

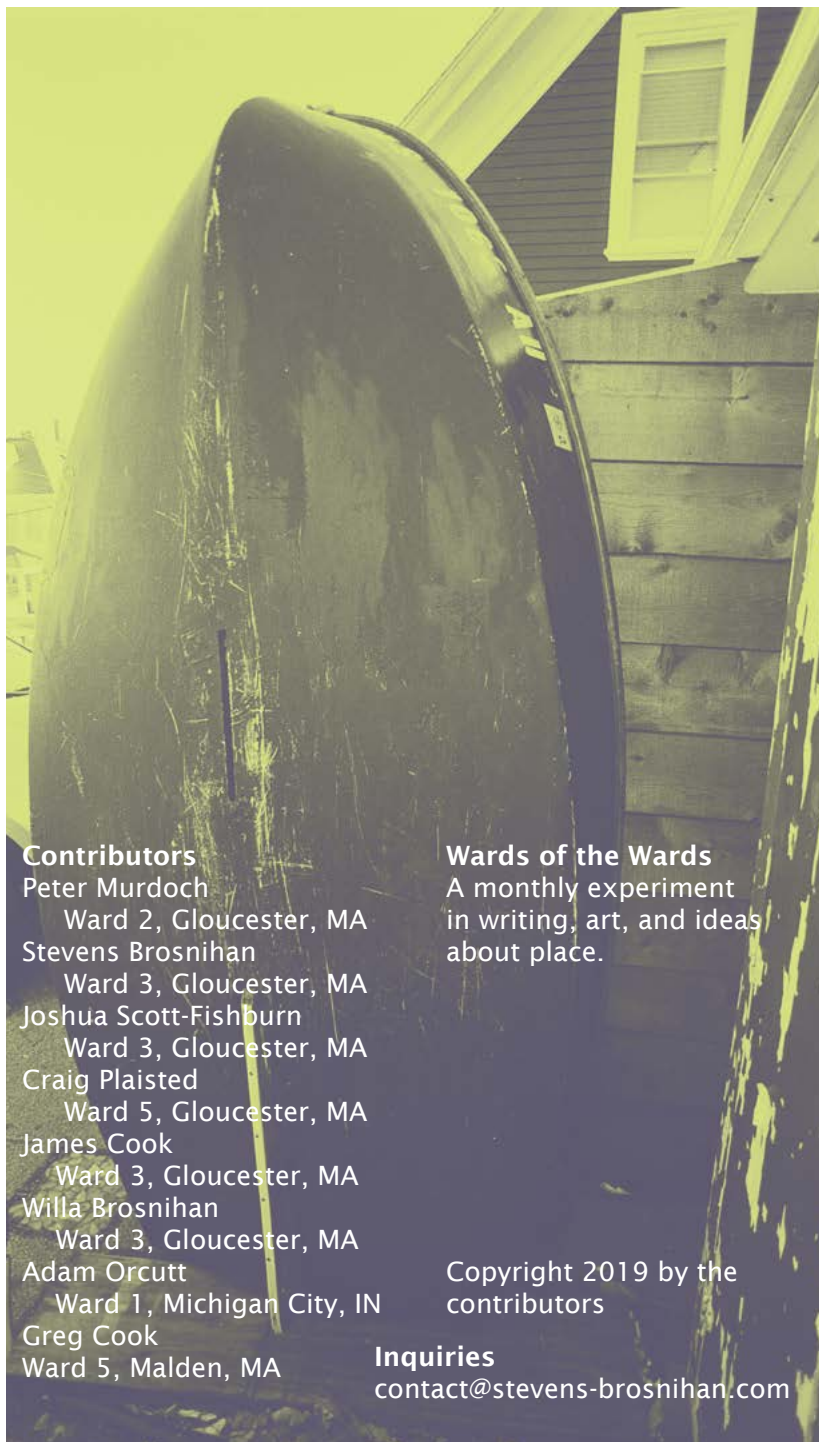
# Wards of the Wards

Make [sh]it and share it

Volume one, Issue three

March things, 2019





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#### Wards of the Wards

A monthly experiment  
in writing, art, and ideas  
about place.

