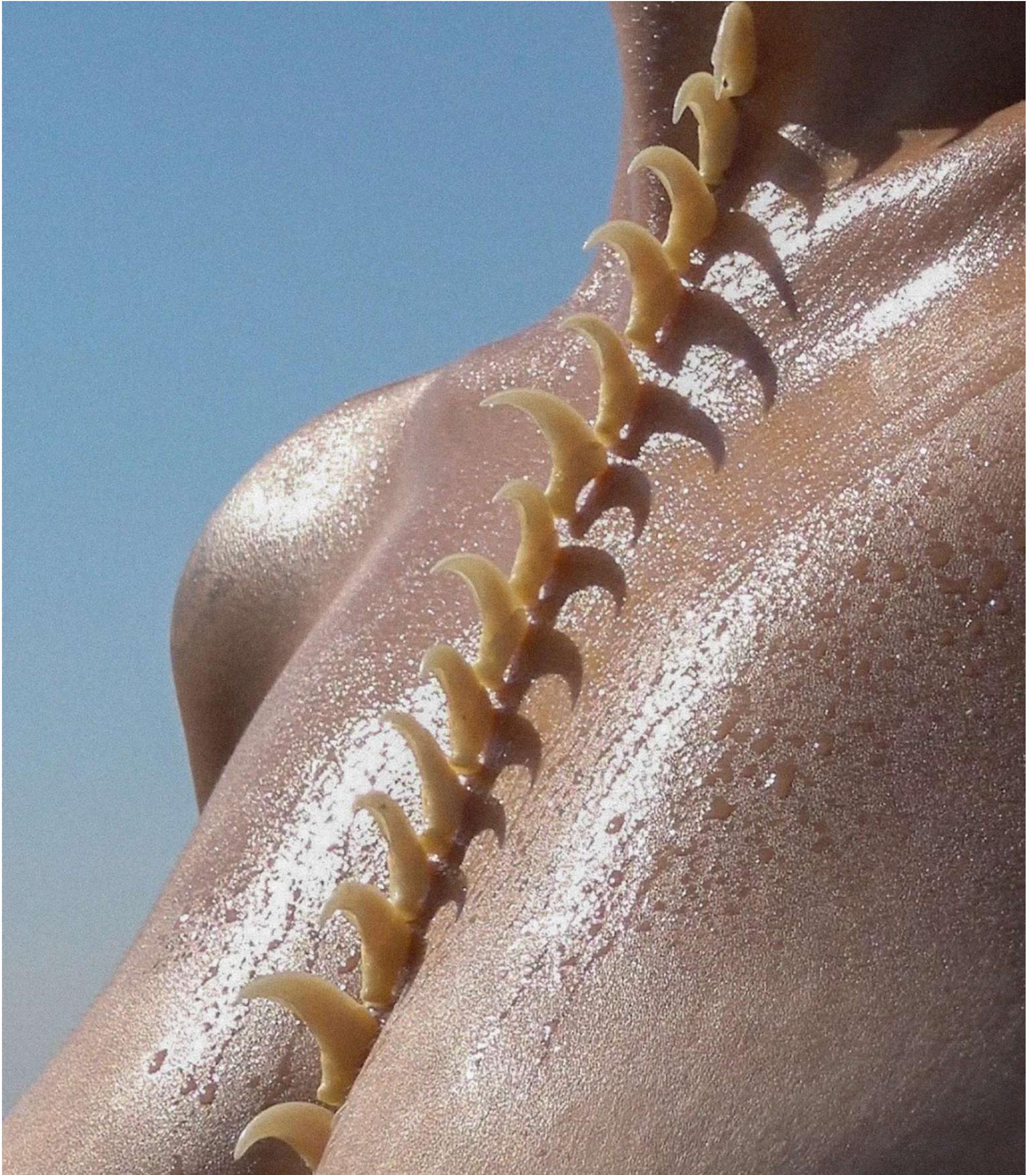


POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER



POETRY PROJECT NEWSLETTER #273

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Editor's Note

Saretta Morgan

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF COLONIALISM / AN AERIAL VIEW LEADS US TO THE VERY DREGS / [BEAT]: TAKE ONE BREATH / 3 THROATS / IN THE AFTERBIRTH, MY OWN FACE / WHEN YOU SAY ALRIGHT, YES, YES / EVERY SPACE REQUIRES THE PROCESS OF BEING CLOSE

The title of this note takes lines from seven writers and artists gathered in this issue of the *Newsletter*: Mónica A. Jiménez, Jada Renée Allen, Rashaad Thomas, Morgan Leigh, Jaye Elizabeth Elijah, Sasha Hawkins, and Dionne Lee, respectively. All Black-identified and holding some connection, whether momentary or intergenerational, to the Southwest United States, living/making work in the cross of multiple borderlands and those unique expressions of life, of desire, and of the consequences borne through ongoing displacement.

Beneath and alongside our various approaches to making and questioning language is the fact that we are all residents of violently occupied land. This folio is intended as a moment to think out loud about the ways in which that particular reality produces meaning in the imaginative and physical terrains underwriting creative practice.

The prompt: to reflect on a piece of personal work or aspect of creative process through the lens of occupation. The responses engage imperialism, colonialism, and settler colonialism through a range of grammars and emotionalities. Theoretical and ecological interventions. Pop culture timelines. Legal frameworks. Questioning of national forests and international solidarities...

There are no clear answers. Don't come looking for concise expressions of personal or collective politics. While politics do emerge in partial and tentative fashions, the emphasis is on practice/process/how we got here/what we do here, not the specifics of any particular position.

Legal scholar, historian, and poet, Jiménez looks at how the law and language function at various registers to create communities, manufacture debt, and strip landscapes of particularity. Allen deploys and questions the lyric to further complicate a lineage of Black artists drawing painful and imperfect connections between Black Chicago and Iraq. With an emphasis on aurality (particularly sounds produced during Qur'an recitation), Thomas, a poet and sound artist, renders an urban war-scape persistent in the wake of municipal divestment. Elijah constellates Black feminist criticality around a fleshy, densely foliated, and exquisitely distilled triptych of two scenes. A visual artist, Lee shares her relationship to landscape photography as a practice of resisting control and remaining intimately in touch with the ground. The punchy, erotic phrases accompanying Hawkins's self-portrait reflect the objectification that underwrites mythologizing and exploitation throughout the Southwest. And Leigh, this issue's cover artist, reforms her body through the accumulated remains of others'.

To the writers and artists included: immense gratitude for sharing your work and some of the reflections that surround it. As our languages—the ground of our knowing—are embedded in them, the ambient conditions of occupation can be challenging to locate. And even more challenging to name. I'll keep asking. And listening. And thinking. Thank you for thinking with me.

Saretta Morgan
Akimel O'dham land,
Phoenix, AZ
June 2023

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SEO JUNG HAK
THE CHEAPEST FRANCE IN TOWN
 Translated from Korean by
MEGAN SUNGYOON

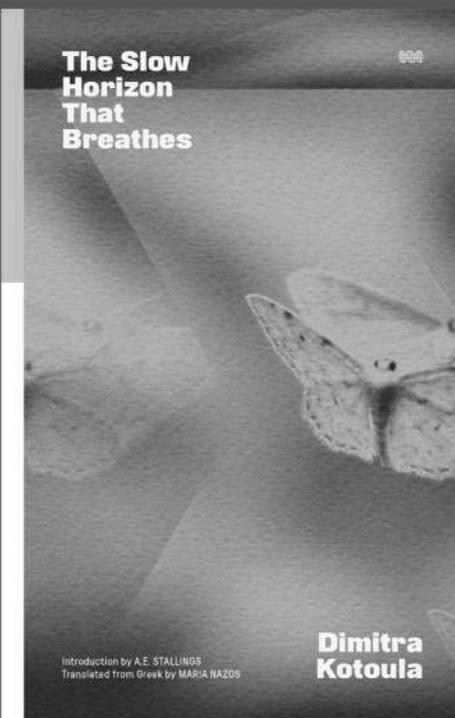
“Seo Jung Hak’s poetry feigns to visualize the present through an extremely low pulse rate. Then the farthestmost outside intervenes—the illustrated world becomes distorted; the multiplicity of poetic composition intervenes. That’s when the pulse of his poetry explodes. The gravity shatters. For what? 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

ULJANA WOLF
KOCHANIE, TODAY I BOUGHT BREAD
 Translated from German by
GREG NISSAN

“Uljana Wolf’s first book begins with pain, a hospital, with a daughter who rebels against the controlling word of the fathers. But it goes farther. Its mouth shifts, playfully inventive, though with a dark undertone of Polish-German history, to find bread in language. Then even a mattress becomes translatable and everything connects ‘in this border trade / on my tongue.’”

— ROSMARIE WALDROP



DIMITRA KOTOUA
THE SLOW HORIZON THAT BREATHES
 Translated from Greek by
MARIA NAZOS

“Kotoula’s voice embraces an autonomous selfhood based on the female bodily experience which like seasonal landscapes can be both breathtaking and discordant ... Maria Nazos brings her mastery as poet and translator to render Kotoula’s irrepressible spirit on the page. We can be grateful for this collaboration for turning the rubble of contemporary life into something beautiful and lasting.”

— DZVINIA ORLOWSKY

American¹ State of Exception²

Mónica A. Jiménez

I.

*Sovereignty here does not bear its ordinary meaning.*³ Nevertheless, it desires the power to punish. There is no authority when one lives on an island of indistinction. Necessity knows no law for those with need. What is the solution to the problem of colonialism? More colonialism.⁴

II.

Consider this juridical conundrum: if the public powers violate the rights of the people, resistance to oppression is the duty of the citizen. Benjamin, witnesses in spirit, pondering our legacy of natural law as a form of violence.⁵ *There are certain principles of natural justice inherent in our character that need no expression in constitutions.*⁶

III.

Law functions to eliminate entire categories of people that do not exist and so cannot be integrated into the political system: those who may live or must die, whose lives can be subjugated to the power of death. This is merely a question of legitimacy: *are you specifically authorized by the State to be a debtor?*⁷

IV.

Justice finds that we are not *of the political community brought into existence by our constitution.*⁸ This is the modern totalitarianism: a utopia devoid of law, a non-place, where no violence is absolutely outside of the law. There is no legal succession in empire because the nonhuman cannot contract or capitalize: everything is for sale in the frontier.⁹

V.

Citizenship appears to offer us something other than exclusion.¹⁰ Still, we must be raced and we must be dangerous. Or we must be raced and we must be pitiable. Either way we must first exist as bodies in want of intervention.

Notes

¹ Here “American” means “the United States,” even while I acknowledge that “America” encompasses the entirety of the hemisphere and that other parts of the world make no distinction between North and South America. It is all America and thus we are all Americans. This tension sits at the center of the poem.

² The state of exception has been theorized extensively, but for my purposes I define it as lacunae of law—spaces where the US Constitution does not apply or applies only in limited fashion. In these spaces Black Americans, Native Americans, and the inhabitants of the US territories, just to name a few, have been exposed to the violence and neglect of the state with lasting and disastrous consequences.

³ Justice Elena Kagan writing for the majority in the US Supreme Court case *Puerto Rico v. Sanchez Valle* (2016), wherein the Court was tasked with defining the limits of Puerto Rico’s ability to govern itself. Sovereignty has always been a slippery concept, especially so for US colonial subjects.

⁴ More colonialism (in all its forms and fatalities) has historically been the response to the problem of what to do about colonialism’s legacies. I am referring here to a long US history of Native dispossession, enslavement, segregation, imperialism, over-policing, war, displacement, gentrification, etc.

⁵ In writing this poem I was thinking alongside philosopher Walter Benjamin’s *On the Concept of History*, specifically Section VIII in which he wrote: “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘emergency situation’ in which we live is the rule. We must arrive at a concept of history which corresponds to this.”

⁶ From the US Supreme Court case *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901), part of the notorious *Insular Cases* which first defined the US’s relationship with its overseas territories. There the Court attempted to carve out a new category for Puerto Rico and its inhabitants—unincorporated territory. In the unincorporated territories the US Constitution did not fully apply, and thus neither did its protections and restraints on Congress, but nevertheless the inhabitants of those places could rely on the inherent justice of the US government to protect them from Congressional despotism and violence. For Puerto Ricans, the histories of the US’s treatment of Native and Black Americans highlighted the limits of that “justice.”

⁷ From the US Supreme Court Case *Puerto Rico v. Franklin California Tax-Free Trust, et al.* (2016). Ownership and property lend citizens visibility, but Puerto Rico has become most visible in its indebtedness. The Court was asked to decide whether Puerto Rico had the power to address its debt by passing its own laws. After a complicated dissertation on the nature of US bankruptcy laws and the limits of Puerto Rico’s powers, the Court declared that the territory does not have such power. It remains hyper-visible and deeply in debt.

⁸ Genealogy: *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901), invoking *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857), wherein neither the inhabitants of Puerto Rico nor Black Americans were contemplated when the US Constitution was written and so that document was not *for them*, did not *contemplate them*, and thus did not protect them. We sat outside the constitution.

⁹ The frontier: a place unoccupied or occupied by individuals who do not count because they are not citizens or are not civilized or both. Our frontiers have included the entirety of what is now the political United States (Native lands, Hawai’i, Alaska, Guam, the Marshall Islands, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Island, American Samoa, the Palmyra Atoll, and other uninhabited archipelagos and keys), Latin America, the Middle East, parts of Asia. It also includes anywhere where gentrification has worked to displace established communities. Puerto Rico is a “new” frontier for rich US residents looking to evade federal taxes.

¹⁰ But what is citizenship other than a demarcation of those who belong and those who do not, those who are worthy of protection and those who are not, those who are “legal” and those who are not?

Chiraq

Jada Renée Allen

an epithet for Chicago, Illinois which refers to specific violent regions, comparing them to warzones; a portmanteau of Chicago & Iraq. It is also a violently inaccurate neologism which arose from a flawed single Iraq war statistic from 2003–2012. Amidst this nine-year period nearly 4,500 citizens were killed in Chicago which was a close approximate to the number of U.S. soldiers who were killed in Iraq. It is unclear whence the term derives, though it has been embraced by a younger generation of Chicagoans—mainly rappers—since its inception.

“Chiraq, Drillinois,”
King Louie, 2011
(rap album)

CHI-RAQ, Spike Lee,
2015 (film)

How does Lee’s lens occupy the terrain of Chicago (a landscape from which Lee is not native)? Lee’s film nods to the convention of “signifyin” common in Blaxploitation movies & the Greek comedy *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes. My poem most directly deals with the artistic & political failures of Lee’s gaze. What happens when the aesthetic choices & cinematic desires of Black filmmakers flatten an entire ecosystem of Black life into minstrelsy?

How might a reader’s programmed desire to search for Anglo understandings of lyric meaning make their reading an occupation of this poem in & of itself?

It is said that the camera cannot lie, but rarely do we allow it to do anything else, since the camera sees what you point it at: the camera sees what you want it to see. The language of the camera is the language of our dreams.

—James Baldwin, *The Devil Finds Work* (1976)

the tenor here is palpable an aerial view leads us to the very dregs of September bullet-tendrils sprout from the mouths of the young dead rebels bloody blocks a red that whips *not-here* whereas the mothers kiss the concrete their darlings go gone at laying down roses with lips blistered by lament cue the ululations the glossolalia of it all— a mother’s grief turned Greek comedy her son’s shield an inoperative star a lyric so un-American it must belong elsewhere

This epigraph by Baldwin is lifted from his book-length essay & memoir concerning the racial politics of American cinema. This biased, dream-like act & method of seeing Baldwin names speaks to the camera-work of “CHIRAQ.” In this poem, I seek to perform violence to the language which enacts genocide, dispossession, & occupation via euphemism, hyperbole, sarcasm, & what many may define as “lyric strategy.”

I wish to make a critique of the lyric spectacle. Whether or not I’ve succeeded, I am uncertain as employing certain depictions of violence may reify violence. However, my intentions remain the same: I wish to murder the language which enables genocide, dispossession, & occupation—be it through tonal sarcasm, passive aggression, or employing other disingenuous modalities of lyric poetries. The lyric is innately violent, colonial, & anti-Black. Therefore, the reader’s indoctrinated desire to look for a rhyming triplet or discuss the vibrancy of language within the poem is itself a violence. I do not pretend toward a fictive landscape where bodies are not directly impacted by the violence of language, nor do I attempt a Brooksian kind of verse journalism. The syntactical gestures (or lack thereof) employed in the poem are facetious. These gestures are my attempt at enacting an aggression against the language itself & not the bodies that are so often travestied by media (a visible arm of settler colonialism & occupation).

Street Lights

Rasheed Thomas

I pee¹ led an army
of inDD²ustrial plastic
hannn³ds

[beat]⁴

recycled waste
lannd fiLLed with nnight

[beat]

skinned baby's grave
yards nnoo head
stoned

[beat]

DDank cannnals
spiLLed weathered flesh

[beat]

CCardboard mmouths
entmmbed
seed annd dust

[beat]

CCaRRy
high-way smoke
stacks
violent air
railroad parks

[beat]

swing⁵ing innfannt lungs
voices cursing

[beat]

Catholic
sidewalKK cracks

[beat]

treeless shadoow
bus bedroommm
sound portals

[beat]

thirty-sevenn train chambers
moans innprisonnn

[beat]

tent villages
under bridges, onne
thousannd corpses

[beat]

missing teeth
redlined lips

[beat]

over police
onne legged wheelchair

[beat]

tonngues prostrate inn
crosswalk
flowers

Notes

¹ Extend underlined long vowel for 2 beats. Example: seem

² Emphasis on capitalized constants. Example: fi-**LL**

³ Extend underlined constant for 2 beats. Example: sunnn

⁴ [beat]: take one breath

⁵ Extend underlined suffix morpheme 2 beats: Example: typ-ing

two scenes

Jaye Elizabeth Elijah

two scenes

—after b.

first

see, rift ripe in the trunk body
a yonic yawn. eye walks
among the pecans and there
she is. tree woman crowning:
a golden egg, a pack of dogs
not pups, three frogs, three
snakes. a dank and spacious ark.
eye wanders through forest; eye
witnesses holy ejaculate,
orgasmic birth. conception
and child simultaneous. slippery
twins, absurd family fuckin' tree!
slime-painted scales, skin,
and greened fur, also slimed.

second

mirror on a steely mountain
good rose, a new sun casts crystals
from cloud into cornea. eye is wet
with refraction; eye is flighty
from fear. rumble of thunder
friction of air, diffuse and dangerous
as a wall. in monsoon onset
eye confused storm for fire
and why: the way mist wisps smoke
from water, the envelope, the growl,
the melting of flesh.

first

from the cunt in the copse
a cascade of offspring, tumbling
and disparate siblings: seven stones
in slime, a swarm of moths unable
to fly, a bear cub, two porcupines,
a charred branch that goes on
for miles. eye should not have seen
but eye keeps seeing. and
in the afterbirth, my own face!

shall eye leave
the door open?

arium.
ot hesi-
the aes-
ls is of
Vo Art
t to lie,
irantee
oses in
truth.

A fiction of security.
When i spoke about rela-
tionships i was immedi-
ately asked: "between
what?" i have always
thought "within what?"

61 —Trinh T. Minh-Ha
"Mechanical Eye, Electronic Ear,
and the Love of Authenticity."

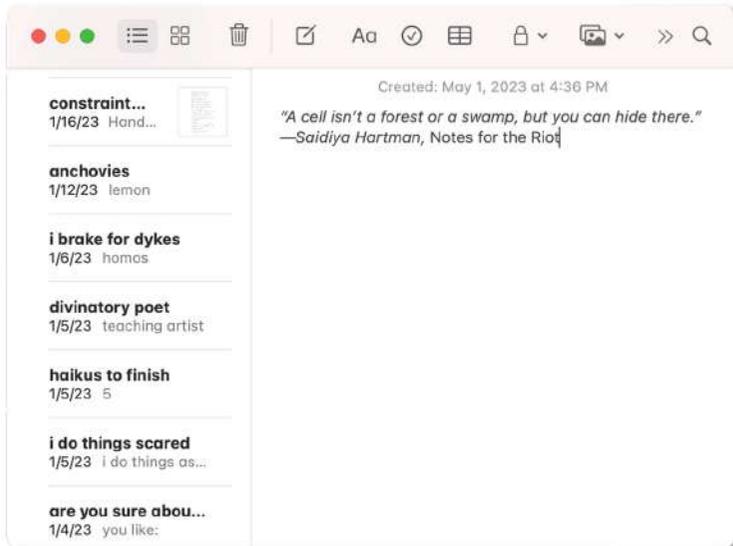
Hear the echo of a folktale: The Talking Eggs, adorned in jewels and shouting "take me!" and "don't take me!" Which sister, Blanche or Rose, is gentle, is cruel? She who listens well? She who distrusts what is true?

borderland of born — the clearing is an in-between place
open spaces BLM wilderness
how can a forest possibly be national?

whitening sky, shining daughter
Blanche: obedient, tame, virtuous,
rejected

Rose on the path, chased by a cloud of strange and venomous creatures, weeping and screaming. Why should the natural blacken, why should the bejeweled bless?

mother, suffer.
mirror me



Sacred mother Beloved mother.
"Your love is too thick"
Your love is a flood.

