

### Field Work Notes, Songs, Poems 1997-2010 by David Hadbawnik

In San Francisco, Austin and Buffalo a chiel's among ye taking notes. David Hadbawnik like James Boswell has a knack for capturing all the things we wish we had said, as well as the street talk which shows up our culture as indescribably banal and fertile. On his way to developing a unique poetic, Hadbawnik kept writing it down; these twelve years of flaneuring perform a voyage of their own, a powerful and mysterious walk towards unknowing. — Kevin Killian

The notebooks of Kafka and the late meditations of Wittgenstein echo deep inside David Hadbawnik's marvelous Field Work, whose investigations collect into something like a scrolling wunderkammer of anecdotal revelation. Or into a tour-de-force ostranenie of the quotidian, one might say... Which is to say, and more plainly, I suppose, that in these quasi-aphoristic sallies, daily moments are never quite what they first seem, always infolding much more than what we all almost always assume them to hold. So Hadbawnik looks carefully and insistently. And he does so again and again. And the mundane unfolds its mysteries. "One minute in the life of the world is going by. Paint it as it is," said Cezanne. That is the writer's ethic here, and the result is nothing less than a strange, serial, and many-chambered gift. We haven't had a truly great "poet's daybook" for quite some time, one that enacts a poetics. Here you are. —Kent Johnson

Born in Detroit, MI, David Hadbawnik is a poet and performer currently living with his wife, dog, and cat in Buffalo, NY. Previous publications include the books *Translations From Creeley* (Sardines, 2008), *Ovid in Exile* (Interbirth, 2007), and *SF Spleen* (Skanky Possum, 2006). He is the editor and publisher of Habenicht Press and the journal *kadar koli*. In Buffalo, he directs the Buffalo Poets Theater, and writes on his blog, [Primitive Information](http://PrimitiveInformation.com) ([habenichtpress.com](http://habenichtpress.com)).

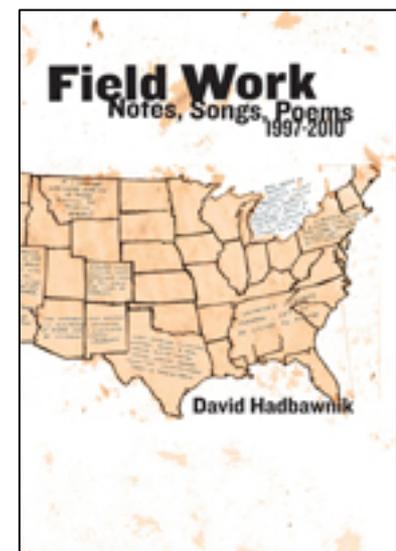
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Selections from *Field Work*

1997

July 9

I notice it again as we're all forced to transfer onto a new bus—that urge everyone has to sit in the exact same seat on the new bus—which I'm unable to do because somebody's already sitting in mine. Everyone looking around at first to check their relative positions

\*

I gave those young women the wrong directions to get to the museum as they stopped me from the window of their jeep driving the west on Mission—and even though she asked me again: “Turn right?” and I realized just then I was wrong, I didn't correct myself, because I was more concerned with her believing me than actually being right

\*

The bird flew headlong into the glass and fell to the ledge and gathered itself. I got up and walked over, squeezing between the payphone and the door. I caught the bird awkwardly by one wing, brought it around through the doorway—causing a woman who'd come in to use the phone to scream and shrink back—and then let it go and it exploded into the air, leaving two feathers stuck in my left hand

July 10

“THE AGING STORE”—turns out to be “THE PACKAGING STORE”

July 11

“A girl who has a bladder infection”—I don't hear the rest of the story

July 20

The stuff you buy at the grocery store—by the time you get to the checkout lane, it's already become personal to you; you recognize it next to someone else's stuff, feel proprietary towards it if it's touched by someone else

July 23

Man puts calico cat into passenger side of a pickup truck, then walks away

August 6

After a bus zooms right past me and I have to wait over half an hour for the next one, when it finally arrives a guy comes running out of the park and I with irrational resentment think, “He better not catch this bus after all the shit I had to go through,” and I really take his appearance as a personal affront; but it turns out he’s just running

