



Neukom Vivarium Variations & Yard Work

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Seattle Poetics Lab • Seattle, Washington



Published by:
Seattle Poetics Lab
Seattle, Washington
www.PaulENelson.com
www.Splab.org

Neukom Vivarium Variations & Yard Work: Poetry
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Printed in the United States of America
Front cover image: Bryan King



These Days

*whatever you have to say, leave
the roots on, let them
dangle*

And the dirt

*Just to make clear
where they come from*

- Charles Olson



Neukom Vivarium Variations

Prelude

The Neukom Vivarium's open
when it wants to be
when train traffic
the slowest ever train traffic
when train traffic
shuts down Broad at Alaskan
a volunteer docent may be winding their way there.

More salmon ladder than Calder
Mark Dion'd say
speaks of Nurse Log as dead tree art
more idea than product, more "sculpture
as process" as the living feeds on dead and dying
(like capitalism.)

The BNSF freight train lurches to a start
starts a chain reaction
of boxcars clinking "GO." Motorists
idle engines,
wipers wipe away rain blocks
view of no cars moving,
inch forward / wait closer. Maybe look left,
at Louise Bourgeois' *Father & Son* fountain sculpture
"two penises for the price of one" says the Times
"a thinly veiled homage to pedophilia,"
says a conservative radio talk show host...
Naked man greets naked boy in a fountain.

The Neukom Vivarium's open
maybe next week depending on volunteers
(like capitalism). "My contribution



to visual culture” Dion’d say. Ferns
on a nurse log, a Howard Hanson hemlock
set on a slab
under glass. “In a sense we’re building a failure”
he’d say, with Bill Neukom’s litigation fortune
as the Amtrak passes, bells
plot rhythm much as more March rain.

A rotting tree
in a greenhouse
as art.



I

Once inside the Neukom Vivarium
find Nurse Log baby pictures
& map/birth certificate, plucked

from near Howard Hanson Dam
36 miles southeast
(beats the average orphan)
past Ravensdale, Palmer, Lemolo

in 2007 lifted
out its soft nest of sword ferns & deer ferns
miner's lettuce & salal, lady ferns &
thimbleberries, inside out plants
& baby firs, red alder.

A new home by
the clang clang of train bells
or the whistling docent Emily says sometimes
overtakes them.

How Sellen would
post its huge banner & crane method
take Nurse Log from near Howard Hanson Dam
thank Bryan King for spotting the perfect "art log"
lovingly cover the root end's fern and rock base,
place Nurse Log in Belltown's Olympic Sculpture Park,
tiled & festooned with worms & fungus
tiles, insect & snail, fern, bird & frog
tiles, blue on white, view of hemlock starts

right out the trunk of Nurse Log. "Essentially an optimistic
organism... an organism... out of context... a memento mori" the artist'd
say. "An appreciation of decay" that gets a bad rap when
fruit on the summer kitchen counter
stinking meat, rotting biosphere



or late stage empire.

A smart building with shades
mimics rainforest hues
computers open roof to regulate hot
keep tree ripe for Artist's Conk
(*Ganoderma applanatum*) essentially
a bracket fungus feeds
on dead and living trees
forms fruiting bodies
and gets computer-regulated
wetness here under glass.



II

Vivarium glass

Oldcastle Glass Company

shaded to meet the needs of plants

trapped here. Laminated green glass, 20%

light transmittance layers of red/blue/gray tints

absorb light from “critical color bands

in the light spectrum.”

Light’s “electromagnetic radiation...
comes in waves...” (like capitalism). Photons.

Plants turn carbon dioxide
into sugars & sunlight in spring’s
lengthening days and summer’s long days
(predominantly blue)

the “go!” for seed germination
& transplants. In fall the red light band’s the
“go” for ripening & light’s insufficient so
irrigation & forest litter some guy’s got to
haul in here, maybe from Ravensdale
Green River litter, feeds

Vancouveria hexandra

(Inside-Out Flower.)

How a flower’d look
had it a hernia. How guts are made
to go outside and once there mirror
our own inner shooting star nature.



III

Was a windstorm took out
the Neukom Vivarium Western Hemlock nurse log
trucked to Elliott & Broad to be serenaded
by train bells & whistling.
The vivarium was built around it.

Ecologists in 2010
came in from Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie
National Forest
perform a nurse log check up.