YEARS FROM NOW YOU'LL BE GLAD YOU DID THIS

blessed waist of this land,

copper buckle of this sun belt,

homesteader, baby, heaven's in your company

I'm writing songs to get in. I'm talking what's meant to be. it's better than skin. the flesh is a dream. your wife but filthy. your home but fox, and perfumed, and ending and leaving with passing arousal. home on the rip, painted horses in the rush.

you dream me, and above, and full of leather, licking up salt. and above, making love as coats. the moon gives down deliverance, purpose as gripped skin. as eternal as it matters. He fashions something to cover his hands. setter in the rush, and I kill what He has eyes for. He says the rip's filled out, she's a real life lady.

it crawls, it makes red dirt of these pale, little coasts, and they cry mercy, mercy, I'm your kid

water, the girls in it, have the bleed coming.

death is good of me, and death is kind of Him. I am a man with something sharp. I am perfect silk, covet freely. I live in His image, and I'm grateful for its blessings, and I'm sick all the time. I'm not eating like I should. I'm already dead! this is the bolt, and the bleed, or maybe here is under the bright light, and you are the skinner, or you are with the skinner, but I know you're not mourning. it was a good life on your land, and I am grateful, and I am sick.

on another, on something lighter, I do believe you care. I do think I love you. it's lust all the way, lust for sure. it's the sun halved. loosened belt when you say alright, yes, yes

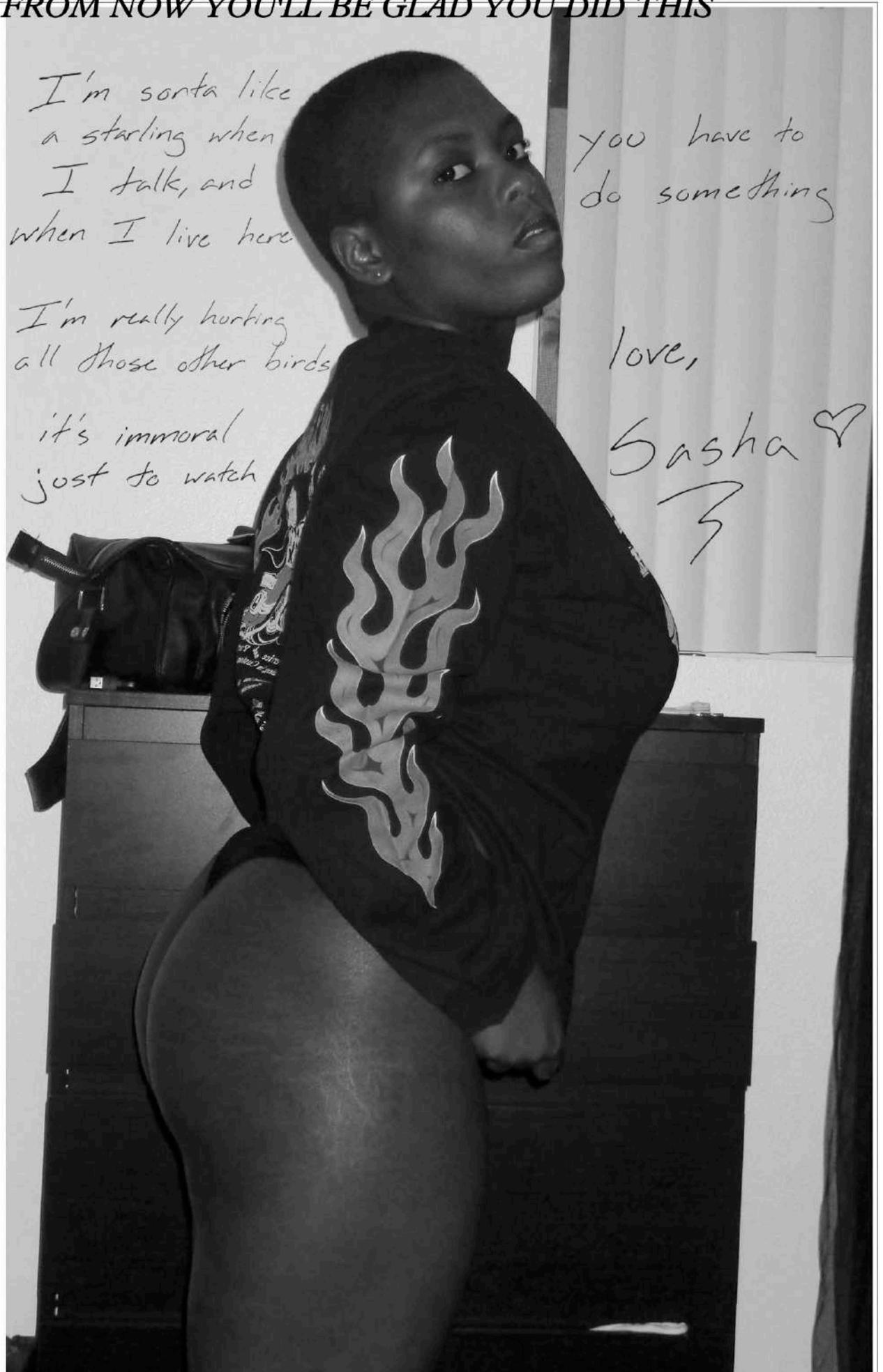
yes

yes, I would, and I will, and I want to. get to the edge and look down. the water moves unnatural. the water's stiff just watching. if you're so kind, and you're so good, you'll close your hand to me.

that's very flattering, the way you're slow about it. the moon is peeling. I see things. I cover myself in the word. I wet it down sheer for tourists. they check my mouth for the unclean spirit, my destiny on my tongue, o, it's in me, o, isn't it delicious!

I close my eyes, and it's something like you're there. something like I'm praying, and you, Lord, with you—

I've never felt so helpless



a young woman prepares herself for you:

"have you ever just wanted something so bad?"

Listening Itself is the Guide: On Landscape w/ Dionne Lee

SARETTA MORGAN: My introduction to your practice was through your video, *Drafts*. Now, at this point, having experienced more of your work, I think about how *Drafts* typifies the different ways that iteration takes place across your practice. What I appreciate about these particular “drafts” is that their progression doesn’t feel developmental. Rather, they are all the groundwork of each other. Every time the frame resets there’s an opportunity for the text and images to offer something that neither neatly extends nor contradicts what came before. Can you talk about how you understand multiplicity as it relates to landscape?

DIONNE LEE: A lot of my work is a response to the ways landscape photography has historically represented places, most specifically the American landscape. The historical view (literally) has been distant, wide-angled, dominant (looking down onto land or across a vast vista). These perspectives are inseparable from (and motivators of) manifest destiny and colonization.

I made *Drafts* in graduate school as I was trying to understand my own relationship to place (after moving to California from New York City where I was born and raised). It was a disorienting time, not just because I was acclimating to a new environment—I couldn’t reconcile the historical patterns of landscape photography. I knew I wanted to make work about land but I wasn’t sure where my perspective should begin. In the last few years I’ve often described part of my practice as “staying close to the ground.” This is literal (my camera is often pointed down, I don’t drive I walk, I collect rocks and sticks for my work...), it is also a pedagogy—a way I teach myself to resist the perspective of ownership, control, and dominance. To resist “documentation” and just look.

The video is mostly improvised. In some ways I was definitely working through my frustration with landscape photography and how to make my own images (I honestly think I’ve only made one “landscape photograph”: *A Test for 40 Acres*). However, I think *Drafts* ended up being more of a liberatory exercise than a reckoning (there is nothing I wanted/want to settle or make sense of/justify in terms of the traditions of landscape photography). Improvisation made space for the impulse to tear through images and create new, fleeting, scapes. In large part the title comes from this... the assemblages are drafts (I also hadn’t actually made a collage yet and was TERRI-

FIED of gluing things together! For real). Multiplicity, for me, is a way to remember that land itself is limitless. It is old and layered and always changing. It changes at different speeds at the same time: seasonally we can see a landscape go through changes, geologically we can’t. I love knowing there are ways in which the land shape-shifts that I will never be able to witness. Lately I’ve been spending a lot of time looking at geology books and fossils and thinking about all those layers.

SM: I appreciate the tension that fossils produce alongside the recognition of change you’re incapable of witnessing. It gives each fossil a poetic quality. As in, they become responsible for expressing a great deal. They are each fully their own expression of life and an origin story at once.

I wonder if you could share about what you understand your origins to be as an artist, and more generally as a person who thinks, and feels, and holds an investment in the way living takes shape.

DL: Yes. Well, my dad is an artist and my grandfather (his dad) was a hobby photographer who built a darkroom in a closet in the apartment my dad grew up in. It’s... pretty wild. I’m actually having a hard time with this question! Partly because family stuff can be weird (though a very special lineage to be part of), but also it feels like a very big question that maybe I am trying to squeeze too tight. It feels related to my role as a teacher. I really believe the normative ways we’ve shown and practiced “investment” in the world around us is limiting and can be destructive (it serves capitalism) when not partnered with self-discovered knowledge, experience as research, and a circular (as opposed to top-down/dictated) way of sharing knowledge. So part of me sees my origins as an artist as a deeply political and spiritual choice... I really believe in the circle! Another part of me, says: I know no other way! Artists are researchers and this is how I research best. And I think everyone should learn to research in this way too.

I really like this question and am going to think about it more. I’ve definitely thought about it in the past...but it’s kind of a scary place to go...! In a not-bad way. I appreciate it.

SM: I was sitting with your response this weekend. And also listening to an interview between David Naimon and Christina Sharpe on her recent book, *Ordinary Notes*. Sharpe

talked about receiving the practice of reading, as well as the practice of cultivating beauty, from her mother. And her understanding that beauty wasn’t something that was “passively received,” but was an intentional methodology. I think that resonates with what you’ve begun to share about 1) experiential knowledge and how we learn to invest in the world, and 2) your question of where you wanted your own perspective/orientation as a person making work about land to begin.

When I think about your photography, I do feel called to think about landscape as a process of navigation. One that’s generative. One that requires improvisation. One that’s inherently speculative. How would you say that you’ve developed (or are developing) a personal landscape methodology?

DL: I was actually listening to that very interview as I was doing some spring cleaning before leaving for my trip. It was such a full conversation. As I was listening, I knew I’d need to re-listen several more times.

Central to my process and research (/methodology) is what I mentioned earlier about staying close to the ground and those literal practices of walking and the orientation of my camera, etc. as a way to develop a fuller and more intimate understanding of a place and my relationship to it. It’s related to the practice of “ground truthing” (which I’m familiar with through the work of Aurora Tang, Program Director for the Center of Land Use Interpretation, who I will spend some time with this fall), in which a first-person encounter is the base for other forms of knowledge and information to be integrated.

SM: If I think of what you’ve outlined, and Tang’s “ground truthing,” as processes for regarding landscape—and I understand that you’re moving against documentation, control, and perspectives of ownership—I wonder how/when you come to know that a particular process or frame (being close to the ground, for instance) is what a moment or space calls for you to practice in order to experience intimacy. What are the governing principles (or to move with your terms: the guiding politic? or spiritual impetus?) behind why you regard in the way that you regard?

DL: I think every space requires the process/experience of being close to the ground/ground truthing/etc. Not only to develop a sense of intimacy, but a sense of knowing (not

in the complete sense, maybe like one or two prongs if one is lucky!).

I think my guiding principle is understanding the limits of *knowing* not as a hindrance or something to aspire to (all-knowing) but a sense of freedom, intimacy, respect, and possibility. I think of *Walking* by Linda Hogan.

SM: Oh, yes! Freedom, intimacy, and respect. For me those alignments are the conditions for pleasure. And pleasure is a *huge* part of your work for me. It’s a similar experience to the pleasure I feel when I’m reading. You know those moments when you encounter words that you couldn’t have put together yourself (at least not yet) but which clearly illuminate something you recognize as existing inside of yourself and also reflecting how you understand the world around you to be. The pleasure of recognizing what you feel.

Thank you for bringing in Linda Hogan. Yes. *Walking* animates—through foliage and corpse and hillsides—the process you’ve gracefully shared. And actually, I’m going to take my next question from her closing lines: “Walking, I am listening to a deeper way. Suddenly all my ancestors are behind me. Be still, they say. Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands.”

There’s such gorgeous attention in her narrative to what plays out materially through desire and competition, and the affective consequences of existing in the presence of “many gods [who] love and eat one another.” I appreciate that Hogan’s capacity to discern the interplay/movement/relationality is tied to kinship. In her words: “...a kind of knowing inside me, a kinship and longing...”

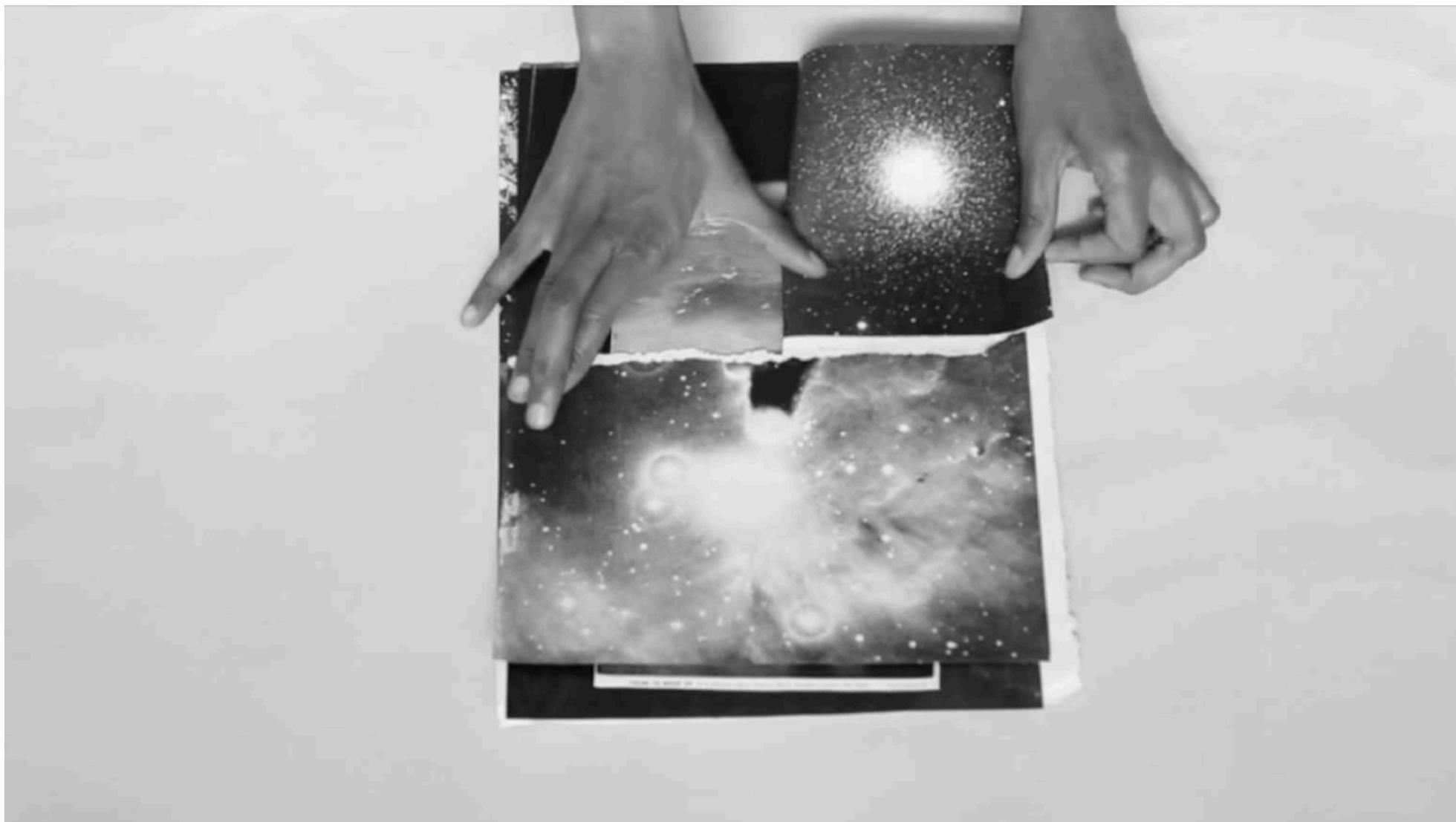
When you’re walking (both literally, and in other expressions of grounding), for whom (or what) are you listening?

DL: My walks (research walks, I suppose) often take the style of a *dérive* (loosely). That said, I am not limiting the act of listening to sound alone. I’m listening to the terrain, what paths may appear, or thinking how I can forge my own (in a literal sense as going off-trail, or in urban environments taking alleys as opposed to main roads).

I am also listening to myself, which is also listening to the ancestors I suppose. In my earlier work I thought a lot about how to bridge the gap I was experiencing between myself and

my environment. A bridge is built through reassurance, and the truth of the fact that connection to land and place has been a long-term formation that has happened generationally for all of us. This collective dissociation from the environment actually feels like a recent phenomenon (of course, I am not talking about when people are forcibly and/or violently displaced from their environment). It's as if we are undoing some of that generational wayfinding. There is such a difference in learning to know a place by wandering, or even looking at a map and trying to remember how to navigate in real time, versus having the Google Maps voice direct each step for you (funny to think about that as a form of "listening").

I want to also say that listening itself is the guide/navigator. There is so much to listen to if you are really paying attention with all senses. I guess sometimes it's hard to choose!



Still from Drafts, 7 minutes and 19 seconds, 2016 © Dionne Lee

my day-to-day actions are a reflection of a vast and generally terrible history:

Mohammed Zenia Siddiq Yusef Ibrahim w/ Morgan Vö

Mohammed Zenia Siddiq Yusef Ibrahim's Tel Aviv landed in my mailbox a few weeks into the pandemic. When the universe sends me important messages, it does so through invisible rays piercing clouds—not sure why! This is somewhat similar to what relishing in the electric vibrations of Zenia's incredible writing is like, hitting direct and clear as day. Their voice is turned up and wrenched, or strangely relaxed—it's a lot of collisions, fields of color, the tactility of words and the spill-over from dream/nightmare. Tel Aviv was a gift of texture and force when I really needed it. In their new book, James Baldwin's Lungs in the 80s, out soon on Chat Rooms press, the gift lives on, but kind of more stuck in the ground, bouncing off the city's walls, confronting time and place as the culmination(s) of a history. Here, we speak origin stories, recent developments in the feel of American politics, urbanity, poetry of course, and more. —MV

Morgan Vö: I was thinking about *James Baldwin's Lungs in the 80s* in relation to *Tel Aviv*, where in *Tel Aviv* cities are these kind of poles that offer, between them, a sense of what the world around them is made up of. Traveling between Tel Aviv and New York in that first book gives me a sense of the parameters of movement in general. But in *James Baldwin*, I feel like there's a little bit more of stasis, and engagement with cities directly, not so much from afar or from this kind of imagined perspective. So, what's your experience of cities? Where have you lived, and how does urban life impact your experience?

Mohammed Zenia Siddiq Yusef Ibrahim: I've lived in Seattle, Philadelphia, Oakland, and here in New York, and the first three of those were in more rapid succession, in my early 20s. Minus Seattle, which I had lived in at one point, and then lived very close to during my childhood, spent a lot of time there, so I guess that was my first experience of a city. And Seattle's a unique city, compared to Midwestern or even East Coast cities, which are much more modeled after each other, whereas Seattle and Portland are vastly different geographically.

But yeah, in terms of the kind of engagement thing you picked up, *Tel Aviv* is much more an accumulation of me having been traveling up until the year I was living in New York, versus *James Baldwin* which I wrote almost a decade after I wrote *Tel Aviv*, and is much more a reflection of me having lived in New York much longer than I have lived in any other city in my adult life.

MV: Have you experienced poetry scenes in other places?

MZSYI: I was engaged in the art scene in Seattle, but most of my friends that wrote were novelists. We definitely shared books and

stuff like that, and even worked on a zine, but it feels less like the poetry community here. And writing was an aspect of our friendship but also, probably owing to us being very young at the time, we were also just living and getting drunk all the time [laughs]. There was less intentionality than I think there is in New York, where there is just a super vibrant scene that is about each other's works, and isn't really competitive or anything. At least what I've found, it's more just supportive and people being interested in it.

