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COVER ART | Fernanda Laguna, “Me concentro para siempre / Es importante” (I am concentrating forever / It’s important), 1994–1995. Ink and color pencil on paper.

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Editor’s Note

Bianca Rae Messinger

The Translation Issue, the Big Thing, Memory and the Possibility for a Translation of the Background

And my heart had to make a great effort to drive the blood into the Big Thing; there was hardly enough blood. And the blood entered the Big Thing unwillingly and came back sick and tainted. But the Big Thing swelled and grew over my face like a bluish boil and grew over my mouth, and already the shadow of its edge lay upon my remaining eye.

— Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, trans. M.D. Herter Norton

Smoke stings silk. Sweetness is like whiteness. Screams: Don’t do it!

It is I! Be sweet dark dear!

— Unica Zürn, trans. Sade LaNay

But still, it’s interesting the ways that books live in us over time, even as memory fades. What I can recall of Tropisms is that it seemed to replace the conventional components of stories with the sensation of these plant-like inclinations that exist in humans—leaning one way or another—I can recall the way that book felt, more than anything else about it.

— Sawako Nakayasu, from conversation with Alexis Almeida

I open with this quote from Rilke’s *Notebooks* (which I only discovered when the poet Zoe Tuck assigned it in a workshop on transfeminine literature) because it does what the poets of this issue are doing. How do we write when we are pumping all our blood into the “Big Thing”? If there is a connection between the poets and artists we’ve chosen for this issue maybe it has something to do with finding a space for desire from whatever scraps of it are around us, from Jayne-Ann Igel’s diaristic meditations (being themselves closely tied to Rilke’s own potential) on transness, to Wu Ang’s tracing the rags of lovemaking which poet and translator Cecily Chen calls a “fraying cocoon,” to Sade LaNay’s translations of Unica Zürn, whose anagrammatic poems conjure up the specter of universality only to cut it to pieces. In other words, maybe they make work against the “Big Thing” or in spite of the “Big Thing,” attempting to chart a course through desire which cannot be subsumed within the unthinkable violence of the world around us.

Maybe then to reconcile with the “Big Thing” we must be divergent, or to let it run itself out while we focus on the background. For Fernanda Laguna, whose work appears on the cover of this issue, her solution comes in the form of a glorious chaos, as her solo show last year at the Drawing Center made clear, creating as many forms of a work as possible, an obsessive practice with the movements of the heart, of the individual but not as a unified subject, as finding itself in its others. In this way it feels strange to include her work on a cover, as it faces away from the things inside it; it makes me want to draw little hearts on it, or write in the margins. So this issue looks at translation as something which we do in the background, as a way to get towards our poems, as a project which we find ourselves doing compulsively. Rilke does not really have a way of “escaping” the Big Thing—but he keeps writing and sleepwalking through Paris anyways,

even as it becomes unrecognizable. Here I think also of Jack Jung’s translations of Kim Hyesoon’s “From Aerok,” of the poet as a wanderer of this “makeshift stage of a city.”

But looking at translation as a background shouldn’t take away from its ability to deal with exile, perhaps by searching beyond the “poetic,” as Mirene Arsanios’ review of Olivia Elias’ *Chaos, Crossing* suggests. In her review of Kareem James Abu-Zeid’s translation of Elias’s book, she writes, “If this review has now devolved into a statement, it is only because form, as Elias teaches, must rethink itself to meet the present.” Yet Elias shows us that cutting through poetics does not mean that “her militancy [is] opposed to the indeterminacy of dreamscapes,” as Arsanios writes. In other words, we are tired of being told our militancy isn’t complex enough.

But what does it look like to see translation as not the Big Thing but as something which resembles being in the world? At JFK they’ve started a new practice of security: before going through the detectors they make you walk by a police dog, with a partner. So even if you travel alone you must be matched up with someone to go past the dog. They clear out about a 20 meter long area for this.

I met Cecilia Biagini in the middle of winter in Buenos Aires, meeting by chance at Fernanda’s gallery in Villa Crespo, wandering our way to catch the bus back downtown. We talked about the cold, how easy it is to catch cold when coming from the New York summer. All it takes is a slight underappreciation and it comes in, it being heavier, wetter and stickier than the cold in New York. Even the snow here “feels” dry. Biagini’s paintings reflect the movement of the world as her prose attempts to re-establish its disunion (the genrelessness of her writing in this issue might be another corollary to Rilke), the constant generative disunion, which is a part of translation itself, which is constantly occurring whether we want it to or not. As Matvei Yankelevich states in an interview with Kay Gabriel, “It’s very strange to me to talk about how translation is impossible when it’s being done all the time.”

Finally, this issue does have an actual Rainer in it, in Rainer Diana Hamilton’s review of Courtney Bush’s *I Love Information* which tracks how poems “think.” It also has Terrence Arjoon’s review of KM Cascia’s translation of Manuel Maples Arce, Igor Gulín translated by Ainsley Morse and Timmy Straw, and many more.

Bianca Messinger
“Buffalo, NY”
10/15/23

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MIREILLE GANSEL

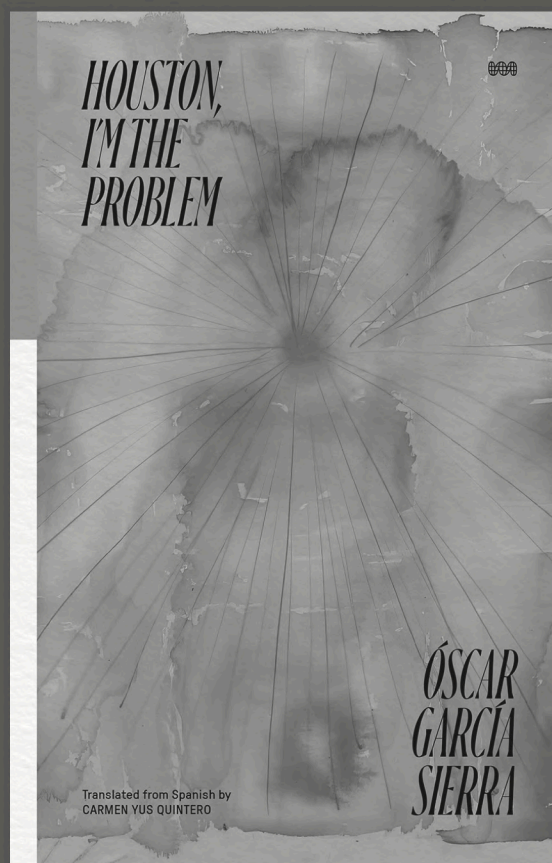
SOUL HOUSE

Translated from French by
JOAN SELIGER SIDNEY

With a preface by
FANNY HOWE

“Mireille Gansel’s book is what I have so often called for: truly nomadic writing, ‘like a pact behind words and borders,’ as she puts it. And this writing, this writer, travels from & comes to rest in a house or a tent, what in Arabic is called *beit*, a word that also means a metrical unit of poetry ... Only a seasoned writer/ translator of Gansel’s stature can achieve such excellence in doing what I have called the poet’s job, namely to ‘pick up everything that shines / throw out the gold / keep the light.’”

— **PIERRE JORIS**



ÓSCAR GARCÍA SIERRA

HOUSTON, I'M THE PROBLEM

Translated from Spanish by
CARMEN YUS QUINTERO

“Óscar García Sierra’s recursive poems hoard and catalog the anxieties of language and living, revealing the ways in which outside forces ‘self’ us. They are searching systems, sending out dispatches in an atmosphere of desire and disappointment under capitalism. Medicated, anaphoric, depressed, dryly humorous, and insistent, these pop-nihilist poems are so full, you can’t help but think of them as beautiful holes dragging themselves through the wreckage of the page.”

— **EMILY SKILLINGS**

Anagramme / conjure words

Unica Zürn (trans. Sade LaNay)

There is great challenge as well as joy and play in translating the anagrams of Unica Zürn (1916, Berlin – 1970, Paris). Unveiling the rich language and dense imagery in her debut poetry, though the desire to match the unique formal scaffolding is challenging. Drawn from her “hexentexte,” these anagram poems do literally conjure words and read like surrealist spells. The witchy nature of the poems I would wrestle in my own witch’s den to erect something similar simply for the joy of it. Peeking into these translations makes me so aware of the mirror of time and what sort of things we have the potential to lose as we hurtle through it.

— Sade LaNay

Wir lieben den Tod

Rot winde den Leib,
Brot wende in Leid,
ende Not, Beil wird
Leben. Wir, dein Tod,
weben dein Lot dir
in Erde. Wildboten,
wir lieben den Tod.

Berlin 1953–54

We harbor the demise

Red wreathes the womb,
bread turns to bale,
living hatchets hacking
at need. We, your tomb,
weave your lot into
the dirt. Feral heralds,
we harbor the demise.

South Bend 2018

Ich streue das weisse Nichts

Ich streue das weisse Nichts;
ach, Weiss ist nichts. Reue des
weissen Rauchs sticht Seide
der Nachsicht. Suesse ist wie
das Weisse. Schreie: Tu’s nicht!
Sie ist ich! Werd’ suesse Nacht!

Berlin 1953–54

I broadcast white noise

I broadcast white noise;
alas, white is not a thing. Regret
whitewashes hindsight.
Smoke stings silk. Sweetness is like
whiteness. Screams: Don’t do it!
It is I! Be sweet dark dear!

South Bend 2018–19

Das Spielen der Kinder ist
streng untersagt

Satt irrt der Spassgeist in den Dunkelregen,
satt des Kreisens in Plunder. Geigend starrt
er in den Garten der Spass litt den Tigerkuss
Kinder, rettet den Sprung! Sagt leis: Reis, Sand
Spart die Genien des Sterns! Irrstunde klagt:
Das Spielen der Kinder ist streng untersagt.

Berlin 1953–54

the play of children is
strictly prohibited

Smug straying spree spirit in the darksome rain,
ringing round the rubbish. Fiddles fix
him in the garden of jest starved of tiger kiss
children, retrieve the spring! Says softly: sprig, sleep
spare the geniuses of the stars! Cuckoo clock wails:
the play of children is strictly prohibited.

South Bend 2018

Es liegt in deiner Hand

Gleite, Seidenrind, nah
an die Lende. Hirngeist
der eiligen Steinhand
singt drei Heilende an:
Enge, hier ist dein Land,
Rindengast, heile Neid,
es liegt in deiner Hand.

Berlin 1953–54

It lies in your hand

Glide, silken steer, nigh
on the haunch. Brain haint
of hasty lithic hand
chants about three healing ends:
straits, here is your state,
cortical sojourner, mend envy,
it lies in your hand.

South Bend 2018–19

Three Poems

Wu Ang (trans. Cecily Chen)

Wu Ang (b. 1974, Fujian Province, China) writes about fizzled-out love affairs that feel no more mundane than the routine of clocking into work, yet still heavy enough to compel one to pen a poem or ten. Teetering on the edge between melodrama and languid disinterest, the speaker in Wu Ang's poems is canny in her observation, wry in her humor, and irresistible in her casual charisma, grafting us into her scenes of stagnant domesticity and the nagging desire for more—whether this “more” is for better or worse remains an open question, buoyed only by a distracted yet insistent need to look elsewhere, to let our eye wander. Wu Ang's poems sit precariously at the precipice of alterity; before we force ourselves to finally separate from each other, she seems to say, let us indulge in the noxious comfort of this fraying cocoon we have weaved for ourselves for just one moment longer.

It will come as a surprise to no one that I discovered and started translating the writings of Wu Ang in the wake of a doomed relationship. Wu Ang's poems cracked me open and made me—they still make me—feel like “a used rag on the floor,” covered in the muck of my own failed romance but still warm from the phantom touches of its bruising caresses too. And maybe the act of translation itself, then, is my way of clinging to this rapidly cooling warmth. For better or worse.

— Cecily Chen

被窝

冷，但也还可以将就一夜
等伸出第三只手来
打发你，打开你

一旦睡着，开始做梦
就找不到枕头
你在正下方
我是块地道的抹布

然后心开始乱了
然后窗户打开，伸出个拖把来
水多，但还是太顺利了
我们并排躺在地板上
像两颗没甜味的糖

bed

cold, but still bearable enough for one more night
until a third hand reaches out
to dismiss you, to render you undone

once asleep, the dreams begin
the pillows are nowhere to be found
you are right there, underneath
and i, a used rag on the floor

and then the heart goes aflutter
and then the windows open, a mop passes through
there is a flood, but everything still happens oh so smoothly
side by side, we lie on the floor
like two pieces of candy that had lost their sweetness

一个应该做爱的晚上

一个应该做爱的晚上
我们吵架
并且分床而睡
开始的时候
你的侧面还很年轻
天亮后
两人都累了

我跳起来穿好衣服
说我要出门去
得尽快找个地方
比如，像交通警察
站在街口
或者像保姆那样
毫无感觉地
睡着
像两颗没甜味的糖

on a night meant for making love

on a night meant for making love
we quarrel
and sleep in separate beds
in the beginning
you look young from the side, still
in the morning after
both of us, exhausted

i jump out of bed to get ready
and say that i need to leave
in this very moment i must reach my mark
for instance, like the officer
who stands guard at the intersection
or like a governess
who, in slumber
is indifferent to the world

请把我埋葬在镜子里

请把我埋葬在镜子里
让我知道谁在我坟前逗留
久久地逗留

一双惊恐的猫眼 或者
害羞的蜘蛛娘
我允许婴儿指尖
轻如豆角的触摸
允许情人
因为背叛而亲吻
却难于忍受
藤叶上的齿印
被一滴水
打湿

please could you bury me in a mirror

please could you bury me in a mirror
so i will know who lingers before my grave
who lingers there, and lingers

a cat's pair of frightened eyes or
a girlishly timid arachnid
i allow the fingertips of a newborn
whose touch is as soft as a peapod's shell
allow lovers
that embrace because of the cut of betrayal
yet i cannot tolerate
teeth marks on the vines
that dampen
from a single drop of dew

Excerpts from *Fahrwasser: eine innere Biographie in Ansätzen*

Jayne-Ann Igel (trans. Mathilda Cullen)

Jayne-Ann Igel was born in Leipzig, 1954, in the German Democratic Republic. Fahrwasser was her second poetic work, inaugurating her diaristic style with its publication in 1991. It was the first book she published after she came out and changed her name as the Berlin Wall fell around her. She burst onto the samizdat literary scene of East Germany with a dysphoric style that meditates on fragments of language that approach her as strange, as a stranger. She writes, "i think everything i've written so far is only because Jayne-Ann had kept quiet, kept withdrawing;" noting that "no matter how my language might change, internally, essentially, in its quality, it will not become unknowable, for it draws its life from the same identity i have assumed, it's been with me for a long time, it's the reason i move." Wolfgang Hilbig writes in the forward, "When Jayne-Ann Igel travels home to come out to her parents, during the Christmas holidays, she is torn back by language. During this trip she thinks back on sentences which emerge with a diction almost entirely masculine... alienated to the point of paralysis." Igel's work revolves around this Rückkehr, what returns to her, what she returns to, turning around, wading through the halls of memory to find what ruins remain, what is left and what is gone.

— Mathilda Cullen

XI-04-1989 "sometimes i catch myself in the mirror," i wrote yesterday, of who i am & who i'll become, yes, am and become, i want to be able to record this process with precision in my writing; but when i put it like that, does that mean i'm afraid of losing her?

a flock of wild ducks passed me by, i heard their voices from afar & searched the horizon for their feathers, when i finally found them high above me in the twilight; how intensely one must let the beauty of the world within oneself, so that one is ready to save it

XI-11-1989 i think everything i've written so far is only because Jayne-Ann had kept quiet, kept withdrawing; now that she's come out of hiding, no longer willing to remain quiet, i've had to start writing all over, even if my experiences endure along with their validity. i haven't been able to write these last few weeks, overcoming my own barriers to speaking, speaking again & against speech, i share the fate of many people, and yet in my previous texts, every now and again, the feminine in me had a chance to speak, those sensations, observations, and discoveries were all sincere: the marvelous is but one facet of life, always spared, unspoken; no matter how my language might change, internally, essentially, in its quality, it will not become unknowable, for it draws its life from the same identity i have assumed, it's been with me for a long time, it's the reason i move

XI-13-1989 in the evening along the road of the new open-cast mine, seams of fog had fallen over the path, and the areas of the cleared wood were relieved of their earthiness by the moonlight, the frost, the fog; the crowns of the few remaining trees seemed moored in the middle of nowhere, tethered to the white ground like rising mushroom clouds, they seemed to belong to a distant time, not to our realm, as though they were only apparitions

XI-25-1989 able to feel very intensely for others, for example when an injustice befalls them, everything in me resists this injustice; but, on the other hand, i seem insensitive to some, when someone is afflicted by an illness or has an accident, not that illness is alien to me—i cannot feel it as wrong, as so many do; i can mourn the loss of friends, sympathize with the wrongs done to them, but when they are possessed by an illness i cannot offer that kind of sympathy; i respond to them as i did before they were sick, perhaps helping in a certain way, but i cannot show any sympathy for the illness, such sentences like: "oh you poor thing," "but why... they are such a good person," i often hear these sentences that declare illness an injustice that can overtake many a person, just not the loved one who has fallen ill, & they are repugnant to me & hinder any sympathy, they push the patient even deeper into their suffering, making it unamenable

it could be that transsexuality is also a disease, but since that other identity took root in me so early & so deeply, i can live as her if i want to, regardless of whatever its causes & whatever i can uncover about her origins in me

XI-26-1989 cold yesterday, snow in the morning, forgot my gloves while laying wreaths at the cemetery with CS, CS is not yet sure of our relationship or its character, since I turned out to be a "woman on the inside;" on the one hand, at our last meeting, our relationship as a woman to woman went beyond the character of a friendship, without it then having to have sexual traits (she hardly had them back then, even as she loved me as a "man"), yesterday she seemed to regard me more as a friend, even as she called me by my male name when she used to say "angel," which surprised even her; she's finding it difficult to establish a new relationship between us, to relate any quality of my old self to who i am now; i was able to allay some fears about the side effects of hormone replacement therapy, the lack of information about it in this country causes so much damage; later on i'd like to speak & write openly about accepting myself & my transition, without the fear of having to unearth something unpleasant again, this will be easy for me because my femininity has always come out since my early childhood, and this transition is a process of its coming to the surface in my history, a process of liberation, of unveiling, even if i don't have a desire to hide my previous life; this long time in my shell has brought many painful experiences, but i, like others, can draw from them & bring them into this life

physically i find myself already changed even without hormones, simply because of my willingness, and yet i don't want to deceive myself, some experiences will be denied me forever, pregnancy, childbirth, periods... but i never want to go back into the prison of MAN; i wear a violet scarf over my black blouse, the ends of which fall over my chest and back, i let my hair down, which i usually only kept behind my shoulders, i let it fall to one side, it is in this way i move freely & in accordance with my inner well-being

a walk along the Outer Alster in Hamburg, a light fog that makes the opposite shore seem even further away; the atmosphere, the mingling of cultures, reminded me of Amsterdam, the air on the banks with the freshness of a dirty river, in the morning, the memories of town canals came back, the waters of the Rhine, where we'd find tiny little shells; i didn't see the Elbe, only her breath, which made us shiver when we got out of the taxi on the Reeperbahn the night before, in my habit of "taking a chance," i let myself be taken by a woman in a heated courtyard of the Red-light District, we went upstairs to her room, where i was supposed to undress, but she had to have sensed that i wasn't THE man, not adventurous in that way, we spoke, she managed an orgasm in which i felt no pleasure; she explained that her parents had come to terms with her work, or were at least happy to shelter her so she could work without much risk of being harassed or exposed to AIDS; Hans & Steffen were waiting for me outside, i thought i'd been released from prison when i returned to the street, we went into an empty bar across the quarter, i cried because of what had just happened, Steffen didn't want to calm me down for a while, i felt that i had hurt myself in taking this chance, and at the same time, i felt like this episode was a final farewell to my life up until now, to all my attempts at life as a man, the outer appearance that had ruled over my entire life up to now; the woman was very gentle with me, there was no hint of that cinematic cliché: that prostitutes reacted in a vulgar & insulted manner if the client didn't behave like a "normal man"

other friends have also taken my coming out positively & accepted me for who, what, how i am, and i'm glad i don't need to hide or conceal anything anymore; Gaby said that if i called myself Herrison in our language i'd seem too exotic, something i would like to avoid, but on the other hand, strangers might call me "Ms. Igel"—this change almost feels too simple, seems too simple to me, and i also feel reminded of my mother, as though "Mrs. Igel" already belongs to her, but could not be mine. maybe this is similar to the fear of becoming one's own mother? "Mrs. Igel" is not available due to the "indolence of mothers" i experienced as a child, but perhaps also due to the conventional image of womanhood (?) i don't have to deny the masculine in me, it was always there, even if peripheral, not driving, like the feminine, which i hid from the outside world & myself

XI-28-1989 i still feel ridiculous, exposed, whenever i speak or write of myself using "die," "-in,"¹ and often avoid it entirely; that's how deep this pain or how extensive this denial goes, and external judgements don't help much either

¹ tr. note: the feminine singular article and nominal suffix

XI-30-1989 so this is my letter to the world that never wrote me back, it feels as though i move through a fog without any guidance, i speak into its clouds and the sounds disappear therein

it's been easier for people who exchange letters with me to get used to my new name; in writing they can get closer to it; those who i often meet still see me the way i am, hardly changed; can they sense what has changed in me in terms of attitudes, behavior, moods? i really need some visible sign of change, how else could this name be binding for those i'm just getting to know now, for those in the future; fog today, and frost on every plant, the maple looks like it's in bloom

XII-02-1989 the language acclimates to things, objects, of its own accord, in the best case, for example, when i record a dream, it becomes formal in the process of explication.

sometimes the thought of how little time i have left to live as a woman, time to live out the woman in me, to live her to every consequence—and it's not just a half, it's a whole life that i can live like this, despite the “half of my life” that's transpired; all of the changes, ages that one experiences, every moment of one's own development—they are always a whole life, in every moment one is completely present & whole

XII-09-1989 i think one's inner & social identity are the criteria that determine which gender one feels or knows one belongs to, which results in one's self-perception of living (but identity crises related to gender are something else entirely, for transsexuals, our gender is physically contradicted, fully & holistically developed, we do not share our consciousness with others, & hardly with ourselves); Andrea reverses these criteria, as though she, unconsciously, doesn't want to concede the status of “woman” to me, maybe she thinks: a little bit of femininity doesn't make a woman—and she'd be right, if this were solely an external affair for me; she, who seems happy for me about my decision, often pushes me back with simple remarks, such as “I'm the only woman in the room...” something that clearly hurts me right now and which I can't, as of yet, contradict; i wonder if these phrases come to her consciously, or if something inside her is resisting the fact of me & and thus “allows” her to speak in this way

XII-11-1989 dream: i saw a man transformed into a woman with small breasts & a bearded face, was saddened at this sight & prospect, but later discovered that he was just a man with a muscular chest (bodybuilding)

tomorrow i'll get the prescription for hormone therapy, on wednesday i'll start—will anything change in a month's time?

