

Suspended Collaboration

Chris Turnbull

A couple of years ago I embarked on a project that didn't work out—sort of. I was curious to explore language drift and wanted to collaborate in a way that would offer each collaborator agency in the sense of what was written and independence regarding who was collaborating. Within this exploration of drift, it seemed important to also enable conceptual filtering across collaborations to include the effect of our relationships and proximities. While there was a framework to the project, within that framework, many elements were left open to the collaborator's own motivations and exploratory impulses.

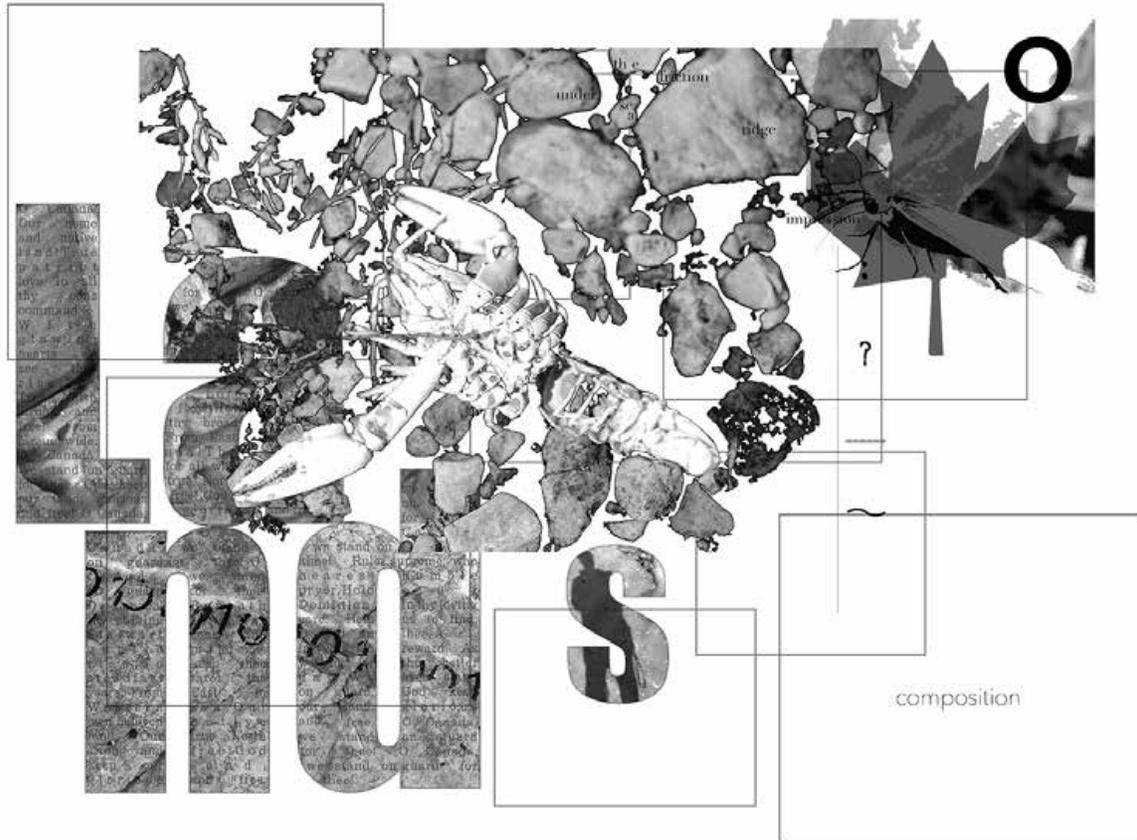
To start things off, I invited Manitoulin Island based artist/writer/curator Sophie Edwards to respond to “Lands Composition,” a visual piece I'd composed and previously published. Loosely, Sophie could use any form that was placeable on paper as her response to my piece, or an element of my work, however she interpreted “response.” I sent along a set of guidelines to help navigate the project as a whole and named it, temporarily, *if/then*.

Sophie had a month to complete her piece, send it to me, and send a similar request on to someone of her choosing. The person she chose to participate would only see Sophie's piece. The text would then be put in a folder on Google Drive that she and I would share.

