

overlapping teams we ended up being on, not to mention the almost daily turning of compost, I remember at some point realizing we were getting into full-time job territory, we were up near forty hours a week some weeks, though it felt nothing like a job. It felt like a vocation, like we were being called together. Which maybe explains our tolerance of, or even pleasure at, if not *need* for, long-ass board meetings, always with food. It might even be the case that some of my most important culinary innovations—sweet potato cookies, for one; lentil barley shitake soup for another—came from wanting to feed my new friends, and to keep up with the other delicious food folks were bringing to share. Breaking bread, it turned out, was one of the most important things we were doing. It was preparation and practice, who knew. (An orchard potluck is the best potluck there is, I'll bet you.).

And if you haven't noticed, I am a fan of the digression, and these meetings could move from the task at hand—for instance, where to source trees from—to Gramma's garden, to the Kurdish way of orcharding, to Masanobu Fukuoka's *The One-Straw Revolution*, to growing conditions in Missouri vs. Michigan vs. southern Indiana, to *Goddamn, how'd you make these biscuits?* or *You said there's nettle in this risotto?* These meetings regularly lasted at least three hours—mind you, we were a busy lot, a lot of us were parents, some single parents, which means to acknowledge the people not at the meetings who made it possible for the rest of us to be there—and when we finally disassembled, it was crumb by crumb.

And as for incompetence, you have never seen a better comedy than when it was time for us to write the contract with

the city for use of the acre they were allotting to the orchard, which, incidentally, had to include something called the suicide or apocalypse clause, which means if we were messing up, they would terminate us. (The orchard, not the people.) Stacey and my earnest attempt at writing this contract, while we ate and shared tea and got to know each other, was more like a poem smeared with soil than a contract, which is to say it was ridiculous, we were helpless, we laughed, for a good four or five hours no less, and so we reached out to a lawyer friend for help. It took him fifteen minutes.

But the inefficiency, the incompetence, the ineffectiveness, the dismal rate of production, the off-taskness, the wandering, the flabbiness, the consensussing, the play, the listening, the dreaming, were all just ways of being together. It was hanging out, it was growing closer, it was mycelial, its product was itself, its product was connection, friendship, it was care, it was *I'm making jam on Saturday if anyone wants to join me*, it was *let me help with hauling the limestone*, it was *you can leave your kids with us long as you need*, it was *take my car*, it was *whatever you need, if I got it you got it*, that was the product, which is to say the product was our needs offered to each other, held to each other, held by each other. Our product was the dream of connection, which, oh yeah, we were living.

And part of that living included, also, disagreeing, struggle, tussling. Because our dreams were not always the same. I have often thought the most important conversations, or actions, within the orchard—more than the site prep or board selection or fundraising or getting nonprofit status or selecting the trees or even planting the trees—were around whether

we wo
Jack F
etc.) t
idea,
such-
trees
into r
labor
many
T
sibili
into
for t
a lot
I thi
wrec
in a
up.
neig
and
coul
the
so.
the
pos
kick
if th
som

we would lock the gate (by the way, beautifully handmade by Jack Brubaker, resident blacksmith, printmaker, boatbuilder, etc.) to the orchard or not. The lock was not an unreasonable idea, not only because of the material value of the trees and such—there was going to be thousands of dollars' worth of trees in there—but also because of the labor that had gone into making the orchard. This was not only the many hours' labor of the board, but time shared, support given, by many, many people.

Truth is, things get busted. It was within the realm of possibility that, if the gate was not locked, someone might walk into the orchard with a shovel and dig out all the trees, either for their own orchard (that'd be ballsy!) or to sell (seems like a lot of work for the payoff to me). When I was a kid, though I think I loved fruit too much to yank out a fruit tree, I liked wrecking stuff. If I was in a mood, maybe especially if I was in a *you have something I don't* mood, I might tear something up. When I was a kid I would sometimes walk the adjacent neighborhoods looking for basketball hoops I could jump up and hang on to, bending them out of commission, so they could be hoopless just like me. Though I never shit in a hole at the golf course, I understood, *I understand*, the desire to do so. A brick through the window of the BMW or Benz then, the Tesla now, I get it. All of which is to say, yeah yeah, it's possible someone, some kid probably especially, might get a kick out of breaking an orchard. And a bigger kick, of course, if there's a lock on it. Just makes the breaking more elegant.

