

POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER #275



WINTER 2024

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Editor's Note

Kay Gabriel

As this issue was going to print, we learned of the passing of Cecilia Gentili, a beloved member of the Poetry Project community and a close personal friend.

Cecilia was and remains a singular force: a writer, actor, drag performer, storyteller, community leader and an organizer in the most meaningful sense, someone who makes it possible for people to see themselves reflected in each other's work and lives. For the past decade, she was also a mother to me, as she was to many other young trans people. She sustained us with her love, and with her abrasive, vulgar sense of humor. When she called you a whore, she meant that she loved you.

Cecilia fought her whole life for trans people, sex workers, immigrants, and she fought for a free Palestine as well. I remember seeing the video of her getting arrested at the Jewish Voice for Peace action in Grand Central, jumping up and down while an officer tried to place her in cuffs.

I've taken solace in seeing Cecilia's presence in the world that she made possible. I see her in the women I'm blessed to call sisters, and in people I don't even know. I see her in the social infrastructure, both formal and informal, that she built for the *thousands* of people whose lives she touched and transformed.

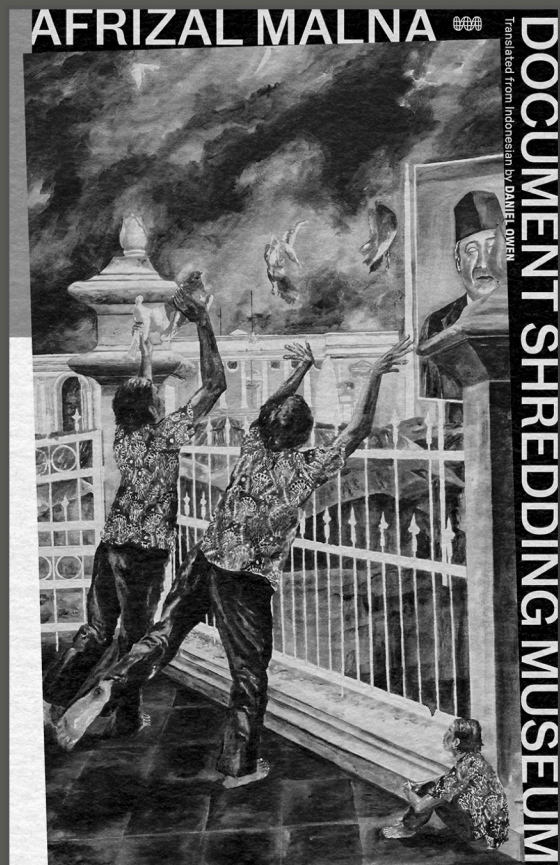
This issue of the *Newsletter* aligns profoundly with how Cecilia taught us to live and what she helped us see. In her interview with Juliana Huxtable, Zora Jade Khiry asks what trans motherhood means for Huxtable; Huxtable replies that "it really brings [her] joy" to be thought of as a mother "to all the girls out here that are so smart and sharp and beautiful and multifaceted." In her review of Mohammed el-Kurd's poetry collection *Rifqa*, Nameera Bajwa traces the liberation tradition according to which "Palestine is saving us"—in which the movement against Zionism, occupation, and apartheid between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea is also catalyzing the development of anti-racist and anti-capitalist organizations elsewhere. In his essay on Owen Toews's experimental novel *Island Falls*, Patrick DeDauw suggests that "for those of us who rage at injustice, professionally or not, it seems like a weirdly practical question to ask how, exactly, we find ourselves in any place 'where partition, atrocity, and quarterly returns [sit] so snugly side-by-side.'"

How to combine our raucous joy in each other with our understanding of why the world is the way it is and how to make it otherwise is another highly practical question.

We love you, Cecilia, and we're asking it in the spirit of that love.

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AFRIZAL MALNA

DOCUMENT SHREDDING MUSEUM

Translated from Indonesian by
DANIEL OWEN

“Voices echo and shred in intermittent inventions, the torn presences of the pressure of realities, implosive, exuberant, blank. Malna and his translator offer verbal charms and social shards, bringing Indonesian into a transforming dialog with the anti-conventional poetics of North America.”

— **CHARLES BERNSTEIN**

“Afrizal Malna—one of Indonesia’s best contemporary poets—challenges the subtle potential for authoritarianism that haunts all language acts. Daniel Owen’s excellent translation maintains the poetic sensitivity of the original.”

— **SYLVIA TIWON**



SEO JUNG HAK

THE CHEAPEST FRANCE IN TOWN

Translated from Korean by
MEGAN SUNGYOON

“Seo Jung Hak’s poetry feigns to visualize the present through an extremely low pulse rate. Then the farthest outside intervenes—the illustrated world becomes distorted; the multiplicity of poetic composition intervenes. That’s when the pulse of his poetry explodes. The gravity shatters. For what? For hot love and infinite freedom. Thus his poetry deviates from the gravity at every moment to remain a documentation of one who has left.”

— **KIM HYESOON**

Seo Jung Hak and Megan Sungyoon will read at The Chicago Poetry Center on March 20, and at The Korea Society in NYC on March 25.

ESSAY

Joycups: Notes on Piss

charles theonia

Dodge had mommy issues, yellow hankies, a “mug of gold,” a “joy cup.” He was a piss queen, and it was good to be a part of something. Cookie Mueller’s “The One Percent” tells the story of this thirsty guy against the world. It first made its way to me via earbud on New Year’s Day, 2021, as I floated home through Flatbush and the Poetry Project’s virtual marathon. I had long lost track of who was reading what. It wasn’t snowing or raining. It sounded too good to be new.

There were a whole NYC’s worth of piss bars to avail himself of, but Dodge entered them all at a remove—he read those he saw as tourists, or the indiscriminate “sleazos,” and his late, heavy-drinking mother as a series of cautionary tales about what he would risk by really enjoying himself. After storming out of a visit to a psychiatrist, who’d told him he probably liked piss because his mother wet his head during childbirth, he decided to stop blaming her for his proclivities. He got to just like what he liked to do, but just as he loosened his grip on shame, he tested positive for AIDS and came to believe that his love for piss had betrayed him. The worst of it was that he’d become afraid of piss, and with it, his own reason for being. “He was ready to die as soon as possible,” Mueller writes. “No one blamed him.”

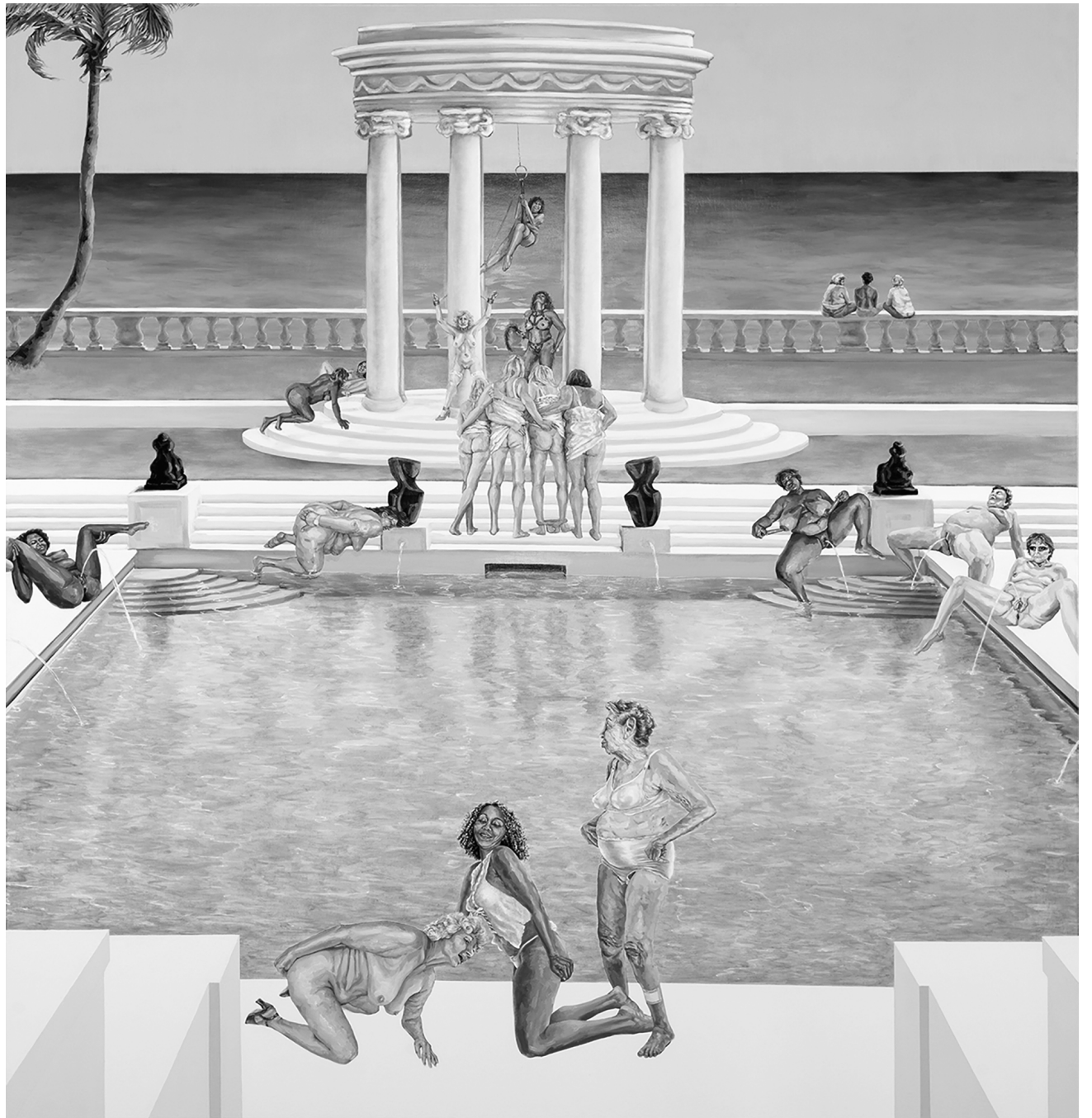
Undertaking a course of spiritual study to prepare himself for the rigors of death, Dodge learned of a time-honored, natural remedy for all ailments: drinking one’s own urine. He believed he’d found a cure for AIDS, “a homeopathic remedy... a new adventure!” Best of all, piss is a homebrew panacea. You’re already doing it.

Leaving the back room for the hospital and sex for a remedy, Dodge reunited with the piss bar habitués: “Life Fluids” was where you went where you wanted to believe you weren’t sick anymore. By telling himself he could only partake of his own cup, he transmuted his troubled piss-drinking into wellness, affording himself a sip of peace when peace was hard to come by. Society had abandoned Dodge and the other Life Fluids, leaving them to erect structures of wishful thinking and sanitized coping mechanisms. Pointing an arrow at the Marianne Williamson’s of the world—who told people with AIDS that illness is “our judgment on ourselves” and that “sickness is an illusion” brought on by an acute self-love deficiency—Mueller’s tragicomedy takes us to the limits of compulsory optimism. The Life Fluids, classic survivalists, never look further than themselves as they incantate their own endogenous miracles. We’ll all be fine, they assure one another, if we just believe we already have everything we need to live—if we just piss in our own eye.



If there’s one thing about piss, it’s that there’s so much of it. It’s just everywhere.

That being so, the tone we take with piss directs its interpretive splatter pattern. There are shameful pisses, irreverent pisses, inconvenient, resistant, defiling, banal, intimate, passionate pisses. Mischievous Calvin pees on cars across the political spectrum—a piss stream can say “fuck you” to anything under its



Samantha Nye, *Piss Pool*, oil on canvas, 66" x 63 1/4", 2021. Image courtesy of the artist.

purview. Duchamp’s urinal makes piss about context (Has anyone tried to use it?). Notably, some of us are allowed to pee more freely than others. My favorite headline about anti-trans bathroom bills paraphrases Dolly Parton to say “Be Who You Are, Pee Where You Need.”

Piss is a collaboration with our environment. In the series *Attractive People Doing Attractive Things*, Samantha Nye paints ladies’ pool parties, debauched gatherings of mostly-nude attendees. They would all qualify for the Timeless Torches, the New York Liberty’s 40+ dance troupe, by a wide margin. Nye—who is, to my eye, our painter of elderly queer glamor—attends with desirous reverence to the belly folds and creased skin of her subjects, but she doesn’t rule out humor. In “Piss Pool,” the partygoers are sexy and lovably ridiculous, mooning the viewer in a chorus line, panties around ankles. The dykes pissing up and into the piss pool are fountains, kitsch decor and participants in their own setting. At its edges, they fuck and see themselves. The pool is a site of unselfconscious looking at what they’re making together: bondage, suspension, sex alfresco, the sea hor-

izon, and their own elegant arcs of piss becoming pool water.



In another reading, piss is an origin story we reenact throughout the day. Directing our unconscious excretions through interpretive sewage systems, we filter memory into narrative. “We are all very fluent about ourselves,” as Rainer Maria Rilke’s *The Gossamer Lion* cites Bernadette Mayer, and the questions posed of us can overdetermine the easy outlets of the sayable. When asked to read our present manifestations through the moment we first learned to hold in our piss or hold down a job, waving off a prescriptive question can air out our field of attention. Bickering with a therapist over the source of a “fear of pleasure,” Hamilton prods at convention telling us to seek out the unconscious in the age of potty training—there’s a much more recent chronic UTI right there. We may learn to manage our piss, but at any moment, it can reclaim the upper hand. “Does anyone believe that what happens / to adults also happens to them / again,” the analyst asks, then adds, “I for-

got to mention / I was also unemployed as a child." I take the poem's rejoinders to be staircase witticisms, though I know the poet to be quicker with a retort than I: In poems, as with piss and pleasure, we always get another chance.

When dreams, like piss, come in the night, we can wake up sitting in them. Syd Staiti's new book, *Seldom Approaches*, describes a dream or fantasy of being a small child who resented the conventions of his upper-class family and had no way out of failing to meet their mannered expectations. While his parents focus on his dirty face and fingers at a dinner party, he can sense a deeper issue at play: "there was a snake under the table but only I could see it." After "pulling on myself" at the table, he stands up to pour wine for the table and has a vision:

one day I will say no to father, one day I will walk into the kitchen, join the others, and burn down the estate. I picture this in my head as I fill the wine glasses, then I walk out of the dining room into the parlor and I walk to the corner of the parlor and I begin to pee, I pee in the corner of the parlor, that's what I do, I stand there peeing all over the expensive Persian fucking rug, then I go back to the dining room and take my seat at the table and pee under the table as I eat, as they drink up their wine, peeing with a smile.

Staiti's piss is the substance of dreams, streaming out into an alternative version of the self, a you who can say no to the family and leave to figure out whom you can really live with.

As a dream pisses its own exit route into being, the story turns to an encounter with the self in one's past writing. Opening a moving box to find a pre-transition poem prompts a struggle to imagine a freer life for its characters, who encounter each other in a home invasion centered on the bathroom. Staiti writes, "I think we need to blow up the poem and hope they escape the ruins. No more time in the tub and on the toilet." *Seldom Approaches* narrates the question of moving out of the nuclear family, an ill-fitting pronoun, your own early work. The answer might be to piss on the floor and detonate the building on your way out.

Like a dream, piss is momentary, but there'll be more where that came from. Once I got ears on it, I heard it dribbling in all directions. Reading Tan Lin on disco, I came to Andy Warhol's oxidation paintings, which he produced by inviting men over to urinate on his canvases. Their corroding metallic pigments forestall piss' impermanence and record the sexual traces of its provenance. During a commotion at the Eagle's Nest, Warhol became "fascinated" by a man who pissed into a beer bottle, and other guys took notice too: "They were all fighting over it." The desire to take home another man's piss was explicitly sexual (perhaps especially if you know you're not going to take *him* home); at the same time, his

friend and model Bob Colacello says, "It was so abstract." Piss is sex once removed.

Joe Brainard noted that "Andy Warhol makes Andy Warhols, and I like that." If the Piss Paintings are too abstract to be Andy Warhols proper, in the sense that most wouldn't recognize in them his stylized hand, they take up another strain of his approach to art and commodity. Lin writes that Warhol's "less popular works embrace highly time-sensitive 'mediums' with short transmission cycles or life spans—for example, piss, semen, head shots, broadcast TV, or BMW hoods" and "his treatment of disco, perfume, and piss as mediums... allowed him to flaunt his undisguised dislike of high avant-garde art production by filing painting under the more relaxed, evanescent categories of décor, armoires, and butch smells." Interacting with the right hormones, Warhol said, even Chanel No. 5 could smell butch. As such, transient piss is art eternal, and art is worth as much as piss.

Holding your piss can also be a show of your own self-made martyrdom. To fabricate "Pissed," a protest against the Trump-era round of anti-trans bathroom litigation, performance artist and sculptor Cassils filled a sizable glass cube with their old pee. They enacted public additions to its stores, enlisting a bioengineer to facilitate long-term preservation. Possibly because of the chemical process she devised, "Pissed" is unsettlingly saturated in hue. If Cassils were a player on the football team that went viral for their coach's color-coded barometer of moral hydration level, the cube's contents would put them firmly in the range of "You're a bad guy!" I think they'd think that metric makes their point—it's tough to be a good, hydrated teammate to humanity when you have troubled access to the bathroom. "I shouldn't have to make this," they said of the piece, dodging the question of why we make one piece of art and not another. "Pissed" was a ritualized expression, scheduled in advance, of the kind of self-exposure many of us have been told we need to make in order to be understood. Cassil's piss collection is an indignity they shouldered to transform nature's call into a call to action for a trans right to public space. Right on, but my primary experience of the piece is how monovalent—conceptually and aesthetically unpleasurable, heavy-handed, sterile yet rotten—it makes piss out to be. Looking at the en-cubed urine, I felt my own backing up into kidneys, probably already enacting the mysterious process of crystalizing into a stone. Still, in an interview, Cassils reveals there was at least one appealing social element of the project: lacking adequate storage space before its first exhibition, they left jugs of their pee in friends' houses around Los Angeles.

In Samuel R. Delany's *Heavenly Breakfast* (the name of his band, commune, and memoir), the

bathroom opened onto the kitchen. There being no door, it was always open. The whole household had taken a recent group trip to the doctor to get treated for the clap, but one of them still couldn't take a piss:

Dave stopped playing his acoustic, uncrossed his legs, and got down from the table. "Hey, man, would it be easier if we all were out of the room?" Little Dave stopped sketching and looked up. Reema put the cover back on the soup pot and glanced over, licking the spoon.

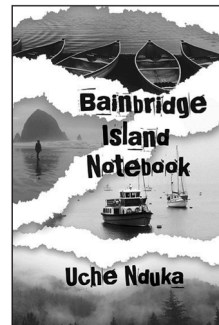
"I mean," Dave said, "sometimes you just can't get the plumbing to work if a lot of people are sitting around staring at it."

"No..." Snipper said. His throat sounded like it was full of sand. "No. Would somebody come and hold my hand, please..." Dominiq and I went over and held him.

Sometimes you need a helping hand, or better yet, several. When he still couldn't go, Heavenly Breakfast took Skipper back to the clinic and learned he had a concomitant fungal infection. The doctor told them it could have been fatal if untreated; since many are too embarrassed to get it checked out or even tell the people they live with, they leave it too late. Living with no bathroom door and a bunch of friends he was fucking could very well have saved Skipper's life.

If my home life has a commune phase, it hasn't arrived yet, but two of my dearest friends are living in a fixer-upper. They fix it up a little more each year, and in anticipation of replacing the bathroom door, they've removed it. Their bathroom opens up onto the kitchen too, and they say they can tell which friends love them best by observing who pisses en plein air, and who excuses themselves to go upstairs.

ROOF BOOKS RECENT TITLES



BAINBRIDGE ISLAND NOTEBOOK

by Uche Nduka

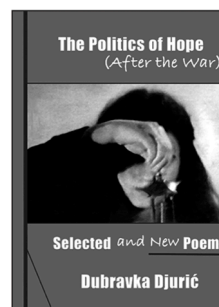
Sheltering on Washington State's scenic and teeming Bainbridge Island during a global pandemic, the poet as anarchic political surrealist considers problems of isolation, communication, and connection in the most personal terms. Using his unique brand of explosive abstraction, Nduka carves out a space to explore the meaning of dwelling, family, health, love, and diaspora.



MAMMAL

by Richard Loranger

Mammal is the latest collection of poetry and flash prose from legendary Bay Area rebel Richard Loranger. Grounded in a poetics of reexamination and the consistent questioning of the nature of most everything. A distinctive and gleeful language-play with stylistics that push the boundaries of connotation and embrace a plurality of meaning.



THE POLITICS OF HOPE (AFTER THE WAR)

by Dubravka Djurić

translated by Biljana D. Obradović

The Politics of Hope selects from a lifetime of writing by one of Eastern Europe's most engaging living poets and feminist theorists. Djurić writes through the changes in governance in Yugoslavia to the horrors of civil war to the new Serbia that is emerging as one of the most independent states in Europe.

More information on titles at Roofbooks.com
For orders, please go to spdbooks.org

All My Life I Had to Tear So Crazy: Zora Jade Khiry and Juliana Huxtable

*I still remember the first time I heard the now legendary “Dekmantel Podcast 288,” more intimately known as “GERMAN VISA PIPELINE,” on Soundcloud... Chills... The mix introduced me to a kind of musical catharsis I had never experienced before, one that induces a healthy amount of fear (somewhere around the 25 minute mark, to be exact). More fabulously, it introduced me to the non-*pareil*, *la muñeca*, Juliana Huxtable, and from there, her boundless and beloved book of poetry, MUCUS IN MY PINEAL GLAND. Juliana and I officially connected just a few months ago when I wrote about a portal-opening, gravity-shattering set she played this past summer. But we had sweetly apprehended each other a number of times before that, an enigmatic DJ behind the booth connecting with an enigmatic raver in front of it. Now, in anticipation of Shock Value’s 10th anniversary (Tongue In The Mind gave rockstar 101, maniacal merriment, faggots and dolls bouncing off the walls at Market Hotel) and her Merge NYE set b2b JASSS (it gave techno fabulation, power lesbian, symphonic frisson), I am honored to tickle the inner profundity of an artist I deeply respect, and I am excited to ki with my sis.*

We sit in her apartment, colorfully and comfortably lit by a collection of beautiful, floral lamps, sip kratom over ice, and talk for almost two hours about techno, Palestine, and trade. Juliana is as kinetic in conversation as she is in poetry, music, performance, and image-making. She is an engine of intensity, discipline, caprice, and taste. She is beyond the affectations of genre and concept. To put it simply, sis just fucking tears!

