Winter Will Keep Us Warm

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I have been reading Wayne Koestenbaum's most recent book *My 80s and Other Essays*. In an essay in memory of Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick, he talks about her use of the poetic concept of *enjambment*, a term, as a non-poet, I hadn't ever encountered. Koestenbaum: "Enjambment—reaching toward the brim, and then exceeding it."

In poetry, (I am going admit that for the purposes of time and deadlines, I googled these definitions) it can mean: the continuation of the sense of a phrase beyond the end of a line of verse (*Encyclopedia Britannica*); a straddling (*Collins English dictionary*); the running-over of a sentence or phrase from one poetic line to the next, without terminal punctuation; the opposite of end-stopped *(The Poetry Foundation)*.

T.S. Eliot uses it in the first stanza of The *Wasteland*:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.

Apparently, William Carlos Williams' *whole* poem *Between Walls* is an enjambment:

the back wings
of the

hospital where
nothing

will grow lie
cinders

in which shine
the broken

pieces of a green
bottle

Even still, perhaps the most meaningful definition, for me, is this: the breaking of a syntactic unit or a clause over two or more lines without a punctuated pause *(Princeton)*. I have a degree in Linguistics—Chomskyian Linguistics at that, where ideas about language structure always are applicable on a larger scale (apparently Kosofsky Sedgewick also liked to stretch the capacity for theory by applying them across disciplines). Notions of scope and hierarchy, in linguistics, are crucial to understanding how meaning functions. In what is known as Government and Binding Theory, we are able to parse complex sentences because there is an internal structure to syntax where despite distance, meaning is still retained.

This idea of stretching is interesting when we consider this physical break that happens each summer when we leave Skowhegan. This time of the year, this letter every year, is a moment when we reflect on the power of that break—what it means to come home, what it means to reestablish a practice, what it means to be without proximity to the people and ideas with whom and with which we have just spent nine-weeks.

I have been thinking about this new space that Skowhegan finally owns for a long time and what it means to be part of a place like Skowhegan—why it's so transformative in its bounded time, its bounded community (and when I first arrived *if* it is, indeed, that transformative). What is the scope of that transformation and is it limited to the time we are in Maine or does it exist only as a ghost trace (another linguistics term)? Is it a place? Is it a nostalgia? Or is it an idea and a commitment that can live outside a specific location, time, or group of individuals? As each summer draws to a close, I tell the participants that the most important part of Skowhegan is that it ends, but perhaps that's not actually true. Yes, being in Maine ends, and being with a closed set of 85 people ends, but we also know that there exists an historical thread that links us all together (and is frankly, our foundation) and a telescoping to a future of artists that we don't yet know that will also share in this experience. *Enjambment.*

This all sounds like abstract romance—so as is the favorite question we ask during the admissions process: where is the content? As you will read in subsequent pages, the notion of community is not enough to serve as content at this point. I will be honest that when I invited Park McArthur and Dan Levenson to write about the new space in the context of what it could offer our community, I had specific ideas of what I wanted them to say. I wanted it to be a challenge to us all to think about uses of space, to consider how we, not Skowhegan with a capital S but all of those who are part of Skowhegan, could use the space and this moment to reconsider our participation in the life of Skowhegan. To activate those Gramscian theories that were so popular this summer, where we as an engaged community have the opportunity to set our own discourse and ask the questions about how we talk and think about contemporary practices. When Dan and Park returned with the very staunch and very necessary challenge to notions of community, I felt a little deflated, and frankly a bit naïve.

As I think about the moments on Skype with the two of them, trying to make my ideas and wants clear, and listening to each of their specific challenges and in negotiating differing opinions, struggling with up against these two great thinkers, I realized this discussion, perhaps even more so then the end result, is exactly why I believe that this is new space is so necessary—beyond the pragmatics of office rent and square footage, beyond simply not wanting to haul chairs across the city to offer a lecture, and beyond clogging up the existing and abundant environment of "cultural production" with more programming. This type of frustration and challenge and patience is *actually* what the transformation really is about. We cling to Skowhegan because we cling to the freedom of ideas that is so, so difficult to find outside—because of time, because of money, because of the market, and because of how we relate to each other in the real world.

This space, as a proposed *enjambment* of whatever the hell it is we do for nine-weeks in Maine each summer, is an intellectual space and gathering of generosity, and in many ways an expression of care for the practices, ideas, and explorations of those we may not know, but who are likewise in this nebulous space beyond the brim and who have also experienced this hiccup from one line to the next. While this is not an experiment in social practice or a way to fix the world through artmaking as social justice, it is our job as engaged thinkers to push beyond what we know. That is what I think Skowhegan, from June to August is really good at. And as an organization of artists who are, whether through mythology or reality, the most forward thinking in our field, we should commit to that constant process of inquiry. It doesn't always end up the way you think it will, and that of course, is the point.

Skowhegan is once in a lifetime…it is summer…it is 65 people, but what we learn from Skowhegan, what we can extend out of Skowhegan can now, in winter, keep us warm.