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## A Way

CRAIG PLAISTED

The raindrops collecting on the window pane  
the smell of wet earth  
and here is goldfinch as it starts its molt  
into yellow  
here is the call of the titmouse  
living one day at a time  
an eye that is peaceful and aware  
pecking the sunflower seeds I left out yesterday  
above The scilla and snowdrops that hang their  
subtle blue and white heads  
over the drab yard.  
There is a way of waking up,  
I hope,  
with a calm body and a clear mind  
a way of not doing the things that do not need to be done.

## Tizzy

PETE MURDOCH

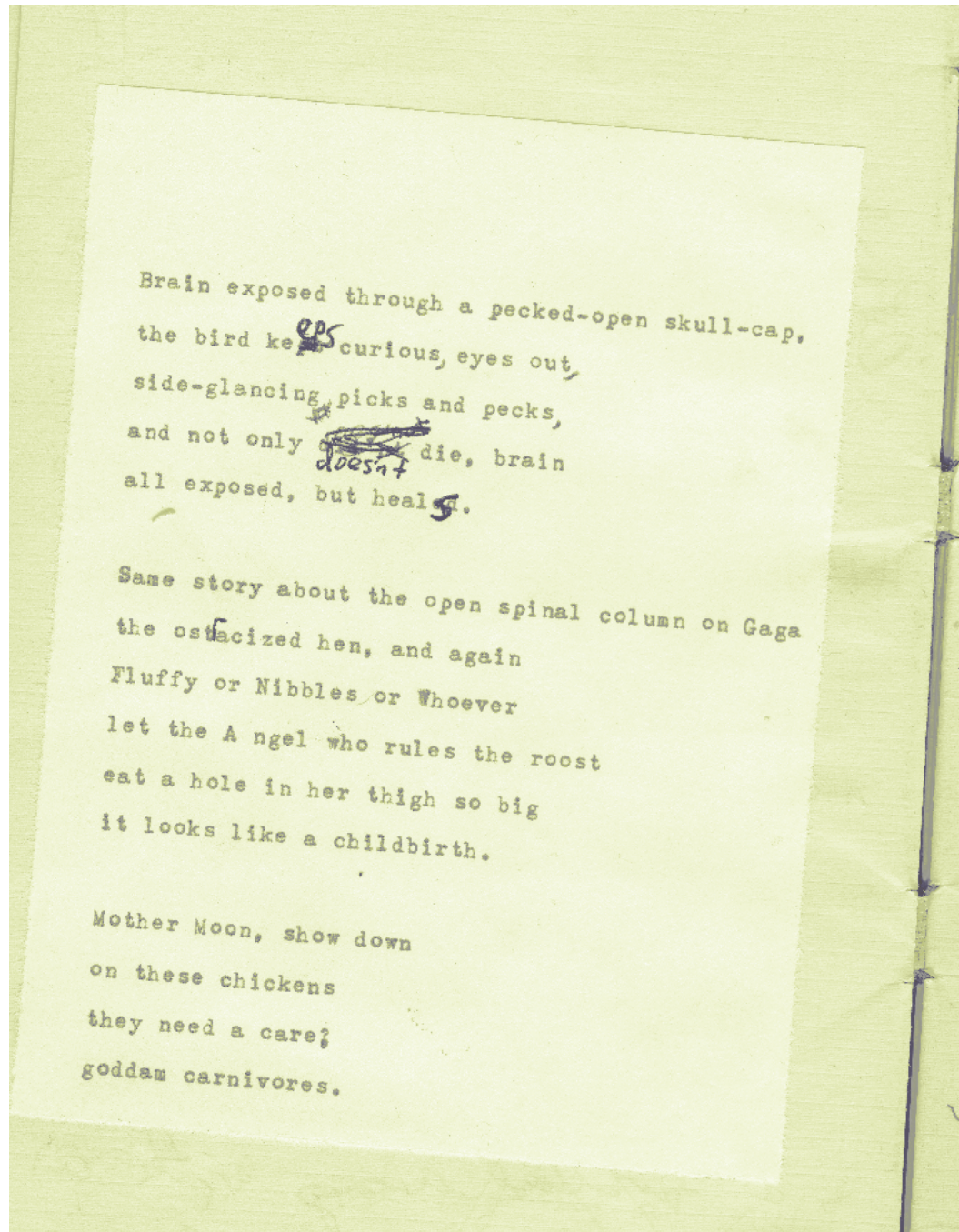
My brother calls it “flooded”  
when a person gets so hot and  
bothered  
that their eyes glaze over just a  
bit,  
and their voice gets louder,  
and they start jumping off topic  
a little  
and bringing in all kinds of other  
stories that might not  
have to do with the first one--  
the one that got them started in  
the first place.  
“They’re in their gator brain at  
that point,” he says.