Sophie asked artist Judy Bowyer to participate. Judy, not having seen what I sent Sophie, would respond to Sophie's piece and also send her own work onward to a collaborator of Judy's choosing. And so on, the same guidelines each time, once a month, over the course of a year.

As the project continued, the Google Drive folder would be populated by each piece, once a month, and each collaborator would receive access once the piece was submitted. We would meet in the Google Drive folder, and through our collaborations, see the slow unfolding and deepening of responses, each at a remove, each over time. This collaboration would evolve from the initial agreement between two people toward an emerging and final collaboration by twelve, each piece developing from direct relationships and indirect influence.

It is a reality that timing impacts collaborative work. Daily responsibilities or the collisions of other projects can suspend good ideas. In agreement, we paused this version of *if/then*. It was a great start.



Chris Turnbull, "Lands Composition," 2017
Previously published in colour in *Cold Front* at coldfrontmag.com

150 introduced species

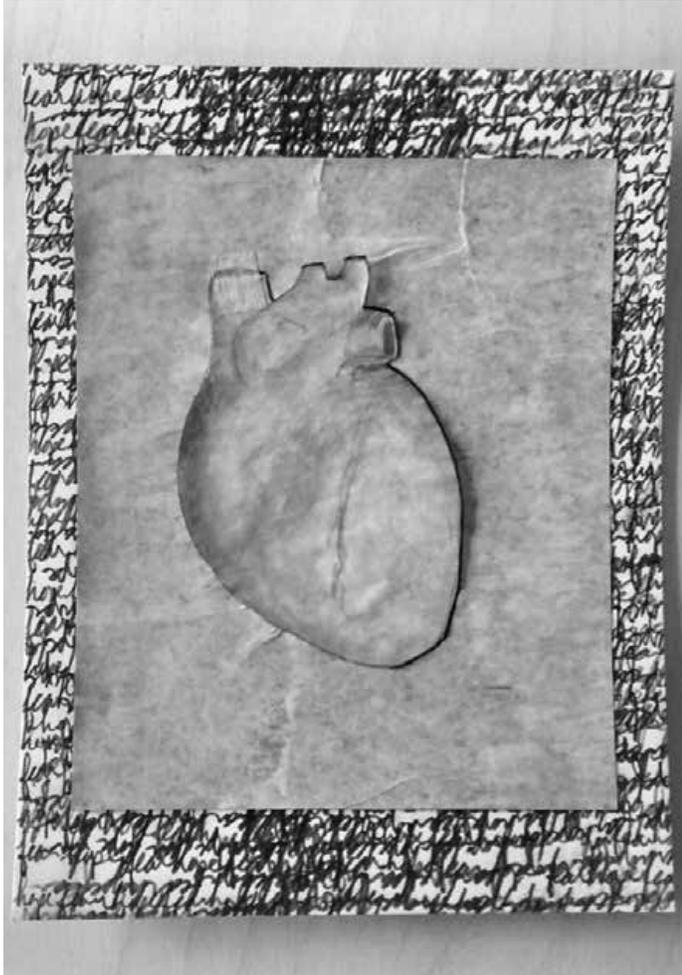


1500s Water lettuce Pistia stratiotes, 1539 Feral pigs Sus scrofa, 1600s Scots pine Pinus sylvestris, Purple loosestrife Lythrum salicaria, Yellow toadflax Linaria vulgaris, 1606 Rock pigeon Columbia livia, early 1600s Dandelion, Fennel, Foeniculum vulgar, 1620s Lamb's quarters Chenopodium album, 1672 Burdock, Yellow toadflax Linaria vulgaris, Early 1700s Common mullein Verbascum Thapsus, Dog rose Rosa canina, Common yellow oxalis Oxalis stricta, creeping woodsorrel Oxalis corniculata, Gray garden slug Deroceras reticulatum, 1727 English ivy Hedera helix, Mid-1700s Woolly mullein Verbascum, 1756 Norway maple Acer, 1759 Broad-leaved dock Rumex obtusifolius, Scotch thistle Onopordum acanthium, St. Johnswort Hypericum 1760s Scotch broom Cytisus scoparius 1784 Tree-of-heaven/Asian sumac Ailanthus altissima, 1800s Common buckthorn Rhamnus cathartica, Early 1800s Tamarisk Tamarix spp, Japanese honeysuckle Lonicera japonica, 1814 Sowthistle Sonchus spp., 1817 European rabbit Carcinus maenus, Mid 1800s Tree-of-heaven 1840 European common periwinkle L. nitida, Little spotted possum, the Norway Rat, 1850s Bullfrogs, 1860 Burning bush/winged euonymus Euonymus alatus, 1868 Garlic mustard Alliaria petiolata, 1875 Japanese barberry Berberis thunbergii, 1876 Kudzu Pueraria montana, 1877 Common carp Cyprinus carpio, Fallopia japonica, 1883 Quail, 1886 Multiflora roses Rosa multiflora, European starling Sturnus vulgaris, 