But wasn't the call, the dream, free fruit for all? What if someone took a tree from the orchard and planted it at their

house? What if, when the fruit started coming on in full a few years hence, someone came in and took all the apples and sped away? Would that be the worst thing? I remember Stacey very clearly, very adamantly, saying the point of the orchard is to give it all away. *If someone needs a tree, or a bunch of apples, or harvests all the blackberries, shouldn't they take them? Isn't sharing the dream? Isn't that why we're doing this?* She didn't say it exactly, but almost, isn't the dream that no one owns all the fruit, or all the land, or all the resources? Isn't it that we care for the orchard in common? Isn't it the commons? Which, caring for, we realize could never belong to us, we could only belong to it? It took some time, it took some struggle, but we eventually agreed that someone yanking a few trees or busting something wouldn't be the worst thing. The worst thing would be putting a lock on the dream of free fruit for all. Anyway, you'll see when you come, the orchard is always open.

The evening before the planting day, we gathered at the site, I can't recall if this was a potluck, but I can remember bringing a jar of a local way-too-hot kimchi that a few of us, the heat lovers (Amy, Sean, myself), ate from, sharing one fork. The site—oh, I haven't yet told you this: when Stephanie first saw the site, which I excitedly brought her to not long after that first meeting at city hall, and had been referring to again and again as the orchard, she asked a reasonable question, though it hurt my feelings: *Wait, this field is the orchard?*—had now been transformed by volunteers into the design Jack and Phyllis came up with several months prior. ADA-compliant limestone paths had been cut and poured

and raked into place. Months and months of compost had been spread across the acre, focusing on the planting sites. There was a cluster of about 150 trees and shrubs and flowers, some of them provided by a grant from the Fruit Tree Planting Foundation; some of them given by community members; two of them, the figs, kept alive in pots on my desk, given by Mr. Lau, though he didn't know it. That tree is the mother of several figs around Bloomington and beyond. And Mr. Lau is the mother of that mother.

Sitting in that circle the evening before, we went over the plan for the planting day, how we would stage the trees, who would be in charge of the sign-in sheet (a new nonprofit formality we sucked at), who was bringing silverware, cups and mugs, plates. (We did not suck at bringing actual dishes, and washing those dishes, which, for an organic orchard, is called keeping it real.) We got the schedule together, and despite our capacity for wandering, it was almost minute by minute. It was the kind of thing that makes me nervous, but I bucked up. I would be among the first to arrive, probably seven or eight a.m., to stage the trees we'd spent hours and hours selecting, placing them where they'd be going into the ground we'd spent months getting ready. The planting day was to begin at ten the next morning.

I don't know when it became apparent to me that this orchard dream, which we had been working on like our lives depended on it for the past eight months (but let's say nine, for the poetry), was a dream as much for others as it was for ourselves. Speaking for myself, I am a college professor, and the life of the professor is often itinerant. It is not especially

common for someone to stay in one job for a long time, maybe particularly if that someone is Black and the job is in Indiana. And given as most of these fruit trees wouldn't come into full production for some years, at least five, maybe ten, I might very well be long gone, living elsewhere, before the trees would be ready to feed us. Or I might be *really* long gone, dead, as some of our dear volunteers would be, before the trees got into full production.

Mike Job, a lovely guy in his forties who brought his front-end loader to the orchard to help us dig the paths and spread the compost, died shortly after the planting day in a motorcycle accident in Mexico. Lucille Bertuccio, an elder in the community who was an advisor and teacher and guide to so many of us, and under whose loving watch the orchard came into being, died about five years after we planted those trees. The poet Jean Valentine, who did not use a shovel at the orchard but came as the first poet-in-residence, sat on a red steel chair I picked up at a janky antique shop just past Ellettsville, she dozed in the shade, she wrote a poem about the hay bales looking like bison, she watched us scythe, she laughed so much, she died December 29, 2020. There are others. And we're all getting older.

