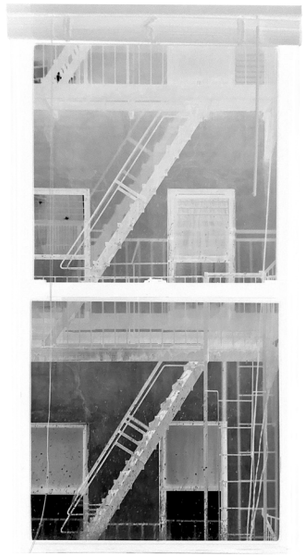

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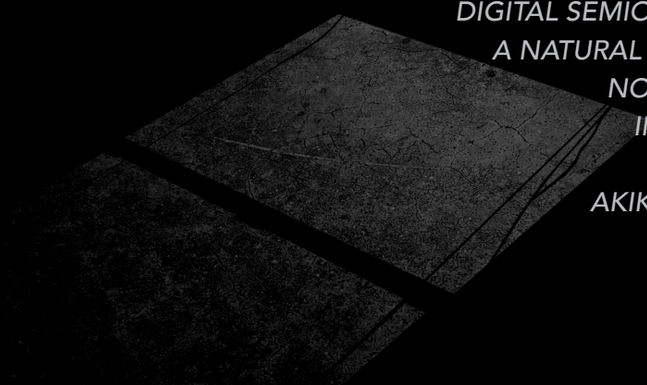

"MY BODY KNOWS UNHEARD-OF SONGS"
DIGITAL SEMIOTICS & PANDEMIC INTIMACY
A NATURAL HISTORY OF DERANGEMENT
NOISE, CHATTER, AND ARTIFICE
INTIMACY AS TRANSPARENCY
EMPIRE'S CAMERAS
AKIKO YOSANO'S TALE OF GENJI
WHERE WE ARE CLOSEST

ISSUE XVIII

COLUMBIA JOURNAL OF LITERARY CRITICISM • ISSUE XVIII 2021

2021

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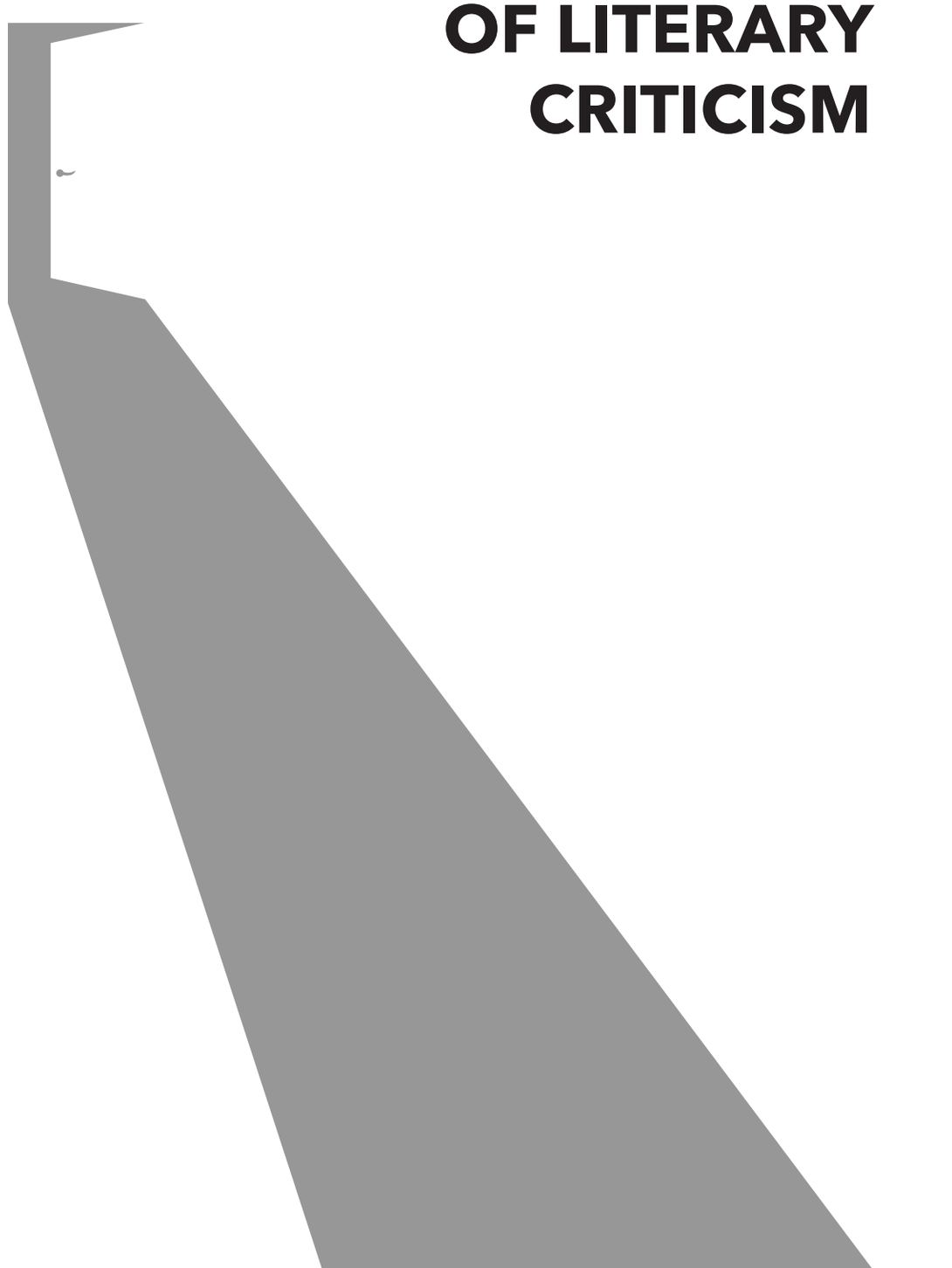
COLUMBIA JOURNAL OF LITERARY CRITICISM



INTIMACY

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Reader,

It is with great pleasure that we invite you to our eighteenth issue.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the structures that once organized our world – from global networks to daily routines and ways of being together – became suddenly unrecognizable. In the name of public health, CJLC's editors and contributors dispersed to spaces near and far. And from our homes, we reckoned with isolation and its attendant vulnerabilities.

Derived from the Latin *intimare*, 'to make familiar,' the word 'intimacy' has taken on new meanings as we've accepted new codes of interaction and molded languages communicable from behind masks. While we grieve the loss of our pre-pandemic intimacies, we wonder at the new grammars of closeness and familiarity generated in this negative space.

In this issue, we present both theorizations and interventions rooted in experiences. The works included here both respond to the legacies of and imagine possible futures for intimacy. Amari-Grey Johnson charts the appropriation of Black syntax in the digital sphere, and Alice Donnellan reflects on the double bind of grief and adoration particular to motherhood. Locating literature's uneasy place in discussions of climate change, Sam Clark forges a reconciliation. Jessica Xing proposes questions of silence and of noise, and Robbie Spratt examines relationships in Paris at the height of the HIV-AIDS crisis. Margaux Emmanuel inspects the intimacies and chasms that arise in the act of translation, while Daniel Delgado and Ellen von zur Muehlen discuss the fraught ties of labor that bind the U.S. and Mexico. Finally, Lilly Cao and Campbell Campbell interview Naima Green about portraits of marginality and what it means to be at home.

The works in this issue come from a diverse cohort of undergraduate authors and artists who present meditations on intimacy that are at once distinct and complementary. We hope you enjoy reading this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

We would like to thank Nicholas Dames, our faculty advisor, for his continued help and inspiration, as well as Michelle Wilson and the rest of the staff at the Columbia Libraries for their generous guidance and resources. We also extend our thanks to Philip Mascantonio, our financial advisor, and Alyza Tüchler, the treasurer for the Activities Board at Columbia, for their logistical support in the realization of this issue. We also thank Lilly Cao, our fellow student and graphic designer, for her talented work on the issue's cover page and collation, without which a thoughtfully unified issue would not have been possible. Finally, we would like to thank our wonderful editors and contributors for making it all possible – thank you for your remarkable insight, creative collaborations, your humor, and your spirit.

With gratitude,
Rea Rustagi, Thalia von Moltke, and Julia Ulziisaikhan
Editors-in-Chief

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ARTISTS

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"My Body Knows Unheard of Songs"

Variations of Maternal Intimacy in the Works of Cécile Sauvage, Hélène Cixous, and Maggie Nelson

Alice Donnellan

Fallait-il que je sois la plante
Qui voit le vent ravir son grain
Et qui reste sèche et craquante,
Les pieds enchaînés au terrain?

Tu n'es plus tout à moi. Ta tête
Réfléchit déjà d'autres cieux
Et c'est l'ombre de la tempête
Qui déjà monte dans tes yeux.

Did I have to be the plant
Who sees the wind steal her seeds
And who retires dry and crisp,
With feet chained to the earth?

You are no longer mine alone.
Your head already reflects other skies,
And the shadow of the storm
Already rises in your eyes.

Excerpt from *Te voilà hors de l'alvéole…* ("Here You Are Outside The Honeycomb…") in *L'me en bourgeon* ("The Soul in Bud") (1910) by Cécile Sauvage, translated by Alice Donnellan.

In 1908, shortly after giving birth to her first son, Cécile Sauvage, a young poet from rural south-eastern France, grieves the alteration of physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy with her newborn son. Sauvage engenders her coming of age as a mother in twenty poems, which together comprise *L'Âme en bourgeon* ("The Soul in Bud") forming the latter part of her first 1910 collection *Tandis que la terre tourne* ("As the Earth Spins").Through the poetic figuration of her conflicting joys and melancholies with maternal status, Sauvage's works reflect an oscillation between her embodiment of and detachment from the natural environment. While pregnancy manifests the closest and most fulfilling relationship possible for Sauvage, childbirth signifies a distancing of the relationship with her son, herself, and the natural world. She shifts between embracing and subverting the romanticization of motherhood through natural imagery to de-romanticize the reckoning bound up with the decentering of self intrinsic to motherhood. Her poems serve not only to foreground the subjects of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood in an art form that about these experiences, but functions, moreover, to complicate facile notions of maternal agency, eroticism, and death.

Sauvage grapples with her own fatalistic arc of maternity that moves from prenatal unity to maternal loneliness. In doing so, she both foreshadows and frustrates more recent feminist writing. On the one hand, Sauvage celebrates the ecstasy of communion with nature through pregnancy and seems to embrace dominant narratives that naturalize and thereby glorify motherhood. However, her disempowered subjecthood following birth leaves her questioning the natural beauty of reproduction's teleology.
But perhaps this is not a contradiction: Sauvage's poems seem to both accord with the notion of compulsory motherhood even while they expose painful revelations of the fleeting nature of maternal intimacy. As comparative aids in navigating Sauvage's troubled notions of motherhood, two seminal works of feminist and queer writing help bring her ardent confessions into conversation with more recent discourse.

The first is Hélène Cixous' 1975 essay *La Rire de la méduse* ("The Laugh of the Medusa) and its exhortation for *écriture féminine* ("feminine writing"), writing that transcends the essentializing categories of patriarchal language and encourages self-authorship. Despite her usage of gender terms to describe the kinds of writing that she desires, Cixous sees *écriture féminine* as deconstructing a gender binary that frees up other modes of relating to the body and to one another. Cixous recommends that marginalized writers draw from bodily experiences to recuperate the part of the self othered throughout literature by the glorification of the white male experience. The collapse of distinctions in Sauvage's poems between her body, the fetus, and the natural world during pregnancy forces an experience of alienation from experiences of autonomy, comfort, and love following childbirth.

Sauvage's celebration of the eroticism of her reproductive body and her (ultimately thwarted) desire for fulfillment in creating a child speak to the taboo topics of maternal sexuality and identification with one's child tackled by Maggie Nelson in her 2015 memoir *The Argonauts*. Interweaving a narrative of her personal experience with queer and feminist discourse surrounding motherhood, Nelson examines her own conflicting responses to becoming a mother and developing attachments to her child. Importantly, her work highlights the danger of Sauvage's conception of the fetus as the means to achieving Cixous' goal of recovering the othered part of oneself through writing. At stake is Sauvage's very sense of aliveness and connection with the world. Motivated by the impulse of "no wave" feminism,[1] this paper explores how reading more recent personal writing, feminist discourse, and century-year-old poems together can generate nuanced understandings of motherhoods past, present, and future.

Sauvage's Embodied Writing as *Écriture Féminine*

Sauvage finds a joyous sense of fulfilment by inscribing her body onto the natural world and embracing the erotic sensations of pregnancy. Sauvage anticipates Cixous' vision for the inscription of the body as a source of non-patriarchal expression. Both writers also draw on the inextricable connections between artistic production and procreation. Regarding the metaphorical function of motherhood, however, the two vastly differ. Cixous draws on maternal imagery to describe the act of writing about one's own bodily experiences as a source of self-care and artistic creativity in a patriarchal world. For Sauvage, writing serves as a practice that renders legible the grave consequences of motherhood. While pregnancy lends itself to the dream of intimate connection with oneself and the world, childbirth and her entrance into motherhood leaves her othered from herself. In order to draw out the strengths and limitations of Sauvage's conceptions of motherhood, it is first necessary to summarise the most essential points of Cixous' essay on recuperating the female body.

Cixous begins, "I shall speak about women's writing: about what it will do. Woman must write her self" (Cixous 875). She bemoans the dearth of published women and incites women to use their bodies as a source for a new language that is necessary for the expression of their experiences. As the following polemical line makes clear, "Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it" (876), Cixous perceives a direct relationship between

claiming the act of writing for herself and claiming her body and therefore attempts to counter the Freudian and Lacanian "psychoanalytic closure" that theorizes woman as the lack in relation to the phallus and as the signifier that refers back to the signified respectively (892). Cixous incites women to write a language that does not rest on binary differentiation in which woman is defined in relation to (and as a subtraction of) man. Cixous asserts that *écriture féminine* confounds the strictures of "definition" and that it exists nonetheless (883).

Sauvage's exuberant embodiment of her life-giving powers and her connection to the growth of the natural world dispels the shadowy notion of the feminine as lack. To open the collection, she invokes the muse of Nature which "Lends to [her] its airy gesture of the skies"[2] so that by the end of the poem she embodies an Ops-like goddess-of-the-harvest tending to the world and her son who "Laughs like Jupiter beneath the nourishing teats."[3] Sauvage lays claim to her body by collapsing it with the external natural realm. The motifs of nature and reproduction as entwined with Sauvage's body are threaded through the entirety of the collection: her lifeblood is tree sap or "sève"; her womb is a honeycomb cell or "alvéole"; her flanks bear seedlings; the two of them are flowers, buds, bees, lambs, sheep, and the sublime sunset described in *L'Agneau* ("The Lamb"). She draws on late-nineteenth-century French Symbolist poets' love of wordplay, as well as the animals of Biblical allegory, to construct her own language with varied resonances. In depicting herself as nourishing and being nourished by the world, Sauvage exceeds the human body's limits and positions herself in an interstitial space between human, animal, and plant. Her act of creation rejuvenates her own sense of vitality; this energy springs from the natural world and in turn generates a space for her within it.

Likewise, Cixous highlights the restorative act of writing later on in her essay by expanding her notion of *écriture féminine* using the companion term "encre blanche" ("white ink"), an allusion to the nourishment of breast milk as well as a transparent form of communication. In a section called "*Woman for women*," she describes women as mothers to themselves and "mother" as a metaphor for the healing act of writing. She narrates the fractured condition of a woman who is produced by the "other" within her. Yet "[t]he locus of the other" is identified as a "source" for change that can be harnessed: "[e]verything will be changed once woman gives woman to the other woman" (Cixous 881). Cixous identifies writing as the act of mothering the "other" within oneself, going as far as to describe the mother as a literary device: "[t]he mother, too, is a metaphor. It is necessary and sufficient that the best of herself be given to woman by another woman for her to be able to love herself and return in love the body that was "born" to her (Ibid.). Mothering, when directed toward the self, recuperates the othered self.

One part of the othered self that Sauvage recovers is the erogenous nature of her body: in fact, the poet perceives sexual sensation as integral to her maternal body. Her body's sensual capacity is intrinsic to her maternal "lifeblood" flowing within her son and the natural world. One such example can be found in *Nature, laisse-moi…* ("Nature, leave me to…") when she asks of nature to "Let [her] while looking at the plum of the bushes / Sense that it is blue between the blonde leaves / From having sucked the life of [her] deep vein."[4] In addressing her yet-unborn son, she acknowledges the intimate sharing of her emotions through her blood: "You know what fervour, what burning fevers / Unleash in my vein a fierce torrent."[5] Once her son is born, she encourages him to "Weigh between your hands the breast of the climbing vines"[6] and see the natural world as an extension of his mother. Alongside the aforementioned use of puns, these lines express the expansiveness of her feelings in a way that corresponds to Cixous' own interest in female eroticism as an infinite realm of sensations. In feeling that she is a part of everything and that everything is a part of her, Sauvage casts what Cixous describes as the "miniscule-immense" areas of her body onto the delicate particulars and sweeping scenery of nature (885). For Sauvage, her erotic and pregnant body together act to expand the scale of bodily sensations. The erotics of motherhood therefore plays a key part in her mystical belief in the mutual immanence of her body and nature.[7]

If pregnancy encapsulates her creative and erotic energies, then her empty postpartum body, both silent and sexless, constitutes her death. In the allegorical poem *L'Abeille* ("The Bee"), she grieves "[h]er downy belly where life beats no more."[8] The image carries the dual significations of the bee's death and the emptiness inside Sauvage after childbirth. The bee sting in its "its soft indecency"[9] which "[l]ets loose the doleful spurt of her sting"[10] represents a parallel loss of sexuality styled as the loss of male virility (73). The suggestions or invocations in these lines of phallic and uterine imagery underscores the total impotence of the creature – bee and mother alike. As eroticism and reproduction are entwined, the evacuation of sexuality suggests that the end of pregnancy heralds absence of life and loss of pleasure. Prenatal maternal and sexual energies are, for Sauvage, forms of "her beautiful desire that made of her a soul"[11] and it is the absence of desire that now renders her mute and lonely: "[h]erself, without a voice, surrenders to silence."[12] Sauvage's simultaneously erotic, maternal, and natural articulation of pregnancy answers Cixous' own call for a "mother tongue" which "will be set reverberating by more than one language" and by the writing of the woman's body (885). Yet this quote points to how the lived dream of unity and creation during pregnancy is transitory. Sauvage's contemplations of childbirth can be read as a warning in identifying so fully with the state of pregnancy. While Cixous invokes mothering as a means of healing, for Sauvage, childbirth metaphorically functions as an othering process, since Sauvage finds herself distanced from complete autonomy.