XII-17-1989 yesterday my parents came to visit, i couldn't share this news with them, mainly because something of a better understanding had just developed between us that i didn't want to immediately jeopardize; i'll have to tell them, write them, because they invited me to christmas & i don't want to pretend, don't want to wear those clothes

dreamt of a guitar hanging from a high-rise window by a wire, its wooden body charred, and we heard a singing sound, a crying, emanating from it; Bettina pulled it up by a silk thread, rocked it back & forth in her hands, stroked the wood, but the crying that seemed to be coming from the soundhole wouldn't stop

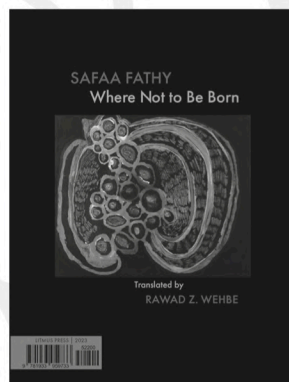
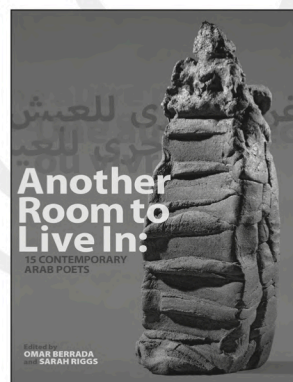
XII-18-1989 as i transcribe older dreams, i feel that i've gotten past the theme of guilt which has dominated me for so long, that the guilt complex is no longer important to me in that way, that it no longer binds me, he no longer binds me, i don't have to keep writing to him; however, the dreams i transcribe are still determined, still marked by him

XII-19-1989 dream: i looked down at myself, naked, to see if my breasts were beginning to grow, i discovered a growth under my left breast, brown, but when i examined the growth it appeared to be a second nipple, my right breast appeared unchanged, but both seemed to have gained some fullness, so i was able to accept this extra nipple

I-06-1990 yesterday at the southern cemetery, a layer of snow had settled over the blossoming everlastings, they looked like faded patterns of carpets or wallpaper, we came across a field of burial urns, planted with low conifers, like bonsai, with fully grown crowns, this landscape seemed bizarre, with its mournful edges of snow, it seemed like the materialization of a dream i had years prior, of the burial of a dwarf in a miniature graveyard like this, tiny obelisks scattered about and i, abandoned by the funeral party

I-09-1990 dream: i was lying in the bed of a large room, one of my friend's, who was saying good night as they lay down in the room next door, i looked at the door, a lamp was burning beside it on a table, shaded so it gave off a mild yellow light, and as i looked at the lamp longer i saw a moth circling it, after a while it seemed to be a butterfly, large & white, and i was afraid it might come too close to me, its shape growing larger as it flew, flying around the light, i pulled myself together enough to run to my friend; when i reached the door and turned around it had become a bird, crouching in its white feathers next to the lamp, and i was naked

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Three Proems

Kim Hyesoon (trans. Jack Jung)

“From Aerok,” “On a Razzle-Dazzle Makeshift Stage,” and “One Day I Will Cast Away Personification” are translated “proems” from “Thus Spoke n’t” by Kim Hyesoon (b. 1955, North Gyeongsang Province, South Korea). “Thus Spoke n’t” represents the culmination of a project that Kim Hyesoon initiated as an anonymous blog in 2014, comprised of vignettes, editorials, riddles, travelogues, and, at times, outright poems. These texts explore the conceptual country of Aerok, an anadrome of Korea, and refuse classification as either poetry or prose. Instead, Kim Hyesoon refers to them as shisanmun, translating literally to “poetry-prose.”

The term proem traditionally referred to the introductory argument of a lengthy prose text, but here, it denotes the intermediary nature between poetry and prose in Kim Hyesoon’s compositions.

*In “Thus Spoke n’t,” Kim Hyesoon introduced a persona named “n’t,” representing my English translation of *안아* (ahn-ab). In Korean, *안아* is an adjunctive adverb of negation, a particle that, when added, negates the entire sentence.*

From Aerok

From Aerok I write.
Barely, here I write.
In this place, I will live, and one day, perish.
Barely, I will stay until the time comes to move on.
Along streets adorned with beauty parlors, student quarters, hospitals, banks, restaurants, cell phone shops, and fruit stalls, I find my refuge, only to retreat and put pen to paper once more.
How many bus rides remain for me? How many books, films, drinks, visits to my mother, or shed tears await? How many moments are left in my tally?
Here in Aerok, pushing past ‘I have nothing left to desire,’ striving beyond ‘I cannot continue to live.’
From this razzle-dazzle of hollow shells, a makeshift stage of a city.
From this makeshift stage of a country.
I adjust my sweater, speckled with pink fuzz.

The solitary star called Earth floats in the vast expanse of cosmos.
On a corner of this desolate star lies Aerok, cradling her skeletal mountains. They seem like tiny insects banished from the cosmos.
Is my writing born from intoxication with solitude, much like the reverberations echoing from an arid well?

Here where
Living is like.
Loving is like.

On a Razzle-Dazzle Makeshift Stage

I visit a plaza in a newly constructed, pre-planned city.

Perhaps it's due to the war, but every place in Aerok resembles a makeshift stage. Yet this place seems even more so.

The cuboid cement buildings are cloaked with flashing neon signs on every side. No surface remains untouched. The stores in these buildings refuse to compromise, hanging the largest, brightest signs they can afford. In doing so, they overshadow the signage of the stores I seek.

On the first floor of these buildings, there are cosmetics shops, shoe stores, clothing outlets, cellphone stores, and coffee shop chains.

Every brand from Aerok has a presence here.

The 2nd, 3rd, and 4th floors host a variety of restaurants, hospitals, and cafes.

The 5th floor houses a motel,

while the basement is predominantly occupied by karaoke bars.

You could celebrate here continuously, every single day of the year.

Almost all the city's money circulates here, except for what's spent on daily necessities.

The throngs of people crossing the streets bear testimony to a 365-day festival.

The majority of the restaurants and cafes operate 24/7.

Dozens of these cuboid buildings line the streets. What's even more astonishing is that most of those who frequent this temporary stage are under the age of 30. Do they celebrate their fleeting existence with such extravagance? When the glaring lights dim and dawn approaches, the streets resemble the chairs of a restaurant, dripping with filth.

There is no silence here. No darkness. No noble spirit moves through this space.

There is no history. It's like a planet illuminated by multiple suns; lights remain on throughout the day and night. Each shop blares its own music, creating an overlapping cacophony of Eastern and Western hits. The buildings, after countless sleepless nights, seem weary. The only remnants of those who've passed through or rooted themselves here are the odd bits of tissue or pools of vomit found each morning. Only that and nothing else, whether you leave or disappear.

There isn't a single tree or book on this street, where both time and 'I' are expended, and eventually squandered. Contemplations don't happen on these streets.

Everyone departs before their 'me' can become 'me.'

The stores too, frequently relocate. The buildings regularly change their clothes, with the fate of the families linked to these stores hanging in balance. Newer, more razzle-dazzle stores and structures rise in their stead, constructing another makeshift stage.

The streets are littered with toys crafted from a blend of nylon and plastic. Among these toys.

On these streets where no one can settle down. On these streets of endless thirst. Is this the pinnacle of Aerok Civilization, now at its zenith in recorded history?

Then, news of the worst tragedy in Aerok's history swept through this city of the makeshift stages. And amidst these impermanent structures and utility poles, banners of condolences unfurled, mourning the lost lives, juxtaposed with the names of politicians in the throes of election season.

One Day I Will Cast Away Personification

There is a level called human.

There is a level called normal human.

There is a level called modern human.

There is a level called Aerok human.

A touch of laziness on any of these rungs—neglecting to clean rooms, iron clothes, bathe, extend greetings, recognize others, step outdoors, or wave flags—and we begin falling down. Dust accumulates, clothes grow musty, and soon we're kicked off. Should one opt out of societal norms, like attending weddings or funerals, disregarding formality and institutions, the descent accelerates. From birth, we're hung up on a level. Suffering nervous breakdowns, we stand, heads held high in the void, hanging on for our dear life. Much like a temple perched on a precipice, we cling to our body's edge.

The birth of n't means the beginning of her personification. The education of n't indicates she's learning her personified role. The continued survival of n't suggests this fabricated virtual life has become her beacon of hope, aiding her resilience. As she persists, she approaches the moment she'll cast away her personification.

From birth, we engage in the ceaseless process of personifying ourselves. We persevere in this civilization by elevating each of our 'I,' even when the 'I' yearns to devolve into the beastliness, to succumb to death, to be deemed abnormal. We're suspended above a web of language.

Now is when n't scribbles a few words amidst lines she is writing. Now is when she consistently casts the persona known as n't atop the moment called now, now, now. This is resilience stretched to its limit.

n't is certain she'll transcend this personification someday.

And more than that, she senses an ineffable surge beyond words, awaiting her.

Bare-naked, she anticipates confronting something beyond human origin.

Perhaps n't yearns for that sight—the vast, lucid visage oscillating across the cosmos, that defining moment when self is rendered redundant.

Though n't writes poetry to shun personification, she ironically employs rhetoric in the process. To carry n't far away to a place beyond the reach of personification. To unchain the chain that has become the mind of n't. To a realm where one sheds all pretense and merely exists. To that moment of shining formlessness. To bring n't there from time to time. To jump off from the levels of human, normal human, modern human, and Aerok human.

To be oneself in one's own universe.

To be a soul.

Five Poems

Miguel James (trans. E.R. Pulgar)

Miguel James (b. 1953, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago) was a Trinidadian-Venezuelan poet active in the 90s; he came to my attention as an abolitionist, via his poem "Against the Police" from 2003's Kentakes, poemas para la reina y otras obras maestras. Diving into his work, I found James' genesis to drip not with revolutionary exultation, but with humorous, sweet, unabashed eroticism—it's an honor to bring you a selection from his first book, Mi novia Ítala come flores, originally published in 1987 in Caracas.

— E.R. Pulgar.

When You Wake

When you wake
and want to make laughter of your dreams
I will be mute, distant, victorious.

To the Dawn I Shall Wake

Any night now the monster sleeps
to the dawn I shall wake
all new, all child, all lov

[untitled]

The poem is a tongue that drools upon the face.

When In Bed I Lay

When in bed I lay
You are next to me
I caress you
I kiss you
I rest my head over your body
You don't caress me
You don't kiss me
You don't do anything
You pillow

Split Ends

Suddenly i remember Mirna, my ex-classmate, the timid one, the one with two braids, always with two braids and bangs i remember improvised shitty moralist poets that made me listen to their monstrous ideas i see myself bowing in front of false gods laughing at bad jokes playing the intellectual the revolutionary promising my professor i'll be as good at piano as Chopin that my professor can traumatize me if i distance myself from music i see libertines who identify themselves as liberals papá reading western novels how to get rich advising i build my own philosophy instead of reading García Márquez my split ends my hurt sensibility mi mamá mi tía mi hermana mi prima mi abuela Angela brave is the friend who confesses the lustful appetites my presence stirs in them i see myself in all of them i want to read Bible and Villón with a red youth make war love no longer listen or read other's adventures about the door of a room place unintelligible clichés nobody will critique or correct my manuscripts inside listening to Beethoven and Masekela mocking poets i don't understand getting closer to Miguel and screams and exorcisms and masochisms and peace.

. . . O . . .

[first three sections of ten]

Igor Gulin (trans. Ainsley Morse and Timmy Straw)

In the days following the attempted July 2023 coup in Russia, Igor (b. 1985, Moscow) began writing a sequence of prose poems and sending these poems, as each was written, to Ainsley and Timmy to translate—an uncanny enterprise because, as the poem sequence developed, we all found ourselves increasingly entangled and implicated in the text’s simultaneous becoming as both ‘source’ and as ‘translation.’ Not unlike that old cinematic game: who can tell, in a hall of mirrors, which face is the origin of a given reflection.

“You are violating our agreement. You write me two letters a day. A lot of letters have piled up. [...] Love letters are not written for one’s own enjoyment, just as a true lover doesn’t think of himself when he loves. You are writing about one and the same thing under various pretexts. Stop writing about how, how, how you love me, because by the third “how” I start thinking about something else.” (Viktor Shklovsky, Zoo, or Letters not about Love, 1923)

— Ainsley Morse and Timmy Straw

/shushan and the elders/

And all of this came to pass in the days of shashlik, harissa and shushan, right after the cook’s exploits, right after the bathhouse.¹

The elders are watching, but I’m not. I’m just not interested in any of that—that’s how you put it. I taught them many things: not fit for a cunt or the Red Army, eat a fish and fuck a cock, suffocating, dilly-fucking-dallying. They can take it from here.

The party’s over, so too the feast of the eyes, and only the mountain, as usual, protrudes decently enough.²

Something’s been interpellated in my gut and will need treatment for quite some time.

The elders are watching, but I’m not. I would watch if it were possible to watch the other way—to wrap the gaze around the neck.

“I greet laboring Soviet Armenia liberated from the yoke of imperialism Lenin” was burned onto the hair of some anonymous by the violinist Kazarian. You come at it this way and that and then you see it.

Having thoroughly palpated a good fifty shaggy dogs, I was schooled again in forgotten eros. is this a feeling? asked my buddy T. I answered them: no fucking clue.

But I would probably have liked to read your hair.

Queer manifesto, marriage certificate, restaurant menu, fragments cut by righteous left-liberal censorship, other stuff: I greedily consume these potencies.

Doesn’t a person become food when you write out your words up against them? How is this better than malegaze-gawping, as the elders do? Fuck if it’s better. Might even be worse.

So it was in the days of wild sorrel, kebab and whitefish.

Some anonymous medieval Armenian painted Christ’s baptism on the skull of a catfish. Holy writ on weird bullshit is evidently a tradition here. A real gesamtkunstwerk catfish, noted my buddy T.³

Yerevan has the tenderest Stalinism in the world, kenosis of the grand style, my beloved ruins. Are you good now? you asked, when you’d climbed them.

Yeah, I’m good now. I’m really good.

¹ *shushan* – a pickled wild herb (*Chaerophyllum sylvestre*), served warm as a side dish with lavash (flatbread); *the cook’s exploits* – a reference to the June 2023 attempted coup by Yevgeny Prigozhin, leader of the mercenary military formation Wagner Group, previously known as “Putin’s cook” (because of his catering business which held contracts with the Kremlin).

² *the mountain* – Mt. Ararat, visible from Yerevan.

³ *gesamtkunstwerk catfish* – refers to a 2014 piece by Gulin, which in turn refers to the seminal art-historical work by Boris Groys, *Gesamtkunstwerk Stalin* (in English, *The Total Art of Stalinism*).

/a cinematic interlude for Polina Barskova⁴

Since I've already brought you into the text, an indexical shift is a bit untoward, but hunkered down beneath new (now Parisian) ruins, we've come to agree that both of us are metonymy people; and so I write this chapter for you, Polina.

Remember that poppyseed cake? Afterwards we talked about this for the first time, and recently we started talking about it again. The subject was prophecy.

Prophecy is a meaty thing, splashing its flesh around. He pulled it off well.⁵ At the movies you usually feast your eyes, here you puke with them (wiseass Pasolini, fruitcake Ferreri—roll over).

What did the Judaeans say when their temple was finally destroyed?—well motherfucker. Or more precisely, “wlmthrfckr.” That's about what we said too. The Hegelian ravings of the shestidesyatniks,⁶ the senile delirium of the grand squabblers—suddenly it all came to pass. The main thing is that everything in his world is just as pathetic as in ours. Just as pathetic as Nebuchadnezzar and his gang of sorry-ass shashlik-grillers.⁷

Having puked our guts out, we saw, at last, face to face—

Meanwhile, I'm writing this to you from the banks of the Oise. Our Gor had a planet with that name in one of his books. He too knew a thing or two about food.⁸

/genosse gemüse/

Vegetable comrades—good title for a Russian novel. Really it's Verochka's joke, but I liked it so much I decided I would make it my own.

Vegetables, herbs, mushrooms. Let this chapter be meatless. The holy patrons of veganism, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They'll give me aid.

Like hunting for mushrooms I've been coming here to suffer for twenty years now.

Now I'm here and am waiting for you.

In Moscow the grayhairs S. and S. dropped by for a neighborly visit with a flagrant tallboy.⁹ Oksana said: while you're on the road you should write your own “Zoo.”¹⁰ I worry it would come out as cosplay. And the fact I've taken you on as the heroine makes it just a full-blown parody—as flagrant as the S. spouses' tallboy.

Recently, though, you said yourself that for me you're the laying-bare of the device. That's how I feel too. Everything is obvious and therefore funny. Having accumulated experience, you can turn unhappy passion into parody even while it's happening. Then the gravity is lost, the gesture remains.

I caught sight of you and my fuckstration lifted. Infatuation is aesthetics. With a messenger's hand it strips away every necessity, the body loses its purposiveness, intentions burst in a kiss.

Auf Aufhebung—yesterday we were drinking in Montmartre at M.'s place, she's gotten over Rancière and fallen for Badiou.

Stirlitz writes down the coded message, pours himself a shot and reaches for his Montaigne.¹¹

That's why I love prophets: the very same Daniel-Balthazar, the holy mole in Babylon—everything he tells us can mean anything at all. All those beasts from the taxidermy shop with ten horns, three teeth, four wings, and other random little fucking details. The very existence of a code lends meaning to the lunacy of history, no need to understand it.

Handsome Stirlitz builds a hedgehog out of matches, and a half-century later a bug-eyed stuffed-and-mounted descendant shows the kids its cat ass and starts shitting out freaks in its own image.¹² Kingdom rises against kingdom, the facebook analysts unsheathe their dusty Umberto.¹³

You like the futurists more than the symbolists, you say that for them the word has consequences. I'm the opposite. I'm bewitched by the sheer effort of the chase, the futility of decoding. And then there's the eternal feminine—that's a dame not easy to forget.¹⁴

The hand of the messenger writes out the verdict, but the sentence could be provisional. You've been found too light. No big deal. I finished off four pelmeni and—*yoo haf tu eet mor er ay'll keel yoo*—is what, with unbearable tenderness, you said.

That very evening I tossed the chicken bones of my fate into the Seine (a shame, of course, that it wasn't from the Mirabeau) and decided I would no longer be fucked by the foreordained.

The hand of the messenger writes out the verdict, the prophet translates it.

Maybe I am not writing this text for you at all. Showing you the beginning was a mistake. You're not into high anguish.

I'm writing this text to be translated. I'll pronounce my own verdict, while the lovely Ainsley and T., my buddy, will try to make sense of it, to disinter the little dog of guilt.

In translation the truth of the text is revealed, the text itself lies.

I am always erring, losing the main thread, giving myself over to the game too much and

equivocating. The translation loses again what was already lost, lays bare the fact of insufficiency. This is why translation gets closer to the action—to the language of things and parts. Things, parts, and occurrences.

Translation lets the name take place.

I toss the round letter out of you and there you'll be (that is, not how it was with God and Abraham, in fact just the opposite).¹⁵ A little rainy-day joke—it only works in English.

At the beginning of this text a mountain was looming, but now a fox might dart through.

Could there be such a thing as a language-kiss that gave away nothing but itself? No intentions, no vain desires.

You, to all appearances, don't believe in God, but in the set of your shoulder he hints to me of himself.

I would have liked to trace my tongue along it, but even more I would have liked to translate its language.

Thinking about the upcoming chapters, I mentally translate them from English. The original and the translation don't change places, they go in circles like painted ponies. Head spinning, you can almost touch Benjamin's pure language. It renders impossible any lover's discourse, there is no place for ennui—only naming and recognition.

Afterward—toppling into a ditch by a hungover Coriolis force, in keeping with the eternal dynamic of passion for the eternal feminine.

A few years ago Vanya Boldyrev told a Tamil Hegelian that the German *rot* [red] is the Russian *rot* [mouth]; the Tamil guy wrote about it in his novel about love and cannibalism, Vanya read it and told me the whole story, and I realized immediately that I'd write it down, starting a whole new cycle of the recursive carousel.

Ever since that conversation I started reading your nails. Last time they were *red*.

⁴ *Polina Barskova* – (b. 1976) a Leningrad-born, US-based Russophone poet and literary scholar. She has written extensively on the literature and culture of the 1941-44 Siege of Leningrad.

⁵ *He* – here refers to the Soviet filmmaker Alexei German (1938-2013), director of films including *Checkpoint on the Road*, *My Friend Ivan Lapshin*, *Hard to Be a God*, etc. He is referred to again below as the “grand squabblers.”

⁶ *shestidesyatniks* (literally, sixty-ers) – the designation for the Soviet baby-boomers, a large and influential generation associated with the relative liberalism of the post-war Khrushchev Thaw.

⁷ *Nebuchadnezzar* – the King of Babylon in the Book of Daniel (a collection of folktales written in 5th-3rd century BCE). He reigned during the first period of Hebrew exile.

⁸ *our Gor* – refers to Gennady Gor (1907-1981), a Soviet ethnographer and science fiction writer and more recently revealed as the author of phantasmagorical poems written during the Siege of Leningrad.

⁹ *flagrant tallboy* – our version of *vopiushei sis'koi* (literally: flagrant tit), with “tit” a slang term for a plastic bottle of beer.

¹⁰ *your own “Zoo”* – refers to Viktor Shklovsky's epistolary novel *Zoo: Or Letters Not About Love* (1923), which is a kind of ghost-text to this one.

¹¹ *Stirlitz* – the iconic hero of the wildly popular late-Soviet television series “Seventeen Moments of Spring” (1973, dir. Tatiana Lioznova). Stirlitz is a Soviet spy embedded in Nazi Germany. It has been suggested that Putin, who spent several years in East Germany working for the KGB in his youth, models himself on Stirlitz.

¹² *cat ass* – during his ritual first-day-of-school visit in 2013, Vladimir Putin drew a rear-view of a cat on the class whiteboard, spawning an entire industry of memes [for image see: https://wikireality.ru/wiki/Кошка_Путина].

¹³ *Umberto Eco* – Italian postmodernist theorist, author of, among other works, a 1995 essay called “Ur-fascism,” which lays out fourteen elements that point toward the development of fascism: <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>.

¹⁴ *eternal feminine* – first articulated by Goethe in *Faust*, the idea of the eternal feminine was further developed by late-nineteenth/early twentieth-century Russian philosophers and symbolists including Vladimir Solovoyov, Sergei Bulgakov, Father Pavel Florensky, and others.

¹⁵ *God & Abraham* – refers to Genesis 17, in which God changes Abram's name to Abraham to reflect their covenant—the extra syllable shifts the meaning of the name from “exalted father” to “father of multitudes,” guaranteeing the “countless descendants” promised in the covenant.

Double Translation

Cecilia Biagini

Bianca me invitó a escribir sobre *la traducción*. Inmediatamente, inmediatamente me pregunto en qué idioma lo voy a escribir. How would I do it? Think and translate or immerse myself in one or the other language? I don't think I can do the switch entirely. Suelo pensar en español a pesar de haber vivido casi la mitad de mi vida en Brooklyn. ¿Cómo es posible que en el acto de pensar todavía no adopte mi lenguaje secundario? Hay frases, *after all*, sí, palabras también, que vienen a mi con toda naturalidad en inglés sobre todo aquellas que no utilizaba antes de mudarme de Buenos Aires. Sobre todo las financieras como loan y due date. Before I used to live day by day with some money in my pocket, moving to NYC has made me part of the economic system where I can acquire debt in order to get what I need. *Schedule*, me acuerdo que me costó... grasp the word until I acknowledge it by repetition, by looking at it, writing it, hearing it... *Razorblade*.

It seems que hay una lengua, una de las lenguas francas de la República de África Central, my friend Marcelo told us about it one night at a restaurant, Sango, if you interrupt you don't understand... You'll have to listen till the end of the phrase... He read it in a book called *Foreign Words*, parece que hasta que no terminás la oración el oyente no sabe si es afirmación o negación así que no se puede interrumpir, hay que escuchar hasta el final.

Personally I find that the Spanish language makes us speakers not go in a straight line of thought, when we answer we take diagonals, long roads and curves, never a short cut. We bring free association to the table. One thing takes us to another and so on. We don't go directly to the point. Ja ja how did we arrive here?

What are you trying to tell me?

