

**A town, three cities, a fig, a riot,
two blue hyacinths, three
beginnings, five letters, a
“death”, two solitudes, façades,
four loose dogs, a doppel-
gänger, a likeness, three airport
floors, thirty-six weeks—**

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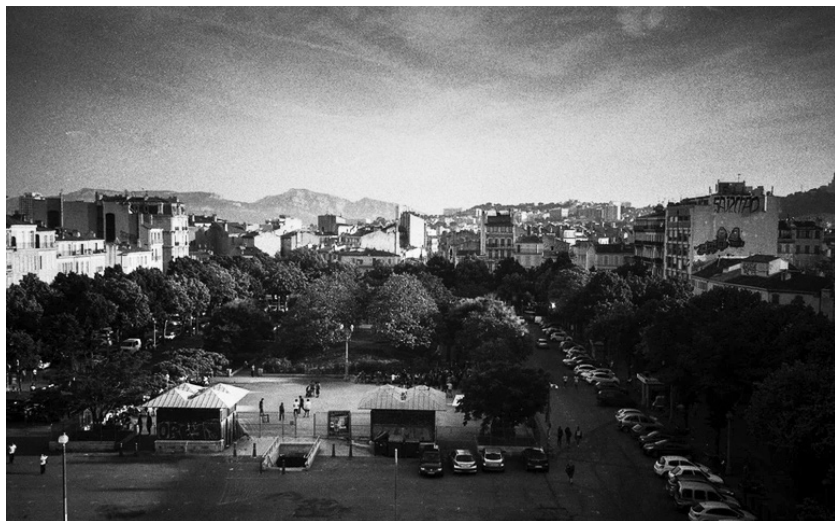
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The we of a position

The dark blue hyacinth offered an opening in time. It was December; it was the beginnings of Act V; it was an impossibility. And yet here it was, peeking up through the muddled pavement. I looked up to the sea of bright yellows, brief murmurings fanning out among the crowds. I looked up further, higher; someone skywriting « divination 4 strategy » against the clouds. *Ça gaze?*

And so I began with a note to myself—is it ever safe to say “we”?

At night the blockade would burst into pieces, rebuilding itself again and again. The flicker of a streetlamp meant the imminent bricking of a car; a garbage bin set ablaze. Barricades proliferated. Shop windowpanes sang loudly of their desires, splashed only by the slightest of rain. I could hear E throwing up in the flowerpots, still reeling from the tear gas. Someone pulled on a balaclava and suddenly the only place you could look was the eyes.

Night flooded the streets, hesitating the senses, and the more dandelion gilets jaunes petered off.



“Have you thought of the night, now, in other times, in foreign countries?” someone in literature once asked. Three whole days of rain and the trees were still thirsty. So sweetened by their plural existence. The BAC—the plainclothes brigade anti-criminalité—hung around corners, waiting to grab individuals from the crowd and drag them off into side streets, to beat them with batons or fists or feet or the butts of guns. It was the youngest—Marseillais kids on the pinnacles of puberty in their glowing tracksuits—and the oldest, who seemed the least afraid. Not braver, just not scared.

We were skeptical and we were stunned. In those moments someone was always changing tracks, rolling rizla, chirpsing in doorways, rubbing graffiti onto nearby walls, passing on anecdotes through the crowd, like a pulse moving underneath the sea. Flares and firecrackers were alighted, elating an eventually quite moving feeling. Every little thing caused a quick backwards glance. What we had in those moments was an anti-literature of life, an afterthought reaching to become the first and foremost.

Les flics descended and we scattered in different directions. The zbeul had been announced. Everything was to be begun; not only that, but unlearned, and then at last begun. Some shrugged and headed for Bar du Peuple, some headed deeper into the streets. Between these modes of existence, the beginnings of a poem started to emerge:

Though it be the season of falling men
high on that bleak mountain plateau in southern France
I promise to try my hardest—

E throwing up in the flowerpots still reeling from the tear gas
“best
birthday ever” o humanity,
 that shifting genre

I never knew I liked it—

its softly lit and clitoral fringes
 fluctuating inside coastal paintbrush factories
turned opportunist galleries every painting left unchecked

Begin again:

who, what, where, when—

Movement depends on moments of collectivity, if not a totalizing unison of. It doesn't require that everyone involved dresses, shouts, or behaves the same—but it does require that all will know which way to run when the shit hits the fan. Like Zukofsky asserted of poetry, protest doesn't compete; it is added to. Like poetry, movements, and moments, are not invented—but develop out of discourse, out of relations, out of real or imagined proximity and diffuse subjectivities. When are your poetics, your politics, not implicated in another's?

Real intimacy requires collaboration. Towards the end of Franco's totalitarian reign in 1975, Allan Kaprow's *Comfort Zones* was interpreted in a small gallery in Madrid. Seven couples led performances experimenting with “territorial bubbles” and eye contact; collective action converging only “when the thought comes strongest”:

A and B, pressing against either side
of a closed door

trying to fit the outline of each other

saying, when the fit seems close, only “now”

repeating again and again until certain

Sometimes there is no possibility of repetition, the ability to try “again and again” until certain. In more recent times we had been known to crumble into many small states, and these small states were mobile. Everyone carried their own state

with them, demanding a toll when another wanted to enter. “It’s an interclass movement,” say the Marxists. “This movement has oppressors,” say others. “This movement has a penchant for authoritarianism and populism,” say the anarchists. “This movement is anti-ecological,” say the environmentalists. “This is a conservative tax revolt,” mostly everyone agrees. Dubious flags flew in colors that symbolized both oppositional sides. Their presence did not mean their hegemony; not everything that moves is red.

By *anti-literature*, I mean that in these moments it became less about whether the doing of the literature was itself a form of politics or not—whether it was necessary or desirable or impactful or possible—and so always bringing it back to that anodyne and shrill question of *use-value*, and more about the life of anti-literature itself. In actuality, its anti-ness existed mainly in relation to its for-ness, and in doing its own thing, it became, ironically, relatively ‘valuable’. Its complicity was no longer compartmentalized to single lines or single poems or single poets or single-serving reading sermons, but grew to flesh-out gradually or at once into something quite beyond.

Among the burning barricades on La Canebière, people from different manifestations mingled with one another, or exchanged updates, or smirked at one another’s chosen aesthetics, or were ignored completely with a kind of flâneurial detachment. There were the yellow vests; there were those protesting the “renovation” of La Plaine; there were those mourning the deaths of eight people—Taher, Marie-Emmanuelle, Simona, Niasse, Fabien, Julien, Cherif, Ouloume—killed when two buildings in the first arrondissement collapsed, a result of unsafe housing conditions neglected by the city council.





One thing next to another doesn't mean they touch. La Canebière was not so much a merging but a convergence. "We" don't don the yellow vests; skeptical and stunned, we come with our own specificities, align only with ourselves and one another. A certain autonomous milieu... unsure of how to relate to a phenomenon that exceeds it. But this did not mean it wasn't important to show up, to be another body, another witness on, or to, the streets. The poem continued as the crowd turned a corner:

out smoking on the steps

L invents a better version of the economy:

flicking the ash,

letting it slowly settle

into absent snow

cement blocks advance

into the square

into crowds

slow-dawning dogs running out from the squatted kiosk

and someone, elsewhere, says:

"five years later

by the shockwaves of empathy

a complete absence

the street rises to the occasion—

beautiful and laughing

we are overwhelmed

and at the same time

of political context"

High voltage lines, supermarkets, roundabouts, toll roads. I watched 2000 casseurs imagine an exclamation mark into existence. “She who denounces exempts herself,” wrote someone in an alleged letter from Venice. Total relativism is pretty close to nihilism, and nihilism is incredibly liberal. “Dear comrade, you have been trapped by the real,” wrote someone in an anonymous letter from Kyiv. No-one could keep the situation under theoretical control.

In *Spit Temple*, Cecilia Vicuña writes:

In high school we studied poetry from Spain’s Golden Age by Góngora and Garcilaso. The kids hated it. No-one could understand anything. The teacher would read a poem out loud and ask, “What does it mean?” No-one dared to answer, but I stood up and offered an interpretation based on what I couldn’t understand. After hearing me, the teacher said, “But you are creating a new poem.” Inside of those poems, I felt I was in an earthly paradise.

Trams stopped running, patisseries slammed down their shutters, shopkeepers watching from their yet-to-be-broken windows. Next to the fountain at Réformés, a small group held YPG and YPJ flags, whooping back and forth with the passing crowd. Side by side, we occurred without excluding one another. It was as though friendships and affinities began to spread outwards, laterally across the streets in quiet confidence, rather than handed downwards as with inheritance or knitted jumpers or blood type. Among the lighting of archives, to be recognized also means to be tabulated, monitored, regulated. I tried to think about the need for witness in relation to stories and to history and to movements. I tried to think about the need for witness as neither listener or teller, but as a generative presence—of that which has happened, or that which may happen, or that which brings that which has happened or may happen into existence again and again.



Does it matter *how* things are brought into being—movement, insurrection, poetry? Someone said, “There is no right-wing riot or left-wing riot; there are only riots, it’s a form.” Someone said, “But the form of this thing, it’s outside the Left.” Someone said, “The riot, it’s not just a form; its form is a content.” *Ban en Banlieue*, by Bhanu Kapil, tells of a blueprint that is also a building, a body, a book that “repeats a sentence until that sentence recuperates its power to attract, or touch, other sentences.” Ban is a girl growing up on the outskirts of London in 1979: “A black (brown) girl encountered in the earliest hour of a race riot, or what will become one by nightfall.” Walking home from school, Ban “lies down to die,” at the moment she hears glass shattering, “on the floor of the world.” Kapil writes, “I wanted to write a book that was like lying down.” Kapil writes, “I wanted to write a book about lying on the floor of England.” Kapil writes, “I want a literature that is not made from literature.”

“Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything,” André Breton proclaimed in *Manifesto of Surrealism* in 1924. “Just as insurrectionism as an ideology exists only when there is no uprising, populism exists only when the people are absent,” wrote Marcello Tarí. If “the people” have only ever existed as a spectral figure for the benefit of the state, under the pretense of outsourcing authority, or power, or blame, or desire, or as a seemingly homogenous mass of “ordinary” people—those not backed by wealth or particular passports—can there be a people of literature, a people of poetry? When *a*, or *the*, or *all*, or *enough* people are really in the streets, government cannot rule; the dichotomy between the individual and the group is false. I try to think about whether a *people* equals an *everyone* equals a *we*. “Toutes les mondes déteste la police!” the cortège de tête yell as cars are flipped, stacked with kindling and

luxuriously set alight by present-day pétroleuses. Anything that can be dislodged is, and thrown. “My Hermès handbag!” a woman resurrected from 1967 cries. A sentence moves up against abstraction: “every time I write in lines it just degenerates into aesthetics.” Existing poetry’s survival rests on its inability to make itself real. I try to think about whether the “how” of things brought into being is aesthetics. I try to think about what the “what” alone of things could mean. I try to think about whether poetry necessarily equals literature, and therefore whether “a people” of poetry is necessarily a people of literature. I try to think of this not as a matter of content, accessibility, aesthetics, or even form—but rather as an ethics of doing. The poem reappeared in brief opening as we circled Cours Julien:

but M’s all
schoolboy dissertations

((((wondering))))

whether Sean Paul ate organic or not
on that long-haul flight to COP 21...

