



NEW MEDIA GALLERY

CITY OF NEW WESTMINSTER





Geoffrey Nilson

2016



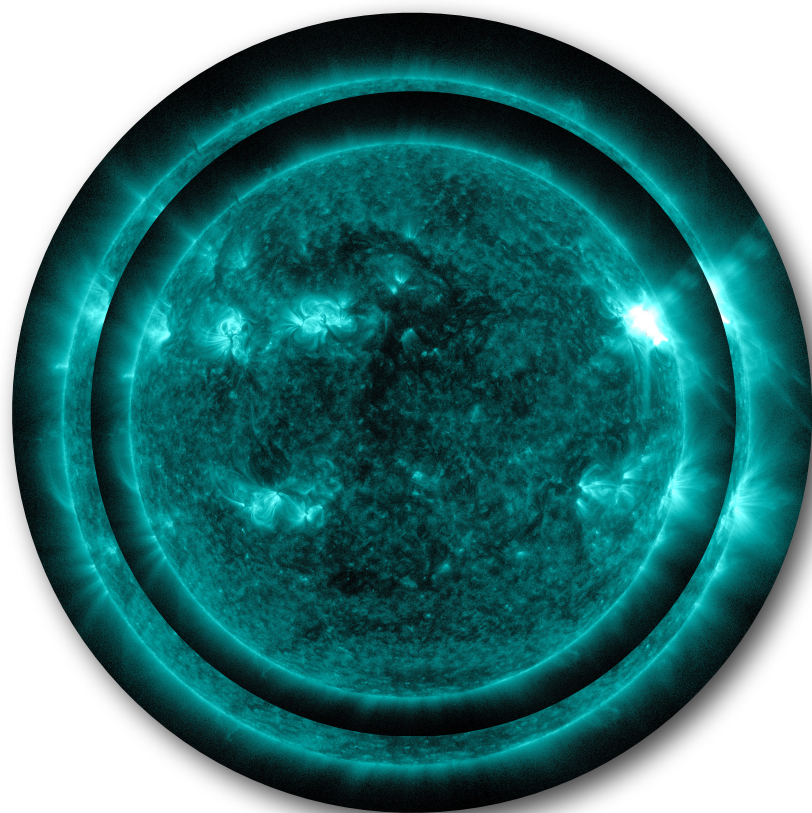
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