But at some point it became abundantly clear that all this labor, all this vocating, was actually for some future someone—might be me, but it might not be. And it would definitely be for someone I would never know, and could never imagine. If all went well, if these trees stayed in the ground, if they grew up, they would feed people in the future. Of all of Whitman, my favorite poem might be "Crossing Brooklyn

Ferry,” a poem I first really heard, and was moved to tears by, when I was about thirty-two or thirty-three, watching the Ken Burns documentary, right here in Bloomington, by myself, which the poem teaches you we never are. The poem is, well, Whitmanian. It catalogs, it is spiritual, it is exclamatory, it is all “as you as well me.” But this poem moves me so because the speaker addresses future people, the unknown, the unborn, who will likewise traverse the East River, just as he did. The poem reaches for me a kind of emotional peak when he writes:

Closer yet I approach you,
 What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you—I
 laid in my stores in advance,
 I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.
 Who was to know what should come home to me?
 Who knows but I am enjoying this?
 Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking
 at you now, for all you cannot see me?

And it is a funny thing to realize or to contend with, this investment or belief in the future, because I have been almost ethically disinclined from making plans for the future. Or at least I have fancied myself so. I mean, yeah right: I eat a lot of greens and exercise and try to remember to floss. I wash down my vitamins—D₃ and K₂, C, and B-12—with a quart glass jar of water with a pinch of salt, lemon, and magnesium. Along with my kettlebells and push-ups and jump rope. Every single day. We could start there. We might say that constitutes

planning for the future. Though it's also true, those plans extend only to the (hopefully forestalled) end of my life. So maybe what I resist, or even hate—and the hatred is probably indication that a little bit I want it, too—is the imposition of oneself into the future beyond one's lifetime. The fantasy of immortality, the pursuit of which I can't help but think of as the outsourcing or offloading of death. Your disprivilege, your destitution, for my life everlasting.

I even gave a talk about this, there's a little essay somewhere, it's called, pretty good title, "Body Musics and the Empire of Time," and I suggest that maybe it's not such a good idea for us to want to take up space into the future. To impose our art, our lives, our anything, through time, maybe we shouldn't. Maybe we should just do our work for the here and now.

Well, I'm afraid we don't really have a choice in the matter, turns out. Bummer. What we do in the here and now exists already beneath your boot soles in the future. Look for me there. Look for me when you turn on your air conditioner. Look for me when the hurricane is coming. Look for me as this virus that used to live in the depths of the forest enters your body. Look for me when you're having an asthma attack. Look for me when the parched tree snaps into flame. Look for me as you run taking only your skin with you. Look for me as you build your boat. Look for me in the wreckage.

Or: look for me in the orchard.

Though I didn't yet have the words for it, planting that orchard—by which I mean, you know this by now, joining my labor to the labor by which it came to be—reminded me,

or illumina
exists not c
past and ex
I so often
By which I
to the con
we are in
direction,
certainly
truest thin

And so
orchard to
people sh
ground, v
around h
I took ca
the soil,
baby, and
on it I h
she brou
could im
come of
feeling a
taking f
beautifu

or illuminated for me, a matrix of connection, of care, that exists not only in the here and now, but comes to us from the past and extends forward into the future. A rhizomatic care I so often forget to notice I am every second in the midst of. By which I came to be, and am, at all. Despite every single lie to the contrary, despite every single action born of that lie—we are in the midst of rhizomatic care that extends in every direction, spatially, temporally, spiritually, you name it. It's certainly not the only thing we're in the midst of, but it's the truest thing. By far.

And so you maybe could imagine when I was leaving the orchard toward the end of the planting day, where about 250 people showed up to midwife the 100 or so trees into the ground, water them, mulch them, a toddler I had seen dancing around hers, a couple college-looking kids I saw kissing theirs, I took care of Mr. Lau's, I put it in the ground, I replaced the soil, I patted the fig in, Mr. Lau's fig I patted in like a baby, and walking toward the gate Jack made that had no lock on it I hugged and kissed every one of us, Amy the longest, she brought us here, just as she was brought here, you maybe could imagine that my eyes filled up looking back at what had come of our dreaming together, and why I was having that feeling again I find myself describing as thousands of birds taking flight in my chest, which means, I think, the long and beautiful breaking into something more than me.