— Zora Jade Khiry

ZORA JADE KHIRY: I’m obsessed with the word “tear” and all of its tenses and forms. I feel like I’ve only used that word at its most basic linguistic form until I started transitioning and going out. Now it has a totally different connotation. So, I wanted to ask you how your style of DJing relates to a tearing of sonic, spatial, or physical fabric?

JULIANA HUXTABLE: Oooo, love! I mean, as a meta note, I just love the way that language evolves in nano-culture. The evolution of language and nano-culture in New York is so fun and fascinating. It’s a place where you can really participate in the generation of new language from the ground up. I’ve seen things within my own friend group. We start using a term, and even if the term doesn’t originate in that group, the specific usage of that term, a kind of colloquial usage or meaning, can go all the way up [*she raises her hand into the air and makes a circular motion as she says this*] and then you see it move through. And, first it’s always the girls and gays. Then it’s, like, the stylist is working with Travis Scott and then Travis Scott drops it in some song and then he was smoking weed with Drake who heard about a party that’s kind of late in New York but to him, it’s the greatest thing he’s ever heard. You can really watch it move. And I’ve even had friends, like my friend Jade, who I grew up with in Texas, we went to high school together. She’ll be like, “Wow, Juliana. I really be finding out shit before it happens by talking to you.” So, there’s a joy with language that I delight in.

But, tearing specifically, I’ve definitely taken to. I find certain terms I am attracted to more and I love “tear” because it’s related to shredding. I think “tear” is femme of “shred,” you know? When I think of shredding, I think of shredding a guitar. I think of going so ham that a string breaks, that you tear a

muscle or a ligament or some sort of connective tissue. And so it has built within it violence, but violence as a kind of celebratory excess. The violence that’s attached to ecstasy and joy and breaking through.

I remember when I first got into understanding different theories of the sublime. I’ve never encountered a concept since then that evolved beauty in such a distinct way where it’s both the beautiful and the terrifying, in one—a waterfall is sublime but a bow is pretty. In order to make a bow sublime, you would have to distort certain characteristics. I don’t think it’s a paradox but there’s something about the tension between beauty and terror in “tearing”... almost about ecstatic states and the violence that is accorded with it, a kind of mania... Even the way people say it, “You TOREEE, you’re TEAAAARING!” It’s like a serrated edge moving through something. When I DJ, I like really intense music. You have states of calm and rest like we’ve just come out of chaotic woods or a tsunami, but in general, I really want to move through ecstatic states, states of intensity, even if that intensity isn’t positive and so I love tearing for that.

ZJK: Do you feel like your sets have a narrative structure to them?

JH: Sometimes they end up having narrative structures that I don’t understand until after, especially as someone who uses techno as a larger genre-window through which to express ideas that can’t be reduced to just techno. It allows me to just follow a sensibility. Techno was the first genre that I chose to try and understand. How are other people engaging with genre? What expectations are they bringing to it? When someone says “techno,” what do they mean? When someone deploys that genre or attaches it to a song or a set or a sensibility, what does that mean? I got into watching all these techno documentaries and reading about the history of techno and early German techno DJs that feel some type of way about the historicizing of Detroit techno. I can’t remember the name of this guy, but he was one of the early East Berlin, German techno DJs, and he literally said, “We are white boys with no soul,” as this sort of celebratory thing. So there are aspects of the “purity of techno” that stresses me out. But ultimately I do think techno has a mechanistic sensibility—as someone who is so about the sample, when I’m operating in the capacity of a techno DJ, I use way less vocal samples. I do love DJing as an opportunity to mix in culturally familiar references, and that is more narrative. But for techno, I specifically enjoy moving into abstraction. If there’s a breadth of how I approach DJing, techno is where I can move outside of language... When I’m releasing a mix online, I like to tell a story. Like, some of my favorite mixes I’ve released are stories. I make mixes when I love someone or even for a breakup. I have one mix that is called “The Awakening,” which is all about this really intense, horrible breakup that I went through and I had to rediscover myself afterwards. I love the final scene in the book, *The Awakening*, when she drowns herself, I was like, *iconic*. She’d rather drown herself than submit to the really despotic expectations placed on her. She drowns herself by choice. She just walks into the ocean. She has a young lover. She hates her husband. She’s completely alienated from her domestic and social life, and she gets just a taste of excess, a taste of what she wanted, and she’s like, you know what? Boom. I’m just gonna kill myself. And that scene, I was like, *period*. That’s kind of how I felt at the end of that relationship. So that mix is moving through these different stages to

ultimately come out—I didn’t have to kill myself, but killing a part of myself that was tied to expectations regarding love or heterodystopic coupling patterns that I was like weirdly being asked to perform.

ZJK: Do you feel like DJing can be compared to a language or like the stylization of language?

JH: That’s a really interesting question... To a certain degree, yes. I think certain types of DJing lend itself more to a language-based structure. If you’re DJing music that is lyrical in nature I think that is obviously way more true also because music influences how people use language in such clear ways. I think sampling can definitely function as a language. I saw Nene H play the closing set at Berghain earlier in this summer—I was there with Christina, my sis—and she [Nene H] was weaving in one reference from a dance hall song that was brought into the UK and then got into garage, and then a UK funk/house DJ picked it up and put it in a song... Like there are these little vocal samples that do travel like language travels. There were parts of her set where she’s literally playing the history of this sample in how she’s mixing these different songs. And so in those moments, I’ve been able to see or understand the structure of language in music. But in other ways, I think it is fundamentally different, as someone that values language so much. Language is such a heavy part of almost everything I do. There is an aspect of music that can move into the ineffable, beyond the grasp, into the ethereal. I really love when sound can do things that just cannot be done in language.

ZJK: How do you feel about the term “doll techno”?

JH: I don’t know how I feel about that term but I do think there’s something there. People bring their cultural data into their musical sensibilities and their rhythmic structures—even on a city level. I think there is a sensibility that you can try to extract. I don’t think you can ever reduce it to something that has non-porous, set boundaries. But, historically, when I hear a sound, I’m like oh, that’s a Detroit-ass sound. That’s a nasty-ass, Detroit-ass beat. Or that’s a Baltimore-, Philly-ass sound. Sometimes, I’ll even have moments where—because of the way that music travels now with the internet, sometimes the references can get mixed up—but I’ll hear a DJ, I’m like, oh, that’s nasty and I’ll think in my head, “oh, he must be Black.”

ZJK: But he’s not Black.

JH: No, it’s like some random white dude from Switzerland, and I’m like, OH KAY! Granted he’s probably only listening to Black people... [*We laugh because... many such cases*] I think that there’s a playfulness to, specifically now, the kind of doll ascension into DJ culture. I remember when I first started, the only doll DJ that I knew of was Honey Dijon. I mean, there weren’t even really that many girl DJs, women DJs, period. Even at the gay parties, half the time, they were hiring straight white men to DJ... I came up at a time before trans visibility really crossed the threshold. For me, I even felt like the sociality of being a doll necessitates a hybridization that really had no contemporaries at that time—at least in New York culture—where you can no longer just say that a space is queer. What does it mean to have a queer space? Are we defining queerness based on how you move through the world, yourself? Or, are we defining it based on how you are embodied and how that embodiment in-

forms your desires and who you are desired by? Is it sexual politics? Is it gender politics? Like, how are we navigating these questions? What does queerness mean in that context? Is it just like a social sensibility? Dolls really embody all of that. With straight dolls—well, now the trade’s in the picture, on either spectrum. Trans people in general, I think, force a kind of questioning and a mixiness that does fold into music. I remember when I came up I felt like my sound was informed by the fact that I was moving through a lot of different spaces. And in all of those spaces, I both felt external to them but a part of them in some aspect. And that kind of Lego-like aspect to building identity I do think plays into a musical sensibility. However, I am generally reticent of attaching music too much to an identity category without a material analysis of where that’s coming from.

ZJK: I feel like the way that you maneuver through so many different practices is very informative for Black and/or trans artists that are still figuring out their practice. I think a lot of times we think we have to stick to one thing, but because you maneuver all of your different shit so well, and you’re so good at all of it, you are a mother to many of us. So I wanted to ask you, what does being referred to as “Mother” invoke for you?

JH: There was a period of time where I would always tell people “My womb is barren. I have no children.” [*I laugh at the playfully dramatic voice in which she says this.*] I was really carrying back then... I struggled with imposter syndrome for years and years and years. It wasn’t until other people could recognize me as something that I was able to just say “I am an [X].” I would be like, “I make art sometimes” or “I operate in the capacity of a DJ.” I would say weird shit and people would be like “Girl, what? You operate in the capacity? What?” I really had a lot of imposter syndrome...

So early on, I almost fell into that trope, which I’m so glad I didn’t, because I understood but resented [that trope] in older trans women who saw my movement through the world as significantly easier than theirs. And so it was difficult for them to see the joy... That you could just be young and trans and doing your thing and making art. Like, I’m downtown and here’s my cute little whatever-boyfriend, who’s maybe a sociopath, but I’m just navigating the normal things of life without a sense of “All my life I had to fight.” It doesn’t need to give Celie.

Now I actually find a lot of joy in it. I really love that and it really honors me. Someone came up to me at Nowadays yesterday, and they were just like, “Just so you know, you’re a Mother.” They were like, “You’re mother. And we just wanna let you know that.” And I actually think that’s really cute. Because I love that. Even you, sis! Like, yes to all the girls out here that are so smart and sharp and beautiful and multifaceted, you know? It really brings me joy. I’m glad that I was able to be a Mother, in that sense.

ZJK: I wanted to maybe shift a little bit to talk about Berlin. In Berlin and many cultural centers in the West, there’s been an intense, punitive Zionist backlash to pro-Palestinian organizing. I think it’s an evolutionary response from a dying oppressor, like a last-ditch effort to resuscitate itself. But, ultimately in that attempt, the people that get harmed the most are people on the margins: activists, organizers, journalists, educators but also DJs, poets, artists. How have your artistic practices and relationships helped you sort through recent political repression?

JH: Being in Berlin was very difficult because the silence, the docility, in relation to state interests surrounding Israel was almost near unanimous. I was so shocked that I was considered singular in what I was saying... At the time, I had my solo show open, I was DJing in Berlin all the time, there was a lot of press surrounding me and what I was doing... And so this

year in particular was set up in a way that I was like, “Okay, I’ve spent a lot of time in Germany. I’ve spent a lot of time in Berlin and I love Berlin!” And when all of this popped off, it’s almost like there’s a lot of people there who resented that. I think people at the margins were attacked because it’s like... Germany was just barely on a wave where it was really unheard of that someone like me would get to move through the spaces that I was moving in without constantly billing myself as the identity booking, the transgender booking. It’s like, no, no, no... If you’re gonna book me, you’re gonna book me because I’m eating. And this is true for a lot of people, particularly in Germany, where they are very anti-identity politics, in general... To the degree that they are foaming at the mouth, ready to call someone an “identitarian shill,” that they actually can’t even see when people are tearing because they’re only able to see their identity. And it’s like, now you’re actually doing the thing that you think you’re fighting against on principle.

But yeah... I felt waves of resentment that were expressed towards people in perceived positions of cultural capital. There was a tacit kind of conditional agreement where it’s like, “Okay, we’re gonna let you move up in this space, we’re gonna let you do your thing... but you better shut the fuck up and follow our idea of what a secular, German, bullshit EU identity is.” The idea that you would challenge Zionism was really unheard of. So, the crackdown was so intense. I was like, “I’m not even a big enough figure... How am I in newspapers? Y’all are really writing newspaper articles?”... DJing was really difficult during that time period. Ultimately because I don’t approach music frivolously and I really wanted to be a conduit, I was able to find a space where I could play, even though partying was difficult.

I still am grappling with how insane Zionism is as an ideology... that it’s now the face of imperialism and colonialism. It has really merged itself through a kind of holding up the Holocaust as the end-all, be-all of crimes against humanity. It’s really an opportunity for people to stop thinking, to stop pushing, to stop being critical. There is no end-all, be-all. There is no absolute worst. Humanity can always be worse. It’s been worse before. It will continue to be. The idea of a zero point of evil is inherently a setup for more for evil shit to happen.

But I do believe the club is also church. All music can in some way serve as a hymn, as deliverance. There is a transference, for me, of the social role that church played—I was in church all the time growing up—and I don’t need an idea of God. I don’t need it to be dogmatic. But, I do think that space for collective release, exaltation, is there. Music is one of the few art forms that still feels really prescient and powerful and capacious. And also with the band [Tongue in the Mind] (*rockstar 101*), playing live music actually really helped.

And so in that sense, the community that music can form has been really encouraging. I’ve turned to it a lot. For me, that has been a key space, but I don’t wanna conflate that with the space of struggle. I think that can be a carry when people are like, “My resistance is my DJ set.” We don’t need to give all of that. Like, there are people that are giving literal resistance. But, there are spaces for working through something, spaces for mourning, spaces for transmuting indignation into something else, even if just for a moment. I do think that music can do that.

ZJK: How do you move beyond the world’s desire to make everything that you do as a Black trans woman a revolutionary act, and instead just do the shit that you wanna do because it’s fab?

JH: Yeah, I’ve always tried to push back against that. I’ve always thought that was so manic... like people shouting at me “You’re so brave!” And I’m like, “Oh, okay... I’m getting a matcha latte... It’s 1:00 PM on a Tuesday. What’s up girl?

You’re scaring me.” And, yes, I do understand what that’s undergirding. Trans people have been denigrated for so long. Black trans people have been the butt of jokes for so long, have been invisible for so long, have been rendered worldstarhiphop dotcom clickbait. You know, I think so often it’s funny that intersectionality has been picked up as the bullshit, worst of the postmodern, Marxist, whatever the right wingers are saying. But like, even people that are purportedly coming from the left—I know most Black people, trans people, queer people, everyone is over the bastardization of identity politics—but it’s interesting that something like intersectionality has been held up, like Kimberlé Crenshaw is just full of shit and an example of the failures of identity politics because I’m like... Well, actually no. Most Black feminist thought really encourages complexity in a way that y’all are not.

ZJK: The girls don’t read.

JH: Like, did y’all even read? The hoes don’t be reading. They literally think intersectionality means the more things you can add on a laundry list, the more of a platform you should be given. And I’m like, what?

But you know, for me... Yes, I’m a Black trans woman. Have I experienced people trying to kill me, blah, blah, blah? Yes. But for the majority of my adult life, I’m fine. I went to college. I’ve had some shake ups, but really, like a little bit into the ’mones, shit got chill and things got easier over time, for me. And the horizon of possibility that my life could be easier is also conditioned by my class. I grew up middle class. I didn’t grow up working class. My first job out of school was the ACLU. I’ve struggled a lot. There’s a lot of intense trauma in my family. You know what I mean? My single, Black mom was barely holding onto the middle class, blah, blah, blah. But the girl who deserves the flowers for facing death everyday is not me. I also don’t think that should be the center point of why you respect trans people. Trans people should be allowed to have medical care because they’re human beings with specific experiences and we have the ability for a diverse, empathetic world in which we can accommodate everyone’s right to exist in self-determination. It’s not that complicated.

ZJK: What possibilities are you most hopeful for in the new year?

JH: I am hopeful for freedom for Palestine, the Congo, and Sudan.

ZJK: Absolutely.

JH: And, I am hopeful for the expansion of the window of permissible time in New York for people to go out. I’m really happy Nowadays is doing Nonstop every weekend. I’m just like why is it ending at 6...? This happens to me all the time. At Basement, it was 7:30 and I had just put my bag down and was like, “Bitch, we lit.”

ZJK: [*loud buzzer noise*]

JH: Clubs closed. Not lit. We just really need to expand our time. I know it’s tied to productivity and labor and money and all of that stuff but—

ZJK: There’s so much possibility with more time.

JH: There’s just so much possibility.

[*This interview is an excerpt. To read the full transcript, view it online at poetryproject.org - ed.*]

Taking Revenge on the World for Not Existing

Ted Rees

[Adapted from a talk delivered at *Communal Presence*, October 2017.]

I.

A few years ago, I was mentioned in a conversation between Brandon and Thom that was published in *BOMB* magazine's online repository. For a while, it was one of the top results when you Googled my name, so that any person who might have wanted to know something about me and clicked on the right sequence of links got Brandon saying, "I love Ted. He's so fucking punk. You know?"

Let me tell you: that really pissed me off. Being recognized is terrible. It is having a fucked mirror placed next to your body that reflects only the most outlandish identifiers. But the fact is that for years following the publication of my dear friends' back-and-forth, I remained in full embrace of punk's signifiers, or at least some variation thereof: I bleached my hair or had total hack job haircuts. I rode freight trains. I lived and fucked in punk houses and squats filled with trash and drugs and no electricity. I wore ridiculously shambling clothes often haphazardly sewn together with dental floss.

I wallowed in punk, rolled around in its effluvia, rambled through its alleys strewn with rigs and snipes and glass shards and screeching speeding sweat. And all the while, I was also writing poetry and giving talks about gentrification and Wojnarowicz and reading Dodie and Kevin and Dennis and Megan Camille and Bob and Bruce, and relatedly, Bataille.

Admittedly, I now find this period of my life or "development" utterly embarrassing, one of the ugliest of the ugly feelings. But from where my discomfort arrives, I am not certain. Sometimes, I think it comes from years of investment in a community of affect that has little to do with what I now hold dear in this world. At other times, I am chagrined by punk's avowed distrust of and antipathy toward any sort of nuance. Yet simultaneously, the DIY punk ethos and its relation to an undermining of capitalist hegemony seems embedded within my spirit, continuing to wend its way through what I write and how I teach and the thoughts with which I spend my time on a quotidian basis. A short-lived anarchist punk band once wrote in a communique, "punk is a ghetto," and I tend to agree with the declaration, but extricating oneself from that cultural slum, especially as a queer person, is not simple, particularly if one has spent a good portion of one's life inside of it.

II.

In a 1997 *College Music Journal* review of *I Am That Great And Fiery Force*, the first full-length record by queercore band Behead the Prophet No Lord Shall Live, poet Stephanie Burt writes,

Behead ... plays top-speed, slightly sloppy, cheaply recorded, metal-inflected hardcore punk, with tangled-up rapid-fire bass-guitar showmanship, drums like a hailstorm on a car crash in an avalanche, and high-pitched screaming about authority and oppression.

Especially for a pop critic, Burt gets the sound right, but the missing element from the review is mention of the music's confrontational, violent *queerness*. Vocalist Joshua Ploeg's shredded throatings are deliriously scrambled and ambiguously pitched so that they are outside of gender; thus, when *this voice* declares, "You know me: lewd and lascivious / la-la-la-lusty every minute of every day / you know me getting la-la-la lucky / it's the one thing the only thing only on my mind," there's really no way for the listener to approach what's piping into their ears except to relate it to desire itself, to Bob (in *Jack the Modernist*) writing that "desire is not satisfied; it's *expelled*." Behead the Prophet's frenzied chaos is the aural equivalent of that expulsion, what can be categorized as the multifarious orgasm, the syncopic moment rooted not only in the pleasures of skin, but in the harrowing deprivations and oft-concealed sensualities of history and its memories. That the thrust of the multifarious orgasm derives an aspect of its motion from resistance to normativity should not be surprising, and the radicality of Behead the Prophet's queer torrent serves as one bit of evidence of such movement.

Pause. Here's an exercise: can you remember the first orgasm you experienced to music?

I knew nothing about Behead the Prophet when, at twelve years old, I picked up the group's CD at Repo Records in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. I'd spent the previous two years dwelling in a truncated grief, as I'd not only come to the conclusion that I was queer, but also had a mother who had been crawling the shores of mortality with stage IV invasive epithelial cancer of the ovaries. Though she had emerged from her illness and was in remission, the impossibility of her ever truly recovering was laid bare by a newfound religiosity, which confronted my burgeoning sexuality in any number of predictable and unpredictable ways. As the cruel banality of the imagination would assume, my hints at my sexuality were treated as my obsession with punk and hardcore was

treated: as part of an early teenage rebellious phase that would pass.

But in my bedroom, I was voracious. I read magazines like *Profane Existence* and *The Defenestrator* and *HeartattaCk* from front to back, steeping my consciousness in the weird brew of DIY punk and radical politics. I listened to records over and over again, by groups like... well, Behead the Prophet, Capitalist Casualties, Submission Hold, and Kill the Man Who Questions. And as is typical for a thirteen-year-old, I masturbated with an astonishing frequency in a vast array of positions and situations.

Yet the first time I can remember the music that was playing when I achieved orgasm, the scene itself was rather staid, normal even. I was lying in bed nude, walls surrounding me covered in a claustrophobic density of posters, left index finger up my asshole, stroking furiously, and Behead the Prophet's "In the Garden" was playing on my CD boombox. And then! There it was: a splash on the "sun air moon and soil ... in the garden of incendiaries," the lyrics positing my young queer body as an explosive device.

I didn't think much of the circumstances at the time, but in retrospect, that orgasm can help form a frame for the collision of New Narrative and queer punk beyond the facility of a shared fascination with (and occasional yen for) abjection.

You see, I'm still that queer punk kid. "I can't imagine a place for myself in the world," as Bob writes in his own story of recollected youth in "Do Be. Don't Be." But unlike Bob, I've never trusted the world enough to allow myself to think it could imagine a place for me. "To take revenge on the world for not existing" remains the goal, as Bob writes in his "Long Note on New Narrative," and this is perhaps where that orgasm comes in again: not only to take revenge, but also to proclaim (with Limp Wrist): "we're the freaks in town ... [and we're] not down with this normal world junk."

III.

In 2011, I was asked to give a talk at Small Press Traffic, and after the usual search for a subject, I settled on what can be handily described as an anti-capitalist rant about the coffee-table book *Punk House: Interiors in Anarchy*. Though rife with the sort of talkiness, bluster, and oversharing that was more in vogue during that period, while reading through the talk again, I stumbled upon the following sentences, where I describe my

headspace during a sexual encounter:

What I'm really pondering ... is how the sound of my head hitting the [shower stall] wall reverberates, and how shoddy the construction of the hotel must be. In a way, I am thinking about money, but more about its tactile failures than the rewards it can yield me.

And then, as if being sent back to that shower stall in SoMa wasn't enough, the next paragraph throws down the gloves:

Recognizing these failures [of capital] is part of what being a punk is all about. Of course, it's also what being a critical thinker and present in our world is all about, but the difference I've found is that most punks I know act on this recognition in their everyday lives. They don't just blather about it or blog about it or write about it in some book only other book-writers will read—they make an effort to subvert capital in the places they move through, the spaces they inhabit.

My naïveté is showing to a certain degree, yes, and the whole mess seems quaintly bygone given the events that have taken place in Oakland during the past six years, but the multifarious orgasm is there: a postcard sharing intimacies from a once and future queer dissident.

