

# big bog

notes on velocity

My dog died at 18 after living with me for 17 years. I left for the Minnesota north woods to lick my wounds. When she first came to live with us she would howl beside me as I played certain taut sounds on my cello.

After she died I learned what it meant to howl ::: felt a keening ::: in my sinew in the flesh that clings to bone through my resonant skeletal chest rising from the heart or gut or empty hands coursing through my bloody circulation.

I became an untethered body in the vast sky the dome of night the blanched and naked day.

The word "mine" - a word so extractive possessive ::: drawn from the body's marrow my other being my shadow companion my belonging to the wildness of the world.

I am writing this from a boardwalk into the Big Bog in northern MN near Upper Red Lake. An interpretive sign talks about the arduous process of photosynthesis - life transfer of nutrients - a slow churning circulation hard won cellular building.

One black spruce from here with a 2 inch diameter trunk had tree rings revealing an age of 127 years when it died. Slow growth ::: slow building.

I arrived here fast on a road that cuts through the 500-square mile peat bog ::: the largest in the lower 48 states.

Recent settlers tried to build homesteads through the bog ::: fought to make this land "productive" by cutting channels to drain the soaked acidic nutrient-poor soils. Their hard labors mostly failed.

There were natural backbone paths & waterways created by an ancient glacial history which indigenous people used to navigate this bog in a slower traversal.

The land is slow to "produce" but it does support a rich ecological history in its own slow manner.

The slow evolution of site allowed for a time scale of adaptation a weaving together of living beings mineral geologies mossy hydrologies.

Messy muddy scrubby "wasteland." That is what this type of landscape was called when I was growing up.

Caribou once roamed these parts. A favorite Math professor of mine had a side passion of trying to restore caribou to their historic homelands. He was my teacher for a graduate-level Mathematics class called "Real Analysis."



Day after day we would work through proofs together ::: climbing over the historic building blocks of modern mathematics. Arduous scrawls on the chalkboard / cross outs / dusty erasures.

Slow show your work symbol by symbol by therefore & ladders ::: narrow pathways perilous chains of reason.

We clambered over assemblages of proven concepts built new platforms on which to stand and build anew. Recipes of sub ingredients sub particles theorem confluence proofs constructed tents rose ideas joined to vibrate into vivid views. Glorious moments of luminous insight and then down again into murky troubled waters new use cases that added complexity ::: frayed certainty & infused our newly built harmonic structures with a spectral noise a cloudy weather static signal drift.

There was a joy in building intuition & elegance of thought ::: beautiful connections webs ::: a lattice of ideas & tools. The entire body gut to synapse to hand to language ::: a symbology of figuring frictions resonance echo. Scrawled systems landscapes maps.

I studied theoretical ecology ::: using mathematical models to explore to draw systems ecologies ::: flows & transfers ::: contours of change and motion distilled ::: variables tested  
Is this axis important? Does this parameter matter?  
How does the whole system ::: the tremulous web shift if I perturb this part?

One of the underlying values of mathematical modeling was transparency of assumptions ::: an honest tally of the simplifications made ::: the things left out  
An ethos of a humble articulation  
An openness to being wrong  
positing a test model system in an attempt to pull out critical structural elements ::: primary actors ::: critical junctures ::: pivot points that tip a system.  
Multivariate topologies dependencies complexities.

Diagrams mathematical models bibliographies hyperlink web spaces relational database structures back-of-the-napkin sketches journal entries book collections scrapbooks card catalogs file systems musical scores blueprints electrical drawings maps  
::: these all help us build a structure for thinking for synthesis. They reveal gaps and connections relations oppositions.

In the search for holy grail of efficiency speed standards cohesion we externalize our hand-wrought personal messy efforts to profit-driven proprietary tools.

Do we really want to cede that much?

Do we want to think without a body without an ecology a landscape?



Do we really want to accept an IV mind drip from a disembodied decoupled metallic on off digital opaque profit-driven carbon spewing resource depleting army of computers churning through plundered texts to deliver a flattened biased mimicry of thought?

What does it mean to think without hands? Or without prosthetics pinned to bone fused to shoulder sockets physical extension intention a body being transformed but still grounded in an "i" ::: a physical cogitation sparked cognition a rhythmic thinking weaving built on pulse or stride or breath. Messy ragged noisy reception tuned to sensory perception drawn from deep time coded memory swallowed and woven into a thick & arduous now ::: an embodied here.

Should humans surrender our messy changeable multithreaded turbulent matrix of thoughts dreams communications relations for a flattening steam roller LLM AI machine? LLMs collapse when trained on recursively generated data ::: This is precisely what they offer us in trade for our surrender ::: an impenetrable opaque dimensional collapse.