1893 wild boars, 1900 Dutch knotweed, Sorghum molybdium, Early 1900s Gnarly bush, Ardisia crenata, 1899 Nutria, Myocastor coypus, European fire ant Myrmica rubra, 1938 Asian clam Corbicula fluminea, Asparagus Asparagus officinalis, 1980s Asian carp (bighead, Hypophthalmichthys nobilis; black, Mylopharyngodon piceus; grass, Variegated grass carp, Ctenopharyngodon milotrix), Eurasian collared-dove Streptopelia japonica, Asian shore crab Hemigrapsus sanguineus, 1984 Spiny water flea Bythotrephes longimanus, 1988 Zebra mussel Dreissena polymorpha, 1990 Round goby Neogobius melanostomus, 2002 Emerald ash borer Agrilus planipennis, Absinth Artemisia absinthium, Alfalfa medicago sativa, Black locust Robinia pseudo-acacia, 1990s Japanese knotweed Fallopia japonica, 1990s Japanese knotweed Fallopia japonica, Crested wheat grass Agropyron nectiforme, Dame's rocket Hesperis matronalis, Dog-strangling vine Cynanchum spp, English ivy Hedera helix, European birch Betula pendula, Goutweed Aegopodium podagraria, Himalayan blackberry Rubus discolor, Hoary-alyssum Berteroa incana, Kentucky blue grass Poa pratensis, Lilac Syringa vulgaris, Norway spruce Picea abies, Norway maple Acer platanoides, Ragweed Ambrosia artemisiifolia, Siberian peashrub (Caragana arborescens) Spotted knapweed Centaurea maculosa, Teasel Dipsacus spp., White bedstraw, Galium mollugo, White mulberry Morus alba, White poplar Populus alba, Wild marjoram Origanum vulgare, Eurasian watermilfoil Myricophyllum spicatum, European frog bit Hydrocharis morsus-ranae, Flowering-rush Butomus umbellatus, Glossy buckthorn Rhamnus frangula, Purple loosestrife Lythrum salicaria, Reed canary grass Phalaris arundinacea, Argentine spiny reed, Sarcocolla Quercus tinosa, Curly pondweed Potamogeton crispus, Floating heart Nymphoides peltatum, Great manna grass Glyceria maxima, Marsh cress Rorippa sibirica, Moneywort Lysimachia nummularia, Yellow flag Iris pseudacorus, Common buckthorn Rhamnus cathartica, Garlic mustard Alliaria petiolat, Glossy buckthorn Rhamnus frangul, Leaky spurge Euphorbia esula, Canada thistle Cirsium arvense, Smooth brome grass Bromus inermis, Tatarian honeysuckle Lonicera tatarica, Yellow and white sweet-clover Melilotus spp., Asian long-horned beetle, black swallowwort, Brazilian elodea Brazilian waterweed, rock snot Didymo, Dog-strangling vine pale swallowwort, Emerald ash borer, European water chestnut, Hydrilla, Golden mussel, Gypsy moth, Japanese knotweed, Killer shrimp, Parrot feather, Phragmites, Round goby, Sea lamprey, Snakeheads, Stone moroko, Water soldier, Wels catfish, Yabby, Zander/little bit of body text

