Editor’s Note

In my reading, I recently came across a passage that reminded me why *grama* felt like a necessary project. The passage comes from Kris Fresonke’s *West of Emerson: The Design of Manifest Destiny*, which undertakes a study of Western exploration journals and contextualizes them within the social and ideological frameworks of the 19th century. Fresonke sets out to explore the claim that so much of what makes the west “western” is the “eastern,” and that the problems inherent with western exploration and expansion (of which there were & are many) stemmed from the desire to recognize the west as “American.” This American picturesque, she writes, “reminded the viewer of art... Characterized by ease, not the drive to discover; by gentle surprise, not the shock of the new.” To find this gentle surprise is to hop into one’s vehicle of choice and go looking for something one already knows they will find.

Anyway, here’s the passage: “Just as all travel around the late 1790s amounted to picturesque voyages, all picturesque voyages contained predictable remarks alleged to result from an ‘individual experience’ in nature—according to strict aesthetic rules. Hundreds of travelers trudged through thousands of miles of entirely unexplored terrain, only to be convinced of the same aesthetic effects over and over.” Reading the poems collected here feels like encountering terrain that doesn’t give itself so easily to repeated passive aesthetic experience.

Rather than returning to tried-and-true “western” aesthetic approaches to poetry, the poems collected in *grama*, both the first issue and this second issue, refuse the gentle surprise of an easily-recognized “West.” And when we do see a familiar rendition, it is neither from the vantage-point of the picturesque’s eschewal of history, nor is it outfitted with nationalist kitsch. They’re in the west. They’re not about an image of it.

There are also a number of references to grids here, perhaps serendipitously. This feels like a time of grids, of boxes, of confinement. These poems push out of these gridlines with a more genuine sense of exploration and critique of the west than the picturesque affords. Thanks for being a part of it as you read these pages.

-Meagan Wilson

Buffalo, NY, April 2020
Contents

Jai Hamid Bashir
   Lovers of Leaving 1

Brent Cox
   *Theoretical Townships* 2

Julian Mithra
   The Great Forfeiture 6

Laura Paul
   Kingsburg, California 9
   The Desert Trip 10

CL Young
   Sugar & Salt 11
   Animal Vegetable Mineral 12
   Poem Moving North on Highway 287 13

Zack Anderson
   Terminal Mirage 15
   A place is an archive of its own ruins 17

Anthony Farris
   Shiro 19
   White Dream 20

Brad Vogler
   *From errand : threshold* 22

Cailey Johanna
   Humanity Dissected 27

Sarah Wernsing
   suburb haibun 6 28

Contributor Notes 29
Jai Hamid Bashir

Lovers of Leaving

Taking on divine chores. Plucking strong stems from bud, split into smaller green hooves, eased with spit into the hard lip of a bowl. To ignite each trot and canter of a furred high. Driving deep into Montana. Smudged in cinderlines of lakes. There was nothing in the past, but the past itself. We arrived—at the homestead. I swam darker blue into our temporary love than our love previously tested. Sallow bones of other beasts rattled around heaviness of farm dogs. On the hardwood floor we warmed and hushed in quilts into our last night. Sweet with feral perfume of hemp and bovine. Passing feet of cows break dawnbramble outside the window. Through lace curtains I witness whistling through sugar. The farmer’s pregnant wife pointed to her husband and my lover building fences on those pulled hills. Raw loam of labor, feet tearing for rebirth until blossoms trodden hard ground. We left the next morning. His callused hands wefting into mine again. For the last time our rented car caravans further; we are lovers of always leaving.
Theoretical Townships emerged from a workshop run by Cathy Wagner at SUNY-Buffalo Spring 2018 entitled, “On Unsettlement: Creative Labor and Collective Work.” For this workshop, Wagner brought together a variety of texts dealing with the racist and genocidal US American expansion into the Northwest Territory. By reading founding statutes and hegemonic histories of Ohio alongside excerpts from works such as Cedric Robinson’s Black Marxism and Susan Sleeper-Smith’s Indigenous Prosperity and American Conquest: Indian Women of the Ohio River Valley, 1690-1792, the workshop brought the invisible (to the white settler’s eye) labor of the Miami people, specifically the provisioning practices of Miami women, prior to white settlement into view. What appeared to the settler’s eye as “unsettled” and “uncultivated” land in the Ohio River Valley, and thus as “wasted resources,” was in fact a carefully tended and cultivated, collaborative, multi-species ecosystem.
The parceling of land by way of its abstraction into clear, delineated, imaginary units was a fundamental technology of USAmerican westward expansion. In Ohio it rendered invisible the complex topological ecosystem developed by the Miami people; thus grids opened an imaginary “empty” space “made available” for possession.

