This project began as a burst of enthusiasm for the possibilities of the prose poem, and ended as a search for a means to move beyond the tired (and tiring) American tradition. Upon reading my first pieces within the genre, I recall a feeling of limitlessness, as though removing enjambment from the work had the effect of compressing experience itself into a stream of images. The more I wrote for the project, the more I felt an overwhelming awareness of sameness. As I began to research the history of the American prose poem, from Russel Edson and James Tate, to anthologies and journals of contemporary work, I began to sense a pattern. The further the genre developed, the more it appeared formulaic. It felt as if the truly successful prose poem operated as if someone took a handful of their most personal items (a letter to a dying mother, an ape, a piece of yellow string, the landscape of a dream), put them in a box together, and shook them like dice in a cup. A prose poem, then, was the resulting mess that spills across the page.

I want a kind of writing that brings back temporal linearity and a speaking subject to the forefront of the work, while still retaining a playfulness and willingness to experiment that (by my definition) characterizes the poetic genre. Rather than moving in the direction of flash fiction, I was interested in finding ways to make everything smaller than before. I wanted these poems to capture the kind of sparseness and lucidity that was historically invoked by haiku and haibun forms, but today might be best exemplified by the still emerging stylistic quirks seen on twitter.com. Twitter forces the writer into concision, rewarding those who can
create tiny worlds through the suggestibility of disparate words and ideas. Some living writers, such as Melissa Broder, have found immense success beyond their published poetic works in this medium, while other dead authors, such as Richard Brautigan, have found new life as their work is excerpted and presented in entirely new contexts.

For me, the challenge was in finding a middle ground between these two tendencies. Perhaps I am still very much indebted to the American prose poem, but the dream is to move beyond it. I try to embrace the minimalism, the temporality, and the speaking subject of contemporary internet writing and place it within the memory of what the prose poem once was.
a bird flies into a pane of glass
again and again and
again

by
Zachary Cosby

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The role of the kiss is to never swallow what it craves

― Michele Glazer

A kiss is the beginning of cannibalism

― Georges Bataille
cave
i wake up in
caverns with no one around

to excavate your
ghost and flood this poem with

tar a photograph or ten
thousand dots of

ink
that i call a name
is this poem a self-understanding or a truce
my arms are yellow paper folded
when my arms dip in water
they transform to something limp and disappointing
it rained through the funeral
everything felt incredible and large
a cup of coffee with the wreckage of lipstick
the smell from wet piles of clothes
so like swallowing a bird in flight
a feeling tunnels through my body

a quiet landscape

a stillness like the space between wings

a stillness like the flooded cave

in this dream, my mouth filled with sand

my teeth bleed we wait for night

i ask for some kind of fire

you touch me like sleeping birds

it feels like the shadows below clouds
below our skin hide lakes of blood

i am trying to remember how to escape

a place without sound or trees

i make a canoe from stone and sail it

i lay in the dark and cover my face with sheets

the lack of air hangs wet and crushing

why do memory pucker and bloom

i don’t really know

don’t really want to know
the front door is locked at night

i lay in the yard a dead pale moth

winter parachutes from the sky

in this dream even icicles feel

the snow an endless plain of bones

i wanted someone to be with

so i held a picture of some strange face

and nailed it to my chest

somewhere an alarm was ringing
our death friends are all hiding
i leave the house to look for them
they become statues partially hidden in fog
like a memory you told me
slipping in the rain while climbing the roof
to watch your dogs teeth the forest
our hands like wood grain in sun
we were not inside those bodies
we were those bodies
imagine a number
that's how many dead deer
a forest could hold
we could walk hand in hand
through the trees
dumping our memory
like a landfill between branches
we could dig new landfills
into everything we touch
there is a phantom limb
growing through my mouth

but you can't see it
we found a cave
no one had explored

you shined a light
but the cave swallowed light

you put your head in
but the cave swallowed you

i look to the sky
and try to find an outside

but there is no outside
and we are very small
when i think about it

thick black fog
flows out of my mouth

thirty two teeth
looking for a way out

each of their cavities filled
with familiar sounds
my lower half
a stomach cramp

a roadside bomb
spraying flesh confetti

maybe my body speaks
in strange languages

it’s scared
to reproduce
maybe gloom sunflowers
swallowed us whole

after three days
we woke in the belly

with hands and face smeared
in seed and pollen

please don’t look away
o’ book of walt whitman’s
infinite teeming womb

o’ ebook of robert duncan gray’s
abattoir of dreams
the webcam model
we spent weeks watching
touch himself
on my computer screen
he was a giant beetle
i thought mothheads
were my head

chewing through
your head
i thought your teeth
were soft white linen

paper wings on fire
a slowly bleeding lamp
tiny parasites
riot in my stomach
they gather in kerosene crowds
and hunger
they want to burn their home
just as their home wants to burn them
how do you make a person
stop living inside you
it’s hard to talk about
without losing a face
youth
i am outside looking in

the spinning particles
shaped like people

does everyone think about lips
pressing against skin

find me
behind the human
i dream of the mole
just below your belly button

when i wake up
my lips are dry

the window is open
and a voice flows through

it is humming a song
in a minor key

there are patterns everywhere
that exist
you can draw faces
from memory

it must be nice
to never feel alone
what does a phone call mean
magnolia trees
and the sunfucked dream

cemeteries are forests
radiating white noise

we stand like tall grass
in june
make dead deer of us

when photograph collections
are broken time machines

the wind is not peaceful
when you blow on my arm

when do spinning particles
turn to chemicals

of people
i wanted to drown
in waves of light

i planted flowers
in my skin

a tiny boy
became a tiny garden

and a tiny garden
became a tiny mouth

swallowing
when you lose that body
a never fake death
take your time
and tweet something beautiful
i try to swallow
every beautiful thing

but beauty disappears
inside a cave

bodies eat themselves
when starving

is cannibalism
beautiful too
everything i touch
feels like oil black hair.