Which one is your mnemonic device to help with the order of sharps and flats in scales? *Fat cat gets diabetes after eating butter*, *Feliz casa gira dando arabescos entre baladas*. That means our references are different, what we store in our brains to help memorize. Our patterns are not necessarily alike *pe ppe ro ni pizza*. *Tiem bla la tie rra*

Rueda que rueda la rueda del ferrocarril

Some centro-americanos living in the US for a long time do *double translation* and create phrases like *Te llamo pa' trás, I'll call you back*. Does it make sense to call someone in reverse? *Te llamo más tarde*. They went full circle in terms of expression.

You make a gesture I cannot get... translate, make it reachable. Me haces un gesto que no puedo entender, que me querés decir?

Hoy aprendí que "sera" es *noche* en Italiano. Valeria me cuenta en español que ella lo habla perfecto y que entiende como tres o cuatro dialectos. Yo tengo el pasaporte más não falo niente, wait a minute... Italian, Portuguese? parole palabras words

Viajo de un país a otro

Estoy llegando a Nueva York, New York desde Buenos Aires, me cambiará la cabeza el punto de inflexión entre un lugar y otro? No lo creo, siempre pienso en *Argentino*, do you?

I adopted *in charge, following up...* but my intonation will always be foreign...

I don't work enough on having the mouth open for each sound, beyond the vowels

Leo inglés y traduzco/no traduzco, vivo un momento, el momento de la naturalización de la lengua. May Sarton describe la diferencia entre feeling lonely versus being alone. En Buenos Aires se lo cuento a una amiga en castellano, y le digo estar sola no es lo mismo que feeling lonely.

There is a baby in the plane. If we speak to babies in different languages would they end up understanding them all? Is it the landscape that configured us all? How do mountains translate/relate to lakes and jungles?

Con Federico tocamos, hacemos diálogos con sonidos, we make dialogues with musical instruments. We generate soundscapes. The *violín* communicates with a *bombo legüero*, with *toc tocs*, *piano*, *chinchines* and *castañuelas*. They are unified by their sound capacity, timbre and pitch. Would I be understood when I speak in another language to you? Can you understand me following my rhythm, my tone? I don't think so. Maybe yes by gestures.

Una vez en un statement escribí, soy un traductor del polvo que nos une. Isn't that the ultimate desire of artists? And ghosts our ghosts. I want to talk to you all. Let me sense the language of the invisible. I'll translate it into a painting. Then I will let it echo, morph into these words so I can become after all the translator of the dust that unifies you and me, this and that. But why do I speak like this and you speak like that? I know...because the river flows into the waters of the ocean. Because existence is bears and flowers, because a cat is not a dog although a cat might feel it is a dog. Who, like an actor, doesn't want to be it all?

¿Cómo es la voz de un color que suena a la intemperie? Camino mientras escribo ya estoy en otro país, otra lengua, otros códigos. Antes de llegar pensé en la crisis que me aqueja, la idea de estar allá o acá. Esta vez no, salí de un mundo y entre a otro sin brusquedad, mi cabeza hizo un click and I spoke in English all day long without questioning or even feeling tire-some from the implicit effort.

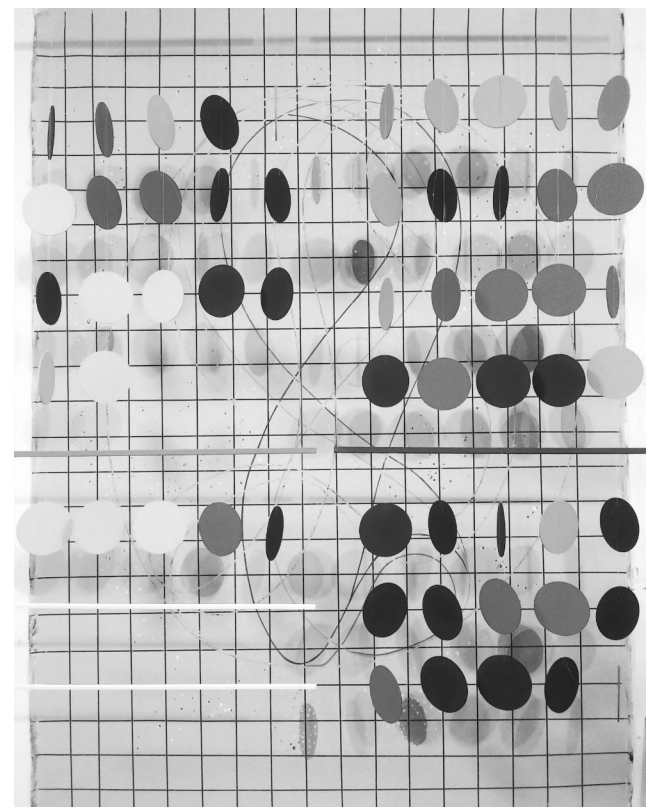
Is there a passage for transformation? Are dreams language or space?

This is a translation of my friend Claudina's dream. Left to me in an audio memo, in Spanish... "I was going through a town that was like a prehistoric labyrinth. All of a sudden someone was jumping from the floor up, alive. I couldn't associate it with the movies I watched, with anything, it was natural. It was like a moving pebble, that is what it was. I kept on going pi pi pi and then I found a skateboard, then an old pair of scissors and another little thing I don't remember and I kept it, y me la guardaba. No me lo guardaba for stealing it, sino que la agarraba in one of those old corridors. All of a sudden a tía passed by and said, I like something of you." Then she said, "I know you because of the pictures you took of Rita," and that was it, the clue of what I was seeing versus...I don't know. That is all. My god I know that! Se me juntan porque muchas veces el sueño se me

transforma en otra cosa...here I am, alone and don't build up anything and I'm watching eight movies a day...I associate all in that place of dreams. Then I watched something, about a clinic where they treat you with a psychedelic drug and the work it does with the unconscious to cure people."

Miro a mi alrededor desde una posición de loto frente a una pintura. Acto seguido miro la máquina de coser, in my bedroom I look at the sewing machine, the table light is putting the focus on it. It is the main character of that angle in the bedroom.

I'm looking for words to present what I see. A warm light. A foot on the floor, half on the carpet that contains the almohadón for meditation. I am sitting here and therefore I write.



balancing act, 2022, 68" x 48" x 13" © Cecilia Biagini

Cuando era chica miraba un programa que duraba un minuto, venía antes de la *Pantera Rosa* y consistía en la definición de una palabra por día. Hoy aprendí que Clío es una palabra que deriva del latín y que sus raíces quieren decir Gloria.

Isn't every moment an act to be translated, to decodify it even the unknown? To translate is to be in transit. It is an action figure. To perceive in other languages. It's spatial. The multidimensional world and its multifaceted figures. Is it freestyle or what is your moral? Acute. How? Systematically?

Mafalda, a cartoon character from Quino, imagined she would be a UN translator and would bring peace to the world by switching some words around from one member to the other... What's the appropriate word for this palabra? Does it relate in terms of sound, timbre, vos sabés qué dije cuando dije palabra? Can we have it all in translation? Meaning, form, style, duration, rhythm? What is left out? Who chooses?

Tones affect languages. What might sound rude in one is neutral in the other.

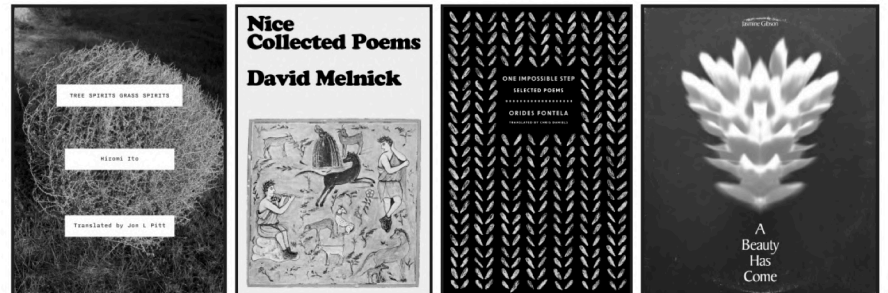
Is psychoanalysis a translation system? From the unconscious to the impossible. When we interact, do we translate? Can we change the way we translate? Can we be free of translation? Does direct interaction exist? Can the body help us? Traducir es interpretar. Interpretar es traducir. The interpreter is the person who translates.

I engage with my son over this topic, he speaks mostly English mientras yo hablo mostly en español. Elaboramos un collage de pensamiento bilingüe that opens the wings for possibilities of thought. It would have been awkward, artificial, if I needed to translate myself to speak with my son and daughter. Never completely real? Why is that? Is language the deepest root for identity?

Leemos libros traducidos todo el tiempo. Al traducirse son extranjeros así mismos? La obra de autor admite translation or it became what it is and something else at the same time? El idioma es como un accidente geográfico, está arraigado en su naturaleza. Fernando Pessoa además escribía en inglés, he wrote in english because he was educated in that language. All that we learnt at a young age will remain with us in one way or another.

La aventura, el doble, el acto de reformatear de traducir es cosa por seguro estimulante y puntillosa, una unión cósmica entre autor y traductor, este entra por afuera a comulgar con el sentido casi pleno de la frase. The adventure to translate an author's work becomes a cosmic union between author and translator. The latter enters the text from the outside to take communion, and *almost* in the "full" meaning of the phrase.

NIGHTBOAT BOOKS: NEW TITLES



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A BEAUTY HAS COME JASMINE GIBSON

A collection of psychedelic poems inspired by Egyptian queen Nefertiti, exploring the slippage between her image and legacy across time, place, and space.

Nightboat Books are available for purchase at www.nightboat.org

2023 Brannan Prize: Hunter Larson

Hunter Larson was selected as the winner of the Fifth Annual Brannan Prize by Judge Vi Khi Nao. On Larson's works, Nao writes: "The poet is visibly lucid and fearless and precise. Long and generally skinny, this poet's peripatetic lines, filled with sageful tenderness, never cease moving, transitioning, reflecting, glancing, submerging. The poet's deliberate wisdom travels like a hypodermic needle, piercing through empirical senses and diaphanous acuity with a lucent, meditative, surprising logic that is simultaneously blinding and eye opening. These three hypnotic poems exude a softness so psychically argute—they could cut metal without hydro."

into the absence that's
you tonight

there I go again coldly wanting
a past so removed it's compact
so I broke it open so I wanted more
from the dying you said, it felt
like that, bright knot of what
we wanted converging
on a raised dais in the middle
it was so good it was kind of like
being adjacent to that real
opulent feeling no words
just the sky and what falls
out of it the surface of
each day marked with a kind of
temperance in my mind
I render it and loop it back
each day the sun so fucked up
spitting bright heaven into me
and I'd like to perfect this
drag a form out from under
the long morning and hold it up
to the light, beauty, the distortion
you have to remember it now
you have to look through it
the warped and the artificial
and if this feels so much like art
then I fucked it up, I want
the tender reasons, the drifting
light of an August night
spent at the lake watching forms
go cold as the day drains away
from what it felt like to feel
so available I'm aware of how
arrogant I sound how tapped in I am
to the abstract but I do believe in
love as a means of suspending time
before it goes through the open

grid of what we mean and who
we are when we wake up
with a reason to, and something
like the sky flooding the room
with duration, something total
and felt like life like light
suspended above a building
the moon a still image held
aloft in the retinal factory
hollowed out a sentence only
to sound emotionally reticent
I walked beneath a fucked up
sky, thinking you back through
the cool streaming resurrect
the cliché for a moment
tell me something stupid
and meaningless, I get so
embarrassed sometimes honestly
and visibly crushed up against
the surface of what I wanted
to show you and what
I had to do to get back there
for a minute I thought I saw you
you loved that moment those colors
elegant meshwork of angles
going partly lost in the half
light of another August gone
and in the parking lot I got so
fucked up I couldn't see anything
terrible, and almost nightly
I see the forms in things in music
so permanently I retreat back
through the voice, but I can't
remember what you sound like
so I go so variously through
the sliding glass doors

in the middle of my thinking
these dark petals of form
that fall across the surface of
my daily wandering awful
breaking into what, something
real enough to touch
a glance sustained that leaves me
feeling something like an edge
to this a soft light and immanence
quietly dilating here in the fracture
so I get up and walk around
into the absence that's you tonight

*The read the complete selection of Larson's
Brannan Prize-winning poems, please visit:
[www.poetryproject.org/publications/newsletter/
274-fall-2023/brannan-prize-three-poems](http://www.poetryproject.org/publications/newsletter/274-fall-2023/brannan-prize-three-poems)*

Interview w/ Matvei Yankelevich

Kay Gabriel

KAY GABRIEL: I'm curious how you got into editing and publishing, and specifically with the purview of editing and publishing poetry in translation.

MATVEI YANKELEVICH: I started a zine in college called *Ugly Duckling* with a few friends. It was kind of a Dada, collage-y, nonsense kind of zine, with a bit of a Russian avant-garde aesthetic. It included some things that I was starting to translate at that time, probably Kharms, maybe Khlebnikov. After college, I moved to Moscow and then I came back to do a PhD at Yale, which I never finished, in Slavic. At the time, I felt so peripheral, so anything like publishing my own work, other than doing the zine, wasn't even in the picture. While in New Haven, I had started communicating with some other people who were doing zines or little magazines and publishing a little there. But I didn't really feel like there was a place, a larger context, for what I was interested in. And I started typing up poems I liked from various library books, just work that I liked, making a very private anthology on a typewriter. Some of the things I typed into that potential anthology were poems that I found in translation, including Erich Fried, this Austrian poet and leftist, and some Michaux who I had just discovered for myself. And you know, it was just sort of a private idea, a future idea.

I dropped out of Yale after like a year and a half and moved to New York where I continued the zine with help from Ellie Ga, and after a while we met all of these people that kind of coalesced into the early UDP. What had felt like a very private thing—a hundred copies of a zine, sending it to a few people or slipping it into a *Village Voice* to see what happens—this kind of intervention of publishing was interesting to me at that moment as a way of getting the work out.

And then when UDP, or something like UDP, was starting up, I put in a translation I had done of Lev Rubenstein as the last piece in the first issue of *6x6* magazine. That's the year 2000. A lot of the early *6x6* orbited around The Poetry Project, coming here to readings, publishing Eddie Berrigan, John Colletti, Jacqueline Waters, people my friends and I were meeting here. I had been in New York a couple years before I started going to the Project. Even though I was working upstairs for Richard Foreman, I just didn't feel like I had an in until I met Julien Poirier and Filip Marinovich and people who had some connection. Plus, because I had done the zine, I had some contacts in the Midwest and other places, like people doing the kind of work that you might say was of that avant-garde moment or whatever, like some people doing more visual related work and kind of outsider-ish folks. After those first few issues, we started to think about including something in translation in each issue of *6x6*.

So it just seemed like a natural part of the writing process was to publish the work of the people I was meeting, hanging out with, corresponding with. And it never seemed like, I don't know, it just didn't seem like a stretch to do that. And I think maybe part of it was like a youthful, you know, *I'm nobody* kind of feeling, and I'm not seeing this work out there because I just don't know better. So I'm gonna intervene, even physically, into a *Village Voice*. Like slip something into whatever seemed to be the dominant culture or distribution system.

KG: It's funny how much *chutzpah* there is in ignorance, but actually that's kind of fab.

MY: I had gone to college at Wesleyan. It was way before Liz Willis taught there. (She's no longer there.) All I knew was the *New Yorker*. In college, I was all about the avant-garde from the earlier 20th century, and I just felt like, where is this stuff now? I couldn't see it. My professors weren't pointing me to it. I found *The Exquisite Corpse*, which Andrei Codrescu edited, in the local bookstore and was intrigued, and a friend gave me a book of Spicer, that old collected poems that Robin Blaser edited. I was like, this is really weird. I didn't know what to do with it. I didn't know what tradition to place it in. So publishing, even small zines or whatever, was like a way to feel like it was happening somewhere.

KG: I get the sense the terrain was even substantially worse 25 years ago. I think about how, at the time, nearly all of Bernadette Mayer's books were out of print.

MY: This was more like 30 years ago. Maybe Tender Buttons had just put something out, but I wouldn't have known about it. Things were perhaps worse, and part of it's the internet, because if I had gone to college during a time when there were tons of poetry magazines online, I would've had a different avenue to finding that kind of thing and feeling like I wasn't one of the only people interested in a modernist lineage. What I was reading in the establishment places seemed to have closed that door. And especially 'cause I was translating Daniil Kharms and writing my BA thesis on him. Kharms got me into a sort of anti-poetic stance, to borrow Nicanor Parra's phrasing.

KG: Modernism feels actually like an important question within all of this. You named Parra, who has more circulation now, but much less than the other famous Chilean poet in translation, which is Neruda. And the Neruda that you read in English isn't the political Neruda. It's like we're only finding that out recently.

MY: Totally. The Neruda we were fed was devoid of socialism.

KG: One thing we're circling around is objective structures that limit imagination and sense-making, and the communities that spring up to make those structures more possible. And some of those obstructions are monolingual poetry cultures, and some of them are cultural expectations that limit aesthetic possibility. So that brings us to UDP: I'm curious how translation came to be such an important part of that press's project. I think of very few other poetry presses where that really seems to be part of the mandate.

MY: Certainly in the aughts that was the case. The monolingual poetry culture thing wasn't only a salient aspect of traditionalistic aesthetics. There's also the focus on what is American poetry and that preoccupation with creating American poetry has been with us from modernism or from Whitman on. You see a kind of aversion to foreignness and foreign poetry, even in the New York School to some degree. A lot of focus on US poetics is about American speech, American versus British idiom.

So when UDP was really starting out, I got interested in connections I was seeing between what I was reading here and what I'd read in the Russian avant-garde and late-Soviet avant-garde, like Lev Rubinstein. Speaking of the Neruda issue, in the US, Eastern European poetry was perceived as a certain kind of liberal, Western-facing, anti-socialist positionality. Poets from Akhmatova onwards were being positioned as, oh, have you read this anti-Soviet poet, or this anti-Soviet poet. And a certain heroism was implied in that.

Around 2002, I started the Eastern European Poet Series for UDP, which was the first focus on translation at the press, which embraced translation-publishing a bit later. The series was about creating an alternative view of Eastern European poetry. Are there people that aren't in the canon, aren't talked about, aren't translated? I knew from the Russian example that there were many, and I figured out that there were many in other parts of Eastern Europe.

I think one year, somewhere around 2015, the press published like 10% of the new poetry translations in the country. Which is funny because it was only nine or ten books. I'm not talking about new translations of Dante or something. It is kind of obscure, perverse maybe. But those were the numbers. At a certain point, it made sense that if UDP's thing is to publish what isn't being published elsewhere that translation would be one of those areas where we could make some kind of contribution. Rather than expanding into more commercial projects, we could do something that's even less commercial.

KG: When I had just moved to NYC over a decade ago and looked at the UDP list, I got a sense of its relationship to work in translation and to a modernism across borders, an internationalist sense of modernism. A couple decades after the start of UDP, what is your sense of its impact on poetry and reading practices more broadly?

MY: I think there is a sort of cosmopolitanism in a leftist socialist sense that comes out of modernism. It's powerful to see one's work in some kind of more internationally connected vein. For instance, we published Alexander Vvedensky who was barely known in Russia and a lot of young poets here were affected by that work. Šalamun certainly had an impact early on as well—in part because he worked together with younger American poets to translate his poems, and that sort of started spreading the gospel of Šalamun. But there are many other examples: Lev Rubinstein, Dmitri Prigov from the Moscow Conceptualist circle. Some of the language school people were like, oh, yeah, we heard about them back in the eighties, but we didn't really know that it was so connected to what we were doing.

Talking to people like Mónica de la Torre (who has in her own practice helped expand an anglophone engagement with Latin American poetry) or Rob Fitterman about their experience of reading Lev Rubinstein, who was, before our publication, pretty much unknown, you get a sense of how Rubinstein was generative for their own work.

The UDP/n+1 book of Kirill Medvedev came out at an interesting moment where some new thinking around the connec-

tions of poetry and politics were happening here. And his very activist positions were, I think, important to people here, dealing basically with global capitalism. And it was not hard to relate to some of his positions about “Where’s the money coming from to publish my work,” “What kinds of institutions am I upholding by publishing the work,” “Where am I publishing the work?” All of these questions had an impact, his very Marxist thinking around the role of the poet and aesthetics. It actually pushed that conversation among US poets who wanted to feel solidarity in what is really a global struggle.

Around that time the book came out, Kirill was starting to move his work toward the more popular genre of song. His band was playing in some of the Russian oppositional spaces. He wrote those songs while he was also translating Pasolini into Russian and while he was publishing his work with his own press, the Free Marxist Press. He was really putting himself as a poet into the service of something.

KG: Sometimes when people don’t have to think about the practical circumstances of internationalism, or don’t have to think about people talking to each other across language barriers, they’ll say something kind of truistic about the untranslatability of poetry. As an editor and a publisher and a translator and also a poet, how do you think about and how do you confront that problem?

MY: I think of myself as a materialist when it comes to that. It’s very strange to me to talk about how translation is impossible when it’s being done all the time.

The most frightening thing would be if there were equivalences between languages, especially in poetry, because then it would mean that we wouldn’t need translators [laughs], but we’d also not need foreign poetry because it wouldn’t be any different.

What translation poses is a sort of cultural intervention, or you could say enrichment—the possibility of an intervention into domestic aesthetics is only possible through translation. And you see this happening all throughout history: it’s through translation that domestic styles or aesthetics or categories change.

You can see the effect of French poetry on Ashbery. You can see this in all the poets who are translators, you can see their poetry reacting to the challenges posed by translation and the kinds of new questions that are posed by bringing something foreign into the language about one’s sense of home, or comfort, or habit.

So to my mind, translation is just something that happens, that we do. Not all translations might be great. Whether they’re good or bad representations of the original isn’t to my mind the most salient question. It’s more about how the translation affects what’s happening domestically.

If it simply supports a status quo and a kind of value system of aesthetics that we already possess, then maybe it’s not so important. What we were talking about earlier bears upon this in terms of like, well, why did we only know the Neruda that wasn’t the leftist? That is a case of a kind of domestication that has been supported by the larger publishing world for a long time. They choose a voice, a new voice from somewhere else, somewhere exotic, but make it into something that’s “readable,” a good English poem.

So that whole category of making something “a good English poem” or talking about the impossibility of translation (because the original has this other sound and this other context and so forth) is to me a kind of smokescreen for what is actually a kind of traditionalist, monolingual idea of what poetry should be, what is acceptable, what is appropriate, and what the appropriate forms are for something to be translated into.

There’s a relevant anecdote. In the late sixties, a British poet named Nicholas Moore responded to a call for a translation contest that George Steiner judged in the *Sunday Times*. Nicholas Moore thought that what he was doing was sort of a refutation of Steiner’s ideas. He actually thought that translation was impossible, but his way of proving his point was to submit 31 versions of Baudelaire’s *Spleen*, which was the contest poem. He submitted his different translations under weird pseudonyms with weird addresses—basically heteronyms. And none of them won the prize, but Steiner noticed them and wrote about them a bit. But they’re all completely different takes on this one poem. So many different voices, personae, like it’s all recognizably that poem, but completely different takes. In the end, I think he didn’t really prove that it was impossible, but rather that there are just so many possibilities. And all of them destabilize our desire to fix the poem as having one authoritative version that is appropriate to our language.

In a way, the Pierre Menard story by Borges bears on this because you translate something the same way—like, let’s say you use the same exact words 50 years ago and now, they’re gonna have a different meaning in the new context. Pierre Menard translating Don Quixote is basically creating a new Don Quixote, though he’s not changing a word. He’s using the same language, Spanish, and the Spanish of that time, but it’s much more interesting. Borges says that it’s so much better than Cervantes because it’s doing all these new things now, even though it’s the same. It’s not even, in a sense, a translation, and yet it is.

KG: Maybe that’s a good moment to pivot to World Poetry Books, which you’re now editing, and which is focused on putting non-English poetry into English.