Adopted by the United States in 1785, the “Theoretical Township Diagram Showing Method of Numbering Sections with Adjoining Sections” articulates a 36-mile-square section that was used to map and sell land in the Northwest Territory, beginning at $1/sq. mi. As Wagner points out, the grid is “boustrophodonic,” that is, ox-turning, or turning in first one direction, then another, like a team of oxen plowing a field. The term usually applies to bidirectional writing (ancient Greek stone-carved writing, for example).” Thus the theoretical diagram opens itself into an accidental space of the poetic. *Theoretical Townships* traces a disorienting bird’s-eye view of this imagined landscape, providing a poetic alternative to the charged neutrality of the diagram’s numbered logic. The poetic accident of the “Theoretical Townships” diagram plays into the hand of the poetic clinamen that can always play the rational against itself, exposing while demonstrating technical rationality’s nauseating idiolect.
I’m drawn to grids and gridding. I think of Agnes Martin’s grids and the grids of Charles Gaines. Both of these artists engage the grid in their own unique ways, which is somewhat ironic if we allow that the gridded imagination desires topographical and psychosocial flatness — the appearance of similarity over what is always an excessive alterity. Both of these artists deal with grids and bodies, grids and number, and the relationship to the square, the organic, the human, and the nonhuman. They evoke the violence of gridding alongside the changing shape of being human. They are artists that re-make the grid against its tendency of forced equivalence, reproducibility, and a quantified, mechanistic coldness. Their work, to me, discovers the human in the grid, where the grid so often otherwise the imaginary tool of annihilation.

The grid seeks to enforce the illusion of commonality but understates the expansiveness of genericity. The grid always seeks to delimit and pretend that cross-pollination does not occur, when it is the law the grid acts against. If the grid grids land, it always ignores, or at least pretends to ignore, the subtlety and nuance of the actual, in favor of a restricted and reproducible virtuality.

I thought of this in relation to the provisioning practice of the Miami people, and the work of indigenous women producing food. After enabling the forced removal and genocide of indigenous people, the grid has enforced unsustainable crops of soybean and corn over a land that once produced a diverse and unique gastronomy.

Grids yearn for absurd names, names upon names, like the flood of Named Forts per township. They are boring without being generic, useful without commonality.

The definiteness of property lives alongside the grid in fictive mechanical imaginaries. Common-ownership, by contrast, eludes the gridded formulation of “this square is this square and that square is that square.” by introducing the notion that collective ownership renders every grid common to all. Commonality approaches the generic of humanity in its ungridded and invisible shapes, while still able to use the grid when necessary.

While the grid creates a type of memory, it also produces a special type of forgetting. It forgets through focusing attention. When the grid presents itself it seems self-identical, singular, and

Cox
present — the grid on the map renders vast swathes of lands the illusion of being ready-at-hand. The map thinks it knows what it grids. And yet, the focus on reproducible townships restricts the extension of imagination. It forgets that outside of every square there is a line adjacent and therefore part of another part of itself. The grid interlaces the world with the possibility of immanence by effacing immanence’s generic extension.

Seeds blow, insects move about, and grids forget the world.

Global racialized capitalism introduces an abstracted economy with the appearance of being devoid of a real relation to labor; it extends objects invisibly through space while seeming to destroy their tentacular relation to origin.

The function of the grid is to reduce contingency toward productive ends. To capture contingency in the moment of its escape. To delimit confusion and to install a sense of security and definition necessary for the circulation of private property and capital. Drawing the grid might not itself be the precondition for capital, but it is instrumental in capitalism’s desire for scalability, thus growth.

*Theoretical Townships* is a poetic work reminding the grid what remains latent within it but it forgets. The same might be said about these kinds of historical documents, which often seem so harmless upon viewing, but are fundamentally necropolitical. The 36x36 grid of the “Theoretical Townships” diagram also resembles an infernal bingo card, playing a game that only one (race) always wins. The mechanical eye of the camera tracking and reading the grid reminds us of our tortured and narrow vision, trained on grids and words that grasp our attention as we forget what came after and what came before. I’m interested in attempting to discover an excess of connection, a commonality that becomes actually generic, and a human thought that can strive for that.
Julian Mithra

The Great Forfeiture

To appease his hot scalp, a man
(or men)
saplinged the prairie for a blot of shade.