Kind of was in the Bay Area poetry scene, but I didn't super get into it. That was a period of time when San Francisco was getting rapidly gentrified, and that had pretty major consequences for the longstanding Bay Area poetry scene. I was kind of coming in the middle of this thing that I didn't totally understand, around the North Beach. 'Cause I lived in Oakland, I didn't even really know where North Beach was. It was at one point a huge focal point of that scene, and I think it was in the middle of a lot of people moving there.

MV: I've only ever written poetry here in New York, and in general art in New York is very segregated by medium. Which in some sense is amazing, because there is that sense of support and community and linkage, and being surrounded in a really direct way by poetry specifically offers something for the practice. But I'm curious, when you were in Seattle and everybody's writing something different from you, how did you start to build what you think of as your poetry?

MZSYI: [Laughs] I realized I was not that great of a musician! To be perfectly honest. And deeper than that, I also realized that, as I was reading more poetry and other works, thinking about more of the concrete things you can do with language in terms of world-building, fragmentation, visual poetry, I

thought, you actually can't do this in a song. Or even explore different topics—at least, I'm not good enough as a songwriter—to explore deeper topics of identity, or different cities, or different things that I could explore in *Tel Aviv*, it being written, that I just couldn't translate to any other mediums that I did. I think that was a big part of it.

I've always been into writing, and I think even in my early 20s doing other art stuff was kind of like a self-rebellion against the inevitable fate that I would be a writer [laughs]. 'Cause I was like, *This is the least paid and the least sexy of all the other things*. Especially in Seattle, where being a musician is so cool, and being a writer, people are like, *Eh*. So yeah, I think that was the big thing, being decent at it, understanding it.

MV: Something I noticed in *Tel Aviv*, but is maybe more on the surface in *James Baldwin*, is the presence of poetry figures as people who invigorate landscapes, or invigorate your writing process. Like the passing mentions of someone like Archibald Macleish, or the extended engagements with someone like Rodrigo Lira. I'm curious, when did you start pulling in other writers like that as material in your poems?

MZSYI: Actually, my first poems were extremely reference-heavy, and then my friend who was a fiction writer looked over the first chapbook I had and gave me really extensive notes—unasked [laughs]! But one of the things he critiqued the most was, he was like, *These references are really obscure, and no one understands them*. He was like, *I would HIGHLY suggest not using them!* So for a while, like with *Tel Aviv*, I kind of tried to consciously pull back on that.

This was 2013, I want to say. Then I wrote part one of *Tel Aviv* in 2014, part three in 2015, and part two in 2017, so they also kind of reflected the changes in style that I was going through at those times. But also, with *James Baldwin's Lungs*, I consciously tried to bring in other writers. Because an idea I had writing poems for the book was, how do we as poets interact with chaotic—to say the least—political times? Like, we could be on the precipice of America being boring and shitty, or we could be on the collapse of the empire, and that's an insane thing to live and work

through. And then like, especially with poetry being the most minimized it's ever been, but also it's most important, in terms of it's political capabilities, I just wanted to evoke that tradition, evoke writers that had been through that. Especially with Lira, whose poetry I think is some of the best of political writing that is not overtly political, but is very engaged with a period of immense political turmoil. He was, I think, 24 when Pinochet came to power, and then killed himself in the mid-80s or something? During maybe the waning days of Pinochet's power, but Lira had experienced the worst of his coup.

MV: Neo-Nazism, and American fascism, and gun-toting teenage boys, are all so present in this book. Sometimes it feels cartoonish, other times it feels frightening. Part of the chaos is that it's all so on the surface, like at this moment people's alt-Right vocabularies are so straightforward, and the Right seems to desire to be seen warts and all, but then what do you do with that, how does one handle it? How do you think pulling in that kind of material shaped your work?

MZSYI: I think it was honestly a way for me to exorcise my own deep paranoia in that period of time. It was pandemic, after 2020. I was revved up about the political capabilities of a stronger Left, but also, like, the Armies of Night are coming for my door right now! Some of the cartooniness is like, I have a dark sense of humor. And I think that's kind of a reflection of the politics of Afro-pessimism, of almost an *I told you so* kind of thing. But also probably a reflection of seeing everything, because it was the pandemic, through the prism of the internet. Much of the alt-Right stuff, especially vis-a-vis the internet, is so cartoonish. As it's oftentimes said, satire is dead in this period of time, 'cause like, Ishmael Reed could not make a more cartoonish figure than Nick Fuentes, down to his name, his very weird optics, him wearing Yeezys. It's just absurd.

I feel like as much as the characterization of the Left is that it doesn't revolve around logic, doesn't like materialism, that's sort of not true. And I think that's the hardest thing the Left actually has to overcome in contextualizing the Right in this new iteration, is that the Right is devolved of any material logic or basis, from party platform—which, in 2020, revolved frighteningly around QAnon, which is

impossible to explain without laughing! [Laughs] 'Cause it's just like, JFK, Jr., for some reason is this messianic savior? Like, why? It's just like this weird thing where like, on one hand you have the Democrats, who have become increasingly more conservative and boring, and very much a return to... not even a perceived normality of the 50s or the 60s or the Great Society, but just like: the 90s. Or even just: before Trump. So it's like, this very unimaginative future on the one hand, and then this *extremely* imaginative but nightmarish future on the other hand that, like, doesn't make any sense.

The Right weirdly targets these nebulous points, is not really antagonistic to any superstructure or the empire as is. Like, this weird obsession with the 1619 Project, and banning it, and banning other books based off it, when the 1619 Project is not that crazy radical. It's main thesis is not even that different than what, like, Howard Zinn said 40 years ago [laughs]. Like, if you're even somewhat aware of academia, and a history of Black studies, it's like, *This is not really that controversial of a take!* It's actually a more mild take. And same with Critical Race Theory, it's actually extremely mild, in its political context. Which is also the thing, these kind of more institutional things have created these weird bedfellows of leftists and more institutional-bound liberals having to protect these more fundamentally important things, if that makes sense? Like, books shouldn't be banned, but I don't think Amanda Gorman's inauguration poem is going to create the next Che or something [laughs]. It just doesn't fit with any logic, but then you're forced to protect it because that's such a fundamental value. There's this elusiveness, but then it's also so fundamentally dangerous.

MV: There are other poets referenced in the book like Lira or Paul Laurence Dunbar, but the spectrum of contemporary poets is weirdly simplified in the book between Gorman and Billy Collins, and I'm curious about that. But

maybe a broader way to approach that is, I feel like when *James Baldwin's Lungs* speaks to a poetry scene, or a poetry environment, it understands poetry to be white space, and for Blackness in that space to feel uncomfortable, to say the least.

MZSYI: Yeah, it's just something that I find as a poet impossible to not grapple with. And I think that like, all Black or non-white poets grapple with this, because poetry by itself, you're a lot of times in spaces with very privileged white people who have never really interacted with people of color. And because everyone's focused on poetry, there's somewhat of an erasure there. But it also can be odd, or not fun [laughs]. So like, that's kind of where that comes from.

I mean, with Gorman and Collins, that's like... I actually think most poets are extremely benign, and I kind of think some of the stuff around privilege in the poetry world is a little self-involved. It's like, ten thousand people, and almost all of us have MFAs. I don't, and don't actually come from a privileged background, but it just doesn't bother me. If you live in New York City and are doing art, that's just something you're going to come across. So I think that those are sometimes not my biggest concerns, in the scheme of things. Like, someone being a poetry professor, and maybe getting lucky enough to get tenure, I don't think that they're actively doing harm. That's just to say, I didn't want to attack anybody for whom I somewhat like their work. I mean, I tried to not make it *about* Amanda Gorman, who I think... she's fine. She's making her money, she'll definitely be finer than all of us, and that's part of it. But more of just the reaction to her poetry, and the idea that it was kind of shockingly, among a lot of poets who I do respect, seen as this, like, *Come up to read poetry for an inauguration for the state*. And to me personally, that's anathema to my idea of poetry in terms of, like, what are the social obligations of a poet?

And then I just think Billy Collins is hilarious, and heard many stories about him making passes at people's moms [laughs].

[A strange bug lands on MV's shoulder.]

MV: Look at that.

MZSYI: Oh, whoa.

MV: I can't believe how many insects are that I've never seen before.

MZSYI: I know. I'm like, *What even is that?* Going into my bad science brain, I'm like, *Okay, six legs...* [Laughs] *Where's the abdomen?*

MV: It just feels like a fantasy, like I'm imagining this.

MZSYI: I love the color. That splash of orange is really beautiful.

MV: Totally. Speaking of science and bugs, are there other areas of knowledge besides writing and philosophy that really get into you?

MZSYI: History. I'm a really big history nerd. I really like how history complicates things. Often a historical event is actually an instance of human incompetence or error, that then creates these larger seismic issues. And I think there's something deeply poetic about that. There's a weird comfort that these events aren't so pre-designed, they're the result of one move that could have been another move, and then history would have been vastly different.

MV: In reading this book, there are multiple instances where you bring up the time scale of a century, or multiple centuries. That frame for me is kind of characteristic of your work, the scale of the repercussions of events, a connective tissue that you establish between events now and those a hundred years in the past.

MZSYI: I definitely think every moment's a

kind of culmination of all the previous moments. Especially being Black, and living in America, I very much understand that much of my day-to-day actions are a reflection of a vast and generally terrible history. I think that's what, in the first place, attracted me to history, because also like, being an immigrant here, there's just something deeply wrong. Like, what the fuck happened?

With this particular time—with the election of Trump, especially—it's brought up this fundamental question for leftists, which is really good, of like, *Was this inevitable, or was this a detour or a shift?* I mean, I personally think it was inevitable, and we've been lucky to avoid it for as long as we did [laughs]. But, yeah, I think with that comes an awareness of... I don't want to say "alternative history," because that sounds fake, but of a history not normally taught. Like, Trump seems like an aberration, but now that people are more aware of slavery and the effects of Jim Crow, and how actually omnipresent white supremacy was in American society until just a few decades ago, I think that that *does* make people better aware that, yes, this does seem like an inevitability.

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Destined to Tear This Building Down: Alice Notley w/ Nick Sturm

Conducted over email, June 5 to June 10, 2023.

Nick Sturm: You and I have talked before about your out-of-print works being republished, like *Tell Me Again* and even *Alma, or The Dead Women*, and there's been this wave of efforts to do this for your poetry, like the new edition of *Songs for the Unborn Second Baby* from Distance No Object and *Manhattan Luck* from Hearts Desire Press for the Alette in Oakland events. You've said that *Early Works* has generated a lot of feeling while also bringing you back to something about yourself. What has *Early Works* been doing for you as you've been reading from and talking about it?

Alice Notley: *Early Works* causes me to remember who I was writing them, so that's my life circumstances, my inexperience at living as a human, my relative lack of poetic skills—though I can see I was skilled. I am remembering how deeply I felt during the writing of certain of the poems, it's a depth of satisfaction that isn't like any other—not sensual or triumphant over others, and I can't get the right name for it at this moment. I've described it before, when talking about the writing of *165 Meeting House Lane*, as a meeting of sense of artistic form and sense of reality, real life inner and outer. The form of poetry achieves that. I'm remembering that feeling but also seeing what I didn't know, how young I was, how I didn't know what was going to happen in my life, to me and others—then some of it is happening, and I don't know the future but maybe I do. I am trying to be something I'm not sometimes, I'm not facing up to the fact that I'm just not normal, and there is no quotidian (there never really was in the real New York School), though there is love. Some of the things I say almost rotely turn out to be so true! There is no money, and there will be no money, and that will be truer and truer. When I was young I thought everyone knew some poetry, knew poetry was a wonderful and noble pursuit, knew that they needed art. My parents, who couldn't afford to go to college and in my father's case finish high school, respected poetry and knew some. Now I know that most of the people in the world don't even read books, though the illiterate often know more poetry than the educated do. But the countries I live in don't really give a fuck if poetry exists or not, on the whole. But I see her, who I was, finding out she would write poetry and hoping she would get better at it and doing it blindly . . . I remember just pushing at it all the time, knowing it was the most important thing in the world. I'm still like that. She

is very very present on the page and in each poem and word – that presence is so much of why the poems are good, so she's embarrassing! She is unbelievably gauche and open and also very tough.

NS: It occurs to me that I've never asked you about the title *For Frank O'Hara's Birthday*, the last book in *Early Works*. You wrote those poems in Wivenhoe, Essex, which is this quaint little village outside Colchester in England where Ted was teaching at the University of Essex in 1973–74. So much happened to you and your poems there, too. I went to Wivenhoe once and there were hollyhocks everywhere.

AN: I think Ted suggested the title, probably among many suggestions, since that is always a favorite game for poets and often with more than one participant. I probably chose it for a couple of reasons. One being that it made a flat horizontal line—speaking abstractly—to this slightly unruly herd of poems that make up the book. It's almost opaque in relation to them but provides an umbrella anyway. However, you might consider the real title to be *In Memory of My Feelings*, I mean I built up to a place like that though not that form: *Songs for the Unborn Second Baby*, written at almost exactly the same time, is more in that form, as form and sound on the page. But something like “Your Dailiness,” that's a subject-matter moment that relates to “In Memory of My Feelings.” Everything you've gone through, and then you arrive at a point of freedom. *Songs for the Unborn Second Baby* is actually an imitation of the form of O'Hara's Odes, so you'll understand that I was often working out in what I conceived to be O'Hara's forms. The collected O'Hara had come out, and I was fascinated by the form of the poems in relation to each other as laid out in that volume. I loved the collage-like effect of all the forms he tried out, and the way the minor and major poems play off against each other. I thought quite consciously that I wanted to make work like that, even a very long work based on such a conception; I had the texture or feel of O'Hara's collected, as a whole form, in my head as a goal for much of the '70s.

NS: What's it been like to have *Early Works* come out simultaneously with this new book, *The Speak Angel Series*? I know this wasn't the plan originally, it was going to be *The Speak Angel Series* by itself. Then Jeff Alessandrelli at Fonograf Editions imagined a “First Four Books of Alice Notley,” and brought me on board, which led to *Early Works*. I'm still read-

ing *Speak Angel* but recognize a series of networks between these poems and your poems from fifty years ago.

AN: *The Speak Angel Series* is in fact a play of different forms set against each other, though longer forms for the most part, but as I say that I realize . . . For example, in Book I, *The House Gone*, there are three kinds of forms set off against each other, a long-line narrative, increasingly snaky short-line stanzas that change the sound of the narrative from time to time, and actual inset poems of various lengths and titles. Book IV, *To Paste On*, contains works of all shapes and sizes, though the narrative is maintained. But with references to actual current events, most of the book being “mythic” or some word like that. And in each of the other four books I find ways to create variety in the surface and form I've chosen. I've worked like that probably since the early '70s, and as a method it is probably related to my love of the O'Hara collected. But there are other kinds of networks between *Early Works* and *The Speak Angel Series*. Any time I give a reading from the two I notice the same words even, the same preoccupations, the Samson dream! I was still dreaming I was Samson fifty years later! Obviously I was always destined to tear this building down. I'm comforted by the fact that I can see these connections, that they're real, that I've in some sense always known who I was and what I was doing, even if unconsciously. Everything I learned how to do as a young poet in the prevalent lyric-I mode, all the forms I played with and perhaps mastered, are subsumed into the overall structure and sound of my later books. I just did it, and I'm just doing it now. I know what I'm doing, but if I have a very deliberate map I won't want to take the trip. Later I see that everything is in place as if by magic.

NS: At the symposium on your work in Paris last April you said a few things about form, and someone actually said it was surprising for them to think of you as a formal poet. You said: “We are condemned to form.” You also said, linking form with matter, “Somehow matter chose to exist.” You're talking about poems but also the forms that are our selves. I remember this part of the conversation ended with you asking, “What can we learn from the fact that we don't die?” Are you still thinking about this question? About form and matter in these ways?

AN: Yes, I seem to be writing a continuous work now dealing with this subject. I'm cur-

rently wondering how to divide it into books for publication, the outer form changes constantly and I might be inside a sub-form for quite a while without remembering what I originally set out to do. Chronology seems to be abolished, and I'm currently confused. Essentially I'm questioning every single thing taken for granted about the existence of matter, what it is like, whether or not one is actually part of the matter system that everyone says one is. Time and so on. I call myself god, since it feels as if human society needs a new definition of what that might be, I say god is powerless, since power is a human conception and doesn't apply anywhere else in the universe. And so on. I say that humans don't die, but there is no judgment or justice in the afterlife because that's also human bullshit, no reincarnation either into some cruel class system. I constantly say that the planet is teensy, and all planets are teensy, and that the reason you don't fall off these little golf balls is that I hold them and you up, being gravity. Things like that. As I write these works I become more and more powerless, my knees are going, I just started blood pressure medicine, I have my annual cancer checkup coming up.

NS: Is there a place where you do draw power from?

AN: I think I'm saying that in the Real World there is no power. Power is what bodies do to each other. It's kind of disgusting. I must be proposing a love that isn't power. There is a sort of electricity I experience though when I read poetry aloud, I suppose also when I write it but that's more flowing. So, yes, the power to light up!

NS: That reminds me of a line in Book I of *The Speak Angel Series* from “The Woman Who Counted Crossties”: “I promise you love at the very least that of the great words and me.” When I'm reading a long work like *Speak Angel*, and how I remember reading *Disobedience* and *Benediction*, it's almost like reading a mystical text. Not that they are those types of texts but reading them is this incremental process of brief or sustained absorptions into “great words and me.” I read Kerouac's *The Book of the Dharma* like this one summer, collaging it into what else I was adjacent to. It's always incredible, while reading, to imagine how writing with this type of duration comes into being. In your preface for *Speak Angel* you give a gloss for each book's form and content, but what was the composition process for the entire project? Did it change, for instance, when you

got to tracing the form of *The Descent of Alette* in Book VI, *The Poem*? Was it startling to suddenly be back in the *Alette* form?

AN: Actually, no. I was in an entirely other kind of place from when I wrote *Alette*. . . I'm still not clear why I did that, except to make a balance with Book III which is in the measure, sort of, but not the overall form book by book of *Alette*. When I began *Speak Angel* in 2013, I had no idea except for long lines. The file for the first book was called "Long Lines." I say what I'm going to do at the beginning of that book—unlike with others of my book-length works, I wrote the beginning at the beginning. Then I wrote daily slowly drawing out the story of the woman and the variant story, as told by my father—he used to tell me stories sometimes, particularly one that was about a house, the house whose loss is behind Book I, *The House Gone*. Because when I was seven he stopped ever taking us for a car ride in the evening as he used to, and I would beg and he would say: Once there was a man who took his family for a ride every evening because he didn't have a nice house to be at home in in the evening, and then he built one and he didn't need to go for a ride anymore! I think I was thinking of that, and how after my mother died we, my siblings and I, very quickly had to dismantle everything in that house and make it ready to sell. I don't have room to tell all this, it is, though, my childhood house, *The House Gone*. My house was finally gone and I real-

ized I was in fact supposed to lead all the dead and living, in this poem, to a certain place in the cosmos out in the open without houses. I realized I had to change the universe or cosmos or whatever one would call it. So I did this inventing ways to keep the surface of the poem interesting, and one arrived. But I know that one never arrives, that isn't Ever what's going on in existence, which is forever. The cosmos is chaotic, more like the ancient perception of chaos than something like a mess. It isn't mess, it's the random creation of moments, not linear, and many many at the same time. So I was going to continue and keep re-finding the meaning of the point we had arrived at and what we were doing. Book II, *Opera*, turned out to be an opera, a singing of further understanding of this new origination which involves collaging and pasting, since there is never nothing to make something out of. So that is sung. In Book III, *Healing Matter*, the fact that in the previous book we were all standing on ice at the edge of an abyss caught up with me, the writer, and I realized I had to do something about a landscape. So I proposed to explore the abyss, and doing that it seemed natural to revive the *Alette* measure since it was conceived for a poem of levels of places. However, I began to refer to friends of mine—my family was already involved, and then Michael Brown was shot and killed in Ferguson, Missouri. I don't name him yet, but someone is suddenly shot and killed while I am going about the poem. In Book IV, *To*

Paste On, I have decided to make a place for different kinds of forms so I can deal with Michael's death and situation and also other events in the world out there—Ebola, and the Syrian Civil War, for example. I also ended up writing several long, long-lined, almost sermon-like works. Then I thought I really did need to use a collage form, since collaging, pasting-on was continuously referred to as the way the new universe was being made. So I wrote the next book, Book V, *Out of Order*, in a black notebook, maybe two, those black leather-bound sketchbooks with blank paper, not proceeding consecutively but skipping around in the notebook, writing the "story" randomly, and in the typing up often rearranging lines, getting my head into a place during composition, as well, where I could "get" the lines out of order, receive them that way. Then I wrote the final book calling it *The Poem*. As if it were what I had been aiming for, and did all of that *Alette* tracing (a good word for it). The outer world stays with me, but it becomes incorporated more and more into the story, people from the news become characters, but that isn't the correct way to put it: I spoke to them and had visions with them. It always felt very real.

