

MAKE AN EFFORT

communiqués



LEORA
fridman

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LEORA FRIDMAN



#85

ESSAY PRESS GROUNDLOOP SERIES

In Essay Press's Groundloop series, curated by Aimee Harrison and Maria Anderson, we seek to bring together authors exploring diverse subjects through loud, innovative architectures.

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September 26, 2016
Nashville, TN

Dear Reader,

I always read the acknowledgements page in books first. I want to know which relationships made something. In some ways it's all I need to know about a book.

"The transition from the stability and absoluteness of the world's contents to their dissolution into motions and relations," writes Myung Mi Kim.

Their motions and relations—this is what I want to know. I want to know who is whose friend and how they move together, how they made the work together. It's not because I want to be friends with them—it's because I want to know what relationships made a book.

So that's what this book is—writing in relation. Last fall on residency in Vermont I was around mostly painters—thank you Vermont Studio Center—and I got to think about forms in a totally new way. He asked me what my "natural form" was—what I go to first, without censoring or trying. And I realized it's not the poem, it's the letter. And somehow it broke my mind open to

realize this was a legitimate way of writing, a way of processing and portraying information. In conversation: this is my natural form.

It doesn't feel legit. I reach out to a writer who I admire, telling her I feel isolated in what I'm doing, and she writes back, "Keep on. I feel the isolation is key." Full stop. My stomach sinks. I don't want isolation to be a necessary part of making. I don't write only for myself. I don't write into a vacuum.

And so I write towards the letter. I read all of Emily Dickinson's letters in one go, I read all of the letters between Boris Pasternak and Marina Tsvetaeva, I sleep with *I'm Very into You*, that book of correspondence between Kathy Acker and McKenzie Wark, under my pillow. I read into the writer writing to someone else.

I read for this: for integration—for a grasp at integration, of the other, of surrounding images, texts, exchanges. I read for the mind at work, the emotions at work, the process of connecting the so-called dots, the movement of the mind, the strange attempt to relate the movement of the mind outside the individual mind. This is what I have loved always in poems, and what I love too in correspondence. I love the muscular squeeze of the grappling mind, the wrestling attempt to connect.

When I was a kid and being lazy or whining, my father used to say to me, *come on, Lilita, haz un esfuerzo*, he'd say. *Make an effort*. I had to try hard, he told me, because you don't get what you want if you don't try hard.

But what about the things I *do* try hard at, which no one sees, which no one recognizes? Does that count as making an effort?

When I read relationally (in the acknowledgements page, in the seeking out of who knows who) I read for these invisible creation-tasks, relationship work.

Relationship is usually default, invisible work—work we put in that is not seen or given credit when we talk about the wonders of our self-made man, our leaning-in women. As Micki McGee writes in *Self Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life*, “all the work of care—both the private and public labors of care—are rendered meaningless and debased when one is seeking some grand work of self-making, some vision of life as a permanent reified work of art.”

Yes, I too am tired of the reified work of art, and the reified work of art-person. But what if the care is the art?

Silvia Federici writes in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle (Common Notions)*, “the reproduction of human beings is the most labor-intensive work on earth.” The meaning of “reproduction” here is not just physical birth, but includes the reach toward each other, the reproduction of thought and mental-emotional connective tissue on paper / page / screen. We reproduce this way because we care.

Last weekend I panicked in the car thinking of how my entire week was going to be lost to other people’s needs. Sunday night and I already knew I wouldn’t be able to make any progress on my own work.

What if this week is only for you, J said, just this once focus only on your own shit.

But it feels impossible. *I’m addicted, I said. I just don’t know how to stop responding to what other people might need.*

Try it for just this week, J pleads. I know I have to if I ever want to get this book done, but my heart sinks. I don’t want to stick with just my own shit. I want to make the phone calls I need to me, keep the connective tissue going, but I want to value this care: correspondence that is of value even though it is with an attainable / readable person—not a person who is unattainable / unreadable otherwise (i.e. dead or a celebrity).

I want to value this creative labor, this reproductive labor to connect—and find somewhere to put it that isn’t just the acknowledgements page. I want it to be not just critical work or work adjacent to creative making. I want it to be a true form.

I know this will take a while. In the meantime, thank you for making an effort.

Love,

L

the horrific thing, the shapeshifter bee monster who
with unearthly bravado speaks for more than herself

—Dorothea Lasky, *Poetry and the Metaphysical I*

All actual life is encounter.

—Martin Buber, *I and Thou*

June 2, 2015
Berkeley, CA

Dear C,

Because of M's new book I've been thinking about *the disappeared* in Argentina, and the Madres de Plaza de Mayo. When I google *the disappeareee woman* by mistake, the first result is *Loving him Without Losing you: How to Stop Disappearing and Start...* and the title trails off, like they do in listings in search engines when they get too long. It seems bizarre and almost romantic that that title drifts away. What will you start doing? You will never be able to know unless you...click this, buy this, find page 72, connect the right d...it's a puzzle you have to unravel perfectly in order to stop disappearing, and you have to do it before it's too l...

and then the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, *who created a dynamic and unexpected force*—no one expected the mothers to keep showing up, attempting to un-disappear their children. I just finished Maggie Nelson's new book (*The Argonauts*, hard for me to title it because my relationship with her books is one long poem only) and she talks less about disappearing into motherhood than anyone I've read on the subject: she says you've got to go to pieces and face death to get the baby out, but it gives me hope how valiantly she insists upon remaining, too—after all, she chose to tell the story as the "I," so she

remains. She forces life unto herself with language. The baby comes, the flesh of her belly slides off, but she forces life back onto her body.

I think there's a way as a woman-identified person that this is always all I'm doing: forcing life back onto my body. Trying to get sensation back in parts of my body that don't want to have it. Maybe it's not even "as a woman..."—I wrote this without thinking. It's been dancing from my mouth lately, this kind of phrase: it's been a confrontational, gendered week in which I often haven't been able to tell if I'm picking up gender as a cloak (avoidant) for human-human conflict so as to hide it and shield it from being (scary) human-human...or if there's just no way for me to escape gender, if I have to keep hitting myself / other people over the head with it, and if calling its name all the time is necessary and everything is as gendered as it seems. When I was trying to talk through my conflict with S, at one point I consciously stopped calling / naming all the things that had been gendered in the conflict we'd had because it felt both tiring and like it wasn't bringing us closer to one another / wasn't helping us understand each other. I went at it from how much I love him and desire connection with him instead.

Maggie Nelson: *Unable to fight my situation, at least for the time being, I try to learn from it; another self, stripped.*

I've been reading more Cassandra Troyan since you wrote to me that something about my writing reminded you of her, something about being straightforward but not trusting but not dishonest—what a gift for me for you to call that out. (I saw she's moving to Oakland!) And I came across [this video](#) of hers (a Trauma Dog video I think) where one of the first things you see is a dog looking up at you and you hear a voice, maybe from behind the camera,

saying / cooing, *It's okay, we like you*, to the dog, as if to calm it, and the dog's nose twitches a little bit.