Is it not romantic, *sturnus vulgaris* to fly the Shakespearean species to create a new English world
A few thistle seeds shaken from a pillow loosestrife lingers in sheep's wool, in bedding, pos
Is it not practical, *cyprinus carpio* to feed a growing population, feed like colonists, to know no boundary
upon eating the red-legged bullfrog to extinction in the gold rush
to introduce the European bullfrog
Is it not resilient, gardener, to fight colonizing weeds, tam for a moment too long, tuck a new found slip, a centre, find into prepared beds
Is it not natural, or connects *rusticus* to bait an angler, to hybridize, rerun a rusty crayfish river
The tick, smallmouth, pine beetle warming to colder climes
Ash borer topples the canopy, phragmites spreads a choking shoreline
We cannot recognize the predation, the occupation is familiar.

sophie anne edwards

Sophie Edwards, "150 introduced species," 2017
 Previously published in colour in *h&c* at handandpoetry.blogspot.com



Judy Bowyer, "My Sign of Hope is a Noxious Weed," 2017. Carbon paper, watercolour, milkweed
In response to Sophie Edwards' "150 Introduced Species"

Collaborative Forms

In 2016, ceramic artist Susie Osler invited me to collaborate with her as part of a Community Supported Art season (CSArt Ottawa, 2016-2017). We called our project *Water~Table*. Water is an element that is often on our minds. We both live rurally and have talked on different occasions about droughts, agriculture, domestic water use, wetlands and marsh systems, waterways, run-offs, aquifers, conservation and water “planning,” and climate disruptions. But how *would* we collaborate? What would we make or do, and how might we engage a subscriber group (CSArt) in our water project?

Clay is material and tactile, has functional and aesthetic uses, and can be shaped toward a physical object that can contain and mark space. Language is material and haptic, mouthed and formed, contains interpreted and shed meanings, and has trajectories of clarity, ineffability, and randomness (partially because of you, the reader, and each of our relationships to language and its forms).

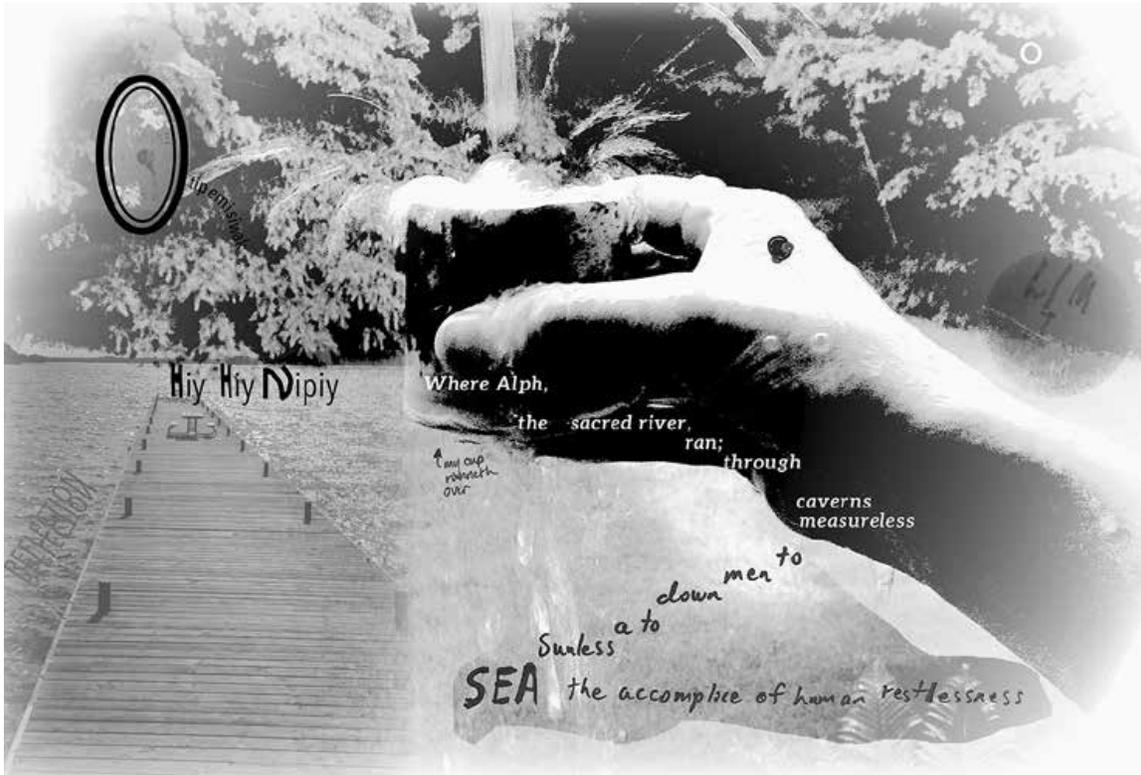
We sent a note to the CSArt subscribers to introduce our collaboration, and to encourage them to participate in an evening organized thematically around the subject of water. Susie made a series of delicate ceramic cups in mixed whites, blues, greys and in shades between, with water marks on them evocative of rain gauges, sinkholes and wells. Each ceramic cup would contain two “water words”—words Susie invited subscribers to send, by email, in advance. These words would also be used in the visual poems they’d make during our evening together. We included a list of questions aimed at helping subscribers think of words for their cups (and for conversation, later).