NS: These two incredible new books are out from Fonograf. *Runes & Chords* was published by Archway Editions. Your book of selected talks and essays, *Telling the Truth as It Comes Up*, is forthcoming with The Song Cave later

this year. You just read in London, you're going to Berlin, and then coming back to the States soon. What do you want to do next? I'm suddenly thinking of how you ended your preface to *Early Works*, how moved I was reading it for the first time: "And once more, I thank Ted, who is somewhere." Where do you want to go in your poems? Where will you go?

AN: First I should say that a new book from Penguin is going into production, called *Being Reflected Upon*. The title is taken from a line by Frank O'Hara. The first poet I loved, and Ted, and Doug, are and will always be inside whatever happens. As well, Anselm and Edmund, those great poets. *Being Reflected Upon* is dedicated to Anne Waldman, and it contains references and anecdotes and specific human connection throughout. It also provides a practical connection to *The Speak Angel Series* and to what I think I know about what's going on metaphysically and also how to go on. Which seems to be what everyone is asking: how do we go on? And as Frank said Samuel and Pierre said we shall continue what else is there to do? Nothing disappears, and everything comes back. So I will continue working on my knowledge, my poetry, my stories. I will continue to be interviewed, since I do a lot of my thinking when people ask me questions. I will be here, or somewhere, the next time anyone comes through.

Richard Hell What Just Happened

With images by Christopher Wool

Richard Hell's new poems are interspersed with images created by Christopher Wool, and followed by an essay and a list.

We always knew Richard Hell was a poet, and that he was one long before he became a rock star and fashion icon. What surprises about his new poems is the density of thought they compress into their apparently casual sleeves.

—Lucy Sante

Garth Graeper The Sky Broke More

Blending eco-poetics, ghost story, and sci-fi thriller, Garth Graeper's first full-length collection imagines survival in a world where nature, time, and identity are unstable and predatory.

The earth of these poems is sincere and erotic, fraught with the unraveling of bodies in human damage, yet sounding to heal with each tone. Their care is impressive, and gorgeous.

—Jonathan Skinner



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just the books"

please check our website
for a late-September launch party
and other events

Robert Desnos Night of Loveless Nights

Translated by Lewis Warsh

Afterword by David Rosenberg

The fiftieth-anniversary edition of New York School poet Lewis Warsh's long out-of-print translation of a major poem by a pillar of French Surrealism.

Desnos's poem, in Lewis's translation, must have influenced us all with its structural changes—stanzas, then none to speak of, prose interlude, line lists, then lovely curt goodbye. I love this poem.

—Alice Notley

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

REMEMBRANCE

Letter from Provincetown (for Minnie Bruce Pratt)

Rachel Levitsky

Dear Friends and Poets,

I arrived for my yearly visit to Ptown two nights ago with my best friend, the genius Dana Greene. The grip of heat, humidity and smoke has loosened for now, and it feels like and looks like a perfect day so, instead of getting to work right away this morning—admittedly I was foggy as well—I took Weinstein (pet dog) to the bay as the tide was coming in. I'm realizing that the West End is to me the preferable spot for a walk and a swim, so I made my way and we found Weinstein's old friend Rabi (pronounced 'rabbi'), a short blond hound. I'm staying on the East End at Olga's. Olga's dead. Her home however continues, very much as hers, I imagine; I hadn't been here when she was alive but her collection of small paintings by local artists is still on the walls, her books, the small details, things, effects in what I once heard a friend call "the adult drawer," and some of her clothes continue to hang in the small addition to the unit, a walk-in closet lined with foil, into which you take a step down. This isn't morbid or goth; it somehow feels like a life force, not Olga per se but something energetically Olga, a field of Olga extended into time and space by the love of people who still feel her and are tending. It always feels impolite when I say or write that someone is dead in that way: Dad's dead, David (brother) is dead, etc, but despite this feeling of being wrong I continue to want to use, and use, this language. Maybe it's me attempting to materialize the dead in their deadness. For example, there is alive Sinéad O'Conner/Shuhada' Sadaqat—gone, but there is also dead Sinéad O'Conner/Shuhada' Sadaqat, which is all the ways she exists for us since she passed this week at the age of 56. It's different, we feel her differently and are broken by the tragic loss and yet we feel her and how she propels, and we'd like the propulsion to continue.

As I was walking, I thought I heard someone call "Brucie" and I entered a reverie about the great poet Minnie Bruce Pratt: feminist, Lesbian, communist, ICON, author of the groundbreaking and gorgeous trans stories of *S/HE*, *Crime Against Nature*, *We Say We Love Each Other*, four other volumes of poetry and numerous political essays including the oft-taught "Identity: Skin Blood Heart." Minnie Bruce was a Hera to me even or especially as we began to be friends in the mid 1990s, her

YES to me then and since then is very much how I have yessed myself toward being a poet. Pratt, who died on July 2 at the age of 76, had a double first name, Minnie Bruce, and this second part was critical. She didn't answer to Minnie, and in fact, her elders, her grandchildren, and Leslie called her "Brucie" (and "Grandma Brucie"). Leslie is by the way, and importantly, Leslie Feinberg, iconic author of *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), *Transgender Warriors* (1996) and numerous essays and articles including many many articles for the Workers World newspaper which Minnie Bruce continued to edit and distribute until her death. International, trans, anti-racist, working class struggle was the lived experience of daily life for both Minnie Bruce and Leslie, who was the love of Minnie Bruce's life and her spousal partner in desire, politics, life, art for 22 years until Leslie's early death in 2014. Their marriage was iterated in various stages of legality and politics and their own political personal ambivalences multiple times during that time. Minnie Bruce's memoir, a first draft completed just before her sudden grave illness and death, is framed by the multiple obstacles and engagements of marrying Leslie, and it is titled *Marrying Leslie*. I was honored to be, am honored to be, one of the readers of the first draft of this book, a marvelous, wild and vast epic of their daily radical histories, which for Minnie Bruce was intertwined with poetry and, maybe causally, of dream. (Are all poets dreamers I find myself wondering.) One of Minnie Bruce's intentions, in collecting a chronological story of her 22-year life with Leslie, is to attend not only to her own biography and theirs together but also to the unwritten biography of Feinberg, specifically the centrality of her commitment to working class struggle. Which was equally Minnie Bruce's.

Coming here to Ptown with Dana has become a yearly ritual, our solo time together here, and this year we have a week to spend. It's nice to be lucky with the weather. Amid the global experience of environmental collapse that has been evident this year and this summer I'm tempted to say that it hasn't been an easy year for anyone but I stop myself... after all I just had a session of psychoanalysis in which I revisited my tendency towards specious and often overly elaborate efforts to implement logics of equity, of us-all-being-in-it-togetherisms. No, can't get everyone to be all in it together, although wouldn't that be nice? But,

my fantasy human drive—common care for others and earth—is a good spotlight for reverie about Minnie Bruce Pratt, whose imagined communities and ideals were being turned real in real time by her life work as a poet, activist, family member, friend. (She was an avid lover and knower of all things plant life—her physical environments are veritable characters in her works.) When I probably misheard the call of "Brucie" I had the nutty thought that I would love to have the opportunity to name a pet Brucie and somehow keep her adorable, gracious, communist, caring friendship-iness close and alive to me as energy. I'll end this letter in the poetical space of The Poetry Project—where my friendship with Minnie Bruce began at a reading by Randall Keenan (1963-2020)—with some quotes from her last published work of poetry, *Magnified*, that came out from Wesleyan in 2021 and which I blurbed, amazed at her work manifesting the ongoing propulsion of her revolutionary love affair with Leslie.

Night after night that bright gaze moves
over us
lying under the comfort of being watched
over.

I realize, mishearing Brucie!, that I don't want to know that she's gone, don't absorb that I can't call her or write to her to talk to her about her work and life, love, politics, my new love.

Without the sun, who could see the sparkle?

I hope I'll take the cue from her last works, her acceptance of the death of Leslie as not an end but instead a drive, not to we-are-all-in-it-together-ism, but into revolutionary after-lives made real by love, dream, memory and politics.

How we work, work, work. Not our nectar.
No death overcome that way. The hope for
a fleeting look, to be even briefly seen. The
wave,
the road crew's hand, *You, go ahead, go on by me.*

All my love,
Rachel



Minnie Bruce Pratt (1946–2023). Image courtesy Appalachian State University.

REMEMBRANCE

“I Don’t Want to Go to Heaven; I Want to Go Where Keith Goes”

Ben Lerner

I write down every dream I have featuring a Waldrop. Keith in particular has shown up in my dreams consistently, frequently, since I met him twenty-seven years ago. And I’ve asked around and it’s apparently a pretty common thing, having Keith appear in a dream. I take some comfort in the fact that so many of us will continue to see him there.

Here are a few of my dreams in which Keith has appeared. Somehow I think Keith would like my sharing a few of these dreams without interpretation more than he’d like my going on about his brilliance and importance—which anyway I’ve done (and will do) elsewhere.

*

I dreamt I was trying to convince Keith to watch the footage of the towers collapsing on September 11th—it was soon after I’d given (in real life) the Waldrops my old television since I was moving out of Providence—and he absolutely would not. In the dream I said to him “I have no idea why I’m doing this” and he said “I wouldn’t worry about it.”

*

I dreamt that Burning Deck wanted to start an imprint devoted to the poetry of Freemasons and Keith had me over for tea to ask me if I was interested in helping out and I said I didn’t understand what he was talking about and that was the entire dream.

*

I had one dream in which Keith asks me to show one of his brothers, Charles, around New York—in the dream the brother looks kind of like Jonathan Winters—and what Charles really wants to do is go to the 2nd avenue deli and order the tongue plate. But within the mysterious logic of the dream I know that Keith would want me to prevent this from happening. That really the whole point of my friendship with the Waldrops—certainly the reason they asked me to be their literary executor—is to prevent Charles from ordering the tongue plate at the 2nd avenue deli.

*

Last summer when I was in Lisbon I dreamt that Keith had curated a show at the Marionette Museum and he gave some opening remarks explaining that it was a common misconception that marionettes were controlled from above by wires or strings. “Most marionettes,” he said, “like most people, are manipulated from below.”

*

I have had more than one dream that I was eating with Keith at an Indian restaurant on Thayer Street in Providence where we did in fact eat a few times. In one of the dreams I am an undergraduate trying to impress Keith by saying something about Olson’s “Projective Verse.” When I finish my little speech Keith is quiet for a moment and then says: “It’s always seemed to me that lines of poetry are broken less by the way a poet breathes than by the way a poet blinks his eyes.”

*

I’ve had more than one dream in which I saw Keith in passing, as if en route to somebody else’s dream.

*

The Indian restaurant, which I assume is gone, was on the second floor. We were seated by the window. In one dream there is a commotion on the street and I look down to see that a horse drawn carriage has been involved in an accident. There are cries from the street, confusion in the restaurant. Only Keith remains calm. This dream has a clear source in his poem “71 Elmgrove Avenue.”

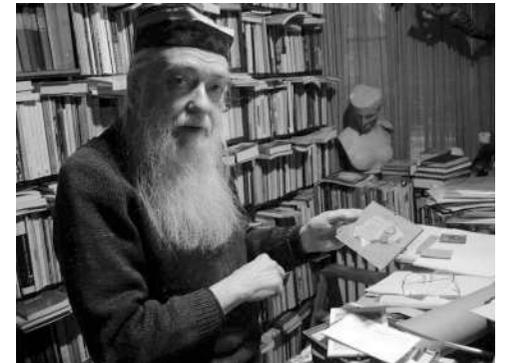
Here, and in St. Petersburg, one
dreams of being run over by
horses in the street. St.
Petersburg, Russia, that is, at the
turn of the century. Since the Revolution,
they are more and more (horses, I
mean) a thing of the past - or of
westerns. Which brings me
to Italy, where a torrent of traffic
rushes, honking, over
the Roman Empire. But here,
and through a desert, anytime, the Nile flows
like a dream.

*

I’m staying in the attic on Elmgrove Avenue. I wake up early and go downstairs to the dining room and find the table is covered in birds’ nests. There are some delicate metal instruments on the table and a little pile of fragments of colorful plastic, tinfoil, string, etc., which I intuit have been carefully extracted from the nests. I realize that these are the secret sources of his collages. For some reason I respond to this revelation by returning to the attic and going back to sleep. At which point I wake up in reality.

*

“I wake, unsure where I am, I and my surroundings vague, the fierce sense of reality having disappeared with the dream.” – from *The Silhouette of the Bridge*.



Keith Waldrop (1932–2023). Credit: Steve Evans

fold

Kaur Alia Ahmed & Nora Treatbaby

Why ignite a puzzle? You let go by doing it at all.
In a mini way we drop the heart of the looker, super the
flow, fly the certain. By picturing the message falling
we ground a constant, asking our bodies to respond
louder to the rock. I know your feelings fade.
Desperation is an avalanche.
If I were to let my hands flow and just tell you,
I might corrode the ladder. Touching letters like my
muscles mind the parallel. In the privacy you took the surprising

turn on the fork and pulsed into me, craving. Your flip pulled slippage from
my pockets and spelled easily. Two squiggles next to each other turned
into ribbons by adding little slanted lines. Forever forgot to happen.

Why allow the span to puzzle? You find beauty in light's formula; symmetry folding surprise.
Like satisfaction the math of the breath pirouettes when you catch my heart wandering.
The other luck teases your own control. How your desire shapes the waft, my first sense curdles.
Some fear gives me paths to turn away.

I found a loop, I'm knocking on the sky to say.
Abrupt tapping and observations, a divet where
water used to be suggests the feathered edgeless.
The branches reach out and repeat, I look through,
reach out and repeat it. I avoid the core, as if that's where
the itch shames. On the city's mountain, echo was
so close to the word it barely left it. I braid uncertain
gusts and look right at you. I asked how many times you had sung out to the expanse. Humm-
mmm mmmm mmm

You said, we get to witness the crescent rise. It's so good to pee and look at it, my light
follows in a soak of coaxing. We want to learn how to feed source.
I dropped the glass of well water. The way I can taste my own mouth.
You said, what's precious is no problem because we're gonna
be again. Breathe in and lean back dreams later.

Do you feel received?

hi nora, It is I, Kaur, your greatest enemy and friend. We shall be each other's creation and
destruction. Are you ready?

I'll be ready can you give me 5 minutes

Yeah for sure. I have to stop and get gas anyways.

I leave myself shaking. A million watts of morning. I take your wind. You said you couldn't.
Cold knot by a water drop spells the squirm that tapped in. Your lean strained against itself.
Will faith plant? Before we FaceTimed I glued myself together for 10 minutes. Into this firmly.
Asking endlessly.

bowl of yellow sound, imperfectly made

this morning's chatter has no answer
rather it hopes you'll light it, note it with conscience

every circle the sound makes marks us a different note
our difference is not separate because it
made decisions to relate
having plucked a different string
the vibe arranges it at varied rhythms

bowl of yellow sound
imperfectly it circles
if not to finish

boundary two

my mind's brushed waste
frothing with guilt, polish loss
chant the boundary

if i step on dawn
my belt flies free and knocks me
the skin of a door

one less painful contour
if the light which we change under together is
adorned with such
adorned with loss
a forlorn cache that puffs open

the marker wipes clean

The signs crawl empty around the boundary
A garden of hopes
arranged in a weird way, young plants blended
touch your feet and respect you

Why ignite a puzzle? You let go by doing it at all.
In a mini way we drop the heart of the looker, super the
flow, fly the certain. By picturing the message falling
we ground a constant, asking our bodies to respond
louder to the rock. I know your feelings fade.
Desperation is an avalanche.
If I were to let my hands flow and just tell you,
I might corrode the ladder. Touching letters like my
muscles mind the parallel. In the privacy you took the surprising

turn on the fork and pulsed into me, craving. Your flip pulled slippage from
my pockets and spelled easily. Two squiggles next to each other turned
into ribbons by adding little slanted lines. Forever forgot to happen.

Why allow the span to puzzle? You find beauty in light's formula; symmetry folding surprise.
Like satisfaction the math of the breath pirouettes when you catch my heart
wandering.
The other luck teases your own control. How your desire shapes the waft, my first sense
curdles. Some fear gives me paths to turn away.

I found a loop, I'm knocking on the sky to say.
Abrupt tapping and observations, a divet where
water used to be suggests the feathered edgeless.
The branches reach out and repeat, I look through,
reach out and repeat it. I avoid the core, as if that's where
the itch shames. On the city's mountain, echo was
so close to the word it barely left it. I braid uncertain
gusts and look right at you. I asked how many times you had sung out to the expanse.
Hummmmm mmmm mmm
You said, we get to witness the crescent rise. It's so good to pee and look at it, my light
follows in a soak of coaxing. We want to learn how to feed source.
I dropped the glass of well water. The way I can taste my own mouth.
You said, what's precious is no problem because we're gonna
be again. Breathe in and lean back dreams later.

Do you feel received?

Redemption is a bowl of yellow sound, and listening is always imperfectly made. You tell me things all the time about who are you by the way you move. That you are alive, like any rock, is a miracle. Trillions of years of cause and effect that produced the outcome of you. And God willed it. Each thing, whether defined by time or space, is so fragile. That you are alive, like me, is obvious. In this existence, you hurt people. Redemption is listening, it is always remade imperfectly. I cannot help you. You can only try to love like wind. The wind forgives itself. It does not carry with it the weight of its path. I am folding the full redemptive cycle of love into you. I was put on this planet to live, to softly place my palm on your right shoulder here in bed and ask you to breathe in the soft lasers of air so to know you are safe because you are here. I cannot help you. You cause harm. Airports cause harm. We are threaded weirdly. You must step forward into the sky and change. You must seek to see the reactions that are set up within us. You must ask "What part of me moves through you?"

Redemption is a bowl of yellow sound. Listening is always imperfectly made, it moves and tells me. Like wind, we can take the threads of the sky and breathe softly beside harm. Love is always remade imperfectly. I fold my loop. To step into the light we must carry the path. The rock's miracle echoes trillions of years of cause and effect. The miracle of the rock as it sits among our chewed gum and rot and prices. We know the color of magic is always transforming. The wind listens and lets go. I cannot help you. The wind doesn't carry the weight of its pat

RESPONSE

On *Dereliction* by Gabrielle Octavia Rucker

sadé powell

issabop on *Dereliction*

iliac breathing one continuous
“never-knowing never-optional” (5)
heart murmur or whisper song

the pneumatics of black femme interiority
uttering the multifaceted neglect
the “septic taunting” (22)

“how to be of things, then suddenly, to not” (63)

yet a sankofa refusal beckons nonperformative “then what?” (57) then nothing.

the whirl in empty sociality
considers the flare
“Four dozen toothed globe snails nesting in the pulp fruit” (36)
as inveterate enoughness

gabrielle submerges prophecy: “wholeness, you see is not [her] goal” (92)
her quotidian gestures of lucidity, her singularity castoff
“—all noise trickling down to ear through string of grassroot stethoscope” (21)

in this book one dwells
as black folx do
as plenum in obscurity
however lopsided or concave
blackness
unburdens the cypher where gabrielle can get her shit off:
“there’s nowhere to speak about what didn’t happen/
all i have are these poems & no kind of knowing outside of that” (71)

her dissembled flit imbued us
upon itself
a black sociologic undertone: *Dereliction*.