August 7

The man sitting next to me at the movies was *breathing*. I wanted to kill him

October 15

With what extraordinary patience the Chinese worker, balanced on a plank on the second level of the huge steel frame for the new elevator going down from street level to the Powell St. Station, applies the last touches of paint—a dull, gunmetal grey—with a paint roller, a tiny roller on the end of a long pole. It’s night. He reaches about five or six difficult spots, the corners where bars meet, the backs of beams, without ever shifting his feet. Every movement slow but efficient—he dips the roller in the bucket again and plunges it up and down, and a thin sheen of sweat glistens on his skin. Table saws buzz, a dozen coworkers clomp and scrape about him, wet paint reeks in the cold night air, and a halogen lamp throws his shadow up the sides of the structure

December 11

On 17<sup>th</sup> and Shotwell, a woman backed her beat-up Honda into a spot, parked, turned and looked frankly into my face as she sang in a screechy voice: “*You want it, you got it, you want it...*”

1998

May 11

“It is entirely conceivable that life’s splendor lies in wait about each one of us in all its fullness, but veiled from view, deep down, invisible, far off. It *is* there, though, not hostile, not reluctant, not deaf. If you summon it by the right word, by its right name, it will come. This is the essence of magic, which does not create, but summons.” —Kafka

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An intermittent splatter of soapy water on the ground, jiggling ropes, “Men Working” signs on the sidewalk, though there’s no one there. They dangle from the side of the building, suspended by two ropes. With quick, jerking motions they swipe precariously at the windows. After a great while they’ve made it to the bottom and get off their seats to move their ropes over for the next column of glass. Presently they appear at the top of the building, adjust the alignment of their ropes, and attach their seats to the pulley on the ropes. Then they toss the seats over the side of the building, and in one quick motion they heave themselves over the side and slide into their seats, which have a sort of harness to keep them from falling off. “Nice job to have, huh?” says a man walking by. The men lower themselves to the top row of windows and begin cleaning them, first reaching down to pull a brush from a bucket which hangs from the boards, soaping the window with that, then using the squeegee to wipe it clean. So what had appeared to be awkward is actually a sort of rhythm: reach down, sway right, dab window, sway left, dab, replace brush, grab squeegee, wipe right, left—soap water spatters the sidewalk

June 9

S.’s film idea: A Robin Hood who steals women’s underwear and gives them to poor hookers on Capp St.

November 9

Alice in Wonderland

I close my eyes and they open inside my head, first one face and then another, looking on and nodding, slowly becoming watching. It’s like riding a bicycle along the edge of a steep curb, practically holding the bike sideways not to fall off. Having to ask an unknown Someone in the dark. Different kinds of silences—  
the kind I can hear you breathing in, compressed, intimate, surrounded by music—  
the kind in which I can hear the shopping cart of the woman collecting empty bottles on a Monday night, accidental, general, just before it rains

December 6

Alice and another person, dancing.

“Alice, shall we...?”

Alice looks at him, shaking her head.

“What’s the matter, Alice? Don’t you want to be Alice anymore?”

“No. Not right at this moment.”

“Really?”

(Nods.)

“Let me tell you a little secret: Alice is the least interesting character in the whole story...”

1999

August 2

Different kinds of waiting for the bus:

- 1) Stand very straight, peering into the distance, willing the train to come—"active waiting"
- 2) "Passive waiting"—stand complacently, not really looking, but facing in the direction from which the bus will come
- 3) Indifference—consciously look in the other direction, pacing, but still occasionally sneaking a glance, or glancing at watch
- 4) Disgust—complain silently, gesture sharply, shake head and walk away as if to say, "I've had it," but then turn and come back to no. 1

August 13

At the playground: Six little kids playing "tag." Cute Chinese kid named "Bill" is "it." He dives bravely from ladder to slide to tag another boy, who denies being touched; after sitting there despondent for a few minutes—"But I *touched* you"—while others run away and consolidate again on a different contraption, Bill finally picks himself up and continues the chase. Others elude him and gather on wooden bridge, taunting him, as Bill sulkily ignores them. Then he sneaks over and chases them again, but whenever he singles one out and is close to tagging him the kid calls "time out" and they both stop, Bill with an oddly adult look of consternation on his face