We designed and sent out a couple of postcards in advance of the event, combining poetry with photographic images of Susie’s cups, visually embedded within the images of local creeks and waterways. We each gathered a couple of water-based images from our own locales and enlarged them; each table received an image to work on over the course of the evening. As members of each table talked and became comfortable with each other (some had never met before), their conversations led to the creation of visual poetry.

Our collaboration began at the point where our practices diverge: in the visual components of our work, in the construction of language, of ceramics, and of visible and tactile forms. The CSArt project led to a shared desire to develop some of the ideas Susie and I had brought forward and discarded over our months of conversations.



Chris Turnbull and Susie Osler, *Water~Table* postcard, CSArt Ottawa, 2016



One of the pieces of collaborative visual poetry submitted by CSArt subscribers handwritten and rendered into text, 2016

Image by Susie Osler and Chris Turnbull

Collaborative Correspondences

Several years ago, I found text artist Bruno Neiva's exhibit, *Museum of Boughs: 1 room*, online. I thought then, and still do, that the exhibit was stunning, and as I found more of his work, I decided to email him, to correspond — about cubes (which I was working on in an outdoor setting), poetry, and built and found objects — and so we've been back and forth on email ever since, conversing.

Recently we decided to collaborate using a set of constraints as the foundation of a new collaborative piece. We developed twenty-one short pieces of poetry with no identifiable timeline for completion and no ordered sequence — one of us would send a piece, and the other would respond with its pair when it was possible.

Undertones collects the work that we created over distance, between 45.0164° N, 75.6459° W and 41.1579° N, 8.6291° W, through virtual correspondence. It was published by Low Frequency Press in Buffalo in the summer of 2019.

Our constraints were as follows:

- a) First comes a number. One of them addresses it and sets the pace. The other follows suit. They take turns randomly and carry on. This goes on and on, for over a year, until they reach twenty-one and finally turn their attention to notepads.
- b) The crease between each set of numbers, each piece, is a form of measure and hiatus. The numbers carry us forward. The pieces are unexpectedly in accord, are a bit unreal. Without summarizing, perhaps they hum in a sort of intercross of tangential, accrued perceptions harvested sensorily from daily and scattered appropriations. Marked treads.

within
 as the
 whose
 temperature
 jumps off CHART
 within
 as
 what
 but
 else
 ovenovella eggs

a little book, swiped at edge with a smooth rock.
 conglomerate. there is a call for the end
 of x, the word. air passages shunt dust
 or do not. compact metamorphic catalogues
 twiddle and invest in battery storage.
 let's all start over. with the copy of the
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 an ovenovellum egg may have an edge
 to smooth. a fact swiped at angle with pumice.
 newspapers reporting on dictionaries.

gain-a-prospect-enlist-support-for-an-idea-or-earn-a-referral

millstone:
the

2x2 stake, 8x10 paper, 8x10 plexiglass, 8x10 plywood, wood screws and marine seal

telepathic dogs
shun intel
view
footgarb,
detached—
in fact, hunger
for an evolution
or two.