On *Bad Diaspora Poems* by Momtaza Mehri

Ed Luker

(Penguin, 2023)

Momtaza, I wanted to review your book or reply to your book or give a sense of how your book replenished me. Not just your book, but your thinking, your challenge, your friendship. It is easy to feel lost at sea in a world of imperfect poetry, between the failures of the avant-garde and the pretty pleasantries of careerist pathos. I struggle to know what my poems are for or what I want them to do. Your work shows a new escape route, helping me to muster a little energy and compact that into words. Here's to your shining light in the darkness, and here's to the fullness in sense that you bring to the page. With love, Ed

Midsummer Night's Delirium

after Momtaza's Borderline Disaster Poetry

Midsummer Night's delirium / Midsummer Night's twisting backwards
 through the screen / Midsummer Night's familiar fatigue like a song you never
 wanted to give up on / Midsummer Night's cold shower / Midsummer Night's
 rhythm in back muscles seizing / Midsummer Night's cliché / Midsummer
 Night's rainstorm in a pothole, the floating nos canisters becoming life rafts for
 the imagination and its impossible grandeur / Midsummer Night's mechanical
 thought, snagged on an algorithmic misprision that we can't shake off / Mid-
 summer Night's forgotten birthmark, found once more in a frantic search for
 flesh or obliteration / Midsummer Night's tilt on toes at the apocalypse after-
 party (the last afters shall be first and the first shall be last after the afters) /
 Midsummer Night's open malfeasance, the unrelenting buttressing against
 chemical facts, presented as nature, felt as sun / Midsummer Night's airplane
 plummeting through a halo / Midsummer Night's melting desuetude in the
 face of clock time / Midsummer Night's spit / Midsummer Night's grease /
 Midsummer Night's gesture / Midsummer Night's second nature, lips curved
 to kiss or cuss like knuckle bone / Midsummer Night's I wonder why I wanted
 you so bad and now you're here it's not that I don't more that I can't, until when
 I don't know / Midsummer Night's not for leaving, not for staying, only for
 shaking the petrol cap off and giving the heart a refill, when the fuel is too hot
 to light without somebody getting burnt / Midsummer Night's cracks in the
 burial urn / Midsummer Night's spectacular ravine echo / Midsummer Night's
 surviving amidst the uncertainty of survivals / Midsummer Night's ice clinking
 in a glass watching pornography with the blinds closed and the window open /
 Midsummer Night's get voyeurism à la mode / Midsummer Night's you get
 used to departure, scraping the memories and the longing into a singular crisp
 note to rest on / Midsummer Night's get jangling in long-emptied pocket /
 Midsummer Night's solutions seem to always appear, well, most of the time /
 Midsummer Night's backseat secrets / Midsummer Night's unopened peony /
 Midsummer Night's what I expected, if I'm honest, was something different to
 what I got – that's how bad I am at the mathematics of dreaming / Midsum-
 mer Night's there's no nerves left to go on, so we'll keep going under until we
 learn how to see down here / Midsummer Night's sunflower seed, sculpted in
 unrealised splendour / Midsummer Night's prayer for every forgotten artist and
 starved prisoner / Midsummer Night's dirtied collar / Midsummer Night's cig-
 arette stumped out in sand / Midsummer Night's alright for fighting, but just
 alright / Midsummer Night's crackle makes bone blend with grill in the un-
 locked hub cap, each axle sings in strain like crickets' legs / Midsummer Night's
 bad poetry, I blame the cholera of distortions that leave the signal jammers
 drained, sickly / Midsummer Night's charcoal sweats / Midsummer Night's
 gold rings on the bedside table / Midsummer Night's harsh bravado / Midsum-
 mer Night's teeth knocked out / Midsummer Night's lessons not yet distrib-
 uted on those who most deserve it / Midsummer Night's calamity form / Mid-
 summer Night's tracing the curvature of a mollusc's shell in the moonlight
 shimmer of a rockpool / Midsummer Night's constant presence / unmaking /

Reviews

Images on which to build, 1970s–1990s
curated by Ariel Goldberg
Leslie-Lohman Museum of Art, 2023
Review by danilo machado

“Time sets on your profile, / transient / taking me through the crevices of memory,” Diana Solís writes in her 1998 poem “For Tony,” recently reprinted in *Poetry* alongside a selection of images. Solís’s work in photography and organizing is one of six key subjects in *Images on which to build, 1970s–1990s*, curated by Ariel Goldberg and on view at Leslie-Lohman through July 30. The exhibition presents six projects that utilize photographic strategies for organizing, education, and self-determination. Through slideshows, portraits, posters, and ephemera, these post-Stonewall projects reflect the connectedness between queer, trans, feminist, and racial justice movements. They honor three decades of cross-community image-making, teaching, learning, and gathering, towards liberatory goals which propel us into our presents and futures.

The exhibition’s central form is the slideshow. Joan E. Biren (JEB)’s *The Dyke Show*, which she presented at least eighty times between 1979 and 1984, was a touring, ticketed slideshow event that showed over a hundred years of photographic history. In the new introduction to the 2022 presentation, JEB speaks about how she sought these images in libraries and archives. She tells the audience about having to photograph some of the books covertly in bathroom stalls, which, in her words, required some “scary balancing acts.”

The same year as JEB’s first slide presentation, Allan Bérubé presented *Lesbian Masquerade: Some Lesbians in Early San Francisco Who Passed as Men* at the Women’s Building in San Francisco. The slideshow was eventually promoted and toured by the writer Louis Sullivan, who was in the audience at the first screening. A decade later, in the context of the Helms AIDS Amendments, which sought to ban funding for HIV/AIDS educational materials that mentioned “homosexual activities” “directly or indirectly” (one of which, attached to a 1987 appropriations bill, was signed into law by Ronald Reagan), the ART+Positive (of which Lola Flash was an active member) presented *This Up Against That Slideshow*, 1989–1990, exposing the violence and hypocrisy of banning depictions of nudity and queerness. *Images on which to build* also features a selection of photographs first shown in Flash’s slideshow for the Clit Club, a weekly gathering founded in 1990 by Julie Tolentino and Jaguar Mary X. Presentations like these utilized projectors to share queer, trans, feminist and political histories and archives.

For these projects, the distribution and circulation of the images were just as intentional as their content. The exhibition “*Keepin’ On*”: *Images of African American Lesbians* from the Lesbian Herstory Archives featured high-quality color xeroxes mounted onto foam boards designed to be easily mailed and installed. *Electric Blanket: AIDS Projection Project*—created by Allen Frame, Frank Franca, and Nan Goldin with support from Visual AIDS—was shown in art spaces, museums, and large outdoor venues over fifty times across a decade beginning in 1990.

Part of what is being honored in *Images on which to build* are the ways photographers have formed support organizations, coalitions, and archives outside of mainstream institutions. Diana Solís, for example, not only documented large demonstrations and marches, but started photo education programs and darkrooms in her hometown of Chicago, including with Mujeres Latinas en Acción’s Women’s Education Project. An institution like Leslie-Lohman differs from many of their original sites of production. Nevertheless, Goldberg is able to present a dynamic display with sound elements and nods to original display strategies. In the gallery, one hears the Kodak Carousel 4400 projecting *This Up Against That Slideshow*. The steady advancement of the slides and the whirring of the machine are heard alongside music from “*Keepin’ On*” playing on a boombox. Compiled by curator Paula Gant in 1991, the playlist features songs by Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Josephine Baker. In a text accompanying the original exhibition, Gant writes that “the lyrics of the early music, some sung by lesbian performers, some by our friends . . . might offend folks today. Back then—just like now?—most lesbians were singing lyrics about ‘my man.’ But not all, not even back then.”

Goldberg’s curatorial framing is at once focused and connective. It’s particularly effective in reflecting the ways that image-making and organizing are led by artists and communities whose identities are not singular. The exhibition portrays a complex legacy of countering many erasures and refusing separation between liberatory strategies—and without the too-common trope of evoking intersectionality flatly.

Two of the columns in the gallery space are covered in wheatpasted posters from each of the projects. Visual echoes between projects and time periods read as testaments to cross-movement, cross-genre connections between communities, archives, and artists. For example, Southern Black trans man James McHarris (also known as Annie Lee Grant) is depicted in passage of “*Keepin’ On*” taken from a 1954 issue *Ebony Magazine*; in JEB’s *Dyke Show*; and in *Lesbian Masquerade*. History-telling that emphasizes these throughlines is much more nuanced than overly-separatist tellings. It seems like an optimistic gesture, perhaps suggesting hope for continuing solidarities across identity categories in our challenging presents and futures.

In her *on our backs* review of JEB’s *The Dyke Show*, Carol Seajay (co-founder of Old Wives’ Tales, a feminist Bookstore in San Francisco) described the slideshow as making “images on which to build a future.” Our present—perhaps the future that Seajay imagined in 1980—is deeply felt in the exhibition. These recent histories continually conjure the present—one where Visual AIDS, the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and Ben Power Alwin’s Sexual Minority Archives are still active, but also notably one where legislation censoring queer content is constantly being threatened, and regularly being enacted. Gant’s question “Back then—just like now?” echoes. Indeed, the soundtrack of *Electric Blanket* includes Jimmy Sommerville’s “If I Could Tell You,” a setting of W.H. Auden’s 1940 poem of the same name. “Time will say nothing but I told you so,” croons Sommerville with the Communards.

Photos are, of course, just time and light—and there is so much of both in *Images on which to build*. Dates decorate letters, magazines, and one-night-only flyers. Hanging on pins are two ART+Positive Calendars, one showing the glowing work of Flash for the month of December 1990. (“Please do not touch the artwork,” says the sign below it, calling out my urge to flip the pages.) Just time and light. There’s sunlight behind protest banners, street lamps surrounding nighttime presentations of *Electric Blanket*, refractions of disco balls, a set of bright windows above Ben Power Alwin—all suited and bespeckled and surrounded by flowers.

The light is the content and the material—it bounces off the cases of ephemera and illuminates the grid of slides from *Lesbian Masquerade* and the accompanying magnifying glass. It is the same kind that Solís tenderly holds in her 1982 self-portrait, taken in Chicago. The multiple slideshows in the room make it so that the content of the space is always changing, slide by slide. Slideshows themselves were often evolving, their carousels allowing for easy editing and the addition of images. Streams of light travel from the projector onto the gallery wall and, if you walk in front of it, your shadow shows, too.

I Could Not Believe It: The 1979 Teenage Diaries of Sean DeLear
MIT Press, 2023

Review by Kyle Carrero Lopez

As a high schooler, I got introduced to punk and hardcore scenes by catching live shows at a DIY venue in my hometown called The Meatlocker, which looked and smelled just like it sounds. Friends would take me there to catch bands made up of either classmates from school or older, more established musicians, the space glossed with stains and grime, graffiti everywhere your eyes could land, mosh pits frequent and full of hard, sweaty elbows. I had a great time, though I was just the green, still-evolving friend following my cooler, more

self-possessed friends then. These friends had the confidence from a young age to go and make space for themselves in punk scenes as black folks, queers, women, and all permutations of these identities. Had Sean DeLear attended my school at the same time as me, he’d have probably been the one in the know who I’d have followed to the good time on any given night, and he’d likely also have led one of the bands playing at The Meatlocker. Reading his 1979 diaries, you can see hints of how deeply inaccurate the framing of punk as white culture over time has been, a point which Brontez Purnell emphasizes in his wonderful introduction. Although the crowd may come across as loudly white and male at times, people like us have always been a part of its core, most especially the boldest of our ilk like Sean. His diaries give the impression that he was fully-formed as a fourteen-year-old, though also deeply his actual age; reveling in the present while being very much of (and from) the distant future.

Throughout Sean’s journals, there’s a great affective sense of what writer and scholar Namwali Serpell calls “*black nonchalance*”: a way of living in the world that acknowledges disappointment or obstacle and then pivots gracefully past it, refusing to dwell, thanks to one’s innate sense of the bigger picture. An avid cruiser—sex-brained in the most teenaged way possible—Sean frequently details some could-be public sexual encounter that doesn’t pan out, then punctuates with “Oh well” before promptly moving on. I feel concern as I read about his exploits with adults (always, of course, the responsible party in these dynamics), but his nerve and candor keep the pages turning. He expresses a mostly cavalier attitude regarding school: while plenty of suburban fourteen-year-olds might worry about grades more than most other things, he admits his report card one quarter probably won’t look too great, followed by a decisive “Oh well.” Perhaps he’s already sure he’s a star outside the confines of academics, and knows there’s no need to sweat it? And he’s right.

Sean’s ease of being translates, often, to keen emotional maturity. On January 22, 1979, after losing his grandmother, Sean writes:

I am sort of glad she died. She has been through hell all her life. I know I will miss her a lot but she is in heaven now. . . I knew I would not cry when she died because she is better off where she is. Thank God. I will see you someday.

He’s able to find peace in letting go because he knows through familial wisdom the cruelty promised for black life in the United States—and understands it firsthand, growing up in the very racist, conservative Los Angeles suburb of Simi Valley—and even as he internalizes, in this coming-of-age period, the ways that this cruelty will continuously compound with homophobia in his own life, he unflinchingly conveys boundless exuberance for beauty

and intrigue in the daily. This is sophistication, I think, akin to Serpell's analysis—not simply naïveté.

I love reading about his bowling scores and volleyball games and school spirit days, his new and ongoing crushes, his friends' birthday parties, his frustration with his mother (AKA "the bitch"). He once posits writing a fake suicide note and letting her find it, which prompted an out-loud *what a little shit* response from me. I love that he loved some of my favorite disco tracks when they were still new, like Donna Summer's "Bad Girls" and Sister Sledge's "He's the Greatest Dancer." I love his obsession with documentation, evidenced not only by the journaling itself but also by his constant film camera photography at school. And I **love** this book as an archive of all of the smutty magazines Sean used to buy or shoplift, like *His & Hers*, *Honcho*, and *Blueboy*.

Stylistically, the nearly daily entries tend to follow a similar sequence: what's up at school, sex and lust, parental drama, maybe a note on something he's saving up for—like a waterbed—and then "good night." Within this year of chronicling, Sean more than once notes spotting what he calls "the biggest cock" he's ever seen: an enthusiast, not unlike a birder or a stamp collector. There's a gritty, minimalist aesthetic to Sean's writing that provides real contrast to the polish and pageantry of traditional literary writing, which echoes punk rock's rejection of mainstream music norms. "Refreshing" and "fun" are the keywords here; it's the kind of work that might inspire writers to let loose some more in their own practice.

This is a portrait of black gay youth, specifically of a youth who stepped into his agency from early on, a youth who was highly sexually active and would outlive the AIDS epidemic, despite belonging to the exact demographic most overrepresented in positive cases and

subsequent deaths—a miracle considering the number of black queers lost to grave government neglect. This book feels like a cousin of the difficult to find *Gary in your Pocket*, edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, a volume of poetry and prose by black queer writer Gary Fisher which includes frank, visceral journal entries from 1977 to 1993 on hardcore sexcapades, desire and isolation, and rage against living with AIDS, among other topics (note: Sedgwick was his professor at Berkeley).

Sean DeLear sadly passed away in 2017, and we're so fortunate that this book has immortalized his gorgeous spirit. Reading him, reading others' words about him, and looking at photos of him, I see a friend. *I Could Not Believe It* sidesteps politeness, respectability, manners, and shame. There is as much revealed directly about Sean's life and interiority as is left unsaid; generous vulnerability paired with Old Hollywood mystique. It's propulsive and salacious and would deeply offend plenty of book-banning zealots. That's true panache!

June 14, 1979: "I did not know I had so many friends but everybody at school likes me almost. If they don't they would be great actors. I am so nice so why should they not like me you know."

MissSettl by Kamden Hilliard

Nightboat Books

Review by Kirby Chen Mages

Destabilized. Destabilizing—as in currently was and still am. In the process of. As in nothing is quite complete, decided, final. Like how Kamden Hilliard said in an interview with *Full Stop*, "The poem becomes a raw-er vector, consumed, and obsessed with the basic challenge of documentation." Like how *MissSettl* inspired me to disrupt my routine of going to my regular library and, instead, try out a new one, to see how becoming unmoored from one institutional tether could propel me into a

different space, a different frame of mind, a different net. Like how I canceled all of my field dates to read this book aloud in the bathtub with my ears underwater to sense the poem's sonorities in an echo chamber deeper even than that of my empty studio apartment. I am a divorcee divorcing from myself at that moment. From the language as I have known it. Like how H read Bob Kaufman for the first time and declared, "I didn't know language could do that." Or did they say, "I didn't know language was *allowed* to do that." As if language must be granted permission—duh, doesn't it always beg for permission? This poorest, most illegible of forms? And we propose an advent only for its rejection.

We contort ourselves into convenient boxes only to explode later within our own language. To decompartmentalize all that we embody on any given day (ever-changing sun and moon and cellular combinations):

thrifty
flirty
shifty me
with my continued attempts at (in)visibility

To become destabilized means to forget what you once knew. Abandon it, even, consciously. "Alas, crisis hot language quandary." This is the state I am in: "crisis hot language quandary." Just as in the poem, "BAD PLATE," it bears repeating: "Crisis hot language quandary." Like how I forgot my computer charger today. Or did I? Maybe it was a prank played by journal and pen. Journal and pen played a trick on computer for once. As revenge for all the pranks that technology plays on us on the reg.

What *MissSettl* reminds me: that if there must be a container, let it be one in which to play inside of. That poetry must always open itself up to the infinite capaciousness of play within language. And beyond play—its particularities, its embedded errors, its limitations and its liberatory methods of which illegibility must

remain one of its power holds for those of us who must function/survive/thrive within the strangleholds of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy...on the reg. For you to not "get it," for you to miscomprehend, is a prize. Because this means that you will not manage to co-opt, to capitalize, on that which is meant to remain free and for the people—poetry.

What is it like to read *MissSettl*? I described it to my therapist as bearing witness to a mental undoing that could only leave my self undone as well. Unraveled. I've shared the book with some friends who turned to a page at random to read a poem. I hand it to them and say, "Read one of these out loud to me." While their reactions are not identical (i.e. universal) there are some similarities. A kind of *woah*, eyes lit up, giddy laughter, a pull the book away from their gaze, close it for a moment to process what it is that they have just read kind of reaction. My therapist wanted to know how the book is affecting me—I told her that I'm existing in that moment I so seldom reach, of language being pushed further, beyond its perceived extremes. Like how B has told me that there's nothing quite like being elbow-deep inside of someone's anus. I have yet to try this but the poems encourage me to do so. Go further. To go ass deep. I suppose I'm having an experience akin to what Hilliard experienced when they first read *Lighthouse* by Terrance Hayes. They said that upon reading that book, "those neat barriers which I'd arranged around in my head, demarcating what is and is not fit for poetry... I realized those barriers were very mean-spirited and dangerous, as most barriers are."

Upon reading *MissSettl* I have come to accept that prior to this, I was walking behind language, following it, straggling behind it like a stalker. Then it abruptly stopped, turned around, smiled and waved at me, slightly mischievous, slightly sardonic. Letting me know that it saw me, had felt my presence all along, and could I please either stop following it,

NOT SINCE DANTE AND MILTON HAS EDEN BEEN SO DEEPLY EXCAVATED

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walk alongside it, or choose my *own* path,
PLEASE???

At first I wanted to be angry with the book for calling the confines of my own neat barriers to my attention in such a distinct way. A glaring line of José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* was shining back at me, blinking like a club's neon sign: *The here & now is a prison house*. But how could I be angry at something so full of love? So brimming with permission granted to be unacceptable, miss comprehensible, completely illegible?

I think it's only fair that I'm afraid to write this *review* (can we use another word, PLEASE???) of a book written by a poet who has said, "I do resist the sentence, the container which is supposed to hold one idea." It is no wonder (but it is a wonder!) that Hilliard has also said that "a poem is a kind of thought... a genre of thought." What is the difference between thought and idea? What does it mean (what are your expectations) when you ask someone the question: *What are you thinking?* How to transmute the thought into verbal/linguistic cues.

"I would love to hear your thoughts," has always been one of the most erotic sentences to me—and here in these poems, I *hear* thoughts! So loudly and so singularly, specifically because of Hilliard's refusal to conform to "an English operated under white supremacy," specifically because they are able to "express the full intimacy" with lines like:

Suppression is a talent i would kill
myself 4 but really , so is love
& so is being loved .
why else yu think I'm kickin' it ? the only ex-
planation 4 this life & its continu-
ing lung capacity . so this is best . this will do
& does
me , cloudy in jeep blunted
w wanting 4 the boi .

The vulnerability of sharing something. Anything. "Hu can show a little and live through the exposure?" How it makes you feel without any certainty that the other will be able to feel what you felt or at least understand how/why it is that you feel this way even if it's not their own lived experience. The fear that revealing differences could, in fact, produce the opposite effect of connection, it could be the opposite of life-affirming—it could, in fact, result in your death.

So how will we know
wat 2 call 'anxiety' wen we un-
body ;
...issa sustained lackadaisical threat :
death

This is the repeated risk that Hilliard takes with their poetics. This is life and/or death poetry. This is love poetry to a most infinite degree of love pushing it/us beyond its/our known capacity.

