Despite thousands of hours spent huddled over its contents, gnawing on roots and bones, I am still not sure this ought to be a book – at least not in the guise of a monograph with a lone author’s name on it. At the same time, this seems like a good spot to recognize the particular ways that this project has been a reckoning with the limits, possibilities, and troubling assumptions of the Book from the get-go. Nothing is resolved here; in an effort to honor the involvements of all those whose tales one cannot possibly claim to tell, this volume puts the prickly question of whether or not it ought to be a book at the core of its proceedings.

Over the course of a long-ass journey across the US South in 2002 – born as it was of a book-that-wasn’t – the idea has stuck in my mind that my companion Aliass carried a few special books in the black synthetic saddlebag, along with our pink plastic sunblock and bug spray, notebooks and water-bottles and crumbled rice cakes. One book, I am pretty certain, was my tattered copy of Watt. I also recall, from the Wilderness Trail campsite the night before, reading William James at the graffiti-laden picnic table... but no, I don’t think that was one on the road with us that day. Anyway I don’t remember, and no catalog exists of that little lost library. So, despite a certain hunger
to archive, this lacuna leads me to wonder: is it not for
the best that I have forgotten, since the premise of that
original journey was that the exclusively human linguist-
ic apparatus of a book – whether as fat papery codex or
pulsing digital record of syntactical thought – could not
contain, and might indeed compromise, the seamy flux
of living tales that comprise our passages in timeplaces?

Well, yes. This was a premise of sorts, a paradoxical
passion that originally drove me and Aliass to hoof it all
those back-road miles that summer long ago. And the de-
sire to buck the assumptions of the Book, to resist exclu-
sive rights to human authorship, remains at the heart of
our dusty barnyard becomings to this day. One could cer-
tainly make a case that Aliass has unfairly borne the bur-
den of a voluminous mass of human expressions, desires,
fears, hopes, and longings for a long time. So while I ad-
mit to certain poetic and narrative urges to commit fuzzy
memories to prose – to somehow cling with words to, say,
the bygone billowing curtains of fireflies that lit our path
in a darkening Tennessee forest, or full-blown moonlight
sifting through barn slats, or the bite of fat wild blackber-
ries on our tongues – one thing I have always known for
sure is that this project must resist the reflective lure of
encompassing memoir, in which the ass herself is but a
foil, antagonist, or comely sidekick. What unfolds going
forward must be otherwise, must do otherwise.

One other thing I can say for certain is that Aliass and
I never would have made it one blasted mile without the
assistance and encouragement of swarms of friendly
strangers, strangely wonderful friends, and myriad mys-
terious others encountered in the places we have passed
through, all of whom nourished and sheltered us in dif-
ferent ways. Many generous and brilliant humans have
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Adam Lore, Kelly Marksbury, Jacob Mitas, Melanie Mo-
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In certain spectral ways, the dream of Aliass-to-come was born in the barn on Maple Hill Farm, where the Mutt of Gold and I were lucky enough to live next door to the lofty studio where our dear friend Alice Provensen created wonderful picture books about the farm’s inhabitants and beloved ghosts. Later on down the road, we were welcomed into other special barns, guest rooms, basements, backyards, and pastures by old friends and new: Vanessa Batts, Maria McFadden Beek, Don Eulert, Becky and Judy Gale Roberts, Amos and Coulter Fussell Harvey, Karen Hawthorne, Kevin Hayes, Kristina Holm, Laura Rittall, Oak Ridge Riding Club, Ketch Secor, Charlie Strothers, Jeanne Thompson, Libby Tucker, and many others who offered gifts of gnarly crabapples, dusty memories, and shady places to graze or lay down in the leaf litter along the way. And to all the nameless others and friendly roadside grasses in places we passed through, regards and gratitude: in places known (more or less) as Abbeville, Badlands, Betty Davis Grocery, Bluebird Road, Boyd Tavern, Carnesville, Cedars of Lebanon, Clinton Hollow, Como, Damascus, Fincastle, Mosset, Naked Creek, Nameless, Noon, One Mile Lane, Orland, Paradise, Paris (Tennessee), Perigord Noir, Pleasant Valley, Philomath, Roanoke and Rowan Oak, the bygone Tallahatchie Bridge (and what’s below), Whites Creek, Wilderness Trail, Val-
The shaping of a slow-ass poetic implosion into an enduring art-research practice over almost two decades owes massive gratitude and reverence to my exquisite mentors Laiwan, Ruth Wallen, Ju-Pong Lin, and Goddard College’s singular MFA–Interdisciplinary Arts program. Lately the Rural Alchemy Workshop has been richly augmented by fertile, dirty glimmerings and earthly wisdoms of Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, Kultivator, and dance for plants. Pamela Albanese has been a steadfast friend and inspiration since we were seven on Green End Avenue. L-Haw (Lydia Peelle) has lit spiraling and deliciously thistly paths since (Mule) Day One, and on and on they g((o)).

Wrangling our R.A.W. ass storying experiments into rippling realms of multispecies studies and art-research in surprising ways, Eben Kirksey has been an enthusiastic champion of this work for a decade. Engagement with vital creative-critical research nodes owes much to the support of Environmental Humanities at UNSW in Sydney. I am especially grateful for the inspiring guidance of Thom van Dooren and Stephen Muecke. For infusions of hot feminist compost, I bow to Astrida Neimanis, Jennifer Mae Hamilton, and Lindsey Kelly. Insights came
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