When I wrote the talk, I lived in a queer punk house with a rotating cast of residents. At one point, there were five queer cis-gender weirdo dudes and a genderfluid Australian overstaying their visa living in a one-floor, four-bedroom dump. It was impossibly cheap and also impossible: the air was heavy not just with the particulate matter endemic to West Oakland, but also the stench of strange food and sex and beer and cigarettes and frying electricity and old plumbing. The Australian told my future partner that listening to us fuck made them wet, but that it might be a good idea to invest in a ball-gag. Too intimate, let's venture to say.

But that period remains instructive: we were a bunch of queer punks approaching our 30s, working shit jobs to eat and make rent but otherwise dwelling in a space against time, a luxurious world of good, kinky sex and bicycling to the beach and flashing the middle finger to the loft-dwellers that were then really starting to stake a foreboding foothold in West Oakland. We woke up "excluded from the day ahead," as Bob would have it, but not altogether unhappy with that fate.

When Dodie writes about laughing at hegemony, at "the suggestion that freedom equals consumption equals human value," her laughter was ours—we existed in an unceasing

chuckle sometimes raised to a manic braying. At the time, it seemed the most appropriate response to the unwavering brutality of the diurnal, to the conditions kari writes toward almost smack in the middle of *Bharat jiva*:

waking up after waking up
after another artificial anti-depressive smile
wakes up individually wrapped cheese
freezing not unlike a lisp
stammering and stuttering to stay warm
uncounted, constantly under flag
freezing trying to wake up
flanked by
freezing heads in cars
bodies in malls

Our laughter's analog is in that stammer, the attempt "to stay warm" in the "individually wrapped / ignored historical doritos nacho cheese / cool ranch next to / doritos reduced fat nacho cheesier." Over time, most of us who lived in that house found our cackles turning to stammers as the conditions changed, the situations we found ourselves in becoming ever more dire, our alienation under late capital blooming as the apocalypse, the bland dread of "the natural white nacho / cheese." Though the remainder of the lyrics are inscrutable, the chorus of Behead the Prophet's "Separated States" is just that two-word phrase yelled desperately over and over again, and its succinct evocation of "individually wrapped" despair is as much a balm as kari's poems—evidence that in our queerness, in our horror and estrangement from each other, there are others like us damning the same strictures even as they attempt to engulf us.

IV.

Much has been made of New Narrative's somewhat recent emergence from a decades-long concealment in the foggy streets of San Francisco, yet given the continued obscurity of some of its most prominent works and adherents, its reputation as an "underground litera-

ture" remains intact, despite where we're sitting. For example, when I mentioned New Narrative in passing in an article I recently wrote for a Philadelphia-based literary magazine, my editor asked me to expand upon what New Narrative is, for while she had a general idea, most readers—even those with erudite and eclectic tastes—do not. [For related discussions in this issue of *New Narrative's underground renown and recent popularity*, see David Grundy's interview with Aaron Shurin and Brian Ng's review of Robert Glück's *About Ed* - ed.]

And while academic studies have been published about queer punk aesthetics, most bands have yet to cross over into mainstream, or even subcultural, consciousness. For every Hunx & His Punx or Pansy Division, there is a group like Livid or Myles of Destruction. What I am getting at is that both New Narrative and queer punk work on various levels of the liminal, hovering between zones of recognition and obscurity. When Bob gives one of his rare readings or queercore powerhouse Limp Wrist perform a rare San Francisco show, the venues are packed, albeit the former is crowded with literary connoisseurs both queer and straight, and the latter is crowded with a mob of sweaty, slam-dancing queer punks yelling along to lyrics like, "I love hardcore boys / I love boys hardcore." These two crowds might rub shoulders or more in the pissoir of the Eagle, but otherwise, their parallel statuses of belonging to an "underground" scene is often tenuous at best.

Still, there is "night, and they walk unsane, sprawling chins of steel, / the fearless, the torn, the lamentable... / freaks of the underworld," as Kevin has written. I remember sharing a copy of *Jack the Modernist* with my queer housemates, and after each reader, the book was more and more sticky. We'd go to punk shows in basements together and make jokes about prolapse and glory holes and unattractive dudes jerking off to us at the bathhouse, but these friends seemed totally uninterested

in accompanying me to hear Bruce read from the re-issued *The Truth About Ted*. The literary world of San Francisco was outside of the interstitial zone of the pissoir, and thus outside of comfort for these queer comrades, and the possibility of *living in* the pissoir and occupying both the liminal spaces of punk and New Narrative seemed outlandish to them in a way I couldn't understand. A good friend, who wrote gorgeous zines about his queerness and sex work, would sometimes respond to my praise with a series of questions: "But who cares about this other than me, you, and a few of our friends? Why write for anyone?" I told him that he sounded like Phyllis from *Jack* when she questions Bob, "Why should I *want* to be a writer?"

These are valid questions, and it seems that both Phyllis and my friend were understandably ambivalent about the idea of the writerly identity, the sort of enclosure that can create. But I've always respected the writerly identity as a sort of commons, a space to "explore the meeting of flesh and culture, the self as collaboration." What about the "enjambments of power, family, history, and language" made them uncomfortable with claiming an identity that they belonged to and belonged to them as much as it belonged to anyone, everyone? What lines had been fed to them that so scorched a boundary around the writerly identity that they could not cross?

Departing from Phyllis and focusing more on my friend, I think that what prevented him and many queer punks from entering the literary world at their fingertips was a sort of class anxiety. Many writers grouped around the New Narrative rubric have become members of the petit bourgeoisie as time has passed—along with those who own multiple properties or are active as landlords, it is difficult to imagine any in the New Narrative coterie who do not perform some of the unpaid social labors of the class as identified by James C. Scott, such as creating or fostering "the aes-

thetic pleasures of an animated and interesting streetscape, a large variety of social experiences and personalized services, acquaintance networks, [and] informal neighborhood news and gossip."

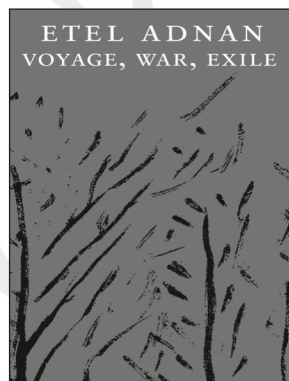
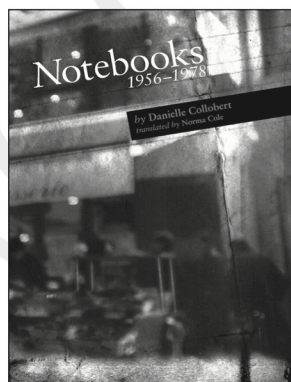
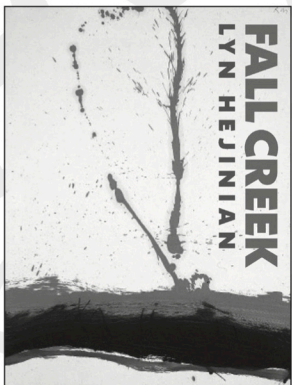
Thus, while there are plenty of self-identified queer punks who come from middle-to-upper-middle class backgrounds, myself included, there are a great many who would be categorized as the proletariat, including those who have been kicked out of these more luxe backgrounds. Entering a world of small ownership, where personal and social autonomy is the great prize, is not some easy feat for many queer punks, in other words, and while many of those within the New Narrative milieu are theoretically radical, when it comes down to self-reflection coupled with actual class analysis, a number of the writers within the movement fail. I could tell some stories, but here I'm going to buck the New Narrative tendency toward public gossip and simply let the imagination ruminate.

V.

I'm going to end this talk, probably prematurely, with another admission: I'm embarrassed of my time spent with New Narrative. In her "Irresponsible Essay" course at CCA, Dodie's first assignment was to write the most embarrassing thing about yourself that you felt you could share, a common prompt within the New Narrative workshop scene. I wrote about the first time I came, watching *Full House* on a tiny analog screen, honed in on the bulge in John Stamos's pants. Later in that course, I wrote a piece about my granny's recent death, how I couldn't stop eyeing the altar boys at her funeral service. (They weren't children, get your mind out of the gutter). A year or so later, Kevin asked to publish a piece about technology and masturbating to cam porn in the *Best New Gay Erotica* that he was editing.

New Narrative and its devices liberated me,

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and that's embarrassing. That I needed liberating is embarrassing. That *my writing* needed liberating is embarrassing. But I did, and it did, and my writing is partly the fault of Dodie and Kevin and Camille and Bob and Bruce and Steve and Dennis and Rob and any number of other people, both dead and alive. Like punk rock and its collaborative spirit, New Narrative wends its way through so much of what I write and think and read towards, and I am simultaneously grateful and totally vexed by that dynamic.

Perhaps I feel hesitation and discomfort when acknowledging the perpetual effects that the fellow travelers of queer punk and New Narrative have on me, because both are outlandish, oft-controversial, and rarely stable. I've lived in seven different places in seven different towns in the past two years, I've helped alienate any number of people during that time, and I've often felt like a being from another planet during the process. A mirror held to my own failings is unsettling at best and scream-inducing at worst.

"There's something in my veins, and it's trying to fucking kill me." David Wojnarowicz was ostensibly yelling to an empty street about AIDS, but he was also yelling about the multifarious orgasm: the "enjambments of power, family, history, and language" which, along with syncopic pleasure, run through all of our veins, and are also actively trying to kill us. Where New Narrative burrows in and investigates, punk rock tells these strictures off. "Given the options, where would your anger take you?—where has it taken you?"

The above is taken from Hand Me the Limits, available in late spring from Roof Books.

POETRY

Oki Sogumi

"there are people who will not [help you] & there are people who will stand in the way"

I think you are already stronger, threaded with a sunshine conviction, more than I ever was

I remember being 21 years old, weeping in a meeting after arguing, begging for a resolution from people much older than I, established, educated, to make the weakest statement of support, I saw how little it mattered that I wept, how they still made their excuses and this became a thread in me

I saw the police take one of us as hostage, and our march and blockade was negotiated away on our behalf, by representatives who named themselves and would prefer to barter than resist and this became a thread in me

All these threads were gathered one by one and found each other within me

I booed and kept striding as people with bullhorns tried to block a march and children on bikes from entering the freeway, the children were laughing at their attempts, someone else took the bullhorn, and anyone who wanted to: we made it anyway

There are times when we find ourselves outnumbered, small, not flush in general strike nor massive riot

There are times we look desperately for a hand, and a hand that looks strong and active

Whose hands are you or "we" reaching for? Will their other hand have a pinkie link or full lock to the State?

In the definitive hour, will they try to take the bullhorn and tell you to stand down? To walk away? To demobilize? To not do "too much"?

We may find ourselves few, but we only delay yet ensure our demise if we hold hands with these demobilizers, the ones who will always eventually tell you to accept your destruction as a victory, your consolation prize as a win

And we may hold hands with people we disagree with, but are with us in that definitive hour, that's important too

Clarity and honesty about what we think and desire, can go some ways in deciding who chooses to be around

What do they support and in what specific instances, what do they decry and in what specific instances

Will they work with the State, the police? Will they satisfy themselves with moving some pieces around and consolidate their own power, or do they want this thing to come down

But there's nothing like the definitive hour itself to show people and groups for what they are, and if you weren't there to witness their past track record, other people were

I think you are already stronger, threaded with a sunshine conviction, more than I ever was

I say all this to bear witness to that as well, and to offer my threads to add to yours

(title from Wendy Trevino's "Revolutionary Letter")

Making the World: Aaron Shurin w/ David Grundy

The life and work of poet Aaron Shurin, whose extraordinary 1997 prose work, *Unbound: A Book of AIDS*, was reissued by Nightboat Books in winter 2023, exemplifies a sense of queer, communal possibility. Born in New York in 1947, Shurin had relocated to Massachusetts and came to poetry through Denise Levertov's workshops at MIT. Levertov, he writes in his 2016 essay collection, *The Skin of Meaning*, "had given me every sense of poetry's immediacy and magic." Yet Levertov herself was not able to fully grapple with the queerness fundamental to Shurin's emergent aesthetic: she suggested that his early work was "too emphatically homosexual," and that its politics—as compared to her poetry against the war in Vietnam—was "parochial in theme." Such criticism led him to define his work politically all the more, as Shurin recalled when we met at his apartment in San Francisco in February 2022 to discuss a book project on queer poetry in Boston and San Francisco for which I was in town on pandemic-delayed research.

"I was making a unified theory of sexuality, politics, gender, revolution, everything and she was saying that it was minimal!" Shurin comments. "Boy, that lit a fire under me." Reacting against the cultural stereotype that to be queer was to doom oneself to a life that was "emotionally destitute," as Levertov had suggested, Shurin's coming to poetry, as for so many of his generation, had been a defiant assertion of queer identity. In turn, the experience of having felt excluded by heterosexual men within Levertov's workshop led to the incantatory poem "Exorcism of the Straight Man/Demon," which ended up being the first publication of Boston's Good Gay Poets press. "Straight man in me who I never wanted Look out! I expel you," writes Shurin.

See how hard your cock is?
That's how strong my jaw is.
That's how fierce my heart is and my
love.

Shurin was one of the founding members of Good Gay Poets, alongside Charlie Shively and David Eberly; a press that, alongside the Gay Liberation newspaper *Fag Rag*, manifested a defiant and highly political reclamation of gay sexuality, with poetry a particularly important vehicle. "My politics, in fact, was my poetics of those days," Shurin recalls. "You find somehow a gay language. It is a poetic language, and there's a lot of freedom."

Within the next few years, Shurin had relocated across the country to San Francisco, where he encountered another kind of queer sensibility. "I had a boyfriend who was living

in North Beach and was a little bit older, hanging out with Bruce Boone's crowd. That's when it happened for me. They were intellectuals. They read. They listened to classical music. And that turned me on. And that turned me on in a gay way. I understood for the first time [that] I could see the shape of what my life might be like."

"In San Francisco during the early 70s," Shurin notes, "you had a glorious gay life, with the Cockettes and the Angels of Light: incredible, grand theater and inventiveness. That remains my paradise. It was a pluralistic moment. Everything seemed possible: people need to understand that. That was the hallmark of the 60s: that everything was up for review. Reinvention. It was psychology. It was sexuality. It was environmentalism. It was everything: everything could be reimagined and redone. And I think in San Francisco the barriers were very loose."

Shurin's start in the Bay Area poetry scene came through publishing in Winston Leyland's newspaper *Gay Sunshine*, a venue whose importance, he stresses, cannot be underestimated. "It was amazing. It was gigantic. It was so influential. I mean, he was the weirdest cat—just the weirdest. But I can't believe how savvy he was when you look at the people who he had interviews with. It was way beyond my ken, really. How did he know about these people? It really did feel like a magazine of the movement, but it was also this dinky little thing. It was incredible and it was certainly home for me for many years, and I think for Bob Glück too."

Another key presence was that of Bay Area elder statesman Robert Duncan, whose work as part of the "Berkeley Renaissance," alongside Robin Blaser, Jack Spicer, Helen Adam, and others, had paved the way for the poets of Shurin's generation to write their own poems of joyful queerness. Poetically, Shurin remarks, Duncan's work afforded "the romantic permission towards extravagance, towards heightened language: that there could be a place for this." The two, as Lisa Jarnot recounts in her biography of Duncan, *The Ambassador from Venus*, were also briefly lovers. Shurin shows me a precious copy of Duncan's *The Venice Poem*—a courageous, conflicted poem of queer love, written in the late 1940s, well before the Gay Liberation era. In the book's inside copy, Duncan had inscribed, in his characteristically ornate calligraphy, a poem of dedication. That poem, which was never published—though it's excerpted in Jarnot's book—was written for Shurin alone. These are magic objects, totems, indications of relations I can only guess or gesture at, freighted with

poetry's simultaneous capacities for prophecy and for a reckoning with the past, its ability to look backwards and forwards at the same time. For Duncan, for Shurin, for the poets of Gay Liberation whose example remains a shining one, poetry serves as the relational bond within the public realm of language, building a community, even if that community begins with two.

Shurin's first stand-alone publication was a 1975 chapbook entitled *Woman on Fire*. The book, he recalls, was "about being in drag and what transvestism was and what it meant in terms of gender." About *Woman on Fire*, Bay Area poet Steve Abbott wrote that Shurin "advanced the idea of drag as a revelation, not a mask, of personality." In today's world, when drag is the subject of both moral panic from the right and Drag Race-induced professionalization, Shurin's vision offers a different path, shimmering beyond the constrictions of gender. Continuing the project of the "Exorcism," the poem resolves: "To speak of ourselves. Unnamed regions—rose-pink and rust-fire / Beyond the stern / and arrogant borders of manhood." "And there races back / and forth across the party," Shurin continues, "instant sympathy, a revolution / of untold ecstasies. *Woman on Fire!*"

Shurin self-published the book under the imprint Rose Deeprise, and to this day he produces an annual chapbook for friends, "making little handmade things as a challenge to professionalism," and a part of the process of building community. The circuits of publishing, social life, activism, and sex created new and porous communities at a time of hitherto untold possibility. Shurin—who the late Kevin Killian remembers at this time as like a "gay shaman"—was gradually moving away from the more declarative poetics with which he'd begun the decade, and towards a more experimental approach, in dialogue with the Bay Area's multiple writing communities.

For a time, Shurin lived nearby to poet and prose writer Steve Abbott, a community-builder and chronicler who would help to define the movement known as "New Narrative." "The big question," Abbott writes to Shurin in 1976, is "what is or is there such a thing as Gay poetry or a Gay aesthetic?" And, more than ever, Shurin was coming to realize that gayness might not, perhaps, mean the declaration of an increasingly visible queer identity, but a play with form itself. Shurin, like many in the scene, was increasingly coming into dialogue with the Language poets. The following year, he wrote back to Abbott: "What we learn immediately from these Language poets is a real need for poetic theory, to understand & map

out why we do what we do. This is not the same as not doing what we do." Language's focus on theory, its insistence on an anti-subjective stance, might seem the polar opposite to Robert Duncan's Romanticism or Shurin's own earlier political declarations; tensions between various positions such as these would, in the following years, lead to the so-called "Poetry Wars," a period Shurin recalls as "so intense: it was horrible!" But, as a writer, Shurin has never been one to limit himself to any one community or style. The poetry dictates its own form.

Looking back on the Poetry Wars several decades on, he remarks: "It seems strange to me, in a way, because the stuff was very specific, and now a lot of the debate is moot. I was certainly schooled by the Language poets: they toughened me up a lot. We just had to read some of the theory. But I didn't feel like I had to pick a side, because I always wanted to do everything. I couldn't figure out why you would choose one mode or one interpretation or not, and ignore the other, which is equally as real. These are all powers of poetry. So I just want to do everything, and maybe it makes me confusing for a lot of people."

As well as Abbott and the Language writers, Shurin was developing long-term friendships with experimental writers such as Norma Cole and Michael Palmer. "Norma, Leslie [Scalapino] and I had a kind of dinner club that every few months we would go out together and have dinner together. It was quite wonderful," he recalls, "And there was a little community." He was also friends with socialist feminist poet Karen Brodine, then involved with the Woman Writers Union that had developed out of the struggle for a more diverse curriculum at San Francisco State.

Before visiting Shurin, I'd spent days in the extraordinary collections of the San Francisco Public Library's James C. Hormel LGBTQIA+ Center, going through Brodine's papers, which, along with Abbott's, are lovingly preserved. A few days later, I'd depart the sunny climes of the Bay for the sub-zero temperatures of Buffalo, NY, and there I found a beautiful letter from Brodine to Shurin about her concept of poetry. "Images," Brodine contends,

are the livewire spark between opposites, contradictions, a juxtaposition of things that are alike and opposite—this is where dialectics come in. And the idea that those most pushed down by society have the most to say about it—in images, shouts, actions, all of those—because we live and see the opposites, the turbulence just under the smooth velour of the manufactured stories. Images leap right out of

those contradictions blasting the true story into breath.

Though Brodine's and Shurin's writing was in many ways very different, this sense of the sparking of contradiction, the juxtapositions that constitute the movement of our bodies and our breath through the world, and the way those fold together to create social life, very much speak to Shurin's own luminous work, whether in poetry, in essays, or in a hybrid prose between the two.

"Anyway," Brodine signs off, "hope to run into you sometime at a reading or a demonstration (or maybe ducking cops at a riot?)." The letter conveys something of the spirit of the era: a sense, too, that the celebratory vision of gay life propounded principally by wealthier gay men in the city was losing the political edge present at the start of the decade. Writing to Abbott in November 1980, Shurin recalls a conversation with Abbott and fellow New Narrative architect Bob Glück about "how our community feeling doesn't seem to be as strong or sensitive or united as it used to be, how in fact we've become not much different from the heterosexual men, the most macho of them even, who we used to counterpose ourselves to." Such correspondence intuited a sense of dread, too, at the increasingly hostile political climate of the coming decade, a dread that turned out to be even more horrifically prescient than could have been expected.

"As high as the 70s were in San Francisco, that's how low the 80s were for that period," Shurin remembers in 2022, "AIDS posed a huge, huge dilemma. I mean it just swallowed everything." Though his experience of AIDS was "bound by community," the forms of community language developed in the prior decade—whether the political rhetoric of early Gay Liberation or the more experimental writing to which Shurin had turned towards the end of the decade, in dialogue with the Language poets—seemed inadequate, as did the existing prose of journalism or of existing forms of elegy and memorialization. As New Narrative writer Sam D'Allesandro wrote in a letter to Kevin Killian, a few years before his own passing from the disease:

I keep seeing obituaries in which the deceased AIDS person is characterized as "a fighter who fought to the very end" and who somehow provided an incredibly positive experience of strength for those left behind. What macho bullshit. I don't believe such descriptions will help anyone facing the loss of his lover/best friend when there are so many other hard emotions to encounter at such a time I don't see many pieces that seem to actually be about how people I know act/react in the world.

D'Allesandro would find his way to an alternative in the sparse, fragmentary narratives posthumously collected in the story collection *The Zombie Pit* (1989), edited by Steve Abbott, and later in the expanded version *The Wild*

Creatures (2005), edited by Killian, both essential documents of the era. This, too, is the drama that informs *Unbound*. "It was so intimate," Shurin remarks: "it involved you when your closest friends and everybody you knew peripherally. I guess there's a way it affects language as well—to find language that could express that or not contain it—but, by this stage, I had moved from a political or more rhetorical position to a more experimental position. And yet here's this non-experimental and quite rhetorical life that was presented to one. How am I going to write about that? First, I was writing prose. That seemed the only way to write about it. Prose could lock it down. And poetry doesn't do that. Or I didn't know how to do that. *Unbound* had its own shape. I couldn't invent it. It had its own shape. I had to report it in some way. And in fact, I felt like I had to invent a prose for myself."