Then more men massed, thought
How lovely.
Furlongs
lengthened under their captive eye
plodded by mules with a taste for straight.
Hackberries shouldered in and blocked the sun.
Scythe-swingers caught, in their heifer's
slackjaw stare,
a wink of bison.
And nobody bothered to set type
or print headlines when God's broom
swept the lot up to heaven.

Then other newer men
retired the halter and hitching pole
and bought a motorized plough on credit.
House-dwellers made an enemy. Fire
(that vengeant wench)
fit to lick with burlap sacks and trenches,
to kill with its own kind.
The Great Forfeiture, a boon to crickets, abdicated mineral rights on uranium, petroleum, copper, incumbent on borderless relineation, and surface rights swilled as well, til some folk tendered a necklace of torches, a careless hootenanny in a rainless year.

The youngins took up the flint, seeding fire to ex-pasture, ex-derrick, ex-mine in a brave billow, eating the heart of meddlesome trees. Mending meadow. Engines fell mute as mud. Bark arched scars. Long-dead roots of tallgrass prick their ears to the shush of ashen windthrow and stargaze. That hasn’t changed.

Biyear after biyear, fire brandishes its sword, cleaving stubborn armor, clearing tilth for their blood-soaked ribs to thrust shoots into the fluster of Buffalo grass.
And once they remembered their name,
Buffalo couldn’t hide any longer
in songs.
So they wallowed in wallows
and rutted in ruts.
They calved calves.
They horned querns;
flaunted their ruffs;
sniffed cold traced by a glacier
from ex-north to ex-south;
bellowed to tadpole, bobolink, dickcissel, and ferret
that wood was a grandmother’s tale
and shade an heirloom.
Laura Paul

Kingsburg, California

My sister and I drive on Highway 99
We go to a place called Kingsburg, California
There we meet our great-grandparents
for the first time—they are dead
This city is like an unguent
in the middle of the dust bowl
a place where history survives mono-crops
and seeds with expiration dates

We take pictures by the fountains
the three crowns, the tiles laid
with Swedish horses
By the mural of the blonde
we pose, she is traditional
and we are dark—we do not
look like her, smiling, kneeling
bending over, apron raised

My people are people who voted Socialist
They drank wine and raised wine and rode trains
the length of this great expanse of time
Isn’t that what California is, not a place
but a clock? Something I root myself to
at least a few generations back—
not industrial, like coordinated time
but a sundial, yes, a sundial, ja!
The Desert Trip

I imagine your arm
around mine
a love triangle forms—
you me and
saguaro

IO    Paul
the net pull of a canyon down
after she died boxes of shoes still arrived at the house
think crimson from my nose onto the toilet paper
a little from my uterus too that sap
continuous engagement with landscape
I thought just take my hands off the wheel I thought
I’m going with you already
the water below not at all blue
flowers rising from pavement
that is what I wanted
as would grease from the center of an engine
for you to grow out of me
it’s a long time to think
about what is and is not
a spruce tree
the blue on either side of Wyoming
I can’t remember is
a chemical or a rock
home is relative
I ask you to come there
when I was a child
the game
gave no limit
to the questions I could have
now no matter which direction I face
you put me in a field of yellow grass
I heard they were considering
cutting a hole in the mountain
so that you could climb up
and finally see inside
but it was determined better
to stand on top of something
than to know its makeup
I continue to be skeptical
on the other hand
if what is inside could turn hollow
how much less heavy
Poem Moving North on Highway 287

pulled clouds falling up from a field
cows everywhere and antelope
I stopped in the middle of the song
in the middle of the road
multiple horses of the same color
don’t respond
I didn’t finish reading
you are dead and
I think some cows are wild
the way I want this to go
is nourish me
next to water
burn something on a beach
Colorado is not the ocean
multiple geologic formations
billions of years apart
I am told their names over and again
I do not learn
in this way I am my father
losing a book under the driver’s seat
I told myself I would stay in the right lane
I said I would not be jarred by a wind created
by anything else
the truth is the car is heavy
and I am alone
how was I supposed make this
into something you
your death finally in place
of a question
when I ask other people
what they remember
they say your body
how it would turn with everything
still in its hands
I thought I’d think of you as free
an affirmation
of our lack of belief
no geologic time
my handwriting already ash from your skin
a hit horse on a highway
leaves the pavement
with a stain so large it’s hard to see
how much blood did you have
what slid into the ocean
and how much was a shape in the sand

14 Young
“Our own gaze upon this scene cannot be sustained.” – David Maisel

The frame is an aerial view and the view is of the land.

