

## **Cento**

*of Matthew Rohrer's The Sky Contains the Plans*

i.

By accident here I am again  
over someone's shoulder.

You can see as you walk  
while still thinking

the whole city's a camera  
and you can break it—

Brooklyn June night  
replaced with silence,

the traffic circle  
stretching in every direction.

While pulling apart,  
I always feel briefly.

The sun is a cruel master  
in different voices;

the light grows older,  
expands if you stare at it.

Then you have a real war  
eating at the lungs of people.

But I am hidden in  
the lonely sound of a room at night,

drinking a whiskey  
with long silences,

just taking up your own space  
as it comes apart slowly.

Does that mean  
denying yourself things?

Wounded crab on the table,  
a great feeling of freedom,

the imagination's sad flute  
in a dream I had,

and marbled  
old pastries and drink—

accoutrements for our  
one endless teacup?

I can't say  
I know that.

The mist pulls away from the bridge  
because we decided not to.

ii.  
From each little piece  
of your vision

I dragged this thing,  
but I really thought about it.

I was talking  
when another neighbor started talking.

There was an indistinct loudness  
I wrapped myself in.

A frayed rug.  
And filing, organizing really—

I realized this  
agreed with me as they sang.

I made a little program  
of the hyperacquisitive.

And when I wasn't thinking  
I hefted my axe and slammed it,

drinking a lot with classmates.  
I just felt

and wrongly felt comforted  
floating there all night.

I said what  
I could see.

In the rain and thinking,  
I found you—

little snatches of songs  
still there, a bird's shadow

across the water  
in your eyes—

I couldn't stop thinking  
no matter how long I looked.

I observed with a smile  
all night with strange lights

motioning us to go  
through the crowds of people,

and we stopped at a diner  
which I'd read about.

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Note:

This cento is entirely composed of lines from *The Sky Contains the Plans* by Matthew Rohrer (Wave Books, April 7, 2020). Matt had them in little dreamy hypnagogic poems for which he wrote some 100 lines in between waking and sleeping over more than a year. He then went back and expanded these odd lines, writing poems for them, collaborating with this “different” voice he had tapped into.

Matt is my former teacher, and I first encountered the cento in his workshop on appropriative, or collaborative, forms. I copied Matt's lines into my notebook while reading the collection for *Element*. Many of the lines were punctuated differently, but they break the same way here as in his book. None of the lines appeared side-by-side in *The Sky Contains the Plans*, but a few couplets derive from the same poem.

Page citations:

i. 22, 23; 15, 31; 30, 16; 51, 18; 51, 62; 75, 75; 31, 12; 1, 50; 46, 23; 35, 3; 48, 67; 66, 16; 13, 13; 8, 59; 42, 1; 48, 2; 7, 2; 14, 9; 33, 6

ii. 43, 50; 77, 24; 18, 21; 25, 55; 72, 52; 18, 17; 73, 6; 47, 61; 79, 14; 36, 58; 13, 14; 60, 68; 3, 41; 56, 51; 47, 65; 42, 44; 58, 81; 29, 23