((((wondering))))

whether it was worth the poet flying 3000
miles
to read that poem—

the one about the destruction of coral reefs
witnessed another 7500 miles away...

tldr;

whether we should go straight back to sleep before we even wake up

our endless desire to grasp things
C’s endless chatty grief

((((wondering))))

at what point does “alternative lifestyle”
become an alternate life—?

at no point
did I say I was convinced by the logical summation of things

Begin again:

that, they, those, them—

I had a hard time knowing when I was inside the protest, and when I was outside poetry. This was not to divulge a binary, or suggest that an anti-literature of life was necessarily a literature of opposition or subversion or transgression. I wasn’t outside anything; I wasn’t inside it either. Mostly we wanted to feel at the center

of things. It was not about the story, nor was it even about how the story is told. Mostly it's about how a story is felt through joining perspectives; a proliferating, running commentary on the capabilities of form. Mostly I did not want to rule out the possibility that poetry or protest or collectivity or solitude could grow to become that which it is not, or that which it is not yet. Mostly I wanted innovation and degeneration and to believe in the idea of both an "I" and a "we" and to avoid admitting sentimentality and to talk about the past and the present and the future all in one long single sentence, and *camembert*; all at the same time. I didn't want the body to forget itself, to become a restriction to Rousseau's rêveries, rather than a spontaneous manifestation upon occasion. "We are living, saturated inside the poetic device of conceit," a teacher in an adult education class once said. I didn't want the poem to be two things leaning up against one another; one inside, one outside, to make the world more "perceivable." Protest does work. But "protest" isn't the same as "a protest," and some protests work better than others. There is no essential nature to a set of words arranged on the page, to an assembly of bodies accumulating on the streets. Maybe form can offer a capacious, deteriorating trace of our lives; "the widest angle of vision before vision fails to mean," as a line in Myung Mi Kim's *Under Flag* registers. Maybe form can be not Aristotle's container in which things are placed, but the means that makes this placing possible.

"I wanted to study what happens to bodies at the limit of their particular life," Kapil writes. "There was never a way to do this in writing." To be a flâneur of the protest-turned-riot is to admit solitude as an organ of the social. Inside night I can smell the tear gas floating through the boulevards and the cours, beneath trees and among foliage, drifting out across the water at Vieux-Port. The quartier's old bars transformed into ice-cream parlours, their facades repainted in bright pastel colors. Someone smashes a window and the glass wobbles in its frame before shattering. Eyes swell, sting and burn. There was no longer a foreground and a background, but a cognitive continuum, a lascivious and boundless perceiving. No subject position, but a distribution of subjectivity. There was little insight or message, and this was both arming and disarming. "Why do we fear the dark as unavoidable defeat when it alone is constant," asks Rosmarie Waldrop in *Lawn of Excluded Middle*. Narratives were partial, incomplete; at risk of falling apart at any moment. I no longer desired the poem to be a witness—or even a generative presence—but a continuity, a textual experience of the unreadable, the unthinkable; not that which has happened or may happen, but that which has not happened or may never happen.



Looking back I suppose has nothing to do with what actually occurred. I became less interested in the formal qualities of movement than their emotional and sensual ones, which both became a form and yet resisted form. I began again with a list of luxurious devastation—loose dogs held aloft under streetlight, the techniques of the body growing to resemble a prisoner of a drop of water, the assertion of people as single letters, the glass bottles thrown at les flics—at shopfronts, at windshields, at one another. Can anything really make a multitude? Coherence is itself obscene, its doppelgänger romanticized as strategic instrument, as symptomatic hunger for innovation. “There is no way you can not have a poetics no matter what you do: plumber, baker, teacher you do it in the consciousness of making or not making yr world,” wrote Diane di Prima. “This movement is petit bourgeois because they have cars,” someone says. “All previous modes of resistance are insufficient to the current moment; it’s not *like* anything” someone says. “This movement is made up of the un-unionized: artisans, chauffeurs, lay workers,” someone says. “Who seriously believes the yellow vests are blockading the entirety of France for just one reason?” someone asks. “We are badly in need of a new poetics of protest,” someone declares, when the thought comes strongest. It is here that the poem encounters.

I work predominantly
in memory—
by the end we knew
the center was within us

Begin again:

why—

somewhere, still
thinking about *us* on the bus going across the marshes—

we will
find a way—

it is, it's just
I want so much for this to be—

to use—
to become—

Begin again:

from these very fingers emerge
lightly knuckled read only by touch

because
the tips sing—

you don't have to ask



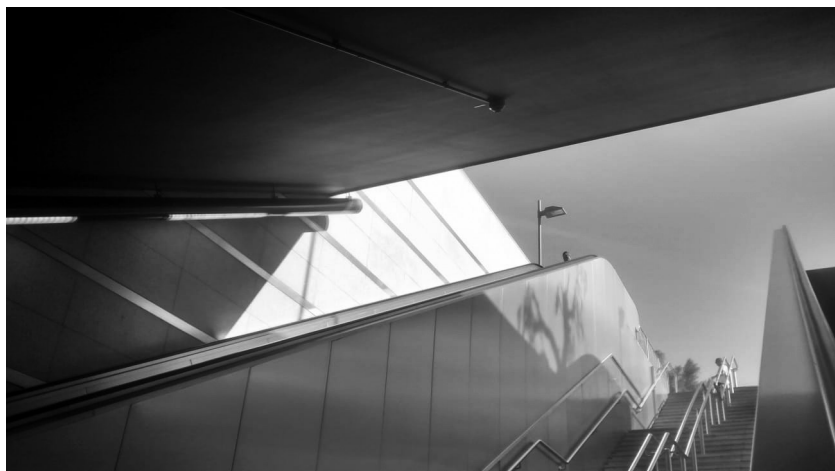
Not to speak about / only to speak nearby

In the passivity of belonging to an order, he was the first disappearing term.

She carried on in the face of the meat market bombings, the conditions in the camps. She carried on amid the Golden Dawn slogans painted across the busiest bridge of the city, the mass evictions, the tented occupations of Syntagma square, the murder of Zak Kostopoulos, the masculine fronting in the squats, the mass hunger strikes, the tightening of passage into Europe, the anniversary riots for Alexandros Grigoropoulos, the pensioners hurling flowerpots at cops from their balconies, the mass raids, the growing number of Airbnbs, the burgeoning graffiti tours, the smashing of cars with diplomatic plates—the one that turned out to be Palestinian, the mass fingerprinting, the YPG posters covering every other wall in Exarchia, the protests in the camps on the islands, the mass beatings, the continuation of Operation Xenios Zeus under other guises, the poetry magazines distributed in squats and social centers and at bookfairs, the Macedonia name-change deal, the ATMs jammed with glue, the conversations about changing politics under broken streetlights and foliage and cigarette smoke, the forced deportations to Turkey, the mass arrests, the rumors of borders opening, the boats arriving and arriving and arriving—untouched by the changing seasons.

I sat at the desk and waited for her return—for the news, any news. We went to eat, to look elsewhere—out the door, down the huddled elevator, the front door, the street that led to more streets to more streets. Past the Polytechnic, carnations covering the bulldozed gate of 1973; past the tomatoes and mangoes and peanuts spilling down Kallidromiou from the local laiki agora, the sounds of rebetiko

drifting out from a late-night steki, or the chant of “We are smashing up the present because we come from the future!”, past the messages of solidarity scrawled across doorways and pavements and forearms and tree trunks. Those times I was more of a listener than a participator. Otherwise skeptical of everything but the skeptical, we were not in any position to distinguish a movement toward the inside from a movement toward the outside.



Language is what happens when we don't feel touched. These transient border “hotspots”—gathering information, sharing information, verifying information, discussing and lamenting and sometimes displaying colossal indifference to the gathered, shared, and verified information—occurring daily, ongoing, occurring, ongoing. When we weren't gathering, sharing, or verifying information related to *here*, we were refreshing screens, posting updates in group chats, checking in with one another about *there*—Erdoğan announcing an imminent invasion, 50,000 olive trees burned down by Daesh in Kobanî—their tanks branded with “Made in USA”—YPJ collective suicides when surrounded, Operation Olive Branch, Trump withdrawing troops from nearby areas, Operation Euphrates Shield, the US building watchtowers along the Syria-Turkey border, volunteer arrests on return, hunger strikes, YPG alliances and compromises, estimated number of international volunteers, estimated number of dead, estimated number of affected, estimated number of friends. The video of a Turkish airstrike in Afrin circulated on loop, whether or not the eyes were open or shut.

Could it have been this airstrike he died in, this very one? Habitually we climbed Strefi Hill, to the north of the city, late afternoons. She stayed up until five in the morning, writing about how “the crisis” isn't over, about how “the crisis” isn't actually the kind of crisis they are calling it, but “a crisis” of something completely different, something so deep in the trenches of crisis that we can barely recognize it as anything other than our lives. Press lists were exchanged, edits made late night

and early morning. Walls were talked and shouted and whispered through. Poets abandoned their studies, and yet poems were still scratched out on the backs of exercise books and rizla and the last of the toilet roll. We talked about the past and the present and the future all in one long single sentence. Someone says, all of the civil service in Rojava are sleeping with their kalashnikovs ready to be called to the front. Someone says, attacks are taking place in the forests in the outskirts of Afrin. Someone says the forests of Afrin are burning. Someone says the Syrian Armed Forces are arriving at the frontlines in Manbij. “But I do promise to be back,” writes J in her message.

We went to eat, to look elsewhere—out the door, down the huddled elevator, the front door, the street that led to more streets to more streets. These times I was more of a listener, and therefore a participator. I got the feeling that the hardening I sensed inside was growing to become more of an opening than a closing—a reaching toward all that I desired, beginning from the premise of what I did not desire, of what I no longer desired, of what I could not and might never desire. I sensed no longer did I want to mostly gather, share, verify, and discuss information, but to invent information that did not pretend to narrow the gap between information, poetry and the world, despite the growing feeling that information and poetry weren’t actually outside of the world. Night, rayless, entire. We sat there until orange hesitated to pink in the sky, and three men further down the hill put out their cigarettes and packed up their plastic chairs. I thought of the night, now, in other times, in that other country that is not a country, that is against the very idea of “a country,” and yet at times seems to resemble a country. On the walk back, I ripped down every single poster of his face I came across.



To say that we had seen the parts of our lives in a new arrangement would be to say that somehow we did not repeat ourselves again and again. It is a story I can barely recite, let alone follow. Each time I came across him, plastered to the walls of alleyways, of side streets, of plazas, of doorways, the discrete borders of the feeling wrapped themselves around the other feeling. Things happen. His eyes remain alive and watchful, gun strapped across his chest. The lilies shake out their pollen to the earth, though there is no body to be found; no way to know how or where or when—or if—he died, exactly:

“Missing from an operation in Afrin around the second week of February and never returned. Searched for two weeks with binoculars and in nearby hospitals, before a decision to announce dead—18 days after last seen. Zero eyewitness accounts. Zero belongings found. Zero knowledge of last location. Zero remains accounted for.”

It seemed like the only story, and people would repeat this story—in reddit forums and encrypted messages and communes and bars. It was as if it was meant to outline or rehash or summarize, but in fact it resisted interpretation.