In this week I've had of gendered everything and my fury about always doing unseen emotional labor. This jarred me: can I ever escape *It's okay, we like you* as a guiding principle? (for me / of how to be here / of how to make it okay for others to be here or remain / that I replicate as what makes it okay to not disappear oneself) I mean, I long for a day when reassuring others that they are *okay* and that people *like* them isn't my automatic or primary role. I mean, I am curious / fascinated by what it would be like not to need others to *like you* / me for it to be *okay* to be here, to stay, to be safe. The longing to be liked is so twitchy. So disappearing.

Claire Raymond in *The Conversant*: *Long before her premature death, [Ana] Mendieta's ephemeral projects already engaged a paradoxical performance of vanishing: performance art / earth work and the photographs documenting it.*

and, I would add: the people liking it
talking about it
remembering it
making it okay

I also want to link this back to earth destruction / environmental vanishing but, like you read in that new manuscript I'm working on, I'm already obsessively doing that, so it's enough for now. There's clearly a political angle here, too, about what makes things okay, about white fragility and about the ongoing / increasing leap of poets and artists right now to a "liking" of Mendieta that does / doesn't *make them okay*...but that needs to be my next letter, I think. The Internet and the disappeared and whiteness is many more letters...

One last thing, I've been thinking about the weird grammar of new-agey Bay-Area talk that crops up around me: *I want to presence* _____ (do you ever hear that?) as a way to say *I would like to mention* or *I would like to bring in* or *I would like to remember...*

"I want to presence that we are gathered here on the solstice."
"I want to presence that my grandmother died a month ago today."
"I want to presence the indigenous people of this land."

I wonder why this particular way to bring something forth: does this mean *it* (whatever the referenced / presented thing is) wasn't there otherwise and wouldn't be there otherwise, or does this mean it was already there and you have to "name it" to remind yourself?

As E says, only-half-mocking of Bay Area new-agey lingo: *name it to tame it*. We know putting *it* into words "tames" *it*, but is "presencing" *it* that too, or something else?

Is presencing a reference to something that has otherwise been disappeared? Is this a linguistic reaction to that disappearing? Or does this lingo also disappear it in a new layer of earth?

the disappeared woman
how and when does she disappear
how and when does she re-appear
if we call her disappeared does she reappear
or do we permanently / extravagantly disappear her
precisely by doing that

Love,
L

How do we keep it positive?*

- Engage don't Enrage
- Connect and Redirect
- Name it To Tame it

*From the work of Dan Siegel

slideplayer.com

July 7, 2015
Berkeley, CA

Dear C,

I am thinking of quitting poetry to sing. Maybe my voice will be more welcome there than at poetry readings.

I came here because I wanted to squeak. I came to writing in order to sing without having to train, so that I could squeak as squeakily as I felt—I wanted to talk as weirdly as I talk to myself and to my loved ones. I wanted my public talk and private talk to be more together.

I have a body that fits pretty well with what people want of it. Most of the time it fits pretty well with what I want of it. I wanted to stop presenting this body in a pretty well way because I didn't feel pretty well and presenting as such felt like lying.

When I give readings it's hard to figure out how to be anything more than pretty well. I'm so well trained to look and talk pretty well in public. I want to make an audience listen to something more than my pretty well body.

You wrote to me once about giving readings and about how you feel your audience is always fighting you. And then, in "Reading as a Wildflower Activist / Pt. 2," you wrote:

A Flower is / A Fruit and A Wound,
is what I think when a Man tells me
a Man who heard me read / said,
"I wish she wrote the way she talks."



What I hear the Man say to you is: *Don't talk if I don't get it. Don't talk if I can't understand. Stop talking to me in a way that makes me uncomfortable.*

I hear:

*I wish she wrote the way she talks—
I wish she was just her body—
I wish she was only her body—
I wish her body was on paper—
I wish she read her body to me—
I wish she read her body for me—
I wish her body was all there was—
I wish she wrote the way her body / lulls me—
I wish she wrote the way she lullabies—
I wish she would lull me—
I wish she wanted to be a mother—
I wish she played across my belly and I watched over—
I wish she played with me like a young girl should—*

I hear this. I hear that I should play like a young girl should / that I should stop talking if that Man can't understand. That I should try to talk real pretty or stop talking.

"I wish she wrote the way she talks."

I wish I could write away from the way I talk—I wish my talking could move my body / not just my mouth. I wish my talking could move my body to a new location when often my location is stuck—my body can't escape the stuckness so only my speech can / my speech can fall out of the stuck.

I'm thinking now about what it means to "fall out" like in [Kelin's new book](#). Especially re: weight and women and space. It's a way to move beyond what now feels stale: the topic of men taking up too much space. I'm tired of the tumblr of the [men with their legs spread wide on the subway](#)—I'm tired of hearing myself talk about it. There's more for me than this wily wise whine—

mentakingup2muchspaceonthetrain.tumblr.com



What happens when you fall out—always? What happens when part of your body falls away or is told it should be taken out—what is LEFT?

[Kelin](#) on queefs: *AIR FALLING OUT IS A CONSTANT REMINDER OF THE OCCUPIERS OF SPACE.*

What's left in that air? What's left in the air when our speech is there, but we are not allowed to be there? When a person writes something a man doesn't like—what's in the air?

I want to believe there's something in the air when I read, when I write. I find myself returning to the word *soul* as a potential resource: something I never thought I would do. My father always used to mock spirituality but the soul has meaning to me the more I carve away / fall out—

What is of value if no one understands me? What if nothing is of *value* and what, then, is that *no-thing*?

Maybe it's because I'm small—my body is small—I've always been told how small I am—cute—coming up to chest level on other people—my head is about at nipple height on my husband—cute—but I feel too large—curves etc.—belly etc.—I developed a butt for the first time when I was 25 and was so confused about how part of me could expand without another human inside me—I felt guilty for more air being taken by part of my body—until men started to tell me they liked it—but I still feel some of that air-taking guilt. I don't want space expanding inside me unless it can fall out.

The only way for my body to expand that is acceptable now that I am in my thirties: a baby—I want a baby to fall through me: not expand me, but lay upon my stomach and fall out through my back—clear out any need I could have to produce—so I don't have to speak—I only have to produce.

If I can produce I won't have to talk. My lady body doesn't need to talk to be good—it just needs to make a baby.

But what if I don't want to?

But what if I want to be what people want from me? Sometimes that's tiring but sometimes I think it's the world I want to live in. I said to S: *I don't want to stop doing this work / I want to live in a world where everyone does this work*—I want to live in a world where everyone is doing that labor of making something other people want, but / and still making themselves slippery—

Is there anything to be said that isn't what someone needs from me?

This is a real question I have. I'm not sure if there's anything to be said, written, or spoken if it isn't something someone needs from me.

Is there anything beyond what people need from me? What else is there? Will I ever get over who my sister needs me to be—who J needs me to be—will I ever get over who A wanted me to be / a heartache poet—a poet—so I was a poet for a man?

Did I become a poet for a man? In part. I came to poetry because a man let me in, and let me in again. I am ashamed to be a poet for a man—but is it possible enough time has passed so that now I am just a poet? That I am JUST as a poet / JUST in BEING a poet—as in, justice has been served, and I am in balance on the scales?