I, Boombox by Robert Glück

Roof Books, 2023

Review by Ayaz Muratoglu

In Robert Glück's 1985 novel *Jack the Modernist*, his narrator considers C. Allen Gilbert's Victorian painting "All is Vanity": an agamograph that is at one angle, a skull, and at another, a woman staring into a vanity. The narrator, a gay man living in 1981 San Francisco, wants his bathhouse orgasm to "fall between those images. *That's not really a place*." The pleasure of Glück's newest collection, *I, Boombox* (Roof Books), a modernist life poem, locates itself in this same in-between place, where a slip of the eye or ear unveils a wholly new image.

Glück's decades-long fixation on disjunction, death, memory, and the tension between public and private space reach a crescendo in *I, Boombox*. He writes to "redevelop / the line break." The book considers a series of "intentional misreadings" that triangulate between an Imagist sense of ideas in objects (as in Williams Carlos Williams), an Objectivist self-reflexiveness, and the New Narrative tradition of generative translation and appropriations of language, among other found material.¹ The misreadings approximate fantasy and seek pleasure: a rule that revising can only happen in cemeteries, bedding gets pulled out with the soil, a hand gets held at "the edge of the paragraph." Language serves as the primary vehicle for these interactions: "The / real becomes / real the more / ways you itch the / word." Glück taps a hole in the membrane of language and widens it slowly, coaxing out surprising depths along the way. He writes, "My mother told / me the stars were / slanting again / intermittently / in a vanished / time. Gorgeous games, / calisthenics / of the real."

Throughout *I, Boombox*, the conjunction "or" allows overlapping realities to be true at once, a tactic Glück pioneered in his New Narrative novels that often defy linear temporality. In *Jack the Modernist*, the narrator poses the question, "How do I mesh modernism's disjunction with continuity and depth of feeling?" Throughout *I, Boombox*, the central disjunction relies on a repeated use of the word "or." In one moment: "Or the flowers / are wiltingly / beautiful, or / he diced of coarse / creating a / separating / consciousness between / house and home." Here, the modernist urge gets merged—the "wilingly beautiful" flowers (decaying) evoke depth of feeling, while the split between house and home provides disjunction. Alongside the "or," Glück's misreadings—of news headlines, Grindr usernames, song lyrics, conversations, French theory—play with the gap between a lack of continuity and depth of feeling, creating a new logic revolving around the poet's consciousness at play. For instance: "I hate being / famous for my / tits and never / for my kisses. / My force slips or / goes funny." While in Glück's fiction characters tend towards disjunction in relation to time and narrative, in *I, Boombox* disjunction takes place syntactically, and, thus, breaks

open the spaces between ideas. Ruth Jennison, in *The Zukofsky Era*, argues that the use of parataxis in the work of Objectivists Louis Zukofsky and Lorine Niedecker produces "revolutionary literacy," that stringing seemingly unrelated clauses together reveals "absolute interdependence" among subjects across distant times and geographies.² Likewise, Glück's parataxis connects political events to the personal slippages of desirous everyday pathology, bridging a dream-like world with the material reality of class struggle.

The lines in *I, Boombox*, in a Language-y way, seem completely unrelated to one another, refractions of Glück's unconscious willfully misinterpreting overheard conversations or phone notifications. Glück worked on *I, Boombox* for over twenty years (ditto his forthcoming memoir, *About Ed*), gathering misreadings in journals before transplanting them into the poem. This work does not square cleanly with Glück's novels, or even his other poetry collections, like the lyric *Reader*. In *Reader*, Glück is primarily concerned with form—all the work in that collection is titled after schools of poetry, time periods, other poets, and pieces dedicated to writer friends ("A Ballad for Kevin Killian to Read," "A Myth for Judy Grahn to Read"). While expressions of explicit desire and fear form the basis of Glück's other projects—and particularly his New Narrative novels—*I, Boombox* focuses more on developing a sense of play. A collection composed of slippage allows the reader room to examine their own desires, latching onto phrases or ideas that might resonate at a given moment, not unlike the feeling of recalling an image from a dream the next day.

In fact, reading *I, Boombox* feels like entering a realm of desire, where the poem offers us a new syntactical mode—that of the dream. The poem does not stay in a single dimension, or even on a single thought, for more than a few lines. In this sense, it recalls Zukofsky or Niedecker: the modernist impulse governs, as does an acute and intimate relationship to pleasure. In "Long Note on New Narrative," a manifesto composed in retrospect, Glück writes, "I experienced the poetry of disjunction as a luxurious idealism in which the speaking subject rejects the confines of representation and disappears in the largest freedom, that of language itself." In *I, Boombox*, this descent into language manifests as a form of yearning: "the longing / to be a fragment." Wanting to "be a fragment" becomes its own form of disjuncture, an unrealized desire within the formal constraints of the poem, which is itself not fragmented. The misreadings reject "the confines of representation" as they stand on their own, contextless, obscuring the speaker's emotional landscape. And so, pleasure abounds.

Part of the appeal of the misreadings is how we cannot trace them back to their source material. See: "Bumbling / through language, thanks / to innovations / he invented / readers, fatally / registered trademarks." What was

"trademarks" before the word went slant? It is difficult to trace the pronoun "he" back to a person: in the following line, the poem talks of "Cardio-Cowboy" and a "Top Daddy for Ruin." These and other characters have no desire to present themselves with clarity, and seem to exist mostly in relation to myth and memory, if to anything at all. At other times, the source text is more legible: "A format feeling / comes—the anal / orientation substitute." Emily Dickinson's "formal feeling"—a reflection on the shock that comes after immense grief—gets reappropriated. Queerness, here, becomes about an orientation towards a body part, and the feeling is *formatted*, literally rendered into objecthood. Desire, too, becomes object in *I, Boombox*: "At the / edge of seventeen / I bravely swallowed / my gulping eros."

Glück tosses us into a world of merging and morphing realities, where the space between inside and outside collapses, the internal is made external ("open side of my body"), and nudity turns the body into a threshold ("getting / as naked as / we feel wearing / a greed door of / shocking orange"). Domesticity continues to manufacture new modes of relation in the poem as Glück crafts a trinity of death, decay, and marriage. We see it here: "bedding schemes / pulled out the soil." Then, marriage leads to decay: "Fester quality / following dream / to rave divorce." And again: "I walk through your / ideas at / night, smattering / lushness wording / buttermilk channel." Intimacy folds in on itself, as domesticity troubles the notion of the outdoors. A lover's ideas can be *walked through*: the "buttermilk channel" takes a kitchen object (buttermilk) and makes it public: a channel—perhaps even the Buttermilk Channel that separates Red Hook from Governors Island in New York City. These moments recall Glück's lifelong chronicles of cruising, where the private is made public.

Glück has always been fascinated by death—violent depictions of Jesus's death in *Margery Kempe*, a parable of men seeking Death in *Elements*, comparing orgasm to death in his poem "Burroughs." In *Jack the Modernist*, the main character considers the space between life and death to be a sexual object, recalling Kathy Acker: "There's Bob looking up at you, you are a mountaintop view of life and death—jockstrap—metal studs." But *I, Boombox* marks a movement in a new direction, where death serves a practical purpose as the conclusion to the long modernist poem. *I, Boombox* follows the quotidian and consumptive impulses of the life poems that came before it, like bpNichol's "The Martyrology," Nathaniel Mackey's "Mu / Song of the Andoumboulou," and Zukofsky's "A." These po-

¹ Jean-Thomas Tremblay, in their essay "Together, in the First Person," troubles the history of this collage mode, considering the line between collage and appropriation.

² Jennison, Ruth. *The Zukofsky Era*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012: 203.

ems that include accounts of errands alongside ancestral origin stories, published in many sections over many years, set the pattern for *I, Boombox*. In this collection, death relates most directly to memory and curiosity, rather than violence or base fear: “The ship’s officer / carelessly relies / on miracle, / seeks disaster / across the wide / estuaries / of death—the rubbed / wool turtleneck / of what he was, / of what he was / in.” Estuaries connect saltwater and freshwater, an entire ecosystem formed in a liminal space. If death is made up of wide estuaries, what lies on either side? The turtleneck holds the form of the officer’s past selves, bridging memory through object. What is the difference between “what he was” and “what he was in”? These questions of selfhood—what is the self, how does the self change in private or public, in thought or dream—abound in *I, Boombox*.

In “Bona Nit, Estimát,” a recent piece Glück published in the *Paris Review*, he returns to many of the themes laid out in *I, Boombox*. Glück refers to himself as entropic (a term chosen alongside Bruce Boone) while reflecting on friends who have passed, Kathy Acker and Kathleen Fraser. He “de-stories / the distinction / between life / & death,” calling their memories and laughter into the bedroom with him and his husband. See: “I often think about the dead before sleep—saying goodnight to them? Not think about—more like have the feeling of them.” Time collapses. *I, Boombox* lives in that collapsed, durational place.

***The Only Name We Can Call It Now Is Not Its Only Name* by Valerie Hsiung**
Counterpath Press, 2023

Review by imogen xtian smith

Mise en scène: Valerie Hsiung’s virtuosic, book-length psychedelia-against-empire—a poetics of obfuscation measured out among heteronyms, a devastating excavation of memory as linguistic matter, performatively picking the scab of phonic displacements, fleetingly renderable while impossible to untangle. “This was how I got my voice,” Hsiung writes. “In memory, a germ becomes a self, / a capsule, a body eventuated in worms and flies and chunks.” With *The Only Name We Can Call It Now Is Not Its Only Name*, the artist resettles herself at the innominate farm, site of civilization posited as original wound. From here we disembark—artist, reader, language—towards an orthography of half-forgotten names & murky violations, “[e]ar pressing up against muddy rock and all.”

The endeavor of Hsiung’s ongoing poetic process, while maximalist in breadth, here takes on durationally fragmented variations of oscillating syntactic rhythm, asking into the always-full hole of history questions barely articulable, whose teasing is made possible in the space of ongoing performance (text). She chases the problem at the heart of naming, which language—distributed across subjects with discrete material half-lives—renders first

as horror, then as art. “Can we explain mysterious acts of self-mending under conditions as cold as this?” Hsiung asks, any possible responses clogging both artist’s & reader’s ears with muck.

Taken as an ongoing whole, the rigorous arc of Hsiung’s work feels immediately improvised & obscure. Prose gives way to crisp lineation, pulsing with charm & tragedy in a tenor all her own. Hsiung possesses a thoroughness of vision & technique, as reckless as it is dazzlingly realized in a space between poetics-as-such & performance art. Hers is a poetics of not-quite-poetry, not-quite-writing. In a recent *BOMB* interview, she states:

If my writing has been composed of dislocations, it’s because the material conditions of my life have been composed of dislocations. What strikes me in all of these dis-es is the fact that they are all standing against assimilation and consumption. The disabled body: the complete dissolution of the structure for understanding assimilation’s capacity, consumption’s uptake. The disobedient body prevents the system from working.

With *The Only Name*, the reader encounters something close to the total *risk* of being. Through the conduit of historical materialism—upheavals of displacement reorienting a person or people’s total experience of grounding—mother tongues & discrete customs of the body must epistemologically contort. Regardless of whether the artist would pose her stakes as such, the book deals in bitter roots (an empire’s obliterative wake), chronicled in their own particular languages.

Interrupting the sometimes prose, often aphoristic formal logic of *The Only Name*’s text, Hsiung composes, in stringy lines of “legible” poetry, the nebulous question of her book-length experiment:

I am afraid
without exaggeration
what I say
is what I write will
send the people I owe
something to
to prison
to their deaths
to their hidings
so I hide a something
chanting can hide a something
and maybe
if I hide enough
like the wind hides itself
enough will make dot to dot make
a point

Hsiung’s work conveys her deep trust in the reader’s ability to push themselves dexterously towards the non-destination that is language’s object—being—while simultaneously doubting & trusting in language’s material ability to do so. “I guess I want the performance to only be an arrangement of the voice, and I want the voice to talk about what the letters are doing.”

Try this approach, live inside it, witness / feel the resonance of all time.

I find it peculiar that K began asking then about my mother’s origin and the ordinariness of intergenerational trauma as it connects to mother tongue and political exile. In the way that K found it difficult to pacify my vernacular-less voice on the phone recording I sent K with the voice in person that I employ—I find it difficult to locate why my mother’s voice matters, at first, and then, now, as I’m speaking to you, it’s very palpable on an almost instinctual level why it matters. Why does it matter.

Exceeding the formal limits & logic of a more conventional collection, *The Only Name* offers instead a fully realized poetics of gestures— “[h]ands, lips, faces, bodies, the loving bodies of the ones I love,” limbs that might arise from humus (the page’s double). In engaging the embodied / performative nature of Hsiung’s latest work, I find myself eager to situate it within a constellation of other consummate experimentalists with the “stuff” of language—Aristilde Kirby, Cody-Rose Clevidence, Angel Dominguez, as well as Indigenous scholar Tiara Roxanne’s performance-based invocation, “I cannot decolonize my body.” Ghayath Almadhoun makes a literal appearance (his work haunts similar spaces), Hsiung stating flatly the necessity of performance poetics in excavating lines to find the level of letter, “...because of the whole history of socio-economic systems which have pilloried and governed women artists and often kept them, us, from freely living their, our, own lives... until perhaps fairly recently. And even then, it feels... often tenuous?”

Throughout the duration of *The Only Name We Can Call It Now Is Not Its Only Name*, an image is subtly recalled: that of the ear-hole pilloried by mud, grounding & confounding any subjective stability we may find in, or seek through, language. “Ear pressing up against muddy rock and all.” I am reminded of Ana Mendieta’s *Mujeres de piedra* (*Stone Women*), a site-specific land art installation in the caves at Escaleras de Jaruco, Cuba, marking a point in the artist’s unification of body & earth as inseparable, mutually-formative subjects. Though differing in their chosen mediums, Hsiung, like Mendieta, creates in the mode of land art. The farm, recurring site of dismembered demarcation in the book, is a place that both mothers & is barren of mothers, these two states threaded together in language to make histories. “It was her who taught me how to remove mud from the ear,” Hsiung writes, the subject here being earth or diasporic mother, heteronyms as nuclei in an impossible attempt to unravel time with tongue, breath, notation, & dissipation.

We flirt, too, with the notion of what it means to keep sending parts of inwardness out into the world and the world is never empty totally because of this.

The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture
Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021
Review by Marie Buck

Ugly Duckling Presse’s 2021 book *The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture* is an admirably capacious and messy book. Assembled by Soviet-born US artist and collector Yevgeniy Fiks, the collection at the book’s heart gathers Soviet art depicting African Americans and Black Africans—a large and diverse set of works, many reproduced in color within the book, spanning from the 1920s to the 1980s.

Fiks named the collection for Wayland Rudd, a Black American actor who went on a trip to Moscow in 1932 along with Langston Hughes and a number of other Black US performers working on a film. Rudd stayed on a while longer, then later returned to the USSR and had a lengthy and successful acting career there. While a few of the works in the collection do depict Rudd, a public figure and prominent member of the Black US expat community, the naming of the book after Rudd specifically seems somewhat arbitrary; Fiks’s collection is not specifically about Rudd but about Black representation in Soviet visual culture, and UDP’s book is about Fiks’s collection and related scholarship.

The particularity of naming *someone*, though, feels fitting: this book is interested in the disjuncts and overlaps between the projections of national imaginaries and the specifics of individual experience. The opening section, “Lives,” includes several essays on Rudd, another on Paul Robeson, and an interview with MaryLouise Patterson. Patterson’s parents were notable Black American Communists. Patterson attended Patrice Lumumba People’s Friendship University in Moscow and was involved in the Afro-Soviet community there for six years in the 1960s. In the interview, Patterson recounts arguing about the faults of the Soviet Union with her father—but yet also joining the CPUSA on her return to the US. Patterson also reflects on the current need for a party structure: “There are new formations, you certainly know about: there’s DSA—I don’t belong to it. I’ve gone to a couple meetings, but I feel the need for that kind of place, space where you battle out the ideas, and you come up with some analysis, based on a mutual understanding of how society is structured and works, and some plan as to how to move forward, again, based on a mutual acceptance of what is needed, how it should be organized and structured[.]” Patterson’s stories and observations put us immediately in the complexities of a full political life, oriented not around abstract positions but around a messy hashing out, around an assumption that people will try and try again, through partial successes and failures, to get history to square up with the cultural production that imagines a better life.

Throughout, the book’s privileging of individual experience, personal and historical anecdote

dote, and political difference has a significant advantage over conventional academic work; we're not forced into conclusions or theories, or to attempt a sort of theorization that would account for everything. While the book moves on to scholarly essays later, it foregrounds anecdote and the messy specificities of individual lives from the jump. I point this out because this is a formally unusual book, and UDP has done something unusual and admirable in putting together visual art, scholarly cultural studies-type essays, oral history, brief biographical essays, and poetry all in one place. In reading it, I was often reminded of Vivian Gornick's *The Romance of American Communism*, the collection of oral histories of CPUSA members that Gornick collected in the 1970s and that Verso republished in 2020. Political fantasies themselves become political actors, and even when people ultimately become disillusioned, the fantasy has still provided the shape for decades of political activity.

The images in *The Wayland Rudd Collection* operate in a variety of registers. Early images from before 1928, particularly from commercial culture, tended toward racial stereotype. In 1928, as Christina Kiaer notes, the Sixth Congress of the Comintern adopted "The Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States" and there was a concerted state effort to produce anti-racist imagery, and imagery that critiqued the US's racism. Images from the decades that followed usually centered white Soviet workers while emphasizing internationalism through depictions of Black and East Asian workers all working together. The book includes a poem by Douglas Kearney mid-way through, a critique of the instrumentalization of images of Black Americans in the collection. Essays by scholars of the USSR and of literature and culture close-read many of these images, digging into the complexity of propaganda. While the images have a fairly straightforward message, the formal means of creating a sense of hope, or attempting to cement a prospective anti-racist prole-

tarian agenda, is ultimately quite complex. The book blows up the art and politics question in a way that might be particularly useful in UDP's, and our, small-press poetry context. Many of us in this context value the parallelism and community around which small-press poetry is oriented. We write to a community of people we know, and the people they know, and maybe the people *they* know; we find our communities through our writing. But if our political commitments mean that in other contexts we orient toward mass audiences, are there ways of repurposing the aesthetic and formal care we've developed in our niche experimental poetry communities to other ends? In my own provincial US context, Socialist Realist work produced in the 30s often feels shocking—the idea of a large audience is so heavily associated with a sort of mid-twentieth-century mainstream commercialism and consumer culture. This book reminds me how specific and contingent this association is.

Meredith Roman, in her essay "Anti-Racist Aspirations and Artifacts," writes that many of the images here "attest to the oft-forgotten fact that the Soviet Union constituted the world's first country whose leaders pursued state-sponsored anti-racism and made America's racial democracy a major focus of their attacks" and that "regardless of the motivations of Soviet authorities—whether they were sincere, opportunistic, or most likely some combination of both," Soviet anti-racism challenged white supremacist ideas around the world. And in the same section of the book, Marina Temkina describes, through personal narrative and anecdote, having been surprised, upon moving from the USSR to the US, to realize that anti-Black racism was still prevalent after the Civil Rights Movement, *despite her experience of growing up Jewish in the USSR*: "I had not believed anything that the Soviet media disseminated, and I brought to America my wishful thinking that racial tensions had ended with the Civil Rights Movement. Hadn't I experienced antisemitism in the

Soviet Union on both private and public levels all the time, in the country that proclaimed equality and friendship among nations? Why then did I delude myself about the United States?"

This is all to say that UDP's book offers a lot of questions, and it reframes how we think of aesthetics and politics within experimental poetry communities, where we often take small, counter-cultural audiences for granted. Christina Kiaer's essay here points out that the stylistic gestures of Socialist Realism were very much debated as a political question; Jonathan Flatley's essay close-reads and attends to the ways that specific pieces called forth solidarity. While we've become used to reading visual art and texts as political—i.e., a standard aspect of, say, a humanities education, or even just looking at the internet, involves reading politics from work that is not, at surface-level, political—this book places us in the grooves of history, of art as a fraught political actor.

Door by Ann Lauterbach
Penguin Random House, 2023
Review by Nathaniel Rosenthalis

Ann Lauterbach's *Door*, her twelfth collection, moves between spare imagistic poems with short lines and poems that use density to ask us to slow down and re-attune our capacity to listen and attend. These poems want to make sure that we really are listening. Consider these lines from "Table":

I wish to be clear.
Clarity is not the same
as the literal. I object
to the literal.
What does this mean?

We had best pay
attention
to what we care about.

This is an economy of means.
To observe that life
pivots between care
and neglect.

