbied for the foundation of the business improvement district, University City District, the bolstering and popularization of Penn’s Guaranteed Mortgage Program and she championed other measures to revitalize University City, the neighborhood in which the University of Pennsylvania is situated. Her 2007 book The University and Urban Revival chronicles the revitalization efforts that took place during her tenure. In
explaining her focus on making the streets in University City clean and safe, Rodin cites Jacobs’ “eyes on the street thesis” which Jacobs describes by stating that: “The public peace – the sidewalk and street peace – of cities is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as the police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves and enforced by the people themselves.”

Sources:


Page 63:

In 1986, a gas explosion that damaged four homes occasioned the city to confront the fact that several blocks of houses in the Logan section of the city were sinking. Since 1986, the sinking homes in Logan have appeared regularly in Philadelphia-area news media as different plans are proposed or suggested to manage the problem. In July of 2010, *The Philadelphia Daily News* printed a brief retrospective of the history of the sinking homes.

Source:

Page 64-67:

Osage Series was originally drafted in response to four photographs by photographer Aaron Siskind, from his 1930-1942 Harlem Document series. Those photographs are as follows: “Façade of an Unoccupied Building, Harlem” (1937), “Wishing Tree” (1937), “Lady in Kitchen” (1947), and “Airshaft” (1940). I elected to work with the photographs (which I accessed in Wesleyan University’s Davison Art Center collection) to explore Siskind’s ability to capture the environment of 1930s and 1940s Harlem with a way of looking that displayed both the singularity of an urban space – how much a block, or a house or a market is central to and defined by the narratives of one urban resident, and by the collectivity of what thousands of those singular narratives redubbed to form an urban framework does to the process of looking at the city as an impetus for creative action. Siskind’s depiction of Harlem looked and felt like I wanted the fabric of University City as it figures into these poems to feel. While Osage Series diverges from those photographs to focus on contemporary Philadelphia, it is with Siskind’s behavior as a person both watching and capturing urban space that I approached the creation of this series.
Source:

Page 65:

The title of this poem references the title of Harryette Mullen's chapbook S*PerM**K*T.

Source:

Page 66:

See notes for page 34.

Page 67:

The figure of the green worm appears in the Galway Kinnell poem “Middle of the Way” in the stanza that reads: “In the human heart/There sleeps a green worm/That has spun the heart about itself,/And that shall dream itself black wings/One day to break free into the black sky.”

Source:
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