Should we externalize our tools thoughts desires be pressed into a mold a profile a groomable target ::: a vortex of accelerating mindless consumption?

Are we merely sensory appendages raw material creative cogs for an uber techne large-scale profit machine?

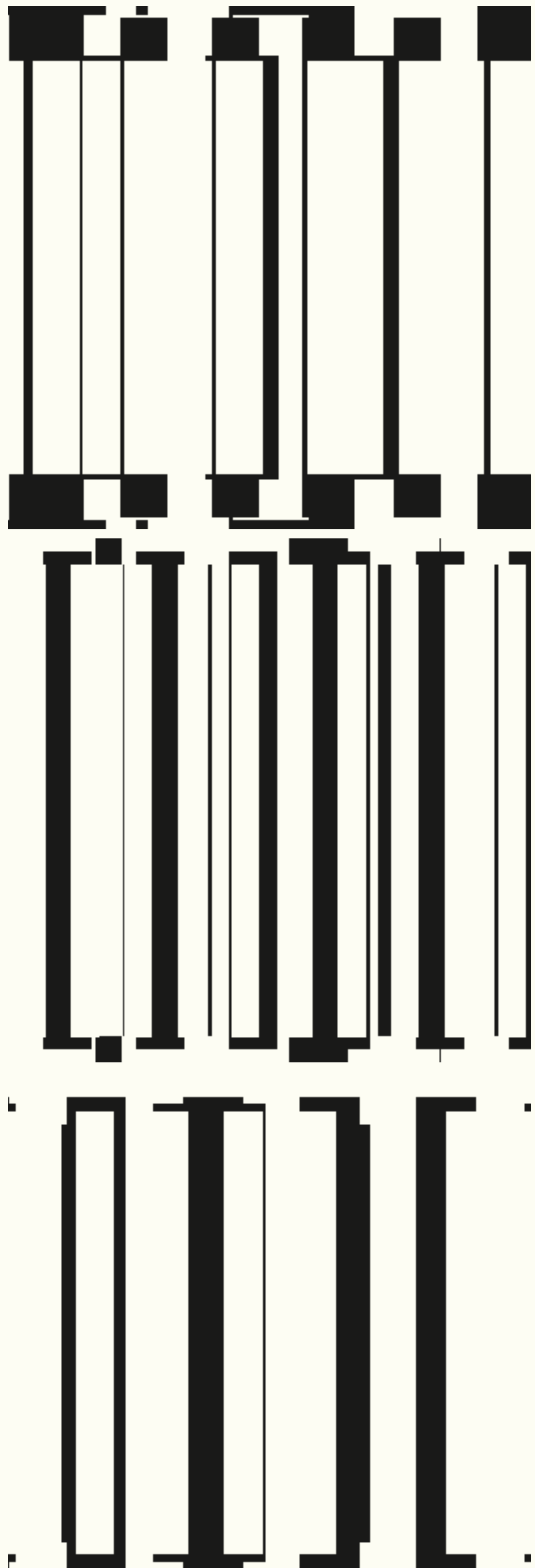
Should we relinquish our memory to the proprietary cloud Our money to digits Our maps our sense of space landscape place reduced to a single moment-by-moment Siri-fed line ...  
our engagement with time with calendar temporal context  
surrendered to next-day next-hour mobile alerts  
our memory to someone else's digital storage silo?

Should we flatten all our dimensions? Outsource all our senses? Be led about by a constructed single-click marketed digital desire?

Velocity isn't a virtue  
if our eyes are closed  
& we are lost  
pressing down hard on the gas pedal  
isn't a wise solution.

There can be a tyranny in acceleration.  
Velocity chaos  
a too-fast-can't-maintain-a-foothold stormy vortex can be a slippery slope a pathway to nothingness not being.

I drove along the car-screen navigation blue single line along the time ticking speedometer miles & arrived alone at the Big Bog ::: surrendered to its late Fall subtle shifting colors ::: an aching vibrant slowness.



The interwoven interdependent community here  
is hard won constrained by a slow nutrient  
carbon cycle a sluggish choreographic  
exchange an arduous decomposition mineral  
release a slow knot nutrient uptake  
photosynthetic building.

