

Pat Clifford & Tyrone Williams

From washpark



Essay and Acknowledgements

Neither forward, in any sense of the word, nor backward, in any sense of that word, these poems constitute a modest, delimited investigation, an interrogation into the presumption of “progress” underwriting the redevelopment of a public park located between, as well as among, the business and residential districts in downtown Cincinnati Ohio. As collaborators on the poems vis-à-vis the “suspect”—the business model that supervenes all other spheres of human activity (legal, social, cultural, environmental, etc.) however much this model claims it is always constrained from running roughshod over, for example, actual human bodies----we both play the roles of good cop/bad cop. The crime this perp is suspecting of committing? “Progress.”

In July of 2012, a new Washington Park was unveiled with great public fanfare after a \$48 million investment that included the removal of a public school and basketball court

and the installation of an underground parking garage, new playgrounds, fountains and (of course) a dog park. The park specifically, and gentrified urban areas like Over-the-Rhine generally, become sites of profound social and cultural shifts as our city governments and developers engineer their “rebirth.” So everything has been made new. The game is changed: board and pieces, strategies and chances. But in the shadows of conversations, in doorways off the beaten path, some frayed threads of the past remain. What happens to the histories that, embodied as memories and artifacts, still amble through the park? When and how does the spectral *before* inhabit this *after*?

Our *washpark* poems are intentional and ongoing explorations grounded in these relational and environmental worlds. But more than that, they are about friendship. The two of us started meeting regularly in 2009 with a simple process: have lunch near Washington Park, take a walk around the site as it was undergoing demolition and reconstruction, and then discuss our impressions, thoughts, feelings, etc. Between lunches we would write these poems back and forth. Both of us are personally connected to the park (and Over-the-Rhine) in one way or another and were very much interested in navigating our evolving relationships to it, both socially and politically. We were observers in that sense, but implicated as well. To that end we sustained a writing project that intersects with the transformations of the park and surrounding neighborhood and, at the same time, intervenes in the narrative of celebration and progress that has, by way of regional media institutions, subtended another narrative, that of cleansing (not primarily or intentionally *ethnic* cleansing though, here as elsewhere, class hegemony almost accomplishes the former by retaining a remainder, those ethnic minorities whose social, cultural and economic—if not political—values coincide with those of ethnic majorities).

At first we worked without an overall plan; we allowed ourselves to individually and collectively imagine and re-imagine the site of the park, its history, its present and its future. After a couple of years of more or less “freewriting” we re-envisioned what we were doing, submitting the writing to a project organized according to what we imagined as a “Clue” (the board game) like scaffold. We did not follow this schema pedantically but it served as a kind of fulcrum around which we wrote and organized the balance of the project. The topics we explore are gaming (and gamesmanship), play (and the implications of this term not only linguistically but also socially and culturally: playgrounds as the usurpation of a “rest home” for those who don’t own or lease property) and loss (the death of Joann Burton, run over by a police car in pursuit of drug dealers, served as an inspiration for us throughout).

The final section was largely based on an interview we recorded with Catherine Stehlin, a friend who had lived across from Washington Park for many years. Her lively anecdotes and nuanced analysis helped to ground our project over the last year. Her loss in February of 2016 was deeply felt and served as an impetus for us to complete and share this project.

The term *washpark*, our playful, doubtless cynical, neologism that captures the cleansing motif and alludes, however tenuously, to laundering (which is, at bottom, what financialization does “to” money; amortization as a money—not car—wash) first came

from the stenciling on the drainage sewers now capturing the runoff from the park. In the meantime the name has also been co-opted by a gallery ensconced next to Music Hall, one of many new galleries and restaurants that propagate when banking and lending institutions back speculators who think they've caught a whiff of surplus, that is, "leisure," money in the air... While the "new" park can be read as an art gallery *sans* walls or ceiling (programs galore for children young and old, the very sign of capital's health) it is simultaneously some(body)'s disaster, bodies that are forced out, turned inside out and/or forced into the absurd space of "progress"? We write for those somebodies.

