A NEW SILENCE

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ALSO BY JOSEPH MASSEY

Full-length books:
Illocality (Wave Books, 2015)
To Keep Time (Omnidawn, 2014)
At the Point (Shearsman Books, 2011)
Areas of Fog (Shearsman Books, 2009)

Chapbooks:
Minima St. (Range, 2003)
Eureka Slough (Effing Press, 2005)
Bramble (Hot Whiskey, 2005)
Property Line (Fewer & Further, 2006)
November Graph (Longhouse, 2007)
Out of Light (Kitchen Press, 2008)
Within Hours (Fault Line Press, 2008)
The Lack Of (Nasturtium Press, 2009)
Exit North (Book Thug, 2010)
Mock Orange (Longhouse, 2010)
Another Rehearsal for Morning (Longhouse, 2011)
Thaw Compass (Press Board Press, 2014)
An Interim (Tungsten Press, 2014)
What Follows (Ornithopter Press, 2015)
Present Conditions (Hollyridge Press, 2018)
Five Poems (Tungsten Press, 2018)
A NEW SILENCE
“We all have moments with the dust, but the dew is given.”

—EMILY DICKINSON
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For the Margin

Night leaves in its wake
a voice I don’t recognize;
an echo flagging
in cold, bent
by cold

and the dull thud
of a 40 watt bulb.

At the seam
of panic
dawn erodes
the hour

while I wait for you,
the nameless,
to pronounce
the hollow

of what I’m not—

the poem
you already are.
SAMPLER
SAMPLER
The Reprieve

A week
that freezes, thaws,
and freezes again.

The skyline scales
and cracks.
Morning’s frayed

gray plumes
pull through the wreck
and the wreck in mind.

To be reminded
there’s grace
in ordinary weather,

in the reprieve
from neon
and clouds low enough

to cloud thought. Grace
in daylight, the drowse
and sway;
and how, when it’s this thin, things barely cling to their names. Grace
to be nameless, a form among forms, drifting in January glare.

Grace, too, when windows reflect and distort,

at night, the shape of a room.
Present Conditions

Today the weather within
is the weather without.
Even the wind is broken,
stammering over gnarled stalks
and black bulbs punctured through
snowpack. I’m alive
in the contrast, dragging myself
from a dream, eyes adjusting
to the bright. In a semaphore
of stripped limbs
the sun, segmented, multiplies.
Reaches

The draft that lifts the page

slips through
solid wall, evades

an origin.

It isn’t like anything else—
this monochrome expanse

at the edge of March. Cloud
frozen above a public works lot.

How far now below zero.

Monday’s bottom-upped sun
scumbles over new snow

and your face, leaving
only eyes at the center.

All the ghosts out
in the open.
Circumference

Notice the damage
arranged in rhythms
that mimic
cohesion, edges
we think
to find our grip.
The way rain
decodes snow
banked against
the curb
—sewer grate
caked with mud:
a few small nouns
stuck there. Notice
traffic's under-
current of
static, silence
(as close as we
come to it) parcels
into speech. Notice
the sunbeam
split four ways
by a spent shrub
at the end of an alley—all of its rubble sagging into gravel, pinned to the flash.
Late March

And the mud again
ripped open

at the seams, silver
in afternoon’s glow-
ering shine. Sunday
slowly implodes

into itself: the hollow
of a vowel humming

under the surface
we strain to pull

our voice—
*a voice—through.

We’ve endured
a certain dormancy

and arrived in time
(out of time) to say it.
To imagine we've said it, that it could be enough.
Sudden Bridge

At the slack edge
of spring, the day

falls behind and
ahead of itself.

Stunted sumac under-
lines abandoned

factory stacks;
bricks flaking

into sky. Turn,
see blue graffiti

ghost concrete—
cracked slab banking

a seasonal creek.
Beneath dammed-up limbs

a toppled yield sign
flickers, and your face
flickers, crossing
the street, in glare
from a guardrail.
Vigil

A contrail arcs
over the wreck. Snowbanks
returned to gravel; litter
and its language
ground to grit. This excuse
for spring. Nothing to see
beyond a blind spot
collapsing into afterimage.
Nothing to hear beyond a voice
consuming itself in an alley.
How the world expands
as a thought expands
with the angle of the season.
Between parking block
and dumpster
crocuses clarify
their square of shade.
Forced Perspective

Alley
outlined
in purple
loosestrife.

Bewilderment—

imagine it
possessed
a tint.
Otherwise

Posthumous in spring, I
collapse into other
rhythms, colors

—a palette unspooled

at the speed of
dreaming. Forsythia

web each edge
and edgeless gap

of a condemned home.
A row of them

strained into a season
where I stand

ahead of where
I stood, the shell

of a word,
of the air,

of what was
or wasn’t said.
Blinds

To listen
is to see

when the light
is a thing

felt in the ear—
it rings

you awake.