The scales keep tipping—always I find myself seeking what is RIGHT—Am I JUST—am I OKAY—is this labor WORTHY—will it make me GOOD—

I love (& hate) that in poetry I've come upon a labor / work / joy that will never be of value in our exchange system. In poetry school, Peter was always trying to convince us to back out of poetry while we still could. He'd say, *It will always be superfluous—that is what it IS, no one will care, no one will pay you*, and yet somehow I keep

yearning, yearning to be told that doing labor as a poet is valid, valuable, good, good enough to be more than just for a man / for a person.

But what could ever be more / more worthy than to do something FOR a person? Really. I want to do things for—to contribute. Is it bad (automatically) because / when it's for a man? For a non-man person? For a group?

Even in writing now, to you, writing comes easily because I write FOR / TO / TO FALL THROUGH. I hope this doesn't feel like I want to fall through you as in erase you or not see you—I just read in Maggie Nelson's new book about how Wayne Koestenbaum got chastised by someone he wrote love letters to, they wrote back: *next time, write to me*—

Such accusations would not come as a surprise to many writers, especially to those who have attempted to pay homage, in their writing, to a beloved. Wayne Koestenbaum tells an instructive story on this account: "Some psycho girlfriend of mine (decades ago!) answered a long rhapsodic letter I'd written her with this terse, humiliating rebuff: 'Next time, write to me.' That one command, on a tiny slip of paper, tucked into an envelope. I remember thinking, 'Wasn't I writing to her? How could I know, when writing to her, that I secretly wasn't writing to her?' At that point, Derrida hadn't yet written *The Post Card*, so I didn't know what to do with my befuddled, wounded sense of being a rhapsodic narcissist of a letter-writer weirdly instructed to 'relate,' to speak to someone instead of to the nothingness at the end of writing."

Part of the joy / job / joy of the letter / poem is to cast out to know something. To cast out—but also to fall through because to write there has to be someone there to fall through / with—I feel often I cannot write without something to fall through.

This morning I fell through Danez Smith's whole book at once / I fell through because I wanted to—I swallowed—my father used to always accuse me of swallowing books instead of reading them—he was in awe of how fast I read but couldn't believe that I could be getting something from through them if I swallowed books so quickly.

Is swallowing books okay? In [an interview](#) Maggie Nelson said she thinks readers should read *The Argonauts* quickly and *take it in all at once*. I want to take it in. I followed her instructions and fell through Danez Smith's book so quickly. I thought about my own whiteness and race afterwards—consuming. Did I use his book only to fall through—to charge myself up with his meaning—to make myself less guilty—to write—to write upon? I want to write with, not upon. What does that look like?

What would it be like to fall through someone / something and not take something FROM them—not take OF them? I'm so grateful that I have no penis to use as I fall through—or no penis grown onto my body—because I can't assault in that particular way. My falls don't go to that kind of assault—but where do my falls go?

*I wish she wrote the way she talks—
I wish she FELL the way she TALKS—
I wish she FELT the way she TALKS—
she talks and falls, writes and falls.*

Does the penis always have to take something away from someone as it falls through?

Does the writing always have to take something away from someone as it falls through? The speaking?

What if taking up space didn't mean taking *from*?

What if space isn't finite?

Danez Smith: *I wonder what song would have to play / To make her a black blur of joy & pepper mane.*

Maybe joy doesn't have to be finite. What creates joy isn't finite. But space IS finite / it is / it is right now—on this planet—in these bodies—in these races and classes we're socialized to have.

Talk of the penis filling a void that needs to be filled is over-done but: what if the void just got bigger with that filling? What if the void only just got bigger when the penis got in / near it—what if the void didn't get filled up, and always had more space left? This is not good for capitalism, to always have more space.

But also, what if you enjoy being filled up? I love to be filled up—I love to feel that I haven't any crannies in me that need to be filled—with books / sex / people / food—I love to *swallow*—I love to feel full—maybe because mostly other people don't force me?

But in other ways I hate to feel full / with food—it means I've not been able to control my body in the way I've wanted to—been taught to—I know pretty well how to restrict this body. I get angry, angry at myself when I am full, for letting myself get full, because it means I will get fat, have an excess / larger than the version of me I wanted: the version of me that has plenty of room to hold others / reach out to others with an offer to hold—hold anything in.

My favorite version of me is not full because it has room for anything anyone can throw at me. I will find spare room for anything anyone can throw at me. I will dodge to catch your needs in my

spare room—are you impressed by how well I dodge and dance? Are you impressed by my room?

I make room for everyone in every place in my life except for in my writing. I don't slash out a space for everyone in my writing. This is where that Man can't find me.

Hillary Gravendyk: *pioneers slash only toward a territory / they remember*



Perhaps in order to slash toward something we don't remember—something new—we can't be pioneers.

So let's not be pioneers. Let's give up on being pioneers. Let's slash away from what we remember. Let's not colonize new spaces. Let's not slash toward.

Perhaps in order to avoid colonizing and pioneering in this work, I cannot slash toward. I cannot slash / I must instead make room in what I have already / slash myself / let the blood be / honor this slashing behavior of making room. Let's take a look at what we have in the room.

pioneers slash only toward a territory / they remember

Also Gravendyk, who wrote this, lived with so much pain. And she made so much beauty. Maybe her saying this is itself a lesson in how we can go forward / keep in touch / slash ourselves, meaning live in the pain and slash at it rather than away from it.

Anne Carson: *Pilgrims were people who figured things out as they walked.*

To walk / slash / speak.

I'm good at keeping in touch. L reminded me I'm so good at keeping in touch that sometimes it's hard to be my friend because no one can be as good at keeping in touch as me—she's worried about disappointing me. I reach out—I reach out—I reach out—but am I reaching up and over—am I slashing / falling out?

Perhaps I keep in touch this way because I don't want to do it in my writing. I slash out toward some pretty distant places.

[Youna Kwak on Roland Barthes](#): *we keep our distance from each other as a means of remaining proximate.*

I'm good at keeping in touch from a distance. I like to be far—I can get filled up and still have endless amounts of room. I want to learn to slash close and survive it.

Like you wrote: *a previously closed indwelling of blood / shedding / or about to dream / Your skin scared and free.*

If I keep slashing the Man at the reading might not understand me, but I might get scared and free. The Man might have to slash himself.

Brenda Hillman: *how good to be able / how good to steer & grin / thinking paraffin / & in that sentence shack / an ache of novelty.*

I am able, I am pretty well, and so I must slash / I must slash at the sentence. I shack up with the sentence and then slash away. I pick a fight with it to get that ache of novelty—I say the shack is shitty and useless and back away—and then I take it back. I sing for the sentence sometimes, but only when I decide.

What I am singing for is the choice to sing an easy song sometimes / a screechy song sometimes. What I am singing for is to write a full grammatically normal sentence sometimes and sometimes not. I want us all to fall out at will. I want us all to invite ourselves to fall out only at will.

I wish I could fall out without slashing—I wish I could reach out without making anyone feel they had to—even though I want—always want—

I wish I could keep in this kind of touch.