MY: Yeah. I took over as editor a year and a half ago. I had some projects like the Manuel Maples Arce *Stridentist Poems* in my pocket with me at the moment that I wasn’t sure what to do with. I had been working with translator KM Cascia for a while, and we decided it would go wherever I was going, and World Poetry became a great place for it, kind of suddenly. It’s still a small press, but it’s growing very quickly.

Of course, the mission is very simple: new translations of poetry from non-English languages, as much of the world as possible. I think of it like building a library: what could be a go-to library of foreign poetry in translation that would cover some ground that’s been covered, but in new ways, and cover some that hasn’t. We just did Keith Waldrop’s translation of early Paul Verlaine, Keith’s last published book while he was alive. For poets like Verlaine, we’re expanding on what’s available in their body of work in English. We’re doing a Seferis next year, stuff that hasn’t been available. But most of all, we’re trying to fill the gaps: writers who have barely been published in English or not at all, important figures of the past or the present or the recent future. It’s a strategy similar to the Eastern European Poet Series project. Meret Oppenheim hadn’t come out in English before at all. Maples Arce, barely. We’d heard through Bolaño about that Mexican avant-garde, but we didn’t really have access to it unless we spoke Spanish and dug it up in libraries. (Maples Arce’s *Stridentist Poems* is particularly interesting in the context of the connections we’ve been hinting at between socialism and the avant-garde.)

Last year we did a book by Antonio Gamoneda, who’s around 90 years old, a Spanish writer. I want there to be a Gamoneda in our library. He’s an important, different kind of poet, had a difficult time with Franco, comes out of the working class, has been nominated for the Nobel, but we barely know his name, you know? And then there’s Ennio Moltedo, Zuzanna Ginczanka, Afrizal Malna... I would like the library that I’m creating to have those names.

The name of the press predated me, and it’s maybe a little old-fashioned, and of course it’s a little inaccurate because the mission doesn’t include poetry from the Anglophone world. There are maybe one or two other presses in the US that focus on poetry in translation. There’s Circumference Books, which is excellent, but they only do a couple books a year. So I feel there’s a lot to do.

Revisiting older work in new translations, though it’s not my primary focus for World Poetry, is something that I’m doing as a translator with my work on [Osip] Mandelstam. He’s an interesting example of someone who was translated quite a bit in a very particular way during the Cold War. Those translations were skewed by Western liberalism and Cold War antagonisms. So revisiting Mandelstam also means revisiting the context and the history and trying to understand the positionality of someone who was working for a long time within the Soviet system and trying to find a way to honor his political commitments—and also his nearly-utopian cosmopolitan belief in a world culture, which many of the early revolutionary authors and artists shared. That idea of world culture was for him inseparable from the proletarian movement: if this palace over here belongs to the proletariat, so does world literature. So, in translating Mandelstam, a major part of that project is to revisit the circumstances in which he was writing, and to understand the poems from a viewpoint that just wouldn’t have been accessible (or acceptable, or “appropriate”) during the Cold War, which entails Soviet subjectivity in the twenties and thirties, like, how does a poet relate to power and to the revolution and so forth. That’s inseparable from the project of translation, this understanding of contexts. And that’s what I meant when I was talking about a materialist position. When I read a translation, I want to know the translator’s interpretation of that context.

KG: I think in this context about the big Brecht poetry book that came out, edited by David Constantine and Tom Kuhn, whose introduction said something like, “Brecht! Great poet. Shame about the communism.” Like, why do you two even like this guy? What is the appeal if you’re not down to clown? But I guess liberalism, as you indicate, is a hell of a drug.

You also started your own imprint, Winter Editions. What can *Newsletter* readers expect from you?

MY: I was already working on starting a small press before I was called into World Poetry, so I had to kind of rejigger things a bit. I probably would’ve done the Maples Arce on Winter Editions, but then I was like, oh, now I have this opportunity to build a translation program, so I can put it there. But what is it that I want to do that’s not gonna fit there? For instance, Lewis Warsh’s translation of Robert Desnos.

It’s not a *new* translation. It’s from 1973. Lewis wasn’t around anymore to fix up some of the misprisions with help from editors or friends. So it wouldn’t work for World Poetry. The Winter Edition book is still a very different edition from the original chapbook. For one, it includes the French *en-face*. Also, we added an essay by the original publisher about those times and circumstances. You know, Lewis was one of the first people in the US to translate Desnos.

Winter Editions is really for my whims and fancies and pleasures: working with a former student on their first book, or working with a friend whose work I believe in, or an ambitious project that might have trouble finding a publisher. And also to continue what I had been doing a bunch of at UDP, revisiting international avant-gardes that seem to be missing from the picture. For instance, a book by Heimrad Bäcker, who wrote essays on documentary poetry back in the eighties, and the poems of Hélio Oiticica, which we’re publishing this fall, poems that have never been published even in Brazil. It’s sort of a secret notebook kind of thing.

The Unfolding of the Mind into Music

A Conversation Between Alexis Almeida and Sawako Nakayasu

*Though Sawako and I had met a few times before, we got to know each other better when we both moved to Providence, Rhode Island in 2017. Sawako had been living in Japan, and was moving to Providence for a new job. I was moving back to the U.S after living in Buenos Aires for a few years. I remember in the early days of being back, when living in English felt jarring and strange, our long, sprawling conversations about translation, writing, love, etc., were grounding, as was our friendship. So when we reconnected by phone in September to begin having this conversation—she was sitting outside a grocery store in her car and I was sitting among many boxes, about to move apartments—the energy of our initial connection (amid transition) easily returned. I also loved re-reading several of her books, including some earlier ones: *Mouth Eats Color*, a multilingual work/durational performance that thinks through and makes visible the process of translating Japanese modernist poet Chika Sagawa (with English, Japanese, and French all appearing simultaneously), and *The Ants*, part autobiography, part process music, performed through (not just about) an ant colony. And, of course, *Pink Waves*, which I love for its tectonic choreography, and long exploration of the textures of an invisible, often inarticulable grief. We talked briefly, then we talked again, then began to write, so this conversation elaborates on several beginnings, each returning to music. Printed here is an excerpt; the complete version is online.*

—Alexis Almeida

ALEXIS ALMEIDA: Hi! Can we start with hockey? I remember when we knew each other in Providence, you told me you had played street hockey in Tokyo and San Diego, and wrote “hockey poems” for a while. My first thought was, *I wish I had played hockey*. I grew up in the Midwest—I was around it a lot, and I always wanted to play but for some reason didn’t. The “I wish I had done that...”—what’s that verb tense? Where the past perfect and the past continuous touch... Anyway, do you have that feeling when you come to work that you admire, and want to translate?

SAWAKO NAKAYASU: Maybe it’s the past perfect subjunctive? I do have that feeling with work I love, that flavor of admiration where you think, *I wish I had done that myself*. I don’t feel that way about everything I admire, but now this brings me back to the first text that I attempted to translate, which was *Tropisms* by Nathalie Saurraute.

AA: Ah, I love that book! And just read it for the first time last year.

SN: Now that I think about it, I must have felt something around that book even before I translated some of it (just a few pieces). I first read it in French class as an undergrad. And there was an assignment, to write my own “tropism,” in French. There’s something about those pieces that I always wanted to inhabit. In any case I never pursued it (translating *Tropisms*), and eventually I switched to translating from Japanese, but I still recall vividly the sensation of *wanting to have written it myself*. I’ve heard musicians say something similar about cover songs, too.

AA: Yes, I do remember starting that book and falling immediately in love with the repetition of different words at the start of sections—“they,” “this,” or “here” and “there”—words that lead into descriptions of moments/movements in people’s lives, a choreography.

They weren’t immediately connected in terms of plot, but definitely connected in terms of tone and feeling. But I need to revisit it.

SN: I haven’t read that book in decades. But still, it’s interesting the ways that books live in us over time, even as memory fades. What I can recall of *Tropisms* is that it seemed to replace the conventional components of stories with the sensation of these plant-like inclinations that exist in humans—leaning one way or another—I can recall the way that book *felt*, more than anything else about it.

AA: Yes. I’m in the middle of moving, so my life is in boxes and fragments (as is my frame of mind), but I remember falling in love with the shapes the language was making, and thinking I wanted to write into those shapes, or wondering if I could move in and out of them. I also keep making the shape of a small square with my hands as we talk over Zoom [laughs]. The edition I read was small and so portable. I’d read a few pages at a time on the train, and it led to a small piece of writing/portraiture I’ve been working on since.

SN: It’s interesting to hear that you had an experience with *Tropisms* that led to writing. I’ve always been curious (for others as well as about myself) about what texts (or artworks) beget new writing—it’s mysterious to me, even though it happens all the time. I did bring a Saurraute book with me when I went into the *Pink Waves* performance, not *Tropisms* but *The Use of Speech*, alongside a few other books. And I’ve often found Will Alexander’s writings to be “useful” to me in these ways, sometimes I find myself almost trying to trace some aspect of his work.

AA: Yes, this feeling—an erotic pull toward the work, wanting to be close to, or finding a place within the work from which you can begin—is something I experience when reading many of my favorite writers: Renee Gladman, Hervé Guibert, Lisa Jarnot, Roberta Iannam-

ico, S*an D. Henry Smith, and others. That feeling of wanting to understand something aesthetically, or maybe feeling an affinity or the beginning of an affinity, sometimes makes you want to respond or make something else in the world. Or when a friend is telling you a story about their life and you’re like, *Oh, I wish I had done that!* (Like hockey!) The limitation—you didn’t do this thing—is an important part of this feeling, but that realm of possibility, even in the past tense, can be generative.

SN: I like this notion of a beginning of an affinity, as something pointing you towards a new possibility, be it an aesthetic gesture or something else. I feel like there are many things I wish I had done, but the big one for me is music. I sang in choir, but in college I was the music major without an instrument—I sang ok enough for choir, but couldn’t possibly call my voice “my instrument” the way vocalists did. So all my life I’ve carried a feeling of wishing I had played an instrument.

And because I didn’t have an instrument, when it came down to choosing a “track,” I chose composition, which allowed me to spend time probing that relationship between text and music. I felt like in most cases the rhythms and syntax of the text was secondary to the larger formal rhythms in the musical composition. If I had continued with composition, I would have loved to explore that further—to compose from a place that started with the text—not “setting the text to music,” but “setting music to the text.”

AA: Yes, a few things come to mind. Something I notice a lot in your work is repetition—and now learning about your background in music and music composition adds another layer to that. I’m thinking immediately of the phrase “variation on a theme,” and then of Bach’s cello suites, which I played a lot as a kid—I played the flute, and often played string parts because they share a clef with some woodwinds—and which were written to

be a cycle, with similar structures and movements that refer to each other, rather than just discrete pieces.

SN: You are so lucky to have grown up playing the cello suites!!

AA: It’s an inexact analogy, but I do think making variations is not so different from what we do as translators—acknowledging that something lives at the center of the work that began someplace else, and that someone else authored—and making an attempt to bring that into a different context, a different language, while of course adding your own nuances. Those structural throughlines can be so hard to bring across in different languages and versions (in Bach’s case, Prelude, Allemande, Courante...). But the desire to do so can also be an exciting driving force of the work.

I also wonder about the impulse to repeat, the way we unconsciously repeat mistakes, destructive patterns, etc. But also the way repetition can lend itself, or open itself up to change over time. That feels hopeful, watching something molt and adapt. It’s something I admire about your work, *Pink Waves*, which begins with (and modulates), “It was a wave all along,” but really so many of your books rely heavily on repetition.

SN: I love the cello suites—what a gorgeous example of repetition—I love how something can be grounded and floating at the same time, to hold the contradictions of motion and stillness together in one place. Likewise with variations on a theme—like etudes, or studies, or sketches—you see it more often with visual artists and composers than with writers, but I like the way it allows you into the mind of someone as they work something out, going back to it, doing and repeating it, observing how their mind moves around a fixed thing, and eventually as it opens up to change. In many of my books there is that sense of “working something out”—in *Pink Waves* the repetition is visible, but also in books like *The Ants* and *Texture Notes*, I’m also thinking something through by repeating the same question: *What is the texture of this?* Or, *What can ants tell me about this?*

And then there is our repetition as readers, how we read and reread something. (All the more if you are translating!) If you could transcribe your mind as it read a poem—how it might loop around a word, a phrase, a line, multiple lines, reread the whole poem, return to an earlier part—some aspects of reading

might be incredibly repetitive, but it's all lost to the extremely ephemeral performance that happens in the privacy of your own mind.

In a way I've always been most attracted to process, the thick juicy middle of being in the midst of art-making. I remember singing four-part harmony, and how things would sound funky and weird in rehearsal until the harmonies truly clicked together. That precise moment, when the music shifted from dissonant (incorrectly dissonant) chaos into its intended harmonies, that always felt like the true magic, and also an experience that you can only have as a performer, and even then only in rehearsal.

I have always longed to get *inside* the work—maybe this is similar to your sense of wanting to merge with something—especially with music, and as an audience member, I so dearly wanted to get as inside as I possibly could. The best seats were of course the ones right in the middle of the orchestra. Janet Cardiff gets close to this idea in her “Forty-Part Motet” piece at MoMA PS1.

When I wrote *Mouth: Eats Color*, part of what I was doing was trying to capture the “real-time”—the inside elements—of translation, which in part accounts for the multiple iterations (though there were other things going on too), and which I also forced into existence by framing it as a durational performance—in this case, the duration was one month. During that month, I went to the office every day and worked on that book. (One day there was a fire drill and we all had to leave the building. But I didn't want to stop, didn't want to leave my (desktop) computer. I kept working by hand, outside on a picnic table, and included that handwritten page in the book as well.)

[Jona Kang-Nakayasu wanders in sick; Sawako tells him to take an orange to his room.]

...I've also always been interested in trying to find ways of translating the modes of repetition in music, into repetition in text. Maybe this applies to translation, too, so when I'm translating, especially if it's poetry and if there is an abstract quality to it... I mean, sometimes the aspiration is to translate not the repetition (or whatever element) itself, but the way that repetition *feels* to the receiver. With *Tropisms*, it wasn't about repetition, but I was interested in translating a quality of the sensation caused by that particular writing style. With *Pink Waves*, I wondered if I could give the reader an experience that was not unlike the way we experience repetition in music. For example, in orchestral music you often have a melodic element that is passed between different instruments—acruing via repeated iterations and layerings—so you have this vertical layering repetition among the instruments or vocal parts, and then a lateral repetition over time, and what you receive from that is familiarity and difference at the same time, where you feel grounded and elsewhere simultaneously.

I wonder, too, if there is a relationship between my interest in repetition and my interest in texture—that repetition resists a kind of linear progression, and instead opts for layering, weaving, a thickening of the original material.

And, given your own (much bigger!) background with music, and also poetry and translation, I wonder where you feel certain resonances of overlaps between these parts of your artistic being?

AA: So much I want to respond to here! “If you could transcribe your mind as it read a poem,” I love that so much. I think you have just captured why I love hearing poems read out loud, why I sometimes (often) read poems out loud to myself, or speak the words as I'm writing. This grain of the voice, I can feel it in some writing as a texture. It's exciting because it feels like modes crossing—you can watch thinking unfold there, or listen to speech become music. When I first read Samuel Beckett I was like, *Oh, I can't remember anything before this...* This also happened when I first read Marosa di Giorgio—I was in awe of her sentences unfolding (in a durational sense, as you mention above when talking about performance)—and Ed Roberson's *Aquarium Works* is incredible in this way, that unfolding of the mind into music, and the repetitive structures bringing that out.

I recently saw some of Julius Eastman's music performed by the Wild Up ensemble. There was one specific piece, “Stay On It,” that involves a lot of layering of instruments and vocals into harmonies, and the repetition of that single phrase. There was a liberatory sensation in the room, but I also felt like the audience was being brought incrementally closer to something. It reminded me of playing the same line over and over again as a kid, trying to figure something out (to touch something), and I experience something like this when I try to translate a line over and over.

SN: I would have loved to go to that Eastman performance. His minimalism has a maximalist flavor to it, and I like that you linked it to the act of translating—as if there is an Eastman-esque explosion of repetition (in reading and interpreting) that happens in the mind of the translator, in what I imagine as the “process” of translating—the transcript of the internal monologue of the translator mid-translation?

AA: I like that. Returning to *Pink Waves*, from the minute I read “It was a wave all along,” it had such a distinct texture in my mind, and such an elegiac quality/tone to it. The book later mentions sitting with a friend and the loss of her child, and meanwhile one (I) can palpably feel time moving through the book, each moment: “Stacy Tran has left / in the wake of accumulated war neverending / mass breathing / dislocation.” I think the book addresses the tension between the desire to hang on to something, to stop and look at it, and the way time moves things along—so the book

also has a very ephemeral quality to it. The reader can sense certain feelings morph into other ones—it's almost like the book is letting that happen, not just directing its motion, and that was very exciting to me as a reader.

Going back to the performance of *Pink Waves* you mentioned, I know that you composed some of it “live.” I definitely felt this as a reader. Can you talk more about this?

SN: Thanks for that, Alexis—it makes me feel like you were the perfect reader for this book. I do think grieving is repetitive. And that much of it is out of our control. And perhaps that it changes shape over time, too. I'm glad you felt, in your reading, some of those temporal aspects of the book, like you tuned in to the way the book was written—perhaps to the way that I was carried by it, too. It's not that the book wrote itself as if on auto-pilot, but there is a sense in which I was writing quickly, and that the act of writing was as much an act of listening as it was one of generating language. Feelings do morph into others, but they also carry the residue of the previous ones, and so I guess they coexist in this way, releasing and returning in cycles.

I've been thinking about “form” in these contexts, too—that the existence of the structure, any structure, can create a place to release the work. Sometimes I think form is more of a shape, and sometimes I think form is more of

a mode. The form for *Pink Waves* is based on the syntax of Adam Pendleton's “Black Dada,” which itself had taken its form from Ron Siliman's *Ketjak*. They were both very kind in supporting this sort of translation-adjacent move of mine, even as it doesn't really look like a translation at all—and yet, in a certain sense I was invoking an “accurate” mode of translation, I was translating one and only one element from my source text, the syntax, in what I call a “micro-translation.” I've always been drawn to the ways in which syntax conveys emotional content. There was some aspect of that that I was pulling out of my reading of “Black Dada,” and wanting to see if I could use that syntax as a poetic form.

On the other hand, elegy, more than anything else, seems to choose its own form. I'm not entirely sure of how much agency I had, ultimately, in choosing the form for *Pink Waves*.

I took these materials with me when I went into performance, which I did mostly because I wanted—or needed—to allow myself the time and space to complete the writing. It was the end of the school year, and I knew that everything was going to shift, once summer kicked in. But I was in the middle of this book and I didn't want to let it go, so I used the framework of performance to force that. It wasn't a lot of time: three consecutive working days, 9 to 5. And during those hours I wrote non-stop. And by “writing,” I mean that it

UGLY DUCKLING PRESSE

Mirta Rosenberg, tr. Yuki Setton and Sergio Waisman; Carlos Soto Román, tr. Alexis Almeida, Daniel Beauregard, Daniel Borzutzky, Whitney DeVo Jessica

IDA BÖRJEL
MA
TRANSLATED BY
JENNIFER HAYASHIDA

MIRTA ROSENBERG
INTERIOR
LANDSCAPE
EL PAISAJE INTERIOR
translated by Yuki Setton and Sergio Waisman
UGLY DUCKLING PRESSE

THE CAPTURE OF
KRAO FARINI
Nay Soursinho

Carlos Soto Román
edited with an afterword by Thomas Rabe

FALL 2023

Pujol Duran, Patrick Greaney, Robin Myers; Ida Börjel, tr. Jennifer Hayashida

wasn't always about adding words to a document—sometimes “writing” involved reading a current draft out loud, into the mic I had set up, and sometimes it was more like editing.

There's also something about performance and grieving that felt like an appropriate way to process this desire to mourn a loss. Maybe all the more because it was a loss that I couldn't find any other way to grieve. Writing gives us those spaces. There was some detritus—materials in the physical world—that I wanted to process via performance. Sometimes you need to burn the remnants, for closure. (Though in this case, “burning the remnants” was enacted by eating french fries.) The writing, the performance, the processing of materials, they all created closure, and a space to grieve. The part about my friend losing a child... Their situation moved me because I could see how impossible—societally, socially—how impossible it was for them to mourn the loss in this particular context, even in spite of how very real the loss was. It wasn't a conventional situation, and they seemed trapped in a space where their suffering was not understood. Our social lives provide space to mourn only certain losses in certain ways, but it doesn't hold everything as we need.

Earlier this year, Gabrielle Civil invited me to participate in her performance project with Velocity Dance Center in Seattle, called *Translated Bodies*. Madhu Kaza, JD Pluecker, and I were invited to join her in a three-day performance series where we explored the intersections between performance, writing, and translation. As one component of that event, I made a piece called “Invisible Losses,” where I invited people to share with me one sentence, describing an invisible loss of their own. They were written down, and on stage I ate those invisible losses. (At one point the piece was titled “I will eat your losses,” which I also liked as a title.) I guess I've continued to want to make space for that, because I now have a second, web-based iteration of “Invisible Losses,” in collaboration with Theo Ellin Ballew and their ORAL.pub project. The invisibility aspect here is so powerful. I find that I'm still unable to actually say what it is that I lost, which is interesting—the saying and not saying of it all. The things and spaces we hold and carry for the different parts of our emotional selves.

AA: I'm very interested in the idea of making space with language, and that language itself can be spacious in its syntax—I feel this even more since becoming a parent. It's a painful thing to experience in this country, that things like healthcare are considered a “benefit” rather than a basic human right, even having space to grieve, to parent, and to make things apart from your job. When you talk about making (and wanting) a space to write and grieve, it very much resonated. The period after Ash was born—one of the hardest times in my life—I wanted this space (to write and grieve) very much and felt it was almost impossible to create within the context I was in. I actually just finished a long poem I wrote in

response to this time, which is basically a series of ideas for books I wanted/want/have started to write. That crossing of time periods, and supplanting of desire into the past-tense, the acknowledging and making something of a limitation, showed up again as a major driving force.

Also what you say about only certain losses being grievable (or being given the social space for grieving) is so true. It makes me think about the state-sanctioned rituals we have for grieving (“bereavement” days at work, etc.) and then the private ones—invisible, as you say, even invisible within close communities, because some losses are impossible to articulate, at least not right away. It makes me go back to temporal modes that cross, which you seemed to capture in your performance. Grieving happens over time, is continuous, emerges, is sometimes swallowed, or is absorbed by a loved one. The way grief is articulated (by the body) changes given the context.

To read the complete interview, please visit: poetryproject.org/publications/newsletter/274-fall-2023/the-unfolding-of-the-mind-into-music

Reviews

Chaos, Crossing by Olivia Elias,
trans. Kareem James Abu Zeid
World Poetry Books

Review by Mirene Arsanios

Words commonly used to mark moments of historical dispossession—catastrophe, disaster, calamity, Nakba—are rarely equal to the violence of the event they intend to represent. The new, obliterating conditions they introduce organize experience into a before and after: at some point there was something, and then, not. That rift, and all that exceeds it, is foundational to the writing of Olivia Elias, who, like hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, was expelled from her homeland when Israel was declared a state in 1948. Elias was four when her family were forcibly removed from Haifa, fleeing first to Beirut, then Montreal, finally settling in Paris where she still resides.