In *Unbound*, that prose moves between essays that reflect on the possibility of narrating the experience of AIDS to prose poems that seem to embody that experience. "It seems essential to me, in the age of AIDS," writes Shurin early on in the book, "to keep the body forward, to keep the parts named, to not let ourselves get scared back into our various closets... couplists or nuclear family paranoia, social scapegoating, stereotyping and moral sanctimony. Didn't my generation become sexual pioneers not just by increasing the range of permissible sex acts... but by tying sexual expression to socialism, feminism, national liberation movements... and if it gets squashed, what else gets squashed with it?"

How, though, to write of this experience? The available discourses seem inadequate. Shurin continues: "I'm infected by a vocabulary, a prisoner of its over-specialized agenda. I know OK-T4 helper cells, macrophages, lymphadenopathy, hairy leukoplakia I'm learning this alien vocabulary by sight—it's symbolic—but I don't understand the grammar. I can't apply it to any other situation; it's a purely local dialect." Two reactions suggest themselves, which Shurin playfully names "Shit! And Shoot 'em!" The first, the experience of loss, "seemed to me woefully personal ... even sub-lexical," while the second—the expression of politicized rage—was the domain of politics: of ACT UP and Queer Nation to which poetics had little to add. Nonetheless, Shurin found that he could not avoid the demands of finding *some* way to express the realities of that terrible present.

"How to write AIDS," Shurin continues, "named me." Such writing would not adopt a single approach, but find "multiform ways into it": the essay of narrative, of "witness," "interrogation and digression," scrutinising "the pure rampage of facts," "enmesh[ing] personal narrative and literary critical methodology"; the poem as "compound metaphor," finding its way to narrative, not as straight line, but as elliptical curve. In the long prose poem "Human Immune," Shurin writes, "the speaking subject inhabits experience from simultaneous loca-

tions as if all persons of voice (first, second, and third) are equally at risk." Drawing inspiration from the circularity of Dante's hell, the poem seeks to "dimensionalize AIDS from the personal to the historical: the curve one round is also around one, surrounding, a world." Here, "the procession of history itself disappearing"—the history of a prior era, of the moment of gay liberation, of the deaths of so many of its pioneers and its followers—another history emerges to take its place.

The homecoming was marked and mapped; they circled in ever-widening loops. Processions migrating on blue nectar—stopping in the rising air over coastal waters. I waited I repeated I waited the test... I have variations about what was there: fathers, sons, grandsons. When the sky cleared the weather superimposed corrections, noticing and recording more details. Fly to an elevated lookout post. It's my intention to describe history at the place we left them. Populations of flesh caught in our net. Of their courtship, of their species: their back was connected to display-movements fading toward the warm neck, a pirouette. Small circles this ceremony for hours on end

"It took me all this time to write 'Human Immune,'" Shurin recalls, "which was a collage poem and absolutely formal. I thought I had to use prose to lock it down. But finally, when I wrote the poem, it's not very locked down at all." The poem ends with a moment of intimacy: part of a collage of multiple voices, it has no one location, no one name, but names instead a relation, a transferable sense of comradeship and of love, whether that of the survivors or the departed. AIDS itself, and the losses it has wrought, defies naming. But so do the ongoing valences of queerness.

We sat in silence, a blanket covering his lap. If you flew by you'd see these impostors, vapors of tenderness. It could never be contained.

As someone who had "lived through the dark ages at the beginning of my gay life," Shurin notes, the experience of negativity, paranoia, or suspicion, was not an unfamiliar one, yet the intervening years of queer community building meant that, as he reflects, while "so much was destroyed, so much was created and was built to respond. The community was amazing in its terms of response and it also made for wisdom, encountering mortality. Frequently it made for some kind of wisdom about life."

"Community," he continues, "is an essential word for me, and a word that I always associated with San Francisco There's something permeable or semi-permeable about cultural life in the city that brings people together and awakens them in some collective way. I don't know where it comes from. It's not just to do with sexuality. But has a progressive contour. I've always felt it. I always thought that the shows of the Angels of Light in their later stages were the apex of cultural formation. A people's opera, that's what I call it: that's what

it was like and I felt part of it. It enlarged me. And I think a lot of people felt that in many ways, about different kinds of things, and so I guess that's community. That's the sense of community: that people are doing things for you, or you're doing things for them as you do it for yourself."

Such community, importantly, also exists in language itself. While Shurin's participation in activism and the role his poetry played in a political moment is important, the real import of his lifework lives in his writing as creating its own space: not apart from or irrelevant to the world, but affording a perspective queerly alongside it. When we spoke, the United States was just emerging from a pandemic that—like AIDS—is not over simply because metropolitan centers have gone back to what passes for normal social life. Shurin reflects on the connections and divergences between the two epochs of plague in his introduction to the *Nightboat* reprint of *Unbound*. More broadly, though, he has been reflecting on what it means, not only to live through two such catastrophes, to survive multiple losses, but to witness the perpetually incomplete project of queer liberation.

"I'm in a little bit of an elegiac mood, as I turned 75, so I've really been feeling it," Shurin remarks, "and during the lockdowns this past year I spent a lot of time this last year reading my own work. And I've been coming just to see it as a life. I have a life work. I was talking to Bob Glück about this. I lived my life as a writer. And that is a gift. It astonishes me. Somehow that's really been becoming clarified and deepened in this last year."

Shurin proffers an example of the symbiotic relation between poetry and life, between what the poet knows and what the poem knows. "Twenty-five years ago I wrote this poem called 'Codex' and I used little pieces of the first collage thing I ever did, these little pieces of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In the poem, I took my father to the underworld, to hell, for judgement. And that ultimately enabled me to forgive my father. But it was the poem that did it. I had no intention of bringing him there. I have no intention of folding him in the guts of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. But I did, and when I came out, I was sad for him. And there's one line, the saddest line, it says, "*he held up his arms for a mast*" as the winds blew over him.' It was so sad. And that changed my relationship with it entirely. And I had nothing to do with it: the poem did it."

Poetry, as Shurin's example attests, is not about repeating what you already know, but the process of reaching towards new knowledge. "Like Robert [Duncan] said," he concludes, "if you're stating a position, you're not making the world." In *Unbound*, as in the rest of his life's work, Shurin strives to make that world.

To Tell the Story, We Need Everything:

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore w/ Forest Smotrich-Barr

"Expansive and awake," Sycamore writes, "alert to the possibility of language activating the body." This is the potential that queer writer and activist Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore gives the reader in her new book, Touching the Art, in which she blends memoir, biography, art criticism and history to engage with the work and life of her late grandmother, Baltimore-based abstract artist Gladys Goldstein. Sycamore frames and reframes our conceptions of how we might walk through cities; talk to our ancestors; look at a single square of paper until it opens up a new space inside our stomachs. She teaches us that to truly honor our beloved is to be attentive to every aspect of their real and possible selves. What follows is a condensed and edited version of our phone conversation.

—Forest Smotrich-Barr

Forest Smotrich-Barr: Gladys defines abstraction in the book as "meaning something that you can't reach." I'm wondering if you can speak to the different relationships that each of you has with abstraction.

Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore: I think her relationship with abstraction was one of purity. She thought, in a modernist tradition, that art could be based on experience, but it had to transcend it at the same time. And I think that was a big rupture in our relationship, where as a child, everything I did was beautiful to her. She was nourishing the things that made me different, like my femininity, my sensitivity, my empathy, my introspection—all of these aspects that in some way the world was against. But then when my work came into its own, and became decidedly queer and political, those things were vulgar to her. Abstraction to her was above that, and so that's one of these paradoxes that I circle around in the book. For me, I think that abstraction is a way of letting the world in, refusing the terms of oppressive structures that we've been given to look, even; to feel.

And I think that she did give me that possibility, but in the world, she was still imprisoned by the middle class upward mobility myth. She gave me an alternative to that in my head, because of the way that she described art as everything. Like, you walk outside, you see a leaf, and you look at the veins within it, or how the colors shift, or how it looks with the sun coming through, or what if it's on the ground; that's art. And in a lot of ways, that's what queerness is for me. Queerness is an everyday experience of the world that's always shifting, and it refuses the strictures, the artificial constraints that suffocate us. But she couldn't understand that, or refused to.

So to come back to this description of abstraction as something you can't reach, in a way, I think maybe the book is actually reaching it, or reaching towards it. I don't think there's anything you can't reach. What I mean by that is that this myth of art as being something pure, or outside of history, is damaging.

FSB: Absolutely. You write that your mother said about Gladys, when they were first introduced, "She loved that I was Jewish, but didn't look Jewish," which reminds me of the title of one of the anthologies you edited, *Nobody Passes*. How has the concept of "passing" touched your family's history and your own?

MBS: One thing I have never passed as in the world is straight. As a child, I was always seen as a girl or a faggot—I mean, the

wrong kind of girl, right—and so my life is definitely informed by that. I tried as a teenager to pass. I would see the way some guy stood, and be like, "I'm going to put my hands in my pockets like that." And then people would be like, "Why is that faggot putting her hands in her pockets like that, who does she think she's giving?"

And I would say, growing up in an assimilated Jewish family, [my family was] not interested in passing as not Jewish, for the most part. As a child I was very proud of my Jewish heritage. My parents were not observant, but they gave us the option of going to Hebrew school, and I chose to go. And it was maybe right after my Bar Mitzvah that I decided I didn't believe in God and I was like, "I don't want any of this." A lot of that was also because of Passover Seders at my relatives' house—this experience of seeing my relatives switch to Yiddish to say racist things about Black people. Seeing that, and then also the ways that misogyny was so rampant, [and] homophobia, and upward mobility at any cost. And that was a myth that Gladys was also entranced by, and was a part of. That was something I didn't realize before writing this book, how central she was to that myth. And I think that's passing.

And in writing the book ... I realized that during the Civil War, when Baltimore was under Union occupation, there were Jewish merchants smuggling goods to the Confederacy, and the vast majority of Jews in Baltimore supported slavery, like the vast majority of all white people in Baltimore. That is what assimilation means; assimilation into white supremacy. Most European Jews who were able to pass [did] ... and passing really meant upward mobility. And I didn't know any of that when I was noticing my relatives switching to Yiddish to say racist things about Black people, but I felt it.

I think often as radical Jews ... people will be like, "Oh, well, the Jews were the union organizers." But they also owned the sweatshops, right? So we need [to talk about] both, and I think a radical tradition in Judaism is not just about invoking our radical forebearers that have been erased, but also about challenging the violence that continues, and that we are a part of; the violence of that passing that continues today.

FSB: For sure. You said that you were surprised to learn in your writing process just how much Gladys was invested in that myth of upward mobility—what surprised you?

MBS: What I did not understand before writing this book was that she believed in having a creative life within middle class respectability. For me, survival meant rejecting that. When I was 19, and remembering that I was sexually abused by my father, who was Gladys's only child, or even before that, when I decided, "I am a faggot, and I'm going to tell the whole world and not hide it," I knew it erased all of my accomplishments. I knew it, but I didn't care, because it also meant that I could live. And it meant that I was going to refuse all of the violence as much as I could ... and [make] those connections, between white supremacy and misogyny; between the family and homophobia and transphobia; between mandatory masculinity and social violence; all of it has to go, right? And I think I thought that when she said that art was everything, she meant that nothing else mattered. I thought she meant that, but she didn't mean that. Because for her, art could only exist within middle-class respectability.

FSB: Totally, and similarly, you write about how Gladys always started with structure in her work, and only afterwards allowed herself to "become emotional." I'm curious how you might have used structure to access emotion in your writing process, or vice versa.

MBS: I think in her sense she was containing the emotion. I think some of it is about misogyny—and "women's work can't be too emotional, because otherwise it's not real art." For me, I'm always moving toward emotion. And, I think, partially because—as a child growing up in a world that wanted me to die or disappear, and then growing up with a father who was sexually abusing me, but it was never spoken of, and his upward mobility camouflaged the violence—in order to survive, I had to be cold. When my father was screaming at me, I had to look through him at one of Gladys's paintings on the wall or at the blank wall behind him. Or walking down the street, when people were telling me they wanted to kill me, you know, for being a queer or a flamer or gender transgressive or flamboyant.

But I think that now I know that moving toward vulnerability is what will save me. Going to the place when I first was writing and thinking, "I don't know what the hell my father's doing here," one way to write a more traditional book might have been, "Oh, well, he doesn't belong here. It's about this wonderful place of inspiration that I felt from this relationship with my grandmother." But of course, that wasn't all there was. And similarly, writing about her, I want to write about the ways that she participated in personal, familial and structural violence, which exist alongside the feeling of possibility, or openness, or freedom that she gave me; all of this is there. And so for me, the structure of the book comes through the writing, it's not the other way around.

FSB: I love that; that feels like such a poet's orientation to writing, which also comes through in the more researched parts of the book. You say about a biography of Frank O'Hara, "the way that a book filled with gossip can still be reverent." That seems like a very apt description of *Touching the Art* as well; there's a wonderful gossip quality to the historical elements. I'm wondering if you can speak more to the relationship between gossip and reverence in the book.

MBS: Oh, I love that. I think the reverence is accidental. I'm starting ... with the art itself, and then my memories, documents that I have, letters between us, photos of my grandparents and my father as a child from the 1950s. And then I go to Baltimore, and it's my experiences in Baltimore. And then, after that, I do what is more traditionally considered research. I'm trying to understand what [it was] like in the 1920s and 30s, living—as Gladys did—just two blocks from the legal dividing line between white and Black people in Baltimore. And then I realize, "Oh, well, Billie Holiday is basically an exact contemporary of hers." And she's an abstract artist too ... and she grew up in Baltimore. So then I'm reading her memoir, and then all these books about her, which are history, right? But they are history formed by gossip.

And, similarly, I'm reading books about Frank O'Hara, because I'm thinking about his relationship with Grace Hartigan. She was an abstract painter and he was instrumental to her career. So I'm thinking about this relationship between a straight woman and a gay poet, and how Gladys's best friend was a gay

artist in Baltimore who was instrumental to her career. And their relationship is not documented, right? But I can read about Frank O'Hara.

I think that history is as much what's left out as what exists. And some of what's left out is what actually happened, and some is what could have happened, and some is what we can never imagine. And I want it all there, as much as possible.

FSB: You write about your childhood synagogue donating funds to "plant trees in the Negev ... since no one told me that this was part of an Israeli government program to destroy Palestinian villages." How do you think Zionism relates to this conversation about Jewish American assimilation, both during your childhood and in light of the current genocide being carried out by the Israeli state in Gaza?

MBS: So as a child, when I went to Hebrew school, what could sound better than planting trees? If I'm in that moment, it's such a beautiful and nourishing act, right? It's like, "The land is turning to desert, and the desert needs trees." Thinking about it now, I'm struck by the level of brainwashing, the ways in which children are being recruited into this horribly violent act, because the trees are planted to camouflage the Palestinian villages that have been destroyed by the Israeli military. These villages have been wiped off the map. And as we see now, often the first thing they destroy are the trees. Because the olive trees are such a symbol of connection to the land. And the US government funds all of this. I think there are people that are ideologically Zionists, but then there are people who are like, "What about the trees we planted in the Negev?" And that's a child speaking, right? It's a child that refuses to learn the truth.

And I think that's what we're seeing now, among so many Jews

who have been brainwashed by Zionism, directly and indirectly. But it goes further than that, because the genocide in Gaza is a collaboration between the Republican and Democratic parties, between evangelical Christians and the Zionist lobby, and Jews barely even matter except as an ideological tool. [Right] now, we have this radical outpouring of brilliant and inspiring direct action among groups like Jewish Voice for Peace or IfNotNow, all of this inspiring structural analysis, intersectional analysis. But at the same time, we have a Congress that says, "If you are anti-Zionist that's anti-Semitic." Right now, that's the mainstream. While in this moment, everything is getting worse in Gaza. It has not changed the trajectory in Gaza at all, or in Israel.

So to come back to the book, what I think is instructional for me is that assimilation means assimilation into white supremacy, right? White flight doesn't just mean going to a "nicer" neighborhood, so you can have a safe place to raise your kids. It's not a neutral act. White flight means dooming the neighbors you left to racist structural neglect, for decades, that continues to this day. That path of assimilation, that path of white flight, is a path into white supremacy, and that's what we're seeing today; attachment to that violence at any cost.

FSB: You write about one of Gladys's pieces, "I'm saying we can imagine our way in, and we can imagine a way out." What ways do you imagine out, and how are they connected to imagining our way in?

MBS: In order to imagine a way out of anything, we need to understand everything that's there. I'm talking about looking at the art, and [how] it opened up a space inside me. So that's what abstraction can give us, right? But I don't want only that. That would be a beautiful dream, but a dream can only go so

far. And so in order to tell that story, or to feel it, I have to talk about the ways that Gladys let me down; about her refusal ever to engage with my work as an artist. And that's the genesis of the book—when I realized how much it would have meant to me if she had engaged with me as an artist. That place of loss, because once she died, I realized how much I wanted that to happen.

In order to tell the story, we need everything. All of the violence—whether it's personal, intimate, familial, structural, historical—we need to examine all of that too. That has to be inside. Without looking at all of that, there is no way out. I want all of it to exist at once, because that's how it is. So I could be looking at this piece of art, and all the textures, what's inside, but I can also be thinking about redlining in Baltimore, and how that continues to doom so many neighborhoods through racist disinvestment. I could be experiencing the art of Mark Bradford as a kind of pure engagement with abstraction and then realize he says that the show is about the failed project of Reconstruction and realize, "Oh, that's what I'm writing about."

So it all circles around itself, right? The experience of being in Baltimore and writing about what seem like random encounters; they're random, but they're also part of it. My experience of dancing in a club might also relate to the experience of the art might also relate to an experience of embodiment or failure. And I think in a way, the different pieces of the book are reaching toward one another. Do we get there? I don't know. But I know that we can't get there unless we have all the pieces.

Emily Simon IN MANY WAYS

At once a log of pandemic life in New York City and a meditation on selfhood, memory, and language, Emily Simon's first book is a lyrical and timely experiment in prose fragments.

Unafraid to tack with the wind, these fragments unfold asymptotically "as they perform the kind of politics they urgently call for."

—*Rosie Stockton*

In Many Ways is a thrilling accomplishment by one of the most compellingly distinctive minds of her generation.

—*Timothy Donnelly*

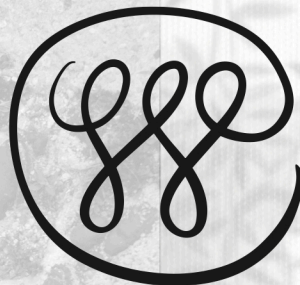
Emily Simon's *In Many Ways* pursues the tributaries of embarrassment through daily life and discovers ways to walk beside them. A lovely work of writing at the pace of living.

—*Hilary Plum*

EVENTS:

April 6, 7pm: Emily Simon & Monica McClure at Topos Too, Ridgewood, NY

April 20, 5pm: Emily Simon & Imani Elizabeth Jackson at Segue Series, Artists Space, NYC



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Ahmad Almallah BORDER WISDOM

In his second book of poems, Palestinian poet Ahmad Almallah seeks a language that captures the afterlives of the mother tongue.

Border Wisdom reassembles the loss of a mother, mother tongue, and mother land, and gives pain a passage. These poems are infinite and steadily moving in memory of all that's gone, and all that will be regained. A piercing collection.

—*Nathalie Handal*

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*

Almallah's writing is immensely relevant; we need his voice.

—*Naomi Shibab Nye*

POETRY

Joshua Garcia

Seated Female Nude, 1965

after Philip Pearlstein

There is no metaphor in the model seated on her hands. No mystery in the lines of her face or nuance to the arch of her lips. We, too, have found ourselves in a neutral pose, heads hung on an invisible axis like coats on hooks. We round our musculature. Softened, inert. Erase first instincts to smooth out the lines. Our weak spots find each other to create an illusion of symmetry. With our shoulders, arms, breasts, we level the tilt of the scale. *You are made a monster for ever wanting out from under it.* Through a discreet arrangement of shapes, we rein in our territories. The way our bodies fall in the light creates a mirror of our shadows. There is beauty in it—how our stillness knows no peace.

Seated Male Nude, 1962

after Philip Pearlstein

The abdomen activates in its waiting. Desire strikes a balance of alert and effortless recline—seated and eager to stir, to rise at the instant of being found. Coded, subtle. There are shadows of the erotic in every detail. *I don't see it that way.* Like feeling someone from another room, the face is the hardest to conjure. There is aggression in the lack of suggestion. Absence, faith. To be in this room is to not be everywhere else. Again, you dream of him, ask for mercy. Again, you sit up like an alarm. *Let the chips fall where they will.* This is pure form: a sweater draped over a chair. You were created and left behind.

Female Model on Ladder, 1976

after Philip Pearlstein

We contort ourselves against the given structures, hold up our bodies with the scaffolding we find. A balance of elements in tension with one another. *A slight variation of light, and all this will move.* In the park, youth desecrate a statue. Render it hideous with their paints. I praise them. *How would you feel if they did that to one of your paintings?* No monument is present without a voice. Shadows silver our embellishments, and erosion hardens our lines. You ask me what we are building. In my ignorance, I have instructed others in love; sometimes still, I hold a brush and scatter the artificial light.

Two Female Models on Mexican Blanket with Mirror, 1972

after Philip Pearlstein

Two bodies in a splintered gaze: *I don't think of myself the way you see me, as man.* The gravity of our flesh twists us in two, one leg heavy over the other, a shoulder turning back. The plane is defined enough: baseboards visible at the edges, folded blankets we put into a box. We feel gross in our bodies, catch side glances in mirrors—at ourselves, at each other. *I can't read you.* How we understand a body changes with our line of vision. An arm wrapped strongly around a leg; a hollow bell. *All parts are rendered with uniform focus . . . there is no room for existential doubt.* We make a stringboard of the evidence, take turns bending over, ask each other to tell of what we cannot see.

Reclining Nude on Tan and Purple Drapes, 1967 / One Leg Up, 1968

after Philip Pearlstein

The same pose over time, reversed, less rendered than before. They say we grow more uncertain with age. Funny how much the eye catches, how easily it's all lost. *Don't you know they can see you. . . .* One can be rendered quickly, with a small gesture, monstrous. Shadow curves. Deepens. Where does all the erased stuff go? *I honestly don't remember a lot of it. I just put it somewhere.* You admire the coat of a passerby. A second glass of wine. The void is flat and blue, unlike how the body slopes at rest, weight shifting, deciding what to hold up and what to let slack.

