

Lyric Essay as Constellation

I recognize that many experimental writers avoid the use of analogy or metaphor. Nonetheless, for me, the lyric essay is shot through with the sort of semi-coherence that comes from recurring analogy, from an attention to language for its own sake, from the pleasures of the associative around an ill-defined center or shape. I envision a constellation, perhaps, bits (stars) that looked at long enough produce a coherent figure. Lyric essay allows not only for the musical qualities of language associated with "lyric," but also for a stance akin to lying; that is, the lyric essay has flights that may start with the "event" (a mouth, a dog, a Boris, a woods, a Mediterranean) but that spin out from it not toward narrative or fact, not toward information separate from the words, but toward constructed and artificial shape dependent on analogy. That's in part what I mean by invoking the idea of lying as a gesture toward the often unexpected possibilities resident in such writing. Modernism has established dependence on artifice (collage, the found object, intertextuality) and the lyric essay takes this "given" and allows for more attenuation. One is in an artificial "world," tethered by light cord to factual bits: there is a place called Pico Boulevard in LA where the lights of the city blot out the sky, although it does not entirely accord with what I might write about it. One follows a line of thinking not expected, traditional, journalistic, narrative, or productive, except insofar as this sort of production is what revives attention in ways opposed to what Wordsworth recognized as an oppressive world of "getting and spending." The lyric essay is as wasteful as extended listening or seeing, as if there were such a thing as music of the spheres. What is produced offers a free movement away from the main event as each star is simultaneously far-flung and also part of the whole Cassiopeia shaped in this instance like a distended *W* or crown.