“What’s with the shotweed” they’d say
an invader here like you & me.
They noted west side vivarium mosses dying
& so said saturate the log like in Ravensdale.
Shoot it with water & mimic wind
since wind releases hormones/increases transpiration
from leaves/maybe add bees, snow

& though hemlocks go faster than firs and cedars
Nurse Log’s got another 50-100 years
they say.

Race to see who’ll go first: Nurse Log
Empire
Biosphere Capitalism.
Composing decomposition.



IV

w/o a natural canopy
Vivarium Head Gardener/Greenhouse Controller
(Bobby McCullough) works
with the sole purpose to nurture
the nameless nurse log. (The home
has a name
but Nurse Log's nameless.)

In 2009 the brain behind the vivarium
Mark Dion visited/answered questions like:

Q - "What do we do when the little Douglas firs and western hemlock
shoots in the log turn into big trees - do we open the roof?"

A - "Let's wait and see and let our response be organic and feel right
when we need to do something."

& later that day, at
Pier 71's Waterfront Grill afterparty
bartenders served Mark a 2006 Vivarium Cocktail
(sort of Cascadian mojito: herbs crushed with ice,
grapefruit juice, club soda (and rum, one can
assume)). Far from New Bedford, Mass, and its lack
of such logs

none anyway like this specimen
none like this lady
(or organism of undetermined gender)
lets life grow out of it
makes decisions that "feel right"
can kind of kick on the mist
middle of August
not pining for the Old Spaghetti Factory
but binging on bright pastels of Teresita's
Seattle Cloud Cover, still waiting for frogs,



bugs & birds once jumped up & down its bark
back in Kanaskat.



V

How important is dirt?

Important enough
for every state to have a state soil. (No jodas!)

Find Pamunkey in Virginia.
Houston Black in Texas.
Miami in Indiana and Drummer in Illinois
but here, Tokul,
mostly west of Cascades
very acidic, maybe from volcanoes
perfect for timber, less so for homes
because unstable.

And Nurse Log dirt
excavated from Issaquah
(good soil) loamy, acidic, saved from a place
where a suburban tract might've gone
lots of decomposing organisms, loamy, w/ leaf mold
could be future antibiotics in that there soil
an inch of which took 500 years to make
a planet of which it took humans about 150 years
to fuck up maybe forever.



VI

Only first 60' of log were taken
of the Neukom Vivarium
Nurse Log, born in watershed
between Chinook & Snoqualmie passes
the Green River, but not the Green that's
part of North Fork Toutle River
Cowlitz County way, no.

This Green a 492 sq. mi. watershed surrounded by mountains
(three sides) 10% owned by Tacoma Water
& Nurse Log'd get it right in the side
w/ a resistograph drill, w/ long thin needle
& power consumption measured & Nurse Log
passed the test.

& besides trimming, see
one ambitious alder
growing out Nurse Log
got hacked at the nub
for growing a branch that'd whack
cellphone-glued visitors. See the clean cut
north side Nurse Log
and the root screwed in.



VII

& the vivarium'd
be how David Douglas
or Rachel Carson might've
operated their naturalist workplace:

brooms & rakes,
shovels & nets, pickax & flood gage,
metal desk w/ rusty drawers
w/ wood glue & whiteout
& two-hole puncher. Ugly is the sink,
rusting two basin sink, since this
a place to work

not just sip coffee & fern talk. This is how Mark Dion'd
have it. Stainless steel "curiosity cabinet" of David Kitts
from Boeing Surplus, some
A-236 Nickel/Stainless Alloy
for a fine finish when sanded. Insect pins,
magnifying glass,
a fine selection of tweezers &
books:

"The Butterflies of Cascadia"
"Land Snails of British Columbia"
"Birds of the Puget Sound Region"
"Skid Road"
"Secrets of the Soil"
"One Thousand American Fungi"
"Animal Psychophysics"
"Decay and Renewal (Student Edition)"
"Traveler in a Vanished Landscape"
"A Common Fate."

For you, fellow traveler
of the future



if the monks can save us
or the East can save us
from latching on to the last real thing left
suck every last bit of its consciousness
transform it into Facebook dinner photos
& empty latté cups. Start-ups & MOABs.
Single-use floss sticks, idling engines
& the occasional tenor saxophone solo.



VIII

“The job of the artist is to go against the grain
of dominant culture, to challenge perception
and convention” Mark Dion says

& Nurse Log as surrealist elegy designed
for those who’d use “museums and collections with an
overlay of the irrational onto the rational...
museum culture...”

& interest in “the recently obsolete.”
A sensibility that “tends to the dystopian.”