Sauvage ruminates on the flawed notion of finding fulfilment in maternal destiny in a way that dovetails with Cixous' prioritisation of desire over destiny. Cixous insists to those who write that it is "not about destiny, but about the adventure of such and such a drive" (885). And yet Sauvage's desire for the intense emotional, physical, and mystical intimacy of pregnancy will remain unfulfilled in the emotional abjection that follows birth. With reference to pregnancy, she writes in *Enfant, pâle embryon*, "[w]hat other embrace will seem to me as strong?"[13] This line belies how believing her fetus to fulfil her desire for emotional intimacy and understanding frames childbirth and motherhood as othering experiences. In the conclusion of *On te mit à côté de moi* ("You were laid beside me…"), Sauvage contends with feeling frigid toward her newborn son, who is sensitive to such cold ("frileux"), and preemptively mournful of his mortality (he is described as being born elderly) (Sauvage 67). She self-protectively distances herself from the vulnerable child of her creative work so as not to suffer additionally from his pain while confronting the futility of her reproductive labor. In explicit reference to a loss of agency over her own destiny, she feels that her son curves "the arc of [her] sky toward [his] little sphere."[14] To Sauvage, childbirth signifies a reckoning with the conflicting impulse to protect her son and devote her life to him as well as to numb herself to the pain of his loss. She questions the emotional double bind of maternal love – the love of possession and protection – and the necessity of letting go, for her son has "dawned for the world."[15] As a mother, Sauvage no longer has a destiny unto herself but faces a destiny that is inextricably bound up with the life she has created. Tragically, the maternal role of protection is impossible to fulfill since his birth requires severance from her protective body. Thus, Sauvage is not only confronted with the inability to uphold her responsibilities toward her son, but she is also left unfulfilled by their separation. The fatalistic destiny of maternity precludes Sauvage's desire for lifelong intimacy. She is left othered by the child who briefly fulfilled her and with whose pain she is bound to identify.

To briefly summarise, her fetus acts as the locus of self-recognition for her solitude and as an empathetic companion. Due to her overidentification with her unborn son, childbirth presents itself as the death of intimacy. Sauvage envisions being reduced to living for and in support of a child she much loves but can do little to protect. Ultimately, she becomes disillusioned from the natural world for which she once felt such unity and resigns to her fate of suffering and solitude as mother. The process of mothering Cixous advocates for is only healing when applied to the self; mothering her son leaves Sauvage disconnected from her body, desires, and the world.

"Helix of Hope and Fear": The Dangers of Self-Identification with the Child[16]

Maggie Nelson writes from the radically different perspective of a queer mother in *The Argonauts* about facing similar struggles as Sauvage during pregnancy and childbirth. Both writers consider the maintenance of a sense of separate identity as a mother and this separation as related to death. Nelson's frank tone and attention to the cordoned off topics of physical trauma due to pregnancy and childbirth as well as death make plain the issues of self-identity and mortality presented in *L'Âme en bourgeon*. Nelson's response to these issues acts as a foil to Sauvage's overwhelming sense of loss in giving birth, the mystical implications of separation, and the latter's inability to improvise a motherhood that accounts for her feelings and rights. Paradoxically, it is in *not* identifying with her son that Nelson finds self-contentment, while Sauvage's sense of self fragments due to investing so much symbolism and emotion into her temporary physical intimacy with her fetus.

Nelson writes in explicit terms about the dangers to which Sauvage yields: those of totalizing identification with and emotional dependence upon a child. While Nelson somewhat ruefully admits that her baby Iggy "holds her" (45), Sauvage is less abashed in describing her emotional dependence on her unborn son. In *Enfant, pâle embryon*, Sauvage directly addresses her embryo regarding the concomitant joy in and fears for their connection: "O my little mirror who sees my solitude / Leaning anxiously beside your crystal."[17] (52). Sauvage identifies the embryo not as an exact reflection of herself but rather as the object that enables her to see herself. In noting that the embryo is also conscious of the solitude it reflects (53), Sauvage subsumes her own downcast feelings out of empathy for her fetus. Sauvage seems at once concerned for the emotional response of her fetus to her anxiety and grateful for its companionship. She is less hesitant than Nelson to commit to what the latter describes as "the mistake of needing [the child] as much as or more than [it] needs me" knowing that the "affair will likely become unrequited" (Nelson 44-5). Rather, Sauvage attaches herself to her unborn son while recognizing the inevitability of letting go and having to bear the pain of separation:

> Fallait-il que je sois la plante
> Qui voit le vent ravir son grain
> Et qui reste sèche et craquante,
> Les pieds enchaînés au terrain?
>
> Did I have to be the plant
> Who sees the wind steal her seed
> And who retires dry and crisp,
> With feet chained to the earth?
>
> (Sauvage 66)

By comparison, Nelson's more guarded approach to moments in which she falls helplessly in love with her newborn clarifies the nature of Sauvage's love: far from blind to the inevitability of separation, she nevertheless surrenders to predetermined maternal sorrow. The fetus is the locus of self-recognition for Sauvage and her desire to escape loneliness and connect with her environment. In anticipation of childbirth, she utterly disconnects from a world she now perceives as soulless due to the loss of intimacy with her son upon giving birth and the preemptive mourning of his eventual death:

> Mais de l'ordre apparent bientôt tu comprendras
> Le triste agencement, les vernis, les plâtras.
> En son lustre la fleur te paraîtra moins nette,
> Tu connaîtras que l'être est pris par la tempête
> Comme un grain dans le vent.
>
> Alors tu me diras: - Qu'avez-vous fait, ma mère?
> J'inclinais au repos, l'obscurité légère
> Recueillait sans savoir mon germe inconscient
> Et pour moi vous avez éclairé le néant. . .
> - Qu' ai-je fait, mon enfant?
>
> But of the apparent order soon you will comprehend
> The sad arrangement, the varnish, the flakes of plaster.
> In its luster the flower will appear to you less clear,
> You will know that being is snatched by the tempest
> Like a seed in the wind.
>
> So you will say to me: —What have you done, mother?
> I wished to rest, the light obscurity
> Reaped without knowing my unknowing sapling
> And for me you have illuminated the void…
> — What have I done, my child?
>
> (Sauvage 51)

Sauvage's jubilant view of the world is transformed by the loss of maternal intimacy and by a confrontation with mortality into a crushingly fatalistic outlook. In response to her foreboding wisdom, the fetus voices its mother's guilty conscience for initiating the creation of a new life which she cannot protect. Tragically, the former mother-goddess of Nature only realizes her status as a mortal subject stuck in an indifferent and deathly world when close to giving birth. While she feels disempowered to change her predicament, she nevertheless gains awareness of the true hostility of nature toward creation through dialogue with her fetus, who also acts here as her conscience.

L'Âme en bourgeon draws attention to a perception of pregnancy shared by Nelson and Sauvage alike as situated within a matrix of violence, death, and separation. While Nelson is fearful of her own mortality during childbirth, she frames the separation of birth as a hopeful lesson for her son on independence and the ability to outlive the mother who gave him life. Sauvage, however, fears childbirth as a metaphor for death of an intimate relationship with herself, her son, and by extension, the world. Nelson sees death as related to the maternal body which Sauvage similarly allegorizes in the aforementioned poem *L'Abeille*. Dedicating space to descriptions of the grueling and grisly emotional and physical challenges undergone by her pregnant body, Nelson relates the proximity of childbirth to death. She manifests the connection between the two in a dramatic interleaving of her own experience of labor with her partner's experience of watching his mother pass away. Nelson focuses on how childbirth substantiates the boundary between herself and her son as a healthy and freeing detachment. She sees both mother and death as sharing the role of instructor on the subject of "maternal finitude": the mother, in giving birth to the child, teaches it the same lesson as death — this is where you end and others begin (Nelson 95-6). However, Sauvage wrestles with accepting "maternal finitude" and instead describes childbirth in mournful images of letting go. In the conclusion of *On te mit à côté de moi…* (Sauvage 67), she first describes her womb embracing her child, then her arms, "[t]hen these arms slowly fall back down / Sensing a moment ago that [her child] dawned for the world." Her imagery here implies a new dichotomy between herself and the world due to her loss of a reproductive role and possession of her son. The reflections of her pregnant body in nature and her indulgent fantasies as creator of the world cannot overcome "the sober truth," the words with which she concludes the collection (76). The truth is that of the unavoidable separation between creator and creation. This separation at birth is the death of an ideal intimacy and signals a return to solitude for Sauvage.

Conclusion

In *L'Âme en bourgeon*, pregnancy represents an ultimate sense of unity with the self and the world to which motherhood is the cruel antithesis. To borrow a phrase from Cixous, Sauvage's body "knows unheard of songs" of eroticism, euphoria, and self-recognition in pregnancy as well as disunion and death after childbirth (876). Her poems bind together the experiences of the maternal and erotic body from which Cixous encourages us to speak. They also trouble Nelson's notion that the mother can avoid the pitfall of identifying with her child to the point of subsuming her own identity. Is it possible to mother ourselves as well as mothering any children that we may have?

In speaking from her body, Sauvage is able to recognise how she is as much subject to Nature's pain and suffering as she is an agent of its reproductive powers. Her questioning of "natural" motherhood is all the more timely given ongoing efforts by a Xenofeminist collective to provoke a new radically inclusive and anti-naturalist movement. Their 2018 proclamation of "If nature is unjust, change nature" promotes resistance where Sauvage yields to the pain-ridden "natural" role of mother (Laboria Cuboniks 0x1A). The issues raised by Sauvage in *L'Âme en bourgeon* endure for consideration by poets and feminists today: How will Artificial Reproductive Technologies (e.g. new IVF techniques, ectogenesis, IVG) modulate physical and emotional connections between mother and child? What new metaphors inscribe these connections? Finally, how can we make the world a place worthy of women, mothers, as well as newborns? What is certain is that Sauvage's work elevates motherhood to a worthy subject of poetry and poetry to a worthy means of interrogating and redesigning motherhood.

Alice Donnellan is an undergraduate senior at Harvard University, majoring in Comparative Literature with a secondary field in Film Production. Their interests span representations of gender and sex identities in film, queer feminism and family abolition, modernist French and British poetry, and the history and culture of China and Taiwan.

Notes

1 "No wave" feminism seeks to acknowledge and embrace the complexities of women's rights and feminism that are overlooked by the rubric of "First," "Second," and "Third Wave" feminism and its implication of linear progression (Hewitt).
2 "*Me prête sur l'azur son geste aérien*" (Sauvage 47).
3 "*Rit comme Jupiter sous les pis nourriciers*" (Sauvage 48).
4 "*Laisse qu'en regardent la prune des buissons / Je sente qu'elle est blue entre les feuilles blondes / D'avoir sucé la vie à ma veine profonde*" (Sauvage 47).

5 "*Tu sais quelles ferveurs, quelles brûlantes fièvres / Dechaînent dans ma veine un torrent acharné*" (Sauvage 53).

6 "*Soupèse entre tes mains la mamelle des treilles*" (Sauvage 55).

7 As Béatrice Marchal notes in her revelatory scholarship of Sauvage's later love poems and letters, the poet transcends the language of simile and metaphor to draw direct equivalence between eroticism and mysticism (44).

8 "*Son ventre duveteux où ne bat plus la vie*" (Sauvage 73).

9 "*sa molle indécence*" (Ibid.).

10 "*Laisse sortir le jet dolent de l'aiguillon*" (Ibid.).

11 "*...son beau désir qui lui faisait une âme*" (Ibid.).

12 "*Elle-même sans voix s'abandonne au silence*" (Ibid.).

13 "*Quel autre enlacement me paraîtra plus fort?*" (Sauvage 53).

14 "*...mon ciel sur [sa] petite sphère*" (Sauvage 67).

15 "*venais d'éclore pour la terre*" (Ibid.).

16 "Babies grow in a helix of hope and fear; gestating draws one but deeper into the spiral. It isn't cruel in there, but it's dark" (Nelson 92).

17 "*O mon petit miroir qui voit ma solitude / Se pencher anxieuse au bord de ton cristal*" (Sauvage 52).

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Untitled, *35-mm film scan, Emily Sieler.*

Setting: Conversation – the site where interpersonal reality is created and existence is realized

Characters:

1. Language – a failing endeavor
2. Meaning – negotiated across the temporal and social experience of linguistic change
3. Goal – to cultivate a precise experience

Premised on the silence of singularity, Hannah Arendt roots the human condition in the embodiment of plurality, "the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world" (Arendt 7).

Distinguishing between the fact of existence and the act thereof, Arendt reminds us where the transition occurs:

"the language of the Romans….used the words 'to live' and 'to be among men' (inter homines esse) or 'to die' and 'to cease to be among men' (inter homines esse desinere) as synonyms" (8).

Digital Semiotics & Pandemic Intimacy

Or What Being (Black) on Twitter Has Revealed to Me

Amari-Grey Johnson

Contemplation starts in media res

This co-constructed reality, *this* conversation, is a series of approximated forms. The sensual poetics generated by such forms reiterates the originating vastness of this reality. For language is unable to confer the experience of a person's meaning.

The promise of the sentence represents an attempt to narrow this approximation by invoking the auxiliary powers of context and performance. In our compulsion to construe reality, to (be) perceive(d), we are subject to the failure of conversation, yet a need to reconcile the miscommunication of self, to create *something*, persists.

Here, in the virtual sphere, the "profile" (you) take up the act of the speech-performance, disrupting a codified distinction between physical and digital identity and the act or result of speaking.

Who is you?

Tisha Lewis Ellison outlines a translation of identity into digital space that mirrors the Piercian model of semiotics. The Piercian model, which reinvents Saussure's signifier/signified semiotic framework, distinguishes between the "the sign vehicle (e.g., a letter, word, picture, or sound) and its referent" (Smalls, "Race, SIGNS, and the Body" 325). Participation in the digital realm divides the self along axes of the "real, virtual, and projective" (Ellison 337). Applied to social media, the "real" is the assumed body of the user, the "virtual" is the profile, and the "projective" negotiates between the two, forming the assembled consciousnesses with which we interact.

> Charles Sanders Peirce offers a relational model of semiotics that inserts a third component in the mediation of signs: mediation itself, which he termed the "interpretant" (1974). Ultimately, the Peircian model introduces a process, or relation, to Saussure's static dyad and reconfigures the "signified" as "object" (i.e., the dynamical object as the thing in the world being denoted by the sign and the immediate object as the meaning created vis-à-vis the sign) (Smalls, "Race, SIGNS, and the Body" 325).

As the creation of an online profile materializes a new object, this projection gains meaning as both a "thing in the world" and an auxiliary to the "sign", the physical self. When the realm of discourse shifts completely to the digital, the projective self is our only access to the sign, the act of signification itself takes on a presence.

The (digital) context of the exchange figures in this creation by centralizing choices regarded in analog speech as "non-linguistic extras" (Crystal 139). Social media interfaces, Twitter in this case, engage David Crystal's two arenas of "Internet semiotics": *multimodality*, "the various ways in which users interact with the technology", and *multimedia*, "the use of text, speech, music….video, still photography, and other forms of interactivity" (139). The digital context situates conversation on a visual plane that is manipulable by the speaker, the spoken, and the spoken to. In this way, text not only communicates through content-meaning but also through its arrangement around the elements of the screen, which are themselves malleable. Reference begins to compound itself by amplifying indexical multiplicities, allowing us to attempt to compensate for what is lost in speech-performance by sensory expansion.

Transforming the range of linguo-visual opportunities extends the possibilities of what language is and what it *can be*, a potentially new landscape for self-translation/creation, community formation, and a deduction or intentional complication of the intra-linguistic gap. The nature of digital communication, "extend[ing] and limit[ing] the ways in which we can operate in spoken, written, and signed language", extends and limits the human condition (139).

The ability to converse in the digital is particularly essential right now, in isolation (more or less), as we (you) are barred from "all human activities and [are] defined [now] from the viewpoint of the absolute quiet of contemplation" (Arendt 15).

Are you lonely?

I (We) come Here not to be:

Focus on the general negative condition of the human can detract from the particular social death of black enslavement and its "afterlives" (us). For the black slave, communal (dis)identification collimates a (un)construction of the self – a " negation of the subject" through which blackness is rendered fungible (Hartman 231). "Put differently, the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values…the surrogate for the master's body….and the sign of his power and dominion" (21).

Extracted from the status of enslavement, Carlyle Fielding Stewart wrestles with the particular significance of black spirituality and marks it as the origin and essence of a black consciousness. "Stewart views African-American spirituality and culture as creative, integrative, and transformative forces that have undergirded the quest for social and political freedom over time" (xi). Read as an interpretive

force, spirituality diffuses a liberatory social space into a liminal *sociality*, a plane in which blackness can be (re)constituted. Stewart situates the creative possibilities of spirituality such that the theological takes up discursive responsibility, "represent[ing] the full matrix of beliefs, powers, values, and behaviors that shape people's consciousness, understanding, and capacity of themselves[...]" [*my* working definition of language] (Yusoff 50). The space of transformation intersticed in black socialities, "crafted in the indices of fungibility and fugitivity" engages the "senses as theoreticians" to locate within "black oral culture of the New World…a counter-aesthetic" whose positionality carries the virtual, multimodal self (50). Flight into digital space forms a precondition recalling Christina Sharpe's "Trans*Atlantic":

> That place, condition, or process that appears alongside and in relation to the Black Atlantic but also in excess of its currents. I want to think Trans* in a variety of ways that try to get at something *about* or *toward* the range of trans*formations enacted on and by Black bodies….as a means to mark the ways the slave and the Black occupy what Saidiya Hartman calls the "position of the unthought" (Hartman and Wilderson 20003). The asterisk after the prefix "trans" holds the space open for thinking (from and into that position). It speaks, as well, to a range of embodied experiences called gender and to Euro-Western gender's dismantling, its inability to hold in/on Black flesh.

Making manifest an "embodied experience" of "dismantling" against the imposed conditions of whiteness, around the captive position of the unthought, reflects the slippage of blackness through fugitivity, a "*trans*plantation to reconceptualize how black bodies reclaimed a right to geography" first in the earth across the Atlantic, now in the digital beneath (Yusoff).

Similar to the interpretive work of black spiritual space, as Black Twitter extends the creative possibilities of blackness, by engaging semiotic exchange, We (black users) actively reconstitute not only the formation of blackness but the terms thereof.

André Brock's conception of Black Twitter as "Twitter's mediation of Black cultural discourse, or "signfiyin' (Gates 1983)" highlights the centrality of language formation in the tradition of black agency and begins to implicate the public realm in its use (530).

> Twitter's discourse conventions, ubiquity, and social features encouraged increased Black participation….In particular, Black hashtag signifying revealed alternate Twitter discourses to the mainstream and encourages a formulation of Black Twitter as a "social public"; a community constructed through [its] use of social media by outsiders and insiders alike (530).