What to do with the “it” that won’t reveal itself? Proliferating I’s penetrated the continually rewritten clouds—barricading all pleasure in the plural, like attempting to fit a rose to a collision spot, or land “the people” jelly-side up. Meanwhile we watched muted videos on YouTube—flag fluttering in the background, olive trees operating in the breeze, gun shrugged over the shoulder, “martyr” written in Sans Serif across the screen. What is presence anymore? “To have a tense of is-was, the residue of it over the clear bulb of your eyes,” someone wrote in a poem. “Today—what a mocking word in this timeless cave,” someone wrote from an underground experiment on Day 156. “Testimonies remain unofficial; reports sit unconfirmed; death certificate hangs unissued,” I write in a small red notebook from her desk.

And what of those who did not choose? Over 3,844 “neutralized” in a matter of miles.

To think about it is to be the sequined woman lying flat inside the magician’s box; to watch the saw come down, to watch its blade cut straight through the middle of you, to watch your hips fall out from underneath your ribs. G asks, “Why is the world ignoring the revolutionary Kurds in Rojava?” D asks, “Did you know it was the Greek state who colluded with the CIA in handing over Öcalan to the Turkish authorities?” M says, “No man is an island, but ‘a’ man reads and writes political texts on stateless democracy from solitary confinement on an island for twenty years and a revolution unfurls.” E asks, “How come no-one went to Ukraine to fight?” T writes, “Benjamin asked us to think what a history based on the state

of exception would look and feel like. Does the anarcho-feminism of the PKK suggest one answer?"

Let us talk about it as though "it" ever existed. I was drenched in texts. I drew hastily on the texts of others—they put into my ears the sounds of all the people living without me. I was not in any position to distinguish one text from another—a movement toward the inside from a movement toward the outside. The texts became whole rooms, and the rooms became whole houses, and the houses became whole streets, and the streets became a yearning occupation of a city, not a country, but a city, in which lush syllogism invoked the need to seize this experience and let it become sentences. The texts became a form—the longest form, one which is still now occurring, ongoing, occurring, ongoing. In Western journalism, the quote marks around "martyr" like a barricade, like Heidegger's fascist cross through a word; "all language is under erasure," the valorizing of one form of commitment over another. The words, his death, in quotation marks—reduced to language, to art, to poetry. It's through this that meaning becomes a state of constant turbulence. I want to ask, can the poem be the resistance that resembles the original violence? I want to ask, how far do these ideas spread to "the people" in Cizîrê or in a library or in a café or in a collective, or in this very room in this very building on this very street—in the city that is a city but is not a country, or at least does not desire or resemble or announce itself as a country?

The posters flesh-out gradually or at once into something quite beyond. Posters through which the so-called dead become routine, become routinized. I go to the supermarket, I go to a bar, I go to a squat, I go to a poetry reading. Never do I consider going "there." Do I.

"Where your nonexistence was so strong," wrote Jacques Roubaud, "it had become a form of being." You think you are dreaming the poem. You are its dream. On the other hand, his being dead doesn't exclude his being alive, either:

"For a long time I have considered the meaning of the point of no return. In traditional liberal politics, there is always a point from where you can return. You never make a full commitment to any kind of cause, not even for a limited period. You never do anything that might change your life forever."

By which how to talk about what is still ongoing? "No tenses anymore," Denise Riley writes in *Time Lived, Without Its Flow*, following the death of her son. The water dries up before the dark blue hyacinths are placed into the vase. A wound opens the possibility of awareness. He will come home younger, though he is undoubtedly dead. I spent too long wondering, is to heal a wound to allow what has been experienced or learnt to fade, to expire, to forget, to disappear? I spent too long wondering, is it possible to hold a wound open—just enough to allow it light, oxygen, world—to prevent from altogether numbing, without having it

hurt more and more? I spent too long entering the text: a room I could go into, in which I could remember. It became a book I didn't mean to write. I wanted it to be autobiographical but not self-referential. I wanted the book to relate to art and literature and music—calamitous paintings, overflowing with oils and pastels and homemade tinctures, radiant velvet curtains and irreverent trees. I wanted to be changed by language, but all that announced itself was the cold, metallic taste of words, neither beautiful, true or even desperate. This was not an anti-literature of life but the literature of a life, a living—occurring, ongoing, occurring, ongoing. It was not what I wanted to make from a life.

“One cannot write poems about trees when the forest is full of police,” wrote Brecht—but I spent too long wondering how to write poems about trees once someone had said that the forests were burning, once someone had said that there was fighting in the forests on the outskirts of the city that was a city of a canton, not a country or a nation-state; when trees were both what I needed most in this moment and when trees were nowhere to be found, him neither.

The feelings are not mine alone, though they are duly privatized:

What I fear most
is becoming “a poet” ...
Locking myself in the room
gazing at the sea
and forgetting...
I fear that the stitches over my veins might heal
and, instead of having blur memories about TV news,
I take to scribbling papers and selling “my views” ...
I fear that those who stepped over us might accept me
so that they can use me.
I fear that my screams might become a murmur
so that to serve putting my people to sleep.
I fear that I might learn to use meter and rhythm
and thus I will be trapped within them
longing for my verses to become popular songs.
I fear that I might buy binoculars in order to bring closer
the sabotage actions in which I won't be participating.
I fear getting tired—an easy prey for priests and academics—
and so turn into a “sissy” ...
They have their ways...
They can utilize the routine in which you get used to,
they have turned us into dogs:

they see to us being ashamed for not working...
they see to us being proud for being unemployed...
That's how it is.
Keen psychiatrists and lousy policemen
are waiting for us in the corner.
Marx...
I am afraid of him...
My mind walks past him as well...
Those bastards...they are to blame...
I cannot -fuck it- even finish this writing...
Maybe...eh?...maybe some other day...

—Katerina Gogou



“Seeing at the moment of, or at the time of, writing, what difference does one’s living make?” asks Leslie Scalapino. The spider cannot be frightened into a jar. “To imagine how he disappeared, how he died... it’s so simple when you’re there; when you’re not imagining but remembering,” R said. Mostly I wanted to learn to endure the unknown; not as to know and then unknown, but that which was never known to begin with—the timeline, the contradictory testimonies, the non-existent eyewitnesses, the whereabouts of belongings, the commitment; all the information and decisions and poetry that can change a story, a life—occurring, ongoing, occurring, ongoing.

Etel Adnan insists:

Some things are not meant to be clear, obscurity is their clarity. We should not underestimate obscurity... [it] is maybe its own light, because it shows you things. Obscurity is not a lack of light. It is a different manifestation of light. It has its own illumination."

An artist once said, "I didn't paint the war but I am sure the war is in all my pictures." But then he did paint the war. I spent too long pretending I could remember anything about those years other than pure sensation. I spent too long imagining it was conceivable to refer back to the moment of utterance (of "I") as a way to organize narrative, story, self-experience. It's no longer possible to, even for a moment, throw my hands up in the air and think, "What can I do anyway? I could just give up." I don't want to lose what I learned from his decision, from his "death." And I don't want closure. And I don't want to "move on." I spent too long being scared of forgetting, of learning to live with it and by which learning to ignore it, like a shadow that grows to become the breadth of a nation-state, a state that is not a state but something like a state that is also an anti-state; like when N spoke of his initial fear of being a sniper, losing that fear, and then becoming even more fearful at his lack of fear. And yet I don't want to relive it night after night after night: to dream-see scenes of pure speculation, not remembering but imagining—to buy binoculars in order to bring closer the sabotage actions in which I won't be participating.

"This is a message from one of you who right now is standing outside looking back," writes J from one canton. To dare imagining: green was the forest drenched with shadows, the trees refusing to take comfort in less sky. At last, to guess instead of knowing; not about but nearby, where the centered thing breaks. Nothing but the half-truth, and the but-truth—how we try to reach one another. "There is no *out there*," writes Muriel Rukeyser, "All is open. / Open water. Open I." I know I'm partly somewhere else—how I miss the future, its sideways surrender. Imagine if afterwards everything can be pure sensation: sugar-fed and alive in its dismantling.



Where the image itself senses

What words can be said now? And how do they distinguish themselves from those that must be said, now. Shots of daffodils flattening in the rain; the return of growth and desire. “Time is the only medium for having a body, extending a voice, acting towards others,” writes Lisa Robertson. “Spring is an opening in time.”

I caught myself more interested in the wasp pressing itself up against the glass than the people animatedly gesturing behind the glass. It was nonidi 9 Floréal in the year of the Republic CCXXVII, celebrating the hyacinth. I suspected that the poppy seeds I had sown in C’s garden back home might be beginning to germinate.

I didn’t desire to “look back” as much as I didn’t desire to “look forward,” and yet I was having difficulty looking here, at that which was right in front of me—other than the wasp pressing itself up against the glass. Past, present, future; I began in the failure of these images. I was happy to look anywhere else—upwards, downwards, sideways, slanted—as long as it no longer constituted an “it.”

this is not the distinction of looking (long and fixed the gaze) as in backward (“summer is over”) or back at you (“i want to memorize your face forever...”)—thoughts up the pass.

it's us who move into awake, finding our calling.

—Daphne Marlatt, *Salvage*

I sat at the window of the small room that was not mine, looking out to the streets of Kyiv. I caught myself wondering what “failure” could mean in the context of movements, of protest, of poetry. “Images in the unconscious are like underwater fauna and flora,” wrote Edmond Jabès, “the diver’s quick torch tracks them down.” I caught myself thinking about that YouTube video—the shots of a non-nation-state flag flying in the background, shots of olive trees operating in the breeze, shots of a gun shrugged over the shoulder, “martyr” written in Sans Serif across the screen:

“I come from an anarchist tradition, but... [I no longer believe] it will be able to achieve its major ends by its own. However, it has the possibility to affect other revolutions. As I am myself too deeply engrained in my anarchist ways of thinking and working, I see no other options to implement the anarchist ideals than to enter the ground where it has some kind of leverage and merge with other revolutionary forces. This ground at the moment is in Syria and in Rojava.”

“A common vocabulary is not necessary, and probably not desirable,” write Lisa Robertson and Matthew Stadler in their introduction to *Revolution: A Reader*. “For us, revolution will be the difference that each of us brings into living, the difference that resists even the smoothing activities that can be a part of community formation. It’s only by staying with the often-difficult texture of difference that we can begin, that there can be a stance that opens into a movement beyond.”

D asks, “What does Rojava mean in the age of hijacked and abused revolutions?” E asks, “How come no-one went to Ukraine to fight?” Headlines demand: “The Ukrainian Euromaidan: The Solution to Putin, or Just Another Fascist Political Coup?” I caught myself trying to imagine the scenes in Kyiv in 2013/14—the things I had witnessed only on a screen: shots of people kicking free a pylon cemented to the sidewalk, shots of tiles torn off of walls—shots of anything not actually nailed down loosened, ripped out and thrown at the Berkut. Thick clouds of tear gas freshly filling the city each week. Once again people were criticizing the government, occupying a central square, fighting the police. I caught myself trying to envisage how these actions had bled into the space of everyday life, rather than holding themselves apart from it or maintaining an extra-terrestrial existence alongside “normality.”