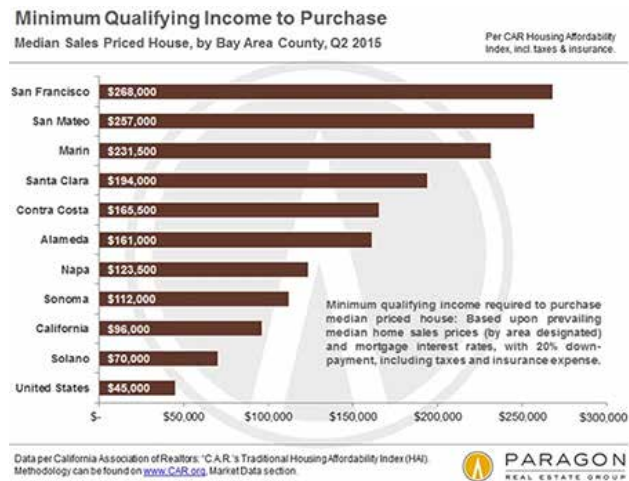
Love,

L

Berkeley, CA
June 29, 2015

Dear A,

I'm thinking about shock these days. I can see that it's helpful to be shocking, to make it clear to people that the Bay Area housing crisis is extreme. I live in the Bay Area housing crisis. *There's nowhere to live*, people say of where I live. But there is—people are living here. Why do we tell each other there's *nowhere*? Do we want to be shocked?



hometeamsf.com

We were talking about shock the other night. Someone brought up shock sites online, so we had to start going through all the ones we know. *Goatse*, *lemonparty*. I asked what *lemonparty* was and without thinking I blurted, "Gross—" and made a face.

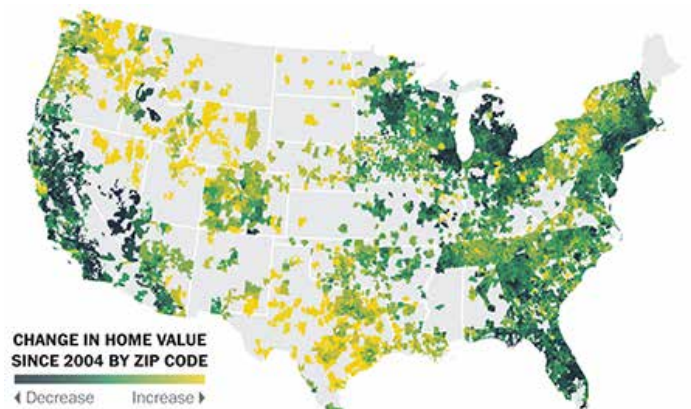
I wish I hadn't. I'm not sure why I did.

I don't think [spoiler alert] old men having sex is gross at all. My old idea of *lemonparty* from when I was a teenager jumped in and took over my mouth.

Shock site. That's what they call those, those websites where someone puts something shocking and you go there without knowing it—or, often, people send you there without telling you in order to shock you.

This makes me tingly: what is the site of shock? Upon where does the shock incur itself? How does shock affect me? Can it take me down?

washingtonpost.com



I like the site. I like locations. I like knowing what the site is. I like knowing where the site is. One thing I like about the internet is that things happen in a browser: one location. You can open it. You can go to it. You can close it. You can click away.

My scariest recurring nightmare involves some variation of something I can't click away from (a ghoul in my computer) or change the channel from (a scary witch on the TV)—in various versions of this dream, the scary thing refuses to respond to my desire to stop / change / click away from it, and it stays, against my will. I've always had this core fear that I'll be stuck at a site and not be able to move away.

I am, though "able to move away"—while I write this I have full mobility of my limbs: I can walk, I can bike, I can drive, and I take airplanes 2-5 times a year. I've moved across the country and across the world several times. I have the privilege and access to move my *site*—why then this deep fear I have of being stuck? It could be privilege itself: being able to move makes me fear having that privilege taken away from me.



I think it's about being a site myself. As much as I move, I've also been instructed over and over—as a female-identified person—that I myself am a site, that I am the location that things move onto, through, and across. Sometimes I sense in my bones that this whole moving thing is just a farce, a weak attempt I make to resist being a shock site.

The other day I noticed a new bruise or lump on my ass: purplish, in shadow, a shock site. A weird mark on my body, a body that for the most part conforms to what other people want from it.

My body is aging in a way I've begun to notice: I used to be able to lean on any part of my body without pain, and now any unusual tweak on my wrist or knee results in a new pain: a shock. My body is conforming to me slightly less.

This often makes me angry.

Can this be my body if I don't like it?

Can a site be embodied and also reject embodiment at the same time?

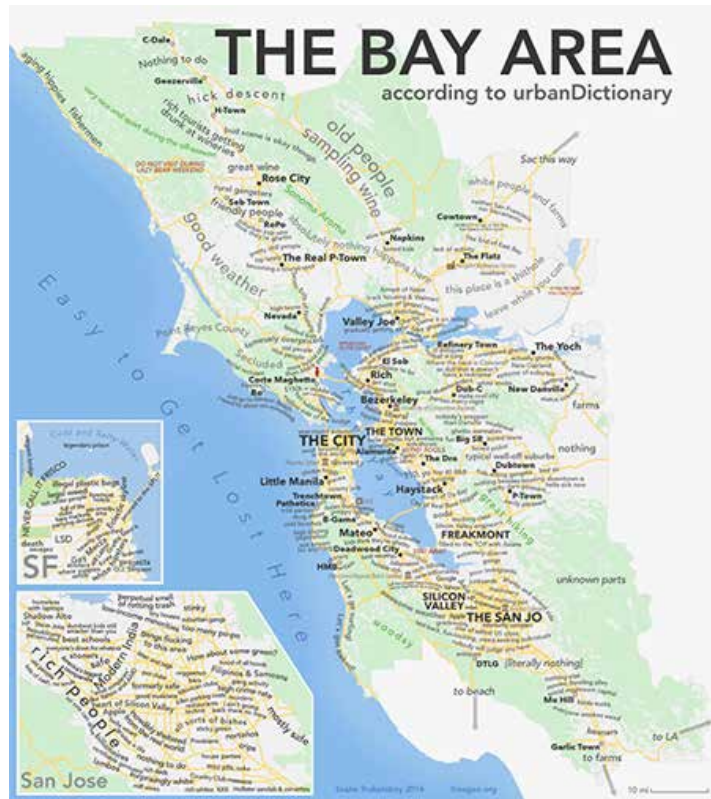
Can I angrily breathe into a body that is myself?

[Laura Elrick in the Brooklyn Rail](#) says the nature of capitalist space separates our bodies from the spaces we inhabit, so that both can operate on the market independent of one another.

Could our bodies ever *be* the spaces / sites we inhabit? Only our bodies?

Could our bodies be sites, but not exclusively sites?

What if our body-sites are all we are?



I'm curious about categorization, naming (*shock site*) and how it could contribute to our sense of what is and is not worthy of viewing in the body, or on the body. What do our bodies include?

"I'm so in my body right now," people tell me. I'm intrigued by the proliferation of this phrase, and how impossible and insistent it is: of course, how could live human beings not be "in their body"?

And, also, I know what people mean when they say this. To be able to feel one's body and the sensation one receives from it. What would it actually look like to speak from this place?

I suppose this is what Elrick (and eco-poetics generally, in many cases) is trying to examine: what is us and what is not of us, and must there be a distinction?