I call it “popping-off.”  
Either name you give it there’s  
that feeling,  
like a sticky coat all over every-  
thing.  
The stink of it lingers.



## untitled

JOSHUA SCOTT-FISHBURN



## Nights Like

### This One

STEVENS BROSNIHAN

A good friend's ex tried to  
ignore me  
in the brick basement bar  
but I didn't let her  
we talked about not making art  
awkwardly, not awkwardly

a puffy man in a cerulean  
T-shirt  
moaned and masturbated into  
the urinal  
later, he tried to take me home  
with his girlfriend

I talked marriage and kids  
with another good friend  
how it's different  
than marriage without them  
we commiserated

One o'clock on a worm moon  
and a Thursday morning  
spring equinox  
last drafts from the Irish red  
after the Open Jam  
in unfamiliar Salem

the air is pleasantly crisp  
the groaner out past the dog  
bar  
moans a comforting warning  
to incoming boats  
and to the city  
each swell a moan

tight, icy rings around the  
searing  
circle of the moon  
bring a self-same system of  
memories  
of every other bright, clear

night  
just like this one, here in  
Gloucester  
in Salem  
nights in Dune Acres, Indiana  
Las Cruces, New Mexico  
Carbondale, Colorado  
Brandon, Vermont

## In March

### Waiting for Things

CRAIG PLAISTED

In March waiting for things  
for the tulips to attend their  
ascension  
through soft wet soil  
for the sun to invite the lying  
down onto the  
earth's bare body  
for the inspiration to begin  
something new in life  
to be open to and supported by  
the day in all it has  
or doesn't have  
instead of striving to make so  
much happen.  
I sit in a wooden chair and  
look out a glass window at  
feeding birds, at fields of flee-  
ing snow, at magnolia buds  
getting  
ready  
and walk up sunset mountain  
through the mud  
over the whispers of melting  
ice  
pouring gently  
joining the startled brown and  
white hawk flutterings  
evading my steps

in saying  
soon enough  
soon enough

## On Solitude

WILLA BROSNIHAN

Saw in your mother a falter,  
when one from the table across the isle dropped a napkin like a  
half living fish,  
too far from the polis of their dinner,  
to be retrieved,  
and good lord, before your mother could get it for them they  
were all looking at it and giving kind laughs,  
to the dropper of napkins.  
She was stuck in a limbo betwixt,  
knowing,  
whether it had landed close enough,  
for her,  
to giggle,  
or,  
if she like the narcissist saints should put her fingers so invisibly  
into others' mess and lift it towards them,  
saying "here is this disaster of yours,"  
to a quiet.  
Should she do what she should do,  
perform help?  
Cut herself from the scrim that is-

woman background to mom  
dropping her napkin at the  
asian fusion restaurant and,  
the whole family praising,  
the exquisite arc,  
of this singular clumsy.

What is she then,  
but a reminder of the guilt deserved by all who do,  
this unanimous forgetting.  
What is Jill,  
in the corner booth,  
but and argument when it comes to that white paper napkin.