Fuck the land.

 Spoiled with filmy loops of runoff
in the shape of a murky flame
latched to the causeway wall
a ley line’s corrosive channeling.

The frame is the frame of the image
and its toxicity.
It spoils me
and I want to be spoiled
as the land has.

There is a spur of land retaining.
A highway spur a crystallized limb
upon the slack water.
A spur is a coercive instrument.

What comes through a salt-burned ear set to the land.
Shoreline of a butterflied lung
dusted with plaster.
The image is a glossed-out catastrophe processing ruin.
No replication without loss
living on a distant server.
The skin of the lake transfers
its caustic spectra to the photo-
spoiled skin of the eye.

Coal burns across state lines to keep the pixels lit.
A place is an archive of its own ruins¹

The burial shroud burned a lattice into the print
a white lace seared a grid into the territory

In the museum an inkjet print of a landform
fixed on the gallery wall with a grid of pins
anchor points for a map a gathering charge

Angled shadows disturb the continuity of the grid
transit from pole to pole the territory
an iterative series of lines disrupting the landform

A system almost distinguishable as writing The Lightning Field (1977)
defered across time repeating strikes trace the same channels

On the north side of Elk Mountain turbines hold down the rim
an outline of wind grids within grids the gathering charge
a stepped leader advancing in 50m increments

Anderson 17
“A full experience of The Lightning Field does not depend upon the occurrence of lightning”

corroded exposures originary wind approaching a system of writing
the burial shroud burned a lacework onto the territory

¹Counter-Desecration: A Glossary for Writing Within the Anthropocene. Ed. Linda Russo and Marthe Reed.
Anthony Farris

Shiro

Let beams lose their breath plucking feathers
even trees leave

glosses of oil
sheddings
sun litter
sheen

watch them coming home

don’t ask shadows about the light

don’t mind the glow that keeps us alive
White Dream

Taken back to
the desert
pastel bursts rubbed against rising crusts
violet blushing
the sacred gloam
dozing hours before the road

quiet enough to hear satellites
dislodged from the gravel
wind thumbed against
porches reserving history
with languid bricks
I watch them orbit

concessive movements
for the weightless untethered
stepping outside
teasing secrets
the fragile permanence
of another’s eyes
to measure distance
as the people we’ve left behind

Tio’s windchimes remind me to tumble through time
In ceaseless departures
to the narrow road
sometimes I’d stop
and reveal myself
for no one mindful that
cons echo regardless
if we look up
do they see me in my childhood home?

my stops only greeted sleep
and left without names
responsible for backseat dreams I’ve realized
we’re all going

and if I’m still the boy
with his eyes on run-ways
streams of lamplight
did anyone look through
the dark and ask
where we went, where we are

and if they could come along?
Brad Vogler

*From* errand:threshold

Go outside. Shut the door.

opens a here
long buried space
(you)
exhumed

body of quiet
body of labor

22
troubled with
closing that opens
route unintended

I've stopped—
months with questions

walking in the park with two friends
they wondered/admitted that they had thought
about quitting, quitting this, this writing.

do you trust this process of finding?

setting out/down
each word, looking.

I see some.

where are you moving?

in and out of light

what else is like this?

calling

crossing unaware into
step follows/ed step
word follows/ed word

the page that held us
only briefly held us

visit revisited
a map (to the mind
full) of
many directions

bird/word/dream stir/ing

wilderness
where the ear becomes aware

keep you up?

yes
for years
shifting/drift

unseen/unheard between
what’s designated
(ω) threshold

and a space between

a line has two sides unravels on the page

after/before
above/below

(maybe) absence is (also) answer

direction

direction

this/threshold is/in
any/every

put forth a calling

listen
Cailey Johanna

**Humanity Dissected**

This is globe spinning, sudden awareness of the existence of gravity. What does it mean to be in orbit, unwillingly mesmerized by the Earth’s core—

everything is connected.

That gathering of fire in the sky is heat and light, illumination, and we curl our lives around it like a sleeping dog’s tail.

