



■ Terrence Arjoon

## THE MINERAL VOICE

**T**he supernova *SN2014J* synthesizes all known cobalt in the universe through rapid neutron addition. Cobalt arrives in the earth's crust. It is a micronutrient for bacteria and fungi. It is the center of the *cobalimins* which make up Vitamin B12.

A cargo ship sets sail for Rhodes loaded with Oxhide copper ingots, Canaanite jars filled with olives and beads, tortoise shells, and cobalt blue. It sinks somewhere off Uluburun.

Someone rushes home from the Blaafarveværket, the *Blue Color Works*, hands blue, late for supper again,—the sun disappears behind the tree line. He hears this is the springtime of the people.

Nathaniel Mbumba leads the FLNC to capture Kolwezi, in Zaïre—the mines stop production for the first time in years. The sky is white. Cobalt smelting yields arsenic, leading German miners to give it the name *kobold*,—goblin.

A ten-year old “artisanal” worker washes rocks in a lake outside a mine an hour west of Kinshasa. Behind him, stands the company officer wearing a hard hat.

The New Deal effort to electrify America is driven by new access to bauxite mines in the Global South, producing the aluminum coating on the wires which cross the nation, snaking underground and connecting Americans in an asymptote of love and horror and light. The darkness is relegated to Thomas

Edward's Wilderness. Electricity is a thing rooted from the ground.

The mineral voice roots in the ground.

In the same way we have pulled cobalt and bauxite from ore within the earth, and oil drawn from subterranean veins,—the world has entered us. Jet fuel from airplanes have been found in our bloodstreams. Micro-plastics too. We swim there.

++++

Xu Lizhi was an employee at the Foxconn factory in Shenzhen,—suicide by cobalt battery components. He published his poems in the company newsletter. Xu Lizhi wrote:

*I swallowed a moon made of iron  
They refer to it as a nail*

Cobalt is a transition metal between iron and nickel. When Xu Lizhi swallows the *Iron Moon* it is a nail, because for him, to make cobalt would be an infringement. This transmutation is denied by Foxconn, and is delayed infinitely across the breadth of Xu Lizhi's poem. His insurrectionary lyric tendrils outwards. The moment of recognition, or synthesis is pushed beyond the factory draped in its anti-suicide netting and into the world. When Xu Lizhi died, the moon made of iron became the Cobalt Moon.



In *History of the Voice* (New Beacon Books (1984)), Kamau Brathwaite writes about, and expands Glissant's idea of "*nation voice*". In countries built upon extractive imperial economies, where English was forced upon those people living there; the indigenous, slaves, indentured laborers, and those who came for a new start—the language they speak among themselves is not English. That language is not a dialect of English, which is a derogatory idea rooted in the superiority of proper "*English*". Syntax splits, extends, collapses proper diction and rhythm,—influenced by both the origin of the workers and the necessities of veiling their meaning from the overseers.

*Patois* is a word often used to describe this new language but Brathwaite argues this is not enough, so: *nation voice*. He writes:

*The pentameter remained, and it comes with it  
a certain kind of experience, which is not the  
experience of a hurricane. The hurricane does not  
roar in pentameters. And that's the problem...*

To communicate in the language of the colonizer is already itself a roar. Celan does this in German. Wilson Harris, Brathwaite, Fanon, Brodber, do this in English.

*It may be in English: but often it is in an English  
which is like a howl, or a shout or a machine-gun  
or the wind or a wave. It is also like the blues.*

To communicate efficiently, *i.e.* produce poetry, traditional syntax must be crushed and worked like ore pulled from a mine, new words must be extracted.

So, I think, how can I make this jet fuel in me turncoat? How do I assemble my micro-plastics on lithium cuirassiers armed with TPH (*Total Petroleum Hydrocarbon*) blunderbusses?

The mineral voice in me speaks from the center of my chest, where it hurts. It comes from behind me and through me to the front, cut and filled with light and wind.

The experience of the hurricane is a wild totalizing experience, winging itself through chipped bauxite mines, into telephone wires and shark-attacked undersea cables.

The mineral voice is quiet.

The minerals are still, not unoccupied.

As RAMMELLZEE writes in his manifesto on Ionic Futurism:

*All formations of word-knowledge are  
constructed under the symbolic thoughts  
of the infinity-sign.*

RAMMELLZEE who in the fight for bombing the exterior of

the A train, mobilized his letters into ideological weaponry aimed at Koch, rival writers, and the increasingly growing rift spurred on by the economic immobility of New York throughout the 1980s. For RAMM, the letters themselves must be arranged into figures of war, laser-beams and tanks, sent into battle, reconstituting and appropriating the tools of oppression, invading the gulf between the symbolic and real living circumstances brought on by the physical and long-lasting violence language produces.

This transfiguration, of non-human oriented time under the domain of the infinity-sign, is not divorced from meaning, but in opposition to State sanctioned interpretation.

Mineral voice comes from the side.

Mineral voice comes from the hurricane in new rhythms and electric glares.

Xu Lizhi has swallowed the moon.

When I cannot speak, I swallow the Iron Moon, and the mineral voice sings in me.

276 million tons of phosphate root through me now.

When I cannot speak I swallow the Cobalt Moon.

Hurricanes speak through me.

I am not separate from this world, I am in it. I am not separate from these minerals and the jet fuel,—it is in me.

The mineral voice is violent in the way the tides are violent—or an eruption, or a sinkhole. It needs no cannons nor tanks,—only time.

The mineral voice is oxidized through xylem, and in the aqueous sacs in our bodies. It is carbon in a marsh pit.

I am not an individual. I am here in the world. The mineral voice tells me so.

When I cannot speak, the granite speaks, the lime voice speaks too.

My jet fuel mind. My micro-plastic soul. My Cobalt heart.

Your bauxite glooms, your silver tongue, your iron squall.

The mineral voice is inaudible to those factory heads.

The mineral voice is mercury song.

The mineral voice snaps electric interference.

☐ Terrence Arjoon's books with 1080PRESS include  
*ACID SPLASH, OR, INTO BLUE CAVES & 36 DREAMS*