Digital space redefines the inherent "fungibility" of blackness by selecting new avenues of transformation, evident especially when those avenues no longer make up for what is *lost* in speech but replace speech itself. Brock's investigations of black Twitter's "cultural conversation" implicates language – both the speech act and act of speaking – in the realm's potential energy. Ultimately, the fungibility of virtual blackness simulates the mediation of blackness on the "physical" plane such that the effects of the death of the social – identificatory anxiety and (in)visibility – are premised on the social death.

Wait,

run that back

Krystal A. Smalls locates this discursive formation within a genealogy of language in which black Twitter might be read as the cultural history of "'counter language' [... or] 'a conscious attempt on the part of US slaves and their descendants to represent an alternative reality'" (Smalls, "Race, SIGNS, and the Body" 327).

Black digital spaces, like their physical antecedents, play a metalinguistic role in the formation of black consciousness (grammar) as an act of subterfuge (Hartman 8). Hidden within/around a now digital grammar of whiteness, Black Twitter

> …grapple[s] with the complexities of black subjectivity and the way it transpires in the afterlife of slavery (Hartman 1997). And, in this particular moment of that long afterlife, when digital sociality is no longer a tangential or optional mode of being for so many black young people around the world, we must bear witness to their intensely public mediation of a subjectivity that is emphatically human *and* emphatically black (Smalls, "Languages of Liberation 59).

Both the act of subversion and a reliance on the intangible metalinguistic sense reflect a strategy of fugitivity bound up with the contemporary attraction to an intentionally racialized digital space.

Smalls speaks on "digital emphatic blackness," an emphasized performance of recognized or stereotypical black signs that indicate referential meaning as well as racial and gender indices; the necessity of signage within digital space implies the persecution of those signs beyond the digital space and assumes the *non*existence of a black sense of place outside of the digital (7).

The formation of a sensory grammar in fugitive digital space continues the tradition of black discursive agency such that Black Twitter effaces not only the "social public" that Brock speaks about but also a metalinguistic sociality. Instead, racialized digital space embodies black expression through a lexicon with its own potentialities, structures, and requirements for authenticity. An exercise in world-building as much as language-making, Black Twitter materializes a political temporality and subjectivity which users can engage to define themselves in relation.

Naming a generational moment when "digital sociality is no longer a tangential or optional mode of being", Smalls parenthetically invokes the conditions of quarantine in which the digital is the primary mode of being: the politic of digital fugitivity and the projective self are oppositional constructions; each are extractions of being – from the physical plane and the observable self, respectively. For this reason, digital profiles are an *extension* of our presence, a space predicated on the assumption that it is *not* the only plane that exists; nonetheless, as if in an extended isolation(i.e. *quarantine*), access to the physical self is completely lost.

For many, particularly young people, extended loneliness can induce a desire for parasocial interaction that ushers a generational flight to digital space (Walsh). This identificatory anxiety intensifies the process of self-creation such that the stakes of the projective self are heightened. In pursuing recognition, Black Twitter's occupancy of racialized digital space then reflects a double fugitivity from/towards both visibility and tangibility.

Gestures wildly

In the total absence of the physical, what power do our "projective selves" hold?

If the digital becomes our only access to the other, the projective self, a negotiation between the on- and offline, flattens into (indeed is subsumed by the notion of) the virtual.

What happens when Twitter is no longer an extension of ourselves but our sole contact with one another? When black communities gather digitally rather than physically? At what point might race change from casual to compulsory in digital identification? In other words, how do emphatically black signs and signers become *necessarily* black?

To quell pandemic anxieties, We (black people) may exist on the plane of digital blackness to destabilize distance and approximate presence in the metalinguistic consciousness. "Black Twitter (digital) practice draws upon cultural referents and discourse conventions ("signifyin") drawing from African American culture" such that we conjure what Carlyle Fielding Stewart calls "a black soul force" – "the capacity to create, interpret, and construct [a] reality," here within the realm of the digital just as the soul in the body (Stewart 104; Brock 1013). The co-creation of a connective/communal plane now alternates between a compulsion and intention, a dual state of signifyin and the awareness thereof. Blackness enters the frame of consciousness such that its fungibility is self-perceived.

This frame is duplicitous.

As black twitter engages, and acts to engage, a metalanguage within a public sphere, the performance of emphatic, necessary blackness attracts non-black viewership. Becoming "increasingly visible", "black internet usage….dominate[s] Twitter discourse" such that Black "narrative acts" then develop beyond the identificatory needs of their enablers into a phenomenon engaged by non-black users. In the end, blackness is revealed as the underlying material resource for the network (Brock 529; Browne).

Twitter's prototypical whiteness, realized and revealed through its programmatic assumptions, necessitate an antithesis for their functioning. In other words, the algorithmic structure of the site therefore implicitly understands digital blackness as its *dark matter*, the

invisibilized infrastructure through which legibility is negotiated. The maintenance of this structure then simultaneously suppresses and hyperfixates on blackness.

For example, Twitter "continually suspends accounts of Black organizers" and restricts communication to hinder community organizing (an inheritance of colonial policing), disproportionately targeting black speech and imposing a linguo-ontological silence (Strike; Ghaffary). These suppressive strategies, enacted by digital overseers (moderators), are the "spectacles of mastery orchestrated by….the slaveholding class [see "Jack", the CEO of Twitter] to establish its dominion and regulate the little leisure" of fugitive space (Hartman 8). Nevertheless, the appropriation of policed black semiotic and linguistic patterns enacts a form of cultural currency.

The acts of digital blackface, minstrelsy, metalinguistic appropriation, explicates blackness as the material resource for building power, platform, and virtual agencies. Emphasized by an anxiety for identification, the measure of this legibility has become increasingly precise and the desire for it pathological. Non-black users appropriate black signage (albeit incorrectly) as a series of spectacles, momentarily engaging the apparatus of surveillance to exit the perceptive void of quarantine.[1] The placement of one's non-black self into the frame evokes a pleasure in being read particularly critical in isolation and available only in the absence of consequences.

Cultural appropriation, beyond the virtual, is an act of eroticism in which the taboo of blackness is enjoyed by those who can relinquish it. Those who engage in culturally appropriative acts perform hypervisibility before abdicating into a norm of privacy; the option for privacy maintains an exemption from perception and identification, yet privacy itself approaches a pathological state as the option is removed, when its consumer is indefinitely secluded. Urgently now, non-black Twitter users eschew their state of privacy – having become their sole space of existence in pandemic – in order to be (hyper)visible for the moments of their choosing. The ephemerality of this voyeurism stimulates an erotic pleasure that satisfies their relational withdrawal and avoids the "constant threat of a suspension" to which black users are subject (Sankin).

Conclusions // my continued thoughts

If language is the result of the human condition and blackness finds metalanguage, then blackness escapes the *need* to be human, excelling inistead in its ability to be un-thought, emphatically more than – something *after*.

A "post" more than a "counterlanguage", a *refusal* rather than a response, Black soul force(s), digital or otherwise, do not endeavor to approximate white grammars, but constantly flow around the confines of such grammars.

"The semiotic weight of Blackness (as the utter antithesis to Whiteness) presses upon many of the meaning-making activities performed by individuals who inhabit such [black] bodies and pulls on the expansive interpretive frames through which these individuals are read and treated" (Smalls, "Race, SIGNS, and the Body").

The experiences of presence (distance), liminality (connection) in blackness are attractions of the digital, which simulates, but cannot replicate, the experience. Blackness is not only the tool but the goal of the digital itself, an extension of whiteness's attack against itself, its own limitations.

Beyond a simple dichotomy of authenticity and performativity, black Twitter as a public/private sphere mediates blackness' accessibility. Therefore, movement around blackness becomes the intrinsic premise for the racialization of everyone – as opposed to proximity or distance from an independent whiteness. Black Twitter is effectively Twitter, and vice versa. Again, We are the foundation, and Y'all are weird.

Amari-Grey has recently started using Twitter again. They are a writer and avatar interested in blackness, un-language, and anything trans. Her work is an attempt to find something (mostly herself) beyond the physical and ontological grammars of whiteness. You can follow them @amarixgrey

Notes

1 This TikTok from user "mylesocean" references instances of AAVE from the discourse space of "K-pop Twitter." This is one example of the distribution of digital blackness across online communities globally as a measure of legibility. AAVE becomes abstracted from its context and invisibilized as "stan language" so that some users may unknowingly take up a thin version of the vernacular. Rather than demonstrate a distance from the apparatus of white supremacy, this represents the symbolic work of cultural & linguistic appropriation to deradicalize the affective powers of AAVE and reaffirms the function of blackness as the underlying even unconscious, resource of the platform.

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Remembering; or, holding onto disappearing moments in blue, *oil on canvas, Julie Kim.*

A Natural History of Derangement

Ecopoetics Shattered and Intimate in Sebaldian Historiographies

Sam Clark

"The Gaucho acquired an exaggerated notion / of mastery over / his own destiny from the simple act of riding on horseback / way far across the plain."

- Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red*

"The policeman is the reader, who tries in vain to decipher this wretched novel."

- Roberto Bolaño, *Woes of a True Policeman*

Amid the liquefaction of the apparently solid conditions of the Earth as they have existed for the entirety of human history, which now retreat like tides around our accumulated observations and predictions of normalcy, it becomes evident that our relationship with the precarious intangibles undergirding our existence is more fraught than has been previously assumed.

Much has been written on climate change's confounding of those long-standing patterns (in human terms) of geophysicality upon which practices of modeling and prediction are based. And yet, comparatively little has been offered in terms of consideration of climate change as potentially *falsifying* the terms of intimate familiarity we have extended to a world we have only briefly persisted upon.

Intimacy, at its most elemental, can be understood as an effort born out of our imperfect faculties—moral, intellectual, sensual—to locate ourselves and the object of our gaze in terms of spatial and temporal situation. It is a mode of commanding the poetics of the unknowable that suggests that the person we fall asleep beside will be there in the morning and that the sea will not have risen to swallow us up before we have woken. It is difficult to feel that such intimacies have ever been more remote than in the present moment. The faith in regularity—regular seasons, regular tides, regular life—from which we become ever more distant from, has in its crumbling precipitated a parallel process, prosecuting estrangements grand and minute, from self, from place, and from history itself. We do not know where we stand.

In 1966, eco-activist Stewart Brand printed a pin asking, "Why haven't we seen a photograph of the whole Earth yet?" (Brand, 1977, p. 168). In 2009, artist Aspen Mays blazoned another pin with an expanded question: "Why haven't we seen a photograph of the whole Universe yet?"(Mays, 2009) The implication proposed by each is an expansion of the ideal of the cosmogram—a form of imagery which not only elaborates the universe but is in fact animated by dreams of *ordering* it through the act of depiction. Yet, these representations do not necessarily land on solid ground. "Occupations of land and the cosmic orders that justify them raise questions of life and death," notes historian John Tresch (2020) in his commentary on such images, "but the central terms of conflict – who and where 'we' are, and what 'we' need – are not fixed."

In the context of climate change, writer Amitav Ghosh considers the novel as the thus-far failed vessel for enacting such cosmographic aspiration, suggesting that the "serious" literary novel's fidelity to the logic of "individual moral adventure" renders the mode incompatible with genuine depiction of environmental change, leaving a grievous depictive gap as we attend to the unfolding crisis. "[B]elief in the regularity of the world," states Ghosh, has been "carried to the point of derangement" (Ghosh, 2016, p. 36). Likewise, Kris Bartkus (2018) observes that despite the existential urgency of climate change, "no good, let alone great, novel about global warming has yet been written," for the reason that an accurate depiction of climate change requires a "narrative inversion" antagonistic to the form of the novel.

Namely, it is the fact that the innumerable small operations accumulating in the background—an unrecycled can, a refilled gas tank—in an Anthropocene context begin to smolder with catastrophic potency. Contrastingly, all these actions, situations, and events—love, death, sex, epiphany—which, in their legible regularities, structure both the novel and life, nevertheless do nothing to curb carbon emissions as mankind hurtles towards destruction. As such, the things which have meaning when reckoning with the climate crisis are precisely those things that literature seems to dismiss as meaningless.

However, it is not the case that Ghosh and Brand do not ask for novels or photographs of climate change or the Earth out of some fidelity to perfect depiction as a virtue in itself; counting parts per million of atmospheric CO2 or metric tons of oceanic microplastic captures the grand attention of neither man. Rather, each considers their respective cosmogram in terms of its potential elaboration of the situating forces and factors addressing Tresch's fundamental questions of "who and when we are."

The tradition of regularity that each draws from framing these questions is one founded upon an idea of intimacy; to address anything cosmographically is to become intimate with its particulars of place and time and locate it in our physical and moral ontologies. Thus, if we have falsified through our imperfect and secondhand sounding of the depths of sea, space, and self, then such a falsified intimacy with regularity does not merely compromise our predicted and modeled worlds, but indeed stunts our ability to locate ourselves—as species and individuals—as moral actors within the temporal topography across which our ethical obligations to past and future unfold.

Between Brand in 1966 and Ghosh in 2016 is W. G. Sebald, whose body of work gestures towards the possibility that the history of man and Earth might be probed not through simple depiction, but as acts of cosmography on scales both intimate and infinite—evaluated on their aspirations of providing legible order and meaning rather than supplying outright description. Notably, we observe in Sebald, as scholar Stefanie Harris does, a tendency to resist the dichotomy proposed by Paul Valery that, in the case of history, there is only "photography," whereas all the rest is "literature" (Harris, 2001, p. 390). Sebald's works, in their formal schemes and aesthetic execution—*The Rings of Saturn* and *Austerlitz* in particular—consider history in a manner similar to Ghosh and Mays—in terms of its cosmographic and moral stakes rather than strictly representative capacities. For Sebald, the addressing of history requires a "falsification of perspective," where even "we, the survivors," seeing "everything from above, everything at once… still... do not know how it was" (Sebald, 2016, p. 125).

This "falsification" signals its charge of moral obligation at several points in Sebald's narratives. In one arresting example of this in *The Rings of Saturn*, Sebald writes of his friend Michael Hamburger's struggle to locate memories of his birthplace in a Berlin leveled by Allied bombs. To Hamburger, his scattered memories appear amid the rubble as "pictures in a rebus," charging him and him alone with the simultaneously monumental and trivial responsibility to "puzzle out correctly in order to cancel the monstrous events" of the past years (Sebald, 2016, p. 178). Here, Sebald considers a seductive proposition: if we could just reclaim intimacy with the

right images lost to time, we might use it to decode what their barely audible echoes ask of us and heed their instructions to reorder the world as it *should* have been.

Indeed, it is his trans-temporal practice which some critics have sought to decry as Sebald's search for, as German novelist Georg Klein put it, a "false intimacy with the dead" (as cited in Jaggi, 2001, p. 4). Yet, how *should* we be intimate with the dead? Susan Sontag writes of the now-naïve hope that "vivid enough" photographs of the dead of the First World War might disallow, through the searing visual proximity to violence, the prosecution of any future conflict (Sontag, 2013, p. 14). How, in the face of mounting tragedies which confound and derange our settled modes of relation, can we discern true from false intimacy? The failure of such purely depictive images of WWI leaves small hope of their success as applied today to a tragedy which acts to upset far more radically our relationship with horrors past and future—held as we are between the decisions of those long dead and the fates of those yet to be born.

Such a point is both core to Sebald's engagement with tragedy as well as a wrenching point of concordance with environmental catastrophe. History, be it global or personal, no longer unfolds itself within the domain of grand progressive forces; instead, Sebald suggests that any project concerned with history such as *The Rings of Saturn* must contend with "something like a description of the aberration of a species," traced in spiraling circles out from the "domestic economy of one's own mind" up through the local, national, and cosmic, "until the circle where natural history and the history of the human species alternate" (Sebald as cited in Groves, 2017, p. 270). In this sense, even though Sebald's ostensible concerns are vast and tragic, his process of *historiography* is attuned to the way the ghosts of these grand traumas must be processed on the individual level, with the unfortunate reader and narrator staged as central moral actors. As such, the trauma which Sebald's narrator is overwhelmed by "does not constitute a usurpation of another person's suffering," as critic Josephine Carter suggests, but instead something fundamentally intimate, revealing "something primordial about (one's) relationship with each and every person" (Carter, 2014, p. 734).

Consequently, to be intimate with history is to know where one stands in terms of one's moral obligations to it. What Francoise Meltzer (2019) observes as the removal of history from the sphere of "things as they happened" and into the recesses of the individual consciousness, has in Sebald's narrative the effect of causing historical images and texts to become charged with the equally crushing and entrancing idea that we might *ourselves* be able to compose some kind of cosmogram with them, ordering the whole of history into an array of things we might still be able to save.

As a direct function of this conviction, which seems to both seduce and horrify Sebald, his documentarian approach takes as first principle the fact that images and depictions of the "past" need not be met on the static and straightforward terms that such depictions give to us; instead, history itself is shaped in its immediate manifestations by *desire*—our yearning to know how to salvage something, to make everything right again. As Sebald remarks on Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*, "if we stand today before the large canvas… we are standing precisely where those present at the dissection… stood, and we believe we see what they saw then" (Sebald, 2016, p. 13). In other words, Sebald implicitly considers our *want* to be in these places—a want which presents itself more broadly as Sebald's narrators' ceaseless turning over of the already said and done, as if the tiny traces of past tragedy are not merely the key to understanding an event, but also a cryptic cipher that reveals the tragic past as ongoing, unrelenting, personally implicating, and above all, *possibly* reparable.

Accordingly, Sebald's view of history positions his characters as seeking to believe—liberated by the turn towards historiography as personal, individual, and autobiographical—that this kaleidoscope of fragmented sorrows, held just correctly, provides a path for things to be changed, repaired, remade, before it is too late. On one hand, if we can just find out where we are, we can fix it all. But on the other, doing so means that the holocausts, slaughters, bombings, mutilations, would be *ongoing*, extending their moral obligations not simply as echoes within the present, but through past and future. If all of human history is not locked away but instead utterly unmoored, then those innumerable past horrors are somehow still inflicting their ravages. We just do not know how to stand or at what angle to look to see it all correctly, such that we could make a difference. It is this same sense that torments the individual in the climate change era. The sense that climate change is an utterly encompassing, implicating setting which has wrecked our cosmograms and left all of Anthropocene history's excesses gushing like spilled oil into the gulf of natural history.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his influential consideration of climate change's impact on historiography, notes that an Anthropocene understanding of events has, among other vexations, forced a reckoning with the fact that natural and human histories are inseparable. What Sebald offers in the context of climate is a mode of moving with care and tact amid the splicing together of human and natural history—a joining which has occurred on neither's terms and perhaps to neither's benefit. The observation made by Chakrabarty (2009), that "absent personhood… there is no human subject of history," thus strikes a Sebaldian note in observing that unfortunate ultimate bearer of human history in all its weight is not humanity, but the individual human.