Torso, Female Nude, 1963

after Philip Pearlstein

To be a body without comparison, backed against a wash of gray-blue weather. Features exaggerated. *I want you to show me your interior world.* Naked. Reserved. Researchers simulate the acoustics of the Notre Dame before it burned. I tell you I do not like to walk in the city. I hear your yawns from the other room. Your hand rests in the elastic of your briefs. *This street, you say, is the most beautiful,* its daffodils humming in subtle variation: alabaster, geraldine, turmeric, peridot, and—there is no other word for it—yellow. Sound is transparent nearest to the altar. To be a body removed from its context, a singular landscape. There are many shadows. There are many sources of light.

References

Let the chips fall where they will.

Philip Pearlstein. "A Realist Painter in an Abstract World." *Philip Pearlstein: A Retrospective*, p. 13.

A slight variation of light, and all this will move.

Auguste Rodin. *The Cathedral Is Dying*, p. 68.

All parts are rendered with uniform focus . . . there is no room for existential doubt

Philip Pearlstein. "A Realist Painter in an Abstract World." *Philip Pearlstein: A Retrospective*, p. 15.

POETRY

Oswaldo Lamborghini (trans. KM Cascia & Garrett Phelps)

Born in Buenos Aires in 1940, Oswaldo Lamborghini was an unpublisbably obscene and untranslatably brilliant writer of poetry and prose, a queer icon, and a leading figure of the Neobaroque movement of the 70s and 80s. The three books of his work that appeared during his lifetime—El fiord, Sebregondi retrocede, and Poemas—had a devoted and often fanatical readership, which included novelist César Aira, who has since played a major role in Lamborghini's posthumous reputation. He spent his final years in Barcelona, working on Teatro proletario de cámara ("Proletarian Chamber Theater"), an immense cross-disciplinary project composed of writing, painting, pornography and photographic collage. He died, in exile, in 1985.

Untitled

1

Accused of complicity with the common ossuary
"you did not want each body to be distinguished
from its neighbor, crowned by a decent cross,"
I couldn't
I couldn't deny the accusation.
Certainly I licked my lips
thinking of this idea
of the common ossuary.

I kept walking
Like a good streetwalker.
Life you can lose, easy as teeth.
I kept on, on the street and in motels
all the same to me
a few drugs a lot of alcohol
going to the doctor every chance I got
to act like I wanted to be cured,
deceiving no one, an actor.
But I like hospitals and clinics
the doctor's white hands
exempt from eros
and even their prescription calligraphy.
Taken, their medication
became my own.
It's all so simple it's
even a bit embarrassing.
Ahh, but talk of grand love is lacking
and having even (even) a
tender word for the little dears.

Cut (but)
The verse
Where there's no cutting:
I couldn't deny that either.
—"If you can't write, you don't. Stay calm: don't lie to yourself
I know what I'm saying. I understand me
There are magnificent poets,
read them;
that's how you don't deceive anybody,
that's, that's how hard it is,
and you lot
you make me swallow the potato
which even (shit) catholics despise.

For me, there came the moment of "pure" chat,
accused of complicity—click—desire
for concentration camp
for cattle prod
for maximum security prison walls
color storm gray
accused: well, yes,

I wanted to be sure.
Now I'm sure.

I tell you all:
Lose no time
deceive not yourselves with these syllables
because everything they chain is true

Because all they do is chain things.
Catalepsy, religious and senile,
those are,
that is.

I demand a chair in the Academy of Letters
or a stable, "chronic" bed
in a psychiatric hospital.
I demand a cigarette.
I demand Erdosian's black house
and a sex change.

A bottle of milk breaks against the pavement
and the cat slips, trots, or *flings itself*
toward a nearby empty lot

2

What a stench
what a mess I am. I selfsatisfy
in selfsympathy.
Or better still, or maybe,
screwing over whoever
(whom?)
at any time maintained
there was nothing to hope for, from me.
And in free verse.
In verse cut
with brute ineptitude and distilled tears.

A pen.
A notebook.

I'm sad and drooling
in this motel
called "Dallas"
in the city of Silver Sea.

His balls shriveled—it said—
that lunatic Van Gogh.
Though I understand nothing of what I read,
understanding occurred when
when I brought home the bacon
and made my wife
Garba orgasm
and I even had a farm,

kids and a wife.
And I even played
word games. And I even
had the rhetoric
of sovereign
guard towers.

And now what have I got?
Rhyme, Purée Chef, Psychopharmaceuticals.

I got dressed to write this
(it rained) soaked to my sack, I came back.
I got undressed, back to bed again
again back to bed
Suspense: again but now
with notebook and pen.

I soak myself I'm so excited. The
drool drips:
my blue Bic with blue ink
with a white cap like a little flag
Me,
lined notebook, spiral,
América brand
—and the handwriting slanted right
infantile, for example.

And,
I know,
all the bad faith
the pimping out
the ampersand
& Lacan
& Lévi-Strauss
Telling us, once again, the Tale
Narrating it.

And now in my new job,
pin-setter in a bowling alley
from which I'll be fired, for sure
for showing up drunk down to my zipper
or not telling them my father died
the day I didn't show.
It would've cost nothing to call them:
nor would it have cost
the Clown
the old man
anything to wait
for another time
to hand his ass over to a nurse and a monitor.
Dead in intensive therapy.
They even massaged his heart.
He was skin, eyes, and bones.
Result of sex,
masculine, very

stripshow, very
prologue: whe-
re he could

The total mass of the cadaver looked like
a *lump*, a nut
no longer sensitive since dispersed.
And this, surely, has nothing to do with the universe.

I saw his white pubes
and the members of senectitude.

Woman is the body without organs
but unfortunately organized

3

Narrating it
And there too shall come
Demystifiers of me
Of the Tale
The State is blue
And when it laughs
Like a sword among the unarmed
The sweet fire of home
Warms feet damp with rain
Coffee steaming in the cup
Cigarette in lips
Something's about to happen
Match burns fingertips
Is tossed in anger
And another struck
Because the cigarette has gone out
(I repeat)
It's not good business.

4

What does it mean to be homosexual?
If I turned myself into a woman
it would be a joy for many
while others would suffer
like an animal
like in a soap opera
or the most sublime
works of art.

5

My head feels empty from all the torture.
A sharp emptiness
like when (I'm hungry)
the sphincter ends up
kind of half-crazed
after prolonged diarrhea.
Stupid reasoning:
well-since-one
time I wrote
now I *must*
go on writing.

An alternative?
I have none.

The body
they put their hands on today
was already mutilated, deformed.
I'm tired.
Effect of the sedative.
But if I sleep
tomorrow I'll wander around with my balls in a knot:
more wandering,
more knot.

from 'Alvear to Freud'

Madness is a second youth
to say nothing of childhood
(I had a friend...)
: like in chess
occupying any square
all the positions are awful
: Baudelaire was more concrete
he spoke of the irreparable

Skin begins to glow
pure milk and roses
twice-aryan love in solitude
(Cupid shall miss us all)
an actual young lady
: the franco-swiss
drawing professor
And I'm gone

If I came back to this place it was only for a moment
my former colleagues the poets will know how to forgive me
: I came to smoke a cigarette in the dressing room
and casually
annotate a phonebook:
the diva loved me in a different time
and can now only offer me pity
and good
pitifully thirsty
I'd long been longing for such pity
Troy Helen—Helen
Troy: pit stop in a dirty war

My word
—the only—
can yet herd sheep
and take it as dogma
lamborghinian koan:
everything is simpler than you think
my friends: gravestone

We have to round up Germán
: we deserve no better

Hartz

from 'Die Verneinung'

for César Aira

Prologue, or Conclusion

What twists of thought,
what absurd pigeons
how stupid, walking.
A naked heap, nothing in its favor.
No intensity. No salt.
What mid-dream commotion,
at odds, yet again, with the crucible of deeds.
And no daring in the summer sandpaper
where angle turns (changes) through empty
and the stump of knowing, through earned
agricultural terror: flesh from the furrow.
An eternity (sigh and aye).
Monumental inefficiency.

Two bodies drank the same potion,
were a single passion in the organs of
union with death.

The Book bedunes into the desert.
That's how it is, or will be.
No daring, either, in the tabula rasa
nor the parsimony of colliding iron.
Canvases exhibited on the wall. Music,
hidden behind a screen.
But why is the body sated
though no potion remains?
Model of emptiness held aloft on a hook—
the other wall, goosebumps on the plaster—innocent.

Stilled, quiet wool in every suit,
impossible to grasp along the axis
any salary long lost. Coin,
good work and even bad novels:
bitten into a wooden volume
or landscape tableau in spoon shape—or grey.
And rice fields planted by grammarians,
eyes weepy from the lack of response.
Let them be, oh gods, by their own hand freed!
They shall always love their own evil.
Cross the patio weeping, sequins or graffiti
and sleep in the bloom of pity
while tree clamors to sky
satisfied by lightning.
This is *chanson de geste*, *mío*
Cid beneath the swordstrikes of an orifice
impreterite or anal. Back, back,
But one must point to
the body parts.

I lived, wrapped
in a diamantine transparency of gin
when the war came to confirm
my most desired ghosts:
the most persistent, most beautiful.
And how I chased them!

Far, far away
(like clouds)
Closer: like a fleeing traveler
Each lack will be declared:
announced and laughed about.
Two bodies the mortal foe
of a silk fan posed between them
for a portrait.
Crimson.

Long years we waited for those lips,
our nipples plastered with jewels, with gold.
With a bra and even (yet or still)
high fishnets.
Long years.
Lips and the painting of those lips.
Long years.
A pose, another.
An accent between two wings, circumflex.
A kiss.

And now that we're in each other's arms
damp with mutual puppet sweat, now
a giraffe peeks over the altar:
we can't substitute the question
sated by the scarce thing now, either.
Substitute: neither one for the other
nor vertigo for a fairy tale.
The plumes of this army, more than sparse.
And still, quiet arms,
in infinite pose:
the one told those long years and,
and the rouge. As they say:
—The thirsty young man tips his elbow.
Or swordstrikes (declared translucent long before the fall).

Refrain like recovered money, blank check.
In a desolate field, they dig their own grave
—a stone between shoulders in place of a head—
because they know they need not die.
Anyway,
they dig
when (and if) the urns are overturned
there will be laughter.

The poison poses for an irregular line
because art comes down like that,
as extinct ritual.

But art is hemophilic.
Between them (art and line)
sterility quiets the voice
and sodomizes in error.

Finally,
executions for pleasure among the legions.
Occipital spelling
and Ohm, the duke of,
affirms the chestnut dressed in silk
intelligently stained with purple
and winged

(the earth cannot support him, the sky
cannot marry an hourglass ass)
a symbol of Zeus Bigshit
able to self-castrate with a smile
ear to ear.
A toilet, basically. Prayer, the duke of Ohm.
The shabby, torn paper of grammarians.

They don't build systems: they're stubborn.
Still one can see that these iron bars offend the park
and perpetually pull at them from the other side.
Time, condemned to an ornamental cave.
And the face slams against it, injures itself,
lacks imagination, even for protest.
But obtained, all in order.
Obtained, with letterhead
with letterhead
with the prison's watermark.

Reviews

Rifqa by Mohammed el-Kurd
Haymarket Books
Review by Nameera Bajwa

Mohammed el-Kurd, in his debut poetry collection *Rifqa*, traces a genealogy of Palestinian solidarity and survival through the memory of his late grandmother Rifqa el-Kurd. By writing in both narrative and prose, el-Kurd eulogizes the unyielding matriarch of his family. His words—rooted in both ancestral and historical memory—weave together the memory of Rifqa with the history of Palestinian resistance itself. The two become interchangeable, their histories indistinguishable. Rifqa is Palestine and Palestine is Rifqa.

If “poetry is a home for the dispossessed,” as aja monet argues in the foreword, then *Rifqa* is a return from exile, a reaching towards home.

El-Kurd writes, “I cried not for the house but for the memories I could have had inside it.” And in thinking of this allegorical house, Saidiya Hartman’s words come to mind: “Is perception most acute precisely at the very moment when everything to which one has belonged falls away? Is this why ‘the mother country’ is most sweet in the mouth of those gone, missing, left, taken, exiled? Is the moment one recognizes a home as *the* home the very same moment in which you lose it?”

The project of *Rifqa* nestles between el-Kurd’s recognition of the loss of his home *and* the call to return to it. El-Kurd places us neither here nor there; not at the point of origin (is there *just* one?) nor at its end (is there *even* one?) as he ameliorates through the pain of his people’s exile and displacement at the hands of the Zionist apartheid state. El-Kurd orients us in the direction of the home, and *Rifqa* is just that—a reaching *toward* home. This reality is not yet realized, and this future has not yet come to fruition. *Rifqa* is an attempt at freedom through stretching both back and forward in time towards home.

For el-Kurd, home is specifically his native Sheikh Jarrah, a neighborhood in East Jerusalem, where most families who—like the el-Kurds—had long resettled since armed Zionist settlers forcibly displaced them in 1948 during the Nakba. In thinking through el-Kurd’s home in Sheikh Jarrah, an intensely contested and militarized space threatened by Zionist projects of land acquisition, we see the neighborhood become a symbol for the entire occupation itself.

In the second poem of the book, “Who Lives in Sheikh Jarrah,” we are made witness to the ongoing dispossession of Sheikh Jarrah. The

title of the poem is lifted from a 2010 *New York Times* article written with the same name by columnist Kai Bird. Bifurcated into two halves, the poem is a meticulous repurposing of the original *New York Times* article. Its syntax is fashioned from sentence fragments; the poem is perhaps haunted more by the words which are missing than by the ones that tangibly appear on the page. At the very center of the poem, a headline half written by hand and half written in print reads:

*Colonialism in
Jerusalem killed the
peace*

El-Kurd deconstructs the original 2010 Kai Bird article into sentence fragments, and then from its guttural remains sutures the historical and familial memory of Sheikh Jarrah into the body of a poem. El-Kurd’s title, identical to Bird’s, has a more ambitious purpose than simply ironizing the style of reportage that he described, during a November 2023 protest in front of the *Times* building, as the “passivity” and “passive voice” of the American journal of record. Repurposing the language of a cultural and ideological opponent, el-Kurd is undermining the once unquestioned authority with which the *Times* feeds the American public a highly biased, distorted version of events in Palestine—one sustained through an ostensibly neutral narrative that in fact legitimates the occupation, apartheid, and dispossession the Zionist project is founded upon. He asks us to consider the various means through which cultural institutions of the United States either run with or against the grain of imperialist desire. At heart, the stakes of the fight that el-Kurd initiates with the *Times* is a battle over reality: who gets to name it, and what processes of violence and forms of restitution they make possible for others to see and move towards.

El-Kurd’s poems, scattered across the page, make use of a spatial disorientation that evokes Fanon’s words in *Wretched of the Earth*: “The colonial world is a compartmentalized world ... a world divided into two.” The bifurcated structure of the poem and the disordered spatial orientation of the words mirrors the bifurcated “colonial world” Fanon speaks of here. Its spatially disordered structure becomes allegorical for the occupation of Sheikh Jarrah and the very disordered nature of colonial violence itself. Captured in the way the poem evokes the literal, material occupation of *half* of the el-Kurd family home, divided into two by Zionist settlers, much like the colonial world is “a compartmentalized world divided into two.”

The project of *apartheid*—an Afrikaans word literally translated to “segregating, setting apart”—is undergirded by what Fanon described as a Manichean logic that structures a colonized society. Fanon explores how this Manichean world constructs a dichotomy between settler & native, colonizer and colonized, enslaver and enslaved; a dialectic

marked by antagonistic aims and projects.

Through evoking this Manichean relationship to space and society, the poem subverts the project of apartheid by spatially disorienting the language in the body of the poem. The way Israeli apartheid, like any colonial power, is undergirded by a Manichean dichotomy of native/settler is further disrupted by the structure of the poem. By intentionally disrupting the bifurcated dualistic structure of the poem, we see how el-Kurd asserts a Palestinian subjecthood as *beyond* the reaches of modernity and its systematizing impulses. It is only by “penetrating its geographical configuration and classification,” Fanon’s writes, that “we shall be able to delineate the backbone on which the decolonized society is reorganized.” In other words, the disordered structure of the poem is allegorical for the process by which a “decolonized society is reorganized.”

Sheikh Jarrah my youth is
gone;
bulldozers razed by Israeli

And yet, even as he traces the very materially violent history of his family’s dispossession, el-Kurd refuses to thematically foreground victimhood as the *only* narrative that matters. He proudly asserts a Palestinian agency and resistance—one that is both inseparable from and always contentious with Israeli settler colonial violence and the many fictions it propagates to substantiate its claim to indigenous land. By refashioning the words from the article and the author’s Zionist sympathies into a poem, el-Kurd resists the sanitization of Palestinian history that appears in *The New York Times* alongside other journalistic mouthpieces for U.S. imperialism.

In “Bulldozers Undoing God,” el-Kurd begins with an ode to Mahfoutha Ishtayyeh, a Palestinian elder who chained herself to an olive tree to protest its cutting down. Locating us at the site of this event, the poem begins: “A chain is corseting / the tree’s waist and hers, / flesh in flesh, / olive skin on olive skin.”

The poem, undergirded by this haptic melding of Ishtayyeh’s flesh with the olive tree, gestures toward an embodiment rooted in both body and the land. Reminding us of the stakes which accompany the occupation by writing “In Jerusalem, every footprint is a grave,” but also reminding us that “every grandmother is a Jerusalem.” That love and loss go hand in hand.

This was only love:
her skeleton is that of the tree’s,
roots stitched into land into identity.
Separations is like
unmaking love
ungluing names to places
undoing God.

A pulling pressure, soldiered:
occupiers occupy her limbs,
untangling a grandmother.

A soldier as old as a leaf born yesterday

pulls a trigger on a woman older than his
heritage.

Two martyrs fall.
One
Martyr
Falls.

Using a lexicon of loss, the poem defines Palestinian subjecthood as inseparable from the earth. In this synesthetic blurring of land and language, bodies in bondage, and ancestral and historical memory, the poem asserts a Palestinian sovereignty beyond the confines of the nation-state defined instead as one literally *rooted* in the land.

This thematic convergence of exile and resistance is perhaps most personified in the book’s namesake: Rifqa el-Kurd. “Rifqa,” the titular poem, begins with Mohammed recalling his grandmother’s past rather than his own. Rooted in Rifqa’s memories, the poem traces the many times she was forcibly displaced from her home and exiled from her country by the Zionist state apparatus. By tracing familial histories of dispossession, Mohammed el-Kurd links Rifqa’s exile in the original Nakba in 1948 to the occupation of Rifqa el-Kurd’s home in Sheikh Jarrah by Zionist settlers in 2020.

The historical undertaking that Mohammed el-Kurd embarks on in *Rifqa* recalls Saidiya Hartman’s claim that “every generation confronts the task of choosing its past ... inheritances are chosen as much as they are passed on.” As witnesses to this genocide, we cannot ignore the past that created today’s horrific reality. In choosing our past, we must recall a Palestine that predates October 7, 2023, one that predates the aftermath of 1967, and 1948, and Theodor Herzl and Zionism itself.

It makes sense, then, that for Mohammed el-Kurd, his inheritance (and ours by virtue of this shared struggle) is the memory of his grandmother and the long history of Palestinian exile and resistance she comes to represent. As the inheritors of Rifqa el-Kurd’s life, we, Mohammed el-Kurd’s readers, are tasked with fighting for the future of a freed Palestine that Rifqa never witnessed come to fruition.

Like el-Kurd reminds us in the final poem of the book, “Farewell, Palestine’s Jasmine,”: “Some people cannot exist in the past tense.”

Some people cannot exist in the past tense.

Palestine will be free, and Palestine is saving us. The Palestinian fight for liberation is at last unmasking the concrete connections among the different factions and interests who have joined together to maintain occupation and apartheid and enact this latest round of genocidal violence. Newly radicalized people are researching and witnessing how private investment security firms and other wartime profiteers net billions off this genocide and

many others; how American weapons, unwillingly paid for by a constituency overwhelmingly calling for a ceasefire, funds this decimation of an entire people; and how Israel, in its assault on Gaza and poisoning of the water, has enacted an ecological destruction worse than the carbon footprint of more than twenty small countries combined. People who want to join el-Kurd in the fight for justice and liberation are already thinking strategically about how to break up this alliance of forces in order to make possible a liberated world where the life of everyone between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean sea is deeply worth living.

Natalie Diaz's words in *Postcolonial Love Poem* come to mind: "Do you think the water will forget what we have done? What we continue to do?" Do you think the land will forget what we have done? Or rather, failed to do? What we continue to fail to do?

We watch—day by day, country by country—as calls for a ceasefire multiply while the world watches in abject horror at the decimation of Gaza. Perhaps most importantly, Palestine is saving us because Palestine is *radicalizing* the global population at an unprecedented rate.

Palestine is not a relic of an ancient past reaching toward an end, nor is Palestine a victim of modernity's encroachment on indigenous peoples and ways of life. Palestine is alive and breathing and fighting. Even in death, Rifqa, and el-Kurd's memory of her, unravels this Orientalizing genocidal Zionist narrative which locates Palestine as a place of the past. It is the inheritance of Rifqa el-Kurd's past, and the way Mohammed el-Kurd eulogizes her, that orients us towards a future in which Palestine is free.

***Island Falls* by Owen Toews**

ARP Books

Review by Patrick DeDauw

Owen Toews wrote a short and weird novel about how to talk about geography. That word, here, means both 1) the organization of human life in space across the earth's surface; and 2) the process of trying to understand and explain those patterns and dynamics to other people.

What human geography means in practice probably seems murky even to fans of some of the field's leading public intellectuals, whether Ruth Wilson Gilmore or David Harvey. It's not a question of "Where is Nebraska?" Gilmore explained to the joy of militant geographers everywhere, but of "Why is Nebraska?" Maintaining your fascination even on the second, arguably richer question isn't always the easiest thing to be able to do. Maintaining someone else's—well, good luck. For those who think of geographic analysis as providing maps for the campaigns that can change that world, as Gilmore and Harvey certainly do, there are real stakes to making that "why" fascinating enough to the right people at the right time.

Island Falls (ARP 2023) is narrated by a graduate student in geography at a "former department store" in midtown Manhattan observing and learning from another graduate student in geography. This second student, a reluctant protagonist named Jan, got himself sucked from a Canadian prairie home into this central place in order to find the means of understanding why the part of the planet he comes from is the way it is. Navigating a New York that could as uneasily be a decade ago as 40 years in the future, the characters try to figure out what they're doing taking workshops, planning occupations, playing basketball, getting evicted, and writing term papers. What could be grim insider baseball—I'm likely a bad judge, being a geographer, too—plays as something different, a back-and-forth between research and presentation that leaks out of the field. The book's cramped episodes of a clumsy life spent figuring things out, and the fitful attempts to do something with it, stage a quietly unsettling challenge for writers with politics, asking us to think about what it is we think we're doing, and how to do it better.