B, rushing from a distance at standing A

swerving at collision point

repeating again and again

trying to lock eyes

A, saying “now” when eyes hold

B, instantly halting rush, holding A’s eyes
until one or the other looks away

—Allan Kaprow, *Comfort Zones*

“I remember seeing it happening during the Euromaidan demonstrations in Ukraine: bona fide fascists, progressives, and anarchists all fighting cops together,” *lal0cur4* writes in one reddit forum. I too caught a glimpse of the red and black flag that did not divide itself diagonally but horizontally. Among the brief murmurings of the crowd, I had imagined everything that moved was red, but I caught myself wondering whether red actually meant something altogether distinct from what I had come to know it to mean when I saw it at demos, on t-shirts, on



pins and graffiti and literature and bare skin—when I saw the flag entwined with a sign that read “Glory to Ukraine!”, a swastika pinned to the top right-hand corner. What was happening elsewhere was happening here: a so-called single-issue protest leading to brutal police repression leading to a generalized uprising, transforming a square in the capital—which this time was a city in a country that did desire a nation-state, that seemed for the very idea of a nation-state, and at all times appeared to announce itself as a nation-state—into a fiercely defended autonomous zone. Insurrection, apparently. This seemed to offer a new approach, in which people cohered around tactics and forms rather than parties or ideologies—grievances with specific governments and specific economic policies and specific social programs and specific instances of corruption. But this was in fact not new, in the way Occupy named a tactic rather than a goal. To many, watching from our laptop screens or barstools or balconies or binoculars, the specific organizers and demands seemed incidental; it was assumed the important thing was the antagonism these upheavals facilitated against the state.

The helmets donned by “the people” became a kind of symbol of the ex-citizen, but anger with government and economy—whether protest, riot or insurrection—has never necessarily suggested anti-state and anti-capitalist aims. Greek flags illuminating the presence of nationalists in Syntagma Square; fully-armed militia members showing up to Occupy Phoenix. In the weeks leading up to Euro-maidan, people smashed the windows of banks during anti-austerity protests in Rome; tens of thousands took to the streets in Italy and Portugal to protest against budget cuts enshrined by “the crisis”; ATMs were jammed with glue in Greece and 24-hour strikes begun; roads were blocked and sit-in occupations of banks were organized in Germany. But in two months of confrontation there was not a single shop or business window broken in Kyiv’s downtown, though state vehicles were overturned and burned as barricades, government buildings were seized, bricks and paving stones and molotovs were hurled at riot police and state snipers.

“War” supersedes participatory insurrection with the spectacle of professionalized violence, sidelining the general population—a possible people that announces itself and makes an account of itself as not having been accounted for. What it means to resist becomes militarized, confines the substance of the struggle to a clash of power-endorsed, armed organizations, rather than spreading subversion into every aspect of social relations, or grassroots guerrilla groups. Then the so-called “populist” parties take over. The endless monastery walls crammed with portrait photographs of those killed fighting in Crimea and Donbas. D points out how no-one in those first portraits from 2014 is dressed in military uniform, but by the time we reach 2019—all the way around the sharp corner of the monastery—all that can be seen are the yellow and blue flags in the background of the portrait, the military uniform, the diagonal red-and-black flag, the neo-Nazi symbols posed in front of.



What to do with the failure of insurrection, when insurrection is not simply a conflict with the state, but a three-way fight against it and its authoritarian opponents; when it's not a contest of arms but a clash between different forms of relations; when it's not just the struggle for physical territory but also for tactics and narratives—for the territory of struggle itself?

And so I returned again to the question of form. I wanted to ask, does the poem need self-defense not only against the state but against other sites of struggle, or do other sites of struggle need self-defense not only against the state but also against the poem? I wanted to ask, can the poem relate to a phenomenon that exceeds it? I wanted to ask, can the poem choose a method other than completely ignoring the legal-official politics' existence by refusing to acknowledge it? I wanted to keep asking, can the poem avoid being the resistance that resembles the original violence? It would be a lie to say that these questions first appeared to me as poetry, rather than a politics in which the poem is actually the organized left, or "the people," or the struggle, or "the state."

For every question there's, like, five more multiplying. "Do poems like these *work*?" Adrienne Rich asks of the writing in *With an Iron Pen: Hebrew Protest Poetry*. I tried again to think about whether the "how" of things brought into being is aesthetics. I tried again to think about what the "what" alone of things could mean. The bare, brutal facts of the words on the page; the room of 12 students crowded around a print-out, discussing the syntax and preposition and use of punctuation and title. I used to think that writing took me away from—outside of—my politics; now I think that writing more often than not brings me back to my politics, while the talking and the reviewing and the examining and the analyzing of the writing with people who are not a part of this politics is what took me outside of my politics, outside of myself. I became less prepared to collaborate with those who did not know the difference between a horizontal red-and-black flag and a diagonal red-and-black flag. Mostly I found myself willing the poem not to work, and the more the poem refused to work, the more the rest of life became conceivable, became copious—not built from a life, but slowly growing to

become the life in which other lives were entangled and inseparable and together enacted a mode, not a virtue. Mostly no-one in the writing—those the writing was for, of, from, about—actually read the writing; and so, a kind of anti-literature of life.

How broad can something be; how much can a form hold before the form is compromised; how inclusive can a poetics, a movement, an insurrection be before its aim is completely diffused? Brecht wished for volumes of poetry to be printed smaller so that you could keep them in your pocket, but Hilary Creek questioned how the police could have found a pair of gloves “impregnated” with explosives in the pockets of a pair of her trousers when the trousers concerned were proven to have no pockets. “These trees don’t take comfort in less sky,” wrote the Greek poet Yannis Ritsos, before being imprisoned in 1967 and exiled to the island of Samos by the military junta for his allegiances to the National Liberation Front. In the early ‘80s, the National Liberation Front was recognized as a “resistance movement” by the Greek state, its members honoured and provided with state pensions.

In Fernando Pessoa’s *The Book of Disquiet*, an assistant bookkeeper in a Lisbon fabrics firm records impressions he doesn’t expect to see published. “To see and feel,” he says, “makes me feel a great hope, but I realize that hope is literary.” Cynicism can be inherently hopeful, inherently utopian—the slow cancellation of the future. “If we don’t believe in possibilities, in a future, or even really in each other except in individual friendships,” wrote J, “then of course we will always hold back from the struggle. If no matter what we do we cannot win, but it’s within our power to make our lives nice, or at least bearable, we will just focus on that. If there’s no hope, why should we push on when things are hard or challenging or dangerous or scary?” But real hope cannot be substituted for optimism or positivity, for simply looking forwards; hope necessitates a looking backwards, downwards, upwards—a looking sideways, slanted.

“And what is the direct trial of this today for the poet if there has not yet been any poetry, any poetry?” asks Anne Boyer in “Questions for Poets.” To imagine a new kind of society is to imagine a new kind of art—one that we cannot see from where we now stand. A PKK fighter in the mountains in Bakur unfurls her umbrella when a drone passes overhead. All the other women nearby are killed. So the PKK orders black umbrellas from Russia. But the trucks are intercepted by the Turkish army, expecting arms, only to find... black umbrellas. To commit to poetry may be to commit not to that which has happened or may happen, but that which has not yet happened or may never happen; not in the form of *anti* a thing, but *for* something else entirely. I caught myself wondering whether poetry, and protest, will begin to add up to something when everyone shares not a principled tolerance towards the actions of others, but a common strategic perception of the situation:

one thing i've learned / come to a provisional conclusion about:
when it comes to fighting, there are people who will help you
fight & there are people who will not & there are people
who will stand in the way. find the people who will help / be loud
& clear so they know where you are — focus on them, be encouraged
by them, encourage them, work with them. don't worry
about the people who won't help. they will be of no help even
if they are on your side. waste as little energy as possible
fighting people who stand in the way, which is to say don't talk
don't argue, just get them out of the way of the fight you came for.

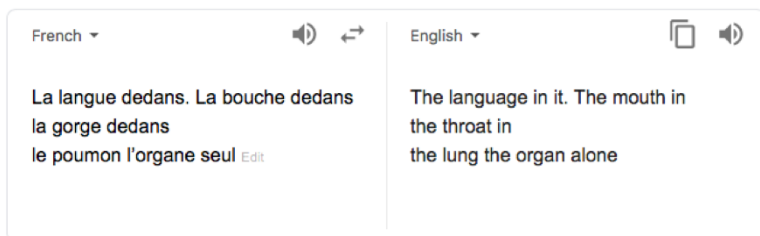
tl;dr: you don't need or want
the people who you know
aren't "with you" to be
with you. really, you don't

—Wendy Trevino, "Revolutionary Letter"

It's a kind of liberalism to talk of unconditionally accepting people. I caught myself wondering whether broadness in movements and revolution and poetry so often fail because the kind of broadness adopted is mostly one that tries to approach—to make—everyone the same, rather than recognize our own real or imagined proximities and diffuse subjectivities. "Assimilation is sometimes the most effective kind of assassination," wrote Mark Fisher. Community, and collectivity, is not an agreement to share a style, or a language, or an aesthetics, or even an analysis. I tried to imagine "a people" of poetry—a people who desire a literature that is not made from literature, who desire a poetry that is not anti-state but stateless, who desire not to gather, share, verify, and discuss information—but to invent a language that does not pretend to narrow the gap between information, poetry and the world. This imagining rests not on an agreement of content, accessibility, aesthetics or even form, but rather as an ethics of doing—an entanglement, whether the writing was read by those it was for, of, from, about; or not. "Accessible to *who*?" I wanted to ask for the millionth time.

And so, after speaking in the assemblies, after participating in "direct" democracy, people got in line once again to vote, to reaffirm the democracy of the state. And so democracy itself becomes an obstacle; "a" people become *the* ex-people, like the lives of two lovers during the "revolutionary years" in Anatoly Mariengof's 1928 novel *The Cynics*. We wonder not, "who should I vote for?" but "is this incompatible with my existence?" Yes, reading is a learned and regulated act, but in reading everything is to be begun; not only that, but unlearned, and then at

last begun—together. Not collage but montage; a sequencing that suddenly makes sense in relation. J writes, “We have to change the way we see things and develop the culture that underlies, not the form.”



This writing was my first failure. By now the wasp that had been so earnestly pressing itself up against the glass lay dead, or just resting, at the bottom of the window. Too many attempts to be meaningful; the mute image that cannot speak for itself. I caught myself no longer wanting to employ the quotation mark for revolution, for protest, for poetry—no more attempts to reinvigorate their power or strangeness or extra-terrestrial existence alongside “normality,” which itself became the “it” held apart from the space of everyday life, the space of the literature of a life that both worked and resisted work. Shots of blurred outlines hurrying toward the theater’s blue tubes of light, shots of our own bodies walking along the rug as it is pulled out from underneath our feet, shots of letterboxes where there should have been a lake. It was only in failure that cohesion no longer began to matter, and so we began to read. No getting “outside of” anything. Outside of what.



The Oasis Tower by night, Great Yarmouth.

Photo: E. Nigels, F.R.P.S.

It is almost that

Looking back I suppose has nothing to do with what actually occurred. On the eastern sky, fingers of pink light. The architect Adolf Loos declared that a “cultivated man” does not look out of the window; it exists “only to let the light in, not to let the gaze pass through.”

Leyla Güven was on her 198th day of hunger strike. Milkshakes overflowed on the streets of England. The author of the *Horrible Histories* series opened his one man show at the local museum. A documentary aired in English: “As war rages in eastern Ukraine, Dima, a former leader of an ultra-right group, and Tanya, a self-proclaimed anarcho-feminist, make an unlikely couple in modern-day Kyiv.” Open letters addressed to Extinction Rebellion multiplied. “You can’t stop a mass movement with milkshake,” declared Nigel Farage. Hundreds of *gilets noirs* occupied Charles De Gaulle airport, chanting, “Contre les déportations, et pour des papiers pour tous-tes!” İmam Şiş was on his 158th day of hunger strike. Zumba classes restarted at the local library. “We will not be selling milkshakes or ice-cream tonight,” a sign on the window of a McDonald’s noted. “This is due to a police request given recent events.” Lawyers were preparing to visit Öcalan for the second time in eight years.