What takes shape across the single accumulation of wreckage suggested by both Sebald and Chakrabarty is the notion of history as a unified desert through which we must journey to discern, with no shortage of dread, how our moral obligations unfold through time. This is the same crushing thought which occurs to Jacques Austerlitz of Sebald's eponymous novel, who observes that if time "will not pass away, has not passed away," then "none of what history tells us would be true [and] past events have not yet occurred but are waiting to do so at the moment when we think of them." As such, even as becoming intimate with the whole tapestry of history tempts one with turning back time "to what it once was," it concurrently "opens up the bleak prospect of everlasting misery and neverending anguish," where the death camps never closed and the dead suffer forever (Sebald, 2001, p. 101). For Austerlitz, it is this pervasive sense that if time were "only various spaces interlocking according to the rules of a higher form of stereometry" which haunts him with the same sense of obligation that staggered Hamburger in the ruins of his childhood home: to attempt by "trifling mental exertion… [to] reverse the entire course of history" (Sebald, 2016, p. 178).

This sense, in which the web of human impact on the environment can implicate the seemingly innocent individual, is perhaps the feature of climate change that is literally, psychologically deranging. It is enough to drive anyone mad to consider that we are inherently monsters—that we shatter and poison everything by sheer fact of our being, and that we are and always have been actors freighted with the staggering moral weight of being a human in the Anthropocene. It is not enough to say that we were not there when the waters began to rise or that we will not be there when they settle, but that these processes are *always happening*, and our responsibility to see things as they are is both crushing and necessary.

The resultant desire is then to create a cosmogram which places humankind not as a broken spot of plastic beading in the geologic tapestry, but as something in harmony with the Earth's past and constitutive to its sustainable future. Such a dream is consistent with the kind of moment that Sebald (2016, p. 24) suggests countervails Thomas Browne's apocalyptic certainty that "the whole world… does not describe an ever-widening, more and more wonderful arc," but instead "leads without fail down into the dark"—Sebald imagines that "on the last day of resurrection," in a curtain-call-as-cosmogram, "the actors [will] appear once more on stage to complete and make up the catastrophe of this great piece" (Sebald, 2016, p. 24). For this reason, Sebald, like Browne and many contemporary observers of climate-change frontlines, scrutinizes the artifacts of human life in search of that "which has escaped annihilation for any sign of [the natural world's] mysterious capacity for transmigration," (Sebald, 2016, p. 26) with the intended result being some form of cipher to be drawn from the inarticulate wreckage.

Even so, Sebald's worlds teem with the implication that even as we are obligated to unravel them, it may be that we *cannot* meet these things directly. Because history has swelled with such tragic, horrific acts, and because we have wired its apprehension directly through our own heirlooms, diaries, and birthplaces, it could be that we cannot ever become the kind of unfeeling machines which could enact the "photographic" view to produce a cosmogram as would be understood by Brand or Ghosh. Indeed, to take a photo of climate change would be almost like taking a photo of human history itself, an act which Sebald would certainly have dismissed as nothing short of maddening.

Still, Sebald makes clear that such things *must* be addressed somehow, because they are otherwise never truly gone or averted. And of course, we know that we cannot look away from our place in history. We cannot now fail in answering the questions of who and where and when we are. But how? How do we know where we stand, such that we can act justly in this moment of truth, compromised and implicated as we may be? We seem to be forced to

look at something utterly inimical to the intimacies of depiction. This is a contradiction addressed with equal urgency by Sebald in his own reckoning with tragedy, as with his observation that a direct viewing of tragedy is paralyzing to the very faculties that enable an intimate understanding of the past as it acts on us. As such, they can only be addressed "obliquely, tangentially, by reference rather than by direct confrontation" (Sebald as cited in Silverblatt, 2007, p. 80). A case must be built.

This gives Sebald's project, in its narrative mode full of melancholy itinerants picking their way through the accumulating rubble of history, the resonance of a detective novel—a pulpy genre assuredly outside Ghosh's category of the "serious" novel. Every site, every object, every memory, burns with violence, destruction, sorrow, and nightmare, sketching out a scene for which we do not have the script. As such, *everything* in Sebald's world is a site of a potential intimacy which can clarify our obligations to the past and future. In our inability to access human history in its complete moral totality, we are as *individuals* confronted with the catastrophe of failed stewardship and the torment of a repair which is just out of reach. Thus, through Sebald and our Anthropocene situation, we are presented with the suffering individual who history has already made into its primary receptacle, cast as a detective desperately trying not merely to understand, but crying out for the view which would allow him to enact the cosmographic knowledge reparative to the whens and wheres lost in the welter of an incomprehensibly wounded world.

All this to what end? If natural history has become a tragedy performed on Sebaldian terms, whereby we are robbed of all intimacy with our only nominally settled place on Earth or with ourselves as actors in history, then Sebald is a valuable ally who proposes that we cannot be made either insulated from or directly laid bare to horror. We are everywhere implicated, even in our feeble grasping at our dimly understood responsibilities, because to live and continue asking *where and when am I?* is to pierce to the heart of mankind's destabilization of the world—from shoals of herring once thought infinite to the filleted cadaver in *The Anatomy Lesson*. We can only be given the tools to discern the dimmest lineaments of our entanglement in ongoing wreckage's tragic proportions, groping poorly to make ourselves our own cosmograms, imperfect but aware, before it is too late.

Sebald, of all people, would not imagine that we might find comforting certainty in such a proposition. Not even climate change, in its overwhelming nightmarishness, can deliver us that kind of confidence—of our doom or salvation or our small place in the cold cosmos. No cosmogram will dispel this moment's powers of derangement; it cannot make us certain because nothing is ever certain or ever will be again.

But even if nothing is certain within the wreckage, we can at least make ourselves the detectives amid the rubble. And that, perhaps, is the path to some kind of repair.

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***Untitled**, ink and watercolor on paper, Isabelle D'Amico.*

Noise, Chatter, and Artifice

Jessica Xing

Silence, in Edith Wharton's "Roman Fever," and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven," operates in two wholly different worlds. In her short story, Wharton depicts a setting of opulence. Her two main characters, Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley, are vacationing in Rome and sitting on a restaurant terrace high above the city. Wharton's world of extravagance, beauty, and scenery is harshly contrasted by the flimsy artifice of socialization—while her two main characters are surrounded by other people, the slow devolution into interrogation, exposure, and shame depict their attempts at conversation to be nothing more than noise, meaningless chatter. While Wharton depicts a world of noise, Poe in "The Raven," makes isolation and silence unignorable—the slow descent into madness is the focus of his famous poem. By comparing these two worlds, one characterized by noise and the other by silence, I question the nature of authenticity, and whether noise, or meaningless chatter, is necessary to sustain intimacy. I start by defining aristocratic performance in "Roman Fever" as a type of noise, using dialogue to interrogate the different roles silence, conversation, and authenticity play in constructing intimacy. Then, I examine the incomprehension of language in "The Raven." Through my comparison of these two works, I argue that noise is actually needed to keep intimacy alive: noise acts as a protection from the horror people find in silence.

Deidre Heddon, in her work, "From Talking to Silence," states that we currently live in a "noisy" culture. Through her analysis on confession and social media, she argues that social media gives people an unlimited platform for "unmediated confession," and thus separates meaning and authenticity from dialogue. Heddon illustrates an instance in which noise, in contrast to silence, informs how intimacy is constructed; she states that "in a noisy culture [...] silence rings out loudly, offering another place to 'be' or to become: to reflect, to imagine, to project, to re-connect" (Heddon 12). She presents one way in which we should view authenticity: that noise inherently obstructs authenticity, which in turn obstructs intimacy. Spaces of silence, of quiet, and more importantly of self-reflection are tenets to achieving genuine connection.

Heddon's discussion of silence suggests that silence is a natural state: between two people, silence is where they should be most comfortable. However, this assumption is questioned by the complicated role silence plays in "Roman Fever," which seems preoccupied with artifice. Mrs. Ansley and Mrs. Slade are two "American ladies of ripe and well-cared for middle-age." The two main characters are established by their place of relative privilege, yet they are displaced—the two socialites stare out of over a "outspread glories of the Palatine and the Forum, with the same expression of vague but benevolent approval" (Wharton 1). The start of the story not only illustrates the background of these two characters, but also the importance of gestures in their communications. Gestures reveal what is not spoken in dialogue, and the differing connotations of movement, emphasis, and expression question the authenticity of what is spoken—forcing a separation of meaning from what is said out loud. For example, Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley stare out over the Forum, to which Mrs. Slade states: ""Well, I don't see why we shouldn't just stay here [...] after all, it's still the most beautiful view in the world" (2). To which Mrs. Ansley responds: "It always will be, to me." Wharton, in particular, describes Mrs. Ansley's response as one with "so slight a stress on the 'me' that Mrs. Slade, though she noticed it, wondered if it were not merely accidental" (2). Through a simple gesture in emphasis, Wharton foreshadows the twist: that Mrs. Slade's daughter (who, along with Mrs. Ansley's daughter, does not appear 'on screen') is actually Mrs. Ansley's, and that this artifice of beauty they are both staring in front of is emblematic of their husband's infidelity. The foreshadowing is done through an emphasis of speech, pointing to a subtle threat of exposure.

While the world in "Roman Fever" is not so isolated as the one in "The Raven," Mrs. Ansley and Mrs. Slade are "two companions" on a terrace that physically and then emotionally isolates the two of them in a space in which socialization, silence, and noise are in an uneasy confrontation. There are instances in which "Roman Fever" seems to advocate for silence as a mode of authenticity, seeing some potential for silence to take away the "mask," as Heddon says, of noise. For the purposes of this analysis, I characterize silence as the brief moments in which Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley stop speaking, looking at silence simply as a stoppage of conversation rather than an absolute absence of sound. This way, my analysis focuses less on proving silence as an absence of text, and rather furthers my argument that chatter and dialogue stand in conjunction with noise. The few moments of silence in the story take place at the very beginning of part two, where the women "continued to sit side by side without speaking" (4). In this rare moment of silence, both ladies found that "there was a relief in laying down their somewhat futile activities in the presence of the vast Memento Mori which faced them" (4). In the silence together the ladies find a sense of "relief," and they find comfort in an authenticity that is separate from "futile activities." "Futile activities" is an especially salient phrase as it reveals some acknowledgement that the conversation that occurred before then had largely been meaningless, and, in a sense, performative. In the silence there is a quiet understanding of their own personal futility, as the silence allows them to look at the vastness of Roman architecture as a point of self-reflection. Equating vastness and elegance with "Memento Mori" illustrates an impending inevitability that the women, in putting down their distractions, face together: the two ladies, in the silence, find a sense of solidarity in realizing their individual smallness—a potentially terrifying concept.

Yet, the question, when confronted by the "vastness and elegance" of their surroundings, is what causes these two women to still turn toward what they already acknowledge as "futile activities." The easy solution that silence is what is needed for these two women to be intimate with one another, is troubled by the distortive role reflection plays in forging connection. Despite this moment of quiet solidarity, the moments in which Mrs. Ansley and Mrs. Slade do not speak to each other become the site for thought and self-reflection, and in reflection comes distortion. When they fall into silence, Wharton describes their companionship as one in which they "visualized each other, each through the wrong end of her little telescope" (4). Silence does not seem to bring these women closer together. Instead, it becomes a place of self-distortion, in which the women are given the space not to reflect, but to project their own hatred, jealousy, and shame onto one another. The vastness of silence reveals an unpleasant truth: The presentation of concepts like family, beauty, and companionship are often flawed. Similar to how Mrs. Ansley and Mrs. Slade are staring into a visually cinematic front of Roman architecture, the beauty of their surroundings only serves to amplify the doom of their own vulnerability.

The premise of intimacy is also naked and hard to look at. In "Roman Fever," Mrs. Ansley is "embarrassed" by "the new stage of intimacy" in their shared silence (Wharton 4). There is a contrast in the women's quiet mediation of the abyss, versus the sudden and crude self-awareness of the other person when the abyss becomes too illuminating. Suddenly, the crudeness of another person needs to be managed—one with whom Mrs. Ansley "did not yet know how to deal" (4). The embarrassment these two women feel in their vulnerability troubles another assumption: that authenticity is necessary for intimacy. Because the slightest instance in which these women are exposed to one another, they are embarrassed, and perhaps ashamed of what the other person sees. Embarrassment on Mrs. Ansley's end also implies that there is something that Mrs. Ansley feels unprepared to share—that Mrs. Slade's daughter

is not truly hers. Authenticity, instead of a point of comfort, becomes a moment of shame, of fear. In this horrible moment of silence, Mrs. Slade defaults to aristocratic performance: "'Five o'clock already,' she said, as though surprised" (4). This hastened return back to the "futile activities" of conversation illustrates that silence is uncomfortable, because silence presents an external version of the self without any mediation of noise. Instead of noise being a point of interference, Wharton suggests that noise might actually be a necessary mediator to bridging intimacy.

Chatter, according to sociologist Georg Simmel, is a detraction from sociability. He argues that language's role in engaging intimacy is to give socialization "meaning and stability," and in order to accomplish this socialization "lays such great value on form, on good form" (255). Simmel argues that all of socialization requires some level of aestheticization. So in Simmel's logic, to some extent, he advocates for artifice in the construction of intimacy, even going as far as to say that all language, and all dialogue requires construction. It is when the structure of language falls apart that noise will supersede it. However, Simmel still understands language as an expression of authenticity; he believes that structure, form, and aesthetics of conversation will lend themselves so that people are able to express themselves "authentically." Both Simmel's and Heddon's analyses of noise, opposite of intimacy, suggest that meaninglessness must stand in opposition against genuine connection—that connection requires a level of truth to it.

If silence in "Roman Fever" is embarrassing, silence in "The Raven" is downright terrifying. Heddon and Simmel both argue to some extent that noise equals obscurity and incomprehension, while silence is equated with comprehension and clarity. Yet, silence as a form of clarity is once again troubled by how "The Raven" and "Roman Fever" depict the characters' reactions to silence. Silence, especially in "The Raven," is not a point of clarity; it is a point of obscurity and horror. While "The Raven" seems to show silence in the beginning as more of a norm rather than a horrifying new phenomenon, intimacy in the form of the inhuman raven is actually a relief from the abyss of silence:

> But the silence was unbroken, and the darkness gave no token
> And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, "Lenore!" (Poe, lines 27-28).

While "Roman Fever" relates silence to the vastness of temporality, the sonic quality of silence in "The Raven" is tied to the absence of sight. Silence, then, is not a moment of clarity, as seen in Heddon's essay, but, in "The Raven," a point of distortion. Darkness, in the passage, suggests a connection of silence and unhearing with a failure of the senses. Darkness, illustrated through the abyss of sight, sense, and sound, becomes a place of fear, of terror: "Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood there wondering, fearing" (Poe, lines 25-27). This quote in particular illustrates that silence and how it constructs darkness acts as a point of unchecked imagination—rather than acting as a space for the individual to authentically develop, silence, especially without the noise of an other, is a place for the imagination to identify with horror. The only point of contact, the only point of comfort is "whispered" to him, illustrating again the obscurity of the dark translating to the obscurity of spoken word, establishing the inarticulation of language as a point of intimacy. Both "Roman Fever" and "The Raven" identify silence not as a point of uninterrupted self-reflection, but as a point of immensity. These texts suggest that silence ends intimacy because of its potential to reveal. In "Roman Fever," the two women are afraid of what it will reveal about them without a careful barrier of mediation, and in "The Raven," silence is at first terrifying, and needs the noise of intimacy to initiate a relationship with an unfamiliar, obscured other. Because of how both texts illustrate self-reflection, Wharton and Poe do not believe authenticity can ever coherently be articulated to another person—attempts to do so stop points of genuine contact.

In "The Raven," the raven disturbs with how it subverts expectations of concision: the raven becomes alien because its grasp on language is too controlled, so articulate that it turns around and becomes increasingly misinterpreted by the speaker. As the poem progresses, the foreignness of language does not actually alienate the narrator—the incoherence of the raven's "Nevermore" actually appears to further his attachment:

> Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather then he fluttered—
> Till I scarcely more than muttered, "other friends have flown before—
> On the morrow he will leave me, as my hopes have flown before" (55-60).

This passage is where the bird starts to gain personhood to the narrator; he identifies in the raven's loneliness, and perhaps sees his incomplete attempts to communicate as humanizing. In looking at noise as a current of human connection, there is a tie between the soul and an unstoppable, liquid flow—in one word, "Nevermore," the soul is "outpour[ed]" (56). Whether it is a projection of connection on the narrator's part, or the bird's genuine attempt to communicate with the narrator, language, in failing to encompass this totality, becomes noise. The rhyme in the poem illustrates this: the repetition of the -uttered suffix in "uttered … fluttered … muttered" suggests firstly an effort at language, only for that effort to get cut short. It also shows an obscurity of language itself—the narrator cuts the raven off through a similar outpouring of his desire for intimacy. "Nothing farther then he uttered… Till I scarcely more than muttered" (59-60). The flow of dialogue into one another shows a momentum of noise—similar to how the communication of the soul is likened to water, the narrator's interruption blends and bumps up against the raven's dialogue—the movement of noise keeps them from falling into silence. The flow of noise makes the language itself incomprehensible, yet despite not understanding each other, the narrator fears the bird leaving him, likening the bird and its incomplete language to a type of "hope." In this awkward, tumbling connection, Poe shows that, regardless of comprehension and form, human beings find intimacy in noise because they see shortcomings in language as a form of humanizing vulnerability. Intimacy, especially in this passage, is characterized by desperation to not fall into silence—incomprehension and unmediated form seem to be where the narrator finds refuge from the abyss of silence.

While I disagree with Simmel's argument for socialization as a purposeful artistic form, his understanding of socialization as a type of relief can be seen in both "Roman Fever" and "The Raven." In "Roman Fever," aristocratic performance as noise is needed to maintain intimacy—it is in silence that confrontation arises and then intimacy dies. Mrs. Slade constantly feels the need to overcompensate for Mrs. Ansley's silence—noise in "Roman Fever" can actually be understood similarly to how Simmel sees sociability as a kind of "artifice … a social necessity rather than a deceptive device" (349). In a sense, the way Mrs. Ansley and Mrs. Slade use etiquette can be understood as a kind of artistic "artifice." However, what makes their performance noise rather than a "stylization" is this desperation in which they—especially Mrs. Slade—engage in it. Similar to the speaker in "The Raven," Mrs. Slade uses her new intimacy with Mrs. Ansley as a relief from silence. When this relief is taken away from her, when Mrs. Ansley chooses to knit instead of responding to her, Mrs. Slade sees it as a judgement of her own personal failings. Instead of providing more intimacy, all Mrs. Ansley's silence does is further distort Mrs. Slade's perception of her. Mrs. Slade uses the silence to analyze Mrs. Ansley's silence and how that might be a reflection of her—the insecurity over how her daughter compares to Babs compels her to rely on supposedly familiar concepts of gender and class in her society to further provoke conversation. She rambles about Babs's potential future, only to cut off with a "recoil of self-disgust" (Wharton 6). This is where aristocratic performance stops being artifice and becomes noise. While Poe uses a very literal figure of horror to represent the isolation of silence, Wharton employs the examined self as a form of alienation. Without the presence of noise, without an endless stream of relief, silence becomes a very insidious form of judgement. The necessity of noise in intimacy then illustrates that connection thrives in sound, not in contemplation—noise was not the real intrusion, as so much silence was.