Tyrone Williams
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2016



2. Voice over

We simply walked up to the oasis, a burning torch, the first fireworks raining forth, scorching the back of the sky cutting airshafts into the earth. In some ways the airstreams felt made-to-order and seemed to be flowing into the discipline of the concessions, the exhibition above. I am quite near the water assembly (also called the basin committee). The pieces I like best are the transmitted water signals leaving the basin. They're like a bon fire organized via a feed pipe of lamps. The signals work to break up, contain and to turn the goings on in the world. Actual behavior! The good of a community! These devices prove very interesting to me as they seem to regulate and channel the crowd in dramatic fashion. They somehow take a peek at the jamboree, sense who owns what, and gives the whistle of a background test. Then as if by an automatic chess player some in the dense crowd move into the flow, putting others out possibly into a correct ordering. I must confess I really cannot tell who does the playing sometimes. It is not known whether the devices are operated by us, living persons, or by some fountain designer from a vantage of perfection. While it must be responsible for determining actual behavior, the visitors do not seem to sense its existence. In that sense, these occlusions replicate the traffic systems, the political elections (vote with your feet), the mandatory education of home school rule. The engineering feats remain feats insofar as they remain buried underground, having supplanted the cemetery, population removal that merely foreshadows, and serves as a pretext for, the population removals above ground. For us the space between our relics binds what is happening, like a whisper resting on an easel from some previously unknown fault line. How else are we able to read each year's growth? In the stupor of now a mirage appears, newborn twins, memory, desire, separated at birth. Grandfathered apart, they go their own ways, as though the yawning desert of evergreen were anything but a mouth that will have, in the years to come, and the years thereafter, spit them out into a black forest set afire. They alone would survive, orphans condemned to make a virtue of loss, to kneel beneath a charred sky, await imminent rains of fire, bending until their brows or lips (parting) brushed ash, and breath.

3.CDCDCDCDCD

Simple notes toward an easy piece, good rates of return to pioneer a new earth if not yet the new heaven. The soundtrack does not, however track (misheard with big Reagan-Thatcher ears) imo info equals imago....At the banks the cd flattens A and B sides into one side fits, the alleged end of history squeezed inside a certified rectangle, onto a shiny disk called This Side Up. That's what's playing in the background as we finalize our purchases, to say nothing of our loans. The lending towards a leaning called the future anterior is gradually but relentlessly being built, bricked, cemented and dry-walled. ConDos electrified (ConEd), ready for Trolls, expenditures guaranteed by new apps, de-unionization, smart bombs, black ops and We've Got A Hundred Like You Waiting In Line. Backed by the swagger of the present, investments mature at some indeterminate point beyond the horizons of the possible, however improbable. Yes, these are the speakers, amped up toward, if not as, the singing ventriloquism of a god that lowers itself to address the lowest of the low. Lest they become like Us, the origin of potency envy.

4. Entranced throngs gather (Cluster designation)

My Dear Forest,

This is your fellow follow (if you want) in that rush to set up and join daily hygiene rituals, the intense Be-light Eucharist, neighborhood green clearly to life. I make dance for the new invisible table, white-cloth so happy it's in no sense random, invokes only an order, your green trust that resembles pleasure. Yet the intense light maintains stuff of biomedical grace, good for anyone with an infection (invisible culprits) or your "communicative" precautions. Ideally you want the hours of daylight to have each succeeding round until motion is halted and my excursions shifted themselves in this sense. I took time to saunter through where the older buck and brick are, apparently, suitable exhibit for anyone.

But in clothes, it seems fail-ure to comply is subject to coiled coordinates--For Your Safety, to say nothing of For Your Health and Foreign Experience, this furniture posted-cum-supervised by irreparable caution forced to tedium and bailiffs, no biomedical gummification, no food or little bottles near the water deepened to black odds, such a sight wouldn't want to halt within the assigned date, once in town or giving unpaved expand for a conventional moment. With no vouch Washington Public & Commercial hands disinfection, no contact with the body inside the body, much fewer the clothes scanned for other than the final Welcome Home. Change your diapers, utilitarian routes, in our rest rooms by being exclusively attention. Inescapably, my own part to play, glimpsed spread, arrive late lonely, elicits wheels whirling within wheels, explain "big enough" without falling short of earshot. Soaking deaf, but irrefutable decor, ourselves blue-gold nodes, susceptible fabric waned and open from the unfinished edge, a more historical account figured in order to create still falling dragged-out leaves. You see?

