In the spring of 2002, on the eve of our first journey across the American South, I married Aliass. I vowed, among other things, to always honor her so-called “silence” and her own embodied “ways of knowing the world that are other than mine.” That rough-ass ceremony in an overgrown park in Paris, Tennessee was the prettiest little shotgun wedding you never saw. And the honeymoon goes on and on and on.

The wedding score given below was drafted roughly one year later for a renewal-of-vows ceremony, performed on a grassy hill at Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia, in May 2003. Revised and renewed numerous times over the years, the homily and vows remain core to the practice of caring for and living with Aliass and herds of untold others in the throes of a global technocratic era, while attending as best as possible to all the galls, hopes, and responsibilities that crop up in loamy, lively paddocks and pastures, weed-blown roadsides, and all the other dirty, earthly places we makes homes and pass through.¹

¹ Both Aliass herself and parts of these vows were present for a blissful ceremony in 2008 when Sean and I tied the knot. As a matter of
Beyond the daily routines of husbandry that maintain the well-being of a little ass herd, the distinctly human hopes and passions that sustain this (admittedly one-sided) marriage to Aliass continue to find kindred spirits in artistic and poetic practices that seek to cultivate ecological care and communion. From the ancient, “mind-bending undertaking” that Gary Snyder calls “transspecies erotics,” to the revelrous and radical weddings to mountains, rivers, and diverse earthly assemblages performed by Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, I hereby hitch this nuptial performance to creative practices that buck miserly, destructive systems – forces that would speak to prevent us from (for)ever holding our earthly peace-of-ass.² Embracing companion-species histories and biological knot-tyings of the kind that animate Donna Haraway’s question – “Whom and what do I touch when I touch my dog?” – the act of wedding Aliass is a way of asking, with respect and humility till death do us part: “Whom and what do I kiss when I kiss my ass?”³

Clothed and behooved, we are gathered here in the grass to celebrate a marriage of beastly lives woven together in timeplaces, as today K-Haw (aka Karin Bolender) and Aliass come together to renew their vows.

Let us hear them.

² Gary Snyder says that global myths of interspecies marriage are “evidence of the fascination our ancestors had for the possibility of full membership in a biotic erotic universe.” Gary Snyder, *Practice of the Wild* (New York: North Point Press, 1990), 211. On the many wonderful nuptuals of Sprinkle and Stephens, see the LoveArtLab archive, https://loveartlab.ucsc.edu/
K-Haw: Aliass, if we know anything together, it’s how every one of these words I’m about to utter is hard-won. Every word is hee-hawn out of fur and flesh, hoofbeats on asphalt, hot sun, rocks and cool flowing water, and hidden milk and blood. Each word I want to offer you is made out of the places we’ve passed through in time together. They grow from seeds gathered in our wanderings, where we waded through roadside weeds and broken glass, in search of something – maybe the place of sweet shade and grassy pastures we found at last, here and now. I wish I could just open my throat and let a flock of birds fly out of it, or maybe a stampede of slow Mississippi miles. I want to make a noise that also listens. Aliass, I want to mirror you in a secret language that rises out of future dark like a beam of what’s coming from behind, like the silver flash of fish from green depths of quarry water, or the way a rearview mirror reflects oncoming headlights from places we’ve already passed. And let these words be a glistening eye, a listening ear that reflects and ech-
oes the mysteries of who you are, and what you do. And where we go from here.

When I married you the first time, Aliass, some might have said I was looking for love in all the wrong places. But what did they know? Who knows what we were looking for, listening for, and who knows how we found it. But we did. We found a certain peace-of-ass at last, sweet she-ass. And today we get to celebrate it, and share it with our friends. And to those who would oppose our union, claiming you are just an ass, I can only say they have no idea what a just ass you are. What a wholeness in a broken world.

In light of our previous ceremony, and everything that’s happened in the meantime, it seems like a good idea to renew the vows that were both spoken and unspoken on that occasion. That first ceremony, which took place in the hidden bottom of a local park in Paris, Tennessee, was a slapdash, threefold affair. It sought to encompass all the elements of a shotgun wedding, a knightly dubbing, and a haphazard exchange of rings and kisses meant to hold us fast to each other, and to the pathless grasses of the mission we were about to blast off into. I was a little drunk, and wearing an enormous sombrero, so I don’t remember exactly what I said. Yours were vows of silence, so to speak, and doubtless you’ve kept them better than I’ve kept mine.