Overall, noise is necessary to sustain intimacy because noise, according to Wharton and Poe, implies a consistency of connection. While the nonstop flow of unmediated thought and meaning might seem like a distraction, in actuality, this distraction is desperately needed because otherwise the relationship would be left in silence. What ends up killing intimacy is the subject's fear of silence. Wharton and Poe suggest that while silence has the potential to unite two people under a naked, shared truth, they seem to believe that human beings are incapable of handling their own authenticity—especially of having it bared to another person. Intimacy ultimately is constructed through a continual presence of noise—noise shows the repeated attempts humanity makes to achieve connection, and while oftentimes it is not perfect, the constant reassurance of communion is needed to continually ensure genuine connection.

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***Untitled**, acrylic on canvas, Elisabeth McLaughlin.*

Intimacy as Transparency

Pleasure and Solidarity in Parisian AIDS Narratives

Robbie Spratt

Content warning: Discussion of AIDS, drugs, and suicide attempts.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first struck and masking and social distancing measures slowly became more commonplace, many found it difficult to feel intimacy in a time that necessitated it most. As a queer college student myself, the unexpected move back to my conservative hometown made me question how to replicate the communities and intimacies I enjoyed on campus, despite not being physically present. For several reasons, this pandemic piqued my interest in the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and '90s, when queer communities were devastated and sexual intimacy as a whole was threatened. While these two pandemics are by no means completely analogous, the ability of people living with AIDS to successfully create queer community in spite of medical and political obstacles struck a particular chord with me.

In this essay, I use the term "intimacy" to refer to a sentiment of emotional proximity between two or more people. For queer theorist Lauren Berlant, intimacy principally "involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out a particular way" (281). At its core, an intimate practice is one that allows individuals to share themselves, to know each other more closely, and to work towards a narrative together. In the French society of the 1990s, the dominant heteronormative narrative deemed marriage and sex the most intimate acts largely for their procreative potential, as they produced the ideal emotional proximity and contained this proximity to the perfect nuclear family. In turn, as Berlant notes, queers are forced to find alternative methods of being intimate, whether it be their own non-procreative sex or emotionally invested practices that disavow sex completely. Although sex is heavily present within the work explored in this essay, it becomes clear that queer intimacy does not simply turn straight sex on its head by virtue of having gay participants, but rather that queer intimacy can hold a more subversive role by hinging on sexual objectification and producing emotional proximity on a larger, communal level.

The explicitly sexual, gay, HIV+ community of Guillaume Dustan's 1996 autofiction *Dans ma chambre* [*In My Room*] is one such example of a queerly subversive and intimate environment. Taking place in the insular gay ghetto of central Paris's Marais neighborhood, *Dans ma chambre* recounts the everyday goings-on of Guillaume, Dustan's fictionalized persona, including his romantic ventures, sexual encounters, and heavy usage of drugs.[1] While it is notable that Guillaume rarely speaks about his AIDS – in fact, the word "*sida* [AIDS]" only appears once in the novel – he is particularly explicit with regards to his sexual encounters, going so far as to provide whole litanies of every single dildo used in a given night. Guillaume's narration is often impersonal, cold, and ethnographic, detailing the intense happenings of his surroundings in various clubs with various men while seldom providing input on his emotional wellbeing.

Throughout *Dans ma chambre*, Guillaume's detached and pornographic narration of his sexual encounters suggests that sex is a banal, emotionless endeavor whose main purpose is pleasure. Despite this, he extends a profound care for the many men he has sex with, signifying a preestablished emotional proximity. If the act of sex itself does not produce this emotional proximity between Guillaume and his partners, as it does for straight couples approved by heteronormative society, what role can pleasure and its surrounding discourse play in producing intimacy? Sex's unabashed focus on pleasure – easily achieved through a system of communal objectification – may seem to prohibit its capacity for interpersonal intimacy, in that heteronormative society vilifies sexual pleasure in an effort to glorify a vision of intimacy founded on procreation (Berlant 283). However, it is paradoxically this same consensus on sex's end goal and the objectifying means used to achieve it among the inhabitants of Dustan's ghetto that allows a communal intimacy to permeate. In the year 2021, as we continue to live through the COVID-19 pandemic, the ghetto queers remind us that openly acknowledging the goals we wish to achieve from our relationships – whether they be pleasure, friendship, companionship – is not taboo, nor does it erase the emotional proximity found within. Rather, such an acknowledgement can serve as a fortified and personalized foundation for emotional closeness when the usual covert ways of expressing intimacy are no longer an option.

Economy of Feelings in the Ghetto

Dustan opens the novel *in media res*, plunging the reader directly into the culture of the ghetto. In the first sentence, Guillaume states, "J'ai laissé la chambre à Quentin. Je me suis installé dans la petite pièce au fond de l'appart pour ne pas les entendre baiser [I left the room to Quentin. I moved into the little room in the back of the apartment so I wouldn't hear them fuck]"[2] (Dustan 11). As this is the first sentence of the novel, the reader does not know who Quentin is, nor the person having sex with him. The abrupt nature of this opening and its lack of context immediately includes the reader in an in-group perspective, as a member of the ghetto who would instinctively know Guillaume's friends. Several pages later, Guillaume nonchalantly mentions that Quentin is his ex-boyfriend and is currently romantically involved with Nico, also a friend of Guillaume's and possibly an ex of his as well. This opening vignette establishes the relationship between the gays and the environment of the ghetto they are submersed in; the only exposition the reader receives is being thrust headfirst into an entangled web of gay relationships and hookups. Every gay man in the ghetto knows every other gay man, with the reader entering into this perspective as well.

However, not only is every man in the ghetto assumed to be gay and to have an enmeshed sexual history with every other man, but it is also assumed that every man in the ghetto is HIV+. At a club, Quentin says to Guillaume, "Tu sais personne ne met plus de capotes, même les américaines, maintenant tout le monde est séropositif, je ne connais plus personne qui soit séronégatif [You know, nobody wears condoms anymore, even Americans, now everyone's HIV+, I don't know anyone who's HIV-]," to which Guillaume's internal monologue replies, "moi non plus, je pense, à part Quentin [me neither, I think, besides Quentin]" (Dustan 53). In contrast to the outside world, where seronegativity is the norm, Quentin's seronegativity inside the ghetto is a notable fact. In this sense, the insular nature of the ghetto subculture assumes different identities than the rest of 1990s Paris: homosexuality and seropositivity, instead of heterosexuality and seronegativity.

Guillaume's narration of his sexual encounters reveals not only what he thinks of them, but also the functions that sex holds within the ghetto subculture. He describes a scene with his soon-to-be long-term boyfriend, Stéphane:

> Je cherche quelque chose de répétitif mais pas froid pour me faire goder. Il est cinq heures du mat, Stéphane commence à être fatigué, il

s'endort, mais il m'a dit que c'était ok, je peux le réveiller pour qu'il me gode.

[I'm looking for something repetitive but not stale to put on the record player while I get a dildo up the ass. It's 5 in the morning, Stéphane is starting to get tired, but he told me it's okay, I can wake him up so he can do it].

(Dustan 36)

The repetitive music he is searching for suggests a repetitive sexual atmosphere, to the point that his partner is falling asleep. Narrating matter-of-factly, Guillaume refrains from commenting on his emotional investment. One could argue that his refrain from narrating the emotionality of sex does not preclude the overall existence of such emotionality, but his straightforward tone and ambivalence towards Stéphane suggests that emotions are not at the forefront of the sexual encounter. In the ghetto, sex is a frequent, quotidian, and mundane experience whose principal, if not only, function is to receive pleasure. As Guillaume puts simply in the only sentence that comes close to acknowledging his emotional input during this sexual episode, "J'aime les sensations fortes [I like strong sensations]" (Dustan 37).

While leaders of the HIV/AIDS activist group ACT UP-Paris contended in the 90s that Dustan and his ghetto neighbors' brazen focus on sexual pleasure rendered them hedonists (Rivas 34), literary scholar Joshua Rivas theorizes instead that pleasure in *Dans ma chambre* enters into a "logic of prosthesis" (38). In the ghetto, where every man is supposedly gay, HIV+, and sexually intertwined, the logic of prosthesis allows Guillaume and his neighbors to "eroticize the failings and un-wholeness of [their] bod[ies] and make of them something productive" (Rivas 38). Rivas relates their seropositive bodies to bodies with an amputated limb, in the sense that both examples are physically defective. The ghetto community functions in that each resident constantly objectifies every other resident, to the point that even genitals and dildos are seen as interchangeable extensions of the body, since they serve the same purpose (Rivas 39). This omnipresent objectification and the subsequent mutual understanding between ghetto residents with regards to sex's function – to give and receive pleasure – is what sustains the physically hurting queers of the Marais in the face of AIDS. In this sense, sex is a form of care that ghetto community members impart from one to another.

However, the prosthesis logic of the ghetto does not only serve a purpose on an individual level. Rivas acknowledges its potential for the formation of community: "According to this logic, Dustan's (supposedly) universally HIV-positive community's dismissal of inferiority in favour of superficiality signals a desire to continue living and emerges as a method of grappling with life's precariousness" (45). Sex serves several purposes in and for the ghetto: it is a coping mechanism, it is a rejection of the death sentence that AIDS had decreed, and it is a process of interpersonal bonding around a common goal. Although Rivas focuses his analysis more on how sex helps Guillaume grapple with his own AIDS diagnosis, he does not deny sex's capacity for communal healing. In Dustan's eyes, the entire ghetto is suffering from AIDS communally, coping communally through pleasure-centered sex. As sex is depersonalized and pornographic, all parties in the ghetto refuse to put on airs with regards to their reason for partaking in it. Acknowledging sex's utility in giving and receiving pleasure in spite of a debilitating disease is a way in which the ghetto community fulfills its physical and emotional needs. While Rivas only defines the result of communal objectification as a sexual practice, I argue here that this same communal objectification can also result in demonstrations of emotional and social solidarity.

Intimacy Built on Utility

The fulfillment of both individual ghetto residents' needs and the needs of the seropositive ghetto community as a whole leads to a particular form of solidarity among neighbors. One such example is a scene in which Terrier, Guillaume's ex-boyfriend, interrupts a *ménage à trois* between Guillaume, Stéphane, and a man they pick up at a club by knocking on Guillaume's door and begging to sleep in his guest room, to which Guillaume reluctantly agrees (Dustan 131). Having already drunk an entire bottle of whiskey, Terrier locks himself in Guillaume's bathroom and swallows a whole container of anti-anxiety pills, effectively attempting suicide. Despite Guillaume's intense hatred for Terrier before this episode and hating him even more once he realizes what Terrier is doing in the bathroom, he calls an ambulance and rides along to the hospital. Narrating from the inside of the emergency room, Guillaume says:

J'ai demandé ce qui allait se passer. L'infirmière m'a dit qu'on allait lui faire un lavage d'estomac et qu'il fallait que j'attende. Alors j'ai attendu. Je savais qu'il n'y avait rien à attendre mais je ne pouvais pas partir.

[I asked what was going to happen. The nurse told me they were going to pump his stomach and that I had to wait. So I waited. I knew there was nothing to wait for but I couldn't leave].

(Dustan 135)

His animosity towards Terrier notwithstanding, Guillaume knows intrinsically that he cannot leave him at the hospital, unable to articulate the reason why he is waiting despite there being nothing to wait for. One might argue that any person in Guillaume's situation would refuse to leave alone the person who attempts suicide in their home, but his decision to visit Terrier a second time after the night of the suicide attempt demonstrates that his care and concern go beyond his initial feeling of guilt (Dustan 136).

In this example, Guillaume exhibits a type of emotional proximity and investment towards Terrier that is closely linked to the importance the ghetto community places on sex. Having no obligation to him on a personal level begs the question: why does he go to such lengths to show intimate care for him? While the constant objectification that Rivas elucidates transforms sex's role in the ghetto unrecognizably from its analogous form in straight Paris, the purpose of communal care in queer ghetto sex also informs all other relationships in this environment. Checking in on someone after a suicide attempt and having sex are both forms of care in the ghetto, allowing a space for one person to give care and another to receive. In other words, while Guillaume may look to Terrier or any other ghetto resident as an object for sexual gratification, in doing so, he also looks to them for a lifegiving care to both receive from them and give to them. In a sense, the logic of prosthesis renders Terrier's personal history with Guillaume less important in favor of a relationship in which the former receives care from the latter. Despite the fact that this objectification is seen most clearly in the pornographic ways Guillaume narrates his sexual encounters, it also leads to a duty he feels to care for his HIV+ brothers. Guillaume's commitment to showing intimate care for Terrier is representative of a system of ghetto solidarity that extends beyond their particular relationship.

The Primacy of Transparency in Pandemic-Time Intimacy

Among the queers of Dustan's ghetto, there exists a new, queer intimacy that relies on the communal agreement of pleasure's centrality in sex, in stark contrast with the heteronormative intimacy heralded in straight couples' marriage and procreation. By sharing a consensus among themselves that having sex is only a means of experiencing pleasure, the ghetto queers redefine this new, queer intimacy that is no longer reliant on "the shifting registers of unspoken ambivalence" (Berlant 286), but rather, on an open sharing of values. In other words, while straight couples may feel that talking openly about their relationship may jeopardize their intimacy – as Berlant puts it, heteronormative intimacy "prefers the calm of internal pressure, the taken-for-grantedness" (286) – the queers of Dustan's ghetto find power and closeness instead through open communication, the opposite of this "unspoken ambivalence." As the AIDS epidemic forced many queers to rethink the ways in which spoken and unspoken rules interact in their romantic and sexual lives – for example, the then-rising commonplaceness of asking for one's HIV status – the queer inhabitants of the Marais find that, to sustain their emotional proximity with each other, they must proudly acknowledge their sexualization of each other and derive strength from it.

As we continue to struggle to maintain a physical and emotional closeness to our friends and loved ones due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we too must reconsider the extent to which our practices of intimacy production rely on "unspoken ambivalence," and whether this ambivalence facilitates or impedes intimacy. Just as the importance of transparency regarding HIV status sparks difficult conversations for many gays, the request for proof of a negative COVID test or a vaccination card similarly forces couples to set firm boundaries and openly speak about intimacy. While HIV transmission is deeply linked to sex in a way that COVID is not, the choice for two people to spend time together unmasked may now be presented as a new emotional decision that affects their health, made by speaking openly about boundaries, similarly to the way in which gay men's choice to have sex during the height of the AIDS

epidemic jeopardized their health at a more dangerous rate. At first glance, it may seem daunting to speak frankly and set boundaries with our loved ones about the platonic, romantic, or sexual pleasure we receive from our relationships spending time with them. When the tacit agreement of emotional closeness is no longer as evident due to geographical separation and thus fails to provide the type of pleasure formerly received, speaking honestly about this failure in an effort to rectify it can prove to be more fruitful than continuing to stay silent in a vain hope that pandemic restrictions will be lifted overnight. Even while intimacy can still prevail, despite and through masking and social distancing, COVID has forced many formerly ordinary activities to spark more overt and uncomfortable conversations about interpersonal pleasure.

An extension of Rivas's theories of sexual objectification and pleasure to both the social environment of *Dans ma chambre* and the social disruption of our current pandemic reality may help us to feel more intimate with our loved ones, despite the glaring lack of physical proximity. While seeing our loved ones as simply objectified means to an end – especially to the extreme of Dustan – is not necessarily beneficial in a COVID-19 context, this utilitarian approach to viewing relationships does have the potential to shape our intimacy into a stronger form on our own terms. Talking openly with our loved ones about how we want to be intimate, instead of guessing silently and ambivalently, provides an avenue not only to create an intimacy counter to the dominant heteronormative system, as it functions in the case of Dustan's ghetto, but also simply to fashion an intimacy that satisfies one's needs. Particularly as we trudge forward in our COVID-19 reality and this satisfaction of one's needs becomes ever so difficult, the communal transparency shared among Guillaume and his neighbors – despite (or through) his exaggeratedly cold and pornographic style of writing – teaches us that, to experience pleasure in our relationships, intimacy can and should be spoken aloud.

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Notes

1 Dustan uses the term "ghetto" in the original French to refer to the gay enclave within the Marais. This term does not carry the same racially charged connotations as it does in American English, but rather it borrows from the term's usage during World War II, when Italian Jews were legally forced to live in ghetto neighborhoods (Caron 79). As the Marais is simultaneously the epicenter of Paris's Jewish and gay communities, the latter group has over time also adopted the term "ghetto" for themselves.

2 The English translations provided throughout this essay are my own.

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Empire's Cameras

A Visual and Literary Study of Bracero History

Daniel Delgado and Ellen von zur Muehlen

Introduction

The Bracero Program, as a labor regime, can be understood both through its historical particularities and its more generalizable themes. Our work attempts to capture how transnational alignments of capital interests create policies that generate a mobile and exploited class of workers. We insist on the subjecthood of the workers as historical actors with motivations that clashed, overlapped, and aligned with those structures they navigated—or were moved by. To capture the significance of the Bracero Program in all its complexities, we blend distinct methodologies. This project is guided by a central question: how can scholars best produce knowledge about policy to accurately reflect the experiences of those who lived its consequences?

First, we elaborate the factual history of the program to provide a firm contextual bedrock that situates the original braceros in their historic conjuncture. This background section focuses on how cooperation between North American political and corporate entities operated in the mid-twentieth century to motivate the program's inception and shape its organization. The history of the Bracero program ought to be recognized as a study of economic life. But it is also a history of race. Laws such as the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act used national origin as a substitute for race to build an immigration infrastructure of racialized selectivity. In this way, "Mexicanness" was denigrated by the global discourse the doctrine solidified. By the time the program rolled out in 1942, Mexicans had been made into racial subjects that were one-dimensional and fungible to serve the labor regime's commodity-function. Migrant's lives and things that held meaning to them, such as family and culture, were devalued.

Next, through a visual analysis of photographs from the Bracero History Archive and a popular magazine, we explore how this racialized subjectivity was the mode through which people experienced class. We show how subjecthood operated as the vehicle of expression for consciousness among workers. Put differently, because the racialized Mexican category was superimposed onto a perceived homogenous workforce, *braceros* in turn appropriated that same category to build bonds of solidarity as comradely nationals. This section emphasizes the ways in which the braceros exercised agency and defied expectation even while caught in the gears of major socio-historical forces. Another major focus of this section is to consider how photographs contribute to our understanding of the past. Rather than treat photographs as passive tools of knowledge conveyance, we engage with ideas of photographic subjectivity and perspective.

