

On “Traces” and “Live from the Surface of the Moon”

The longer of my poems appearing in this issue is partly inspired by CBS coverage of the first moon landing, excerpts of which are available on YouTube. I recommend watching it, whether or not you were in the audience nearly fifty years ago. As the poem recounts, there were some interesting gaps and bumbles in the broadcast, even during the most famous moments. Cronkite also highlights the context of late-sixties social unrest, which got me thinking about whiteness and racial conflict, then and now (issues I can't help thinking about in any case). The typographical element of the double colon represents the footprint of the lunar module in moon dust, but I was also thinking of the old SAT analogies—how did my parents' housing development relate to the moon mission? How does the past relate to the present, for me and for my country?

What “Traces” and “Live from the Surface of the Moon” have in common is my obsession with transmission and in particular, lately, with how the past influences the present. That ghost whistle—the sound of long-gone trains I sometimes, impossibly, still hear—is analogous to boot prints on the moon, somehow. I feel an obligation to be receptive to those echoes and residues. As a citizen and a human being, I also feel compelled to research the traces, to discover gaps between the messy past and the smoother versions we tend to remember. Old stories have a way of shaping our present lives, so it's important to listen to them, faults and all.