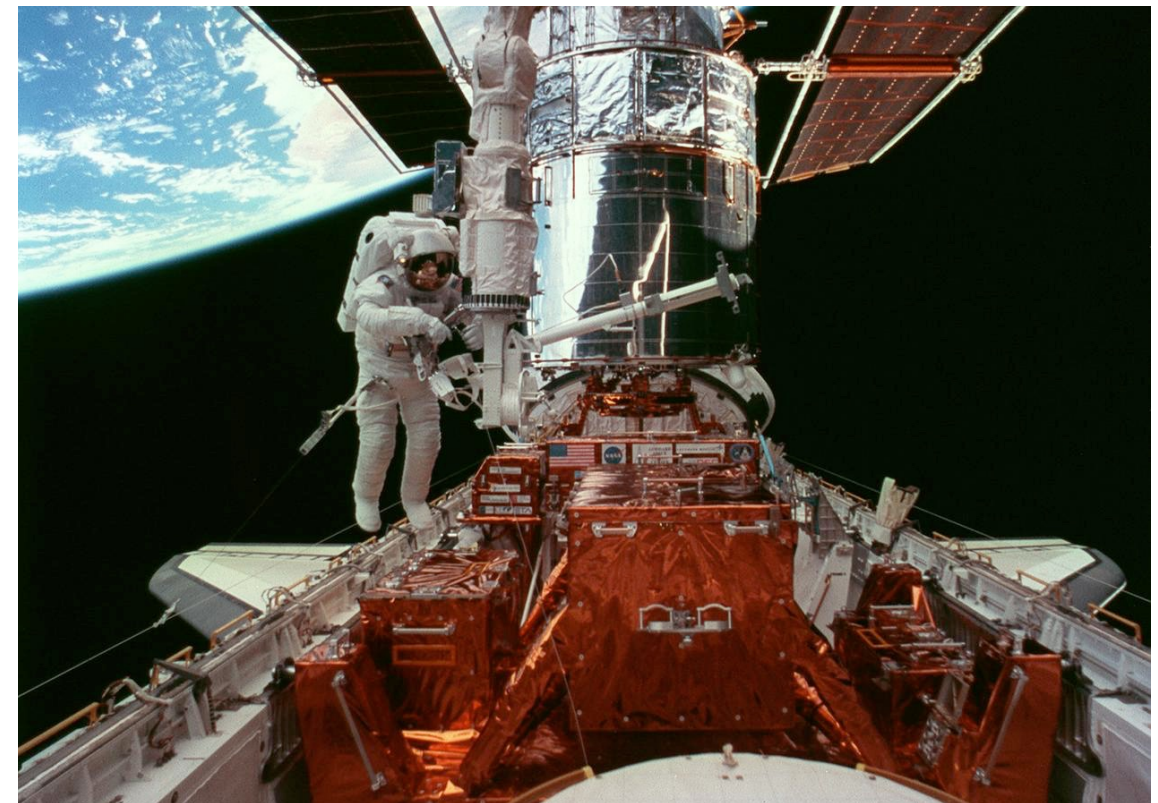
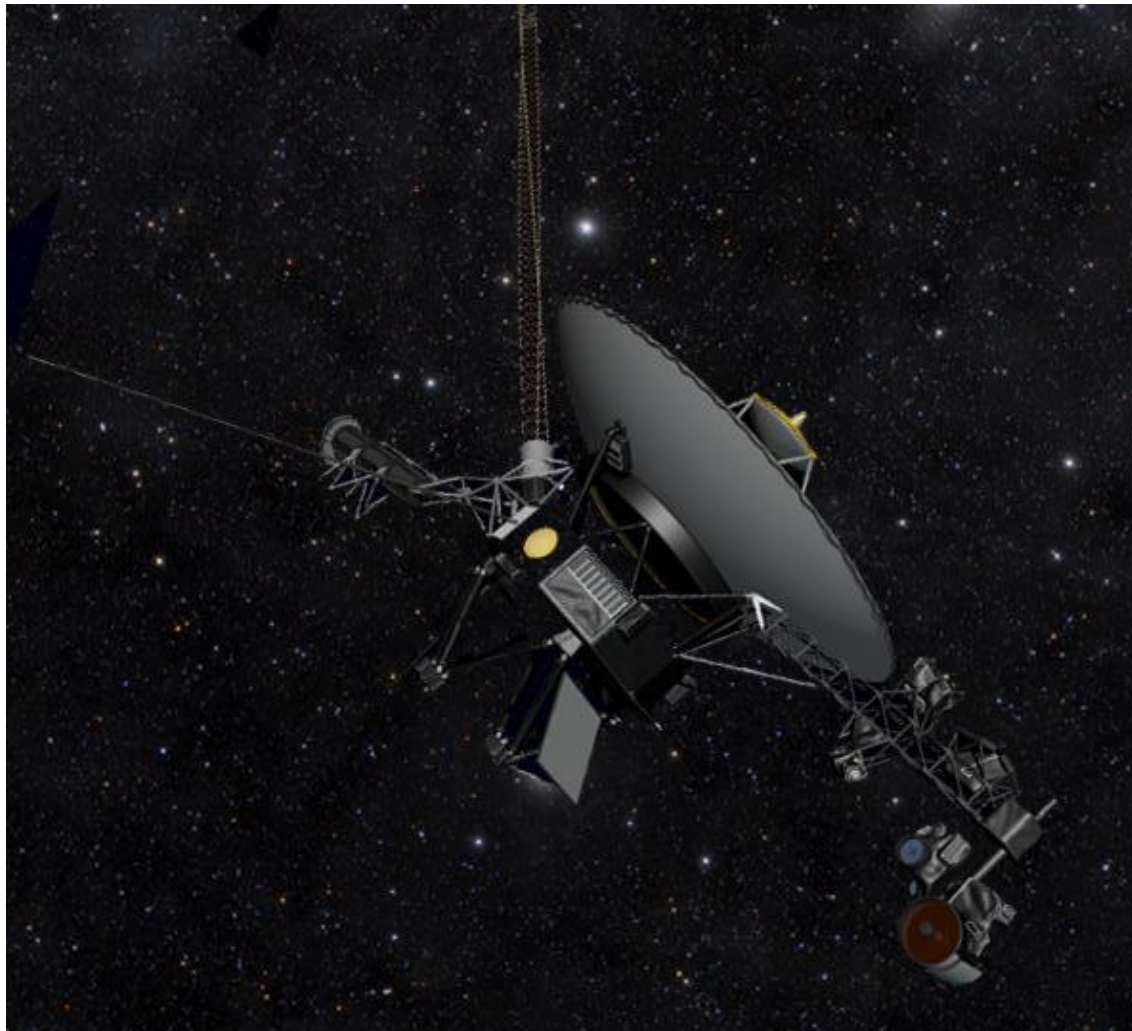
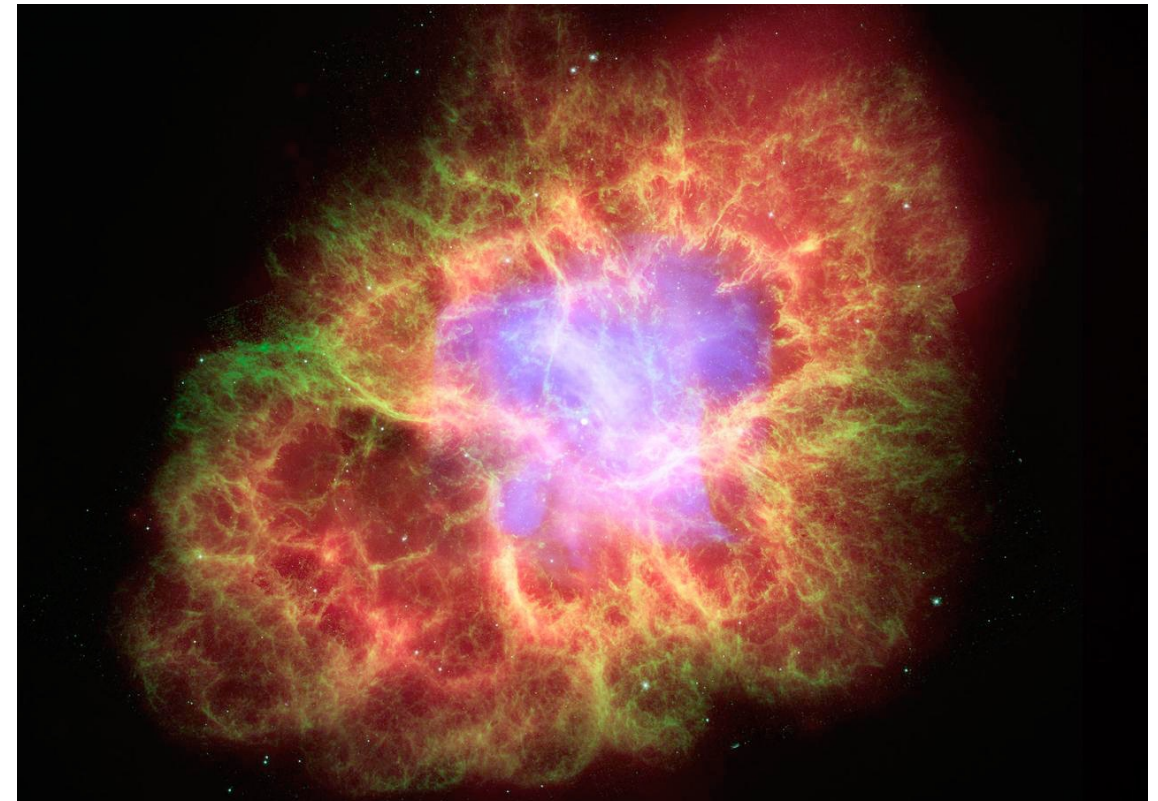
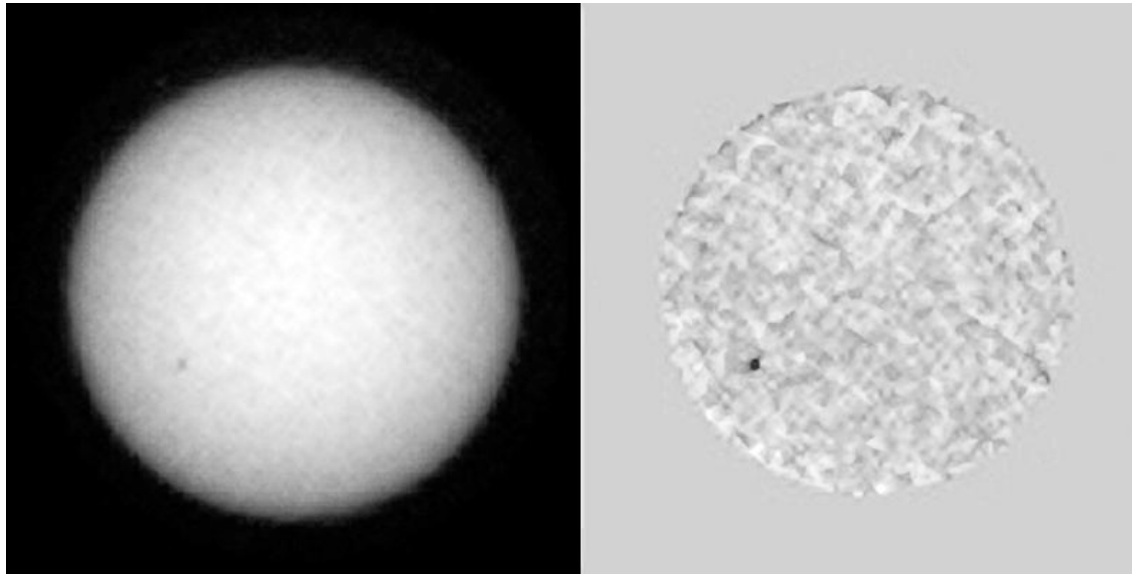
This text was created for Fresh Talks: Perseids + Poetry at the Anvil Centre Theatre, August 12, 2016 for the City of New Westminster and the New Media Gallery in response to the NMG exhibition *space_*