This narrative line is repeatedly overtaken by the drafts of Jan's PhD project, awkwardly enough not taking the form of a dissertation. "People in my country like inquiries," he said. I couldn't tell if he was kidding or not." If you're familiar with Canada, the joke is a bleak one. These intercut pieces make up the outcome of an inquiry, with enumerated findings of fact left in a printer, presented in a class, mailed to a friend who barely gets what you're doing. It could just as well be titled "*Why* is Island Falls?" but that would probably be too cute.

Jan's report, "an anatomy of evil, or something, from what seemed like the perspective of an escapee, or a liberating army," describes an industrial settlement in the Canadian prairies, a place where people were thrown together under devastatingly unequal terms. In *Island Falls*, the uneven conditions of these people's spatial integration into work and life—as residents of the mill's/town's forced-assimilation-camp North Wing, its paper-manufacturing Central Wing, its Laundry and Café Wing, and an ambiguously situated and eventually dam-riven Shantytown Wing—come to stand in for explanations for the type of people they are, what they're entitled to, and what can legitimately be done to them. Some wings' residents can work as long as the mill is running, others only temporarily when there's a surge in demand, and others have to live among the industrial runoff until they change how they organize their lives, though even that job isn't guaranteed. The despotic boss—let alone "capitalism"—doesn't freehandedly plot these hierarchies, but his enforcers and exploitees definitely contest and replot them as capital reorganizes itself in lurches from crisis to crisis.

The inquiry traces how people with varying levels of effective control over the state-like institutions of the company town seek to manage internal and external pressures for change in particular ways: partitions, expul-

sions, industrial invitations, patrols, divestments, strikes, repurposings, prisons. There's a lot, but not enough, change in the enforcement of rules for how different people are supposed to reproduce their lives in relation to one another, and to the forces that give them spotty entitlement to receive goods and services where they live. The report's author feels compelled to itemize normal and terrifying lists—of neighborhood association fines, of known ways of avoiding overseer checkpoints, of backup sources of income, of sister mill towns, of balls and parades—that point everywhere to the vast work required to reproduce partitioned social life. Regional development thrashes unstably onward, buffeted by the planetary rate of profit and fits of state intervention, while differently equipped people try to make their own lives out of what's available.

There's a code to crack, but it's not deep—maybe two letters off. The report isn't indirect because the human experience is impossible to describe. It's more that there may be things we need to encounter again, awkwardly, in order to actually get it, especially when we think we—especially we—already know. It's funny how many concrete things come into view when Toews, through Jan, dials us *up* a level of abstraction. Reducing complexity does make key aspects of complexity—the strategic ones we need to act on—clear. The bizarre effect of the report's relentless references to residents' home wings, without the expected qualifiers that a clever reader knows are implied, is to help us grasp anew and differently how the racism produced by and through the built environment has structured even some radical assumptions about people's interests, worth, and priorities.

The text is cold. Its summary prose casually invokes dim historical events, as Shantytowners are themselves partitioned in an unstable hierarchy by "ancestral proximity to the North Wing and to past insurrections." Even when people do organize themselves to think how people could relate with each other differently—beginning to account for what to do about the genocide in their midst—it's not a rally speech. It's more like passing by a place we swear we can remember from somewhere.

The book's acknowledgments let us know that *Island Falls* emerges from visits to mill-like towns in actually existing Manitoba—stark and too ordinary in the archival and original landscape photographs Toews places throughout. The composite town's not real, but it basically is. For those of us who rage at injustice, professionally or not, it seems like a weirdly practical question to ask how, exactly, we find ourselves in any place "where partition, atrocity, and quarterly returns sat so snugly side-by-side." Synthesizing these social-scientific research trips into the quasi-artistic output of a fictional character, narrated in a novel by some-one unlikely to be the author, Toews is doing something strange—I'd say making something strange, but it almost feels like invoking Brecht will make you stop catching my drift here.

Let me try this another way. The thought-terminating cliché—"it is what it is," for example—doesn't only do its pacifying work among people opting into political complacency. There may even be phrases that we like to recite that we use to do the same thing: "all struggles are interconnected," "shocked but not surprised," or "settler colonialism is a structure, not an event." What was inevitable and what was contingent about how those interconnections came about? What does that tell us about building the concrete forces necessary to transform them? What are the parts of that structure, and why do they move together, many times, and apart, other times? How often do we invoke Amiri Baraka's profound "changing same" to actually argue that a same is not, in fact, changing? As Jan's observer defends his work, "He had turned his attention to the place itself, the whole prefabricated place, every part of it implicated in every other part. He tried to present, as simply as he could, that connectedness, and the way people there had been made to relate to each other." If we grasp the fundamental outlines of why we are where we are, then what is to be done?

A thought-provoking rhetorical question or five, of course, isn't any more useful than a cliché—which itself might be a necessary shorthand. But encouraging us to encounter things diagonally, sometimes, is worth a shot.

Toews's first book, *Stolen City: Racial Capitalism and the Making of Winnipeg* (Arbeiter Ring Press 2018), grows out of his own dissertation in geography. This intensely different book sharply and faithfully recounts the facts of how people in a race-riven class society found vehicles (churches, nations, business improvement districts, unions, armies, country music scenes, inquiries, condo boards) to set, contest, and reset the terms of the human transformation of the land and of each other across a whole region. A carefully researched nonfiction record, it's also written to *shreds*—a description of what happened that shows us what *could* be done by showing us what *has* been done, for centuries. Toews, it's worth mentioning, is also an organizer.

Reading *Stolen City* and *Island Falls* together teaches us something key about how to see familiar horrors anew, and how to think about and struggle with the inescapable challenge of telling that story in a useful way. How do we learn things about the world—about why there is suffering and what people can do about it—and how do we teach people what we've learned? How do we, collectively, snap out of it, and into something else?

I'm sorry to say for the poets that Jan's anguished handwringing over finding the appropriate literary form never emerges as, in itself, all that interesting of a question. His desperate joke at the end about writing this into a musical, to make usable explanations "sing to us, the way they sang to him," falls flat. Parlor games, like basketball, aren't bad just because they're not practically oriented. We learn a lot

in the process. But thinking about how to put together things we know so that other people can encounter them, be changed by them, and make them useful—that’s the whole point, isn’t it?

Sustaining Air: The Life of Larry Eigner
by Jennifer Bartlett

University of Alabama Press
Review by Stephen Ira

Sustaining Air: The Life of Larry Eigner, Jennifer Bartlett’s new biography of Eigner, is a boon. We ought to be very grateful to this author for her tireless research and careful approach to the life and work of this underappreciated poet. Why, indeed, is Eigner’s name so infrequently spoken, when it was so well-known to colleagues and friends like Robert Grenier, Cid Corman, Robert Creeley, Ron Silliman, Robert Duncan, Denise Levertov? These same colleagues spoke and wrote of his vital interventions into Charles Olson’s projective verse and his resulting seminal contributions to the development of Language poetry. Still, ableism shrouds disabled relationships to life and literary production in secrecy and shame, and Eigner struggled all his life to enter a social world that afforded him few if any accommodations for his cerebral palsy.

We can also say that, frankly, Eigner’s contribution is hard to apprehend because it is intimidating. Olson wrote of “the breathing of the man who writes,” but it was Eigner who, casually and without pomposity, took up this notion and attached the dazzling high stakes of his own precarious life, proceeding to dispense jagged, dryly-delivered, primary-colored insights on the phenomenal world. His descriptions of weather and color tantalize with idiosyncrasy; they slip frustratingly easily from the mind. That a disabled man could accomplish these effects—that his problems with his body were produced by an inaccessible world, and that his body itself enabled rather than hindered the development of his style as a poet—was a matter long ago resolved for him. His description of the way he perceives is so matter-of-fact in its high modernism:

He saw things without thinking they
didn’t let him look, they
included him

so much That his eyes hung like moss

And hanging-moss eyes are not a question of politics or even dignity—in Eigner’s arch descriptions of disabled life, he bounces over them both. It is a simple question of what Olson had already said about the body, of saying what the words that push inside your particular body have to say.

When Eigner’s line moves across the page along with what he called the “wild side” of his body—that is, the side with more tremors—it doesn’t need disability liberation as a tool to do so. We may certainly wish, and

we do, that Eigner had had access to more community, more resources during his life. He might have lived longer, for one, and his thought might have evolved in useful ways, but Bartlett takes care not to write about these possibilities in such a way as to diminish the value of Eigner’s actual life and work. Even without access to these things, his power and agency within his own poetry was absolute. “If life, things, weren’t so interesting, it, they would kill me,” he wrote. As it was, they gave him what he needed to write, even over many years in isolation in his parents’ home. It’s hard not to think about Emily Dickinson, who also so accentuated the social aspect of poetry by exercising an isolation-saturated perceptual apparatus. Eigner’s formative experiences with other disabled people were in institutional situations that set up everyone involved in them for pain. These experiences, and his resultant cynicism on questions of disability solidarity, are painful to read about. Bartlett reminds us often how Eigner repudiated identification with disability, but she emphasizes that this did not mean a disavowal of his body. In fact, it meant a full identification with it, untroubled by the meaning placed on it by those around him. Eigner assumed the exaltation of his body as a tool of poetry, “a machine for talking.” Bartlett’s respectful insistence on the possibilities of disability liberation makes a fine counterpoint to Eigner’s cynicism about solidarity. He thought of any association with other disabled people as an inevitable path to humiliation and infantilization, but the care Bartlett exercises in her account of his life is itself a testament to what such association, in the form of solidarity, has to offer Eigner. Considering all these seemingly contradictory facts requires equanimity, political courage, literary acumen, and love, and Bartlett delivers in spades.

The care she takes with Eigner’s story makes legible the ways in which *all* poets, not only disabled ones, emerge into literary history not purely “on their own merits,” but as a function of the care networks that enable them. Bartlett here particularly excels in describing Eigner’s painful and beautiful relationship with his mother, Bessie Polansky. It was Polansky who advocated for her son to be educated, and to escape institutionalization; Polansky who took dictation for him and later, bought him a typewriter, a life-changing device; Polansky who loved poetry, and shared this love with her son. It’s true also that it was Polansky who was often cruel to him, and whose forms of care kept her son isolated and infantilized. Bartlett holds all this and correctly insists that Eigner deserved better, and so did his mother—they both deserved access to forms of care and assistance that don’t make any reasonable person want to scream about wages for housework.

Eigner hated being read as a “disabled poet,” as some kind of unusual “cripple” success story, but his public success as a poet often came with this pitfall. When the poets he admired wrote of him in reviews and blurbs—poets of the Black Mountain and the proto-Language

schools—they tended to do so in this idiom, foregrounding not his body and the poetry he made with it, but his body’s pathology, its diagnosis. Bartlett offers a thoughtful examination both of Eigner’s desire for such acclaim and visibility, and of his rage and frustration that this was the form in which they came. Strangely, however, Bartlett historicizes this rejection, and Eigner’s rejection of conventional narrative, as a rejection of “confessionalism,” which she chooses to represent with two figures: Robert Lowell and Elizabeth Bishop, the latter of whom is famously the opposite of a confessionalist. Eigner himself seems to have been not so much anti-confessional as not very interested in the whole thing. He spoke of Lowell’s “academic touch”—but even this was a reaction not to Lowell’s work but to his dismissive remarks about Eigner’s own poems, which, Bartlett reports, Eigner had initially wanted Lowell to read. The problems that attend to telling readers about personal struggle pertain to a much larger set of aesthetic choices, movements and patterns than confessionalism alone. In misidentifying Eigner’s experimentalist style as a rejection of confessionalism, Bartlett mistakenly displaces onto confessionalism this array of larger concerns.

Ron Silliman felt that Eigner was “the first man to isolate words/phrases/perceptions in such a way as to force the attention onto them, not to the context.” This placement of attention may be easily mistaken for a disavowal of the social or political, but in fact such attention ends up asking how language feels in the body. For Eigner, it feels precarious, insufficient, relational, gorgeous, painful, and yes, politicized, as in this description of navigating power, humiliation, dependence, love, and care with his mother:

every day afterwards I sat at the table with her
and said the same thing

no, I don’t need any help
I can get the food by myself
or I’ll wait, I
was never hungry, for food

I never dreamed that moment

on my birthday she bakes a cake
I wish I could do one for her
from under my feet

Asking how language feels in the body, for Eigner, is the ultimate version of Olson’s “composition by field,” and Bartlett’s biography shows us Eigner’s central role in transforming many Black Mountain-type notions into Language-type notions. The closeness and depth of his relationship with his friend and colleague Robert Grenier, which Bartlett writes about beautifully, can illustrate for us the depth of Eigner’s influence on the latter movement: when we read Grenier’s famous provocation, “I HATE SPEECH,” we may think of Eigner’s efforts to embody Olson’s poetics in a body that struggles with speech as a physical task. We can thank Jennifer Bartlett

for the reminder that some of Language poetry’s beginnings lie in Larry Eigner’s experimental account of his embodied life—that it was not just a coincidence or a matter of personal affection that made Ron Silliman dedicate his 1986 Language anthology, *An American Tree*, to Eigner. There are so many different types out there who are bound to be interested in this biography—Language poetry people, lovers of the Black Mountain avant-garde, people who like embarrassing stories about Robert Duncan, disability arts people, disabled people who recoil from the notion of disability art, family abolitionists, and other theorists of care—and Bartlett’s biography provides all these with fruitful jumping off points. I look forward to an Eigner revival.

***In Lieu of Solutions* by Violet Spurlock**

Futurepoem
Review by Rosie Stockton

The opening lines of Violet Spurlock’s *In Lieu of Solutions* begin at the farthest point from the eponymous irresolution: a debate.

We debate about my tiny titties.
— You think they are getting bigger,
— I think they are getting smaller.
 ° Predictable.
— You say that I don’t see myself
— From the side.
 ° See, that’s an argument.
— You may offer me sensory details
— About how you view my profile
— But I process it as evidence
 ° (Against my perspective)
— For which I am grateful.

In a blissful parody of a logical proof, the syntax ignores the bullet points that disrupt the two speakers’ exchange. Eight bullet points, to be exact; a number that finds formal echoes in the book’s eight sections, and again in Beverly Dahlen’s epigraph: “I have an eighth of the solution.” And since we find ourselves opening a poetry book that begins with a debate, it is worth emphasizing that Spurlock competed in policy debate as a teenager. It is perhaps no coincidence that the number eight is also a staple of the competitive debate world, where the format is organized around eightfold arguments and eightfold speeches.

But, for now, the point is the conflicting perceptions of growing or shrinking titties, not numeric form. The first poem invites us to consider two people considering whether titties are, in fact, getting bigger or smaller. But this disagreement is not the point either. What is under examination is the tension between “sensory details” and the word “titties.” Can the relationship between these two things (bodies and words) be rescued from the status of “evidence?” How can we possibly know what is objectively true? As the poem proceeds, the argument is temporarily solved by a tale told by the speaker’s *Other*, in which “A man wins and loses the love of a fairy.” Spurlock tells us it doesn’t exactly matter what hap-

pens in the literal fairy tale, “Because the surface is so rich” and the teller of the tale tells it well enough “for anyone to fall in love.” Even if the form of the fairy tale doesn’t triumph in matters of truth, it does so in matters of love.

The crisis of Love and the crisis of Bodies haunt *In Lieu of Solutions*, always trying to wriggle out of the questions they are trapped in: what does it mean to win or to lose? to have or to have not? to get bigger or smaller? Falling in love with the fairy tale teller isn’t the solution to the gap between words and bodies, even if it brings the speaker so much pleasure she temporarily puts down her insistence on her receding titties. Later in the book the speaker interrupts herself while wondering how to demand and give love, to demand or give anything at all: “*Oprah moment: / you can’t give what you don’t have.*” We might rebut this with a “Lacan moment”: “Love,” as Lacan says in Seminar XII, means “giving what you don’t have to someone who doesn’t want it.” Sinking into the stakes of *having* or *not having* (Love or certain sized titties), I searched the book for a “Spurlock moment” and landed on this: “*I came to this party to be introduced to a man so bisexual / he could cure me... He doesn’t want me. I’m cured.*”

The brilliance of the statement “I am cured,” is in its failure, its theatrics, its petulance, its metaphysics of empathy: don’t recognize me. This “cure” rings with the cruelty and relief of a joke. Cured of what? The burden of gender, or the burden of being desired? The imperative to the burden of proving it, of turning over evidence to prove oneself, and one’s gender, as (as if it was possible) ontologically legitimate? If the Other’s desire involves inevitable misrecognition, is the best we can hope for gorgeous invisibility?

Winner of the 2023 Other Futures Award, Spurlock’s debut book of poems starts with a debate around the status of the trans body’s relation to description and ends with the trans body’s relation to metaphysical & material administration. To put it simply, the trans body poses a problem: logically, medically, linguistically, figuratively, formally. In terms of the latter, the book quickly gives way from argument into other poetic forms: the lyric, the concrete poem, the epistolary, the riddle, automatic writing. We may formulate the opening provocation as such: what responsibility do words and their utterers have to describing the body—titties, pussy, etc? “Are my titties an image?” asks the speaker. “Perhaps.” “My titties certainly have a spectral existence. / If I describe them to you, I am both extending / And negating the imagined space that they fill.” And later, when the speaker’s friend says, “Well, my pussy doesn’t quite get hard these days,” the speaker responds by saying: “— It is important that we extrapolate no fact / — About her body from this word.”

Description only mystifies. Spurlock so brilliantly says it and then invites us to imagine otherwise. What if the body owes the word

nothing, and words owe the body everything? “I love my friend’s pussy because a word was made different in response to a need,” Spurlock writes. “I love my friend’s pussy because I cannot speak its name without getting free.” This book is just that: “words made different in response to a need.” Not as solutions, but as a means to freeing the body from the burden of evidence. To the speaker, her titties are *and* aren’t an argument. If gender is an argument, can poetry solve it?

Yes, but more importantly no. But even more importantly, Spurlock argues *against* the notion that poetry ought to offer a solution—political, social, emotional—to the gulf between bodies and language. As the bullet points of logic are massaged into lyrical address, the section “A Dream Phrase Vanished” offers a litany of political worry interwoven with hope. The lines are literally braided, the syntax only beginning to make sense through scanning between multiple lines. Marked with both anxiety and calmness, the poem gently tumbles down the page until it pools at the very end. This is one way of thinking about a solution: one thing dissolves into another. The poem responds to the “emotional science project” of Bernadette Mayer’s *Studying Hunger*. But Spurlock’s version of an emotional science project is marked with a repetitive concern: “what if I can’t think my way out of my body with love”.

One of my favorite lines in the book returns us to the opening fairy tale, where we must confront the fact that even fairy tales can’t escape the claws of exchange: “Remember how the Tooth Fairy taught us we could sell our bodies.” As if we could get rich off loss, win by losing, trade bone for metal, bodies for resources, evidence for recognition. This line jumped out at me while Spurlock was reading the poem “Voice Polish” at her book launch at the Poetic Research Bureau in Los Angeles. On the page, the words of the poem appear in a cacophonous traffic jam: some words are underlined, others appear bold. The page is a crowded, loud, unrestrained deluge of contradicting thoughts, as if to exhaust every possible angle of the problem. No corner of trans discourse is left unturned, including one of its most fundamental questions: how can transness be rendered politically and metaphysically legitimate in general without making an individualizing appeal to a predetermined gendered body? How do our narratives—that are both coerced and freely given—allow for the indeterminacy of the trans body?

Out loud, Spurlock performs “Voice Polish” in the style of “spreading,” or “speed reading,” a technique in the competitive debate world where the speaker makes their argument by speaking as fast as they possibly can with the goal that their opponent will fail to respond to all the arguments posed in one’s speech in the allotted amount of time. The velocity of Spurlock’s “spread” is thrilling, breathless, and physical. Like screaming in the mirror with equal

fury, incoherence, and desperation: “And I’m just going to say this every time, fucking transition and stop this nonsense.” *Let there be light.*

In order to answer the implicit question of the book—can the speaker transition through writing a poem?—Spurlock enacts (*in lieu of* the question) a poem’s transition from one form to another. If a book can have a volta, it happens in “A Pawn Upon A Pawn.” Here, we find the exact same language in “Voice Polish” unraveled into a dazzling, gentle lyric. The “transitioned” poem is bridged by “The Unseduced,” where the speaker traverses the gendered acuteness of “having two birthdays.” When we read “Love’s lilting tears blessed the pleasure desert,” we find ourselves far from the eightfold bullet points that opened the book, but placed squarely back in the question of love, home sweet home in the lyrical form. Spurlock’s ability to traverse the drastic spectrum of form draws attention to the material of language as it mediates her own relationship to “birthing” herself. Many poets have attempted the heroic task of denaturalizing the lyrical “I” from coherent self-hood, but Spurlock dares to push it further: giving the same content a new form.

Spurlock teaches us, though, to know better than to think that a poem can offer refuge for “an afternoon spent / confronting the infrastructure / which comprises & compromises so many lives.” She stands against the idea that a poem ought to offer redemption, solution, or cure to violence, longing, or self-hood. Even if the poem literally can transform, the poet can speak her own transition into reality, the poem and the speaker remain not only uncured, but fundamentally incurable. Like the discourse of psychoanalysis that promises no cure from our suffering but only the working-through via traversing—*in language*—the symptoms we repeat, Spurlock brilliantly enacts the repetition that could help her find a form that makes life more livable.

Where Spurlock began with the body theorized, we end with the body spiritually administered. Trying to explain the “spiritual effects of estrogen,” the speaker reaches “towards the unification of sensation and emotion.” No stranger to historical materialism, Spurlock sees the administered body in doctor’s office waiting rooms fondling fake ferns in the hands of Marxist theorists, where we must think of “nothing but the means of production my body a mere conduit.” But the dialectic offers no solution either, just another turn in the argument, with more insight, tantalizingly, just around the corner, if only the body—or the poem—could make the proper argument. Instead, Spurlock demands, “I know I prefer my opiates administered metaphysically / I don’t want to know where it’s coming from I want to know / It’s coming from nowhere.” The metaphysical assertion moves us beyond the political frame, and returns us to the infinite (im)possibilities of nowhere: a world without argument, without evidence, without solution. The ending returns us to the begin-

ning—as the other epigraph attributed to kari edwards invites us to tilt the book’s formal rhyme of 8 onto its side into ∞ (infinity), and we are left “searching for an endless solution...”