everything i write
sweats that first time we met.

all things
are made of skin.
the carpets
a toothbrush
red candy

skin.

chat rooms
an erection
guilt smell

skin.

grocery stores
your best friends
the ocean

skin.
windows
despite their transparency

are a different kind of skin.
that immense feeling
of you on top

one hand on my hip
the other in my mouth.

that feeling
was always skin.
we will evaporate
in the air as clouds

heavy with cum
and bile

and blood

i can see
my neighbor

he's raking
brown leaves
horse
i write your name

in ink

and hope it never becomes

like the wallpaper

in the kitchen

of grandmother evelyn

that would fade

every summer heat

into pale ghosts

nobody could recognize

it was a beautiful name

for a grandmother
i watch a sailboat erase the horizon
and finally understand enormity

the sun has stopped in the sky
my phone a face in glass
my wrists in vases
    of plastic flowers
they don’t feel small
    or beautiful
    they feel like copies
of some dying thing
    i wash my face
in the sink
    i fall asleep
like wet ham
    i use google to find you

give a new name
to something on the left
give a new name
to this book of poems
sometimes i call my mother

and say everything will not be okay

i always hang up before she responds

but one time i said something different

i said death is the final horse

and laughed

it sounded like a swarm of bees

as thick as fog
i have a nightmare about a horse
and all my friends as beautiful marble statues

one of my friends is on her phone
one of my friends is eating grapes
one of my friends is laughing and laughing
and all are beautiful marble statues

thirty seven beautiful marble statues
frozen in thirty seven beautiful marble ways

i wonder what it’s like to be invisible
as i make a picnic for one

over there
a horse eating a field of grass
there is a horse wandering through my home

i place my hands on the horse’s face

and place my hands on the horse’s neck

when the mouth opens

wood vibrates like ten thousand bees

or clouds
a man walks to the horse
with a revolver in his hand

he presses the revolver
to the head of the horse

and whispers run
my own fingers fold
in the shape of a gun

the air is punctured
by the screaming of horses
deer
nothing exists outside of experience

which is to say this poem

is the space outside of masks

a gun fired into open sky

reading missed connections
i tell myself to write poems but I don’t even like poems
there is nothing in the act of poem
why cannibalize memory for the sake of nothing
to eat a clementine alone in the dark
i put on a shirt
something necessary
i think this face is not my own

i think this face is not my own

i think this face is not my own

i think this face is not my own

a bird flies into a pane of glass

again and again and

again
my neighbor
is holding a rake
like a mannequin
a dead deer crumpled
through the hood
of my car
the sun is black
in a sky of black
over a crayon
also black
something is moving
behind the cans
in the pantry
if you want
to know something
it helps to name it
helps to touch it
i am amazed
how antlers don't bleed
my neighbor is
raking a field of rakes
i ask what he is doing
he points to the stars and the satellites
the night is for sleeping
and the day is for staying alive
it goes back and forth like this
for a very long time
i make a mountain of meat
that takes a lifetime to climb
i can see my neighbor
between two little houses
that little house is mine
that little house
is not
i make friends with a child
at the peak of the mountain
we share a common enemy
whose name we do not speak
our story is a ghost story
the kind a child
tells another child
a child wears a deer head
like its own head
i wear my head
like my own head
my neighbor
is raking the rakes
a child asks
about my face

a face

is a face

is a face

is a face

except
dead deer fall from the sky
and smack against our homes
a body falls apart
like a handful of flowers
pushed against a face
until it undoes
i see my neighbor
with black shirt
soaked in black fog
i want to save him
want to know
his name
i walk down meat mountain
below a black cloud that spreads
from this horizon
to that horizon
and that horizon
and that horizon
and that horizon
i clutch an umbrella to my chest
wow says a child

dead deer follow you everywhere
and we laugh
it was true
there is a portal to hell
in the corner of my bedroom
everything smells
a man that looks nothing like my father
puts a hand on my shoulder
it was a very funny joke
you had a dream of hostile billboards
we ran through new york in abstract fear
the faces on magazine covers glaring
we caught eyes like late spring pneumonia
we were 900 channels of television and worshipping the sound
of white noise breaking beyond our frame
i’m going to vancouver this afternoon

i wash deer blood off the hood of my car

i take a picture of me and my world

i like the thought of losing five, maybe ten pounds

consider replacing friends with plants

a change of surroundings would be nice

like opening a new tab
a tiny piece of glass cuts my right foot

it was shaped
almost nothing like the rays of the sun
passing through the window

i remember your name
i pour and pour away
the blood

feeling more like ghost
than the death that births it
slow
and incredibly far away

you would like it here

like how
alone it can feel
my body
no longer inside

this mannequin
    hex
citrus
the name of this poem is citrus
i retire my lips
in a gesture of goodwill
towards those i fucked over

they live
their final days

inside a cave
with the memory

of red grapefruit
tongues

the ghosts they birthed
live on

as friction burns
on the skin of horses

a name
is a terrible thing

i hope a name
never becomes true
this is a forest fire of
paper cigarette ebooks dog
feces coffee street litter cables
reducing my head
to charred neurons stumps
and ash habitats.

once i found a moth
in the glow of your cellycell's
flashlight app

it flew inside my mouth
and recited a poem
moth poem

blue screens of death
   flash inside your eyes

digital flowers bloom
   black between our thighs
even these things
that i want
i don't really want

i think
i'm trying to say
that i want
to stop wanting

avoid
like a void
trying to swallow
another void
he says

*i want to leave you with a virus*

*that doesn’t scrape off*

he does

it won’t