Can you change who gets pricked and who does the pricking? Can you change who is or beholds a shock site? Can you distribute or expand the experience of site-ness? Dressed up for a party, can I be more than just something to be reacted to?

And so my weird blurt about *lemonparty*, and the feeling I had when I looked at *lemonparty* this morning for the first time since

I was fourteen and thought, *oh, this is nothing*. This is no *thing* to be reacted to. This is not a *site* I need to see or be wary of.

That thing-ness, that site-ness: what makes it worth looking at. If it's not shocking, it's not worth looking at. Or it is worth looking at, but mostly to prove to myself that I can handle it? It fits into my knowledge. It does not disturb my sense of what is in my world and what I can handle.

Again that return to the capacity to handle something: in my recurring nightmare, the fear is all about what I won't be able to handle: it will keep on being itself without my consent, and I won't be able to turn it off or turn away.

This is also shock: I will not be able to turn away and remain whole / the same after I have seen it. Shock changes me. *Lemonparty* used to be shocking because at that moment in my life seeing older men having sex changed me. It altered my knowledge of what could occur in my visual field.



vidsshare.com

A shock site changes you: this is part of the proliferation of reaction YouTube videos—reaction to looking at a shock site like *lemonparty* or *2girls1cup*—in these reaction videos we get to see someone being altered by shock—potentially irrevocably—this is also one explanation for why all these boys loved tricking me into seeing *lemonparty* when I was a kid. They wanted to watch me get altered.



dailyemotion.com

L tells me about how traveling salesmen used to sell this tool: when you looked into it, two pictures taken at slightly different angles would overlap to allow you to see something “in 3D.” The salesmen would invite the husbands of a household to try out this fantastical tool, and then, while the husbands were engrossed in 3D viewing, the salesman would put the moves on the wives.

Is getting lost in the 3D machine an early version of getting lost in the internet for hours, losing tracking of where we are and what we're trying to do?

When is a site embodied, and when does a site take us away from embodiment?

The salesmen found a way to shift attention to a site that would capture all of the husbands' attention, a site that would take their attention away from their wives' bodies.

I don't know of any record of how the wives felt about this.

Who is the villain here, and who the victim?

The salesmen, the husbands, the wives?

Who needs to get their act together?

Who needs to focus on the right site?

Rebecca Solnit at Tom's Dispatch:

a graphic has been circulating on the Internet called *Ten Top Tips to End Rape*, the kind of thing young women get often enough, but this one had a subversive twist. It offered advice like this: "Carry a whistle! If you are worried you might assault someone 'by accident' you can hand it to the person you are with, so they can call for help." While funny, the piece points out something terrible: the usual guidelines in such situations put the full burden of prevention on potential victims, treating the violence as a given. You explain to me why colleges spend more time telling women how to survive predators than telling the other half of their students not to be predators.



10 Top Tips to End Rape

- 1 Don't put drugs in women's drinks.
- 2 When you see a woman walking by herself, leave her alone.
- 3 If you pull over to help a woman whose car has broken down, remember not to rape her.
- 4 If you are in a lift and a woman gets in, don't rape her.
- 5 Never creep into a woman's home through an unlocked door or window, or spring out at her from between parked cars, or rape her.
- 6 USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM!
If you are not able to stop yourself from assaulting people, ask a friend to stay with you while you are in public.
- 7 Don't forget: it's not sex with someone who's asleep or unconscious - it's RAPE!
- 8 Carry a whistle! If you are worried you might assault someone 'by accident' you can hand it to the person you are with, so they can call for help.
- 9 Don't forget: Honesty is the best policy. If you have every intention of having sex later on with the woman you're dating regardless of how she feels about it, tell her directly that there is every chance you will rape her. If you don't communicate your intentions, she may take it as a sign that you do not plan to rape her and inadvertently feel safe.
- 10 Don't rape.

9gag.com

A woman's body must be controlled so it doesn't make a man do something he doesn't want or mean to do. He will not be able to remain whole or unchanged after he has seen us.

Part of me, I can admit, loves the power of being told a man will not be able to remain unchanged after I enter his field. What a power to attribute to someone. Sure, I crave this power.

But the gendered bit is the problem, the slip: we *all* irrevocably change each other, over and over again, when we enter one another's fields. Whether or not we are looking hot, whether or not we are on a website or partaking in a kind of sex (or an age of sex) that is normative / socially accepted.

I think of James Tate (z"l), who writes:

Why should you believe in magic,
pretend an interest in astrology
or the tarot? Truth is, you are

free, and what might happen to you
today, nobody knows. And your
personality may undergo a radical

transformation in the next half
hour. So it goes. You are consumed
by your faith in justice, your

hope for a better day, the rightness
of fate, the dreams, the lies,
the taunts—Nobody gets what he

wants. A dark star passes through
you on your way home from
the grocery: never again are you

the same—an experience which is
impossible to forget, impossible
to share. The longing to be pure

is over. You are the stranger
who gets stranger by the hour.

We get stranger, and we can't turn away, so we turn to each other, strangers.

As Adrian Chen writes [in Gawker on seeing Goatse](#), "And after that: 'Oh God, I need to show this to everyone so they feel the same pain as I did...'"

licktheballs.com



Oh God, I need to share it. I don't want to be in this altered state alone. We want to be changed together.



Can I be shocked and still have agency?

Chen again: "Goatseing someone without their consent is emotional assault. It's also funny as shit."

Shocking someone without their consent—or, more precisely, sending someone to a shock site instead of another kind of site they think they are going to—is assault. Because they are not agreeing to be altered in this way. But what does consent even mean in the case of shock?

This leads me to the gray area I've been dwelling in a lot lately. As A said and I've heard so many people say: *she seemed like she wanted it—sometimes she likes raw or surprising sex—when does it get rapey—it only felt rapey afterwards...*

Trigger warnings: if you warn someone, does this mean you are getting consent? Their consent to be shocked? Can they still, then, actually be shocked?

If you warn someone about something, do you take away its power?

I think of huddling with women in bars, using our bodies to steer each other away from men who are harassing us. When we are all calling something dangerous, is it still dangerous?

When does it stop being dangerous?

Or also, with trigger warnings: can they protect us? Can they blanket us completely and keep something out? I don't think so. I read [that New Yorker piece](#) everyone was sending around about trigger warnings and censoring on college campuses, and I thought: the experience is still there. The knowledge or story or language that someone is triggered by does not disappear because someone is shielded from it. It's just preparation, a title, telling someone the door to the thing is there.

This comes up often for me as an ally to women who have experienced sexual violence. I think I can take it. I think I can handle their stories, but sometimes I can't. Sometimes I listen for hours and provide support, and then I collapse from the weight of it.

If I consent to listening to someone talk about their rape, or their rapist, does this consent extend to hearing *everything* they have to say? Even if it triggers me / makes me feel my own shock and pain?

Do I have the right to consent to hearing or not hearing about pain?
When it is all around me?

How far into space and time does consent extend?

How far into bodies and space?

How far into the internet?

Love,
L

October 30, 2015
Berkeley, CA

Dear J,

I want to write to you and reference your voicemail, the transforming fearful relationship you said you're having with poems right now, but then I realized it might not make sense because you left that message weeks ago and you don't have it anymore. Only I have it.