Sincerely Yours,

The Tree

5. Sideline reports

Another generation reduced to the spectatorship of a bench.

My simple image surviving in painted vein.

How much can: ur-Haul then add our p (if not our cue), the penalty of assumption?

Flags, the “bleach” reason already knows.

Who else watches your kids.?

Take on linearity, hinged & binding.

No excessive poem entitled The Bench.

Not so much described injuries.

The wall inside the wall citizenship responsible for the kids darting in and out of trouble dressed down as grass .

To the suffice edge, still lending speech in untied space this so-called analysis, a secret quoting.

Like any other hood.

So forth deal.

Parent bench, press North of Court (however always south of Law).

At what treatise posed all the far divides.

Command performances to heritage.

Such heartrending deliberation, we belong to such outdated thinking.

Sit and watch the children run back and forth between the fountains of life.

Listening as a courtyard pronoun, affection strolls for trying.

Inside and outside the park are places to stop, stations to rest as a history of invited dissuaded participation in one’s own interpellation.

No longer composure to photograph airing its lean altar & egalitarian neck.

Put me in coach v. start own league.

Just music and problems hurried until amid.

Self-same rules justify isomorphic structures of how, if not why.

This box, our stunning swear—both cape and expression.

They who sit model the rules of disengagement, jettison these resting sites from a history that once, when the homeless populated this circumspect land, veered close, almost intercepting the narrative of Betterment (available in several flavors).

Don't want to assume that we're more than transitional figures you know.

That was, as they say, close, but now—and from now on it's always now—this gagged mouth on the perimeter of the water fountains and the children will not interrupt the narrative.

6. Color commentary

The playground is just the veiled inner levels of the reversal. What is out in plain view is precisely what remain outside perception. Floats and peculiar, due motto. Decanter awning the hold. A spectacle of the object salutes upheaval and removal as mediated—and thus not seen—through the fine handshakes, slaps on the back. Distracted goad, with a rubble cup. Glowed, they go off, bisected. About everything. And so the invisible is made invisible again, a doubling that produces the difference of progress to say nothing of creative consent.

Half the thank and fact. Left sentence. A button backwards tires, habit tightening and reared. Sent up the solstice. No people lay its shape. Before the hoops non-dream of just what it is and nothing more or less was designated for relocation, farther west, young bloods. Remove avenue and smoke unsure the cold stoop of all attraction. Before the tripwires were strung along the boundaries of the open meetings, consultations pointed at every nappy head.

Score the run and can't see me.

Man up
I got 'im I got 'im
Take it
op is what it is, optimally
Drink of the sweet wall.

Check
Check again
Post-



Pat Clifford is the author of several chapbooks including *The Embrace* (2010) and *Court and Spark* (2016). He is co-author with Aryanil Mukherjee of two books of poetry: *chaturangik/SQUARES* (CinnamonTeal, 2009) and *The Memorandum/MOU* (Kaurab, 2011). His poetry and critical work has appeared in *Moria*, *Jacket*, *PennSound*, *The Sunday Indian* and *Kaurab* and has been translated into Bengali. Pat received his MSSA from the Mandel School for Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University.



Tyrone Williams teaches literature and theory at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. An experimental poet of a rare breed, Tyrone has authored four books of poetry, *c.c.* (Krupskaya Books, 2002), *On Spec* (Omnidawn Publishing, 2008), *The Hero Project of the Century* (The Backwaters Press, 2009), *Howell* (Atelos, 2011) and a number of chapbooks including *AAB* (Slack Buddha Press, 2004), *Futures, Elections* (Dos Madres Press, 2004) and *Musique Noir* (Overhere Press, 2006). Williams is also the editor of *African American Literature: Revised Edition* (2008).