Humans extract accelerate and yet my own body  
coupled with its years of accumulated plastic  
exoskeleton forever chemicals surging through  
my bloodstream embedded in my tissues will  
decompose at an even more glacial pace.

the death of a tree  
a long resinous groan  
then heavy mass through air  
thud to ground  
through tangled branches of neighbor  
trees shrubs mossy landing  
back to minerals and carbon

my own death will leave an exoskeleton of  
plastics a mound of (un)de-composable  
artifacts of this consuming life  
or rather a geologically aching slow  
decomposition into toxic pellets colorful  
sand

this anthropocene this epoch  
a slowest of bogs  
a bog of all bogs  
a synthesis of oil  
of bogs an evolutionary challenge :::  
a strange mineralization ::: a scifi molecule  
of cyborg plastic morphologies  
a disjoint relation  
to evolutionary biologic time

a confounding of the organics to decomposers  
to uptake of minerals to photosynthetic tree  
of life a mimicry of the circle of life  
in chains of plastic necklace  
dinosaur bone to oil to plastics to  
planetary chokehold

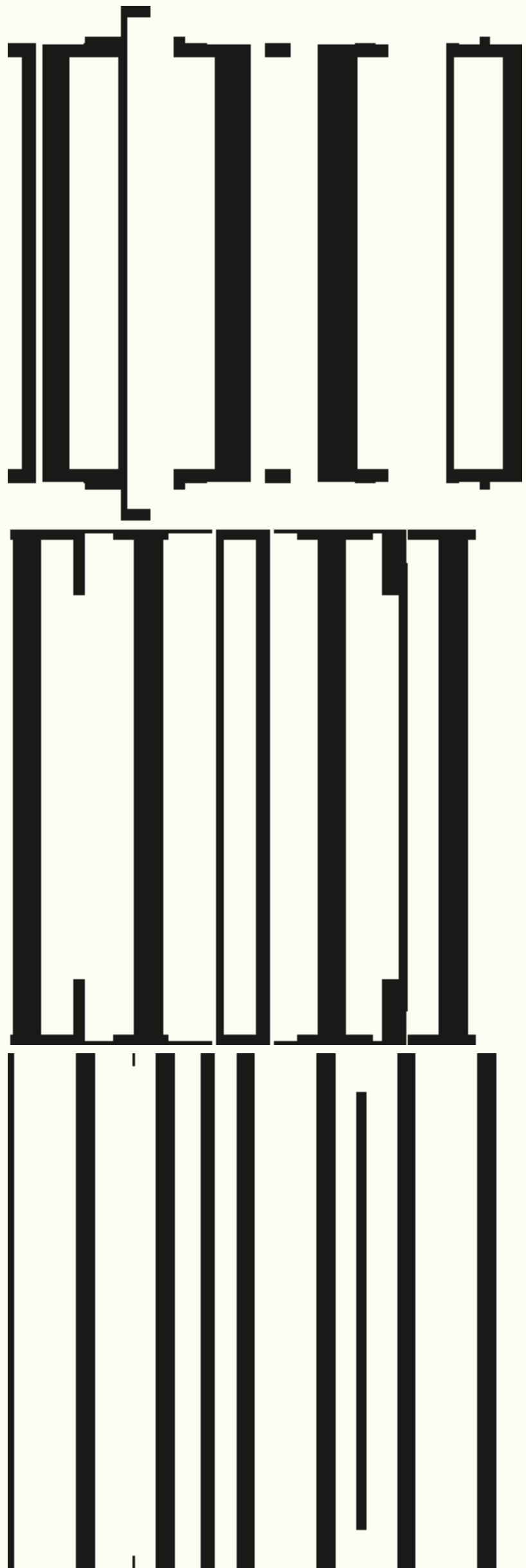
go slow  
velocity is not an end  
in & of itself  
the hare's acceleration into  
a void isn't better than the  
turtle wielding a loom & hoe

My dog's name was Sky.  
I held her carbon cycle mineral body one last  
time. Her fur & paws.

Sky was a walker a curious researcher  
a naturalist sniffer  
she broke the tether of my screen time.  
She showed me the value of uselessness  
wordlessness no pixels.

The singular relation  
there is no AI reconstruction  
you can't average this  
you can't generate this with a machine  
you can't exchange this for anything better.

This is not a data point a deviance to be  
averaged out  
to be swept  
away.



a circulation a synthesis a relation a  
physical memory an archive  
in my mind  
an imprint in my body my hands.

down streets & hallways  
walking ghosts stumbling no one sees each  
other greets each other.

Our communications are mediated  
triangulated filtered tracked redirected  
harnessed through centralized turnstile  
sorting machines cataloged by the amazon  
buy-button clearinghouses algorithmic  
friendships  
& warfare

we cross the threshold  
from the land of organic analog vinyl film  
paper ink  
to the pixelated ad-laced streaming digital  
virtual world  
across  
the river styx  
a boatman  
a coin a journey

Here in this diverse generous generative bog

the wind in my hair i hear a tree slowly fall  
into the embrace of a glacial-etched damp &  
mossy tomb

A smell of pungent green.



\*\* presentation for Alexis Elder's PHIL 3242  
Values & Technology class

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