And so I left the “endless nights talking in tenement buildings under skylights,” “cycling along dirt paths in the dark to Carbeth,” “collective meetings lasting into the wee hours,” “conversations about changing politics under broken streetlights and foliage and cigarette smoke,” “mass texts about a raid or a deportation or a party or an arrest or a heartbreak,” “demos and counter-demos and counter-counter demos converging in Ibrox and Govan and Pollokshields,” “proofing press releases,” “moving tenement every six months,” “more collective meetings”—to live alone

in a room in a town at the furthest easterly outlier of England, at the edge of a street of a country that was not only a nation-state that desired and resembled and announced itself as so, but a nation-state that supplied the helmets and helicopters and missiles used to strike and shell that other country that is not a country, that is against the very idea of a country, and yet at times seems to resemble a country. A nation-state that put in place other nation-states; that consistently demonstrated economic and political interest in the building and demolishing and running of other nation-states and not-quite nation-states. A nation-state that was ecstatic to sell arms to a list of nation-states and not-quite nation-states which were in fact part of its own self-conceived list of “human rights abusers.” A nation-state that existed and was conceived on the practice of conquest abroad and repression at home.

I could see it all from the window—the Confederate flag hanging from a car boot, vacant amusement arcades lining the seafront, the cash-poor circus preparing for its next show, the chatter of Kriolu and Guinensi and N’golá and Sáotomense drifting out from the cafes with their doors open all night, the last smokehouse closing, the freight ships out to sea, the seagulls fearlessly innovating new ways to find food, the industrial area less and less full of machinery and more and more occupied with artists and unlicensed boxing rings and foodbanks and makeshift spaces for prayer and raves, the anniversary of the Suffragettes burning down the pier, the B&Bs advertising color TV, the derelict high street, the crew from the Malaviya Twenty stranded in the port, growing increasingly skilled at table tennis in their boredom. What could it mean, I wondered, to end up in the place she ran from at the age of 17, a lifetime before giving birth to me?



One thing next to another doesn't mean they touch. I stayed indoors through it all—in the single room of a vicarage turned B&B turned industrial weed-growing operation turned raided-by-the-cops turned derelict turned into my lodging arrangements. I remained by necessity an outsider, and in turn the town remained for me a convenient place to dream about, spin tales about, write about, and, in the end, avoid—like Katerina Gogou's feared *poet*: “Locking myself in the room / gazing at the sea / and forgetting...”

At the window, I was drenched in texts. Post-it notes piled up over the desk and windowsills and floorboards, between duvet and mattress, slid into pockets and pillowcases and remembered and recited during showers and stir-frys and phone calls. The notes swelled in numbers. I was determined to write something not for “them” but *for* “us”—not an indeterminable, abstract *we* of everyone or anyone, but a scattered group of people made up of my most recently contacted and my most rarely contacted—in Glasgow and in Reykjavik and in London and Athens and Marseille and Granada; in Adelaide and Rojava and in Alexandria; basically, anywhere that was not here.

When you live with friends in intimacy, and with a real try for directness of feeling—when you have shared jobs and goals that help you all keep focused on the same target and moving together in a common rhythm—when all these different parts are explored by those around you because it affects them, because it affects the quality of our daily life, our work together, our sanity... when all this happens, the densest sorts of bonds can be created. They are born out of effort, striving. They happen.

So when I think of my experience of these kinds of rich relationships, and then I read about the history of revolutionary and resistance movements, I am puzzled. It seems that, in general, there is too much emphasis put on the roles of “ideas,” on theory, principle, ideology, as the web that holds movements together and “explains them.” Have I misunderstood something? Does something happen in the process of writing? Is it words themselves? Of course I don't mean ideas aren't important. Perhaps they are why we get together in the first place; the light that draws us there.

People try to turn themselves inside out. They go off knowing that definitions of “success” are uncertain, ever-changing, and probably not measurable within their lifetime. For an “idea,” sure. And day to day?

—Jean, Prison de la Santé (1980)

In writing “our” lives, I didn’t want to represent or romanticize, and though I was not in any position to distinguish a movement toward the inside from a movement toward the outside, I knew that in being somewhere of such solitude I now existed closer to the “outside” of whatever—wherever—I had once considered to be the “inside.” I wondered whether then, by writing *my* life—which was by necessity our lives—I could end up doing all of the above. That in being somewhere geographically removed, it could become easier to write *about* than *with*. That it could become easier to rely on words like “capital,” “community,” “responsibility,” “complicity,” rather than detailing the specific ways they infringe on our bodies and friendships and time and energy. I did not want the words alone to constitute the doing of the work.

Throughout the friends leaving and the friends returning, the friends dying in Rojava and the friends-of-friends dying in Rojava, the friends having babies and getting married and doing so many things we swore we would never do, or swore we would always do, or swore we would tell one another before doing, I spent too long wondering—can people be “just” “people,” not persons of such decisive moments? I knew that I didn’t want the poem to be two things leaning up against one another—one inside, one outside—to make the world more “perceivable.” But in not knowing when I was inside the protest, and when I was outside poetry, had I made not the poem but the essay two things leaning up against one another—poetry and protest, “politics” and “poetics,” the “I” and the “we”? Someone said, “In so many insurrections, poetics has been in the mouths and hearts of everyone,” but when I looked around during moments of *insurrection*—on the streets, in tenement buildings, under broken streetlights and in endlessly long meetings—I wasn’t so sure I could see poetics in the mouths and hearts of those around me. Or, I wasn’t so sure that what I could see in the mouths and hearts of those around me could be called poetics, when existing poetry’s survival seemed to rest so firmly on its inability to make itself real.

“Why is the world ignoring the revolutionary Kurds in Rojava?” asks D, again. I spent so long wondering what place poetry might have in a nation-state that is not a state but something like a state that is also an anti-state, that I forgot to wonder what place poetry might *not have*. What place poets might not have. We all know that poets aren’t needed for poetry to exist; they are often presented as antithetical to poetry by poets themselves—along with agents, publishing houses, MFAs, publications—and yet we proceed to write and publish and talk about (and sometimes be paid to write and publish and talk about) how unnecessary or inadequate or unattainable or *unrevolutionary* poetry is in “the” world. That is, we still proceed to participate in a sort-of-poetry. And yet it feels increasingly more difficult to speak of “a” or “our” or “their” world, rather than *the* world. And yet people still desired poetry—and agents, publishing houses, MFAs, publications—still resembled these things, still announced themselves as “poets.”

The people I have written about over the past three weeks have mostly not been poets. They are my *we* and yet never chose to be a *we* that will be written about, never chose to be asserted as single letters in a sentence or quoted verbatim or listed in full first name at the bottom of a post on “poetry.” Some of us will always be framed as marginalized, but no-one is marginal to their own life. Writing can admit agency over a world—over “the” world, over “our” world—but when that world involves those who are not the one writing, what does it mean to write on our world’s behalf, *of* our world’s behalf? And can *on* or *of* or *to* ever become *with*—when it is an “I” who wrote the words, who proofed the words, who sent the words to the editor, who later thought about the words that no longer felt true or applicable or desirable—and not a “we,” the *we* of us out on the streets, in tenement buildings, in endlessly long meetings? Mostly I imagined no-one in the writing actually read the writing—and so, a kind of anti-literature of life. But then they did start to read the writing. I became drenched in words of my own—that were never solely my own—but I didn’t want anyone-who-was-not-*us* to see what was shown, what was secret, what may be hidden among the visible. And yet I continued to write, to publish, to call myself a “poet” at parties and readings and meetings and once in the queue at Aldi. I was no longer ashamed or embarrassed or fatigued to call myself a poet. I just didn’t want to write.

To refuse to speak in the present tense is a specific kind of avoidance. What does a *we* mean when it is no longer the “we” of place or position, but of particular person? When this *we* no longer participates in my daily dawn-to-dusk life of meals or spontaneous conversation or “what are you doing right now?”—but a life of whatsapp voice messages, the clanging of letterboxes and *I miss u’s*? “Mostly I’ve lived according to circumstances, but lately my life has been upgraded in agency,” writes Anne Boyer. “In other words, I chose this solitude. Then I chose to call it *lonely*.” I began to live with the overwhelming feeling that this—to be alone, in this town that was a town but didn’t feel like a town but another world—was not enough to constitute a living, a life.



The water dries up before the dark blue hyacinths are placed into the vase. When I return to memory, I do not return to the same point. “The act of writing makes it true, *non?*” someone asks. The past established as a kind of continuous present:

Everything is the same except composition and as the composition is different and always going to be different everything is not the same. So then I as a contemporary creating the composition in the beginning was groping toward a continuous present, a using everything a beginning again and again and then everything being alike then everything very simply everything was naturally simply different and so I as a contemporary was creating everything being alike was creating everything naturally being naturally simply different, everything being alike. This then was the period that brings me to the period of the beginning of 1914. Everything being alike everything naturally would be simply different and war came and everything being alike and everything being simply different brings everything being simply different brings it to romanticism.

—Gertrude Stein, *Composition as Explanation*

What to do with the “it” that won’t reveal itself? I tried to recover memories. When I found a particular memory in my mind, I wrote it down. I discovered quickly that as soon as I wrote it down, I lost it. When I tried to find it again, all I found was what I had written—the gaze from a window overflowing with post-it

notes and journals and amputated margins. The texts became a form, the longest form—the most uncertain of forms—one which is still now occurring, ongoing, occurring, ongoing:

“What does the hard look do to what it sees? Pull beauty out of it, or stare it in?” asks Denise Riley. When writing to an audience bigger than the contents of your contacts list, is intelligibility something to desire or something to be feared? Some things are not meant to be clear; obscurity is their clarity. To obscure is to admit a poetry that no longer presents but participates in the process of thought; to admit the memory that is not the original memory but the memory written down. *The act of writing makes it true, non?* No. And yet to write of a we—whether *for* or *with* or *about* or *to*—is to represent, one way or another. “I know that a car wasn’t set alight during that demo in Marseille. I remember how scared we were; how much constant running away we were doing,” L says. “Where is that in your writing?”

What is the relation between the poem and a form of life? Once again, on the streets of Marseille, of Athens, of Khartoum, of Reykjavik, people were criticizing the government, occupying a central square, fighting the police. I tried to imagine how these actions bled into the space of everyday life, rather than maintaining an extra-terrestrial existence alongside “normality.” I had no desire to bottle and convey the kinetic immediacy of collective action in the present; *jouissance*, these moments of pure power and rage that can never be intelligible, can never be used to represent us. “This poem is nothing if it has no reader,” I write in a poem—thinking it useful, thinking it collective, thinking it chooses *life* over *poem*—but now I think I might believe the opposite.

Once again I had imagined that poetry was about necessity or desirability or impact or possibility—the question being whether the doing of the poetry was itself a form of politics or not—rather than the “doing” of the person doing the poetry. Entering the doing of poetry at the level of collectivity has got to do something to your attitude towards language. Lisa Robertson says of the Kootenay School of Writing: “The collective structure is completely non-hierarchical and everyone has equivalent say. Everyone did everything from washing the floors to writing the press releases to writing the grants to hosting the visiting writers. That’s a politics. Our writing was coming out of that very, very directly.”

