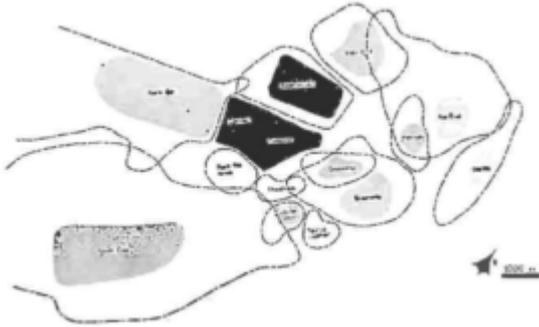


“Brief worlds are my favorites”: A Conversation with Parker Tettleton

written by Joe Milazzo | June 17, 2020



Alternately mellifluous and discordant, Parker Tettleton’s [This Is A City](#) (Ravenna Press) is as much an act of listening as it is writing.

Or, to put it another way, there’s a kind of echolocation – thus a constant recentering – at work in these pages. Readers may well ask themselves: “Are these syntactical bursts emergent? Are they instruments wielded by a speaker sounding out their evolving relationships to the world (of objects, of nature), their self, and others? Or are they reflections? Pulses and frequencies snatched free from the interference we all muddle up as we use words to orient ourselves?” The answer is: “Probably both simultaneously.”

But difference doesn’t melt away in all that *This Is A City* encloses between its covers. Instead, difference becomes primarily interstitial therein. Improvising within such tight spaces requires more than facility. As Tettleton’s writing reveals, making the provisional meaningful under such circumstances can elevate technique to the status of a modality.

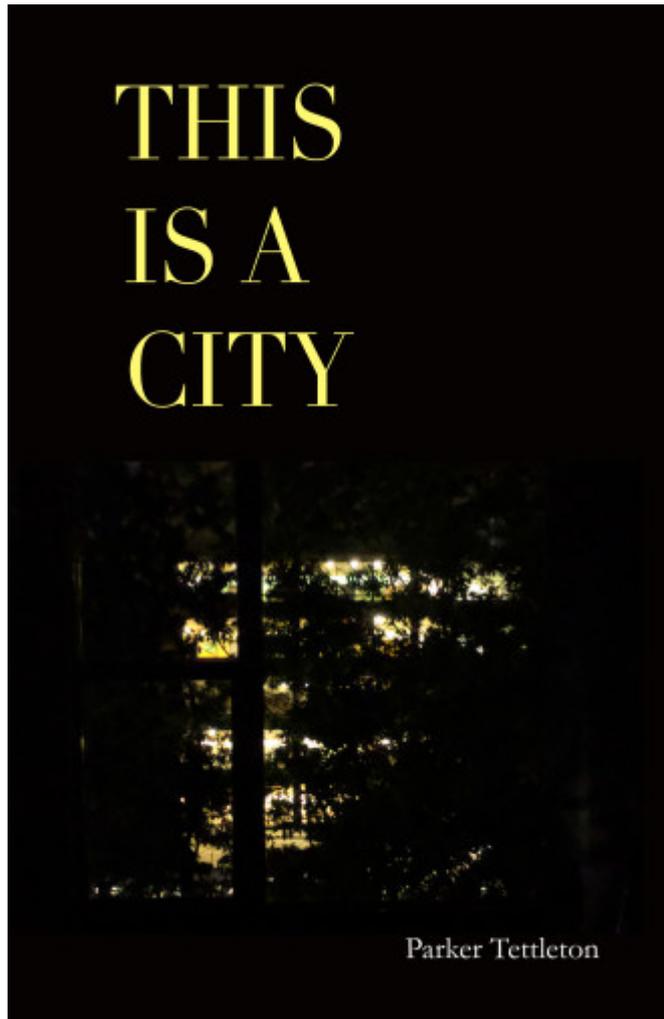
The following questions and answers were exchanged between May and June of 2020.