Nurse Log as environmental
oxygen tent in a hospital, part celebration
part “mourning and melancholy.” Triage
for a biosphere can’t take much more.

Today’s lesson in decay & renewal. Check yr direction
as infinity’s that way ——> celebration

of spring, as Nurse Log nurtures
leafiness, check the huckleberry bush
survived the most suicidal winter in Seattle’s
white man history.

“Ordering
taxonomy
classification
folklore
personal tastes...
imaginary hierarchies...”

Oregon beaked moss.
Curly Heron’s-Bill Moss.
Wavy-Leaved Cotton Moss.
Salmonberry. Red Huckleberry.



Pave paradise, put up a vivarium.



IX

Hooray the homage to heterotrophism
& systems connected to systems
sustaining all heterotrophs
all consumers & their food chains
& Nurse Log, she, of undetermined gender,
dies slow for the lives of younger others
that leaf & branch, shoot out from her, she

“tiny fragment of an intimate conglomeration of ecosystem functions,
nature’s emergent machinery for... sustenance...”

For the slow dance of life,
an ode to the recently obsolete
before the age of robots
providing your french fries.

The ongoing life of the
Green/Duwamish River
quenching thirst of the citizens
of the City of Destiny.

Nurse Log as “living knowledge”
that Subiyay-Bruce Miller’d
ascribe to Einstein, downstream here
where the heterotrophs are
wondering how this all ends
on a log, under bark, by the bay,
by the train bells.

She, the nurse log,
dreams of Elk & Black Bear,
Cougar & Eagle, Osprey & Heron,
Chinook, Chum, Coho & Winter Steelhead

& how one day be reunited



w/ the heart of a watershed
reincarnated as Thimbleberry
or Banana Slug,
NW Salamander
or Pacific Tree Frog, Western Eyed Click Beetle
or Sow Bug resting in the shadow of a sapling
which may,
w/ love and elk shit,
oxygen & positive ions,
hope & healthy Tokul
become a lady fern near a
future Nurse Log lifting a leaf in a slow-motion salute
to the nurse log in all of us
the latent nurse log inside each of us
who'd nurse & nurture & nourish
in an age when riches are reserved
for something so much less.

11:41am - 4.15.17



Yard Work (For George Sawchuk)



Yard Work

George Sawchuk has yard work to do. Marxist George, one-legged George finds soul food in the Mother forest of Fanny Bay, BC.

“Wacky woods” they’re dubbed but deliberate the faucet set in a tree’s nook, gages jabbed into trunks, wood books chained to other trees or notion *What Went Wrong Was the Disparity*. Still is. Still no laughing like Jesus who George says is not coming back because he didn’t like the “hospitality” last time.





Chow Time at Camp 5 in 1945, back in the BC woods because George wished to live deliberate, to front essential life facts, find if woods could be teacher, and yes he discovers to live is to create even if it's a blue coffee pot on a table to rot above ferns, or a gage in a flower pot capitalism'd find disposable just like a one-legged Russian Canadian Cascadian waiting at the hospital for new parts.



Paul E Nelson is a poet & interviewer. He founded SPLAB (Seattle Poetics LAB) & the Cascadia Poetry Festival. Since 1993, SPLAB has produced hundreds of poetry events & 600 hours of interview programming with legendary poets & whole systems activists including Allen Ginsberg, Michael McClure, Joanne Kyger, Robin Blaser, Diane di Prima, Daphne Marlatt, Nate Mackey, George Bowering, Barry McKinnon, José Kozer, Brenda Hillman & many others. Paul's books include *American Prophets* (interviews 1994-2012) (2018) *American Sentences* (2015) *A Time Before Slaughter* (2009) and *Organic in Cascadia: A Sequence of Energies* (2013). Co-Editor of *Make It True: Poetry From Cascadia* and *56 Days of August: Poetry Postcards*, he's presented poetry/poetics in London, Brussels, Nanaimo, Qinghai & Beijing, China, has had work translated into Spanish, Chinese & Portuguese & writes an American Sentence every day. Awarded a residency at The Lake, from the Morris Graves Foundation in Loleta, CA, he's published work in *Golden Handcuffs Review*, *Zen Monster*, *Hambone*, and elsewhere. Winner of the 2014 Robin Blaser

Award from The Capilano Review, he is engaged in a 20 year bioregional cultural investigation of Cascadia, lives in Rainier Beach, in the Cascadia bioregion's Cedar River watershed and serves as literary executor for the late poet Sam Hamill.