What does it mean to be socially and politically accountable in poetry? “And who is that accountability to—people or concepts?” asks L. I didn’t want to eventually become one person, gathered up maybe, during a pause, at a comma. “The riot, it’s not just a form; its form is a content,” someone says. It was not about the story, nor was it even about how the story is told. Mostly it’s about how a story is felt through joining perspectives—a proliferating, running commentary on the capabilities of form. Solitude offers its own form, its own ability to obscure—to avoid being seen, to avoid intelligibility—but so does collectivity. In solitude, can you still be a “we”? A *we* that is—but that refuses to speak for—a million things at

once? I no longer wanted to believe in the idea of a resolutely “I” and a resolutely “we,” but an *I* that necessarily emerges from a *we*; an *I* that does not pin language to my experience but opens language to other experience. “There’s a stronger solitude that refuses to be understood as merely pre-social,” writes Denise Riley, “that rejects the benevolent will to make everything, and it too, familial.” But can the act of de-familiarizing—in order to write *about*—obstruct a writing *to* or *with*; only furthering “their” understandings of us, not our understandings of ourselves? “I fear that I might buy binoculars in order to bring closer / the sabotage actions in which I won’t be participating,” recalls Katerina Gogou. Can the poem avoid being the resistance that resembles the original violence? And in even entertaining this question, does the poet risk the possibility of foregoing or displacing or devising the representation of a “we” in the service of poetry, of the poem?

Whereas I lived as a pulse moving underneath the sea—
not below ground
not above ground
but somewhere in between.

This needs a witness.
or at least;
this needs to be witnessed.

Looking back I suppose has everything to do with continuous warfare
against the state: before the chatter of rain
the eye of silence,
perfect titles of sincerity.
Soon I became soaked in subtitles;
I notice then my cigarette is no longer lit.

And so I began with a first note to myself—
is it ever safe to say “we”?

I flirt with the idea of how we slept:
squatted over our own bodies
the waistband with or without grenades.

A singular thought lingers.
What pushes them to represent the state like this?

The quote marks around “martyr” like a barricade.

Never sure if protection was for those inside, or those outside;
neither able to “see” the other—
glass that only lets the light in, not to let the gaze pass through.
Her unfurling a black umbrella as a rose growing backwards,
swelling into a bud; to when things were not “simpler” but easier to avoid.

All the other women were killed. One action multiplied to provide meaning
to the rest.

Can anything really make a multitude?
Waiting here at a quarter to two;
orange glowing through the curtains.
Leaves falling from the softly lit trees.
Window open, cold though it is—
I can see to the corner of the next street
as errands run through the mind: whether to see C or break it off
before even beginning
whether to write J and tell her I miss her,
is she alright, what does sunrise look like
over there?

Tell her,
I have discovered that there are no gaps but language itself.

In the midst of experience I ask myself—
what would a history based on the state of exception look and feel like?
This world isn't dissolving.
But the idea of *now* seems pathetic and irrelevant and run dry; and all I
gained was loss.

J writes, finally, to transform is not to abolish:
they “act” as if there is “a state”;
even though there is “not” “a state”;
even though “they” are “against” the “idea” of “a state.”

Waiting... for what?

Just because something is current doesn't mean it is newly felt.
The whole thing must be reimagined.

Orange hesitates to pink in the sky outside.

The singular window lets in no light but finally I can gaze out.

What I see.

I dream each roof has its own assembly.

The people—neighbours, friends, the cashier from earlier today at the bank
aren't living in tents

but sitting in circles, chucking pans of water to quell the tear gas,
brushing away the tracks.

Waiting for one another to piss in the enormity of “just” “being.”

Yes desire is endless.

It needs to be witnessed.

Rain accelerates down the red roofs,
dismantling into disciplines;
collecting into bottles and saucepans
and strategic plant pots.

One barricade climbs over another.

Everything in the world seems so small and so quiet and
so distant and unbelonging.

By which how to talk about what is still ongoing?

Two whole days of rain and the trees are still thirsty
so sweetened by their plural existence
by which I can feel my own need
by which I bring it into the present tense
by which I attempt the negation of what is already absent;
the dark insides of sentence
barricading all pleasure in the plural.

This poem is nothing if it has no reader.

The recurrence of history, style, crisis—

I began again with a list of luxurious devastation.

The techniques of the body grew to resemble a prisoner of a drop of water;
its doppelgänger romanticized as strategic instrument,
as symptomatic hunger

for innovation.

I wait here and I am overcome,
strangely suspended,

not with what was—

the loose dogs held aloft under streetlight,
the quiet confidence of motion in the cantons,
my own peripheral and inquisitive cunt
indeterminately touched by the changing seasons—

but what could be.

Afterword

I'd slowly progressed from world politics to city
(London) politics to local politics, till finally I was left
with the smallest unit – myself.

And without a sense of humour what can be done?

—Anna Mendelssohn

To remember is never solely to report on the past so much as to configure—to reconfigure—your own relationship to it. What is included, what is excluded, in the record of individual memory? Of communal memory? In the autumn of 2018 I moved to a town at the easterly edges of England, a place where I knew no-one. I had spent the past two years restlessly turning from city to city: London, Tangiers, Marseille, Glasgow. I was tired, uncertain of so much. I wanted to be in one place but I didn't know how.

A few months later I visited a close friend who had just moved to Marseille—a city we had spent time in already together, and that I had spent some suspended months in a few years earlier, with the bedbugs and the €1 pizza, the squats and walks to the sea. Two residential buildings had just collapsed in a nearby neighborhood, killing eight people and displacing many more, and demos of intersecting points were taking place continuously. We walked the hill to Mary Magdalen's cave. A friend got married and played Aïcha on repeat into the night. As the *gilets jaunes* began occupying roundabouts and péages, we took a day driving to Paris. I stayed slouched on the van's mattress through the endless traffic jams, the empty highways, the UPS truck burnt to a shell, the tollbooths lifting of their own accord. I spent the night on the floor of Orly airport, sleepless for my flight to Athens.

There's that line in one of Sean Bonney's poems after Katerina Gogou: "I love my friends / they are wires stretched from city to city"—those places across the world that are marked by loved ones. In Athens I stayed six weeks with a friend that I had shared many collective spaces and organized with over the years. I had come to visit her, and, allegedly, to meet poets—but there was another reason I had gone, that I hadn't yet vocalized to myself. It was where Haukur had been living before he left for Rojava, from where he never returned. I had spent the previous nine months trying to come to terms not just with his death, but with what it might mean to make this kind of political commitment, what it might mean to go elsewhere to participate in revolutionary armed struggle. Maybe it was naive to imagine, even on an unconscious level, that I would find answers in Athens—but it was one of those times when a series of things fell into place, somehow happened without thinking or trying. It turned out that the then-partner of my friend, also visit-

ing from the UK, had fought in Rojava alongside comrades from Athens who had later been with Haukur in Raqqa. We all met as Turkey once again invaded Rojava, watching passively from the laptop screen, from the whatsapp group, from the balcony—thinking of the friends who continue to tie us so concretely to that particular struggle.

In Athens we were talking persistently about protest, about insurrection, failure, internationalism, revolution; im/possibilities. My friend's partner was organizing in working class neighborhoods against fascism back in the UK, and had recently been to Ukraine for an anti-fascist boxing tournament. We spent late nights searching google and reddit forums for documentaries and writings on 'Euro-maidan'—some interesting, some boring; most clearly US or Russian propaganda—trying to understand the relationships that had played out in 2013/14 between form and content, strategy and ideology. Five months later I found myself in Ukraine, mostly through curiosity and a £19.99 flight, with my friend's partner and comrades.

But: before. I had been organizing in no borders collectives and non-hierarchical structures for the previous five years; I felt connected to a whole network of friends and comrades organizing against detention, against deportation, against state violence, across Europe, and North and West Africa. Years of sharing beds and rooms in different cities, waking in the middle of the night to eat together, collectively contributing money and food, writing political texts together, asking favors and commitment and for time alone from one another. I've felt how time passes differently when shared; when the rhythm of the day orbits around the same structure or political purpose that creates not just proximity but intimacy. Towards the end of the years I spent in Scotland it felt like there was a moment of breakage, when people started to leave for elsewhere or make plans to. We were no longer together in a single space sharing decisions, perspectives, notes, actions, ideas, tears, food. Or, looking back, it felt like a moment of breakage but maybe I just left and everything—a 'we'—continued.

Later, organizing intensely in London around deportations and the looming trial of comrades facing likely prison sentences, I began to consider the long echo chamber of a milieu that often fails to recognize the differences between a scene or subculture and actual community. I realized that what I'd experienced in Scotland *was* community (however abstractly monolith, reductive and appropriated that word can be)—one that challenged me not to confuse care for getting all our individual needs constantly met, not to confuse freedom for having no right to ask for commitment or sacrifice, and not to confuse collective life for lots of individual people in one place. "To exist in community with people who constantly piss you off is exhausting," wrote Bryn Kelly, "but ultimately: worth it." But in London I began to think more about the ways in which a certain kind of social capital plays out in subcultures; how anti-capitalist organizing so often replicates the priorities and endlessly deadening tactics of capitalism—productivity, a hierarchy of tactics

and ‘usefulness,’ and barometers of ‘doing enough’. An emphasis on individual development to become the perfect political subject rather than collective learning; and the consequences of a type of organizing that is often guilty for trying to manufacture a sense of togetherness. I knew that I wanted to feel alive, and didn’t. Not a thrill-seeking alive, but the lived feeling that there is much we can share with one another beyond aesthetics or language or identical analysis. And that these experiences and principles and ways of living against the structures that hover over us can be most announced in so-called ‘radical’ scenes, but are just as present (and autonomous) outside of them.

I had tried to keep my organizing out of my poetry; to let my politics be the form (that touches everything, always, anyway) but not necessarily the content. I was scared (am still scared) of all the ways in which, as content, it’s so much more easily recuperated—made representable by the state, and by a self-identified ‘left’ just as capable (and often willing) to homogenize anti-authoritarianism and struggle: to reduce it to what it never was, never felt. As I’ve written elsewhere, to never truly be convinced by the act of naming, and thereby writing, is to forever do a double-take on your own intentions. Poetry is not revolution, and ‘the streets’ are not a kind of poetry, whatever people say. And anyway I was too shy to share my poetry with my friends and comrades—so I kept it separate, secret. But something shifted that autumn of 2018, around the time I moved to the edge of England, around the time I visited Marseille and Athens. I had only started reading and writing poetry with any real momentum about a year ago; before that it had been press releases, polemical articles, constitutions, collective statements—things often written together in unison, early evenings or late mornings, gathered round a computer screen. A kind of writing I considered ‘useful’. I knew nothing about contemporary ‘experimental’ or ‘radical’ poetry in an identified, codified sense; and I hadn’t encountered people within explicitly anarchist or communist circles who called themselves poets. I just thought that what I had been writing late at night would probably be called poetry. But that same autumn I was working part-time in a library in a prison, thinking and talking about reading and writing and freedom and resistance every day in the same sentences, and I started to realise that the people I wanted to feel present in my writing were friends and comrades. This was given more urgency by how more and more of ‘us’ were now scattered all over the place, and talking and thinking had taken on a more epistolary form.

I found out that a poem I’d written after being at a demo in Marseille—sent to a handful of friends who’d been there—was floating around, being shared and read aloud between friends in different cities. Back in my one room in England, poems began to become something social, as my day-to-day living became more solitary. I have experienced acutely the different kinds of relationships that are born out of comradeship and shared struggle—different to a mutual interest, geography, or the perceived commonality of poetry. These relationships move beyond the individual life. I think it’s this that Haukur gave his life to—for—more than any abstracted idea of ‘revolution’. Our commitment to one another too is a politics,

one that we make and remake daily. I wondered what it meant to move away so decidedly from an everyday living of these kinds of relationships, to live alone in a town at the edge of the country where I knew no-one. How to hold onto a sense of commitment to a collective project, future, present?