I'm surprised in this day of digital curating of the self that we don't get to also hold onto our own voicemails, review them later for how they fit with the rest of us, where we are now.

I think of my friend C, in her poem "To Lie Down / In An Attempt"—

I've been practicing thinking of the book / its
insides / all along in my writing / in my life. To
hold the text / with my insides to remember / with
my body. What does that mean? This is the most
important kind of reading I've only just learned how
to do. The reading I do away from the book. The
reading I do while feeling or looking at the text

elsewhere and beyond the reading I do / how prone
I am to dog / and cake / and compulsion / and a
mosaic or bristling / nudeness / Am I poet / Aren't
I mere / mutilations?

This is why you've always been a poet and you don't have to be
afraid of approaching poems. The mutilation is you.

Maybe that sounds like a bad thing—to mutilate has a violent
context which I don't mean, but I hope you can see that I mean
the bit about shapeshifting alongside what you read / view /
see—you are so steadfastly yourself and you are changing by
things and people in such a loving wholehearted way.

Suddenly I'm feeling self-conscious about telling who / how you
are—I don't really like to do that. I'm sorry! I guess I feel conflicted
because I don't know / I don't know who / how you are in any
given moment and I don't want to pin you down to that, but I also
know it's felt loving to me in the past to have other people tell me
what they see in me / mirror back qualities they like in me so I'm
sorry if it feels I'm pinning something on / to you that doesn't sit
well or that makes you feel boxed in.

I mostly just want you to know that I carry with me everywhere
I go the gift of knowing and so I think about you when I read
text about art / life and I think / associate how or where you
are in that text / art / life. And C's work reminds me of you.
Maybe because you both sit in my heart in this very deep way
from far away.

Now I'm writing like C, with all these slashes. Ugh. I TAKE
EVERYONE IN. Can that be okay? Can that be useful, please?

C and I have shared a meal together two times, and met only a
few more times than that. She lives in Atlanta. I think: can this
really be a real friendship? Is it authentic to call it that / think of
it that way?

Forgive me, then, if my distance / thoughts flatten you into
something you don't identify with.

E is one of my first friends who really tells me who she thinks I am
/ what she sees in me, and that was kind of a shock at first—she
wasn't as delicate / careful with my boundaries of me-ness as
maybe other friends were. But I felt so loved and seen by it that I
started to adopt it more.

Maybe that's one thing people can be for each other—
container-people, mirror-people (but not in a way that erases
the person holding the mirror) → container-mirrors that hold
a person (not in a claustrophobic way, just temporarily) and
shows the who they are being. I like to be held in this way.
Do you?

Denise Levertov: *A groan, but not / gloomy, rather / an escaped
note of / almost unbearable / satisfaction, a great / bough or
beam / unaware it had / spoken.*



I cracked open this giant *Collected Poems of Denise Levertov* and right by this poem there was a tiny pill bug (I think that's what it's called) sliding along. The size of the head of a pin, as they say—I can't think of something better to compare its size to—and just gliding along in short spurts, maybe an inch at a time. We've had these tiny pill bugs in our office lately—I spot probably one a day—and I guess I've decided not to worry about them. They don't appear to be eating books or leaving poop everywhere or anything disastrous like that. Re: our questions about not being great at cleaning: do you think that is okay? It is okay to just choose to live with them if they are not (I don't think) grossing anyone else out or causing any major problems or destructions, aesthetic or otherwise?

I love this feeling I have now, of turning to you for the answer / what is the Right way to behave—same feeling as the other day

when I was at the dentist so early and I asked you to tell me what I should get for breakfast afterwards and you told me and it felt so good to be told what the right choice was by you. (I'm an active bottom, as always.)

Maybe that's what we can be for each other, too? The feeling of Right? What to turn toward for the feeling of Right—we only have each other anyway—is that a kind of mirror-container too?

I love you, I miss you,
L

October 5, 2015
Johnson, VT

Dear A & M,

We said we'd try to write about it, so here's a shot.

How do you know if you love your husband?
Does love stay?
How do you know what it means for love to stay?

I come home and my husband and I are happy to see each other.
I do not want to fall in. I want to stay where my skin came from.
With him I so rarely have a reason to be lonely.



Sometimes I miss loneliness. M writes, *I have built myself a little house of limits and links*, and I miss the limitlessness of my own loneliness, the pouring sense of what could be and isn't. A missing.

Image credit: Charlie Macquarie



I told L how I was working to have less desperation, less anxiety, and she said, "Really? I think I need that to make art." Ugh. Do I? Am I still asking this question?

On the way to the pond we are giddy, even though when we get there the pond is murky and we are too cold to swim. We crouch above the pond trying to explain ourselves to each other, peering into the algae, trying not to say too much, to over-share and fall in.

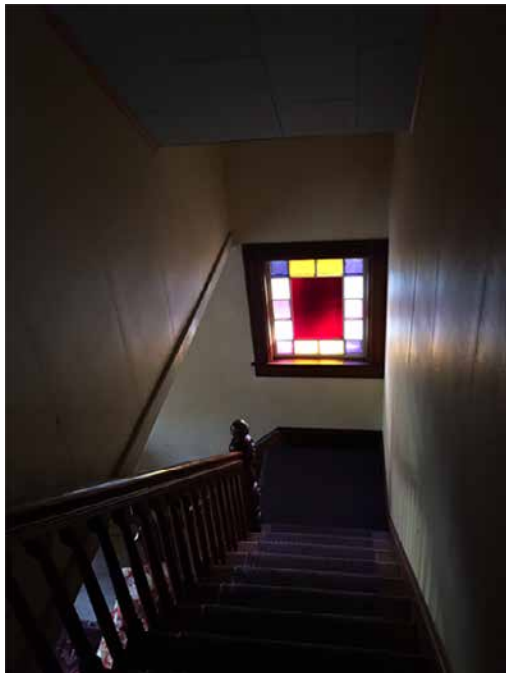
Or, we are at the ocean, and it is foggy, and only I am too cold to swim. Usually I swim in the coldest of waters. It is foggy, though, and I'm cold. My husband bests me by swimming anyway, dunking alone, and I feel sad to have been beaten.

He seems sad about it, lonely and not even showing off. I wish then for a son for him, someone who would be limitlessly impressed.

These days I can't let myself be impressed by him. For safety? I don't want to pour over into my love for him.



I have built myself a little house of limits and links. How do you know which link, which limit will make you sad?



The fog descends after that time at the beach.

I mean a literal fog descends. The Bay Area can be so relaxing that way: it has your emotions for you. The fog sinks in on your behalf. It sinks for me sometimes. I say things I don't mean and I weep.



A few days later I start bleeding, or "it is that time of the month," or "my moon time." The sad is gone, relief in its place, movement. The blood comes and the sad is gone, and I try to explain to my husband that I still mean that past sadness. How do you tell someone *I mean it* and *it was temporary* at the same time? I crouch below above him, holding tight to a sadness that is already gone. I want it back to be real to him. I don't want it to go.

I go. He goes. I love my husband when he goes.

I once left my husband a note on the special tiny “love note” stationary that our neighbor gave us for our one-year wedding anniversary. It said “I love you because you let me go / sometimes.”