In his introduction to *Chaos, Crossing*, a collection of poems appearing for the first time in both the original French and its skillful English translation by Kareem James Abu-Zeid, Palestinian poet Najwan Darwish situates Elias's diasporic sensibility, the layered texture of a language cultivated over years of exile and only made public at the age of 71, when Elias published her first poetry collection, *L'Espoir pour seule protection* (Éditions Alfabarre, 2015). According to industry standards, Elias is a “late” bloomer, if “late” implies a normative understanding of time. Yet Elias' poetics refuse chronology, and by extension, the linear arc of national and settler colonial narratives. In clipped, elegant lines, she explores scenes of delays and reversals, a “journey that never ceases to begin,” a “slow birth,” a loss repeatedly revisited on the page through a kind of ungovernable duration. On her way back to childhood, she sheds stones “weighing down her pocket / one by one / relieved of the fear of losing / even myself / now is the time / ; for lightening.” For Elias, memory isn't remembrance—a way of designating the past as past—but an act of presence (the same way a psychic symptom doesn't come after a traumatic event, but becomes the event itself). These repeated returns to physical sites of childhood are reminders of the violated status of Palestinians on their land. “How to solve the equation of maturing in a country / of the absentees and the present absentees,” Elias asks with terms used in Israeli law to designate Palestinians who left and are denied the possibility of return, and Palestinians who remained but are forbidden from returning to their villages.

I never tire of reading of a lost land, jasmine-scented gardens, “pomegranates the figs / the greengages” because the material loss these

images represent trump their metaphorical qualities. As I write this, Israel has launched an obliterating military operation on the Gaza strip, aiming (by the occupying power's own admission) to wipe Gaza out of existence, to turn the repeatedly bombed enclave and its battered infrastructure resulting from a 17-year blockade, back to rubble. Elias' digressions (returns, delays, reversals) become temporal sites for bearing witness to the blur between past and present wounds. To revisit a traumatic memory stages a demand for justice, a working not only through but against the conditions that led to the Nakba in the first place.

The act of naming (as her second collection, *Ton nom Palestine* indicates), or its absence, haunts Elias' work. In solidarity with and in response to racial capitalism, her poem “I Say Your Name” joins the chorus in speaking George Floyd's name (in a review of Elias's book, a writer criticizes her understanding of issues that do not directly pertain to her identity position, as if social justice wasn't premised on acts of international solidarity). Hiroshima took ten years to be named, she says in her poem “In the Kingdom of Bosch and Orwell”; “How long must those in Gaza wait for the devastation to be named?” she asks. By conjuring the dead, naming reasserts their existence among the living and counters their erasure from memory. But to name can also be an act of institutional violence, inscriptions establishing national and historical records from a colonizing standpoint. In her poem “War,” Elias lists the names of decades of Israeli military operations Cast Lead, Grapes of Wrath, Pillar of Defense—names that will, in further accounts, have to include the latest addition, Sword of Irons, declared on Oct. 7, 2023. In an act of performative enunciation, Elias's writing shapes itself just before experience is solidified into history.

But Elias also desires a language as clear and immediate as a color, the Klein Blue, and as loud as refusal (“I'm looking for something / that screams / Refusal / as loudly / as James B. / *I am not your Negro*”). Embodiment (the sun hitting someone's face, the expanse of the sea) can't be divorced from politics in her work: with sensory experience comes the aspiration for militancy. The Mediterranean is both a sea and a grave tragically replete with migrant bodies (“and still more seas & pains / and everywhere little bits & pieces / of humans”) within these necropolitical landscapes, there are moments of suspension; Elias gets distracted by a scent or the lushness of a landscape (“alas for me in seeking I'm too inclined / to / lose myself distracted by the color / of the cyclamen”). The self that keeps returning seeks pleasure, even rest, amidst the dread. “In short,” she writes, “there is no method” as long as there is a body.

From exile, Elias draws cartographies that proceed from both details of the land to established designations of space—Palestine, Aleppo, Damascus, Gaza, Minneapolis as well as shores, pine and olive trees that resist being

subsumed under the logic of national territory. Her language mirrors the same duality. The sound of the imagery is recognizable in references (Aragon, Rimbaud) she explicitly invokes. And there is the way she cuts through the poetic with a live presence; a direct interrogation of the page where the poet appears to vocalize doubt, or engage dialogically; she tells us things from the now of the language she desires—a direct form of address or interrogation that undermines more formalized linguistic registers. “Have I forgotten any” she asks, at the end of “War,” then later ends “Light” with an ellipsis, “Draw up the list of / everything / that can kill / & doesn’t last...” Elias’s language moves between the desire for naming and the unbearable blur that precedes it, both asserting and interrogating acts of inscriptions.

Albeit under very different circumstances, I share with Elias the writing in an adopted tongue. I recognize her accented French, her restraint, her plight. I am familiar with the cities of her itinerancies—being from one of them and having lived in another—the writing from a hometown in which you no longer live, a grappling for a shared set of references and lived experiences that don’t recede into irrelevance (when you leave, you no longer know what it’s like), I also recognize her belonging to an educated, diasporic class, a cosmopolitanism gathering artists around topics of resistance and art, a critique of oppression and orientalism radiating from Western urban centers. Although Elias has just entered her poetic career, she joins an already established set of Arab voices writing about a homeland in an adopted language (Etel Adnan, Assia Djebar, Abdelkhabir Khatibi, Elias Sanbar, etc.). And although to speak between here and there is its own fixed position, what I like in Elias’s work is that it finds the present, that her militancy isn’t opposed to the indeterminacy of dreamscapes, and that her elsewhere is grounded in political urgency. When she writes “je est une autre...& always this child who believed so strongly in the future” in the closing poem of her collection, “The Grace of Rain,” she distances herself from the solidity of a national self. The future she so strongly desired now converges with a present where Palestinians are currently being punished to an atrocious, unspeakable degree for attempting to break through, albeit very violently, the containment of their own imprisonment. All the excess of words such as “catastrophe,” “disaster,” “calamity,” “Nakba” is channeled in this historical juncture which must be recorded in poems, declarations, and actions of unwavering solidarity for Palestinian people, their right to liberation and self-determination. Elias’ question “How long must those in Gaza wait for the devastation to be named?” must be imperatively answered with “mass slaughter” “ethnic cleaning,” “genocide,” leaving no room for rhetorical ambivalence or the vile distortion of Western, settler-colonial narratives. And if this review has now devolved into a statement, it is only because form, as Elias teaches us, must rethink itself to meet the present.

In the Same Light: 200 Poems for Our Century, trans. Wong May

The Song Cave
Review by Sam White

I have read poems in Chinese! Because I don’t know, for example, Korean, translations of it are simpler for me to enjoy, not shadowed by rhythms, syllables, or non-memories of a life where I returned to China like I thought I would when I lived there for a year in high school. I approach Tang poetry twisted, on top of my insecurity that I’m insufficiently wet for poetry. But I wanted this book to belong to me—I went out in the rain and bought it—to try Tang poetry again as I continue to become less of a bitch.

In the Same Light: 200 Poems for Our Century from the Migrants & Exiles of the Tang Dynasty (2022) is an offering from the translator, Wong May, who was born in China, lived in Singapore, Iowa, and now Ireland, where she writes poetry, paints, and domesticates with a physicist. The Tang dynasty (618-907) is, from what I hear, most Chinese people’s favorite dynasty. She decided to do this project from a hospital bed in Beijing when “the language was happening to [her] on a different level.” Wong creates poems “for our century” by breaking the forms of classical Chinese poems and curving them to impact an ear that has been listening to English poetry from the last one hundred years. She does not mimic qualities like rhyme or regular line length. A quatrain forms a precise rectangle in the Chinese, while Wong’s dangle down the page like a weeping willow. White space, forward slashes, and ampersands = drama, rest, and emphasis.

In her 100-plus-page afterword, Wong states the goal for the translator and the poet is to disappear, so that the reader can cohabit the act of creation with the poet. Historical context and elucidation on Chinese philosophy branch off of 志 *zhi*, 神 *shen*, 文 *wen*, roughly defined as excellence and knowledge, spirit, and literature (in addition to the better known 仁 *ren* and 道 *dao*, benevolence and way). Wong’s capacious and intimate analyses familiarize readers with the humor and flourishes of her voice, like how she proves a point with abrupt eye contact: “You know what I mean?!” For example, here she shows her passion as I imagine her swaying at a party wearing overlong pieces of shimmery fabric:

A poem for Li Bai is... one breath from take-off to finish, holding all the disparate elements. A swooping voice off the page, with time to spare for myriad, minute modulations. A wager with brio—unassailable? It has to be.

In the way of Eliot Weinberger, compare Wong’s voice to two others. First, her version of a line about a songbird (“The Temple of the First Minister of Shu”), which in two other translations remains “unheard”:

Well behind the foliage the goldfinch
empties himself

Song after song, heart
& soul, waiting on
No one.

Vikram Seth’s translation (1992) mirrors the tight box of the original and attempts to preserve rhymes: “Sweet-voiced, leaf-screened, unheard, a yellow oriole calls.” In “A Little Primer of Tu Fu” (1967), David Hawkes translates poems into prose paragraphs that make the poets’ voices sound immediate and pedestrian. Hawkes’s book makes you work for the poem, gathering line by line literal translations and exegesis so you can translate it into poetic form yourself. His version is: “Beyond the trees a yellow oriole sings its glad song unheard.”

Wong’s afterword is like a confession that clears the way for readers to experience the poems as they are—her interpretations. She wants them to be felt. Collectively, the poetry community can’t experience the poems in the original—pronunciations have evolved over the centuries anyway (although even with the sounds of modern Chinese, poems can be so concise and specific, it hits like the miraculous). But this loss we don’t have time to mourn, so if Mary Ruefle is right that “a poem must rival physical experience,” what kinds of physical experiences might we be in for here? These poems have some offerings for our crowd: animism, the sensorial, landscape, communion, negation, emptiness, to say what is missing, longing for a friend, and the absence of an I, what to do with mist, mountains, the moon, the faraway friend.

The first line of the famous Wang Wei poem “Deer Park” describes emptiness and absence:

Empty mountains
No one about.

More examples of poets showing what is not there:

The bell at noon
Not heard
At the creek
— Li Bai

No one to say where he is
— Li Bai

No cries reach the distant dreamer
— Li Shangyin

No fire to warm the ground they lie on
— Meng Jiao

The river blue-green,
Empty for the day.
— Yu Xuanji

No, I do not mind your bare room
One with
No smell of cooking
Its smells of nothing
No smoke
From the fire
Of human habitation
— Xue Tao

Giving absence form, a place, pointing to what is outside the sensorial realm is possible in writing, but would challenge visual artists. How would you draw something hidden? You could draw what blocks something from sight, like a mountain, a force responsible for distance. How do you extend your senses to see or hear around the block and how do you understand what stands in the way? A counterpart to absence is an animate object. The mountain isn’t there inert.

Temples remember my last visit
— Du Fu

Tomorrow – mountains
& hills as well
Will come between us,
Friend
— Du Fu

That the moon shines bright
On all partings
— Xu Ning

Finding consensus about what’s missing is a political conversation. In difficult relationships, when I can’t articulate what’s missing, I can’t/don’t leave. Once you say what’s missing, it becomes possible to change where you are.

A couple common phrases begin with the character that negates: “you’re welcome” and “good,” which are, respectively, 不客气 “don’t be polite” and 不错 “not wrong.” The places you are not outnumber where you are. The “correct” suggested by “not wrong” is bigger than “right.” You don’t ever have to arrive at “right” to be 不错 “not wrong,” which in my experience was often the highest praise on offer (from Chinese-speaking figures of authority).

Poetry can bring someone closer. Bo Yao’s “For Zhang Yuan Fan” exemplifies the endearing synonym for friend, 知音 “know music.”

Broke all the strings on his lute
At the death of his friend,
Sworn to silence.
To the world
Did he sound any different?

More distance separates strangers on a bench than friends separated by land and war. A grieving wanderer is like a pregnant person

¹ Footnote: François Cheng (1977): “The effort to avoid, as much as possible, the three grammatical persons is a matter of conscious choice. It gives birth to a language that places the personal subject in a particular relationship with beings and things. In erasing itself, or rather in choosing only to imply its presence, the subject interiorizes the exterior element... the daily ramble of the hermit is presented as the very movement of the cosmos.” (*Chinese Poetic Writing*, 35) The exchange of elements goes in both directions; without personal pronouns, the cosmos becomes more alive as individual subjects “dissolv[e] into an indivisible whole.”

taking in for one plus. I once lost a friend, and later when major events happened in the world, he would distinctly feel present as I took in something he wouldn't know. I am here where you are not.

Last winter, my second cousin M, who was born in Beijing, moved to Halifax, Canada with his wife and daughter. The rest of my Chinese-American relatives immigrated to the United States in the 1950s and 60s. This move felt sudden and wasn't expected, but my cousin is, from what I can tell, a political dissident—at heart, if not in the streets. (If he were, I wouldn't tell you.) In China, he was critical of the government but said that friends do not talk about politics. It could be held against you and show up who knows how or when. Gatherings are discouraged and a community space he went to was shut down. Despite the passion driving his departure, he keeps teaching his 9-year-old Chinese so that she will be able to read poetry—and that's the only reason why. He asked me for the equivalent in English, where it is beautiful and bitterly untranslatable. Help. I said maybe hope is a thing with feathers.

A couple weeks ago, I read Meng Hao Ren poems to my friend Nico Gregorits on the autumn beach from *In the Same Light*. She's more sensitive to beauty and life than I am, IMO. She said,

It's like being in a cold room and looking out the windows at the breaches of animism. What kind of attention can people give poetics amidst our own extinction? In my writing, I'm trying to give agency to mechanisms that play a crucial role in burning fossil fuels, to wring out sounds of ancestral memory. If poets harness the inner workings of this expression, they can find love in the most tragic and destitute of wastelands.

By omitting the word Chinese from the title and including Tang, migrants, and exiles instead, Wong implores English readers to consider Chinese culture as one that cultivates dissidents. There have always been writers of Chinese who oppose authorities and the corruption of power. Some of the writers in this book escaped to the mountains, living off bark and berries after they were cast out, demoted, or persecuted by a new ruling group. She writes in the afterword, “the exile's moon lights up differently than the court-appointed moon”—just as the Chinese language is contested territory, lit up or in shadow depending on who's speaking, and in what context. How do we listen? It's possible Tang poetry can alter how we listen and imagine being heard and observed. Mountain ranges of this metropolis are observed by poets I know. Thirty seven windows remember my last visit, becoming bright between us. Our surroundings are animated by the writing of peers you admire.

A Place Beyond Shame by Ed Steck

Wonder

Review by Ted Rees

I've never understood people who disdain horror films; in fact, I'd say that the antipathy creates a gulf between me and the horror-averse, a sort of void that the films themselves then fill. From this void howl the moments that echo in my brain: the woman running through the woods in the rain in *Suspiria*, Danny's seizures as the Overlook Hotel possesses his father in *The Shining*, the son and daughter rushing off to play after shooting their murderous parents in *Twitch of the Death Nerve*, drunkards hollering as they night-stalk kangaroos in *Wake in Fright*, Albrun's drowning of her daughter in *Hagazussa: A Heathen's Curse*, and the list goes on. To me, the predilection for horror films signals the ability to grapple with what exists “at the limit of what can be assimilated and thought,” as Kristeva terms it; to engage with such films can be read as part of the eternal struggle against the hegemony of the superego, that which would tame and constrict through its imposition of cultural mores, rules, and expectations. Horror is transgressive, yes, but it is its *reality* that allows it this quality—it exists in the space of annihilation to which most of us quite understandably avert our eyes.

While Ed Steck's *A Place Beyond Shame* is published in a gorgeous, full-color hardback edition by Wonder, it is also drenched in horror, and is difficult to read. The difficulty does not derive from its formal constraints or insistent gestures or enigmatically disturbing visual tokens, but instead from the central narrative that gurgles and gasps in its shadows: obscured sexual trauma and more explicit physical violence inflicted on the book's speaker by the speaker's father in a “heavily wooded” landscape of “white power stickers” and “fentanyl” and “chicken shacks ablaze.” It is a book that one puts down at intervals while sighing heavily, perhaps whispering “holy shit” under one's breath as the phantasmatic confrontation with the abject tightens its clammy grip on the psyche. Steck writes, “I remember feelings of outside, feeling being outside on my skin, feeling fluid on myself squirm noxiously, bodily,” and as readers we, too, writhe in discomfort.

Throughout the largest section of the work, “Westmoreland County Double Feature,” two columns (entitled “When the Day Won't Start” and “When the Day Won't Start II,” respectively) run down the page, moving between repetitions of “I watch [*film title*],” psycho-geographical rambles, philosophical musings on horror aesthetics, mundanities (“Butterscotch candy”), and scenes from the dire, disturbing relationship between the speaker and his father. The vivid accretion of signs throughout this “Double Feature” is punctuated by these scenes, so that the sheer force of their terror is magnified. The father has already been described as a “yellowing, decaying mass,” addicted to opiates and surrounded by “Coors Banquet cold cans” and other detritus

of poverty and paranoid substance abuse, so when he forces the speaker at gunpoint “into dog food bag choking on kibble dust, gagging dense doggie bag air, crying-digging through compressed beef-wax dust,” the reader recoils as if we are also in the ramshackle house in the rustbelt of southwestern Pennsylvania. “What would you do if your father stuck a gun to the back of your neck and threatened your life over a bag of dog food?” The question is impossible, and indeed, the next sentence reads, “How could anything else be real?”

Here we are at the apex of horror, what Kristeva calls the “limit of the originary repression... repugnance, nausea, abjection,” the locus where “object and sign” are so horrible that they become part of the “impossible real,” where the loss of distinction between self and other overwhelms, allowing the monstrous to take hold *and* be repressed. Indeed, Steck's speaker echoes Kristeva when he writes about “a rejection of object-based memory for the abjection of self—an exclusion of one from their own biographical agency.” This “me' (who is not),” this exclusion helps to explain Steck's major character constructions in the book, Ghoul and Son of Ghoul. The former is quite clearly the father, and the latter is quite clearly the book's speaker, but in their construction, they become characters *excluded* from the “I” of the book and the father that terrorizes him. In “Lobby Cards,” the section of the book preceding the “Double Feature,” the final sentence reads, “*Everything is in place now for audience, Ghoul, Son of Ghoul to proceed down the path to a place beyond shame together.*” In this sense, it becomes evident that Steck's book is an exorcism, an attempt to move beyond the abjection of “finding [oneself] to be so many other things but never a person,” beyond the “weird butt stuff” and “placing [oneself] smashed naked in... beady, red-cracked arms,” beyond the druggy animalistic violence of the aforementioned scene of dog kibble and firearms. Ghoul and Son of Ghoul are the characterizations not just of the actual lived pain of the speaker and the father, but also of the path that is coexistent with that pain yet able to travel beyond the shame of “absolute negation in self-embodiment” caused by “addiction and trauma,” that which “stole everything” from both of them.

Through my time with the book, I found that *A Place Beyond Shame* lends itself to repeated readings and reinterpretations, and perhaps nowhere is this more clear than in the final sections of the book, which include a deeply spooky photo gallery entitled, “*Can You See the Real Me? / The Mutilator (1984)*,” as well as “Haunted Cabinet,” which proves a more prosaic and less fragmented reflection on the events of the “Double Feature.” Here, after the narrator loses himself in a hallucinatory daze at a drive-in movie theater, there is the resolve of “a truck with flashlight-beam-like headlights traces the invisible horizon...[carving] beingness from nothingness.” In most other books, such a phrase would feel impossibly cheesy and high-school existentialist, but in

Steck's hands, it feels like grace after everything that has come before.

Kristeva hypothesizes that poetic experience with an immersion in the abject allows the artist to protect themselves from its horrors, but given *A Place Beyond Shame* (among other pieces of literature), I am no longer certain that her words hold true. If we immerse ourselves in the abject reality of our own collapse and annihilation, then might we be merely reinforcing that reality's nihilism? At one point in Steck's work, Ghoul says, “Have you ever seen death? It's like a corridor of mirrors.” Destroying the image is possible but means death, yet sitting with the image means sitting with death. Perhaps this is the main challenge of Steck's exceptional and harrowing work: how to sit with death without embracing it. As Judy Grahn would exhort us to say, “death, ho death / you shall be poor.”

I Love Information by Courtney Bush

Milkweed Editions

Review by Rainer Diana Hamilton

The title is honest: Courtney Bush does love information, which here replaces revelation as poetry's source. In the “Seraphim or Nothing,” she asks that we be more honest about the fact that poets no longer take dictation or fill a priestly role:

I don't like the way songs define god
by saying all the things god is not
because what they actually identify
is some baseline fear
that there just isn't anything
I don't think language can fail
Fail to do what
You wouldn't ask experience to be language
You wouldn't mop with a tennis ball
I think poets are the best kind of people
and experience is not very abstract to me

Winner of the 2022 National Poetry Series, *I Love Information* (Milkweed Editions, 2023) takes place in a fictional world somewhere between Sparta and a shrimp festival, where everything otherwise unnamed goes by “Katelyn.” The point is to figure out if poems could *be* thinking, even if they cannot quite think. Earlier in “Seraphim or Nothing,” Bush puts a line from Nick Cave's “Into My Arms” (the song was also performed at her book launch) into the past tense: “I didn't believe in an interventionist god.” In her poems, as in Cave's song, atheism can be temporarily suspended by experience, producing an “if-then” faith that keeps divinity always discomfiting, half-ironized.

My favorite line is “I read the Wikipedia page for Vaslav Nijinsky once and for all.” Learning is a settled matter: before that line's present tense, she lacked information about Vaslav Nijinsky; after the line, finally, absolutely, she knows something or other, and there's no returning to Eden or to Kansas. But the eponymous information does not become the work's direct material. The poem where this line ap-

pears, I mean—“Baby Blue”—does not regale its reader with appropriated examples of the collectively written biography of Nijinsky. By tracing Bush’s steps, I learn Nijinsky was known for breaking gender norms by being great at dancing on tippy-toe. Bush represents the love of information, rather than information itself, where “to love” means “to organize.”

The book is organized into 26 poems (realizing this makes me briefly hallucinate a new alphabet), nine of which take the “Katelyn” title. The next most common title takes the form “_____ Voice,” e.g. “Rilke Voice,” and “Cassandra from *Agamemnon* Voice.” I think the source of each poem’s “voice” is whatever information the aforementioned subject would like to have. The book opens, for example, with “When You Get to Sparta Voice,” which introduces the main narrative event of the collection, a speaker in the process of generating a tentative thesis. Bush often approaches a subject that might normally be a matter of prayer—here, “entering sacred time”—only to recoil, on the edge of understanding, and fall back on something like humor: “In summer I arrived at the idea of entering sacred time recklessly / as it regarded the way men interpreted the behaviors of my friend Jessa and me.” This language is strange, awkward, the misplaced “as it regarded” undercutting the former line’s promise, what will be one of many of Bush’s vertiginous falls from high register.

I hear an echo of it later, “Concerning the bartender Jef with one f / It was like the Middle Ages and I was like the angel / Talking to Molly who was trying to work / *I’m back* I said.” These out-of-place participles suggest a way of ordering the world around logical missteps (it’s not Jef himself who was like the Middle Ages, but that word “concerning”). Bush’s manner of *concerning*—i.e. regarding, relating, tying fact to lie or detail to desired observation, or establishing networks of semantic relation—is medieval, I think, to the extent that it esteems the imagination as a faculty of apperception that uses bewilderment to understand. In *Medieval Marvels and Fictions in the Latin West and Islamic World*, a “unifying theory of marvels across disciplines, languages, and cultures,” Michelle Karnes begins with a study of the imagination, which she says has no proper home in truth or fiction: “As a faculty, imagination . . . heightens qualities like vividness that might belong to both,” and its main task is to generate “phenomena that resist easy categorization.” She draws from Averroes’s commentary on Aristotle’s *Poetics*, noting (positively) that imagination can destabilize by making figures too like their references:

His examples are constellations called “crab” and “spearbearer,” which so closely approximate the objects for which they are named that they create uncertainty in the one imagining them [...] in other words, the more the astral and terrestrial images resemble one another within the soul, the more likely they are to create confusion, and in Averroes’s view, that is a productive state...

