Manifesto for *Selfies with the Moon*

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1.

"For Proust," Susan Howe writes in her preface to Emily Dickinson's *The Gorgeous Nothings*, "a fragment is a morsel of time in its pure state; it hovers between a present that is immediate and a past that once had been present." A moment that is neither now nor then. The "instant" is a momentary lapse that can only be understood through reflection. Each time we consider the "new" instant, the most recent "now," we must discard the previous one.

2.

The poems compiled in *Selfies with the Moon* exist as scraps, fragments. If poetry is language at its most economical, these pieces must be distilled even further. In an attention economy, where our senses are already divided, is there even a space for poetry? Can we make time for the poem?

3.

My project was to write for the attention economy, and it found its home on Instagram, because, like so much of social media, it is predicated on small doses of pleasure[1]. "Instagram" as a word, is a portmanteau of "instant" and "telegram"[2]—a name that explains how we, as users, should treat its content. Ostensibly the photos we share are snapshots of our lives in the moment, the instant, and they are used to communicate, like a telegram. It's not a place for high art.[3] It's a space for visual ephemera—clever, funny, touching, beautiful, even blurry ephemera, but ephemera nonetheless. And given that media determine our situation, Instagram afforded me the necessary constraints to create poetic scraps.[4]

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[1] We "like" and "favorite" posts because we find them, on some level, pleasurable. Further: as a poet, I figure pleasure is the least I can give for a reader.

[2] From Instagram's FAQ: "When we were kids we loved playing around with cameras. We loved how different types of old cameras marketed themselves as "instant" - something we take for granted today. We also felt that the snapshots people were taking were kind of like telegrams in that they got sent over the wire to others - so we figured why not combine the two?"

[3] Though we may find that some accounts post gorgeous photographs, they often feel out of place in between someone's lunch and another's selfie. Moreover, the filters afforded by the Instagram app do not so much mimic the style of high-end cameras as they do retro polaroid cameras—cameras that I associate with the production of family photo albums, not photography hanging in museums. And while my intention is not to debate the status of the high and low brow, I will concede that polaroids have been seen hanging in museums. At best, the line b/w high and low art is blurry, maybe even completely nonexistent.

[4] I briefly considered housing this project on Twitter, but discovered that the 140 character limit to be too verbose. I needed less space to work in.

4.

One cannot write a sestina in a tiny square frame and expect it to be legible on a smart phone. One cannot write a sestina in a tiny square frame and expect to have it read all the way through. Especially on a smart phone.

5.

Part of my process was an attempt to update the spirit of Dickinson's envelope poems. To create a poetic status update, a "fleeting message"[5] (as Jen Bervin called ED's work). The poem should arrive, provide some momentary respite, and maybe, one would hope, some illumination, and then finally recede into the background.

6.

In attempting to work in the spirit of *The Gorgeous Nothings*, I've taken photographs of poems—a decision that both allows me to constrain the work, but also make the poetry indistinguishable from the image. These pieces are as much about their language as they are about their visual presentation. They exist as much as poems as they do as images—perhaps they exist as prayers.

7.

Prayer is one of the first wireless discourses.[6]

8.

Let's get real: *Selfies with the Moon* contains no actual selfies[7] nor moons[8], unless you consider the pronoun "I" as enough of a subject. The same goes for the word "moon." But writing is an extension of its author, so what's on the page, on the screen, can be claimed as a representative of me.

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[5] Bervin also described ED's work as epistolary, a move I've borrowed quite literally. The poems in *SWTM* often call out to others, to the moon itself, to Lorca. This was a conscious decision to provide a perspective on my poetic lineage. Even the choice to write short poems I think of as a nod to Dickinson's ability to distill language to its sparest, most evocative parts.

[6] Consider how when posting on Twitter or Instagram you are sending your desires into the nebulous internet. You have no idea whether your declarations will be answered, spurned, or ignored.

[7] The notion of the selfie breaks down when there is no human subject, but the photos still play into the tropes of the form. The glances of the typewriter are meant to mimic the outstretched arm of the selfie-taker. The selfie-taker's arm suggests that subject and producer are one in the same. The only thing absent is the camera. Here, the typewriter, the page, any scratched out pen marks, all try to point to the medium as producer and subject in one.

[8] Part of the project is to disrupt the expectations we place on technology. The typewritten manuscript is not the final piece of art. It is only when it becomes a photograph with a filter that it transforms. Moreover, the fact that that a poem appears in someone's Instagram feed should be somewhat disruptive. We're expecting pictures of food, of vistas, of dogs, etc.

9.

My one nagging frustration with *The Gorgeous Nothings* is its heft as a text. If ED's envelope poems were meant to be these lithe, energetic poems, why must they be constrained by this cumbersome book? The answers are easy to come by, but I can't quite put my itch to rest. To foreground the ephemerality of *SWTM*, the poems should only exist on the Instagram account. They shouldn't exist physically[9], because any page, no matter how light, would produce a sense of posterity.[10]

10.

Dickinson wrote in a letter: "Would I write a telegram? I asked the Wires how you did, and I attached my name." I could very well respond to her question, calling back through circuitry, through signals, through time, back to Dickinson—I would capture a response with an Instagram and perhaps (anticlimactically) receive a little heart in return.

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[9] But despite this claim, and others I may have made saying that these poems should not be made into prints, I've changed my mind. Conceptually, the argument may work, but in practice I'm no longer happy with it. In keeping with the social media aspects of the project, *SWTM* shouldn't be artistically blackboxed. If anyone wants a print of any of the poems or wants to manipulate it for their own art—they should be able to.

[10] Here is where the argument may fall apart: I could imagine that a poem (any poem, not just *SWTM*), if it were somehow printed on incredibly delicate tissue paper, that it would become *more* valuable, not less. If the paper were within moments of disintegrating, lost forever, that some part of us would be moved to preserve the object, not treat it as transitory.