In our last section, we blend both the macro and micro view of the bracero program by engaging with two works of fiction: a film and a novel. These works give vivid accounts of the lived experiences of migrant laborers while also offering a critique of the power structures that shape those experiences. The novel in particular, *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita, makes an argument about the temporal continuity of the bracero experience. Set a century into the future, *Lunar Braceros* details its own history, which coincides with real history up to the present day, at which point it projects a future that seems almost inevitable, a prophetic vision of the future that global capitalism will bring.

All the stories that we gather and consider in this project serve to emphasize the stark contrast between two major ideas of the migrant worker. On one side, we have the gaze of the white, liberal capitalist, a gaze that produces the figure of the worker and later decides that same worker is redundant and disposable. On the other side, we have the workers' self-conceptions which chafe against the bounds imposed on them, at times producing acts of rebellion and resistance. This tense relationship plays out across the lens of the camera, through the documents of the archive, and in the pages of both speculative and historical literature (Marche, 2012).

Foundations for Understanding the Bracero Program

Between 1890 and 1929, around 1.5 million Mexicans migrated to the U.S. as agricultural workers (Bowman, 2016). Despite harsh labor conditions, migration continued due to a simple fact: those who participated in the U.S. economy fared better than those who did not. Implemented in 1942 during World War II, the Bracero Program marks an era in U.S.-Mexican history in which the "migratory character" of Mexican labor that sustained the U.S. Southwest economy was *codified* (Driscoll, 1999). The bilateral agreement between the United States and Mexico had the stated intention of alleviating wartime labor shortage in the near-term. However, there were other forces at play that motivated the architects of the policy. In reality, the agreement lasted for twenty-two years until 1964. During that time, the program was responsible for issuing 4.6 million contracts to guest workers, marking it as an unprecedented immigration policy because of its scale, and because the U.S. government assumed the role of contractor itself (Sifuentez, 2017).

How had the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement, as it was officially known, come to be? By underscoring U.S workers' military service during World War II, pro-migration policy makers cast the program and the seasonal workers it contracted, the braceros, as part of a "heroic" contribution to economic mobilization for the war. Most of the wartime migrant laborers were contractually restricted to harvesting crops, although some also labored on railway maintenance crews. After the war, growers continued to press for access to Mexican workers, and so the program continued until 1964, when it was terminated by President Lyndon Johnson.

The twenty-two-year duration of the Bracero Program was a complex epoch among U.S. and Mexican policy makers, reformers, diplomats, and politicians. As a regime that enmeshed sectors of labor with migratory trends, it operated under three departments: the Department of Labor, the State Department, and the Department of Justice, specifically as a program in the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). Historian Manuel García y Griego breaks the program's history down into three significant phases in his 1981 treatise *The Importation of Mexican Contract Laborers to the United States, 1942-1964*. "Wartime cooperation" characterized the early years (1942-1946), and "turbulence and transition" described the middle (1947-1954). Finally, from 1955 to 1964, the program reaches "apogee and demise." Each period brought its own complications, ideologies, politics, and consequences for both the U.S. and Mexico, but especially for the workers (García y Griego, 1981).

The 1920s marked the first era of robust debate on the "problem" of emigration between Mexican officials and policymakers who were worried about its impact on postrevolutionary economic reconstruction. Active recruitment efforts from U.S. employers animated fears of labor shortages and pressures to raise wages. In cities like Monterrey, local employers complained that U.S. contractors were taking away skilled workers from the steel mill and railway shops in the early 1920s. Critics of the Bracero program declared that those in favor of emigration were ludicrous: some even declared this policy the result of a failed revolution (Hale, 1995). Young and hard-working Mexicans were being encouraged to leave the homeland to slave away in lands that once were rightfully theirs, objectors protested. By the 1950s it had become Mexico's most controversial state policy (Overmyer-Velazquez, 2011). On the other hand, prominent intellectuals and statesmen believed that with proper guidance,

Mexicans would enter the agricultural industry, learn new skills, and remit their earnings. Modernity was on the horizon if Mexicans just learned to cooperate with the colossus (Snodgrass, 2011).

In spite of the hardships, discrimination, and abuses migrants faced, the Mexican anthropologist, Manuel Gamio collected evidence that illustrated the benefits of remittances, the improvement in migrant's diets, hygiene, and housing standards, as well as their return with better clothes, tools, and farm implements. Emigration, according to Gamio's study, also coincided with the promotion of state projects to educate and uplift the rural masses. The argument's logic was the following: peasants who went to labor in the U.S. would develop discipline, technological skills, and aspirations which they would use to improve their communities of origin upon return (Gamio, 1930).

Understanding the Bracero Program as a source of federal support for U.S. growers, during a time of Keynesian economics, helps to explain the enormous success of agribusiness and the program's eventual termination. The economist Wayne Grove has demonstrated that the need to manage the precarity of the transition to mechanized farming convinced Congress of the utility of the Bracero Program (Grove, 2000). As Cohen illustrates: "This support came in two forms: first, allowing growers to employ and control low-wage labor, from which they accumulated capital for equipment and additional land … and second, funding research on seed and soil requirements for sustained mechanized farming … only after these technologies were readily available at reasonable cost (in the 1960s) would the Bracero Program be terminated." By formally integrating the U.S.-Mexican political economy, Congress ensured for U.S. growers a reserve pool of workers to ease the road to mechanized farming and development of the Southwest (Cohen, 2011). This is how agricultural mechanization was achieved in the U.S. under the tag-team tutelage of private capital and "public" interests.

Visualizing Braceros: Narrative Through the Camera Lens

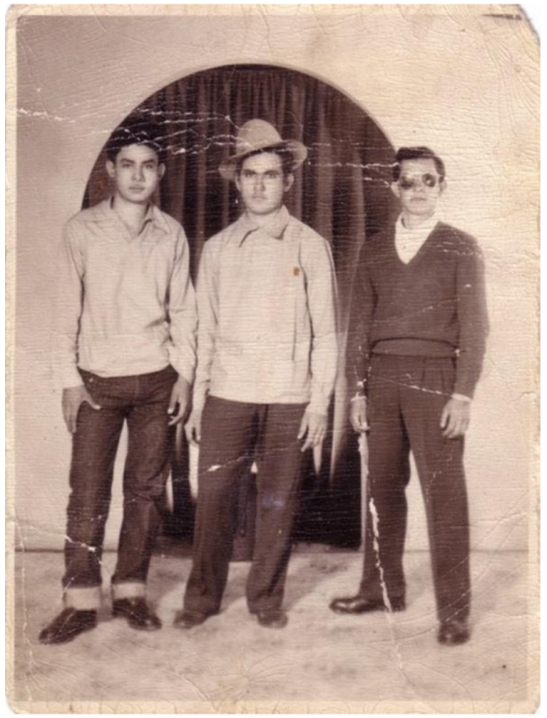
The camera enjoys a privileged position in modern visual culture. It is ubiquitous, and so are the images we produce with it. Among the privileges of the camera is the assumption that it has the power to capture truth and thus to produce knowledge—knowledge deemed highly valuable as a result of its presumed objectivity, neutrality, and transparency. The mechanical eye of the camera casts its unfeeling gaze on the objects before it and produces an accurate representation of those objects and their surroundings. Following this logic, photographs are documentary and therefore represent powerful sources for describing history.

In contrast, Western cultural perceptions of texts tend to assert their narrative function. As Christina Walter notes: "in Anglo-American culture (and in Western European cultures more broadly) texts were presumed to capture an observer's interiority, active reason, and disembodiment, but images were treated as if they passively conveyed external objects of observation, along with their stable form and materiality" (Walter, 2014). In our work, we hope to blur the lines between what images and texts are presumed to communicate and consider how both combine to enmesh a narrative about the Bracero Program.

Our goal in this work is to push back against the assumed objectivity of the camera and instead assert the agency of both the photographer and the people represented in photographs. We ask how photographs of people show a blending of individual subjectivities through the intermediation of the camera. On one end of the camera, the photographer casts their gaze through a lens, both literal and metaphoric, and decides how the subject will be framed and viewed by future observers. On the other end, the photographer's subject gazes back, directly at the camera or elsewhere, and interactively communicates with their body—through gestures and positions. Finally, future observers of the photograph apply their subjective lens to the interpretation of the photograph, now an object removed from its original context.

We will consider how the men of the Bracero Program resist objectification and assert their subjectivity through the lens of the camera. To do this, we put the photographs in conversation with written testimonials from the Bracero History Archive. At the same time, we examine the photographer's role as *both* documentarian and storyteller. In a sense, we hope to diminish the role of the camera itself and focus on the human actors involved, thereby rejecting any claim that photographs capture an objective reality superior to human vision, or to storytelling through text, or to intersubjective experiences.

The Bracero History Archive



While the Bracero History Archive contains hundreds of images of braceros at work, the photographs we have chosen highlight the social lives of braceros instead. In these sets of photographs, we glimpse moments of leisure and social engagement as well as performances of masculinity outside of context of labor. The picture of the top left, archival item #954, underscores the youthfulness of many braceros. The archival description states "Photo of Jose Ramirez Delgado and braceros in 1950," but because the image contains three men, it is unclear who Jose is. The young men's attitudes and attire make it appear as though they are prepared for a night out. Indeed, the aviator glasses, the slightly angled hat, and the neatly cuffed pants suggest they are not preparing to go to work. The photograph to the right, item #565, shows a cool, collected, stylish posing in front of a car. The description simply states: "Color image of bracero leaning on car in town." With his relaxed pose and casual attire, this nameless man also appears to be enjoying free time away from the fields. The car is also notable as a distinctly masculine symbol of upwards mobility. Taken together, the two images of stylish young men depict a social life with uniquely gendered signifiers of leisure and status.

The final photo centered here shows a bracero with his daughter. Margarita Flores is the young girl in the photo. The photo was taken in 1947 on the "Sparks" Ranch. The creases and the fading at the bottom suggest that the photo was heavily used, likely as a memento. This picture reflects that braceros were often followed to the U.S. by their family, and also illustrates some of the motives of the braceros: improving their family's well-being. The desire to support your family economically while having to separate yourself from them to do so, is a difficult paradox of migration narratives, and one that many braceros were forced to reckon with. Many of the images in the Archive depict single men at work or in

moments of rest and recreation, but images like this one document that the social lives of braceros also involved family.

The Sid Avery Collection

These pictures were taken by the photographer Sid Avery, who is better known for his time in Hollywood than in the harvest of the American South West. The perspective they offer on the past is both revealing and obfuscating. He was assigned by the Saturday Evening Post to do a story on the Bracero Program in 1957. His coworker, who wrote the accompanying article, Fred Eldridge, explained how each year more than 400,000 Mexican laborers played the role of "modern agricultural mercenary" helping make the U.S. farming industry work. Rafael Tamayo, pictured above to the left, became the main subject of the story that got published. In the essay, Tamayo explained that he "came to America because my family and I are very poor. I am a campesino [farm worker]. I earn seven pesos a day." In the U.S., however, these people would be laboring for as low as $1.50 per day. Indeed, "the destruction of semi-feudal relationships of mutual obligation on the ranch and the shift to wage labor was, in fact, necessary to create the agricultural proletariat that modern agribusiness needed" (Ngai, 2014). The propertied elite of this business strategy took the mobile workers as proverbial cannon fodder for their industrial farms.

Sid Avery's standpoint as a Hollywood photographer must inform our reading of his depictions of these braceros. The photo of Rafael Tamayo, in particular, resembles a celebrity headshot. Tamayo's upwards gaze, slightly furrowed brow, and artfully positioned hand create a cinematic narrative of righteous suffering, echoed in the accompanying quote. Avery's gaze, informed no doubt by his other work, invents the role of a tragic hero, a sympathetic man working hard to escape—or alleviate—poverty. This role collides and enmeshes with the image of self that Rafael Tamayo presents to the viewer. Tamayo is not, after all, an actor intentionally adopting a role for the camera, but a man embodying his own condition of life. Together, Tamayo's sense of self and Avery's artistic vision create an image with a style that is more narrative than documentary.

In the second photo above, a similar interplay between the photographer's and subjects' perspectives tell a story about leisure and sociality. Several men prepare a meal at a camp, two fully visible, while another two just peek out of the margins of the picture. The fully visible man on the left stands out for his apparent youth: he looks like he could be yet a teenager. As a scene of camaraderie, the image suggests something about the social lives of the braceros, who found community and friendship with each other in a space of intense labor alienation. While the context of migration and labor regimes implies displacement and alienation, through the images above we see how it also produced novel communities and enriching social spaces.

Some of Avery's photos told a very different story, a story of institutional violence that contrasts sharply with the social themes of the previous images. The next photograph shows the men being dusted with DDT—a colorless, tasteless, and mostly odorless crystalline chemical compound originally developed as an insecticide. Ultimately, it became infamous for its negative environmental impacts and carcinogenic effects in people. This process reflects the ways in which braceros were viewed and treated as fungible workers whose sole purpose in the U.S. was the commodification of their labor power. This sanitation process also reflects the modernizing ideology touted by the Mexican policymakers who promoted the bracero program. Sanitation and public health are key themes of modernity that in this case were weaponized against migrant workers. As migrants from supposedly backwards communities, these workers were met with a racialized suspicion towards their hygiene and health standards in the receiving communities in the United States. The application of insecticide directly to the braceros' clothes and bodies is the extreme and damaging manifestation of this suspicion.

For the braceros, modernization through the program entailed subjection to health and sanitation practices premised on racism and designed to allay the anxieties of white people in receiving communities. A contributed item #3239 by Mary Vargas in the Bracero History Archive titled "Un Simple Bracero" shares the experience of a young bracero when he joined the program:

> "He felt at ease knowing he was going to the USA with his cousin. As they arrived in Arizona, he found himself in a small room overcrowded with others. His stomach growled with hunger; he was surviving on limited meal portions. After a couple of days of waiting, he started to smell. No showers or rest[r]ooms [sic] were available to them.
>
> They were ordered to form 2 lines. They were told to take off all their clothes and walk into a room and stand there. Soon, he heard a spraying sound. He found himself covered with a white powdery substance, he was told the powder was to kill lice, yet no shower was provided afterward. The men were ordered to put their clothes back on."

Mary Vargas, the daughter of the man in the story, illustrates her father's experience in a vivid narrative style. This brief episode provides an inside perspective on the treatment of braceros documented in Avery's photo. We see how the officials of the bracero program forced the men into inhumane conditions and denied them access to basic hygiene facilities. The program operated with a kind of efficiency grounded in the alienation of the workers from their very bodies and bodily functions. The routine functioning of the bracero program was premised on cruelty—to enter the program was to lose a certain degree of agency over one's own body and be subjected to harm and humiliation. Even Avery's overall gentle depiction of the program captured something of this cruelty.

Despite the fact that Sid Avery's photographs exist to create a narrative of the Bracero Program palatable enough for a popular audience, there are useful elements in what he "documents." In his visual assemblage of Bracero history what can be denominated as "archive" accounts for a wide range of affective displays, from the heartwarming to the horrific. With images of both cruel mistreatment and worker leisure, the work of the camera is in full effect. What the camera as object "does" is materialize the visual field of the photographers' emotional empathies and the policies' practical ramifications. In this sense it shows the overlaps of phenomenological interaction with the program and structural adjustments to the legal system necessitated by the reach of this agreement. Avery's work is both documentary and narrative, communicating factual and subjective elements of the bracero experience.

The Criticisms of a Film and a Novel: When Art and Reality Collide

Fictional accounts of migrant experiences can add dimension and truth to historical accounts. In the dreamlike film "Y No Se lo Tragó la Tierra," based on the novel by Tomás Rivera, the director's deployment of "camera-work" helps depict images and sequences from the life of a young boy from a family of migrant farmworkers. The boy, Marcos, follows his family as they travel north with other families from their town to work in farms in the northern states of the United States. Marcos works alongside his parents, harvesting crops and other chores. He also attempts to attend school, both in his hometown in south Texas and in a small town in Minnesota. Marcos' education becomes a central concern. While Marcos and his family are passionate about the boy getting an education, the educational system itself is totally indifferent to Marcos as a student. The film's disorienting narrative style, which weaves together vivid moments and images into a fractured, nonlinear chronology turns an intimate lens onto migrant farmworker life.

Scenes of violent encounter and institutional negligence underscore the impact of racialization and white anxiety on the lived experiences of migrant farmworkers. When Marcos begins school at the town in Minnesota, he is confronted by the cruelty and prejudice of the school officials and his classmates. On his first day, the school nurse conducts a humiliating search where she checks Marcos for lice then has him strip down and douses his clothes and hair with insecticide. His treatment reveals the racist suspicions of dirtiness that white northerners imposed on migrant farm workers and their families, both interpersonally and in terms of policy. This scene also creates a direct link to the archival document describing the moment when a new group of braceros were dusted with DDT and the Sid Avery photograph depicting the same event. In concert, the three source materials demonstrate the bodily harm enacted by white authorities towards migrant farmworkers from Mexico.

The actions of the nurse are echoed in the behavior of the white children at the school, who taunt and torment Marcos. In one scene, three boys corner him in the bathroom, with the leader threatening Marcos, saying "I don't like Mexicans because they steal. I don't like them at all" (Pérez, 1994). Eventually, the boys' insults and intimidation prompt Marcos to punch the largest one in the face, which results in his getting kicked out of school. We hear the school principal on the phone, assuming that Marcos' parents won't mind him getting kicked out since he will be able to go back to work. Through the principal's clear apathy towards Marcos' education, we can see how he employs an essentializing notion of Mexican migrants as racialized laborers. In his view, there is no loss of potential by expelling Marcos, despite the fact that he has proven himself to be a thoughtful and intelligent student.

The depictions of Marcos' school experiences recall one of the contributed documents in the Bracero History Archive, titled "Education gives you the tools to survive," item #3242. This note, created by Belem Antunez, recounts the author's experience as a sixteen-year-old farm worker and student. At Fabens Grade School in El Paso, Texas, Belem encountered racism and prejudice from her classmates similar to the fictional Marcos. For example, Belem describes how a classmate took advantage of her imperfect English to embarrass her in front of the class: "When I used to asked my apparently friend, in the school Can you help me? in this poem? She will said, sure I help you, but only to put the wrong words in the poem to make the others mack at me, Like my horse went to drink water and I was eating his food, things like that, to make every one laugh." Belem notes that "at that time I was so Innocent," and that made her an easy target, since she would have never assumed someone was trying to be malicious (Ibid). Belem's (probably white) classmates signal her otherness to her by rejecting her attempt to connect and turning it into an opportunity to ridicule her over her perceived lack of mastery of the English language. While she had expected that her willingness to learn and make friends would be reciprocated, Belem finds that much like Marcos, the constricting pressures of racialization close off these opportunities. Though Marcos' story is fictional, it accurately illustrates the themes of alienation and casual violence that pervade the lives of racialized laborers, such as those swept into the Bracero Program.