Reading this passage, I am sent back to the opening lines of Bush’s title poem, the last in the book:

If you’re hewing the stone it goes
pomegranate dove pomegranate dove
I’ve been watching my boyfriend watch
Pierrot le fou and I’d like to prolong
The experience of measured green tones in
the dark on the contour of his cheek
Pomegranate dove lion palm
Capital chapter column harp
I want to know how to build the tabernacle
Who had daughters who had sons

A few lines further down, we’ll learn that the moments of linguistic nonsense are fragments of children’s speech, as they learn new vocab. Here, though, at the poem’s opening, they seem to represent the desire for information itself. My first attempts to interpret them, that is, repeating the syllables, *pom e gran ate dove pom e gran ate dove*—while I research stone-sharpening strategies, search for sources—dissolves into the image of the actual fruit and the actual bird, until that too unravels, becoming the readerly desire, “I want to know what *pomegranate dove* means, here,” finally joining the speaker in her experience of desire: now I too just want to know how to build the tabernacle. The astral pomegranate, its suspension between a word that might refer to something and pure sound, becomes too like the fruit, and all language briefly refers exclusively to the desire to know.

Searching for the line “when you get to Sparta,” to understand what that poem’s voice might want to know, I find a translation of Lucian of Samosata’s satirical *Dialogues of the Gods*, where Aphrodite reassures Paris that he does not need to understand her plan: “When you get to Sparta, Helen will see you; and for the rest—her falling in love, and going back with you—that will be my affair.” Paris, alas, wants information he cannot have and does not need. He does not let it go. Bush’s speaker keeps at her questions, too, which leads her in addition to *arriving at the idea* here, to a number of deflated epiphanies:

- “I had this lazy basely idea I would go back to writing regular poetry”
- “I began to see all art is about organization / Yes, all of it”
- “She found out there are only three kinds of ovens”
- “My arms became weak and more realizations entered”
- “Before that I invented permanent green”
- “To have the idea of the secret chord is to have the secret chord”
- “At least I know love is the point of everything / so love is why stingrays kill people”

Bush maintains a clear distinction between ideas—what one begins to slowly see or know—and revelations, which come on all at once. The latter come as evidence of poetic experience, but they are a lot less satisfying than

the former, and they do not prophesize. An important refrain of *I Love Information* is the speaker’s being able to say that she has received two “revelations” before the age of 30. As elsewhere, what might look like loose language turns out to be precise: it is the new ability to “tell everyone” about them that matters, not the ways she will take up some revelatory teaching in life, or in the poem. After each, she claims (in a repetition that proves its own lie), “I have received a revelation, I will have no other worry” or “I have had a revelation / and I will have no other worry.” In the post-revelation glow, the poet forgets about the organizational work ahead. In the first (only in terms of narrative chronology, since it appears second in the book, in a poem titled “Poem After My First Revelation”), after hearing Marjorie Welish note a student’s bare feet, the speaker comes to understand that *everything is a choice*. The second, coming from a dream, was “not a novel idea” either:

I had my second revelation
The thought planted in my head in usable
language when I woke from sleep
Was not a novel idea
*We are supposed to recreate our lives the way a
little child would*
Inside the realm of your imagination
And the small realm of your control
Pronoun incongruity is retained because it
was a revelation

The poem goes on to clarify that she does “not love the revelation,” as it apes the adult presumption that it is possible to experience or replicate childlike thinking—those who assume “every kid likes the Beatles,” overlooking the fact that “We make our own music here,” among children. This is a mistake Bush, whose book jacket says that she works as a nanny, would never make. To this end, she treats discovery grumpily, as a part of the poet’s job description, perhaps something one should be sure to avoid having outside of working hours. What is revealed might not be new, trustworthy, or beautiful, whereas “information,” on the other hand, is sturdy, pleasurable, abundant. Here, the poet’s job is to decide what information to receive, and what to share, rather than to address angels, who are themselves unenviable (“I would not want to be an angel / of the lower orders / so assigned the role of guardian or worse / property angel / I think I’d quit that job too.”) Bush is demonstrating the difficulty of distinguishing poetic epiphanies, especially the end of lyric flight, from cliché, since the only angelic orders poets can now address are the lowest. By pulling back from the epiphanic false promise, though, she lets poems be forms of informational organization that still get to brush against the thrill of mysticism. For Bush—though it is too late to receive hallucinatory visions, too late, even, to write Rilkean elegies lamenting the muses’ lack of cooperation—the divine recusal from mortal life leaves a vacuum to be filled by the imagination.

***Making Water* by Laura Jaramillo**

Futurepoem

Review by Dana Venerable

Laura Jaramillo’s *Making Water*—adorned with a sea-green background and light blue waves made of alternating ripples of Ms and Ws—showcases translations of time, water, and their theatrics in her collection of long yet fragmented poems centering on Durham and Orange counties’ Eno River and the poet’s earlier life in Queens.

Jaramillo—a critical theory scholar from Queens who lives in Durham, North Carolina and co-runs the performance series *Paradiso*—notes her family’s Bogotá origins and her own diasporic Colombian identity in a 2022 interview for Rob McLennan’s blog. Further capturing the Eno’s intrigue, she discusses its roots as a tributary of the Neuse River named for the Eno tribe, alongside her own activities tending to the Eno and its surroundings. Jaramillo dwells on the Eno River Rock Quarry and its state park, where people gather and share space to notice what’s theirs yet also not theirs. She embodies the necessity of the short-lived, either overhearing murmured conversation or diving into the speaker’s body-mind.

“Quarry,” “Autoimmunity,” and “Bad Magic” are immediate stand-out works—pushing me out into the speaker’s own experiential mapping that directs and guides the collection.

The opening poem “Quarry” describes people from all walks of life blowing in and meeting at “afternoon’s boredom / bodily anarchy” and “loop around the empire of mosquitoes.” Rainwater, like language, collects over time, creating a tempting pool of cold, clear water surrounded by Earth’s mineral accumulations, electric currents, abandoned equipment, and animal habitats. The thrill of the quarry causes many people to drown; the coldness brings them into states of shock. Jaramillo invokes warmth and fire through locals smoking spliffs in hidden pockets the quarry holds:

There’s a will to drown consumer electronics
that’s distinct from revolution. Local kids
smoke spliffs and cliff jump
the quarry. To have perhaps re-encountered
yourself in
anger, natural as infancy in water.

Rebellion can stabilize, yet “it doesn’t smell so somehow circulates quietly through generosity and impermanence.” Both the smoke and the “somehow” drift over, under, and among collectives of friends and strangers taking risks with their senses. The word “if” also emerges through the rhymes of “spliffs” and “cliff.” Following the breeze and smoke, Jaramillo highlights the immediacy and relieving stability involved in presence:

They described people they
desired as *present or, so present*. Edged by
jagged rocks and slime, the

middle is sun traversing evening water. A pat description of beauty is that which cannot last... To say she's present really means everyone else is just not really there. The thereminic cry of girls before they hit the water. Grind w/their granite lichens to sand. Light scatters through the canopy as a disco ball throws light.

Here, memories crash, strobe, and settle again with their own tempos. Jaramillo's poem aligns forests and bodies of water, vast and concrete, never-ending but sampled within grasps and gasps of awe, as the speaker reflects in the quarry, "Lost for a time in the abstract forest of your name." Jaramillo becomes an observer to a group discussing their experimentation with drugs: "ringlets heavy with lake one narrates the spiritual properties of meth." Jaramillo's speaker condenses images of summer and of substance(s), creating space within a body bound sensorially:

I've never liked anything more than time... A tendency to float de-realized above the afternoon... bodies on the gravel... Dust that traverses the sun's rays down to its depth.

I imagine that I am the dust's depth as it rests on my surfaces, just as time settles throughout a day, a season, or a lifetime. Jaramillo reminds readers that we can float when we lay down on

the ground, keeping time with vibrations rising from below without having to understand everything. Jaramillo then concludes with an epiphany/fact from the speaker's experience: "Everything I know is fragments swimming off into the private world of women," a labored settlement of concentrated understanding and the resulting comforts and releases from within it.

"Autoimmunity" explores lack(ing) on the axes of health and touch with "failure not visible on body's surface yet." Illness does not show itself, does not reach its peak or full potential, until time passes and until strangers, acquaintances, and loved ones show us who they are. Failure bleeds like water through typed or handwritten pages, smudging the ink. Touch (and the lack thereof) becomes a central focus; we see an inability to understand touch yet a need for it, a desire for it, as the speaker continues:

Simulated care sunk in the circulatory system. To listen like babies
Pink and swaddled, alone and far away. The velvet lather of voices
Automated against your aura... So many years I wanted anyone at all
To touch my face.

To go on without touch, actively searching and yearning, causes a restless exhaustion. Jaramillo writes, "The first prohibition is touch... The birds sing at night unbearable

and real." She describes "water traversing bones" where "a moment of internal silence impossible the heart is an audible presence then," acknowledging internal constitutions and rhythms of touch that sustain, even just for the time being.

Nostalgia operates and moves within the poem "Bad Magic," where "no longer quite young, you appear to yourself as a photograph and the bad magic of Images fails you." Moving through relationships, schools, new cities, beloved objects, memory becomes imagination—its details fade and its outlines remain, shaping daydreams. When Jaramillo writes, "Yellow Schwinn Collegiate stolen. It's coming / it's going in waves," I flash back to my own blue Huff bike getting stolen, first as a prank and then for real, when I was at university. Events ebb and flow, the speaker becomes bilingual and then transcends languages, communicating in time signatures, in registers, in "days speaking one tongue, years another." One can attempt to keep their footing or give in entirely to floating, but either way, as Jaramillo notes, "it makes you feel imaginary."

"Gate Agent" develops and heightens an awareness of borders, their enforcement, their fluidity, their violence, and their tendency to limit people more than they protect them, as "a girl bleeds from the mouth at border control." The airport, like other sites of arrival and departure, becomes "an envelope" where "notes

to future selves write themselves," leaning on the image of a dream realized or a dream potentially deferred. Referring to happiness as an illusion that the body learns to carry through society, and through those nearest, Jaramillo writes,

Mi cuerpo alegre camina
Porque de ti lleva la ilusión
Como el agua
Como el agua
Como el agua
Camarón de la Isla

I try to practice "a new way of sensing" with Jaramillo, as recommended in "Handedness," attempting to witness new repetitions like waves, like performances. "Warmachine," the speaker describes taking "thirty-seven pictures of myself in the back seat to make sure I still existed" —similar but different each time. Sound meets image in the concluding poem, "River Society," where the river becomes a moving quilt of portraits that howl, that part ways when the wind blows:

And if we were images
It was only for a time and they're
ululating
On water and broken by the wind
Where again they scatter.

Each poem has cinematic scenes that I could access and arrange. Water can balance and re-

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LIGHT ON WATER

WILLIAM BENTON

NEW AND SELECTED POEMS
1972 - 2022

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member as Jaramillo details one river / one body moving through a cherished city. *Making Water* translates time through its “cuts,” bends, falls, postures, rushes, and variations of serenity.

Prescriber by Chia-Lun Chang

Nightboat Books

Review by Morgan Vō

The other day I was walking down a subway platform, when a woman going the opposite direction came my way. Her frame was stiff, like she was marching, and on the front of her t-shirt read a curious phrase:

DEFENSIVE FORCE FIELD

I took the words in as she passed. In one light, I took the phrase simply, as a straightforward warning—to stay back, to leave her alone—and I felt sorrow in acknowledging the ever-present need for that warning, the unevenly distributed danger of walking around. But looking at it from another angle, I found an almost magical humor to the phrase, a catalytic smirk of irony ushering in this invocation of a field that does not—in the world as we know it—exist: an impenetrable zone of protection from the harms of power-over.

I desperately want to believe in the sci-fi fantasy of a mode of speech that, in its strangeness and poignancy, in the precision of its perception and the courage of its obstinance, could ensure its speaker's safety, could expose how diseased the violent among us truly are, and could blunt the speaker's vulnerability to harm.

Chia-Lun Chang's *Prescriber* explores the myriad impacts of language when it is used as a tool of control and oppression, and assesses the potentials of utterance as a force for rebellion. The world of *Prescriber* is a globe fundamentally altered by the modern rise of the English language and the violent power English wields within an internationally dispersed system of patriarchal capitalism. English is the horizon through which *Prescriber's* protagonists will either fail or succeed, be loved or be scorned, become or become subsumed. Through Chang's uniquely twisted explosions of a poetic ear/voice, it is also perversely the tool her figures take up in their bids to disrupt such live-or-die dichotomies, to claim spaces for living beyond failure and success.

At times, I think Chang operates from a desire similar to my own: the desire to believe that when speech rises to the level of utterance—when it attests to the vitality of life itself—it can defend us against anything. But *Prescriber* never misrepresents speech as being so simple in its power to affect, so easy to put to use. Instead, the book confronts us with the reality that speech has significant limitations, particularly the speech of the disempowered Other, whose voice is forever inflected with an accent that disturbs the hegemonic ear:

My lips aren't placed where they're supposed

to be
The R sound eases its way out
Standing here, I annoy you,
drag you, punish you

What drags annoyingly at the authoritarian “you” are funny names, foreign accents, grinding teeth, flamed legs and scars. What's accepted is English, gendered submission, worker visas, shitty jobs, and dutiful lies, all the requirements of the Other's obedience. “I'm sorry,” Chang's speaker apologizes, “I'm becoming a dishwasher right away.”

Throughout *Prescriber*, Chang's speakers face a bitter pressure to acquiesce to authority through the performance of normative roles within the distinct but intertwined contexts of the economic (“To advance society ... add gas to a Mazda”) and the romantic/erotic (“Nest me, please”). Chang explores the overlaps between the two in poems like “Engli-shhh isn't Yours,” inspired by a 1967 *Time Magazine* article that relays how the U.S. military advised its troops in Vietnam when taking Rest and Recuperation trips to Taipei: “Do not purchase the company of a girl for more than 24 hours at a time; they seldom look as good in the morning.” In the poem, the speaker reckons with what English does and does not offer to sex workers servicing foreign military powers:

But bombs are owned by soldiers,
I needed to speak English

to kiss them who
bangbang without paying.

What kind of kung fu is that?

Chang's poetry holds anger with a unique depth and richness. “Being angry constantly takes energy,” she writes. “How do I come up with a long-term plan?” The speaker goes on,

... When I negotiate,

pages I wrote are seared by liquid
the sound I made erupting,

as there's a bone stuck in my tongue.
Reminder: as a traitor, I need no bones.

As a server, I provide comfort: no
communication.

Her poems revel in sarcasm and confrontation, deploying tongue-in-cheek at maximum volume to call out hypocrisy, suppression, and cruelty with language and imagery that rises to a corresponding level of the comically absurd. In the above, the speaker meets the hostile male gaze with mutual disdain, not merely highlighting the misogynist contempt that saturates the *Time* quote, but further illustrating the grotesque dynamic with which militarized power infuses the exchange. The soldier does not want a “girl” for the night, but rather a monstrously subservient creature, a wordless,

boneless form that would disappear before the sun comes up. Chang's speaker challenges the powerful by offering them what they didn't know they were asking for: a figure of abjection that they would prefer not to recognize as a product of their own making.

Western male figures appear as the likely antagonists throughout many of these poems: customs officials, bosses, art creeps at art shows, Mark Twain and John Sotheby. But from the start, Chang makes clear that the pressure to obey emanates not only from the outside Western world onto the foreign body, but rises as well from within the foreign family, through their embrace of assimilation as the natural path to one's best life chances. In *Prescriber's* opening poem “Parents,” the speaker explains: “I came to the United States for love. When men asked about my past, I replied, Father said *we must not talk about // feelings.*” In the second half of the poem, Chang's speaker describes her mother:

I taught my mother to build her name too
many times, each time she became a
shalom, she demanded to know,

Have you found your love. I cut out part of my
language to make love to them.

Through aligning immigration, language, taboo, familial love, and romantic love, Chang positions English (and the kinds of lives it makes possible) as a near-biological imperative, an “inescapable / Inseparable / Inevitable saga.” Defining the family as a pivotal site of this sense of imperative amplifies the frustrations of Chang's speakers, adds to their exasperation when they meet failures, and complicates the effectiveness of their refusals. “You can't talk to me / Like that,” one argues, “I was born without consent.” Another relents, “I have removed the crumbs / in my body / in hopes of / losing and being invisible.” It is perhaps in direct relation to such moments, where what one can say is so overly determined by the circumstances of one's oppression, that *Prescriber* continually mines the breakdowns of grammar and sense-making for its moments of potency, for its sense of action and charge:

Your soldier uniform is attached with
perspiration and admonition. Documented,
not a typical
penetration. Stay, joy, so I can burn you to
the sun. I am all
the way naked, as a red moon

after the prolonged tide in the dusk.

I think back to the woman I saw on the train platform, how the slight off-ness of her t-shirt's phrase destabilized me, and held me in a space of thought. Chang produces this effect again and again, arriving at surreal images and phrasings through a mercurial sense of improvisation. *Prescriber* is primarily concerned with scenes and contexts where the possibilities for what to say are so intensely constrained, yet Chang faces that with a talent for poetic in-

vention that makes those constraints seem to lose solidity, makes the borders of what is possible seem to momentarily fade. I love it when her moments of invention feel vaguely threatening, almost humorously so, as when one speaker implores, “Let my ... Grumpiness pilot you an unlimited outline.” But what stays with me most are the lines when Chang carves out a space simultaneously removed from the world and emphatically present, like a shadow and a light combined:

I go, I lie, I tree and I were

Serviceable Clothes for Life in the Open

by Laura Woltag

speCt! books

Review by Evan Kennedy

A poet's first book is worth celebrating, more so when they're mid-career. I can only speculate about the development of *Serviceable Clothes for Life in the Open*, but Laura Woltag makes a case for a poet taking their time. The poems are witty and tender, mournful and whimsical. They feel vibrantly unique while harmonizing well with my library. Namechecked influences include Diane di Prima, Ovid, Edmund Spencer, Anna Akhmatova, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Carrie Hunter, Philip Whalen, and Joanne Kyger.

I associate Woltag with Bernadette Mayer's sexy, sensitive, and sweetly waggish lyrics. “Trust in Everyday,” the title of the first poem directs us, though I wish I shared Woltag's unique perspective on the everyday, an eye like Mayer's that elevates the so-called mundane through writing that makes me hesitate to call anything mundane. Replenishing my sensitivities, the poems are often occasional, topical, spanning not just the ordinary, but also literary community, family, ecology, American injustice, queer romance, animals upon animals.

Regarding the book's concerns around climate change, statements like “I am a walking popsicle”—not “just like” or “similar to” or “becoming” but *am*—lose their outlandishness, become weighty, showing me my fragility, how I'm continually exposed to the elements. “I'm melting here,” I often gripe on vacation. Blazing beneath the Carnegie Hall spotlights, Judy Garland, with the punchiness of a great rhetorician or vaudevillian, said, “Ladies perspire; I sweat.” (That's probably the clearest semicolon in audio recording history.) I recall those suburban Houston summers when the pavement was brightly splattered by melting popsicles not yet discovered by dog or armadillo, like a classmate's diorama of some chemical plant's explosion. We were surrounded by refineries.

Woltag's poems align fecundity with futurity, eliding them into the Earth's generative potential, a resilience that combats its destructive occupants. While the book is “dedicated to other species,” “the world is an endless French fry / for the resting gull.” There's superabun-

dance for many. Gulls work little for their dinner, but it's not nutritious. We're "propelled by fat," whether we're elephant seals or poachers. It's a disconcerting commonality to alight upon. The Emerald Tablet notes, "As above, so below," for Woltag to reply, "everything up here cooked as everything down there cooked." A galaxy fried hard.

Invoking much, from barnacles to seals to horses to maples, Woltag notes, "When we attempt to collaborate with animals in the open space of composition, we enter the possibility of translating instinct." Woltag identifies with the flowers they cut, storing death, addresses lover and mineral, alternates between the domestic and encroaching fascism or some scenario of America in collapse.

"What happens after hope?" Self-invention is an option: "You need to make the being you'll become." Even a poem has the capacity to transform the Statue of Liberty into a vibrating dildo. (There's no mention of whom the lady is meant to pleasure, though I volunteer myself.) Later, Woltag continues breaking distinctions like a geologist beginning to identify with their subject: "what can we hear in one another that is rock?"

Alongside these shifts from ocean depths to distant stars, *Serviceable Clothes* deftly leaps between degrees of abstraction and straightforward reportage. A poet requires time to learn how to handle multiple registers. The book's incubation period must be longer than most I've read. It's another argument for writers to take it slow. Like an outfit harmonizing colors and fabrics collected over time, an item from a friend, an accessory purchased at a dusty market abroad, another item from an Oakland clothing swap, Woltag's sensuous, lush, agile vocabulary makes *Clothes* cohere: "Texture chips at lament. Pulls, shifts, returns. Remains / abandoned to motion."

Dreamlike narrative and visionary encounters occupy the middle zone between abstraction and clarity, and here Woltag reminds me of Alice Notley: "Others had jumped, their falling slowed or distilled for me, so I could see the smooth slow falling time, the torso in time, moving through what I thought was resulting in death... Having gone through the fall, bodies swam in the square." The flooded square evokes for me Venice, that sinking dreamworld that's neither land nor water. And elsewhere is "...the dream I had earlier in the summer about each horse I knew and cared for at the barn where I worked in my teens appearing before me, one by one, to be seen, to say goodbye, perhaps, because I never said goodbye. The field open enough for the nature of their haunting to cease via just being seen, beheld."

This is queer thinking, identifying with everything, struggling but shifting in form, "living outside the body" while making oneself at home in corporality and fulfilling its pleasures, gratifying its wants. This is what's so great about being queer. I love it. I needed to be reminded I

love it. It's like a blessing is being explained to me. I am cutting the confetti for the day I make a wildlife sanctuary of my body. I want nature to occupy every opening along whatever form it finds me taking, or, as Woltag writes, "Loon in a panther's den, butterflies marveling penguins, an owl cuddling with kittens."

Does the Bay Area inspire such thoughts? I've been obsessed by these concerns since *The Sissies* (Futurepoem, 2016), my love letter to San Francisco and Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals like the dog-masked boys on Folsom Street. Endorsing the warning voiced by Woltag's zoo constellations, the dog-boys sense we're approaching closing time in the gardens of the west. They wag their tails (however they're attached) and gnaw their leashes.

***Stridentist Poems* by Manuel Maples Arce,**
trans. KM Cascia

World Poetry Books

Review by Terrence Arjoon

It happens every year: an undersung Latin American poet, praised by Octavio Paz, Jorge Luis Borges, or in this case Roberto Bolaño, is translated into English; small book, no foreword, no translator's note, to be lost on basement poetry shelves. Which is why World Poetry Books, newly helmed by Matvei Yankelevich, is so refreshing. In KM Cascia's translation of Manuel Maples Arce's *Stridentist Poems*, we read not only poems from Maples Arce's near decade of writing, but also the "Stridentist Manifesto" underpinning his aesthetic and political program, an introduction by Cascia introducing the reader to Maples Arce through Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*, and an afterword which puts both his translation and Maples Arce's poems in context.

This structure—poems, manifesto, and afterword—has a fascinating effect on the reader. Words from the poems take on new polygraphic meanings, electrified with the stink of history and failed political projects. In the wake of the Mexican Revolution, Maples Arce created Stridentism to fight the solipsistic decadence he saw in Mexican art and engender an avant-garde manifesto suitable for Mexican arts. Sort of an antifascist Futurism manifesto: "Everything approaches and goes away in the moving moment. The means change and their influence changes everything." The antidote to solipsism is communal flux, removing quasi-literate flourishes and replacing them with intent. "No retrospection. No futurism. The whole world, there, quiet, marvelously illuminated on the stupendous axis of the present moment; observed in the prodigy of its unique, unmistakable emotion." An aesthetic *cri de coeur* as well as a political one: to escape the paralyzing yoke of the strict regime through art making. To mix the sacred and the propane.