What does it mean to be human, human and not ape, gifted with forward thought, and the inability to withdraw. The earth is sheltering us in cracked hands and dirty fingernails, even giving away the moon to us—

and we keep spinning ignorantly, filled with hate.
we create habitat familiar to ourselves landscape turned inscape
we can say home only when home exists
before or the idea of home my suburb in Colorado
like the suburb of Tennessee childhood my affection
for barefoot Kentucky bluegrass in a state dying for
want of water still I love the lush underfoot
still I love lark and robin and sparrow birds at home
in this made ecotone this place that is not
Colorado is not Tennessee is not Arizona is
also all of them this place made to hold all places
container not large enough yet all we have
it keeps stretching and stretching someday will there not be enough water / tree
/ air / openspace / soil / sky we like limits
here but not when they press into us growing up in
suburbs we think every place looks alike

grass thatch, thick-knit—be-
neath, soil feeds grass which feeds soil
all alive and world
Contributor Notes

Zack Anderson grew up in Cheyenne, Wyoming and earned degrees from the state’s only university. He holds an MFA from the University of Notre Dame and is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Georgia.

Born to Pakistani-American immigrant artists, Jai Hamid Bashir was raised in the Southwest. Jai has been published by *The American Poetry Review, Palette Poetry, The Margins, Academy of American Poets* and others. Jai is currently a graduate student at Columbia University in the City of New York.

Brent Cox is a Ph.D. student in University at Buffalo’s Poetics Program. He is the co-founder of The Topological Poetics Research Institute (TPRI). He also co-organizes Ecopoetry Workshop at the Nature, Art, Humanities Residency (NAHR) in Val Taleggio, Italy. His recent Video Poetic Criticism has screened at 2019’s &Now: A Festival of Innovative Writing, and at The Louisville Conference in Literature and Culture since 1945. His sci-fi geo-fic, "Without Identity," will screen at the (gen)erations exhibition at the CityArts gallery in downtown Orlando as part of the 2020 Electronic Literature Organization conference.

Anthony Farris is a poet based in Las Vegas, Nevada. He earned his MFA from University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Cailey Johanna grew up between Mexico and the United States. She is a freelance writer, editor, and translator and an avid poet. Her poetry has been published in *Willard & Maple, Hispaneecdotes, 8 Poems,* and more. When not busy writing, she spends her time chasing beautiful things, like God, cacti, and that weird little fish called an axolotl.

Julian néc Sara Mithra writes about things that have not happened and never could happen. Their latest experiment curates documents from a forgotten archive of the underground.
Laura Paul is a writer living in Los Angeles. Previously, her work has been published by the *Brooklyn Rail, Coffin Bell Journal, Entropy Magazine, FIVE:2:ONE, Luna Luna Magazine, Shirley Magazine, Soft Cartel, Touring Bird,* and featured at the West Hollywood Book Fair and Los Angeles Zine Fair. She is the author of *Entropy’s* monthly Stars to Stories column. Raised in Sacramento, she earned her B.A. from the University of Washington, Seattle, and her Master’s from UCLA where she was the recipient of the 2011 Gilbert Cates Fellowship.

Brad Vogler is the author of *my radius, a small stone* (Spuyten Duyvil), *i know that this ritual* (Lute & Cleat), and three chapbooks: *errand: a version of* (Meekling Press), *Amid the Waves Which* (Beard of Bees), and *Fascicle 30* (Little Red Leaves Textile Series). His work has appeared in numerous journals including: *1110, Cutbank, Free Verse, Small Po[rf]tions, Versal* and *Volt.* He works with Delete Press, *Posit,* and is the editor/web designer of *Opon.* Find out more about him at [bradvogler.com](http://bradvogler.com).

Originally hailing from Tennessee, Sarah Wernsing has since taught English in Eastern Europe and Colorado and worked in a bookstore. She has poetry and non-fiction published or forthcoming in *Citron Review, CALYX, Compassion Anthology, Pilgrimage Magazine,* and elsewhere. Currently, she is revising her second novel manuscript while working as an academic advisor at Colorado State University where she is also completing her MFA in poetry.

CL Young writes poems and essays. Her work can be found in *Lana Turner, Poetry Northwest, The Volta,* and elsewhere. She holds an MFA from Colorado State University and lives in Boise, Idaho, where she runs a series called Sema. [clyoung.info](http://clyoung.info).