In the end Jill decided,  
to leave the thing unturned,  
allow the family the peace of dis-influence,  
let them laugh,  
not know her or their loneliness,  
Jill,  
in a glance to me,  
gasped:  
"Do not break the egg"

## The Moss at Sedgwick Gardens

PETE MURDOCH

The moss,  
how lovely and green and fresh  
all the moss looked today  
at the down back trail  
behind long hill:  
the long walk,  
the twelve ounce and a breather one,  
with a few prayers thrown in  
and a chat with the god  
who probably finds certain heavens as achingly dull  
and handcuff-like as my coworker  
who found zen one day, and today said,  
"Heaven: that's nothing but a pair of handcuffs."  
She was really on about it.

But what I still kinda wonder about  
is that old saying from what's his name,  
about the carrion birds and the live body:  
They don't fly in circles over the one that makes it out—  
right?  
Like, that's no body at all to them.

So, maybe there's a no body out there  
somewhere in heaven's gutters,  
hiding from the cops. Or maybe  
there's a whole no thing world out there  
just hiding  
and growing  
and never dying  
along the ragged edges  
where no one walks,  
in the down back,  
along this stone-cold  
antebellum  
heart.







*Adam Orcutt*

## A prison break with imaginary numbers

Or, becoming human on Saturday

for/after Alan Sparhawk (“The future is prisons and math”)

JAMES COOK

Comedians, you’re not helping.

I am the “no” in a profligate nation,

which is a tempting but unuseful position to take

in a time of criminally misdistributed abundance.

Isn’t that right, Mr. Singer?

“You keep saying ‘right?’ I’m not sure you’re right,” he said,

playing coy. He was looking for ways to defend his son

for equating homosexuality with illness.

Ire quivers—the psychic price of restraint.

I had to go far away and let the rehearsed words do the talking.

Where do we go from here?

I’m queer as a Catholic son in a long-dreamt of bathhouse.

The key digital information is the super-blood-wolf moon enlarged to show texture.

But what is the lock?

We can’t help but have all sorts of ideas for our children,

but they have other ideas for themselves and are, it would seem, other people.

So fuck you! Happy fuck you!

You abhor anywhere people aren’t allowed to be sad.

It’s not that the comedians have let us down,

it’s that they can’t be who we need them to be.

Or, it’s not time to play the Fool but time to make them pay.

“By whim and by fancy, the Fool Collective amassed on the high ground of the city,

then descended on the Capitol” goes the fairytale I need:

“Wake up! Wake up!”

“Punch up! Punch up!”

Like so many woke rosters. O the coxcombs!

Don’t be a tool, Fool.

Don’t need a cock to tell me what time it is.

The wit of the Fool / to the writ as a tool...

I’ve been hanging around succulents so long that

when I saw my daughter’s braided hair on the table

and again later in the compost, I thought I could conjure her from the cutting.

“I’m gonna miss you when you’re gone./I’m gonna miss you when you’re gone.”

But by what magic the conjuring, Mr. Lansing?

I long to know the source beneath the house.

“Will you miss me—miss me when I’m gone)?

You’ve been gone for a year and another vernal occasion is coming,

like peeps on a moonscape marsh,

like mousy hair on mars,

like genderqueer time travel,

like a drip-drip icicle death on the compost-fed mycelia,

like the ghost apple of all your becoming,

like the lugubrious waves of winter at a distance breathing the air of nostalgia uncrashing, then

like a dandelion behind your ear.

I watched the cell wall break and the insides come out and then there was no inside—and no wall.

I pondered the divine materials for a long while after the dissolution.

What kind of order are we?

Do you hear me? I’m asking you.

I want to know something again as a way of being—before it’s over,

before this too falls apart...

I can’t imagine. But I like to pretend.



## Up Here The Air Is Full

CRAIG PLAISTED

From sunset mountain  
Gloucester is hiding under a  
settling fog  
little river pretending to be  
a far off view of the saint  
lawrence,  
uninhabited.  
Up here the air is full,  
brimming  
into mist  
dark green pines, heavy with  
moisture,  
sag over granite ledge  
water collects in elongated  
shining spheres on the buds  
and branches  
of oak and ash  
it seeps down the trunks of  
birch and beech  
down  
around the house the lawn is  
fully saturated  
footsteps mud and puddle up  
over dormant grass.  
where do I put the things I can  
not hold  
the things I do not know how  
to bare?