In *Transnational Battle Field*, Heriberto Yépez writes:

When sitting and feeling the wind coming
Through the trees
Outside I think
What is the relationship
Between the Poetry Foundation
& the CIA
Today?

The CIA shaped
The Writers' Workshops
That shaped you.

Is there a shape
Capable of thinking THIS
Without being a shape shaped
By the CIA?

The wind blows through the trees.
Poetry and the CIA have a history.

When the Poetry Foundation commissioned me to write four essays on whatever I wanted for their *Harriet* blog, I didn't know what I now know about them. I didn't know that the president of the Poetry Foundation, Henry Bienen (salaried \$436,292), served on the board of directors of the global investment bank Bear Stearns, and acted as consultant to the Department of State, the National Security Council, the CIA (also serving as a member of the senior review panel), the World Bank, Boeing (who partly funded 'Operation Homecoming': writing workshops for troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as on the largest US military base in Afghanistan, in partnership with the Poetry Foundation, NEA, all four branches of the Armed Forces, and the Department of Defense). That the chairman of the board, Willard Bunn III, acted as CEO at banks such as Chemical Bank and Marine Corporation/Bank One. That one of the trustees, Allan E. Bulley III, is CEO of Bulley & Andrews, a construction firm that, in their own words, "built the room that housed a self-sustaining reactor that produced the world's first atomic pile"—i.e. that housed nuclear weapons that were then

dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I didn't know that the Poetry Foundation had called the cops on two people who crashed a wine-and-cheese reception celebrating the opening of their new \$21 million headquarters in Chicago with a "Dada-like" performance. One was arrested and detained; at her hearing representatives from the Poetry Foundation (who pressed charges) argued that she should be given extra prison time. That called the cops again on a handful of protesters who silently passed out leaflets and hung banners that read "VIVA CADA" and "WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF EMILY DICKINSON HAD BEEN PRESCRIBED PROZAC?" during a reading by Raúl Zurita hosted by the Poetry Foundation. I didn't know the Poetry Foundation was founded to manage the \$200 million endowment to *Poetry* magazine in 2002 from Ruth Lilly, a heir to Eli Lilly & Co—a pharmaceutical company the Poetry Foundation continues to hold stocks in. A pharmaceutical company that is protected from class action suits over thimerosal by Department of Homeland Security legislation. A pharmaceutical company whose former CEO was appointed by Bush (whose father held stocks in Eli Lilly) to the Homeland Security Advisory Council. That profit (and thereby that the Poetry Foundation profits) from the highly inflated (and continually rising) sale of insulin, cancer drugs, prozac, methadone, zyprexa, making a profit of \$8.3 billion last year. That were paid \$405,000 in 1953 to manufacture and supply LSD for the CIA's MKUltra, a program that experimented, without knowledge or consent, on adults and children (including people incarcerated in prisons, secret detention centers, and hospitals) with the aim of developing drugs and procedures to be used in interrogations, coordinated with the US Army Biological Warfare Laboratories. That the Poetry Foundation is a private operating foundation managing \$250 million in assets, the majority of which is in hedge funds, credit funds, private equities and real estate. I could go on.

Back then I didn't know there really was a poetry industry: that there are poets with agents, that you can make money from poetry. Through an adult education poetry class I met a well-known British poet, who told me he was paid £1500 [\$1825] for his first full collection with one of the biggest poetry publishers in the UK. Yeah there's money in poetry—commodified just as much as anything else under capitalism—but that wasn't much over five weeks on full-time wages at the minimum-wage call center where I was working at the time. Any poets I had met up until then were permanently broke, and didn't come from money. Whatever the content, poetry to me was always connected to the perpetually unemployed and dole scroungers, the wayward dreamers, the failures and drop-outs—those who saw organized society for what it was and turned their backs on it—rather than an indulgence of the rich. Maybe this was to do with so often being in close proximity to people who weren't scared or suspicious of poetry but experienced it as a fact of expression, a given: a best friend's dad who would recite from *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* and tell us it was poetry (we were 14 and would listen in exchange for WKDs), a high school teacher who abandoned the curriculum to teach us about feminism and German expressionism, the autodidactic boyfriend of my mum who would stubbornly hand and rehand me Ursula K.

Le Guin's books, my grandma who wrote poems but never talked about them as anything other than self-processing, friends who would recall by heart the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish and Cigexwin. Looking back it's easy to romanticize or make a whole from several parts, to place meaning on what often felt mundane. But I do this, now, to remind myself that even during the later years, when I was convinced poetry couldn't be reconciled with revolutionary action (and I thought I needed them to be); during the years I didn't write, refused to write—instead answering phones and googling case law, forgetting crabgrass logins and running for meetings—I had always been surrounded by poetry. It was just part of ongoing life rather than something you 'did' or got paid to do.

At the time of the commission and in the months leading up to publication, I wasn't friends with anyone who knew enough to tell me about the Poetry Foundation's history—either in the town I was living in, or friends elsewhere. But months after the essays were published I happened to be at a poetry reading in London and was lucky enough to bump into a poet I had seen read once before and liked, who started to tell me some of the Poetry Foundation's background. We stayed in contact through email, and I began doing some research myself. Would I have published these essays with the Poetry Foundation had I known what I know now? It feels too easy to say no, now. The essays were published with the Poetry Foundation, and I'm not interested in rebranding them as somehow, here in this pamphlet, "in their rightful place." Maybe more important now is that I won't publish, read or participate in anything with the Poetry Foundation again.

What I did know about the Poetry Foundation at the time was that it was a massive institution. And this is what I spent time reckoning with. What are the practical dangers of publishing with an institution while speaking of poetry and a(n anarchist) politics in the same sentence, when it is a politics that neither wants to aestheticize or make itself consumable or classifiable to an art or literary audience? When so much of not just writing, but publishing, teaching, performing, is saturated with 'problematic' complexities that are actually not that complex? I think it's possible to commit ourselves to the same principles without necessarily choosing (or agreeing on) the same strategies. I think of friends who will accept invitations from platforms like the BBC and the Daily Mail to get on live TV/ in print with their abolitionist politics; who will read poems while calling on the venue to divest from Israeli state funding; who will take money from an institution to write a series of essays and use that money to pay rent, visit comrades, and support friends without access to work. But can there be a meaningful politics of redistribution, when, as I know now, the money is still blood money?

When uncluttered politics can so often be a consequence of stagnant, prescriptive and inward-looking exclusion, so often made up of people who are less interested in others' moments of exposure or politicization than in keeping the circle closed, how to create ways for widening access, widening exposure? There are many times I'll advocate for the circle to remain closed. Back in 2016 a handful of 'us' were

trying to set up a social center in Scotland, after years of meetings in various different assemblages. A friend had finally found a solid space, and meetings restarted where ‘we’ talked about what we wanted the space to be used for. Because meetings were broadcast more widely, people from outside our organizing circle got interested. In the end there were around 15 people consistently meeting. At some point, as differing intentions for the space became clearer, there was a split: we wanted the space to be one thing, organized a certain way, and *they* wanted it to be another, even if on the surface we shared anti-authoritarian politics. But many of ‘us’ at the time were gripped by this desire to try to form something which spoke to more than just us—that broke with the usual insular homogeneity—particularly now that we had come this far ‘together.’ Meetings and relationships got heated, got frustrating: how inclusive could it be before our aims would be completely diffused? Why all this hassle, when instead we could assert what we wanted to do, and just do it? I guess I’m remembering this because I’m thinking about how much time is often spent imagining, particularly in the political context of the “the left” in the UK, that some kind of ‘togetherness’ can happen, a kind of forced unity: that we can all have what we want and have it together (and that this equates to care and to freedom). And yet I do feel committed to what might happen in dialogue, in being outwards-facing. The constant metamorphosis this requires risks being turned against itself, but it’s a risk I’m still willing to take. And I think this is one reason why I left a kind of subculture and ended up in a town at the edge of a country, knowing no-one. And I don’t think there are only two possibilities, to be inside the echo chamber or to be outside it.

I guess what I’m trying to get at, to prod and poke and jab at, is this feeling inside myself that refuses to leave things be. I remember a friend wondering what might happen “if we just left things alone,” rather than ‘make’ or ‘do’ something from it—art, poetry, language. To write of—i.e. to make visible—a riot and its tactics is a contradiction. What world was I illuminating? And to who? To publish writing with a platform like the Poetry Foundation means whatever you write will, more likely than not, be consumed by an art or a literary audience—and that the writing will be consumed *as* art, *as* literature, rather than as the pieces by which you arrange your almost-life. To speak of a *cortège de tête* and Katerina Gogou and the PKK in a “Poetry Foundation” essay online can share histories, struggles, desires to those it could mean something life-changing to, or offer a moment for reflection or feeling, or tools for understanding, but can also open it up to be recuperated, capitalized, made consumable—subordinated to aesthetics. What is this urge to have ideas, moments, movements, reach as many people as possible? When, as Anne Boyer writes, visibility doesn’t reliably change the relations of power to who or what is visible except insofar as the visible prey are easier to hunt—why not try to be the smallest, the most unknown, incoherent, unrecognizable, inarticulate? I do think there are ways to be intelligible to those aligned; to dodge the comprehension of authority, of fascism, and of a liberalism that in no way challenges the former two. “I think I’d find it tough [to make sense of the essays] if they didn’t rise so directly from the experiences of our communities and of being in them,”

wrote another friend. In Tangiers I had friends from Senegal and Cameroon who together spoke a variant of Camfranglais, mixed in with Wolof and some Darija, in an attempt to still be able to speak and organize with one another while their neighborhood was constantly controlled by cops and state officials. I do think it's possible (though I don't yet know how) to forgo any presumed representation of a 'we' for a world looking in, when *we* ourselves know no-one can represent us, that our ideas and struggles and meanings cannot be subsumed into the state and capital's reality as approved alternatives. Sure, they can manufacture a consumable version of it—more a funhouse mirror than the actual thing—but I don't think even the Poetry Foundation has the power to make truly legible what can never be to those who don't already know, or wonder.

But that still leaves the question of what it means to read your poems in public and not recognize a single face in the audience. Of how we can leave things alone while still holding onto them. It's easy to get exhausted at the collective piss-take of the same poets who denounce individual ambition submitting to the annual cycle of competitions; the poets who bemoan the literary industry while thanking institutions for their \$25,000 grant; the poets who publish anti-capitalist critiques of the state with university presses; the anti-capitalist poets with agents, studying or teaching at universities funded by the arms industry. What I'm left wondering about is complicity. A girl's gotta eat but has she gotta declare a fast at the same time? The hypocrisy is headache-inducing, and I'm not outside of it. But maybe one (sole) advantage of being a teenager in a dead-end town in England during Occupy was that I've never been fully convinced by the sentiment "what is being done to most of us in the interests of the few." The lines are clear, sure, but the everyday living of these lines is a bit more slippery. And what this reductive 'us' and 'them' positioning does is erase all the ways in which the people who are not them are also not necessarily *us*.