\*

**2001**

June 28

A Sonnet

Wings spread like the man slicking his hair  
over the water fountain in Buena Vista Park  
the gulls soar out into the air  
above the pond, gently lapping, heavy  
breathing of a woman power walking  
which suddenly stops as she passes,  
jogger adjusting his pack, but how many  
of them want to be a river or even  
one of those buoys floating against  
the current, no they want to be  
hamburgers pick-up trucks Shimano gears  
all these things we make now that don't last  
much longer than our brief breaths  
pulling us that much closer to wind's

June 30

A Sonnet

When we say love we mean to give a name  
to something so secret we must keep it  
even from ourselves. The calling out to  
the Friend, the love-cry, the woman carrying  
a quart of milk all these things sacred coming  
one time only this moment and only  
when there is absolutely nothing else  
to say, no other sound to make a pigeon  
flattened right in front of my house  
the blind cat hunches its shoulders as I walk  
past and out, down on the street, this feels like  
the first day and I can't remember  
where my car is or when I'll have  
to move it again, holy

July 2

A Sonnet

Women there are in whose faint smile  
of recognition lies the grave of beauty, the echo  
of a wistful glance brief as sunlight  
flashing on keys, the woman who bought Frida Kahlo  
stamps at the post office walked out  
with a limp and I thought how it all fits  
together so strangely, that you are what  
I have been saving all of my favorite  
postcards for, my last words, the first  
bit of sweetness I feel in the morning  
the dull pleasant ache in my groin as if  
a hand had just let go of it infinitely  
soft and unaware of its own  
deft power

\*

NO ATTENDANT  
ON DUTY  
DO NOT PAY IMPOSTOR  
USE PAY  
BOX ONLY

--parking lot sign, 5<sup>th</sup> and Clementina

2003

October 9

Train to Berlin. Muted greens, gold of the leaves and the houses blurring by and the dark vines and brick among them—“There was a flash of yellow and green light,” Tante Hedi said, before an earthquake when she was 16, in Pfullingen; “gelt und grune licht”—and the angel on top of the Marienskirche Dom fell off and beforehand all the birds and the animals cried

and the fields and towns and playgrounds, poor and humble but neat, and the rich mulch on the black earth and the red tile rooftops, spoils of *schokolade* on my yellow corduroy pants

and earlier at the Dinea in the Kaufhof, after listening to Hedi and Gretel argue about directions, zipping around Reutlingen, how I disappointed her by not finishing the enormous serving of breaded turkey, *spetzle*, and *kartofeln*, and I felt guilty for ordering so much, even though she cleaned her plate and then threw up a little on her blouse from indigestion

**2004**

March 26

I was slow on the draw when it came to feelings—wrapped up in my thoughts, I didn't often sense the undertone of what someone was feeling for me, what they were really saying as we spoke, didn't sense if a woman was saying she wanted me, if a man was saying he hated me; didn't sense if I was being insulted or praised. Flirting I knew, but that was the most obvious and practiced subtext to any conversation. Sometimes the biggest emotions—hate, love, anger—could be the most subtle

October 14

The astonishing shit of dogs. Rich red-brown, often with undigested bits of food in it, beaded, sculptural, coming out in little balls or “soft serve” in one big bubbly lump, warm in my hand through the plastic bag

**2010**

June 15

Out of weariness or carelessness or lack of skill a thing can be ruined by putting down the wrong words—most often the little words that hold it all together

June 16

Have not spent enough time looking up at the sky

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“What our eyes see, our imagination can no longer see. The same things cannot be the object of both kinds of seeing.” —Joseph Joubert

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A waitress strolls by and, making eye contact with me obliquely, leans behind me and hoists up the blinds over the huge window beside my booth—light floods in, unwelcome at first, but then I adjust to it

\*

My disease—indecisiveness; symptoms—irritability, restlessness, lack of presence in the here and now; what is actually killing me, like a virus that weakens a system and invites in a different illness, is incessant pining for those things I don't have: a different city, different life, different...

\*

“Tell me what is happening on earth.” —Joubert