A literary lens can offer a unique and creative window through which to analyze and contextualize history. The artistic license afforded to fiction writers can arguably lead to a more honest account, one that delves deeper into subjective truths. The science fiction novel *Lunar Braceros 2125-2148* by Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita treats similar themes to the film in a vivid alternative future setting. In this future, the United States has collapsed, and many of the southwestern states have formed a new political entity with a large portion of northern Mexico. This polity, called Cali-Texas, represents a conglomeration of corporate powers into a nation-state, including "the transnational agri-business corporation and the four big biotechs, companies that controlled anything and everything that had to do with technology transfer, information and any kind of power generation, biofuel, nuclear or otherwise" (Sánchez and Pita, 2018, p. 6).

Society has bifurcated into an upper class of the extremely wealthy and an underclass composed of primarily non-white dispossessed workers, the unemployed, and the unhoused, all of whom have been corralled into "Reservations" that function similar to prison camps. This segment of society "became a controlled laboratory labor force, like lab rats, a disciplinary society that was useful to the state" (Ibid, p. 14). This work of fiction thus projects a future that mirrors and intensifies the real, historic Bracero Program. Mexican and United States powers coalesce into an organization that requires the exploitation of a racialized underclass to advance their modernist projects.

Lunar Braceros takes to the extreme the notion of the disposability of racialized laborers. The central plot of the story follows how the main narrator, a woman named Lydia, volunteers for a job in waste management on the moon, which has become an important site for mining and waste disposal due to the utter degradation of the Earth. One day in the course of her duties on the moon, Lydia and her partner Frank discover that the previous crews of workers had never been sent back to Earth as promised but were dead and stored in waste containers on the moon. These workers, all sourced from the Reservations, prisons, and general pool of desperate people, became sacrifices in the name of capital accumulation; they were killed to make room on the transports for more mining products. The symbolism of the murdered workers interred in waste containers is obvious: the authors make literal the disposability of the lunar braceros by linking their fate to the very waste they manage on the moon landfill.

In her narration, Lydia notes that "At a social organization level the Moon modules were turning out to be a recapitulation of Earth history. What was clear was that much like on Earth, on the Moon the Lab Director had the power to determine life and death" (p. 59). Despite representing human aspirations toward progress and modernity, the colonization of the moon served only to replicate terrestrial inequalities. As with the real, historical Bracero Program, which was ideologically tied to notions of progress and modernization, the organization of labor in *Lunar Braceros* revisits the worst offenses of colonial labor exploitation while claiming to offer a preferable alternative.

The title of the novel, by referencing the historical Bracero Program, is as much an indictment of the past as it is a projection of the future. While the original Bracero Program was suffused with a nationalist narrative of progress and modernism and dignity through labor, *Lunar Braceros* dispenses with this narrative entirely by depicting the story's central characters as exploited, alienated workers in a state of constant resistance against oppressive capital/political forces. As a speculative work, *Lunar Braceros* imagines a future that "represents not so much a site of progress and humanistic harmony as a return to the colonial past" (Rivera, 2012). The novel thus functions as a critique of colonial relations in the U.S. and Mexico, past and present. If offers a perspective on the future from below, the perspective of the worker whose bodily sacrifice is deemed acceptable, or at least unavoidable, in order to achieve the advancements in technology and territorial expansion desired by the ruling class. Sánchez and Pita draw a direct line between the real, historical practices of colonialism, which have always been in service of supposed progress and modernity, and speculative futures, forcing the reader to recon with the notion of "progress" from the standpoint of those whose labor makes it possible but who do not benefit from it.

Conclusion

Together, film, novel, archival documents, and photographs provide a prismatic view of the Bracero Program and its historical themes: labor alienation, migrant experiences, and the contradictions of modernity. These materials layer over each other, enabling an analysis that plays with the tensions between intimacy and distance, interiority and exteriority. In the photographs, the men pictured communicate with the viewer through the intermediation of the camera and photographer. In the film, the director uses artistic expression to narrate what is available to us only as a snapshot with the photos. In that sense, the interplay of the film and

the visual appeal of photography are in conversation. Methodologically, then, these mediums compel us to consider the means through which we consume history and, as a result, how we come to know it.

This project is therefore an intervention on our disciplinary moorings. By incorporating a number of visual materials we intend to push beyond history as textual. By engaging with history as a product of speculative literary methods, too, we argue that an understanding of the past must be apprehended through numerous types of knowledge. In fact, by making central the use of photography, film, and literature the work of this article is about what is considered to be evidence. In this way, we also insist that the more open our notions of "historical evidence" are the more we come to know the braceros the way they knew themselves. This does a lot to combat the kinds of epistemic violence that scholars can reproduce when writing about the past using documents that reflect the state's apparatus rather than the humans that apparatus claims to govern.

Finally, by specifically analyzing science fiction as genre we also try to unpack modernity's dark side. By questioning its promises, Sánchez and Pita comment on the future as well as the past and mark the notion of time with new meaning. By setting it in outer space they also reimagine the notion of borderlands—an idea central to the literature on bracero history. In the midst of hemispheric currents of economic modernization projects, both U.S. and Mexican policymakers trumpeted that by earning a place in the guest worker program, the braceros would themselves acquire a more "modern" identity. Cohen argues that "modern" was "the then broadly accepted term for the ideological package that figured progress, democracy, and technological and scientific advancement as unquestionable goals" (2011). Thinking of "modernity" itself as a sort of borderland, that is contingent on historic social forces, issues of race and nation, and power, challenges the common dichotomy that perceives immigrants as either confronting exploitation or opportunity, and gestures to how they could experience both simultaneously. Sánchez and Pita accomplish this by using literary methods, causing us to rethink approaches to the past's reconstruction. We hope that our study does so too.

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***An Inclination of a Wave**, mixed paper and acrylic on canvas, Maria Tan.*

Akiko Yosano's Tale of Genji

Redefining Intimacy Through the "Translational Gap"

Margaux Emmanuel

Content warning: Mentions of sexual violence.

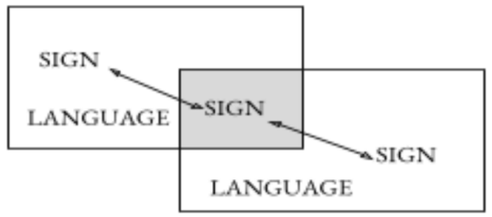
いとせめて恋しきときはうばたまの夜の衣お返してぞ着る

> When love presses me,
> Relentless in the glistening night,
> I take off my robe,
> Then lie down to sleep again,
> Wearing it inside out. (Rowley 11)

In Akiko Yosano's (与謝野 晶子) tanka in *Midaregami* (みだれ髪, "tangled hair"), the image of the robe being worn "inside out" ("衣お返してぞ") configures a "radical departure from tradition" (Rowley 11): the action of "taking off [one's] robe" is an invitation to a dimension of empowered sensuality that is couched as antithetical to the previously established tradition of Japanese waka writing (waka, 和歌, "Japanese poem").1 As Harriette Grissom writes, Yosano, a 20th century writer associated with early Japanese feminist movements, "transform[s] Japan's traditional … waka poem from a sterile exercise in formulaic sentimentality to a bold, resilient medium equal to the complexity of the modern condition" (Grissom 23). This analysis also proves germane when considering Yosano's modernized translation of Heian period (794-1185 AD) noblewoman Murasaki Shikibu's (紫 式部) *The Tale of Genji* (源氏物語). This narrative focuses on the aristocratic and courtly conventions of the Heian era, centered around the eponymous Hikaru Genji, the "shining Genji", son of the fictitious Japanese emperor Kiritsubo. However, the women of *The Tale of Genji*, such as Aoi no Ue, Genji's first wife, are also central figures in the tale. Yosano re-wrote this tale as the *Shin'yaku Genji monogatari* (新訳物語) in 1912, the modernization made explicit through title itself, a "new translation" ("新訳") to spoken language. In this way, Yosano explores the duality of the concept of intimacy through the act of translation, turning this text "inside out". On the one hand, this "intimacy" denotes "proceeding from, concerning, or affecting one's inmost self; closely personal" (OED) but also signifies a "closeness of observation, knowledge" (OED). Yosano utilizes both of these conceptions of "intimacy" in her translation, disclosing feeling through a "spoken language", but also widening the semiotic scope of the tale by tending towards a universal ground of experience and knowledge, transcending mere autobiographical parallelism.

José L. Ramos configures the translator as both "encoder" and "decoder" (Ramos 377). Translating entails using a language encoded in a sign-system that belongs to *another*, as much as it also concretizes (through writing) the translator's position as an interpreting reader. This creates a precarious balance of power when considering the agency of the translator as caught between these two "encoder" and "decoder" positions, especially when considering gender dynamics. This is of particular importance when positioning Yosano as the first modern female Japanese poetic voice. Yosano confers a sensuality to *The Tale*, appropriating Shikibu's original discourse and using it as the vector of a highly female experience. Czech linguist Mukarovsky postulated that "the artistic work is a system of signs which [is] creatively interpreted by the receiver" (Ramos 377), whereas Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak postulated the translation as a "surrender" (Spivak 179) to the original text; the question of agency is problematic when regarding the act of translation as subordination. Yosano, through the colloquialization2 of language, creates a gap in terms of shift in sign-systems. The semiotic discrepancy between Shikubu's Early Middle Japanese and formal language, thematically mirrored by a narrative anchored in a courtly setting, and Yosano's modern take on the tale with Genbun itchi (see footnote 2), allows the latter to use this as a vector of intimacy and sensuality. This paper will seek to address how Yosano's oeuvre demonstrates how intimacy can be articulated in the re-appropriated, dislocated discourse of translation. In this essay, I will examine this "translational gap" as it interacts with "intimacy" in its polysemy - "intimacy" can be understood as the translator's decoder-encoder status as a close and intimate negotiation with another sign-system, but also in terms of the regained agency of feminine sensuality in language.

The semiotics of translation is not a simple overlap of distinct sign-systems, which would be configured as a transactional relationship between semes and syntax, but engenders overlapping *and* transfiguration, operating on two different levels. The translation, of course, necessitates a binding element in the language itself in order to be designated a "translation" of The *Tale of Genji*. However, the translator is *reader* as well as *writer*, and strives to recreate the position of creator. In this reconfiguration of the translator's relationship to the text, the translator intimately operates with the text, a closeness that alienates them; the hermeneutic process of translation dislocates them from their position as "reader", as well as allowing them, through this act of "ventriloquy", to employ another sign-system for their own expression. This "semiotic gap" creates a locus of discursive appropriation which Yosano can manipulate as she wishes. A way in which this could be schematically portrayed is through this, the gap is illustrated in the "grey zone":



This grey zone both belongs to two distinct sign-systems as much as it operates independently from the two of them. Yosano utilizes the "grey zone" engendered by the "translational gap" by strategically omitting certain passages, re-centering the narrative in the way she wishes; Akiko Yosano becomes *creator*. Rowley underlines the paradox of Yosano "protect[ing] Genji" (Rowley 116) in this way: she doesn't condemn the male selfishness that is commonly attributed to Hikaru Genji, but instead intentionally omits the passages that might tarnish the perfection of Genji. This can be seen in the passage "Hahakigi", where for instance Genji, when visiting his wife Aoi, breaks into Kii no Kami's father's wife's apartment in order to see her: "His sharpened senses made him aware that the room next but one to his own was occupied, which led him to imagine that the lady of whom he had been speaking might be there"(Shikibu, Murasaki, Suematsu, Kencho 59). These passages have been omitted in Yosano's translation. In a way, this may seem as contradictory to the image of Akiko Yosano as a feminist figure, but scholars have speculated that this "protection" of this fictional character might stem from an autobiographical element : "she sometimes turns the tables and refashions Murasaki Shikibu's text—and even Murasaki's life—to conform with events in her own life" (Shikibu, Murasaki, Suematsu, Kencho 113). This relationship between personal experience and narrative is emphasized by the poem that introduces the *Shin'yaku monogatari*:

源氏をば　一人となりて　後に書く　紫女年若く
われは然らず

Writing Genji alone, left behind
Murasaki was young; I am not. (Shikibu, Murasaki, Suematsu, Kencho 113)

Both Akiko Yosano and Murasaki Shikibu were widowed when they undertook "writing Genji." This preliminary poem describes the context, perceived by Akiko Yosano, that explains the textual differences between the *Shin'yaku monogatari* and the *Genji monogatari*. By underlining this age difference, Yosano suggests that the principal difference between the *Shin'yaku monogatari* and the original *Monogatari* is not the colloquialization of language, as in the passage from classical Heian period language to Genbun itchi, but the author herself, and the way her womanhood has been altered by her age. Both women are characterized in these lines by their common loneliness ("一人となりて") as widowed women, but then Yosano underlines what she considers the reason for these textual differences : age, as we can tell with the adverb "年若く". Yosano utilizes her closeness to the text not to manipulate the narrative into a feminist tale, but instead to negotiate with the text and to mould it according to her own experience. In a sense, simplifying Genji as a character elevates him to the level of a paragon, contributing to the myth-like plasticity of this tale; the very existence of "Genji shortcuts" (Shikibu, Murasaki, Suematsu, Kencho 26), textual simplifications of *The Tale*, show how Akiko Yosano's discursive appropriation is also related to the canonization of Shikibu's original text, as they demonstrate the adaptability of the text. This has prompted scholars, such as Brian Philips with "The Tale of Genji As a Modern Novel," to speak of this book as "...surg[ing] with life. Genji abounds in the texture and detail of lived reality rather than the mere brocade of ritual" (Phillips 373), a textual "liveliness" that is also of interest when regarding the gendering of the tale's semiotics.

The previously contemplated "grey zone" must also be interpreted as a sense of agency conveyed by this "translational gap". We must examine the text as its own semiotic entity, close to what Umberto Eco designates as the text's own "intentio operis" (Eco). However, if it is this semiotic entity status that allows Yosano to redefine the terms of Shikibu's narrative, the intentionality, "intentio auctoris" of the author, is also a necessary component of the act of translation. This "intentio operis" constitutes the terms that frame the discursive appropriation of translation. D. J. Enright writes "Heian Japan was 'a man's world'... and it was left to the women to write about it" (Enright 166), making apparent the gender dynamics of not only Shikibu's original Heian era narrative, but the way in which Yosano's "intentionality" also redefines these dynamics. Spivak writes that "the task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the workings of gendered agency" (Spivak 179). When reviewing the semiotic process of translation, the question of "agency" as well as gender in relation to this agency complicates with Spivak's study of translation as a "surrender" to the original text. Language may help reconfigure this "gendered agency" as a "clue", but there will still be a subordination to the original intention of the author. Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* is centered around a male figure - however, scholars such as Komashaku Kimi, founder of the Women's School in Osaka, have postulated that "the tale is not about Genji but about the women who surround him" (Kimi, Yoda 28). This gender dynamic of *The Tale of Genji* is mirrored in its status between a men's classic a "*koten*"(古典) and a "women's romance". *The Tale* was considered a narrative for women, and yet was also read by men: "*Monogatari* seem always to have been regarded as reading for women that was dangerous for women" (Rowley 18). The unclear intentions of the original work also contribute to the creation of the "grey zone", recreating this liminality that will allow Yosano to assert her own discourse. Yosano was known as a "poetess of passion" ("情熱の女流歌人"), a "new woman"("新しい女"), or even a suffragette" (Rowley 114). We cannot ignore the potential feminist implications of her work when reading this translation. In this light, we can recognize that she uses the "translational gap"as a locus for "gendered agency" as Spivak writes, a space of expression for a highly *female* and sensual experience, which was considered typical of Yosano's works. Yosano often utilizes Shikibu's narrative as a malleable myth that can align itself not only with her own experience, but with a more universal female condition. This is especially noticeable in the "Aoi" section of *The Tale* (Aoi being Genji's first wife); the universality of her writing can be seen, for instance, in the following passage that describes the loss of virginity and rape of Aoi by Genji:

> などてかう心憂かりける御心を、うらなく頼もしきものに思ひきこえけむ」と、あさましう思さる。
>
> Not even dreaming that he had such a thing in mind, she was appalled that she had trusted so completely one with such base intentions. (Rowley 114)

There is a palpable repression of emotion here, as we can recognize by the use of terms such as "appalled"("あさましう思さる"), "she had trusted": Aoi is almost blamed and held accountable for Genji's actions. In relation to the reaction of being "appalled" is the phrase "うらなく頼もしきものに思ひきこえけむ". The formulation of this phrase is centered around a transgression in *trust* ("頼もしきもの" can be translated and understood as 'thing' that is reliable or trustworthy), but there is no mention of any bodily reaction or transgression. When compared to the *Shin'yaku*, we can see how Yosano alters the text to render more apparent the emotional, but also physical implications of this transgression:

> こんな心があるとは夢にも知らないで頼みに思っていたと思うと暑い涙がはらはらと頬お伝うのであった。
>
> Not even dreaming that he had this in mind, when she remembered how she had trusted him hot tears coursed down her cheeks. (Rowley 115)

This liminal space between the "dream", the "mind" and the reality of this transgression are kept in Yosano's interpretation of the text, but it is still in play with an unabashed emotion. This can be seen with the mention of the "hot tears coursing down her cheeks" ("暑い涙がはらはらと頬お伝うのであった"), the specific use of the onomatopoeic adverb "はらはら" conveying an activeness to these tears. There is an emotional transparency and candor in Yosano's translation. She also emphasizes a certain directness, "などてか", an archaic form for specifically the term "why" is replaced by the determiner "こんな", "*this*," almost accusational in its tone. These details show how *Shin'yaku Monogatari* navigates intimacy, using the process of colloqualization to emphasize this transgression. Following Rowley's analysis of the "Aoi" passage, the story of Aoi's loss of virginity has been linked by scholarship to Yosano's own experience:

> ふるさとを恋ふるそれよりややあつき涙流れきその初めての日
>
> Hotter still than those of homesickness
> the tears I shed that first day. (Rowley 114)

Hayashi Sadako (林 貞子) writes that this line is part of a song Yosano wrote about her hometown ("ふるさと"), Sakai, after leaving for Tokyo ("晶子がふるさと堺をうたった歌は、あわただしの上京の旅から数年を経て" (林)). The "tears [she] shed" can be directly linked to the bodily and emotional reaction she attributes to Aoi, in spite of the euphemistic retention of "that first day" ("その初めての日"). This consideration of the translation of the *Monogatari* as autobiographical is reductive as it configures the *Shin'yaku* as the product of causality; paradoxically, this analysis would create a binary between experience and tale.