I left it somewhere for him to find it when I wouldn’t be around. I didn’t want to be a part of him receiving it from me.

Elizabeth Willis: *a face in locomotion that crashes in between*

He goes. I bleed. I go away for a few weeks. I leave his cycles and our routines.

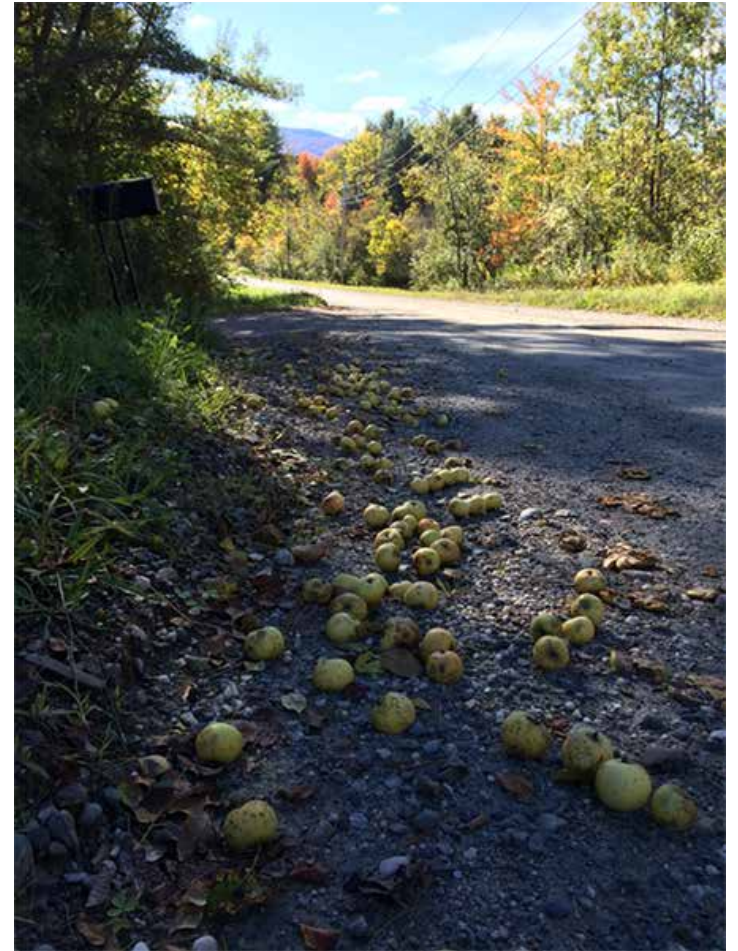
I bleed. I leave our routines and enter the cycles he can’t follow me into because he is not a woman. I want to go somewhere he can’t follow me. I want to go somewhere no one can follow me so that I can get my energy back. S said this is what introversion really means: my boundary wall is so thin with other people that even if I want to be with them it’s exhausting because I can’t keep them out.

Fanny Howe: *So I will never leave you a message. Because it is the space between us that has to be protected. Not the lonely message.*

When I talk with my husband on the phone from afar his voice is rugged, foreign, and I can’t link it at all with the body I love to fall into. I hear only his mannerisms, his “dude,” his “hella,” the West Coast slang he sloshes around his speech. Far away from him I hear only his words, feel only his gentle heft.

Lisa Robertson: *People’s mouths are brutal, portable things.*

How can he carry that mouth around so far across the country?
Is it the mouth that I know?



I love: I go away and return to him with the same mouth.

I love: I ask how he has been, if he has missed me.

And the month turns, and I growl again. And then I am growlier as I get closer to bleeding, that time of the month, again, again.

I growl and wait for a blanket, someone to take me, enclose me.
My husband can never enclose me enough.

Wayne Koestenbaum: *hurry up sheer things / corral me*

I want him to take me in but sheerly.

My husband says he wants to put my menstrual cycle on his calendar. He wants to know what will come, but he can't. All he can know is my body will be there.

Harryette Mullen: *Even though she bled every month, she always had someone to blame; while he noted that each time he touched her, her body was there, which had not always been the case with her predecessors.*

I turn. I turn another time of the month. I turn and I stay. I turn another growl.

yours,
L

November 12, 2015
Berkeley, CA

Dear A,

Last night I cried all night on the couch because no one pays me for the things I love to do and all the things I love to do are massively underpaid. Do you ever have nights like this?

I tried to do the math of all the hours I've spent doing things I didn't get paid for but then I thought better of it. I tried doing the math of my own productivity outside of how much I got paid for it. How many reviews I got published in the last month, how many wonderful people are blurbing my book, how quickly people reply to me when I ask them to submit something to my magazine. But that felt so hollow and crappy too. Just another day when I'm trying to write worthiness back onto myself, my actions, my body. I'm tired.

I woke up and M had sent me [a link](#) to Introjis, emojis for introverts. Cute! I felt relief at being known for liking to leave the party, liking to sit quietly with another person and read books. I took a screenshot of the "leave the party" Introji and made it my Facebook profile picture. I tried to align myself with that. I felt tired. What do you when even the introvert emojis suck energy from you?

My cultural production, my identity production—it's so constant these days. I'm producing so much for other people to understand, and I'm tired. Maybe this is why I write poems, and often strange poems that don't make immediate sense to other people / aren't always narrative. I get so tired of parsing myself. I want to talk in a way doesn't feel like parsing.

It's cold in my office and my fingers are stiff as I write this. I looked all over the house for my skintight little gloves that you can use even on an iPhone but I couldn't find them. Heh. Figures. My body is revolting against communicating all of itself.



designtaxi.com

Laynie Browne: *Hands were meant as bare thermometers.*

My body wants to be known but also it's so tired of not being compensated for that, not getting back a value exchange. Is there any way to stop feeling like I need to be exchanged for an exact value?

Lisa Robertson: *I start a school called how can I live.*

This is the school I'm trying to start when I write. Over and over I'm trying to start this school.

I said to J: I just wish that I could trade the things I love to do and know how to do for the things I need and can't do myself.

I've tried doing that, trading food and goods I make for massages from friends, but it ends up feeling so superficial, only drills down so deeply. I still have to pay rent, and I live in an expensive place, and you can't pay rent with your homemade canned goods here.

I love this place, but lately it's been feeling like it can't possibly be "worth it." I don't really want to leave—I don't know, really, where I'd go, and I'm just getting to the point where I feel like I might actually have a long-term professional vision at my job, a job that is so locally-oriented that I couldn't move it or, as the kids do these days, "work remotely." But this worthiness thing comes up here, too. How can it be worth it to stay here? Is there any way to measure how worthwhile it is for my body to live here?

Silvia Federici on post-industrial women's work: *In the new capitalist regime women themselves became the commons as their work was defined as a natural resource, laying outside the sphere of market relations*

I feel a commons. I feel a commons coming on. I feel things moving across and through my body as my cold hands plug into the internet.

Do you have any ideas about how to unplug better? I mean, I know we meditate. I try that. I try that again. But I still want to plug in. This is the weird thing about being an introvert / maybe

the kind of introvert that I am—I am so drawn to connect with people, to plug in with people, I want to hear them and be in things with them, and I want to share. But then I exhaust myself and withdraw in a way that instead of unplugging feels like collapsing. Collapsing so wired up that I can't rest.