The lineation and word choice here are simple in a way that reveals the deeply didactic, urgent nature of the book. A poem in the middle of the book, "Ethos," carries a similar didactic charge, but using more sustained narrative moments: "In high school, a teacher introduced the idea of an ethos. / It was difficult to comprehend. What was an / ethos?" Stepping back into the shoes of a younger self, stepping into the memory of reading the *Odyssey* in high school, leads Lauterbach to muse that at the time, she must have been learning about the ethos of "ancient Greece," which she juxtaposes against her own moment: "Are we at the end of an ethos? I am / not but we are. But if *we* includes me, then I am." This curiosity about time, its passage, and her perception of shifting values, brings Lauterbach to plaintive but charged musings that are anything but simple: "Someone must have predicted this, some Jeremiah / not believing in the new renewals of the new, / the ineluctable flower." It is this ineluctable flower—what she also calls "if-then relations" and the image of "someone looking down, back hunched with bending, / following the dark ground"—that Lauterbach attends to over and over in *Door*.

One way that Lauterbach focuses her eyes and ears is by reusing poetic occasions from previous books. The second-to-last poem, "Nocturne," features a clear, stable third-person point of view in a prose paragraph where the vertices of time and space stay undisturbed, a set-up reminiscent of the wonderful reanimation of Lewis Carroll's Alice she's done in the masterful *Or to Begin Again* (2009) and *Under the Sign* (2013).

It turns out there wasn't a door, so she stood looking at the wall, and then at the ground, and then again at the wall, and then up at the

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sky. The sky was doorless, which was comforting, especially at night, when she could make images from the stars by drawing lines between and among them, as the earliest persons had done as they walked along on the desert sand. But now, looking up into the brightly strewn array, she could not draw a door because the shapes she saw resembled other geometries and, although everything seemed infinitely open, there was no way through. Perhaps, she thought, I can draw something else, not a door, but simply a path; why would anyone want to be inside when the way through cannot be enclosed. Why am I sad that there is no door? she asked herself, and then she saw how she had turned in the night air, and found herself entirely enclosed. And she asked herself, How is it possible to be at once enclosed and illuminated

The simple set-up unlocks a poignancy where the “she” reads as a stand-in for the figure of the author herself, asking fundamental questions of where to look, what to make, and what to make of it. The ostensible preoccupation with suffering and poesis gives way to her attention staying outward, rather than ping-ponging in the artful self-consciousness that is characteristic of most of her work, and utilized in the book’s final poem, “Door,” one of several poems with that name.

In the poem that functions as a companion to the aforementioned “Door,” the same preoccupation with illumination and night time and stars and image-making gets a staccato lyric treatment. The poem proceeds in couplets, without the gifts of landscape and fixed, personal point of view, those stable ear-markings of the human perspective. While before we had a woman in a landscape making direct observations and asking questions of the physical world, now we are stranded at a door where there is a “small incident among closings”: the incident isn’t named, and the second line of the couplet gives us “a singular display confirmed.” With the specifics unsupplied, we then find ourselves in the second couplet where there is “not the risky allowance of fate not / accruing slowly as in a habit // certainly not mere weather not / choosing a hinge or a lock.” By choosing to suspend herself and us in the voice between image and name, between perception and landscape, by choosing not to plant us in a landscape where we might get the seeming luxury of our hand and eye landing on a single concrete “hinge” or “lock,” Lauterbach shifts the emphasis to the empirical questions of who we are and what we do when we leave one zone for another.

It’s this strategy’s hope that we fill in the blanks accordingly. The final lines of the poem give us as good a summary of the mode and theme as any elsewhere to be found in the book, where we face

a condition and its picture
what was once shuttered

allowing light in allowing the moment

to resist passage yes
that endowment the image
simple recursive
darkly enfolded—
ancient as night traversing loss
and the abrasion
an appeal advent to be
restored.

The poem is asking, as so many of Lauterbach’s poems have, in this book and in previous books, about what an image does and why we ask it to do what we ask it to do.

This is not an abstract, merely aesthetic question, but one with explicit political stakes: “They spoke about the *disappeared*, I recall this; a fleet of awful bodies under moving tarps, a desert, a prairie, some hole in the gutter, some sewer, some truck running over hard gravel making the sound of teeth on metal skin.” This indexing of reportage about disaster, war, refugee crises (elsewhere named in the book explicitly) leads to a stand-alone sentence that has all the drama of a break-up text: “Nothing is going to get me closer because I don’t trust you to be on the other side.” Lauterbach, it seems, is breaking up the relationship between writer and reader. It gets more bitter: “as if in the bright air of evening I could sit and disclose the very amplitude and extent of the lost and found in a flirtatious swell of stories, as if these might deliver the precision for which you have asked but which you have in no way earned.” I put an exclamation mark in my margin here, feeling addressed and dressed down. We might say that the “flirtatious swell of stories” refers to anything from gossip columns to a meager, tawdry hunger for event reportage, what Lauterbach called, in her 2011 lecture “The Given and the Chosen,” the confusion between information and knowledge.

Lauterbach’s disgust with the mode of the larger culture gives way to a longing to be able to sing, that other classic trope of poetic production: “If I could sing then my body would escape into the pool of notes which might then arrange themselves as a soul, it has been done, I heard these transformations as I know you have...” I pause the quotation here because this is where the everyday sentence-level sense is, but Lauterbach uses a comma splice to unhinge that, to find her music, what much of her book is in search of:

when whatever we imagine has been seen has then been forfeited, thrown, its bloods released into poppies and sunsets, so that pathos, the tears of Mary, the tears of a girl, these are strewn into receptive air, without echo or retrieval, no ghost, no dream recalled; a chord from which the singer can drag a lament, nothing to do with melody, nothing to do with pleasure.

These poems do give real pleasure; they harp,

in both senses, on not being able to say something adequate to loss; many beloved and gone figures are invoked in the book, from Kenward Elmslie to John Ashbery to Stacy Doris. The poems become powerful by making plain where they stand. Lauterbach opens and closes doors many times in the collection, often in the sense of occluded language finding sudden illumination. Here’s one among many, from the poem “Habitat”: “Today in the shower I was recalling / orgasm as a layered volume of flow / so intricately woven as to be the sensed motion / of time slowly opening.” The gift of *Door* is to read and reread, landing in different musics, different zones of perception.

Zeroes Were Hollow by David Larsen

Kenning Editions, 2022

Review by Gabriel Kruis

“*His Shaykh is Satan.*”

This is a line from the poem ‘FAIR PLAY FOR YEMEN’ in Larsen’s collection, which deals in part with the destruction of the Uways al-Qarani mosque in Raqqa. “You know Uwaysi? It is the most beautiful thing,” David Larsen writes, “the tales of abject holiness / the tutelary figure for the teacherless.” Uwaysis are sufi mystics who believe in the transmission of spiritual knowledge independent of physical interaction. Though he was alive during Muhammad’s lifetime, their namesake Uways never met The Prophet, opting to care for his ailing mother instead; despite this, he was granted the honorific Khayr at-Tābi’in (“The Best of the Followers of the Companions of the Prophet”). Before they destroyed it, Larsen tells us, ISIS spray painted this inscription upon Uways Mosque: “Who has no shaykh, his shaykh is Satan.”

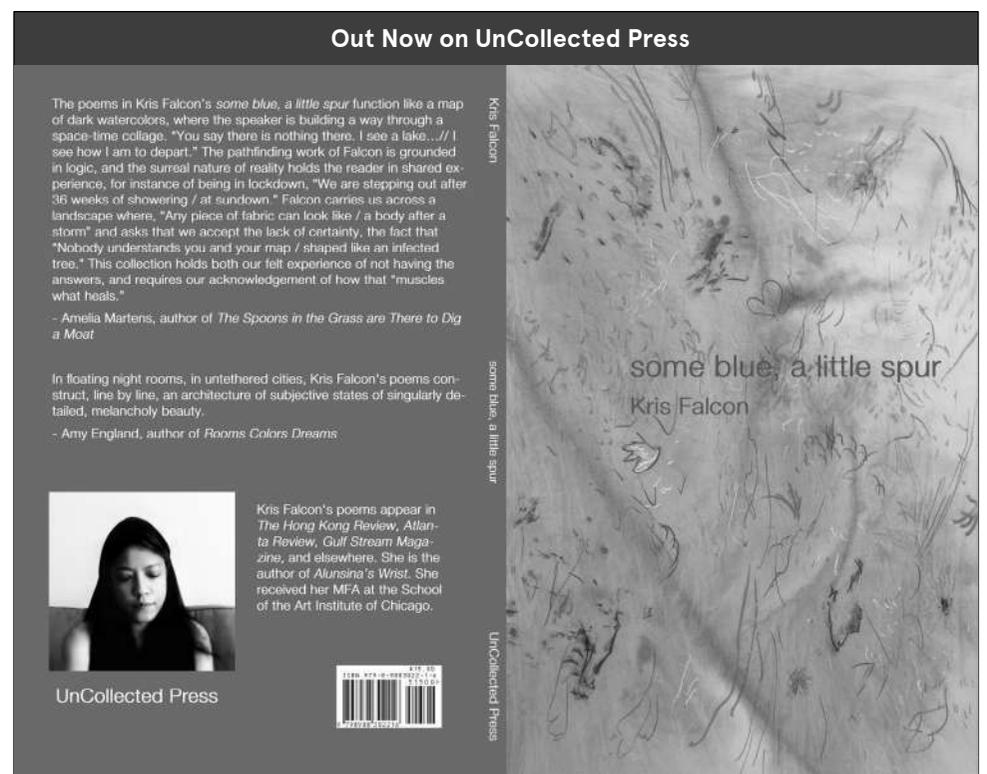
In a world which has relied almost unfailingly on the frangible poetics of the binary, it might be enough to simply see who Larsen contrasts the Uwaysis to, to understand their value to

him—not to mention how he fell in with the Devil. Whether it’s Raytheon (who built the bombs) or the US (who sanctions and profits off their sales in the Middle East), Larsen puts the question plainly, “Oh tell me please, without United States / what ISIS would there be? / Oh yeah, and what Israel?” The sense is: if the Uwaysis are wrong, I don’t want to be right.

It’s only a few pages later, in “HOOFPRIENTS IN THE SNOW,” that Lucifer returns to clarify, or further muddy, the picture. One line reads: “Satan is the devil who makes error beautiful.” Another: “Jesus is the devil that loved the world / a lot.” This love of error and good trouble, of troubling received logic, of indulgence in “imperfection,” marks every inch of *Zeroes Were Hollow*.

Take, for instance, the handwritten poem in various colored inks on the back cover: its penultimate line is X’d-out and there’s an inscrutable scribble tying it off (I think it spells NAVE?). The acknowledgements and the TOC, too, are scrawled in the author’s hand, as are several poems throughout. You don’t have to have read Barthes’ *Writing Degree Zero* to appreciate the immediacy and corporeality of the handwriting, especially when it renders the formerly “neutral,” totally serviceable typeface, null; the poet’s anarchic wit is as evident in every looping O and squiggled N as it is in every poem in the book.

The associations between Larsen’s block lettering and comix are certainly there, but the Brooklyn Museum’s show on Basquiat’s notebooks a few years back also comes to mind. Through quotes from the artist and the curator’s wall text, it was made clear that the nixed or misspelled words, the repeatedly blurred or obliterated objects, were intended to make viewers look closer and decipher: to be made to remember what they witnessed “beneath the noise.” Not that that’s all that’s going on here. That’s too reductive and self-serious for a book so hedonistic and, honestly, wonderfully



slovenly. Still, the Kenning Editions re-release of *Syrup Hits*—Larsen’s collaged remix of his first book, *The Thorn*—as well as the inclusion of two linoleum block print collabs with 80s punk auteur Raymond Pettibon, places *Zeroes Were Hollow* even more firmly in the graffiti’d/pop-art domain of Basquiat’s downtown aesthetic.

The formal idiosyncrasies in the book will be familiar to readers of Larsen’s 2005 *The Thorn*: the bathroom stall handwriting; the poem in lieu of a blurb (“...THIS TEXT ANTICIPATES YOUR RESISTANCE AND OFFERS IT A MEAT EATING FLOWER”). But *Zeroes Were Hollow* is marked by an additional anarchic caprice: where there are titles, they often arise in ALL CAPS in the midst or at the end of a piece. This is the case in the book’s second poem, “REQUIRED READING FOR THE GENIUSES OF THE WORLD,” and the effect is discombobulation: do these poems run backward; are they inverted; or do they unfold from the center outward? Reading that particular poem in reverse does make a certain sense; and a line like “It was written with a pen held backward” lends credence. It’s also true the poem on the back cover reads “more cohesively” if you take the inks color by color (but its title, “FOR MISUSE,” makes me wonder if this is a faulty Rosetta Stone). While references to fables and riddles and sphinxes abound, while *zero* and *cipher* all share a root in Arabic, there’s always that diabolical countercurrent in the book which takes us far from any punctilious games of codebreaking—or moralizing, for that matter. When, for instance, in a handwritten poem, the title arises in medias res, it is at the same time effaced or subsumed in Larsen’s majuscule scrawl. If you want to know what the poem is called, you have to return to the TOC. It’s rare for that page to be more than a paratextual artifact, let alone an informative and mordantly wry companion. Take the brief (seemingly titleless) handwritten lines on page 16 (“WHAT’S THAT / A SHOT / TWO SHOTS! / NOT JUST / A SUICIDE / THEN”); which, flipping back, we see is called “THEATER OF THE NIGHT.”

This abrupt poem and its dichotomies—bleak hilarity; the shoot-out versus the suicide; the witness and the victim—are emblematic of the book’s concerns. They represent an insoluble algebra. There are unspoken players in this cruel drama, an X factor Larsen is sure to point to elsewhere: the gun seller, Raytheon, and “the arms dealing, good life stealing / United States of Malignant Bullshit.” *Zeroes Were Hollow* seems to recognize the implicit tension in taking this mess seriously enough to say something serious about it. Opting for anarchy and rage, Larsen invites the reader to participate in manifold perversions and involutions of dominant logics and paradigms.

In “I WRITE IN THE MIRROR” (whose title also appears as a non-sequitur 7 lines in), the sensation of inversion mimics the splitting/doubling effect of a mirror. I at first wondered if the title meant the speaker wrote backward

(as in, REDRUM); or, was this suggestive of an artist creating a self portrait? When the speaker clarifies, simply, “I write looking in the mirror,” these first two senses (both valid) are obscured by the comedic plainness of the image. Yet the stance is both physical and metaphorical; here we have a poet who writes with a kind of blithe, seemingly witless honesty, as the lines that follow attest: “The day has every hour in it / and uh clouds everywhere.” The poem ends by turning the mirror back on the reader:

I write in the mirror
How about you

In this reversal, a coterie is implied. The reader is identified for what they probably are: a poet.

When, in *Writing Degree Zero*, Barthes writes, “The absence of any explicit signifier functions by itself as a signifier,” he performs the same maneuver in semiotics that the Arabic mathematician al-Khwarizmi (whose name gives us the word algorithm) performed 1,300 years earlier when he expounded upon the ways that zero functions not as a lack or absence, but a number in and of itself: “the absence of all quantity considered as quantity.” In *Zeroes Were Hollow*, there’s an adage which concludes “A TALE OF FARID AL-DIN CATTAR”: “man is the enemy of what he does not know.” It could be said that ignorance (deliberate or endemic) is an absence of “knowledge” best considered as quantity: a dark energy or negative algorithm which animates the flow of capital between organizations like Raytheon and Empire.

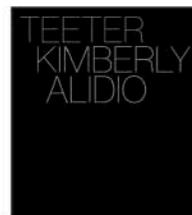
Even where Larsen deploys a seemingly neutral “I like this/I like that” notational tone, it’s in a poem titled “FUCK EVERYTHING”: “I like non-existence, not existing / stuff like that. I find it soothing... I like solitude and mono-amory / and heavy metal that is slow and content-free / Fuck everything else / I swear to God, get it out of my face now.” Following the destruction and defacement of the Uwaisi Mosque in “FAIR PLAY FOR YEMEN,” the poet writes of ISIS fundamentalists: “I hate those people / and the mullahs and the stupid kingdom...” While rage and even hatred are palpable, it seems right to consider the nugatory/nullifying mode in *Zeroes Were Hollow* to be a quantity, as well. It’s a rage that should also be read as a profound and abiding love for difference, for that which has been destroyed, obliterated, trampled on or kept from existing, for the outsider artist, the unacknowledged, unschooled, forgotten, ignored, the hidden. In Larsen’s own words from “THE FLEA’S PILGRIMAGE”:

The different is not the Other
The different could be your twin
Some men are so beautiful
it presents a problem
and they mask their faces
That’s how beautiful the Other is

Books Received

- Arne Weingart, *Concentration* (FutureCycle Press)
 Brian Kim Stefans, *For Trapped Things* (Roof Books)
 Calvin C. Hernton, *Selected Poems*, ed. David Grundy and Lauri Scheyer, foreword by Ishmael Reed (Wesleyan)
 Cindy Juyoung Ok, *House Work* (Ugly Duckling Presse)
 Charisse Pearlina Weston, *Awaiting* (Ugly Duckling)
 Ed Barrett, *The Leaves Are Something This Year: New and Selected Prose Poems* (Quale Press)
 Emma Wippermann, *Joan of Arkansas* (Ugly Duckling)
 Hiromi Ito, *Tree Spirits Grass Spirits*, trans. Jon L. Pitt (Nightboat)
 Ida Börjel, *MA*, trans. Jennifer Hayashida (Ugly Duckling)
 Ida Vitale, *Time Without Keys* (New Directions)
 Laynie Browne, *Practice Has No Sequel* (Pamenar Press)
 Laynie Browne, *Letters Inscribed in Snow* (Tinderbox Editions)
 Laynie Browne, *Intaglio Daughters* (Ornithopter Press)
 Lucia Hinojosa Gaxiola, *The Telaraña Circuit* (Tender Buttons)
 Jahan Khajavi, *Feast of the Ass* (Ugly Duckling)
 James Lovelock, Hans Ulrich Obrist with Daisy Hildyard and Precious Okoyomon, *Ever Gaia* (Common Era)
 Jean Day, *The Night Before the Day On Which* (Roof Books)
 Kazim Ali, *Sukun: New And Selected Poems* (Wesleyan)
 Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine, *Proximal Morocco* (Ugly Duckling)
 Ronald Johnson, *The Valley of Many-Colored Grasses* (The Song Cave)
 Rose Lesniak, *What the Dogs Tell Me* (RLDT Press)
 Rosa-Johan Uddoh, *Practice Makes Perfect* (Book Works / Focal Point)
 sadé powell, *word to my dead* (Ugly Duckling)

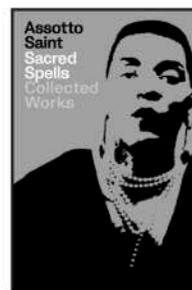
NIGHTBOAT BOOKS NEW TITLES FALL 2023



TEETER
KIMBERLY ALIDIO
 An autohistoriography of felt time that arises from subversive hearing practices and the emotional prosody of a mother tongue one does not understand but activates another poetic language.



HYDRA MEDUSA
BRANDON SHIMODA
 A book of poetry, dreams and speculative talks, collected from the psychic detritus of living in the US-Mexico borderlands.



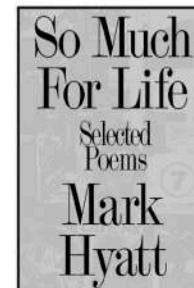
SACRED SPELLS
ASSOTTO SAINT
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JASMINE GIBSON
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MARK HYATT, ED. SAM LADKIN AND LUKE ROBERTS
 A long awaited collection of poems by Mark Hyatt, one of the great lost writers of mid-century British poetry.

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

Protocol

Grayson Scott

In the early 90s, Gillian McCain—who later edited the Poetry Project Newsletter and then co-edited Please Kill Me, an oral history of punk—wrote a literary events feature for the Newsletter called “Dirt.” For the foreseeable future, Grayson Scott is bringing back the gossip column to our pages. Expect reporting on literary and cultural events, but, as you’ll read below, not just. —ed.

An old word for columnist is “stylite”: Someone who is on top of a column. A friend of mine told me a story from when she used to write columns, about how she sought out her country’s most prolific columnist, then retired, as her subject. When she asked him how he did it for so long, the columns, he panicked. Column and calumny are different words, but can be mistaken for each other when overheard.

I went to **Frieze** on opening night, abetted by my girlfriend, who has a profession. She explained to me that the opening was properly called a “vernissage,” which is an instance of euphony and therefore incompatible with **The Shed**, one of the most graceless buildings in the city. Like **Sebald** said, “there is no point in exaggerating that which is already horrific,” and I am accordingly uncertain how much can be said about Frieze. It is sponsored by **Deutsche Bank**, and the opening was the same day the bank was ordered to pay a \$75 million settlement for helping **Jeffrey Epstein** traffic all those kids.