## Here's this town a way

JOSHUAH SCOTT-FISHBURN

I remember it  
waking up early  
to a woman outside  
in the snow  
miniskirt and wintercoat  
unzipped  
low to advertise her job or  
how summertime sounded  
before air conditioners  
shut the windows,  
“Where were you  
when I fell off the TV,”  
“Dio Mio,” and Davia  
Jenkins’ chaise lounge  
submerged in a kiddie pool,  
“Come on over and have a  
dip!”  
“Ah, you’re softer than a  
sneaker  
full of oozy, runny shit...”.  
Now the wholesale fishiness  
becomes a backward glance  
towards the bar where some-  
one  
brasses out “Don’t turn your  
back  
on me” while she works  
her hand on the crotch  
of a mustached man  
who smiles like he knows,  
now the Braggs are dead,  
no one begs at the door:  
for booze whores have gone  
to Craigslist and Davia sold  
her Bass Ave strip join  
to shithead condoizers and the  
hand-job  
at the bar is window-dressing  
for something more un-wild,  
and banal.



Stevens Brosnihan

## President, San Luis Obispo's Local ACLU

JOSHUAH SCOTT-FISHBURN

Hank Alberts could turn a pot  
a mug a jug  
into a laughing thing,  
his wide thumbs pressed in  
smiles where the slip-stuck handles  
met jovial curves.  
“Form follows function!”  
He swore, then, “Everyone get  
settled: sit back down,  
I’m going to tell you about the SUITS,”  
his sonorous Brooklyn cadence  
pleading 1st Amendment rights  
in jails for whores, and addicts,  
or homos, anyone at all suppressed,  
oppressed, or outside what most  
of our pimple-faced ceramics class  
considered Normal or Taboo.  
At lunch, anyone could do work  
in the studio, but Hank would not  
suffer movement from the chaise lounge  
centered carefully inside the atrium,  
outside the kiln,  
his faded coveralls unbuttoned,  
his hairy chest bared towards California  
sun, face upturned, eyes closed—  
his half scowl a secret smile,  
a mask in clay, baking.

## How to keep my name out of your mouth

for/after Ibi Zoboi and Octavia Butler

JAMES COOK

First, dump out the puzzle dust.

I’m not using quotations from my reading as often as I used to.

What’s the matter? What’s the trouble? What’s at stake here?

I’d like to talk with you about interspecies survival sex:

will the new us survive the parasitic larvae eating through the  
beaks of our young in the night?

On the other side of the tracks are a plastic café, wooden dart  
bar, and Thai restaurant with bubble

tea under one roof with a cocktail patio just outside the walls  
along the street.

Some people aren’t allowed, but I think we could change that.

A brick building at the triangle intersection is ideal but veiled  
on the other side of the tracks.

I can’t draw it from the unconscious into the here-and-now-  
with-me.

It’s a scene made of stools and chatter. I can’t draw.

And, anyway, some things can’t be made into a game and a  
game is a privilege.

Along the tracks I find two shoe stores where I thought there  
were none.

There is a man moving in the nearest store stacking boxes.

I cannot see into the other store. I can see both signs. I don’t  
remember the shop names.

I think of Larsen’s on Main Street which usually makes me sad—  
fading colors on towers of disused boxes.

But Larsen’s is at the heart of the city and that makes me hap-  
py—

people of unending variation pass by at all times of day and  
night—

and I’m happy that I’ve found these hidden-to-me shops on the  
other side of the tracks:

Who are the people here? They are neighbors but strangers.

I’m embarrassed not to have seen all of this before, though my  
notice lends to the scene nothing in

particular.

While I’m at it, I should look at trees and understand how they  
grow—which is not a metaphor.

...

...

...

“No cause, no cause,” she says.



## Another tear

STEVENS BROSNIHAN

Clothes I was given from dead mens' closets  
What's that about, so many folks giving me  
things of the dead.?

I read meanings into it  
The things were worn by my friends  
or strangers  
worn by people now ash

And as the things crumble  
as they tatter on my body  
I tremble and rejoice.



Maybe the internet  
will cheer me up....

03.23.2019

G. Cook

Greg Cook