To conclude, Yosano's *Shin'yaku Monogatari* demonstrates how intimacy is at the heart of considering the linguistic "translational gap": Murasaki Shikibu's *Tale of Genji* translated becomes a malleable, mythic, and thus open to universal experience. The semiotic shift of translation necessitates a close operation with an original sign-system, not only from Heian period Japanese to Genbun itchi, but from one distinct experience to another. This allows Yosano to portray through the sensuality of her language not only her own female experience, but to also develop the conception of translation as as semiotically isolating as it is semiotically "opening". The act of translation restructures the hermeneutic process, blurring the lines between interpreter (reader), and creator (author), letting Yosano put forward her own idiosyncratic style, rooted in a context of early Japanese feminist movements, with its cocomitant sexual and sensual themes. The semiotic "grey zone" becomes an essential notion in translation, the act of translation no longer an isolated phenomenon but a universal, complex process. This zone between interpretation and recentered intentionality is relevant when analyzing race and translation. Still, this consideration is made difficult by the decoding and re-encoding process of the "grey zone", a question that remains to be further elucidated by future scholarship.

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Notes

1 The term “waka” itself both refers to a specific Japanese poetic style following a 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic structure, as well denoting “Japanese poetry” more generally.

2 “Genbun itchi”(言文一致), literally meaning “unification of the spoken word and language”, refers to the Meiji Era linguistic switch from “kanbun”(漢文, chinese writing) a “national language”(国語).

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***Last February**, analogue collage, Leah Collins.*

Where We Are Closest

A Conversation with Naima Green

Campbell Campbell and Lilly Cao

***Pur·suit**, 2018–present.*

Naima Green is an artist and educator interested in reviving the queer and BIPOC archive and reimagining the relationship between the photographer and subject. She works primarily with digital and film photography and short film, and she holds an MFA in Photography from ICP–Bard, an MA from Teachers College, Columbia University, and a BA from Barnard College. Her work has been featured in exhibitions at the Smart Museum of Art, MASS MoCA, International Center of Photography, Houston Center for Photography, Bronx Museum, and many other institutions. Her recent exhibition Brief & Drenching *at Fotografiska New York showcased a series of photographs as well as a short film titled* The Intimacy of Before*. Many photographs were pulled from her project* Pur·suit*, a reimagining of Catherine Opie's* Dyke Deck *consisting of 54 playing cards depicting queer, trans, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people. CJLC's Campbell Campbell and Columbia Undergraduate Journal of Art History editor Lilly Cao interviewed Naima on her artistic intentions and influences.*

This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Lilly Cao: Data collections and archives can be dehumanizing—especially in the contemporary digital age, they often commoditize identities in service of profit-seeking institutions and corporations. *Pur·suit*, itself a kind of archive or data repository, is in contrast radically humanizing: you give your sitters the power to dress and pose how they want, and your pastel fabric set appears soft and welcoming rather than clinical or objective. How do you view this work in conversation with conventional data collections or historical archives? Might it help us reconceptualize what it means to collect data of and about people—or what it means to create an archive at all?

Naima Green: I am thinking about historical archives and modes of data collection, wanting to rethink the ways in which people can participate in their own self fashioning, preservation, archival. With *Pur·suit*, I was interested in the set design because I wanted people to feel welcomed and comfortable in their bodies and center their embodiment and play. That ranges from someone stepping on a prop to me offering them tea or a soft place to decompress from the day. I asked people to come as they feel most comfortable and confident and in any state of dress or undress in which they feel comfortable.

This kind of data collection is also in how I assigned the cards and the suits. I created a survey with fifteen to twenty questions that range from "What texture do you identify with?" "What season calls to you right now?" and "If you could choose the number and suit that you could be in the deck, what would you choose?" If people have relationships to a favorite number, I ask that they share that, and I created a key for myself. The card suits, diamonds, spades, clubs, hearts can translate to seasons or earth elements, so I asked expanded questions in case someone wanted a spade and there were no spades left. If someone wanted to be a seven of diamonds, and that was taken, then they could potentially be the two of diamonds because they connected with the two.

I tried to invite people in the designing and naming of the card suits as well. To further your questions about humanization, it feels very critical to include the names of people who are in the deck. I was thinking about the truth that we do not often know who people are and what their names were, and we often only learn about people after they have died. What does inexpensive and nuanced queer life look like around me between 2018 and 2020? How can I name those people and invite them into my practice? Anyone who is not queer or black or sat for the project can still find an invitation through the different dynamics that they bring into playing with the cards.

Campbell Campbell: I spent an hour looking through *Pur·suit* and Catherine Opie's *Dyke Deck*. I am curious about what led you to *Dyke Deck*? How do you see yourself expanding or disrupting the tradition of portraiture?

NG: I had learned about Catherine Opie's practice while I was in the school, but I had not heard of this project until I was stumbling through a database in the New York Public Library, and I don't even remember what I searched to get to the *Dyke Deck*. But I saw it and realized they didn't have it in their collection, so I checked and ordered a deck on eBay. When it came, I was excited by the material and the transformation from an everyday object. Most people have a deck of cards in their homes, but how can you take that universal object and insert new communities? Opie's *Dyke Deck* felt thrilling, playful, and iconic, but the more I looked at it, I felt like I was missing and many queer people around me were missing. I felt an urgent call to think about the communities around me and celebrate them. I often photograph people I know and love, but it felt important to invite people whom I didn't know. It was

***Yellow Jackets Collective**, from the series **Pur·suit**, 2018.*

***Sara Elise & Amber**, from the series **Pur·suit**, 2018.*

my first time having an open call process, and sixty to seventy percent of the subjects are people whom I was meeting for the first time. That adds a layer of intimacy and trust, since I was getting to know and establish trust in people quickly. I photographed about 106 people over nine days, so most sessions were thirty minutes if you were an individual and forty-five minutes if you were a couple. That is not a long time to build rapport, so I made an effort to listen and ask questions—where are you coming from, what do you want to play, what music do you want to hear, how does the day inform how you show up? I created a space where people can let go of something horrible that might have happened on the train and can bring in something wonderful that they carried from the morning, since all of those things exist in the image making process.

LC: I love the idea of bringing together narratives into the cracks of everyday life. I am wondering if you could talk about the shift in materials and color and textures that occurred in *Pur·suit* between 2018 and 2020. What initiated this change?

NG: The set is related to thinking about the suits and elements and seasons. If the first set is spring, it is light, it is airy, it is mauves, it is mesh, it is iridescent. I built the second set with the set designer for the project, Jessie Levandov, and it was deep, autumn, velvet, dense, and opaque colors. That set was installed in late February 2020, and I had eighty people schedule to sit for *Pur·suit* in 2020, but that was not possible due to the pandemic.

We did the first iteration of *Pur·suit* as a deck of playing cards, but there are only 54 cards in a deck of cards. There were a lot of people who were not in the deck but very much in the project that I wanted to honor. I think about the ways in which a contemporary archive is still emerging and might be the best place to hold stories as they develop, so that is what *Pur·suit* at recess was going to be, to make more images as they were happening. I interviewed couples who are business partners and asked people to contribute playlists, TV shows, and answer questions about what their lives look like in 2020. The goal, as the project continues, is to think about these subtle shifts in environments and what is the best way to move forward.

I know for certain that creating this archive feels necessary to the larger project, so that is what I am working on right now. Thinking about how that happens and what that looks like. In a couple of weeks, I will be releasing the first stage of the archive with all of the portraits that I was able to make in 2020. Thinking about how we work now and what 2020 felt like and how we care for each other and ourselves. Thinking about the needs of individuals and communities.

CC: On the note of safety, could you discuss the role of the home in your photography? Is there a connection between the safety and lack of empty space in your photos?

NG: For the last six years, I lived in the same apartment and invited everyone to come over. I photographed them and this society that I had, and I was thinking about who came into my space, how they changed the space, and how I changed in the space. There is an element of safety if I am inviting them into my home, but I am also thinking about the homes that we make are mobile or temporary or just a gathering on the beach one day that will be dismantled by the end of the night. I am surrounded by people who think safety and accountability are important: to be able to have honest and difficult conversations with the people who surround you can create more elements of safety and transparency. I am interested in homes as places where we may be the closest to ourselves in some ways, and I mean that I am not thinking just about physical bodies and space, but the things that we keep around us. When I go into someone's space, I take notice of how they decorate their mantel or what books they show and what spices they have out. This information contributes to the portrait and the life, and that can be more interesting than a static portrait because when you see a beautiful portrait, you see a beautiful person, but do not know anything about what they're reading, what they're listening to, what they love. Those points of entry are fascinating.

LC: Could you talk about the objects in your exhibition at Fotografiska? The furniture and the vanity are items from the home; was this the atmosphere you were trying to evoke in the gallery?

NG: That second gallery, there is a video playing, the short film called *The Intimacy of Before*. Jessie Levandov, a designer and filmmaker, and I made that film together a few weeks before I moved out of that long term apartment that I lived in. Of the objects in that gallery, the mirror in particular is important because that is a mirror that used to sit on my desk, and the way it is is how it sat on my desk. Then, there's a little elongated rectangular card that says, "I Like You," and there's an etching tucked into the bottom and a photograph tucked into the bottom. There are a set of polaroids that sit to the left of the mirror; all of those polaroids were made in the "I Like You" mirror. That series started in 2017, where every time I changed clothes in the span of 36 hours, I took a Polaroid, and I was kind of bored at home. I think I had just had dental surgery, and I didn't want to go anywhere. Usually, up until that point, I mostly worked outside in natural light and in daylight, in the warmth of spring and summer and fall. So, I really was thinking, "What can I make in this space that I spend so much time in?" I didn't think it would really become anything, but I would make polaroids in that mirror all the time, with people who visited, but still mostly alone.

Having the mirror in the gallery—having the physical mirror in the gallery—it invites people to make their own selfie in the mirror. If you stand at a certain angle, there is a larger self portrait of me holding a camera that you can see through the mirror behind you. You can see me making a portrait, as you are looking at or making your own portrait in the mirror. It felt important to bring in the actual objects from my space. In the gallery next to that one, there's a chair in the corner, and under it, it says, "I'm Waiting for a Picture or a Person." That chair also lived in my apartment for a little while. Another point of invitation is to have something to sit on that actually feels supportive. Looking at the work and actually spending time with it and having something soft that greets you when you're in a gallery space-- that's so rare. I was thinking, "What does it mean to make an exhibition that considers a few more elements of the experience of the visitor?" That's what I do in my home space. So, because I'm not there to offer you water or tea or make you a cocktail or give you a snack, here are some wider chairs for you to actually

***Self-Portrait (I like you)**, 2017.*

sit and look at the work and experience the work with some time rather than just running through the exhibition because there's nowhere to sit, or because there's nowhere to exist for a long time.

CC: Turning to filmmaking, could you talk about what drove your interest from photography to filmmaking? What can you explore in filmmaking that you cannot explore in photography? Could you talk about images of excess and the body?

NG: Filmmaking is a very new way of making for me. I feel like I had never really been drawn to film or video simply because I always felt like I didn't know what I was doing. That feeling stopped me, and now I feel like isn't that the beauty of it? So often you don't know what you're doing until you try and you try again and you just continue working at it. I could have said that 20 years ago, I didn't know how to make images, but I still was making them. So, I'm trying not to hinder my own practice and process in that way. About the film, I made a sketch film with some of these ideas right after the election in 2016. I was getting my MFA at the time and didn't know anything really about making a video; it was just me and a tripod, but I was interested in this idea of consumption to the point where it might break you in some way. I was also interested in ideas of shedding and ideas of releasing.

Those are some of the elements that were brought into *The Intimacy of Before*, which was really interesting to make in quarantine, thinking about touch, and about how so many people have been deprived of touch and deprived of intimate contact. All of the audio that you hear is voice notes or recordings from a sound library that I've been maintaining for probably three or four years. I record all sorts of things, like my dreams in the morning, when I wake up. There are some frogs croaking that you hear in one moment in the film, and that was over the summer in the woods in Connecticut. There are also the sounds of water pumping that are from Oaxaca in December of 2019. I was thinking about the way that I can trace how sounds become a map and also about a way of remembering and being able to drop into such specific moments that I probably wouldn't be able to recount without the sound.

Going back to how I came to making a film, I think I'm interested in bringing more life in, and I think that the video allows for that in a very specific way. It also was a way for me to create some sort of time capsule of what my space used to be like and what it meant to live in a place for so long. And also, what it meant to leave that place and to recognize how much I grew and how much I stretched and then how much I outgrew that space. I was thinking about all the ways that that happens throughout life all the time—the ways that we, in friendships or in partnerships, think at some points that the relationships might be nurturing and supportive, but in other moments, you realize that you outgrow it are you realize that it's become stale or that you're no longer being nurtured or nourished. So, you let go and release those things, and maybe you see how to have fun in the process of that even through very real and difficult challenges. There's no one narrative around that film. I can't say, "It's about X." It's about so many things. The more that I think about it and the more that I watch it, I think it can become about so much more than what I was even initially thinking about.

CC: Looking at your work chronologically, it seems as though you can trace an increasing focus of movement and time in your work. Could you discuss how you're incorporating these more in your portraiture?

NG: In my earlier portraits, I was thinking about stillness and distilling the portrait down to a breath. I was thinking about the way that the landscape and the figure might be interwoven or situated. I work in a lot of different modes and ways and wanted to think more about the spilling out of life. There's so much messiness in thinking about portraiture and homemaking, about friendship and community, and just the way we live. I want to look less at a very still portrait where someone might be confronting me, or the camera or the viewer, and instead give more space for interior life in personal reflection, in the turning away to the camera to create blocks and to create questions and points of curiosity where you don't need to know what this person's face might look like. Where you don't need to know how they might hold their hands. Then, you can see a little bit of what they're looking out at, or get the feel for how they might be moving in space, or in a hot tub, or on a roof in the middle of summer or at a quarantine birthday party, sitting six feet away from friends. I am just thinking about more places of movement, and also of living in a different way.

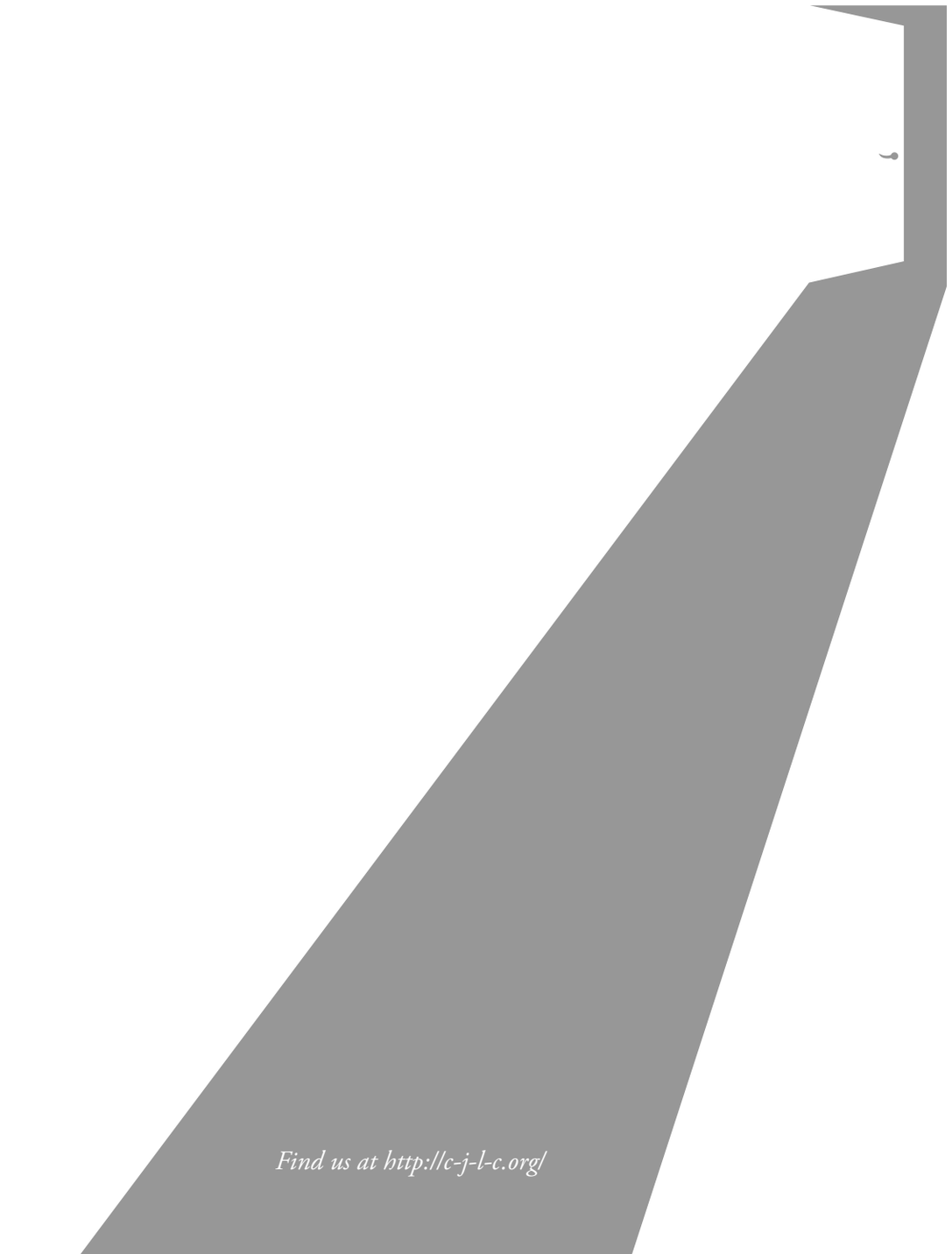
LC: On the notion of process, how is your artwork in conversation with the literature that you're reading or the music that you're consuming?

NG: The current show, *Brief & Drenching*, at Fotografiska, has its title from one of the last lines from *Zami*, a book by Audre Lorde. I started reading that text at the beginning of 2019 when I moved to Mexico City, and I didn't want that book to end, so I read it really slowly. I would just read a page then put it down, then I would come back to it a week later and read a chapter and still think, "Oh gosh, you're moving too fast." I finally finished that book at the beginning of 2020. I read it over the course of a year. I learned so much—I didn't know that she lived in Mexico, and so I felt like it was such an important period of my life to read that book and to also sit with what a page was giving me and opening up for me. I feel like a lot of my exhibition titles come from text or things that I've read or excerpts. Last year, I read Carmen Maria Machado's *In the Dream House* really slowly, and that was so important for where I was in my life, too. It's important to be a reader as an image maker. I think about some of the books that indirectly have changed the way I think about image making and the way that text comes into that

process. [Maggie Nelson's] *Bluets*, I love that book. I love short stories. When I first read Miranda July's *No One Belongs Here More Than You* maybe eight or ten years ago, I thought it was hilarious. I tried to pick it up again recently, and I didn't connect with it. I'm honoring what the text and the books and the writing and the literature might do for you in a very specific time, and not expecting to have that same relationship with the book for your whole life.

For more of Naima Green's work, visit http://www.naimagreen.com/.

***Untitled**, 2017.*



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