***Night of Loveless Nights* by Robert Desnos, trans. Lewis Warsh, Winter Editions**
Review by Joe Elliot

Winter Edition’s lovely new volume, *Night of Loveless Nights*, by Robert Desnos, translated by Lewis Warsh, is a must-read for students of Modernism and of how its torch has been passed on to Postmodern poets. Desnos, pal of Benjamin Peret and an active member of the Surrealist group in Paris between the wars, was a dynamo of literary activity among the literary vanguard, publishing three novels, several books of poetry, writing reviews of jazz and cinema, working in radio and collaborating on screen plays. He was known in particular for his automatic writing. Apparently, Desnos would fall into a dreamy half-sleep and thus take dictation in order to create his poetry. He was practicing what the manifestos were preaching. He isn’t a poet advocating automatic writing; he is doing it, and doing it beautifully. *Night of Loveless Nights*, like Crane’s poem, a sustained and wildly inventive meditation on the difficulties of Love, is a pivotal work of Surrealism. As the title suggests, the poem is a compression and compendium of all love-lorn tropes, the whole tradition going back to the 12th century in one poem, all the nights into one night. It’s a summing up and taking stock and emptying out so that at the end it can move on and call for revolt. As the book’s informative afterward by David Rosenberg suggests, the extra-ness of Desnos’s poem is a way of pruning the tradition of all its falsehoods:

...a form of grandiosity which language itself makes inevitable. They undercut it in *Night of Loveless Nights* by allowing it to exhaust itself in an anti-grand opera encompassing all the socialized manners of civilization—shedding them, as it were, by tossing them off extempore...

In a similar vein, the poem is notable for the war between the perfect surface of its alexandrines and neat rhyme schemes and the chaotic and excessive energy of its mysterious turns, hyperbolic sensibility, and strange imagery (“the beautiful mouth with the man-eating teeth”). The poem is both supremely rational and supremely irrational, completely sincere and totally campy (“... what we used to call deadpan”). It is this ambiguity, this having it both ways, that one can see the attraction for Warsh, a second-generation New York School poet, a young man coming into his power during Woodstock and Vietnam. Desnos’s poem offers a kind of real excellence and discipline and achievement in the context of wild freedom. He shows this 60s poet how they can still be an authentically reimagined part of the tradition, late and messed up though it may be.

The publishing history of the book is also instructive. The New American Poetries of the 50s through the 70s were all about revolution, taking over the means and modes of production. Poets became printers and publishers and organizers, not waiting for a counter-revolutionary establishment to affirm their work. The tradition had become dysfunctional, unable to absorb vital new energies, and they had to proceed by any means necessary. Thus, David Rosenberg, pal and peer of Lewis Warsh, devotes a whole issue of his magazine, *The Ant's Forefoot*, to Warsh's translation. The magazine's name of course refers to a section of Pound's Cantos, a quintessentially modernist work, wherein the narrator seeks redemption from their vanity and their wrongs. In this passage the tiny and insubstantial ant's forefoot is what saves the narrator; and thus, by extension, it is the ephemeral and fleeting mimeograph machine that saves poetry, that brings Desnos to these new and eager readers. At the same time, Warsh publishes Rosenberg's first translations of the Psalms. This kind of mutualism and collaboration, this ethos of *poetry helps those who help themselves*, introduced by Modernists as an alternate survival strategy, becomes a central way of life for poets in the bloated consumerist society of the 70s. The handsewn chapbook gives Poetry a safe, off-the-grid residence, an alternative to Levittown, which, of course, is everywhere.

Lewis Warsh was a great poet. I remember hearing him read in the early 90s with Wang Ping at Granary Books and how he opened my eyes to the sentence, how it could simultaneously be a vehicle of continuity and discontinuity, how, freighted with both everyday specificity and otherworldly mystery, the sentence could sing and restore us to a place of seeing. Thirty years later, at a *Brooklyn Rail* reading, Lewis batted clean up, bringing the audience with him on his swervy mind-trips, wowing us with his psychedelic clarity. Lewis was also a good fellow poet, taking the time to converse at events, gracious and sly and light, always receptive and always encouraging. I always looked forward to seeing him at readings, symposia, AWP, book parties, and especially at the Poetry Project. He was a kind of poetry glue, holding communities together with his presses, Angel Hair and United Artists, and teaching creative writing at LIU, encouraging both students and teachers. His passing to cancer has been a terrible loss to the poetry community, and so it is timely that Winter Editions has republished this lovely translation which exhumed Desnos thirty years after his death in a WWII camp, and now exhumes the youthful Warsh, with all his ambitions for poetry and freedom and community. If, as Pound says, all literary history is hero worship, then Desnos and Warsh are two such deserving heroes, and let us hie to the temple of poetry and buy this book!

Mine Eclogue by Jacob Kahn

Roof Books

Review by Violet Spurlock

Ever felt happy just to lilt regardless of the chorus lost to history during financial crises? Lilt and so will I...

I begin this review by merely quoting the first lines of Jacob Kahn's *Mine Eclogue* firstly because the seductive enticement and gentle rhythm of its tripartite structure pulls a reader from question to command to promise. This is a book that draws you in, one that does not assume its reader's degree of familiarity but actually plants that seed and cultivates it, by means of a strong lyric voice that both celebrates and deprecates itself while constantly reaching out to the larger world and other poetic traditions for grounding. As the title suggests, these poems are classical and imitative while also being decisively Kahn's, animated by the particular concerns of his milieu and aware of their ancient lineage. These poems will ask you questions with full anticipation of your response, playing with rhetoric while also situating it within the theater of everyday life rather than the elevated discourse of poetry. In other words, they are speechy while being squarely trained on the archness and oddness of speech as it's actually used.

But Kahn's lines quoted above also beautifully pose a pertinent question: how to reconcile poetry's pleasures and joys with its complicities and failures. The regardlessness of our happy lilt suggests both that it will continue despite inhabiting an austere and precarious world which does not nurture poetic practice, as well as suggesting that it may continue without proper regard or concern for its many harmful omissions and assumptions. The word *lilt*, which now refers to a pleasant swinging rhythm of speech or music, comes from the Middle English *lulte*, which means to sound an alarm, and thus its use here perfectly encapsulates the undecidable question as to whether poetry smooths over or gives voice to the ongoing crises of capitalist society and our particular conjuncture within it.

But there are two kinds of song, perhaps arranged contrapuntally, in Kahn's opening lines: the lilt and the chorus. Part of his gambit, I think, is that if you are willing to lilt along with him, the various songs may form a chorus. This chorus emerges through the deep intertextuality of his poems with the various Bay Area lineages he claims, from the feminist, Language poetry of Norma Cole and Jean Day to the more recent return to lyricism in the work of Brandon Brown and Sophia Dahlin. Many of these poems are written for or after poets who share many of the concerns I outlined in my previous paragraph, but I detect something a little different in how Kahn approaches these questions, namely that he approaches them by means of asking more questions, and I came to love this sense that a poem must be more curious and more open in order to join the larger chorus.

Mine Eclogue's questions keep coming in the poem "Sylvan Ditty": "Have you read the Eclogues is / a gauche question I get but have / you read it??" The force of the question here is strong enough to overcome the embarrassment of asking it, elegantly shedding the pretense of poetic lineage by means of both self-deprecation as well as a genuine curiosity and desire to share. When Kahn connects the politics of land use and ownership in the first Eclogue to modern phenomenon like right-wing separatist movements ("there were those separatists, remember, / the Bundy clan?") as well as the movement to defend Indigenous lands against the ongoing state-sanctioned project of forced displacement ("Standing Rock / anyone?"), he does so in each case by asking a question, leaving open the question as to whether we can read Virgil as more useful to us or to our opponents.

Of course, questions in poems do not need to be, perhaps even cannot be, answered. One of the ways that Kahn gets to have his cake and eat it too in this book is by framing the songster and the cynic as flirts who enjoy annoying each other rather than as mortal enemies. This dynamic reaches fever pitch in "Eclogue: Reprise," which ends with a tremendous crescendo:

Everyone says I'm too negative
to be loved but I say I
deserve it more. I can list
the names of birds and trees
what else would a true
love want?? Before I used to be
so abstract in my horror
at the world's affairs, a fellow
beachgoer and mellow
Greek—now I'm that asp who
strikes feet in the street to notify
them of the nature of empire.
It truly is that bad. My song
is like radioactive decay
forever breaking down but
never going away. And me
and my love are those
two lines always approaching
but never to touch!!

Here, negativity is a perverse kind of public service, keeping the public notified of the horrors lying unnoticed underneath their feet, although one of those horrors is the serpentine poet himself, whose song (whether it sounds the alarm or pleasantly lilt) is poison, pollution. If there is a kind of ecopoetics in *Mine Eclogue*, it's a dirty one, primarily focused on poetry's tendency towards extraction and waste. But "Eclogue: Reprise" is ultimately a love poem, as is clear both in this excerpt as well as in its opening lines which figure love as a kind of hazardous material: "Daphnis, no, I don't / want to know what love is / but I bet we've already / been exposed." Kahn addresses the purported inventor of pastoral poetry only to brush off its assumption that love offers some respite, as well as the thought that there might be any respite from love itself.

What I love about "Eclogue: Reprise" is that it

so operatically proves the truth of the line that closes the earlier poem, "Agrarian Capitalism": "The base lyric is dispossession / As moral protest is the greatest pleasure of man." If moral protest against empire is the greatest pleasure, greater even than bad TV, wine, or weed, then we need to reconsider the supposed divide that separates the righteous asp from the mellow Greek, look more closely at the vanishing point between those two asymptotically approaching lines. According to this logic, the venomous killjoy is even more of a hedonist than the happy loungers that serve as the unwitting victims of their incendiary critiques, and indeed their supreme pleasure must come at others' expense. Kahn is clear that moral protest against empire often can't help but cast some of its ire on the friends and neighbors who populate its terrain:

...My friends
tell me not to draw connections
but my philosophy blasts
their contentions to shit
and tokens remaining schwag
endowing me with
poisonous faith...
...Now all realms
suck!! That's enough my best
friend says, but even
her voice sinks into the
contaminated pit so
treachly and treacherous
a family of geese lands
only to wither quickly
into mush.

Again, tropes of poison and contamination serve to describe not the fallen world but instead the inner faith and spirit which drives the lyric voice to drown out all others with its righteous song. It's a critique of virtue-signaling, sure, but it goes deeper than that. Unlike those who feign that their moral outrage emerges from a sense of upstanding dutifulness, Kahn's poet enjoys his moralism fully and selfishly rather than merely broadcasting it, allowing him to bring its logic to completion and indicate its limits. Part of this enjoyment involves an acknowledgment that moralizing feels good because it comes at others' expense, rather than uplifting them. It may be that the chorus mentioned above is more discordant than one might have imagined, that its power as well as its pleasure derives from its many interlocking antagonisms. With this suggestion, *Mine Eclogue* offers a surfeit of pleasure (without apology or qualification) alongside a ferocious statement of political demands, while also asking quite genuinely whether it's all we really want.

I'm trying to keep these claims subjunctive; I do think it's quite important that most of Kahn's thinking takes place speculatively and inquisitively (the indulgent decisiveness of "Eclogue: Reprise" is the naughty, delightful exception). In "Eclogue II: Deepwater Horizon," he asks "What is *appetite* anyway?" and gives the answer "Annoying eating sounds, dedication / to a false promise," but he's also

opening the floor to our answers. It would be a great shame, indeed, to reduce Kahn's poetry to a mere vehicle for a singular and definitive argument, and he counsels against such a reading in "Top Result Eclogue" when he writes: "To intend a song is not to sing it." To the extent that I am guilty of such a reduction in my review, I have done it for my own pleasure, with faith that its excessiveness will produce leftovers for those who prefer to delectate in the same way.

Many other reviews could be written of this book, ones which might opt to focus more on, say, the ups and downs of its singsong harmonies or its hilarious, tender explorations of masculinity and the scatological. (As an aside, whenever someone eventually edits a volume of the many poems which have been written over these past years in memory of Kevin Killian, I hope they include Kahn's "Kevin, Come Back.") This book is a chorus in itself, and one that asks for other voices to join. The pleasure it takes in its own complaint is deliberately self-indulgent, but it is too curious and outgoing to be exclusionary; these poems flirtatiously dare you to kvetch back, even if it ends up being at their expense.

***About Ed* by Robert Glück**

New York Review Books

Review by Brian Ng

In a poem in Robert Glück's *Reader*, dedicated to the artist Ed Aulerich-Sugai, the speaker describes "Ed sucking me at the baths, pounding my heart once with his fists," sending the speaker fainting, then imagining himself floating above his body to see Ed sucking his knotted 15-foot cock. "Now I am totally alienated from my body," the speaker says to himself, "This might be a good time to stop and think."

The joke is that few writers have milked the possibilities of embodied thinking like Glück; he's plundered formal techniques from lyric poetry, verse drama, critical theory, fable, epistolary writing, and visual media, setting down his and his friends' lives in the thick of it. Glück's work captures moments of physical intensity—the throes of orgasm, horny yearning, betrayal, grief—with drama, titillation, and style, while also making an argument for its position of epistemic advantage for denuding reality.

About Ed, Glück's newest book about his relationship with Ed and Ed's AIDS-related death, flagrantly violates many of the expectations for an AIDS memoir. Instead of serving a dramatic arc, Glück cuts back and forth through time to blur our narrative associations. We gather that Bob met Ed on a street-car stop in 1970, both newly out and in San Francisco, coming into their artistic careers and sexuality. They date for the next eight years, as Bob dotes and Ed cruises; they break up ("our marriage was so open it no longer included me") but stay friends; Ed is diagnosed HIV-positive in 1987; Bob visits and helps Ed, and collaborates on material for the book;

Ed dies in 1994. The book's dramatic aorist defaults to the present tense before the depiction of Ed's death, and the past thereafter; death cleaves time, distorting cause and effect.

The narrative is also interjected with episodes of thematic, if not immediately expository, relevance. The book begins with "Everyman," a section that briefly depicts the illness and death of a neighbor, Mac, who is straight, and meddlesome if well-intentioned; the side-plot of Mac's mourning acts as a rehearsal of sorts for Ed's later in the book. In a book launch hosted in NYC, Glück elaborated on this choice: "Ed and Mac were both loyal to reality, even when they were not included." In the ars poetica that ends the section, Bob contrasts "Ed's solitude" with "Mac's fact," as romance and reality conjoin to invoke a domestic muse. The juxtaposition poses questions: How does a community of next-door neighbors differ from a community rooted in queer identity? How does one arrive at a true representation, or an ethical response to grief? Disjunctions like these across time and perspective reflect the primacy of capturing the book's discursive quest towards grief over biographical continuity.

The intensity of grief is embarrassing in its scale, always too big or too small. Glück's work is often a comedy of manners, and what event has greater demands on manners than the ceremony of death? In *Jack the Modernist*, Bob gets a call from Phyllis, a fellow writing workshop participant, about the unexpected death of her son Pete—whose name Bob doesn't even recall—and the long, convulsive sob Bob bursts into surprises himself: "I wondered who all those tears were for. My question wasn't so much a question as a symptom of an ironic emotional structure with its cruelty of design." Grief's irony lies in its indifference to valence and obligation: after Ed dies, Bob feels "a weird euphoria...the perilous nights connected me to the grief of other catastrophes—rejection in love, say, or when The Figures rejected a manuscript... I was weary after I slept, hungry after I ate...—the present could not take shape." Grief is intolerable when it cannot enliven activity or appetite, but feels sadistic when it does. The narration of *About Ed* is suspended in this reflexive state, ruminating on the exteriorization of loss. The physical effects of loss bring this into sharper relief. Months after the death, Bob describes eating Mac's frozen almondine—"Mac's monument, a pure, solitary burial"—like Karen's last ziti in *The Sopranos* with less catharsis: "In my dinner his blue eyes opened. I was not anguished. Perhaps I ate with a greater awareness of the moment."

"Ed lived the era, was committed to it," writes Glück, "I only halfway." The book, two decades in the making and published in the fifth decade of the AIDS crisis, is conscious of its belatedness and, among this century's echoes of New Narrative, hardly alone. Rob Halpern's "Touching Voids In Sense" circles the hole in which he injects medicine into an HIV-positive lover as treatment for sarcoidosis, rendered simultaneously erotic and abject, in a

discourse that ricochets between Guantanamo detainees, disability justice, and Mike Kelley's *Dust Balls*. Eric Sneathen, in "Don't Leave Me This Way," recasts the figure of Gaetan Dugas, inaccurately vilified in *And The Band Played On* as "Patient Zero" of the AIDS epidemic, as a tragic hero—implicitly drawing a comparison in the epigraph to Odysseus, "a complicated man." These examples explicitly confront the reader by dangling eroto-lyric pleasure before a compromised subject, proposing the inversion of a dominant system of values.

Distinct from these endeavors, Glück does not provoke or mythologize; the book is remarkable in how doggedly it attends to emotional ambivalence against the backdrop of death. Ed and Bob share plenty of scenes of riotous sexual discovery, sex both hot and hilarious, but Bob dedicates much of his attention to the complications in their romance: feeling cheated by giving away much of his time to support Ed's career; annoyance with his own ambivalence to Ed's promiscuity; fearing that his expression will betray him as he confronts Ed's physical deterioration. It would be easy to imagine a book organized more explicitly around passion, injury, and revelation, and frustrating for some to sit with one where Bob answers an incredulous Ed asking if Bob truly loved him: "I was not sure I did. I'm reporting a conversation in a novel in which the whole truth is delivered. Instead, our feelings were hidden in subordinate clauses, passed over in an instant, pieced together later."

Scattered across Glück's earlier work are glimpses of other possible takes on *About Ed*, satires of campy premise transfigured by a sentimental or critical pitch. Count the Purple Men in *Denny Smith*, purple dye having spread throughout their bodies from a scientific experiment to measure the spread of parasites, a fable that would be silly if not for the lengths to which Glück takes the metaphor. Perhaps "Violence," a story that bookends *Elements*, which starts with Ed narrowly escaping a gay-bashing on a bus and ends with him heroically interrupting a violent assault with mace, which Glück offers (winkingly, with abrupt tidiness) as a token of hope. Camp and satire there had the urgent task of liberating the Person with AIDS from the lurid dominant representation à la Nicholas Nixon of ravaged bodies resigned to death, by depicting them as social beings who fuck, care for each other, and fight back. In "Caricature," a 1983 talk, Glück recalls reading such stories to queer audiences and being told after that he had "got it right," suggesting that it brought forth a collectivity which "gives the writer access to history."

It's not that *About Ed* relinquishes its grasp on this communal consciousness, as Glück lays images of erotic intensity beside the detritus of community and crisis—bathhouses, picket lines, reading groups, coterie poetics, AIDS panic and confusion, workplaces—but that the intervening decades have freed for Glück to explore a more enduring, abstract question:

what can we make of death? Unlike those examples, which conclude with presenting a heroism (however provisional, comic, or subversive) borne of political defiance, community romance, domestic intimacy, or erotic apotheosis, *About Ed* contends that grief has no essence—"An emptiness I can't fill"—and is instead an accumulation of contradictions—"image replaces image"—which together form a dreamlike image of totality.

It's fitting that *About Ed* ends with the extended section "Inside," which compiles fifty-odd pages of Ed's dream journals. The present tense resumes, presenting scenes in Ed's perspective, in reverse chronological order with an anaphoric refrain of "Before that," as a succession of lovers, parents, and friends collide in episodes of madcap sexual violence, bending gender ("loose chartreuse super-mini bikini strings circle my waist. My cock spills out, a secret I promise not to keep"). The displacement of voice provides new documentary avenues towards social totality, for instance to interrogate the floating signifier of race, sometimes a blind spot in New Narrative. Writes Bob:

Violence, terror, paranoia, and sex don't surprise me, because that was Ed... But I didn't know that he hosted a vibrant multiethnic community in his sleep. His friends and lovers were mostly white. That disparity is a blind spot in our relationship. How can I know Ed if I don't know the kind of problem that race was for him? ... It seems [he] dealt with sexuality when we lived together, in the seventies, and with race in the eighties.

One of these 80s dreams seem to depict an internment, where Ed in a mass of Japanese prisoners "file in and hide behind a drape" before armed military guards. Whereas American experimental writing of Glück's generation has a tendency to use Asianness as a red herring—for instance, the figure of China in Bob Perelman's "China" and Steve Benson's "Views on Communist China" acts as an organizing principle of the texts insofar through their unexpected distance from the work—these images leave room for nodes of content to condensate from the dream-world.

About Ed lives in the edit, a mind making the world as it interrogates itself, in a tiger's leap into the past.

***Discipline Park* by Toby Altman**

Wendy's Subway

Review by Darcie Dennigan

Maybe Toby Altman internalized Fred Moten's letter to his students against completing assignments ("Let your relation; let your relation change; let your relation fade into an entanglement that lets difference run even faster") or de Chirico's idea on arcs ("The arc of the circle can be beautiful... In the arc there is still an element of incompleteness that needs to be and is capable of being fulfilled"). *Discipline Park* is a deconstructed salad of a book:

jottings, photographs, questions, inchoate lamentations, and quotations intersperse its lyric paragraphs, and also themselves together make poems. I love this book for its incompleteness. Poets should be determined to fail. Wholeness isn't a lie, but...

On page 25 of *Discipline Park*, Altman includes Mark Fisher's report on a "widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but that it is now impossible to even imagine a coherent alternative to it." This isn't Fisher giving a greenlight to neoliberalism, but diagnosing the problem in the hope that "the tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism." While Altman seems to share this hope, he's not interested in reducing himself to—by arguing against—the level of cynicism that Fisher describes. Instead he addresses the cynics: "Let's say you agree. Doesn't that mean that utopia is the task of poetry, that the poet is called to freshness and conjecture, to adventurous song that soars beyond the limits of the world?" The answer, to Altman, is *yes*. The poem is the event. And how does the poet enact this idealistic, emotional "yes" / event?

By a sort of Quixote-like project that centers around the Prentice Women's Hospital and Maternity Center, where Toby Altman was born. In 2014, despite an extensive campaign by preservationists to save the building, Prentice Women's was demolished by Northwestern University—which, at the time, employed Altman—to make way for a "state-of-the-art biomedical research facility." (That phrase rings especially hollow in this book, which is so careful to sidestep soul-crushing diction in its depiction of our soul-crushing conditions, and which longs for "a language that does not damage.") And so we have the poet haunting the site of the hospital, and the Youtube video stills of its demolition, and especially haunting its architect, Bertrand Goldberg, and Goldberg's architectural style, Brutalism, and then haunting sites of other Goldberg structures, and the Goldberg archives, the poet aware always of his own starry eyes, and yet persisting ("This book is about love") and pragmatic ("Say that you want this world and it is yours. It hides inside of money").

Wait, though. This book is not only a diagnosis. We've had enough of those, I think. Altman continues, asking: "What do you see up there—I am asking you, almost in prayer—and what kind of language do you need to tell me about it?"