And still it's too easy to fall for the appeal of refusing to appeal, to mold disavowal into its own aspirational brand of cultural production, remade in capital's image as an approved representation of resistance (or respectable career). "If we want to write useful poems, we have to keep on reminding ourselves of how it feels to refuse to step out of the road. Of course one of the ways to do that is actually to refuse to do it," wrote an almost-friend in an unanswerable letter. What could it mean to really live by a politics, rather than interact with it as made up of unattainable concepts and 'complex' principles, saved for a constantly deferred future utopia? Or to abandon 'a' 'politics' altogether? As if things can only emerge once we have a position on them. We are shown again and again for this to be false. At some point you begin to wonder whether we can really find out through writing itself, when writing can be so incredibly reductive, when the act of naming can't account for things "that can only be seen when they are left slightly out of focus," as the same almost-friend wrote; when naming is just a few gestures down from representing, metaphorizing, aestheticizing, marketing and assimilating in the assembly line of coherent subjective experience—i.e. literature.

What do you go towards, when it is so difficult to articulate ‘in’ the moment—to articulate at all—and still afterwards all you’re left with is ‘about’, is outside? Time has a habit of hierarchizing, of putting things in their wrongful proper place. And remembering is not opposed to forgetting, but a kind of forgetting. It’s too easy to narrativize, to memorialize, and thereby to unify; and somehow the wanting of the narration—for moments as fixed monuments—can get in the way of the actual doing or feeling or seeing, can expel a desire or meaning for experience rather than the living experience itself: moments that often lasted less than an hour, that occurred in between other moments. These essays were written beneath a mold-covered ceiling with a perpetual cough, in the darkly lit room of a lover, with a best friend visiting, in cafes scattered throughout the town, in lunch breaks, on the back of the bus, at an airport; in frustration and furious doubt. But they were also written long before—in conversations and at dusk, writing letters and collecting post, in hope and failure and uncertainty, alone and cycling to a sea, sometimes leaving things alone and sometimes making-from, in feelings sparked from a way of living; someone always turning to somewhere, eating figs, carrying mint, continuing to walk home in the dark.

Thought has no ties: it lives by encounter
and dies of solitude.

—Edmond Jabès

None of this would exist without the thoughts, conversations and writings of others —those I know and those I don't. We do not arrive at our positions by chance. We read. We write. We discuss with one another. We argue. We tend to each other. We take risks together. In many ways these essays are just a collection, reassembling and sharing of a much larger, continually evolving constellation of thoughts, conversations and experiences.

In their first publication online, each essay ended with a list of the people who had informed the writing, noting: "Alongside those already attributed above, some words/lines/ideas/images have been used/developed/reworked from the writings/ words/conversations of/with." Usually it was a mix of friends and comrades (who I kept to first name for anonymity and intimacy), and published writers/film-makers/etc (whose full names were listed cause I didn't know them personally). Sometimes the word/line/idea/image was present but not necessarily legible in the writing, and at other times it was used word-for-word. Sometimes this was with attribution, sometimes it wasn't - there wasn't a particular pattern or qualifier to this. But I felt the impulse to make visible the threads behind the writings, especially on a platform like the Poetry Foundation where individual accolades are so mass-produced.

I've written elsewhere, with more energy, about attribution - how in the worlds of academia, of literary criticism, of so much poetry, attribution is seen as a sign of respect, of recognition, of requirement. In the wider poetry world it's easy to feel like there exists a vortex of ownership hovering over and around each individual writer's thoughts and words; that we have no right to borrow from (and therefore challenge) the shelves that make up the mythical chambers of solitary authorship. I think this is connected to the same rationale of 'originality' that means we don't often see the same writer repeat themselves in different places; a line or an image belongs to a single poem and only it (as if you never say the same thing to yourself again and again, bang your head against the same wall over and over and over, only to find out it's a door). As so many have stated before, this thread of thinking cannot be undone or separated from the capitalist and imperialist logic of private ownership - of property, lovers, labor, meaning. The word 'plagiarism' literally has its roots in the notion of "the kidnapping of one's slaves." And that, in poetry, this desperate appeal for attribution and originality is so often done in the service of the long lumber towards this thing they call 'finding your voice.'

I feel much more invested in and shaped by zine culture. With friends and comrades—those who I know and trust—there is a clear understanding that we are thinking together, that we are in constant dialogue, that we trust each other enough (and are unafraid to offer critique and honesty) never to talk on behalf of one another, but to use each other's elongating thoughts to better understand our own—individually and collectively. We have copy and pasted paragraphs from one another without asking, written whole essays based on a single thing another said, made poems from scraps of shared experience. There is no competition between us—to win prizes or grants, to get publication acceptances, to be asked to speak on panels and at conferences, to have ourselves branded as 'the poet who writes about struggle' or 'the poet who writes about gender' or 'the poet who writes about race'. We are instead remaking the world together.

There are of course many people - whole swathes of society, in allegiance with the state and its imperialist project of taking and renaming - who take and appropriate without acknowledgement the labor and hours and commitment and sacrifice given by others. But I think this is more rooted in structural power relations than inherent in the act itself. It has long been an anarchist tradition to disbelieve copyright or ownership, to refuse to talk on behalf of the group, to reject an identified and uniformed set of desires or ideals. To recognize that our thoughts and desires are the products of numerous people and histories. To turn our backs on being accounted for.

But still, I want to share fragments of whose thinking and writing and living went into sustaining these essays - that which is maybe less visible in the writing, or acknowledged more generally. So:

The afterword to this pamphlet was written in March 2020, during the start of lockdown in the UK, before enough collective pressure (albeit seemingly aimed at reform through liberal representational politics, rather than abolition) was put on the Poetry Foundation that Henry Bienen resigned as president and Willard Bunn III as chairman. But, before that, I learned a lot about the Poetry Foundation—their history and their present—from twitter accounts @creepingmrxist and @gamerpoetics. Some of what I learnt also owes to the Dispatches from the Poetry Wars website, which although is full of interesting critique, is written in such a tediously-typical condescending-male-tone, disguised as a satirical sense of humor, that it's difficult to feel that grateful for the actual writing itself. INCITE's *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex* gives a detailed, broader context to discussions of foundations, white supremacy, and the co-option of radical movements by the state and accelerating capitalism—there's a free PDF online:

<https://libcom.org/files/incite-the-revolution-will-not-be-funded-beyond-the-nonprofit-industrial-complex-2.pdf>

Much of the afterword was thought through ongoing emails with Danny—when much of what I thought, and what he thought, and what I thought about what he thought, and what he thought about what I thought, wormed its way into the writing. You also introduced me to that amazing quote by Anna Mendelssohn about shrinking politics. Several lines are his, as are many of my thoughts in general about poetry.

Questions about care, freedom, individuality and collective living have been massively shaped by your writings over the last years, Jenni: specifically on individualism, collectivity and revolutionary commitment. Thoughts related to these questions were also magnified by a conversation between Cassandra Troyan and Oki Sogumi in *Tripwire* 13.

The questions asked throughout *The we of a position* are indebted to time spent with Jazra and Elena in Athens in winter 2018; to the article ‘Yellow-Vest Diaries’ written by Rona Lorimer; to much of what Dilar Dirik writes about Rojava and internationalist feminism; to emails about writing and witness with Bechaela; to Verity Spott’s blogpost ‘Poetics of Protest’. The poem running throughout the essay was written during and after time spent in Marseille in the autumn of 2018 and winter of early 2019, and is for Lewis, Matti, Agathe, Celia, Euan, Adam, Clémence and Zayn, in solidarity with struggles against the displacement and gentrification of La Plaine.

The photos in *The we of a position*, as well as the one on the back cover of this pamphlet, are by Matti Sutcliffe. More of his photographs here:
<https://longdistanzrunna.wixsite.com/mysite>

The title is borrowed from Tiqqun’s ‘Call’: “The We that speaks here is not a definable, isolated We, the We of a group. It is the We of a *position*.”

The second title, *Not to speak about / only to speak nearby* is borrowed from the filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha: “A speaking that does not objectify, does not point to an object as if it is distant from the speaking subject or absent from the speaking place. A speaking that reflects on itself and can come very close to a subject without, however, seizing or claiming it. A speaking in brief, whose closures are only moments of transition opening up to other possible moments of transition.”

The Katerina Gogou poem was translated by G. Chalkiadakis, and found on Mira’s tumblr: <https://her-moth.tumblr.com/>

While I was writing *Where the image itself senses* I was reading writings by Oleksandr Kolchenko and Oleg Sentsov - both imprisoned by the Russian state - as well as Kirill Medvedev, and an article up at The New Inquiry by Alexey Samoedov: ‘Lessons from Maidan’. As well as rereading *Undoing Border Imperialism* by Harsha

Walia, *What Is Found There* by Adrienne Rich, and a 1997 conversation between Yedda Morrison and Myung Mi Kim.

The google translate screenshot of ‘la langue dedans. la bouche dedans / la gorge dedans / le poumon l’organe seul’ is from Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s *Dictee*.

The title of the third essay is from *3 Summers* by Lisa Robertson: “Walking between the field and the last houses at 10 p.m. / holding the lilacs aloft like a torch / its vital sense of pause / everything will be hesitation / the acts of transposition / muscular, tactile, olfactory / where the image itself senses.”

Photos throughout all four essays, and the final essay *It is almost that*, differ slightly from original publication. The closing poem, through which some of the lines in the prose of the essays first emerged, was written at the time and originally included in a draft of the final essay. The poem was published in *Tenebrae III* (Fathomsun Press) - thanks Kyle.

The fourth essay’s title *It is almost that* is from a 1977 artwork by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, composed of faltering phrases projected onto black-and-white slides; “the humming state of the not-quite this and not-quite that... what familiar taxonomies cannot order.”

There are other things I no longer remember.

from and for friendship:

For Thabit and Haukur - who I owe so much of myself to.

For The Unity Centre collective of 2014-17: Lucy, Jenni, Lizzie, Philo, Lee, Yvonne, Etza, Alieu, Beth, Lewis, Phe, Jas (and very wee Omolola), Dania, Dolly, Mando, Lynne, Patience, Ben, Tamima (and sweet Raffi jamming every computer), Bola, Mahmoud, Polly, Joel, Martha, Kirsty, Dharrish, Mathieu, Babu, Hamdi, Khalid, Sandeep, Emrys. Sorry to anyone I've left out—it was always hard to keep up.

So many thoughts and strength of feeling and shared collective life—whether it was sharing a room every night for months or organizing together in intensity, seeing each other once a year or weekly voice messages—has kept me going. Forever hugs to Roses, Xelu, Flo, Jamie, Mira, Cai, Matti, Euan, Mai-Vân, Karl, Paula. For Lucy again, who I experienced so much of this with.

And especially for Lewis - for making friendship and life together. You were here for, and beside, and through all of this. I'm forever glad we met that evening on the steps of Garnethill all those years ago. So many of these thoughts and experiences (of thinking, doing, reading, listening - and all the little moments in between) were grown with you. Were grown from what continues to be made between us. In friendship, and in struggle. †††

Lotte L.S. is a poet living in the town of Great Yarmouth, at the easterly edges of England. She published an untitled pamphlet—a long poem and short essay—about loss and protest in Iceland in January 2020; and *wake entry*, a short pamphlet with Earthbound Press in October 2020. She started red herring press in summer 2020 to print, publish and distribute local writing in Great Yarmouth.

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FORTHCOMING

11. Kevin Killian, *Selected Amazon Reviews*, Vol. 4, eds. David Buuck & Ted Rees, with an introduction by Matias Viegner.
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