Raw as it was, that Tennessee ass wedding must have done some of the trick, or I guess we wouldn’t be standing here now. This doesn’t surprise me, actually. For all the rush and lack of planning, that thrown-together ceremony in Paris was overflowing with sacrament and rough magic, deeply felt by all present, as far as we know. Sweet Pea (aka “Her Royal Pea-Ness”) stood up for you, and Mariann Black acted as the barnyard shaman-preacher, while Sebastian was witness and official photographer. To get to the wedding spot, we rode a thin bridal path, through yellow grasses taller than all of us, past Rahkeem’s catfish
pond. The whirring cicadas sang us onward, watching us pass with their red unblinking eyes. The monstrous catfish that no human has ever seen skimmed the pond bottom with their blind, o-ring mouths and wormy whiskers, lazy bottom-feeders in sunken barrels and logs. These were our congregation of guests.

Along the path, we plucked orange Indian paintbrush and bluets and black-eyed daisies, and stuck them in your browband and saddle horn, and Sweet Pea’s. I held a bunch of weed-flowers in a stemmy bouquet. Then we emerged from the green thicket into an out-of-the-way, newly mown corner of the park, and assembled ourselves between the telephone poles, back behind the baseball diamond and the field where we hunted for wild asparagus on the night before. It was just on the other side of the abandoned railroad tracks, which we crossed to reach the wedding spot, and then rode over again, like a threshold, after Mariann proclaimed, “You may now kiss your ass!” And then you and I rode off a ways down the tracks, back and forth, together and alone, and soon to be on our way for real.

So, I guess it’s in keeping with our lovely assbackwards slide to exchange marriage vows again here and now, almost a year after the beginning of our rough-ass honeymoon. The adventure of that summer wasn’t so much a honeymoon as a two-moon mission, where we blasted into the new reality of American backroads to discover, among other things, the deepest echoes of our Big Poet’s assertion that “the honey of heaven may or may not come, but that of earth both comes and goes at once.”4 We hit the highway and we searched for it. We hit the earth inside us and we dug. We rode the Southern byways, hundreds of miles of rank tar rolled out under swooping wires and panting passerines and green leaves and sky.

Oh ass, there were roadside weeds and trumpet creeper vines inside of us, fading chicory and Queen Anne’s lace, roadkill and poison ivy, and we waded through wave after wave of them, day after day after day. And all that time, Passenger rode along inside of you. I didn’t even know where we were going, exactly, but somehow we made it, led on by ghosts of old fireworks and botanical jokes and great blue herons and full moons and pavement cracks, to what I thought was the impossible home.

So here we are now, in a kind of happy-ass afterlife that’s like nothing I ever thought possible. I asked the world for an answer, to a question I could never quite articulate. Our journey became that question, and the answer you taught me to read in the slow pulse of every moment was Yes. That Yes is you. Before you and Passenger came along, I underestimated the power of nameless exploration, until I found it wed inextricably to assemblages of bodies-in-places, such as we find them.

There are no rings to exchange here, except for the hope that these vows will ring true, now and into the future.

*K-Haw and Aliass will now exchange vows again. Please repeat after me:

I, K-Haw, vow to take this so-called American Spotted Ass, (un)known as Aliass, as lifelong companion, with all the thralls and galls and cares and concerns that come with this gift of commitment.

(repeat)

I will always seek to harmonize my words and deeds with your knowable needs and unknowable wishes, and I will try my best to honor your ways of knowing the world that are other than mine.
I promise to honor the illumination and peace-of-ass I find especially in your presence. I will honor and protect all that’s hidden behind the heart-shaped breastplate.

I promise to honor the loves-in-places that our quest to wed words and untold worldings has uncovered, and to always search for a m<other tongue that orbits the core where your nameless knowing hums.

With these here vows, I wed thee.

Aliass, please repeat after me:

I, Aliass,

promise to stay true to my rough-furred, blinking, softly breathing, inscrutable donkeyness, to what I do and to what I know, and also to the mysteries hidden within spectacular ass hides and behind the heart-shaped breastplate.

With these here unsaids, I wed thee.

By the power vested in the human tongue, I now pronounce you wedded companions in the quest for matrimonial assonances in fleeting mortal timeplaces.
K-Haw, you may now kiss your ass.

Aliass, you may now eat the grass.
Fig. 2. On the path to the wedding in Paris, Tennessee, June 2002, with Sweet Pea and Mariann leading the way. Photograph by the artist.