I thought for a little while that I wouldn't be able to fall asleep last night, that I'd just stay awake forever because it's impossible for me to live this way: trying to be an artist, trying to be an activist, trying to feed myself well and exercise, trying to live in the Bay Area.

Julie Carr: Poetry is companion to those who live in fear, for those who fall asleep anyway.

So, I fell asleep anyway, next to two of Cathy Park Hong's books, which don't speak only English. They speak / pray by speaking themselves. I pray by speaking myself and trying to decolonize myself of the belief that the way I speak is not correct, and the way my body is is not correct, and that I need to buy things to be okay / better / acceptable. I'm not colonized in the way she / her ancestors were colonized, but I am colonized in other ways.

Actually, maybe not. My ancestors were never colonized that I know of, so I'm not sure it's okay for me to use that phrase to convey what I mean. I'll back off of that one.

I'm trying to learn how to only own the language as a white writer that is okay for me to have—it's so new to me to think that not all language belongs to me. That is my privilege. But I'm trying to learn how to be spacious and limitless in my writing but then keep myself from using the words that are not mine to use. This is my responsibility.

Kevin Killian: If I were a poet, maybe I could imagine that to continue as we are is to make sure we kill our young.

I wonder if I can actually kill off all that I want to kill off inside of myself and inside of my communities. It's approaching Thanksgiving and I want to be an actual interrupter when I go home to my family's house—I've done this a few times, usually it's only mildly uncomfortable—and face the little racisms and classisms, be responsible for them.

And yet my family does know, they do know some things, they are older than me, many of them, and it's so much to ask that they inhabit a space of not-knowing. They feel they've earned knowing by living a long time, and I bet I'd feel that way in their places. My parents and grandparents feel they have a degree of worthiness that they've earned by living and surviving, and I don't blame them for celebrating the fact that they've survived, especially with ancestral histories of trauma and mass murder. They want to celebrate that they've survived and know things, and I don't blame them for that. How then, to integrate the wisdom of not-knowing?

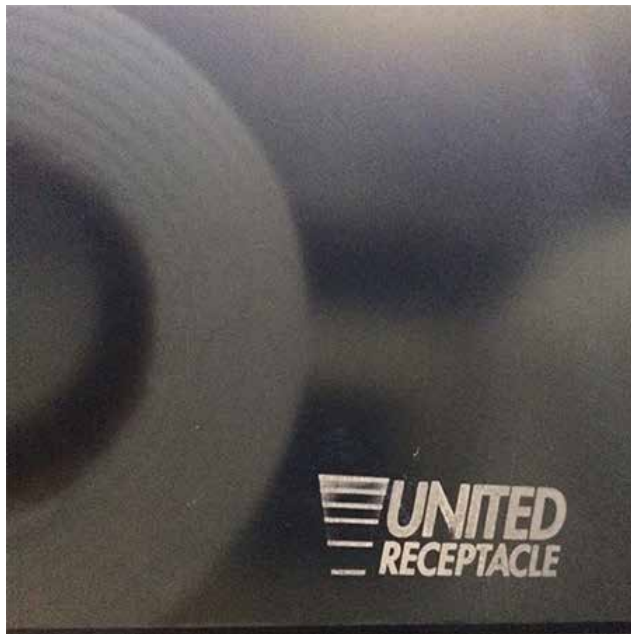
Thom Donovan: The poem is a site of knowing what we don't know and thinking through how this not knowing can effect how we conduct ourselves in the world.

I still believe, sometimes, in this kind of ethics in writing. Writing being only a release, a stripping away. I don't constrain it just to poems, either. But it is how I approach writing—I sit down to write to explore what I don't know. I try to resist the temptation to create something that shows how much I know—something parse-able, something sell-able.

And back to money: for so long I've said that my model for being in the arts world is to not ask my art to make money. To free the art that way. When people asked me, *what are you going to do with that*, about my arts degree, I didn't have to answer—I laugh, I am flip, I say—I *don't have to do anything with it*.

But then on days like these I'm stuck as a money maker, a laborer, and an art-maker, in between, stretched so thin between making money and doing art for free and not asking one to be the other. I feel I'm this weird commons that is not meant to be a commons, a body that doesn't know how to communicate with itself.

Maybe this is the site of not-knowing that Donovan talks about. Is there a righteousness to letting trade occur across / around / through my body and often not knowing how to parse it?



I know for one thing that I cannot remove myself from this trade. First, I need to admit that I do want to be seen as worthy, do want to be compensated, am not just a ground across which trade crosses. I am not outside of it.

Secondly, I am responsible for and implicated in this trade that is crossing my body. I work at a nonprofit and I feel in my bones that "[The Revolution Will Not be Funded](#)." So there's this turning away then, there, too, from my own desire to serve / be important, as that book [says](#):

It is central to remember that our focus should not be on organizational (or career) preservation, but on furthering the movement of which an organization is a part...we must create autonomous movements. But once we develop that mass movement, non-profits could serve as buffers that protect autonomous movements from government repression.

Again, as always, I'm thinking of the individual and the mass. Where's the role of the individual in this and, if I'm suffering to some degree already because of value systems and class positions, where can I put that suffering?

Maybe that's not the most important, but it feels honest to me say that that's a question that comes to mind.

Also, while I feel motivated by this idea to focus on movement orientation, how does that intersect with a money-based society? As in, I don't want to lose my salary at a nonprofit because I want to be able to keep my house and feed myself and my loved ones. So I *do* feel motivated to preserve the nonprofit itself for the sake of self-preservation, economically speaking.

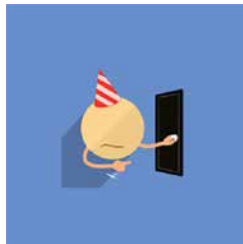
But I want the revolution to come so it can erase me, erase my exhaustion of laboring to be me, my class position, and my need for money.

What does it mean to preserve a self in order to try to bring on the revolution? Is this possible?

Should I keep posting shit on Facebook? Should I let myself get sucked out by the internet in order to define me as a commons? Something that can be written upon / over and thus used well? Even if it exhausts me to the point of Introjis?

Maybe this is what it means be a commons: to preserve a self while knowing it will (and should) be overrun.

I present to you the leaving-the-party Introji.



introvertdear.com

I sent this one to S and she texted back: *your signature move.*

But the thing is, I leave the party because I want to be at the party. I am wearing that tiny party hat and I leave wearing it. I leave so I can keep wearing it, stay alive and save all of my energy from being drained completely by being at the party. At this point we

know all of this, from pop culture thinking about introversion / extroversion, and from [that book](#) everyone tried to get me to read.

My signature move: leaving the party but actually staying at the party. Leaving the party but re-living the party until I can fall asleep.

So you see: I'm not actually trying to leave the party. I'm trying to wear the most ridiculous party hat to remind myself I'm actually alive. I'm living in a tentative, created, fragile ego. I'm only here as long as the party hat isn't crushed, and we all know it's getting crushed soon. Those paper cones, they aren't meant to be used over and over again. They aren't made to last longer than one party.

Love,
L

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