Who is he asking?! At first I thought it was Mark Fisher, who died by suicide in 2017. Or Bertrand Goldberg, the book's lodestar. It could be either. Then again, maybe it's us, Altman's readers. We're stuck on the 18th floor of some corporate office building, or the 3rd floor of an academic building, we're looking out, and down, at a little poet on the ground, because "the poet's task is to circle the megas-

tructure"—we're seeing a poet, a rather young white man, probably with a messenger bag, he is "wandering around strange cities, looking for a place to shit," he is "strangled by grief"—guys, is this our poet? This isn't what I thought our poet would look like. But he is ours. He is our poet and he is asking us—imagine, us!!—what kind of language can provoke a coherent alternative to capitalism.

Well, I don't think it can be "coherent," and especially not after reading this structurally compelling book. Altman's poem purposefully and repeatedly undoes its import. It's awesomely daffy—for instance, he gives the Sun Chips slogan ("Being different is our thing!") a mind-boggling pride of place—and relentlessly humble. Altman says in an interview, "Our task is to surrender to the archive," and this book enacts that surrender. It doesn't *process* its research. It lets the archive, perhaps as it should, win—which isn't to say that it stays in the realm of history, paper, photographs, thoughts. No, we're always brought back to the body in a way that Svetlana Boym describes in her essay "Ruinophilia": "Since antiquity, there has been an isomorphism between nature, architecture, and the human body. In decaying columns one can see tree trunks, while phantom Atalantas and caryatids haunt porticos all over the globe." In *Discipline Park*, inside the Brutalist structures, one sees the reflection of the poet's keen eyes, sagging shoulders. Inside the 20th century ruins is the decaying and comic 21st century human, for whom it is "impossible to eat without making the carcass fruitful!" Or, my favorite: "Well I don't have any more nachos in my belly,' someone's dad announces in the archive's bathroom as he washes his hands."

I started writing this review in Rome, of all places, in my head, walking around the ruins of the Roman Forum, having to pee, trying to concentrate on "the bitter texture of history" but failing, and as usual thinking about love. In the final section, Altman says, "If one is to resist the production of objects—in literature as much as architecture—one must produce a writing that fails." The primary way that he hews to failure is by wanting the book to do everything, say everything. So many good books show the poet's magpie tendencies, resist synthesis, and ask us to read spatially—but do they do it with Toby Altman's heart? This whole book is a wound: poetry is bleeding, the avant-garde is bleeding, the environment is bleeding, institutions are bloodying the landscape, idealism is bleeding and capitalism is licking the blood off its sword/words/wards, and the hospital where Toby Altman was born, along with the utopian vision of its architect, has been bulldozed.

The poet on the streets scene reminded me of Danny Hayward's "Wound Building" where he talks about a particular kind of intimacy: "I hate big ideas; lyric poetry continues to be one of the ways in which we talk about how we're sick-n-tired of them. We write lyrics to say 'fuck you' to our thoughts, to their vagueness

and powerlessness and fixity, and to the way that we see them repeat themselves unchangingly throughout our lives and all of their reverses." Altman's lyrics take on his own ideas and powerlessness so achingly:

I ate alone at Potbelly and I was not nourished. I watched the institution demolish the hospital where I was born, unfolding as it goes into the raw open, unfathomed wound, and I was not nourished. I watched it again, and I was not nourished. At the time, I drew a small monthly stipend from the institution, and yet I was not nourished. I fell on the ice and my shoulder caught me. In fact, the wound advanced through the house until it became hard abundance of leaf. Still, I was not nourished.

Discipline Park's lyrics on neoliberalism, whiteness, and utopianism help us recognize, as Hayward says (of a poem by Jayne Cortez), that actually our ideas almost never "arouse in us the feelings that ought to correspond to them, and that can correspond to them if we are willing to do the necessary work..." Altman writes that Goldberg "wanted to build a flexible city, compact, adaptable, contained in circular walls. He wanted to endow a space with nourishing. To leave a smear of honey on the counter at the bodega." Then he undermines that by quoting another Brutalist architect who also aimed for humanist, socially-engaged work: "One always expects,' Mendes da Rocha writes, 'architecture to deliver extraordinary buildings which, however, change nothing whatsoever.'"

But this book isn't like a building—it's not so much a thing made as a thing manifesting. Is it going as far as Virginia Woolf's claim that "there is no Shakespeare, there is no Beethoven; certainly and emphatically there is no God; we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself"? Nearly. I see Altman's digressions and paste-ups as his way of making the scaffolding visible. He is telling us: I lived this poem as I built it. And he's offering not just his lyrics as an ethic but his life. He is opening his whole self to judgment. *Discipline Park* is telling poets that it's not just what we write that matters but also what we're eating, where we're shitting, who we're asking for money and who's asking us. It matters who we love and who we're hurting. And how.

Quiet Fires by andriniki mattis

Anamot Press

Review by El Roy Red

andriniki mattis' poetry debut *Quiet Fires* reflects his many experiences of new york black queerness. With trickster energy, mattis implores humour to spell out the dangers of being alive while dressing it down. His poems play kitten into realisation, sometimes soft and always sharp. Even as joy and pleasure permeate the page, so do the questions.

To paraphrase Christina Sharpe, what is after-life if your ancestors were slaves in their own

country?—a place where apocalypses happen every day. Sharpe writes in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*:

Living in the wake means living the history and present of terror, from slavery to the present, as the ground of our everyday Black existence; living the historically and geographically dis/continuous but always present and endlessly reinvigorated brutality in, and on, our bodies while even as that terror is visited on our bodies the realities of that terror are erased.

And later,

In the midst of so much death and the fact of Black life as proximate to death, how do we attend to physical, social, and figurative death and also to the largeness that is Black life, Black life insisted from death? I want to suggest that that might look something like wake work.

And this is where I find mattis' debut rages. It resists reduction and classification based on identity while interrogating identity and constructing Black thought and existence. Wake work:

We cannot help but "*no*" ourselves into oblivion, how dissociation may offer reprieve so that we can survive. We cannot help but know ourselves into existence. And through the process, maybe we hold onto the soft spark of who we know ourselves to be. Here, mattis provides kindling, spark, and oxygen.

"is there ever a party if you're always working this skin" opens the collection and sets the tone with the title. Phrased as a question, without its marking, the title is reframed as an answer. The opening lines reflect the same tone, "if i were your garden how often would i / be tended to what fruit would i bear." In this way, mattis first challenges the reader to think in his world, through his terms; he is sharing his fruit. He address us a few lines later:

this is the house you will live in
abandonment an everyday act of this
country
& everywhere it wounds who you are
building this house for
the secret everybody knows the ice of my
eyes melting transgender in
america
an ambitious ritual they say the weather
oppressive not just the four seasons
becoming two how they envy us with a
bullet in a nightclub

or a bruised ego put into law

Quiet observations seamlessly make plain the processes we carry in our bodies: gentrification, climate change, bigotry, homophobia, transphobia, diaspora, policing, ever-present desire and longing... and still we find a way to be / sweet after the flinch of another's touch. No one can look away, not even a shudder can

shutter nor shatter the windows.

Death, explicitly & implicitly, plays on the page, hovers, lingers on foreground and haunts the background in mattis's book. In "black mischief," "there has always been heaven and hell in trees." Spanning six pages, mattis gives us breathing room, even if we're all breathing ash. "=== the sun / = will abandon us / ==== this way." Nothing is untouched. Each page vignettes a scene, visually cinematic. Stanzas alchemise; lines shift stanzas along the pages. Stanzas turn to smoke, the sun—buttressing a crescent moon on adjoining pages—sets and rises. Punctuation becomes scattered chaos, delineates horizon. So that in the last stanza, the phrase "call it government call it memorial day" overwhelms, glares from the top of the page while

to be
a bullet

to end a world so touched like a
smile so black like a heart.

This phrase is both grand and grounding, and grinds the poem to a halt. It burns the image into our retinas. I can hear Kerry James Marshall's "Portrait of the Artist as a Shadow of his Former Self," (1986) laughing through his missing teeth.

In *Quiet Fires*, poems march in the street and shout through RAGE. They live through a pandemic. They cut school to go to Coney Island. Poems locate spatiality: move to Jamaica via Flatbush, Crown Heights to Brixton, to France. Poems reverberate with first loves, masculinity, the fog of breaking up, tsa selection.

While mattis is naming apocalypses, he excludes a "meditation of not giving a fuck." Poems may be direct, coyly polite, and coquettishly buttoned up. mattis writes "(in progress)," "angry people want their anger in me / the world has its mysteries / drenched in rain / romance / always wrapped up / in some inconvenience." He's showing you enough to let you in while keeping himself safe and comfortable. He doesn't dabble in language's dexterity; mattis shows precision in his punctuation, capitalisation, spacing, word choice. The bounce of alliteration titillates the flow of assonance. A poet's poet: sure, the words are stunning on the page, but this is giving face. And let's face it, not every poem will let you wear it in public. Couldn't quite get your lips around it, taunts the mind of even the most voracious readers. Everyone's stumbled a word, got back up, and found their way. And yet, here is yours, graceful, smooth, rageful, quipping.

Isn't that the point, when looking death in the eyes? Find a way to laugh or something. The poem "capitalism wants to know what's in my pants so it can pay me accordingly" begins

o
sweet
goodnight

to every woman put upon me
monikers cashiers hurl needling

questions into my skin \ \ left in the cooler
to expire
frostbitten by time / / / / / cold again
my tongue stuck to a pole
a christmas story failing at femininity
freed me
can i step into the picture frame
o hazardous joy

Paradoxically, joy becomes a known hazard. It sparks, a caution. What does existence resemble when one is unable to emote freely while living with "an apocalypse in full view," as mattis articulates in "i am nothing but explosions"?

"Apocalypse" is often thought of in biblical terms &/or that of catastrophic destruction. What about a 3rd thing? Originally, "apocalypse" is from Old English *apocalipsin*, via Old French and ecclesiastical Latin from Greek *apokalupsis*, from *apokaluptein* 'uncover, reveal,' from *apo-* 'un-' + *kaluptein* 'to cover'; while only used twice in *Quiet Fires*, I posit that mattis utilises all etymological values. We get a sense of the biblical and the disaster mattis is uncovering. This is his "wake work." We see what he sees, hear what he has named, no stone unturned. mattis's tongue is untied, in the lineage of Marlon Riggs, whose seminal documentary was, in his own words, "motivated by a singular imperative: to shatter this nation's brutalizing silence on matters of sexual and racial difference." One can feel the reverberation of Riggs's method in mattis's work. We see the destruction and feel its revelation.

Every poem has a turn, replicating the multifaceted conundrum of life. In the poem "how to live btwn the lines," mattis writes,

my collarbone leaves space
for the tips of another's hands
such pining
evenly carved
into the body
a moon holding its circle
while appearing bitten into
a sacred hollow

& isn't this what breathing is for

i stand on pavement

slanting sunlight

this plywood chest

warmed sweetly by the sun

He goes back to the land, with questions of consequence.

unveiling skin

earth below
mined of its wick & who am i

to be treated if land can be ruled
by what it will outlive

This mirrors the opening lines of the book, "if i were your garden / how often would i be tended to." I read this as relating Blackness, in and with nature, while in juxtaposition to apocalypse. Is capitalism the earth's poisonous kiss of death? In "black mischief," mattis writes, "the grass has a story of its own a village of black people lived here once pressing / / the escape key from the purgatory of waged labor." mattis refers to Seneca Village, expunged and reduced to Central Park, and the multi-million dollar views of the apartments that border it. There's something reminiscent of Katt Williams's interview on Club Shay Shay: "You know what the number one job of someone who sold their soul to Hollywood is? To act like it didn't happen." I hear an echo between mattis and Williams in the voicing what would be otherwise kept clandestine—like, say, a 400,000-strong protest against genocide not being reported on by major media outlets. Or perhaps, as "how to dissociate completely," elaborates ramifications of gentrification: a native new yorker "becoming expendable / taken by streets / that no longer / resemble / my home / & forget / how quick / i can be / filleted / for flowering / wild." mattis is naming the stakes.

With "in a country where no one knows my name,"

we find new words
for death
for those unalived
by violent frontiers
violet veins
marked by impact
saddled indifference
a brute requiem

my country
of turpentine
of economy
over ecosystems

I swallow
I open
a harpsichord
a chrysalis
a quiet fire

Line by line, these poems give voice to the quiet fires inside of us, not necessarily given a chance to smoulder let alone blaze. Marginalised folks, often, who are given so little space to articulate emotion, let alone process grief, may find opportunity within these pages. One may feel a sense of power over quotidian microaggressions and overt oppression. *Quiet Fires* holds space for epiphany, for joy, for grief and everything in between.

Before I had a copy of this book, a friend came over to mine, excited to share a poem with me. Tearfully, they acknowledged they didn't have words for what they were feeling previously, and through the poem, they felt seen. After

my friend carried emotions throughout the week, the somatic release enabled catharsis. mattis contends in "silencing water":

now you get high in in the woods
& cry to songs for dreamers
who have forgotten how to dream
& you misplace your reflection
in a light too big for your hands
so it swallows you whole instead
grief sharpening your lungs
& you take to your unmade bed
then you hear the water silencing itself
for the first time
& you want to believe in believing again
this silence you have belonged to for so long
leaving you blanketed & barbed

Can you see, dear reader, how this sweet friend was able to crack open the barrier of themselves which led to a salty shoulder? Can you see how I've found myself alive through these poems, enticed & emboldened to share my experience?

After reading *Quiet Fires*, one may playfully think "I know your secrets..." and isn't it nice to hear how someone else has withstood something similar and survived?

We are all quiet fires. RAGING.

Books Received

Ty Chapman, *Tartarus* (Button Poetry)
Miya Coleman, *Cottonmouth* (Button Poetry)
Will Daddario, ed. *Glimmerings and Constellations: Creative and Critical Responses to the Plays of Jay Wright* (Kenning)
Constance Debré trans. Holly James, *Playboy* (semiotext(e))
Dubravka Djuric, *The Politics of Hope (After the War): Selected and New Poems* (Roof)
Marlon Hacla trans. Kristine Ong Muslim, *Glossolalia* (UDP)
Emily Hunt, *Stranger* (The Song Cave)
fahima ife, *Septet for the Luminous Ones* (Wesleyan)
Melinda Mátyus trans. Jozefina Koporal, *MyLifeandMyLife* (UDP)
Toby Olson, *Collected Earlier Poems and Collected Later Poems* (Shearsman Books)
Brontez Purnell, *Ten Bridges I've Burnt* (FSG)
Dan "Sully" Sullivan, *O Body* (Haymarket)
Jared Stanley, *So Tough* (Saturnalia)
Morgan Vö, *The Selkie* (The Song Cave)

Magazines Received

1080 Press Newsletter
Bellevue Literary Review
Improbable
New England Review
Poetry

Spring 2024 Events

FEBRUARY

Fri 2/16 | **Ahmad Almallah & India Lena González**

Wed 2/21 | **Imogen Binnie & Evan Kennedy**

Wed 2/28 | **Joris/Peyrafitte — Domopoetics: Karstic Actions/Works**

MARCH

Fri 3/01 | **Nora Treatbaby & Mohammed Zenia Siddiq Yusef Ibrahim**

Mon 3/04 | **Cookie Mueller at 75**

Thu 3/07 | **The Potency of Images: A Conversation and Study Session on Gaza and the Politics of Visuality**

Fri 3/08 | **stefa marin alarcon & OHYUNG**

Wed 3/13 | **Launch of Martin Wong's *Footprints, Poems, and Leaves* and *Das Puke Book***

Thu 3/14 | **Redistributive Art: A Dis/Course Workshop with Diya Vij**

Mon, 3/18 | **Samuel Espíndola Hernández & Jimin Seo**

Fri, 3/22 | **Zaina Alsous & Dana Ysabel Dela Cruz**

APRIL

Mon 4/01 | **Launch of Ann Rower's *If You're A Girl* (Revised & Expanded Edition)**

Wed 4/03 | **Chris Kraus & Kim Rosenfield**

Fri 4/05 | **Pipilotti's Salon Series for Gathering: 'BRAIDS,' a Living Room Psychodrama by Alex Tatarsky (at Hauser & Wirth)**

Mon 4/08 | **New York Arab Festival**

Wed 4/10 | **Alice Notley & Anne Waldman**

Fri 4/12 | **Tara Aisha Willis & Damon Locks**

Thu 4/18 | **Nuar Alsadir & Claire Donato: Psychoanalysis and Poetry**

Fri 4/19 | **Joshua Garcia & charles theonia**

Wed 4/24 | **Saretta Morgan & Jared Stanley**

Fri 4/26 | **Cody-Rose Clevidence & Sahar Khraibani**

MAY

Wed 5/01 | **Launch of *Breathlehem: The Selected Poetry of Jim Brodey***

Fri 5/03 | **Launch of *She Follows No Progression: A Theresa Hak Kyung Cha Reader***

Mon 5/06 | **Fulla Abdul-Jabbar & Tilghman Alexander Goldsborough**

Wed 5/08 | **Emily Johnson & Cuthwulf Eileen Myles**

Sun 5/12 | ***Questions to Ask Before Your Bat Mitzvah***

Wed 5/15 | **Joyelle McSweeney & Eleni Sikelianos**

Thu 5/16 | **Empty the Prisons: A Dis/Course Workshop with Kaleem Hawa**

Mon 5/20 | **Kaur Alia Ahmed & Gia Gonzales**

Wed 5/22 | **Carolyn Lazard, Geelia Ronkina, & Constantina Zavitsanos**

Fri 5/24 | **Anelise Chen & Ben Fama**

Wed 5/29 | **Peter Gizzi & John Yau**

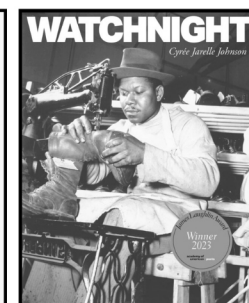
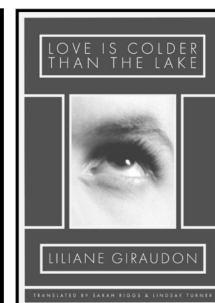
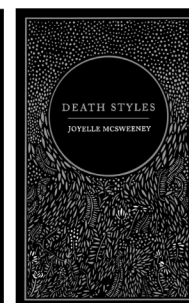
JUNE

Mon 6/03 | **Workshop Reading**

Wed 6/05 | **Volunteer and Intern Potluck and Reading**

**All events are held at St. Mark's Church, unless otherwise noted.*

NIGHTBOAT BOOKS: NEW TITLES



BOILED OWLS AZAD ASHIM SHARMA

A collection of poems that demystify drug addiction, alcoholism, depression, and anxiety whilst thinking through their relation to capitalism and its resistance.

DEATH STYLES JOYELLE MCSWEENEY

A record of daily bewilderments and accidental concessions to hope after a momentous loss.

LOVE IS COLDER THAN THE LAKE LILIANE GIRAUDON, TR. SARAH RIGGS AND LINDSAY TURNER

A tour-de-force by the experimental French poet Liliane Giraudon that shows her power and range.

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Wild (\$0-\$99)

Anon. (3), George Abagnalo, Robert Acklen-Brecko, Kaitlyn Airy-Johnson, Laith Ayogu, hannah baer, Lauren Bakst, Anselm Berrigan, Jen Blair, Andrew Bolotowsky, Gale Bonker, Heidi Broadhead, Kayhl Cooper, Maria Damon, Claire Donato, Charles Donnaud, Eliza Doyle, Zachary A.

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Student/Senior/Individual

Onur Ayaz, Steve Benson, Amy Bobeda, Emily Brandt, Andy Butter, Isabelle Cachia-Riedl, Marina Caron, Barnett Cohen, Eileen Costello, Noah Davies, Macauley Davis, Melissa De La Cruz, Nicholas Dehler, Lila Dlaboha, Patrick Dunagan, Chantz Erolin, Lilith Fairman, Seth Fragomen, Gloria Frym, Nora Fulton, James Gao, Cassandra Gillig, Maura Gingerich, Ariel M Goldberg, Jessica Grim, Leo Grossman, Matilde Guidelli, Chris Hammer, Bob Koshin Hanson, sam harvey, Ian Hatcher, HL Hazuka, Barbara J Henning, Larkin Higgins, Tony Hoffman, Alison Jennings, Jack Jung, Aisha Khan, Chris Kraus, Steven Lewis, Susan Lewis, Kenny Likis, Lillian Lippold, Lucas Lou, Alexander Loukopoulos, Melissa Mack, Gabriella Mayer, Monica McClure, Bianca Messinger,

Edminster, Herb Elbern, Jacqueline Feldman, Adam Garth, Christopher Gianunzio, Lorena Gill, Cassandra Gillig, Judith Goldman, Stella-Ann Harris, Carla Harryman, Tony Hoffman, Perri Hofmann, Tate Jorgensen, A. Kaiser, Jackson Kao, Jennifer Karmin, Anna Kay, Sahar Khraibani, Gigi Kriegsmann, Anne Kristoff, Charlie Markbreiter, Dave Morse, Laura Mullen, Elissa Oberman, Elaine Peluso-Farris, Leah Pires, Monica Raiss, Ted Rees, Tracy Reid, Diana Rickard, Victoria Ruiz, Jennifer Snyder, Divya Victor, Jason Wallin, Katherine Walsh, Meg Whiteford, Savannah Whitmer, Darlene Wiczek, Tyrone Williams, Katharine B. Wolpe, Candystore

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POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER #275

WINTER 2024

FREE

ESSAY *Joycups: Notes on Piss* by charles theonia // CONVERSATION *All My Life I Had to Tear So Crazy*: Zora Jade Khiry and Juliana Huxtable // TALK *Taking Revenge on the World for Not Existing* by Ted Rees // INTERVIEWS *Making the World*: Aaron Shurin w/ David Grundy, *To Tell the Story, We Need Everything*: Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore w/ Forest Smotrich-Barr // POETRY Ama Birch, Joshua Garcia, Osvaldo Lamborghini (trans. KM Cascia & Garrett Phelps), Oki Sogumi // REVIEWS Nameera Bajwa on *Rifqa* by Mohammed el-Kurd, Patrick DeDauw on *Island Falls* by Owen Toews, Stephen Ira on *Sustaining Air: The Life of Larry Eigner* by Jennifer Bartlett, Rosie Stockton on *In Lieu of Solutions* by Violet Spurlock, Joe Elliot on *Night of Loveless Nights* by Robert Desnos, trans. Lewis Warsh, Violet Spurlock on *Mine Eclogue* by Jacob Kahn, Brian Ng on *About Ed* by Robert Glück, Darcie Dennigan on *Discipline Park* by Toby Altman, El Roy Red on *Quiet Fires* by andriniki mattis
