

Under Western Skies

This poem performed and written for the Perth Poetry Festival event [Under A WA Sky: An Evening of Eco-poetry](#)... there's an audio (low, bassy drones with a stretched chainsaw recording) that goes with it. Note that the line: "producing, consuming..." is repeated a few times - acting as mantra of sorts throughout. Its a longish piece, designed specifically for this event - about 10 minutes. I read it slowly, deliberately. Each word with gravitas. (antipoet.info/under-western-skies)

hot for this time of year, she said

under scalpel thin sky here

we cut deep holes in the earth

expand without sovereign consent, we rip

as if there were no core

wider and heavier than expected

and the growling western dirt

glows a dense white

in the cloudless breeze

of piling corpses

it stops raining

yet its that cleansing titanium flavour

in the fluorescent grey bathroom light

as we bulldoze as many trees as possible

before winter

gazing into the blind face of god

we farm violently to the black dust

as the koolbardie warbles us to end it, begin it

and the red-tails chant to the chainsaw
and the yonga runs from the remnant
and we take turns to burn great piles of trees to ash
and the smoke makes its way to the coast
and we burn, and dig
burn
and dig

producing, consuming...

in the embers of century-old trunks
the endless stories crackle and snap
lose their shape
and the sky goes red

in relentless abiotic suburbs
we stand and hide, cower in the dunes
between the gaps in rendered brick n tile
limestone and colourbond
bowed heads, doors shut
sealed inside remote garage-door bliss
and watch ourselves inside screens
afame, in competition

producing, consuming...

listening to the water table rise
can you hear it?
the lilting tarmac
melts like a superphosphate dream

and we're killing each other softly
in a doom scrolling trance
unable to breathe each other's air anymore
the couch-grass browning out there
in the sprinkler-ban rust
the essence of cut lawns
captured instant and seamless
on a collapsing sunday
we instagram delightfully
sharing the smouldering plastic until the dusk
prodding the incinerators, judging the deep tones
bathing in the charcoal life-cycle
a shadeless existence

producing, consuming...

and we are hyper-connected and endless
like lovers fixed in vast data-centre stares
overlooking freeway lanes
and poly farmer tunnels
standing the man on the mark like a statue

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reaching for the next
bloated floating
kicked leather sailing
50 metres out
buckets of chips aloft
artificial beef pies waving at the camera
black wardong pecking at the frustrated roadkill
raising capital in recycled beer glass remedies
my corporate logo spinning to the million-dollar
daily concussions of life

producing, consuming...

until the radio cuts out
and the blue-tooth bass cuts in
in guttural thuds from the car next door
under the floor, into your bones
the tuarts fall to the understory
and we cheer in packs
crushing everything beneath
through the posts for a rushed behind
or over the goal umpires hat
and we watch chicken fry in vast banks
free the secret bacon from sow stalls
and sing the jingles as we sleep
for the toothpaste glory

oh the salinity

producing, consuming...

the pool glitters at night

reflecting southern stars

the sound of the filter whirrs into dawn

that air-conditioner mantra

the iron ore calling our name on the breeze

pleading for our machines

from the petroglyphs

producing, consuming...

can we gather in rebellious extinction?

we shut down some streets

and they scream at us from car windows, skyscrapers

hotel balconies

as we glue each other to the cops

a baton at your neck, mask down in radical defiance

whispering impolitely at the elected few

waiting for their bones to bleach

like patriarchy dieback

until the perfect vaccine for toxic footprints

arrives into my thickening skin

producing, consuming...

now that fenceposts, razor-wire
and synthetic heat-sinks define us
we roam this stolen noongar boodjar
a rabbit-proof wall
of ecosystem bankruptcy
a flowing petrochemical city
risen from the coastal plains
and in the bitumen narrative
we are free

producing, consuming...

we walk the banksia woodland
as it dissolves to brittle fragments underfoot
our four-wheel-drive kicks the dust
off-road bike ruts
cut scars across the face
turn forests into driveways for logging trucks
and chained to trees
we sow the gold and wait
for the burn season
to reap us

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producing, consuming...

here in the heat of late bunuru
i can't seem to shake
this carpark identity crisis
as traffic banks up into the street
on cheap fuel Mondays
we wade the crystal facade
waiting for jesus to fix it
or the government
to make twisted promises
a wheatbelt salt prayer
a second coming of buddha
driving the blade to the ground
a seedling in the tube
a piercing slice to the lake's crust
in a sunset worth its own
fluctuating weight in bitcoin

producing, consuming...

in this violence of us
we bury each moment
each leaf and microscopic biota
under the weight of the past
the guilt of a bitter future

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our visceral century of capital
forgetting that property is theft
that land is not owned

producing, consuming...

she said,
can we stop?
just sit
and stop?

can we rest in the median strip
between shadows and concrete
glass and steel
smokestacks and cranes
cars and trains
under the towers of flat screens
without the interest-free phone screen
without a flexible no-lock-in, month-to-month contract
without apps to assist your corporate development
may we just sit in the collapsing canopies
outside the homes without trees

can we
sit and stop
stop