– JM

“This Is A City is a world of genius parts. Like puzzle pieces, each inhabiting its own beauty, making an expansive whole. Each we, each you, each I in this universe adds to the collective whole of this book, along with each thrilling detail. The normal everyday lives of these characters become not normal, not everyday, but full of linguistic and extraordinary surprises. In this book, Parker Tettleton creates a new and original collage of worlds, of words, a lovely and refreshing mix, a geographical twist.” – Kim Chinquee

“From the brilliant and mad mind of Parker Tettleton comes This Is A City, a metropolis of postmodern prose poems constructed out of the building blocks of life: desire and love latticed with interminable strangeness and vegan cuisine. If this book were an actual city, I’d pack my bags fast and speed

through the night towards it, but since it's not I'll reread it instead." –
Ryan Ridge



1) Let's start with the title. Read as a story and nothing else, one might be tempted to call this book *This Is A Marriage*, or *This Is A Union*. But that would ignore the questions of citizenship – and, more broadly, belonging – playing around the edges of the text. Not to mention the subtle fluidity of the text's first and second persons, both singular and plural. How do you see the city serving as a governing metaphor for this book?

I see this city as welcoming, unarmed, cautious, anxious, with & in love.

2) The very first sentence in the book reads: "The first sentence is the weekend calculator of your dreams." This construction becomes something of a leitmotif as *This Is A City* progresses. And, as it does, it expresses less and less self-reference. That is, the sentences being indexed in this manner often appear to exist outside the text we're reading, and maybe in a primarily verbal rather than scriptorial space. (We know this because those sentences are sometimes quoted in full or in part.) What has happened to occasion here? Are these poems recollections, like entries in a journal or chapters in a memoir? Or, as the prevalence of present tense suggests, do these poems have a more documentary relationship to a narrative present? Is the voice in these poems a consciously poetic voice, or a subvocalization – to borrow from Nathalie Sarraute, reverberations of a kind of poetic tropism?

I can't claim an occasion. I am often torn between now & before.

3) What ultimately sways you toward the one? The other?

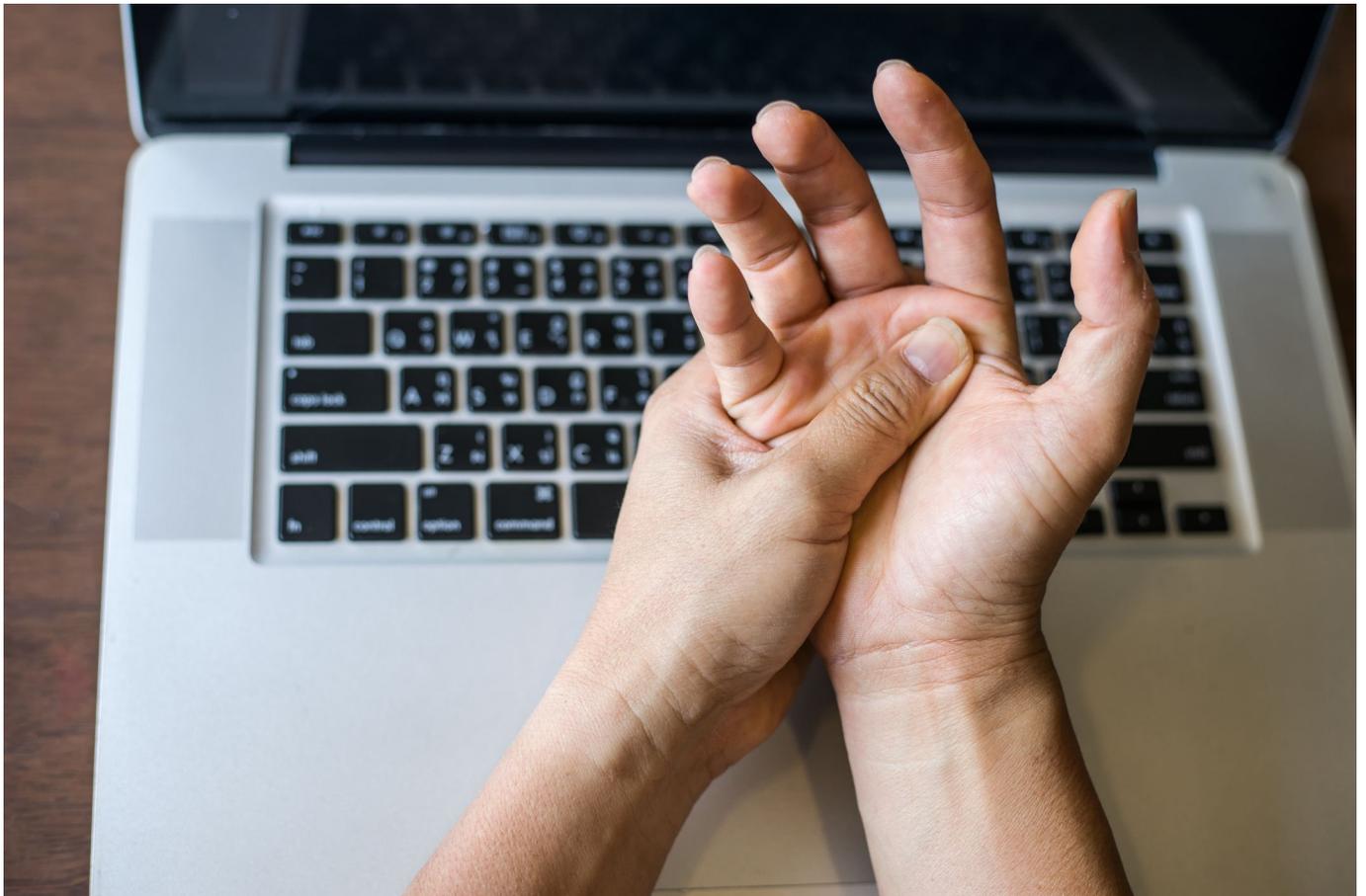
I'm looking to surprise myself – everything I write is instinctive & visceral. I'd rather blend past, present, & future than separate.