However, in order to preserve his career, and possibly his life, Maples Arce denounced Stridentism—even going so far as to remove any

mention of it from his 1940 *Anthology of Modern Mexican Poetry*. As Cascia notes in his afterword, Maples Arce was all but forced to renounce Stridentism and communism by the government—controlled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—suppressing his work and the work of his peers, leaving Stridentism a "suicide mist in greenish streets." This makes the process of western assimilation easier; already denuded of all radical intent—the same process that defanged Neruda, García Marquez, and women writers like Pizarnik, Mistral, Lispector. Cascia quotes Eugene Ostashevsky: "there 'is no decolonization in English only."

Johannes Göranson expands upon this claim in his pamphlet "Transgressive Circulation": "Written language becomes a source of confusion precisely because of its 'transgressive circulation': writing is dangerous because it puts a work into circulation, opening it up to misinterpretation." Translation doubly, or triply so, multiplies these opportunities for miscommunication. In Spanish, Maples Arce condenses images and syntax, flattening registers and modes of speech; processes which doubly served to produce wild Stridentist work and further a radical communist program. The accelerating city becomes anthropomorphized, motives become displaced: "City: / Bodyguard streetcars / patrol subversive streets. / Shop windows assault sidewalks, / and the sun sacks avenues." The city is under attack from itself, an auto-anthropophagy, and the citizens get lost in this assault: from commerce, from the police.

The poet becomes sickly observer to crumbling infrastructure, to the crumbling colorless streets: "(Romantic morning, like foamy noise / spills in colorless neighborhood streets / where sometimes they hand out programs." Change happens in the streets, but slowly, surreptitiously, so as to avoid state-meted-out violence programs; but still, a chance of love: "and a well-loved girl's sickly paleness / is a clear music heard with eyes." Maples Arce ventures into queasy romanticism, as if trying on an old obsolete style. However, he quickly grows bored of it—or is distracted by more pressing concerns: "While a poet, / hung in the window, / dies gargling / electrified / silver." Private mineral extraction operations infarct the poet's blood, leaving him "cosmopolitanized." This narrative disjunction is truth itself, or as Maples writes, "everything approaches," which is a sort of locomotive extension of Manet's injunction: tout arrive [everything happens].

This locomotion operates on a literal and metaphorical sense. Maples Arce expands on and corrects F.T. Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto, which was so fascist that Marinetti was tapped by Mussolini to co-author the Fascist Manifesto. Marinetti writes, "A racing automobile with its bonnet adorned with great tubes like serpents with explosive breath... a roaring motor car which seems to run on machine-gun fire, is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace." Marinetti's dictum is so

anti-human and anti-historical it approaches parody, and encompasses everything Marinetti calls for: a radical violent break from history. Maples Arce's poems are filled with the same machines, whose violent impositions sweep up the poet, his lover, the entire city. "The train is an iron gust / that roams the landscape, moving everything." But, in contrast to Futurist poems, every instance of speed and locomotion in Maples Arce has an effect on someone, reframing them from an exaltation of speed and technology to their effect on the real people engaging with them. For every moment of joy: "The succinct automobile / has at times / mineral / tenderness. / For the meddling lady friend / devoted to dangerous turns;" there is a moment of terror: "factories burn / in fire of twilight, / and airplanes / execute dusk maneuvers / in bright sky." In the second example, from "Revolution," the syntax is clipped and articles are removed, as if these dusk maneuvers had disarticulated the very syntax of the poet. In every poem in the collection, people are harangued by the onslaught of newfound speed, and find themselves in moments of silence on the balcony, with only the slow movement of the moon to catch them.

Everything approaches the poet in the city. In "Prism," Maples Arce opens with a twist on the opening tercet of Dante's *Commedia*: "I'm a still point in the middle of the moment, / equidistant to a star's castaway shout." The midpoint of one's life is the ever-present yolk of the current moment, bathed in the sun's yellow screams. One sees even here a hint of his future rejection of Stridentism, sidestepping history and archive to become the black hole shout—and one can see why Bolaño loved him. To disappear from history is no small feat, even for a few years. Even better, to enter the library of lost works: Benjamin's final manuscript, Sibelius' 8th Concerto, Walser's *Theodor*. Lost in a world that extracts your silver: "where, from time to time, / electricity bleeds in the ironed street."

Maples Arce moves from parody to imitation, surrealist anthropomorphism, earnest yearning, and finally to tag-lining and sloganeering in the breadth of a stanza. He forcibly carves a place in the avant-garde for Mexican poetics. He ends "Prism" by dismantling Yeats' widening gyre: "Locomotives, shouts, / arsenals, telegraphs. / Love and life / today for Labor, / and everything expands in concentric circles." The second coming won't happen as long as we are all in that widening gyre, filling those concentric circles with poems, love, life; refusing the urge to be continuous and successive, but consenting to simultaneity.

The Hog is a Lonely Hunter: On *Pig* by Sam Sax

Joshua Gutterman Tranen

I was originally commissioned to write this review by the Poetry Foundation. On October 8, 2023, the day after the Hamas-led attack that killed 1,400 Israelis, and the day before the review was to be published, my editor at the Poetry Foundation informed me that he was going to hold off on publishing. I immediately objected; the review examines nuances of Jewish anti-Zionist politics, and I felt that the war in Palestine was more not less of a reason to publish. Over the course of the next week, and despite the growing evidence that Israeli forces were committing war crimes against Palestinians in Gaza, I was told that the Poetry Foundation did not want to be seen as choosing a side in political events, and that there was no plan to publish the review “for a while.” I decided to pull the review.

This review was written before the massacre of October 7, 2023, the following aerial bombardment and ground invasion of Gaza, and the renewed ethnic cleansing campaigns by armed settlers in the West Bank. I have made minor edits to the review, but have kept the majority the same. As a critic, I do not believe it is ethical to make Sax’s collection respond to events that preceded it. Lastly, in a moment when Jewish anti-Zionist solidarity with Palestine is crucial, I encourage reading my criticism of Sax’s anti-Zionist politics as a dialogue between two anti-Zionist Jews—in the pages of this magazine, rather than a Beit Midrash—on how to interpret their shared history. From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.

—Joshua Gutterman Tranen

The first time I tasted prosciutto was in college on a date at an upscale wine bar. I was happy with just my glass of red wine, but when the man I was with learned I’d never had prosciutto, he insisted on ordering some. Minutes later, a bespoke wood serving tray laden with marbled strips of delicately folded ham appeared before us. I watched as the man carefully selected a piece, plopped it in his mouth, and pushed the last bits of stringy meat into the corner of his lips. *One bite*, I thought. *I can do that.*

I thought I was going to vomit.

In truth, the pink ribbon of flesh didn’t taste bad—as far as meat goes—although I wasn’t prepared for its intense saltiness. No, my near regurgitation was cultural, not culinary: I was a Jew eating pork. Although I’d stopped keeping strict kosher nearly two years earlier, there was a difference—at least in my mind—between eating chicken that hadn’t been slaughtered according to Jewish custom and going full ham,

literally and figuratively. As I gulped down the uncooked meat, I reminded myself that according to the Torah and traditional rabbinic law, the punishment for gay sex (death) is much worse than the punishment for eating pork (39 lashes). And I’d had plenty of gay sex. So why not eat some pig as a prelude to becoming the pig this man wanted in bed?

More than just the tale of losing my pork virginity, my memory testifies to the wide range of meanings and emotions that have been foisted upon pigs and the unexpected places where they collide. In their new collection *Pig* (Scribner, 2023), Sam Sax identifies similar places of pig convergence to examine the contradictions of American life with a focus on queer and Jewish experiences. At first, *Pig*’s argument appears relatively straightforward: historically, pigs have been what humans needed them to be—a food source. But as Sax’s poems demonstrate, eating pig does not alone explain the semantic burden we have placed on the animal, especially given the impossibility of pigs meeting our epistemological demands. *Pig* rolls and snorts around in our porcine contradictions and asks us to consider *how* and *why* pigs play such a vital role in the most intimate human experiences.

One central figure *Pig* explores is the queer pig. An identifier primarily used by queer men, “pig” denotes someone who desires uninhibited, raunchy sex. Though a top can be a pig, pigs are usually bottoms who submit *both* to their tops and to their own feral desires. Two general elements define the queer pig. The first is a metaphorical transformation from human to pig, a movement into a contradictory state of being in which one inhabits both the subject position of a human and the object position of a pig. The second is the desire for a top to “breed” their ass, a term for ejaculating in someone without a condom.

Importantly, both elements borrow from livestock husbandry to articulate queer sexual desires. Queer pig discourse takes for granted a human-pig relationship wherein pigs are subordinate objects that humans breed, kill, and consume. The violence that undergirds hog production is not incidental to queer pig culture but rather one of its defining features; in queer pig sex, one can experiment with passivity, objecthood, ownership, and consensual non-consent within defined parameters.

More than the violence of hog production, hygiene—or the lack thereof—may be the queer pig’s most powerful appropriation. Queer pigs reconsecrate the pig’s “uncleanliness” while welcoming the dehumanizing aspect of that association; to be a queer pig is to gaily roll

around in cum, sweat, and piss like a pig rolling in shit. As scholars such as Tim Dean and João Florêncio documented, queer pig fetishes emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s after the introduction of HIV antiretrovirals but before the introduction of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, when condomless sex was much more likely to result in HIV transmission. At a time when morally charged and stigmatizing words such as *clean* and *unclean* were regularly used to describe a person’s HIV status, the queer pig’s eroticization of HIV through breeding made those terms irrelevant. In the queer pig’s world, everyone was dirty.

With an eye toward the violence of desire, *Pig* offers an ambivalent view of queer pig sex. If the sheer range of examples *Pig* marshals—from the police to *Winnie the Pooh*’s Piglet, from *Deliverance* to Miss Piggy—reveals the imbrication of the pig in everyday life, Sax’s pig sex poems do something similar for queer culture. Though not all queer men identify as pigs, and “pig sex” still exists as a specific fetish, pig culture has nonetheless permeated the wider field of contemporary queer male desire. Radicalized within HIV bug-chasing subcultures, breeding has, in the time of PrEP, become ubiquitous in gay pornography and in everyday gay life. Yet, despite breeding’s shift from the margins to the mainstream, the term nonetheless maintains traces of its older usage—a hint of violence, the transition from human to animal-object—that brings pig sex into a larger field of sexual identification. Rather than asking if one should (or shouldn’t) engage in pig sex, Sax understands that choice as false. In a world in which a previously kinky request to be bred is now just pedestrian sex on PrEP, we are all already queer pigs.

However, this doesn’t mean that Sax thinks alternatives to pig sex shouldn’t or can’t be explored. In “squeal like a pig,” Sax considers how filmic depictions of rape informed their early understanding of queer sex and foreclosed pursuing nonviolent fantasies. The poem borrows its title from the infamous scene in the 1972 movie *Deliverance* in which a “city” man, out in the woods for a weekend of camping, is captured by one of the local “country” men, stripped to his white briefs, and forced to “squeal like a pig” while being raped. “this is how men were / meant to touch / i believed,” the poem begins, recasting the scene of rape, which one could argue is devoid of specific sexuality, into what Sax thought queer sex was supposed to look like.

But then the poem ventures into unexpected territory. The speaker recounts that they

never imagined
i could leave
become the trees
eating light
while all these men
blur & dilate
around me

Although pig sex isn’t explicitly called out as such in the poem, I read the final lines as providing an alternative. If pig sex offers a fantasy-driven way to defang the violence that scenes such as the one in *Deliverance* literalize, it also fulfills a secondary wish: the desire to exist, momentarily, as something other than oneself. The poem reconfigures the latter desire with less violence. Turning away from the choices of “boy hurt” and “boy hurting,” the speaker learns of a third option: “become the trees / eating light.” The men the speaker desires don’t disappear but instead “blur & dilate,” undergoing a similar boundary crossing, one that imagines queer sex as a blurring of porous bodies. Moving from the literalness of the rape scene to the airy, metaphoric transcendence of the final lines, the poem suggests an open-endedness to the question of how to find less-violent ways of satiating desire.

For those who do become pigs, queer pig sex poses questions of ontology: What is the state of the bottom—pig, human, or both? What can humans know about the pig bottom, and what do they know about themselves? In “pig bttm looking for then,” an invocation of a common screenname on gay apps such as Grindr and Scruff, Sax toys with this (un)knowability. The poem finds a post-coital speaker lying in bed next to a wealthy man he just hooked up with; the man is asleep, and the pig bottom asks,

what buys this ease

to sleep with a stranger in your bed
or do i now somehow seem known

to him? having opened like the back
of a picture frame. having came

& stayed. what drove me here?
to seizure and breed?

The speaker’s pointed questions put pressure on sexual scripts, questioning what can be known about someone whose subjectivity has been siphoned off to become an animal of desire. However, the tension that emerges from these questions is not the result of roleplay or anonymous sex but rather the wealthy man’s forgetting that there is more to the pig bottom than what he’s made of them. That the wealthy man feels comfortable sleeping with a stranger

in his bed is precisely a function of this forgetting. In his mind, the pig bottom is only an object, harmless as a picture frame, into which he's slipped the image of his desire.

In an unexpected turn, Sax ends the poem by flipping the violence associated with the submissive and dominant roles. The pig bottom reflects,

this is the most tender i've felt:
how easily i could kill him

it is enough to let him sleep.

With this ending, Sax redirects the violence of pig sex *away* from the bottom and onto the man—who, it is important to note, remains a “man” throughout the poem, a man and *not* an object. In a reversal of the discursive violence that becoming a pig entails, it is the pig bottom who reanimates as subject, not object, a speaking subject capable of murderous desire. With this twist, Sax asks readers to consider what happens *after* the transition back from animal object to human and questions whether one can ever move between these states without slippage between them.

How does one become a pig, anyway? For Sax, it's often a visual process, with spectacle and exhibitionism aiding the project of objectification. Rather than seek out a physical encounter, in “pig bttm looking for now,” the

speaker logs onto a website where one can watch men masturbate live and be watched masturbating in turn. I've been on sites such as the one Sax describes; the thrill isn't so much from watching others pleasure themselves but from *being* watched as you pleasure yourself. On these sites, fantasy takes over: everyone is a screen for one's projection, and imagining that the hot man you're watching—the one grunting and making encouraging faces—is also watching you is easy.

But in Sax's poem, the speaker takes drugs and passes out, severing the two-way connection necessary to complete the circuit of desire. Without a conscious body to use for their projection, the other viewers on the site become “angry” at the speaker; they “don't like to see a body emptied of its spirit. / draws attention to their own, body i mean.” What Sax astutely understands is that the viewers aren't angry about not getting off but because they're forced to confront the process of objectification the website fosters. Just as one might become a pig bottom to momentarily exist as something else, so too the one *objectifying* the pig bottom might find temporary relief through domination. The poem ends with an uncomfortable suggestion: perhaps as pigs we become what our human selves cannot tolerate.

What, then, does being a pig mean today? Or, more specifically, what does it mean to be a pig in the age of PrEP and the scientific confirma-

tion that HIV with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus? Although some still fetishize actual transmission, the introduction of PrEP turned condomless sex into standard sexual practice, not the mark of a sexual avant-garde. Yet *breeding*, a term that arose after HIV and is historically rooted in the eroticization of the virus, maintains its rhetorical power. Rather than a sign that people have moved beyond their fears of transmission, the fact that so many queer men desire pig sex and breeding reveals that HIV still occupies a central place in sexual psyches. Put another way, this is a time of overlapping temporalities: on the one hand, medical advances have allowed men on PrEP to stop worrying about acquiring HIV. On the other hand, for some people, the history of HIV/AIDS still structures conscious and unconscious sexual desires. Instead of making bug-chasing anachronistic, PrEP merely opened the playing field, allowing more queer men to enact their HIV fantasies without risk of infection.

Sax articulates the tension of these overlapping temporalities in “poem written inside a leather pig mask.” In this poem, Sax tries on a leather pig mask at an adult store and finds himself

transposed & transpossessed back
inside the living cow in its lake
of cows outside some missouri
township all knowing they would die

but none imagining they might be remade into the perverted image of a different living animal then worn by a man wanting to be regarded as livestock.

The present-day Sax exists simultaneously as living cow and dead hide, feeling both the terror of guaranteed death and the violent pleasure the mask represents. Still wearing the mask, Sax watches porn about “two men now surely dead” play on the store's TV. The poem ends with

i've never been lonelier than i am
right now, inside this pig mask
made out of a cow, watching
these men break into each other
again & again, two men
who will never die.

Braiding the image of the two men fucking with that of the dead cow, the poem suggests a mirroring of their experiences. If the now-dead cow knew its death was all but assured, what, if anything, did the men in the video know? If the men could see where their porn was playing now, what would they say? And should the answer to either of those questions change the “yearning” that Sax feels from within the mask?

I returned repeatedly to this poem and to Sax's loneliness in the final lines. Perhaps it's

Claire DeVoogd VIA

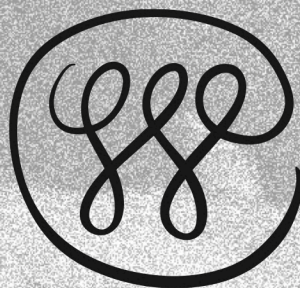
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In his second book of poems, Ahmad Almallah seeks a language that captures the afterlives of the mother tongue. This collection blurs the borders between languages, between the living and the dead, between presence and absence.

I admire a poet who is unafraid to rise up and be a pallbearer, who is unafraid to point out the difficulty of holding in our memory what we would rather hold in our arms. —Divya Victor

because I, too, recognize the loneliness evoked here, one that is both individual and communal, the inheritance of queers seeking pleasure in the shadow of HIV/AIDS. I close my eyes and picture Sax as they are in this poem: wearing a mask molded from the skin of a dead animal shaped into the form of an animal that represents sexual objection and violence, a mask to be worn for the same acts that might have transmitted HIV to the men, now likely dead from AIDS, fucking on screen. How could Sax not feel alone, torn as they are between two competing impulses: pursuing queer pleasure and honoring the dead that lubricate pleasure's arrival?

* * *

Queerness is not the only generational inheritance *Pig* examines. Many of the collection's poems address Sax's Jewishness, the role of the pig in Jewish history, and the American-bred Zionism that millennial and Gen Z Jews were force-fed. To my surprise, Sax's treatment of the latter topic troubled me and not for the reasons one might expect. Politically, Sax and I agree on anti-Zionism; I, too, hope for the day the Israeli apartheid "borders / collapse under the weight of their own split / databases." Instead, what concerned me was Sax's downplaying of the role land has played within Jewish history, a move that flattens, rather than adds nuance, to their anti-Zionist politics.

In "anti-zionist abecedarian," Sax uses the second-person pronoun to address the Israeli state and its Jewish occupants. The abecedarian, an ancient acrostic form in which each line begins with the subsequent letter of the alphabet, was first used in the Hebrew bible. In Judaism, the most famous abecedarian is Psalm 145, which comprises the majority of the *ashrei*, a prayer usually recited twice a day, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. The abecedarian's ties to Jewish liturgy therefore make it the perfect form for an anti-Zionist prayer. What better way to speak back to Jewish ethnonationalism and religious Zionism than using their own linguistic structures?

Yet I have the eerie feeling that despite the poem's second-person addressee, the true audience of "anti-zionist abecedarian" are non-Jews who are *watching* Jews talk to one another about Israel. For starters, nowhere in *Pig's* notes, which otherwise provide important context for many of the book's poems, is there mention of the abecedarian's history, and the poem itself does not allude to the Jewish origins of the form. I'd be willing to chalk these up as missed opportunities if it weren't for the poem's surprising gloss of "home" in Jewish belief:

for us

home never was a place in dirt or even
inside the skin but
just exists in language.

What? Even accounting for the centrality of text-based learning in Jewish culture, one would still

have to ignore thousands of years of literature, philosophy, prayer, and the Hebrew Bible itself to claim that home was always a metaphor and never a literal place. Just as intriguing as this claim is the explanation that follows:

let me explain. my people
kiss books as a form of prayer. if dropped we
lift them to our lips &
mouth an honest & uncomplicated
apology—
nowhere on earth belongs to us.

And here we get to the root of the poem's politics. Suddenly, the second-person address drops out and is replaced by a third-person address to a non-Jewish audience. How else does one read "let me explain. my people / kiss"? If another Jew was the intended audience, why not write "let me explain. *our* people / *we* kiss"? Or why explain at all?

"anti-zionist abecedarian" is not the only place in *Pig* in which Sax claims that a Jew's most authentic state is as a wanderer, but the slippage between the intended addressees—Jew and non-Jew—tells me the most about the possible anxieties of the poem's production. "anti-zionist abecedarian" exemplifies Sax's understandable desire to separate himself from the actions and ideology of Zionists. What better way to do so than to claim that home was always a metaphor, that thousands of years of Jewish history just happened to get that part wrong? With one word, *never*, Sax gets to posit *their* anti-Zionist Judaism as authentic and banish Zionists as land-hungry, colonizing aberrations of the faith.

If only it were that simple. To pull off this feat, Sax must create a version of Jewish history in which land is pure metaphor. But even a passing familiarity with Jewish history reveals that a place called *yisrael* plays a star role, literally *and* metaphorically, in Jewish belief. While I am sympathetic to Sax's politics of *doikayt*, which prioritizes the "hereness" of localized and diasporic Jewish communities over the "thereness" of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine, I fail to see why it must preclude the recognition that *yisrael*—the geographic region of Palestine—has functioned, for some, as one place of "thereness" long before the Israeli state was created. So why pretend otherwise now? Sax's politics represent a fear I've encountered before in anti-Zionist Jewish spaces: that acknowledging the literal role land played and plays in Jewish history somehow supports the Zionist project. But to ignore the many roles land has played in Jewish history *is* to let the Zionists win, because to do so tacitly suggests that the only conceivable way Jews can interact with the land is through settler colonialism.

In one of the collection's earlier poems, Sax writes "how is it we are always where we've been / even when unaware of it?" My reply: what if this is who we've always been, even if we don't want to admit it: a people displaced from many lands, victims of a Holocaust in

Europe, and yet capable of inflicting a genocide on Palestinians in their own land? Rather than deflating one's anti-Zionist politics, acknowledging the centrality of land in Jewish history makes one's politics stronger. First, it allows coalitions to develop through histories of displacement: my people have been displaced, and therefore I refuse to continue to allow my people to do the same to you. Second, it allows anti-Zionist Jews to actively *choose* the shape future Jewish relations to the land will take, to decide that the narrative of metaphor *must* supersede the literal if Jews are to live ethical lives. Finally, to recognize that a physical relationship to Palestine cannot be a priority for contemporary Jewry because Zionism has weaponized that history to barbaric ends—and not because land was always a metaphor—leaves open the possibility for literal, non-colonial Jewish relations with the land to one day exist.

The challenge of writing a book like *Pig* is one of cohesion: how does one make all the pig meanings amount to something *more* than their individual instance? Sax's solution of using the pig as a metaphor to probe larger questions of identity strikes gold in the collection's queer pig poems. By treating queer pig culture as worthy of serious attention, Sax successfully articulates contradictions of desire, examines what living with inherited trauma means, and does so with understanding, not judgment, for the queer men who find pleasure and even healing in the violence of pig sex. But whereas Sax treats queer pig sex with nuance and specificity, they opt for an idealized version of Jewish history that doesn't account for our political reality. Of course, the stakes are lower in pig sex than in Palestine, where apartheid, ethnic cleansing—and now genocide—are a fact of everyday life. But this is poetry, not a policy paper. And if a queer, Jewish poet can't fully inhabit the contradictions of contemporary Jewish life in poetry, where can they?