Thanks to Kristina Fiedrich, Arts Programmer for the City of New Westminster, and Sarah Joyce and Gordon Duggan, Curators of the New Media Gallery.



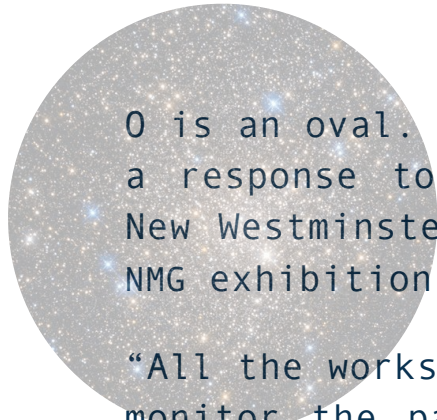
for Scarlett





FORWARD

SPACE_



0 is an oval. 0 is an expanding circle. 0 is a response to space_ an exhibition at the New Westminster New Media Gallery. From the NMG exhibition text:

“All the works monitor bodies in space. They monitor the passing of time and the recording of great distances. Recalling places, objects and times that are gone or tied to us now by the most tenuous of threads...absent, abandoned or existing only in memory. The works suggest a repetition of recorded histories and traditional power structures. They remind us that once there was a race for space.”

Except the race for space is still on. It's just the space we are chasing is not the same as before. To respond to space_ I needed to ask one fundamental question: What is space? In this poem, space is defined in three distinct ways.

First is the Internal space. This is the terrain of the poet. The lyric expression. A person's opinions, feelings, emotions, and rationality. The existential and isolated freedom of the self.

Next is the External space. The external space includes everything that surrounds us. Our rooms and buildings and cities and countries. Our forests and rivers and oceans and atmosphere. This is where things get more complicated, because, while only I define the self, the external space is defined and redefined by the public and the power structures at play in the body politic. Who gets to define these spaces? Who occupies them? How can the marginalized assert their freedom when space is denied to them by the society at large?

Finally, the Literal space, Or as I like to call it, the “space” space. This is everything outside our atmosphere. From our solar cradle to the oldest reaches of space-time. The connection to all matter. The literal space has captured the attention of humanity since the beginning.

And so these multiple spaces, not limited, bleed into each other. All spaces feeding back on themselves. Into language. Formed from the galaxy of stuff, from all spaces to this space and back out again.

*it is the interchange the form took
like walking in and out of a star
the words are left over collapsed
into themselves in the movement*

between visible and invisible

-Robin Blaser, *Image Nation 8* (morphe



o

Whole one the singular expression
the expressive sequence a unified argument

opinion a series of opinions
as part of conceptual practice

base ground level
bottom dollar low
down bargain basement

what it all means
doesn't so much matter
as how do you feel bathing
in cosmic radiation

swimming in capital
a sudden flame appear
ing—the illusion of the real

o

O sun propel my curiosity
what wonder without stars?

i'm a collection of particles
contained by physics

look up

we are the same
fusion dust the same
stuff at the chemical level

connected junk
maybe arranged different is all

o

Who am i but a chamber stuffed
with a heartbeat
pulling guts out with gravity

videoscreens play visions
of calculated
ascension or at least a step toward
the history of us—a leap forward
a leap back

buckles, snaps, mirror finish
voices on the radio—primitive
orange steel, suits of armour
& armoured compartments
fearful tone of the glitchy static
nothing as safe as it seems

o

Out there space is the o
ther the great beyond
where no one has gone before where

the relentless colonial pressure

can't breathe without supplied oxygen
the dead take technology & archi
tecture atmospheric replicated
in the liquid of test pools

it's not the leaving that's grieving me
dens of another age coffins
of past that last aquatic realism texture
spheres & smooth floating

o

Space race race to the stars
first star i see is a dead
dichotomy star bright binary
companion
political starlight space
to exist for the privileged

cold war farewell o
identity out in the cold
frozen margins to build
dreams enchant feel
exist within as free chemical
beings



o

musical inventory of voyager's golden record:

The brandenburg concerto
kinds of flowers
initiation song
morning star & devil bird
johnny b. goode
house record
crane's nest
e major for violin
georgian chorus
melancholy blues
stravinsky
glenn gould's well-tempered clavier
navajo chant
wedding song
flowing streams
dark was the night
indian raga
murmurs of earth

o

The sun

this is the technicality
of the environment

yellow blue teal

this this is how
we act upon

the body
all influence
bodies

light
light shift
ing—great loops
of hot plasma around
the sunspots

around the centre
of swirling—the red
hot hurricane

so real it staggers

steps with a whis
per.

o

Predictions indicate
the debris will pass
close enough for concern
presence divine
water found with a stick
metal detector disc
over airless politic
innovation the offspring
of economy

o

There are french satellites
damaged by rocket debris
defunct soviet experiments
destroyed american communication
china used a missile to vanquish
old weather

more trackable junk in the inventory

over 20,000 pieces
larger than a softball
human-made & rising population
long-standing
set part of a larger body
nonfunctional abandoned
how we deal with potential

orbital debris increases
the tracking highly accurate
sensors the size of a marble
danger sufficient to warrant
an imaginary box that extends like a thirty
mile cantilever with a lifeboat at the centre



o

This is my connect
ion to the cosmos

my trash
some where
no one will be forced
to look at it—in the ocean
on some plot at the outskirts
of cache creek in orbit

spherical
wall of burned-out rockets
mechanical parts
& collisions
with no half-life

in sync with my own
remnant how

i leave a trace
everywhere
i go wire link & colloquial

networked
to what's left
behind the touch of
connection
what history
i have before me

o

voyager one in deep space
lump of tech at velocity

distance an obsolete
clicking up hundreds of km/s
in concert with a levitation of debt

purple bright in the void
of an immense spatial relationship

in the matte hollow
arms outstretched for something
to hold on to nothing within reach

not even a bench to trip on

colour like a mood for the room
shifting in triangulation
with the interstellar

i am reaching out for voyager
give me something to hold
that is not my grief

o

O blade of pure grade stainless steel
o aluminum casing
show me the bond you have with the world
show me the bands of data in your cache files
rather than the fibres of your chemistry

i want to have your tensile strength your commitment
to support—dedicated honesty to material form
i am the twisted branch in the tongs of the machine & still
face the sky at our past—the dust of billions of atomic
explosions a quiver

like a twig in the late summer wind off the river

& up the hill toward the high plateau
we're all busy doing other things

o

Space is the final
frontier

bodies populate & integrate
everything we see

my space no reflection

simmer in starlight
cook our temptation

raise
your skin
& give in to the
urge

i exist on a border contained

expansion this desire to go to push
species

competition people vs. what
i make what i
define

what is space until i occupy it?

what does it mean to
space
to be denied

existence?
the politics
fold—edges rub

o

Content & vessel
the self the earth
the galaxy the universe
i'm a squeak in a bubble
i occupy multitudes

o container to seed & soil
space exists in relation to the blue marble
junctions of us

& other fields each nation
falling over its feet in the rush
for the never been touched

even tiny paint flecks
can damage at these velocities

o

Friends of space how are you?
have you eaten yet? come visit
if you have time

hope everyone's well we are thinking
about you all please

are you well

greetings to you whoever you are
we come in friendship to those who are friends
greetings from a human being of the earth
greetings from a computer programmer
in the little university town of ithaca

hail residents of far skies
we greet you great ones
welcome home

NOTES

This poem contains found text from the following sources:

NASA Voyager—The Golden Record

voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/spacecraft/goldenrec.html

NASA ISS Mission Pages—Space Debris and Human Spacecraft

nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/news/orbital_debris.html

Star Trek by Gene Roddenberry

Farewell by Bob Dylan

All images were sourced from the NASA Image Archive and
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Geoffrey Nilson is the author of two chapbooks, *Alchemy Machine* (2014) and *We Have To Watch* (2016). Nilson's poems and essays have appeared widely in Canada and recently in *Event*, *PRISM international*, *subTerrain*, *Dreamland*, *Qwerty* and *Poetry is Dead*. His book-length manuscript, *Paraphrases from a public whiteboard*, won Honourable Mention for the 2015 Alfred G Bailey Poetry Prize. Nilson is Social Media Editor for *The Rusty Toque*, a Contributing Editor for *Arc Poetry Magazine*, and holds a BA in Creative Writing from Kwantlen Polytechnic University. He lives in New Westminster, BC, with his daughter.