4) What is your favorite preposition? Why?

Notwithstanding – it has an elegance about it.

5) *This Is A City* is brief. Semantically, it's probably best described as "approachable." But these prose poems are radically compressed. Unpacking each sentence and each paragraph takes time. How slowly – or in how many sittings – do you hope readers make their way through this book? Assuming you think about such things, how do you feel about the incommensurability of the time it takes to write a book versus the time it takes to read one?

I hope there are quite a few sittings, mostly repeated ones.



6) Whether or not it's appropriate, when is repetition most useful? To what end?

Repetition is its own standard of belief – there is no end that I am confident of.

7) On p. 40 of *This Is A City*, after the poem entitled "Anderson," I have scribbled this note: "Togetherness apart; constitutive of being together are

these degrees of apartness, wedging their distance with conditional verbs." One thing I admire about this text is that it does not attempt to nullify personal identity. Nor does it use standard narrative tropes to dispense transcendence. (In the collection's final poem, "I Hear Everything I Hear," the speaker declares: "I want you to know everything about me – I don't, I really, really don't.") Is *This Is A City* a love story, the story of one very specific experience of love, or a story about what love might be?

It's a love story written for all of us.

8) How would you respond to a reader who said they felt barred from this city, this us, the love your book elaborates? How might you direct them to an entry point, and what would that be?

I trust & am appreciative of all reactions. It's a city to me, but that doesn't mean it translates for you, & I want to hear & acknowledge what makes a city for each & every one of us. I do not plan books, & treat each piece the same in terms of practice, but usually the last few are the ones I am fondest of.

9) Two poets kept coming to mind as I read *This Is A City*: Robert Creeley and Joseph Ceravolo. The former as a love poet and skilled magnifier of minutiae. The latter as a diarist (especially in his later work) but, more importantly, a poet who, even as he destabilizes syntax, somehow preserves recognizable emotion. (This is perhaps what is most songlike about Ceravolo's most experimental poetry.) Did any particular poets, writers, or creators in other métiers guide or inspire these poems? If you didn't feel a specific influence in the act of writing these poems, do you detect any now in retrospect/now that you've become a reader of this work?

I miss David Berman so much.

10) What aspect of prose composition do you find most frustrating? Most worthwhile?

Art is the least frustrating thing. I think about life & call it a privilege.

11) One of my favorite moments in *This Is A City* occurs early on, in "Is a Christian," where we encounter these lines: "The way the world works begins all over again each day just in case you're living." Which interests you more, being or becoming? Contingency or expectation? The lucid or the opaque?

Brief worlds are my favorites.

12) What are you working on right now? How has your work on it been informed by your experience writing *This Is A City*?

There is a companion piece to *This Is A City* called *OR*. I'm currently working on a manuscript called *Classic Plastic*.

[Parker Tettleton](#) is a vegan Leo living in Portland, Oregon. His other books are *Please Quiet* (Ravenna Press, 2018), *Ours Mine Yours* (Pitymilk Press, 2014), *Greens* (Thunderclap Press, 2012), and *Same Opposite* (Thunderclap Press, 2010).