Under the misapprehension that I might get something for free, I went to the top floor in search of the origin of the discarded glasses littering trash cans and non-art surfaces. Up there was only \$30 wine and an automat-style device that dispensed skin-care samples if you solved its riddles, which seems like something Andy Warhol would have made if **Valerie Solanas** had shot him in the face. There was free water from Vote.org, presented in a similar can to the ones Coors Light sometimes comes in now but stamped BANNED in impact font, intended to dramatize voter suppression in Georgia.

All of the young people were downstairs on the second level. Many were wearing pink, incidentally matching the copies of the **FT** staffers were handing out which had a story about the **Sacklers** above the fold but neglected the Epstein news. Re: the art, the **Nan Goldin** photos in the Gagosian booth were wonderful, and the beach shots reminded me of that **Gregg Bordowitz** short film from *Portraits of People Living with HIV (1993)* where

they all go sailing, which I saw at the **Triple Canopy** series they did at **BAM**. Speaking of movies, *Earth II*, a film from the **Anti-Banal-ity Union**, has recently been made available to stream for free. Made by re-cutting scenes from over 300 feature-length blockbusters, it is both a genuinely original climate-collapse narrative and the funniest movie I saw last year.

I arrived at the Triple Canopy **Symposium** as it was ascending to total illegibility, superintended by beloved artist and performer **Alex Tatarsky**. A **white lady** successfully rapped, a **stand-up comic** bombed, and **The Illustrious Pearl** made a waffle. After a lull, a Black MAGA intervention—a surprise even to some of the symposium’s planners—erupted. “FUCK WHITE BABIES,” bellowed **Crackhead Barney** as she launched some chairs around. Effective boomer-removal tactic for the **Club Cringe** DJ set. TC’s annual **Benefit** at **Rule of Thirds**, which I also arrived late to, sounded fun: Honoree **Andrea Fraser** smashed a pie decorated with TC’s operating budget into her face. Fraser is now eligible to join Wikipedia’s “List of people who have been pied,” alongside **Friedmans Thomas** and **Milton**, most members of the **Red Hot Chili Peppers**, and a seeming plurality of international bankers. On my way out I overheard someone say “I haven’t heard anything about whip-its in a while,” which made me despair for the speaker and their relationships..

Bladee and **Varg 2**, musicians who make songs for people who look like they’ll reenact the **Cat Marnell** home invasion on me, had a show at **The Hole’s** 86 Walker gallery. **Mary Jane Dunphe**, musician and **Poetry Project Marathon** alum, wrote the text for the show, which is good both on its merits and relative to the standard. **Kaitlin Phillips** was somehow involved in the show. I had work and missed the opening so had to go later, but **Elena Saavedra Buckley** wrote an excellent dispatch of the scene there for *The Paris Review*. The paintings put me in mind of the way YouTube comments are iterative without rising to the quality of memes, and are also Ur-bit-y in a way that is probably coincidence (“Worst shit I’ve ever seen,” according to a guy at the **Montez Press Radio** event who did make it to the opening). Some of the paintings had been spray painted recently, which, in evidence of how badly **Eric Adams** has fucked this place up, put me in mind of the first vigil for **Jordan Neely**. We, the protestors, were on the uptown F at Broadway-Lafayette, and I have a voice note on my phone where I say: “Fuck are we being kettled? [. . .] There’s a

chemical smell, smells like spray paint.” The crowd moved and I could see someone had painted JORDAN NEELY MURDERED HERE on the floor. You can’t go look at it, because I returned a few hours later to check and it had been erased. **Arielle Isack**, writer and now editorial fellow at *The Baffler*, wrote an account for *n+1*:

Real estate greed, the glutted police budget, ceaseless gentrification, racist journalists, Eric Adams, Kathy Hochul, white people—we cycled through the injustices, against them, re-suscitating despair into focused rage. A doorway is an emptiness that has a shape.

Other publications learned something from 2020, since almost everyone covered Jordan Neely’s death. Like formerly homeless activist and witness to Neely’s death **Johnny Grimas** said in an interview with *The New York Times*: “We got to bust out right now, bust out for truth.”

Nakba Day, organized by **Within Our Lifetime**, continues to be the best time you can have while still conforming to the Noahide laws. The \$100 million **Strategic Response Group**—founded as an anti-terror unit, but since 2020 ubiquitous at protests—hassled us when we started marching and played that stupid DISPERSE NOW recording. The cop who holds the speaker is probably always a different guy, but invariably looks like he’s just been dredged from one of the **digester eggs** and avoids making eye contact with any of the protestors like he’s trying to suppress a hard-on during his niece’s dance performance. The march was more subdued than last year’s, but the speeches were great and nobody went to jail. Min al-maya l’il-maya, Falasteen 3arabiye!

n+1 threw a party for the launch of the “Attachment Issue” at their still-new-ish office in Greenpoint. **Mark Krotov** read an excerpt from the issue’s editorial note, eliding the part where they greatly exaggerated *Bookforum’s* death. Good news for hipsters. I caught actual party reporter **Andrew Federov** lacking in front of his boss **Gabriel Snyder**, who is from the nice part of my home state. There were more people there than I’ve seen at a legacy magazine event since 2020, and it maintained an admirable one-to-one ex ratio.

I’m not even sure **Verso** does events anymore, which is sad, but **The Poetry Project** has them all the time. A brief inventory of phrases uttered there recently: “White people have been making yogurt since before they were in-

vented,” (**Bob Glück**); “He just looked so cute,” after abrogating a Q&A to hug writer and professor **Alexander Zevin** (**Gary Indiana**); “I wrote that yesterday and might feel differently tomorrow,” (also Gary); “Work your ass off to change the language and don’t ever get famous,” (**Colter Jacobsen** quoting **Bernadette Mayer**).

Remarks aren’t literature, but remarks about literature can be a column. **Dorothee Elmiger’s** novel *Out of the Sugar Factory* (**Two Lines Press**, trans. **Megan Ewing**) takes the “I should feel as if I had been pirouetting” from *Middlemarch*—the sense following after you’ve been overwhelmed by the vastness attendant to any commodity, the trace of the people who made and moved it—and spins it out. She writes: “[S]omething seemed to reveal itself to me that I couldn’t articulate but could only rediscover in circumstances of similar or analogous structure—as relationships, repetitions, parallels.” The book almost mocks pareidolia; its range recalls Paul B. Preciado’s remark “Happiness lies in the ability to feel the totality of things as being part of ourselves.” Elmiger’s erudition and restraint are a model for how a serious person should engage material like this.

There is an epigraph in **A. Alvarez’s** *Savage God*:

Suicides were the aristocrats of death—god’s graduate students, acting out their theses to prove how limited were the alternatives He had allowed Himself and His creatures. Their act was, at its best, superb literary criticism.

Blake Butler has written a book, *Molly* (**Archway Editions**, November), about his late wife, Molly Brodak. Brodak shot herself in a park by the couple’s house in March of 2020. **Janet Malcolm** wrote in *The Silent Woman* that suicide is the “erotic” alternative to other kinds of dying, and most reviews of this book will be elaborations of whether it is good or bad to reproduce your wife’s suicide note or provide a catalog of the infidelities she concealed while you were married. For me, reading *Molly* was like realizing the incandescent lightbulb you put in your mouth has cracked and that you now must chew.

Molly was blurbed by **Michael W. Clune**, whose memoir about being a grad student who uses heroin, *White Out*, has been reprinted by **McNally Editions**. A friend texted me this review: “The Michael Clune book about how communism/group feeling

basically solved his heroin addiction really moved me.” It has some of the funniest stories about drugs I have heard and I used to be a line cook.

I only listen to music that could be on a playlist called “Overheard on the B6,” but **Blank Forms’s Tyler Maxin** was so damn nice to me at the launch for **Lary 7’s Larynx** that I regretted not having a turntable to play the LP he gave me. I used a friend’s to listen to it, and it’s fascinating—*Larynx* is 7’s first retrospective, detailing decades of music made with his collection of discarded and obsolescent technology. This is genuine freakdom, and its preservation is a benison.

7 spun dub reggae and possibly something called “furniture music” (NB: writers, name your forms like musicians do). He had a plant on his turntable that was identified to me as both “Lary’s totem” and a fern but was in fact a lotus, which to his credit is not an easy plant to care for, something 7 reportedly has done for ten years. I went to get some beer from the deli on Canal and Orchard and found it totally packed with people from the launch, amplified when someone walked in and announced “What is this, Berghain?”

Back upstairs, I asked **Tom LaPrade** about the huge rock on the floor underneath the trestle table where **Lawrence Kumpf** and 7 had set up. He said it was left over from the previous tenant and too heavy to move, then admitted not knowing what kind it was and proposed a rock identification app; I countered that this existed and was called Shazam. He took this with equanimity and this is a credit to him. An attendee, who I can only describe as wearing a soul patch and a fedora, gleefully pressed a small AM/FM radio playing a live transmission of the show against my ear and declared “IT’S WORKING,” which reminded me of the part in **Stanley Elkin’s The Franchiser** when the protagonist puts Colonel Sander’s hand in his mouth. A noticeable quantum of intergenerational flirting was developing on the dance floor, and I left. I thought I saw fictional real-life **Hanya Yanagihara** character **Yeonmi Park** by the **McDonald’s** on Delancey, where both my friend Matt and my girlfriend separately ran into **BLP Kosher** a couple days later and were granted implausibly similar selfies. His show at **Market Hotel** is hotly anticipated.

Fall Events

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

SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER

Joss Barton & Cecilia Gentili
Wed., 9/27, 8pm

Woman Life Freedom: a reading by iranian writers and translators, curated by poupeh missaghi and lida nosrati
Thu., 9/28, 12pm ** virtual*

Book Launch for I Could Not Believe It The 1979 Teenage Diaries of Sean DeLear
Fri., 9/29, 8pm

Stephon Lawrence & Diamond Sharp
Mon., 10/02, 8pm

Kim Hyesoon & trans. Don Mee Choi; Elizabeth Willis & Nancy Bowen
Fri., 10/06, 8pm

Jonathan González & Alexander Weheliye
Thu., 10/12, 7pm

Wendy Lotterman & Violet Spurlock
Mon., 10/16, 8pm

Book Launch for Patricia Spears Jones’s The Beloved Community
Wed. 10/18, 8pm

Dionne Brand, Saidiya Hartman, & Christina Sharpe
Wed., 10/25, 7:30pm ** The 92nd Y*

Number of the Beast: 6th Annual Halloween Party and Fundraiser at The Poetry Project
Fri., 10/27, 8pm

Michael Nardone, w/ Cecilia Vicuña & Raven Chacon
Co-presented with Printed Matter
Mon., 10/30, 8pm

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER

Courtney Bush & Peter and Julia
Fri., 11/03, 8pm

Always More Roses: James Schuyler at 100

A Morning For The Poet
Sat., 11/04, 9am ** KJCC Center, NYU*

It Goes, It Goes: A Reading for James Schuyler
Sat., 11/04, 5pm ** Dia Chelsea*

Hymn to Life
Mon., 11/06, 8pm

Mike DeCapite & Gail Scott
Wed., 11/08, 8pm

I AM AN ANGRY FORCE I CANNOT SEE
Sun., 11/12, 8pm

Celebration of Assotto Saint’s Sacred Spells: Collected Works
Wed., 11/15, 8pm

Alt Text Selfie: An Alt Text as Poetry
Dis/Course led by Bojana Coklyat & Finnegan Shannon
Thu., 11/16, 7pm

Alexis De Veaux & Keioui Keijaun Thomas
Wed., 11/29, 8pm

A VIRUS IS AN UNDEAD ARCHIVE
Cea (Constantine Jones), Theodore (ted) Kerr, & Eleanor Kipping
Fri., 12/01, 8pm

Fall 2023 Workshop Reading
Mon., 12/04, 8pm ** virtual*

More events to be announced.

Fall Workshops

The Endless Feminist Reading Group * *virtual*
5 Sessions | Thursdays, 7–9pm | 9/07–10/05

*Within light there is darkness,
but do not try to understand that darkness.
Within darkness there is light,
but do not look for that light.*

—Sekito Kisen, “Identity of Relative and Absolute,” 8th Century

In Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Ring of Endless Light*, a teen processes the complexity of grief and the confusion of her desires through developing a telepathic connection to dolphins. The titular light is endless in that it contains both life and death, trauma and healing, suffering and joy, not as opposing poles, but as continuous substance. What does the ring of endless light encircle? Darkness? A mirror? An ocean?

In The Endless Feminist Reading Group, we will explore questions of eternity, timelessness, repetition, and relation. Some artists who might join us as guides inside the vastness include: Etel Adnan, Bruce Boone, Courtney Bush, Sean DeLear, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Fanny Howe, Imani Elizabeth Jackson, Benjamin Krusling, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Fred Moten, Adrian Piper, Gabrielle Octavia Rucker, Jackie Wang, Simone Weil, and Simone White.

This reading group will be facilitated by the Poetry Project’s Program Director, Laura Henriksen.

drinking strange water w/ Ian Dreiblatt * *virtual*
10 Sessions | Tuesdays, 7–9pm | 9/12–11/14

In this workshop, we will read poetry that emerges from experiences of exile, migration, dispersal, and displacement, as well as generate and share our own texts that respond to these poems. Considering work by writers including Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, Ovid, Dionne Brand, Georges Perec, Granaz Moussavi, Osip Mandelstam, Asiya Wadud, and the authors of the Bible, we’ll tarry together in the question of how poets have written from and through exile and displacement, and what the work they’ve produced can tell us about the relationship between language, home, and elsewhere. We’ll also workshop our own writing, not through the lens of exile, but in a conversation vivified and complicated by the texts we’ve read together.

Abject Portal(s) w/ Dianca Potts * *virtual*
5 Sessions | Sundays, 1–3pm | 10/01–10/29

Through a diverse selection of creative works, revelatory prompts, and engaged discussion, we’ll collectively explore the possibilities of embracing abjection, body horror, and the sensory as generative portals. Participants will unearth new ways to invite fissures and fractures into their creative practice and spark the cultivation of new works and approaches to craft. Participants will also learn how to incorporate artifacts, new media, and theory into their work to further excavate, channel, and conjure new forms and landscapes within their writing. Together, we’ll uncover the narrative potential of what disturbs, rattles, and haunts. Participants should arrive open to sharing work that is in-progress and/or fragmented. Participants will also receive written feedback on their work throughout the course.

Poetic Games and the Everyday — Extended Deep Study Session w/ Tan Lin * *virtual*
3 Sessions | Mondays, 6–9pm | 10/02–10/16

This course explores games, non-sense, and constraint-driven exercises. Students compose original works by experimenting and playing with language’s visual and sonic qualities, modifying literary and non-literary forms (e.g sonnet, cookbook, grocery list, crossword puzzles, anagrams, video game walkthroughs, parking tickets, indexes, operating manuals, and playlists), and utilizing non-traditional compositional techniques: cut-up, content scraping, n+1 aggregation. Because experimental writing often adheres to rules/formal procedures, students adopt rule-bound, constraint-driven forms that share an affinity with literature, gaming, and information theory.

Poetry, a Breaking Wave: Spilling, Plunging, Collapsing, Surging —
Workshop w/ Lara Mimosa Montes * *virtual*
5 Sessions | Thursdays, 7–9pm | 10/12–11/09

I have been struggling with belief in the most basic sense of the word. Belief. For months I inhabited long sequences of uninterrupted time where I dared to imagine the world without words. I visited the ocean and silently observed the waves. I stopped writing and practiced living a life without poems which is not the same as a life without poetry or the force of poetry.

It was in this break that I started to experience my writing and my relationship to poetry change in concert with the time spent watching the waves spilling, plunging, collapsing, surging.

This 5-week generative writing workshop is for those who have experienced a similar sense of doubt, silence, or withdrawal— an extended blankness— a crisis of belief. Inspired by the teachings and legacy of The Poetry Project, this workshop is intended to create space to dwell inside the sacred, devotional aspects of poetry. By “sacred” I mean language lost and forged in the break, in the presence of “a weird faith.” In risking belief, we’ll collectively encounter poetry as “the part / that no one sees,” to quote Cedar Sigo. Rather than workshop existing writings, we’ll draft new writings as we read and discuss works by Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Fred Moten, Alice Notley, Emily Skillings, Julia Kristeva, Cecilia Vicuña, and more.

Paratextual Play — Workshop w/ Holly Melgard * *virtual*
5 Sessions | Mondays, 7–9pm | 10/23–11/20

Even though writers and publishers spend exorbitant time and money composing paratexts to guide readers to and through their work, standards in mainstream publishing strategically mask paratextual labor to appear invisible and unobtrusive to readers. Paratexts are things like blurbs, synopses, book covers, even separate author bios and interviews, all of which are peripheral dimensions of text that designate boundaries for its reception in discourse, as Gérard Genette theorizes in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (1987). Meanwhile, competing for the scarce resources of attention, recognition and material support, poets for over a century have designed unconventional paratexts that disrupt information flows and reveal invisible architectures of capital undergirding the “Literary” category.

Paratextual Play studies the conventions of literary packaging by exploring paratexts as sites for creative expression, experimentation, self-authorization, and mischief-making. Activities in this workshop are designed to support you in your own Paratextual writing. We will begin by checking out Genette’s theory of paratext more closely and reflecting together on a century of paratextual play (with examples by Tan Lin, CAConrad, Kamau Brathwaite, Rupi Kaur, Theresa Cha, Hannah Weiner, Bernadette Mayer, and Gertrude Stein among others). Midway through, we will deliberate over ways Genette’s theory can be updated to better reflect 21st century born-digital paratexts like hashtags. And further in, we will examine paratextual labor in several recent collective practices (Black Took Collective, Gauss PDF, Troll Thread, and some Ugly Duckling publications + ephemera). Throughout, we’ll workshop your own paratextual creations for framing your work—however conventional or unconventional—with the group. Here, we’ll utilize the resource of our hivemind to process these invisible forms of frame-writing we commonly practice, but never call “the work.”

Experimental Prose: Cut-up Vs Continuity. An Oxymoron? —
Deep Study Session w/ Gail Scott * *in-person*
Thursday, 6–9pm, 11/09 | 6 - 9 pm

For our experimental prose workshop, we will start with an informal discussion of issues that come up for many working in this field. And you may well have others to contribute:

- Why still do narrative at all if it seems narrative should be thwarted or cut up or diverted to be relevant today? Is it possible to both do and undo at once, in the writing, if what we mean by narrative is working something through?
- Can one experiment meaningfully with narrative without seriously breaking up structural components of the novel form?
- How necessary is it for radical formal work on narrative to be driven by radical political impulse?

It is interesting to look at Renee Gladman’s way of posing the question: “I hadn’t wanted to think about narrative at the same time that I was thinking of my body lying in the object world.” She poses this as an issue of space. As she puts it: “was it possible to say something was gathering outside of a thing with the intention of meeting something else when this something else was the larger space in which the first thing existed?”

For full description of Experimental Prose: Cut-up Vs Continuity, please visit:
poetryproject.org/learning

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Guest Edited by Saretta Morgan

POETRY **Mónica A. Jiménez, Jada Renée Allen, Rashaad Thomas, Jaye Elizabeth
Elijah, Sasha Hawkins** // INTERVIEW **Dionne Lee** w/ Saretta Morgan

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INTERVIEWS **Mohammed Zenia** w/ Morgan Võ, **Alice Notley** w/ Nick Sturm // REMEMBRANCES **Minnie Bruce Pratt** (1946–2023) & **Keith Waldrop** (1932–2023) // POETRY **Kaur Alia Ahmed & Nora Treatbaby** // RESPONSES **sadé powell** on *Dereliction* by **Gabrielle Octavia Rucker**, **Ed Luker** on *Bad Diaspora Poems* by **Momtaza Mehri** // FEATURE *Protocol* by **Grayson Scott** // REVIEWS **danilo machado** on *Images on which to build, 1970s–1990s* curated by **Ariel Goldberg**, **Kyle Carrero Lopez** on *I Could Not Believe It: The 1979 Teenage Diaries of Sean DeLear*, **Kirby Chen Mages** on *MissSettl* by **Kamden Hilliard**, **Ayaz Muratoglu** on *I, Boombox* by **Robert Glück**, **imogen xtian smith** on *The Only Name We Can Call It Now Is Not Its Only Name* by **Valerie Hsiung**, **Marie Buck** on *The Wayland Rudd Collection: Exploring Racial Imaginaries in Soviet Visual Culture*, **Nathaniel Rosenthalis** on *Door* by **Ann Lauterbach**, **Gabriel Kruis** on *Zeroes Were Hollow* by **David Larsen**