Protocol

Grayson Scott

“I’m not seeing any Bonghitters. Very disappointed.” I was in Central Park with **Andrew Fedorov**, reporter for *The Fine Print*, to see a game of softball between the Bonghitters, fielded by *The High Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. (It wasn’t just the stoners: A call to the league’s commissioner revealed the game had been rained out.) He’s been covering the games for years, and working at *TFP* since 2021, as party reporter, features writer, industry correspondent, and interviewer. His pieces run weekly, and sometimes more often: By any estimate he’s one of the most hard-working and versatile writers in New York.

It’s from his scene reporting that I first met him, and it is this that accounts for his own newsworthiness. Writers’ social skills are often desultory, and they are given to backbiting and cruelty. They mock. I’ve heard some unpleasant things said about him, albeit generally using the mononym, that most reliable index of influence: A typical party report includes dozens of names. Writers and editors are more reluctant to admit they have looked for their own names in his pieces than to confess Googling themselves, filing late, or various types of infidelity.

Fedorov on his method: “If I go to a thing, I will go up to the host and be like, ‘Hey, will you play proper nouns [with me]?’ And they will just point out all the people, and they’re like, ‘You should talk to this person. They have something fun going on.’ And then I go to people, and I’m like, ‘Hey, what’s your name? How do you spell it?’ It’s totally random.” He took a break from the social column, “Vital Moments,” over the summer, because he had started feeling “a little paranoid,” like he “was going everywhere having an evil eye.”

People sometimes wouldn’t talk to him at parties. A briefly-notorious *saloniste* claimed he “didn’t realize” Fedorov was “recording the whole time,” because he regretted what he’d said.

TFP operates from a sense of public interest, unlike *Gawker* (middling) or *Bookforum’s Paper Trail* (*Publishers Lunch-y*). Significant stories from Fedorov include **Erin Overby’s** difficulties after she shared diversity statistics at *The New Yorker*, her employer; a rocky period at *The Baffler*; and what **Julian Barnes** (*Times* reporter) thinks about having the same name as **Julian Barnes** (award-bespangled novelist). *TFP* is intended for people who work in media, and it does affect how accountable they feel for what they publish and how they treat

their workers, colleagues, and readers. A few days later, a friend asked what the name for Fedorov fans would be, and I proposed “the Fedoyeen.” I count myself among them.

I went about my own duties with Fedorov’s warnings and pointers in mind. But summer is lazy. Some columnists are lazy. Friend and editor at *The Baffler* **Matthew Shen-Goodman** took me to see my first professional fight, making up for the rained-out softball game. It was also my first time at **Madison Square Garden**. I discovered **Muhammad Ali’s** grandson, **Biaggio Ali Walsh**, has a tattoo on his chest that says “Arabic” in Arabic. **Flava Flav** was there. Midway through the card someone a couple rows back vomited so fantastically he cleared our entire section, which would have been a great time for the city to demolish the place.

I heard *Dissent* was throwing a party at their Wall Street office. After, a fellow attendee remarked, “That was the worst thing I’ve ever been to,” and he would know. They do have a terrace overlooking the East River, which made me feel like a passenger on an Air America flight: Lovely view, distressing atmosphere. **Christian Lorentzen’s** arrival, soon after his return from Albania, was applauded, and he obligingly doled out duty-free cigarettes and made a pass at a friend of mine. I overheard some unpleasant things about conditions at *Harper’s* from a fellow attendee, but this source was optimistic about the incoming editor, **Chris Carroll**. Here I’m inclined to apply *The Paris Review* rule: Replacing the current editor with someone who shares their first name guarantees improvement.

Speaking of, *TPR* throws the best parties in the city. I got a ride home with a couple editors from the *New Yorker*, but found myself unable to grill them thoroughly since what makes *TPR* parties great are free and recklessly strong drinks. They also have **Dan Piepenbring**, whose recent accession to the book column at *Harper’s* has already made it the finest going. **Danielle Carr** had a party later that week, possibly celebrating her return to Los Angeles, but also plausibly for the publication of her excellent piece on **Bessel Van der Kolk** in *New York*. An editor of a prominent little magazine autopsied the worst pieces in their forthcoming issue, because I asked, but I’ll spare them this time. *Semper vigilans*.

I increasingly suspect that *Triple Canopy* is the best magazine in New York, if only because it’s the one that, to borrow a friend’s phrase, feels the least like “an adult lemonade stand.” They hosted a panel to discuss the artist **Darren Bader’s** attempt to sell his artis-

tic practice. A short film from **Pacho Velez**, with title cards from **Becca Abbe**, the legal contract Bader had drawn up, and an essay are on the TC website. **Rachel Ossip** introduced the panel, including art historian **Rachel Hunter Himes**, Harvard professor **David Levine**, filmmaker **James N. Kienitz Wilkins**, TC founder **Alexander Provan**, and artist **Dena Yago**. One million dollars—the price set for Bader’s practice—doesn’t entitle the buyer to rights over his work to date (like a French horn filled with guacamole), but it would allow them to produce nearly anything they wanted as Bader. Levine remarked that he found the gambit unpersuasive until he considered it as a sincere business proposition: So long as it isn’t an artwork, “it’s a masterpiece.” Maybe opting out will be cool again.

In *About Ed* by **Robert Glück** (NYRB, November), one of his many lovers tells him something that would feel unearned in a book by any other writer: “[Y]ou possess a sophisticated creativity and gratitude for your life that is unusual.” Here, you’re delighted to agree. *About Ed* is the record of Glück’s life with another lover, **Ed Aulerich-Sugai**, and their friendship until his death from AIDS in 1994. It is an oneiric, lyrical book, suitable for a writer who describes himself as “a novelist working outside the genre.” Glück’s sense of humor is intact, albeit subdued: There are the rare, smaller jokes, familiar from his criticism and poetry, but the big laugh is how foolish we all are when we’re young, and how helpless throughout. The memoir is partly a dual *künstlerroman* (Aulerich-Sugai was becoming a painter, and Glück a writer), and much of the book is about how Glück’s vocation fails him in grief:

From the start, I was illiterate with an illiterate’s complex shuffling of appearances. Like an illiterate, I imitate conversance with ‘subject matter,’ fear of life, love of life. Inevitably I crash into the high wall of my ignorance, the overwhelming falsity of experience, as though I *misread* Ed’s sickness and death. What remains is terror on a two-dimensional stage.

Glück’s genius is in the fineness of his perception, and every sentence in *About Ed* is laden with disarming acuity. It ends with Ed’s dreams, dozens of them, each keen and whole: “Before that we rushed downstairs—a cyclone! Cylindrical, not apexed.”

A friend once suggested: If you’re unhappy, and particularly if you’re unhappy about your work, go to Coney Island and ride the **Cyclone**. There’s a story about the Cyclone in 1948’s *New York Times*: “For five-and-a-half years **Emilio Franco**, a 35-year-old machinist

and coal miner from Fairmont, W. Va., has been speechless. After one frightening ride on the Cyclone at Coney Island he can speak again. He said so himself yesterday.” His first words? “I feel sick.”

The day after the **Hamas** offensive began, **Palestinian Youth Movement** and the **Party for Socialism and Liberation** organized a demonstration in **Times Square**. Before we even reached the rally a counterprotestor asked my friend if she felt “like a feminist” for supporting Palestine. We were driven into a pen when the march arrived at the Israeli consulate, and I found myself beside a group of young men talking in Arabic and English. My friend, to her delight, noted that they were cursing the counterprotestors in robust Hebrew. The tone of the march was tentative—another attendee called it “generic”—but support for the resistance was firm. Our group retreated to **Margaritaville**, next to the Statue of Liberty with “NO PASSPORT REQUIRED” on her tablet, and talked about just war theory and what it’s been like to watch another Iraq.

This was before the extent of the retaliatory airstrikes and raids in Gaza were known, and before the threat of a ground invasion loomed as it does now. Over ten thousand Palestinians, nearly half of them children, were alive then who aren’t today. Gaza hadn’t been bombed into dust. We had just seen the videos of the bulldozers crashing through the fence at the border. We were talking about a “paradigm shift”—a new generation, thirty years after Oslo!—and how it explained the muteness of our left and the confusion and bitterness of our opponents, not yet knowing about the more than a million people who would be displaced and bombed as they fled.

The following Friday, the **PYM** and **Within Our Lifetime** unity march, also from Times Square to the consulate, was larger and more resolute. Attempts by the NYPD’s **Strategic Response Group** to box the demonstration out of the square in front of the consulate were frustrated, and we continued nearly to the **U.N.**, but grief or fear stopped us short of a sense of achievement.

On Wednesday, someone I had never met loaned me her car so I could drive down to **D.C.** for the **Jewish Voice for Peace** march. Things had changed: We had a demand. We wanted a ceasefire because Israel had turned the water and electricity off, food and medicine were running out, there was a blockade on the aid convoys and airstrikes at the Rafah crossing, and entire families were dying in their homes. I didn’t know if a ceasefire with

an apartheid state was possible: Wasn't it already war, with the embargo and the assassinations and the settlements? But **Biden** had sent two carrier groups to the Mediterranean, and wanted \$106 billion for Ukraine and Israel and for a wall on the southern border, and it had to stop. **Rashida Tlaib** and **Cori Bush** cried as they spoke to us. I saw a dozen people from my neighborhood, who'd also left at dawn and would get home past midnight. I missed the chants in Arabic, because I wondered if people in **Jenin** or **Gaza** or **Shatila** would understand what we were saying if they saw a video. The march terminated at a congressional building where, inside, three hundred people including two dozen rabbis were being arrested for demanding a ceasefire. **Marjorie Taylor Greene** mocked us from a balcony.

On Friday, **NYC-DSA**, **IfNotNow**, **Adalah Justice Project**, **Crown Heights Tenant Union**, **DRUM** and **JVP** organized a march from **Bryant Park** to **Senator Gillibrand's** office. The night before, I learned several members of a friend's family were killed in the bombing of the **St. Porphyrius Church** in Gaza, including a six-month-old baby. One hundred and thirty-nine people, including State Senator **Jabari Brisport**, were arrested demanding a ceasefire. This earned half a sentence in the *Times* two days later. My arresting officer googled "disorderly conduct" on his phone as he walked me to the bus.

The next day, at the action in **Bay Ridge** organized by **WOL**, **PYM**, **Al-Awda**, **Samidoun**, and others, I saw dozens of people from the night before already back in the streets. There were thousands more, blocks and blocks worth. **Balady** grocery store had arranged vegetables in the shape of a Palestinian flag, and it was wonderful. A friend gave me za'atar-flavored cheese puffs and remarked on the "genius of the Arab people." We marched for hours, and there were fireworks on rooftops and teens climbing streetlights and buses. When the police split the march, I didn't notice, because there were still hundreds of people around me. I was feet away when the police rushed the first ranks of the protest and arrested twenty-two people, mostly Black and Palestinian, some of them children. I watched from the sidewalk as a cop punched someone in the face.

Books Received

Rennie Ament, *Mechanical Bull* (CSU Poetry Center)
 Cheryl Boyce-Taylor, *The Limitless Heart: New and Selected Poems (1997-2022)* (Haymarket)
 Xavier Cavazos, *The Devil's Workshop* (CSU Poetry Center)
 Ozamu Dazai, *Self-portraits, trans. Ralph McCarthy* (New Directions)
 Melissa Dickey, *Ordinary Entanglement* (CSU Poetry Center)
 Olivia Elias, *Your Name, Palestine, trans. Sarah Riggs and Jérémy Victor Robert* (World Poetry)
 Rudy Francisco, *Excuse Me as I Kiss the Sky* (Button Poetry)
 Dominique Fourcade, *Son Blanc du Un / Blank Sound One Line, trans. Peter Consenstein* (Éditions VVV Editions)
 Safaa (Argyros) Fathy, *Al Haschich, m trans. Patrick Love and Safaa Fathy* (Pamenar)
 Graham Foust, *Terminations* (Flood Editions)
 Peter Gizzi, *Fierce Elegy* (Wesleyan)
 Oneyda González, *The Infinite Loop, trans. Eduardo Aparicio* (Akashic)
 Maria Dylan Himmelman, *Sundry Abductions* (Hanging Loose Press)
 Brionne Janae, *Because You Were Mine* (Haymarket)
 Virginie Lalucq, *Cutting the Stems, trans. Claire McQuerry and Céline Bourhis* (saturnalia)
 Katy Lederer, *The Engineers* (saturnalia)
 Ben Lerner, *The Lights* (FSG)
 Erica Lewis, *mahogany* (Wesleyan)
 Richard Loranger, *Mammal* (Roof)
 Holly Melgard, *Read Me: Selected Works* (UDP)
 Uche Nduka, *Bainbridge Island Notebook* (Roof)
 José Olivarez & Antonio Salazar, *Por Siempre* (Haymarket)
 Olatunde Osinaike, *Tenderhead* (Akashic)
 Alexa Patrick, *Remedies for Disappearing* (Haymarket)
 Mirta Rosenberg, *Interior Landscape, trans. Yaki Setton and Sergio Waisman* (UDP)
 Sofia Samatar and Kate Zambreno, *Tone* (Columbia)
 Nay Soursourinho, *The Capture of Krao Farini* (UDP)
 Carlos Soto Roman, *11* (UDP)
 Rebecca Suzuki, *When My Mother is Most Beautiful* (Hanging Loose)
 Allison Titus, *High Lonesome* (saturnalia)

Magazines Received

Boulevard
Ganga Review
New England Review
Poetry
Rattle
West Branch

donors

Utopian (\$5,000 or more)

Anon. (3), Annette Bening, Deepali Gupta, Karma Gallery, Low Road Foundation, Ricardo Alberto Maldonado, The Estate of Jim Carroll, The Pat Steir Foundation

Outrider (\$1,000-\$4,999)

Rosemary Carroll, Karen Koch, Poets for the Planet Fund, Arden S. Wohl

Radical (\$500-\$999)

Anon. (1), Eloisa Amezcua, John Cappetta, Doug Cattie, Stephen Facey, Jonathan Fortescue, Kyoo Lee, Greg Masters, Jonathan Morrill, Fred Moten, Eileen Myles, Network for Good, Rosmarie Waldrop

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Supporting

William Aarnes, Kemi Alabi, Genji Amino, Stine An, Stephanie Anderson, Penny Arcade, Terrence Arjoon, Brent Armendinger, Mirene Arsanios, Mary Jo Bang, Hollis I Barickman, J. Mae Barizo, Dara Barrois/Dixon, Alan Bernheimer, Charles Bernstein, Elizabeth Birkelund, Andrea

Experimental (\$100-\$499)

Anon. (2), Kostas Anagnopoulos, Neil Baldwin, Susan Carolyn Berger-Jones, Agnes Borinsky, Laynie Browne, CA Conrad, Will Creeley, Nicole Dacuyan-Faucher, Margaret DeCoursey, Marcella Durand, Brianne Garcia, Susan Gevirtz, Stephanie M Gray, Alan Greenhalgh, Rebecca Henriksen, Sharon Johnson, David Kermani, Nathan Kernan, Zoe Leonard, Rachel Levitsky, Kimberly Lyons, Yamile Marti, Shana Moulton, Chris Nealon, Rena Rosenwasser & Penny Cooper, Rochelle Owens in memory of George Economou, Kimberly Rosenfield, Andre Spears, Elizabeth Starkey, Richard Tuttle, Smitty Weygant, Therese Young Kim

Wild (\$0-\$99)

Anon. (7), George Abagnalo, Joseph Alvarado, Lee-Ann Azzopardi, Jen Blair, Gregory Botts, Marietta Brill, Heidi Broadhead, Margaret Browne, Catherine Cafferty, Gabrielle Civil, Jeremy Cohan, Kate Colby, Tom Cole, Dennis Cooper,

Blancas Beltran, Ana Božičević, Samuel Breslin, Marie Buck, Jacob Burckhardt, Jack Cairl, Anna Carey, Margaret Carson, Sydney Choi, Lonely Christopher, Ama Codjoe, CA Conrad, Lydia Cortés, Alexandra Cuff, Mike DeCapite, Elizabeth Devlin, Terence Diggory, Richard Dobbs, Ted Dodson, Leonora Donovan, Dolores Dorantes, Omar Drissi, Jay Délise, Ruth Eisenberg, Samuel Espíndola Hernández, Betsy Fagin, Katherine Franco, Cliff Fyman, Brianne Garcia, Joshua Garcia, Peter Gizzi, Judith Goldman, Gia Gonzales, Deepali Gupta, Peter Gurnis, Nile Harris, Shannon Hassett, Lara Hidalgo, Sheryl Holland, Chris Hosea, Valerie Hsiung, Lucy Ives, Omotara James, Rachel S James, Steffani Jemison, John Keene, Sahar Khraibani, Susan Landers, Denizé Lauture, Stephon Lawrence, Shayla Lawz, Zoe Leonard, Bill Livingston, Anthony Thomas Lombardi, JenMarie Macdonald, Mark Manivong, Chris Martin, Greg Masters, Joan McClusky, Deborah A A. Meadows, Iman Mersal, Marina Metalios, Nate Mickelson, Roberto Gabriel Montes, Yesenia Montilla, Tyler Morse, John Most, Fred Moten, Robin Myers, Chris Nealon, Kenneth Nemcosky, Tammy Nguyen, Daniel Owen, Allyson Paty, Raymond Pinto, Liam Powell, Brontez Purnell, Christopher Rey Pérez, Joan Retallack, Eléna Rivera, Martha Ronk, Phyllis Rosenzweig, Raquel Salas Rivera, Sarah Schulman, Max Seawright, Diamond Sharp, Ginevra Shay, Nathaniel Siegel, Eleni Sikelianos, Irene Silt, John Skoyles, Ada Smailbegović, Forest Smotrich-Barr, David Solo, Marc Solomon, Syd Staiti, Jared Stanley, Ann Stephenson, Sara Jane Stoner, Nick Sturm, Celina Su, Billie Swift, Stacy Szymaszek, Leyya Mona Mona Tawil, Courtney Faye Taylor, Rebecca Teich, Susie Timmons, Nora Treatbaby, Teline Thuy Tr`ãn, George Tysh, Ann Koshel Van Buren, Georgia Wall, Katie Willingham, Rachael Wilson, Christopher Wood, Jeffrey Cyphers Wright, Sixing Xu, Matvei Yankelevich, Dana Ysabel Dela Cruz, Testerino Zull, hannah baer, mayfield brooks, danilo machado, justine nguyẽn-nguyẽn, imogen xtian smith

Lydia Cortés, Kennedy Coyne, Rob Crawford, Maria Damon, Monica de la Torre, Sonya Derman, Charles Donnaud, Kayla Ephros, Marion Farrier, Lauren Festa, Jen Ellen Fisher, Lawrence Flood, Gloria Frym, Cassandra Gillig, Judith Goldman, Phillip L Griffith, C.E. Harrison, Carla Harryman, Joseph Hayden, Tony Hoffman, Samantha Hunt, Emily Jacobi, Jonas Jonasson, Jennifer Karmin, Miriam Karraker, Anna Kay, Alan Kleiman, Denizé Lauture, Jaeun Lee, So young Lee, Beth Loffreda, Andrew Lotterman, Edgar Javier Ulloa Luján, Daniel Marks, Martha & Basil King, Anna McDonald, Joseph McGrath, Ken Mikolowski, Dave Morse, Laura Mullen, Urania Mylonas, Elissa Oberman, Maggie Oczkowski, Elaine Peluso-Farris, Ted Rees, Tracy Reid, Diana Rickard, Alex Ronan, Gabrielle Octavia Rucker, John Rufo, Lori Scacco, Justin Sherwood, Lisa Pearson Siglio Press, Emily Skillings, Kelly Spivey, Aldrin Valdez, Divya Victor, Marina Weiss, Bernard Welt, Tyrone Williams, Terence P. Winch, Uljana Wolf, Katharine B. Wolpe

Student/Senior/Individual

Rider Alsop, Thayer Anderson, Ioannis Andronikidis, Onur Ayaz, Steve Benson, Andrew Bolotowsky, Madeline Boyer, Emily Brandt, Tess Brown-lavoie, Turner Canty, Marina Caron, Dariel Cobb, Barnett Cohen, Coco Collins, Eileen Costello, Macauley Davis, Melissa De La Cruz, Nicholas Dehler, Lila Dlaboha, Patrick Dunagan, Nicolas Duran, Chantz Erolin, Chiara Alissa Estivariz Lopez, Lilith Fairman, Carolyn Ferrucci, Lawrence Flood, Seth Fragomen, Gloria Frym, Joanna Fuhrman, Nora Fulton, James Gao, Cassandra Gillig, Maura Gingerich, Ariel M Goldberg, Emma Goldman-Sherman, Jessica Grim, Bob Koshin Hanson, Roberto A Harrison, Ian Hatcher, HL Hazuka, Barbara J Henning, Larkin Higgins, Tony Hoffman, Alison Jennings, Jack Jung, Chris Kraus, Carlene Kucharczyk, Steven Lewis, Kenny Likis, Lillian Lippold, Lucas Lou, Melissa Mack, Ana Martinez Jimenez, Gabriella Mayer, Monica McClure, Bianca Messinger, Ken Mikolowski, David James Miller, Liz Minette, Linda Moakes, Anna Moschovakis, Charlie Nightengale, Annie Ochmanek, Jon S Olson, Rochelle Owens, Kurt Ozment, Sarah Passino, Noel Peng, Eilin Perez, Graham Pergande, Douglas Piccinnini, JD Pluecker, Lee Price, Kameelah Janan Rasheed, Darian Razdar, Jennifer Rhoads, Timo Rissanen, Claire Ronan, Kaley Roshitsh, Rebecca Sambol, Dean Schabner, Amelia Schonbek, Melody Serra, Susannah Simpson, Amy Beth Sisson, Tash Nikol Smith, Isabel Sobral Campos, Andre Spears, A.L. Steiner, Karen Swann, Rachelle Toarmino, Monica Torres, Claudia Ullman, Evangelos Vaiannis, Ashlyn Velasquez, Asiya Wadud, Moira Walsh, Jacqueline Waters, Susan West, Sam White, Dan Wilcox, Tyrone Williams, Tiffany Wu, sam harvey, Amy Bobeda, Myra Mniewski, Ken J. Stec

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The Translation Issue

POETRY *Anagramme / conjure words* by Unica Zürn (trans. Sade LaNay), *Three Poems* by Wu Ang (trans. Cecily Chen), *Excerpts from Fahrwasser: eine innere Biographie in Ansätzen* by Jayne-Ann Igel (trans. Mathilda Cullen), *Three Proems* by Kim Hyesoon (trans. Jack Jung), *Five Poems* by Miguel James (trans. E.R. Pulgar), ...o... [first three sections of ten] by Igor Gulin (trans. Ainsley Morse and Timmy Straw), *2023 Brannan Prize Poems* by Hunter Larson // ESSAY *Double Translation* by Cecilia Biagini // INTERVIEW *Matvei Yankelevich w/ Kay Gabriel* // CONVERSATION *The Unfolding of the Mind into Music: Alexis Almeida and Sawako Nakayasu* // REVIEWS Mirene Arsanios on *Chaos, Crossing* by Olivia Elias, trans. Kareem James Abu Zeid, Sam White on *In the Same Light: 200 Poems for Our Century* Translated by Wong May, Ted Rees on *A Place Beyond Shame* by Ed Steck, Rainer Diana Hamilton on *I Love Information* by Courtney Bush, Dana Venerable on *Making Water* by Laura Jaramillo, Morgan Vö on *Prescribee* by Chia-Lun Chang, Evan Kennedy on *Serviceable Clothes for Life in the Open* by Laura Woltag, Terrence Arjoon on *Stridentist Poems* by Manuel Maples Arce, trans. KM Cascia, Joshua Gutterman Tranen on *Pig* by Sam Sax // Protocol by Grayson Scott

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