

EINTOU, OR
MY GOVERNMENT NAME

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Acknowledgments

Statement of Poetics

These poems are working to negotiate joy with sorrow. Upon hearing from an agent that she is no longer accepting stories of Black trauma because she would rather read about joyful Black experiences, I took it upon myself to write through this confliction. Vinson Cunningham wrote this in *The New York Times* regarding the Black literary movement, “The joy of expression and the sorrow of experience, properly commingled, might result in something new — and true.” I have taken this formula: **Joy of Expression + Sorrow of Experience = New/True** and have used it to map my work. Joy and sorrow are aware of one another in each poem, they coexist through the speaker’s memory. While recurring images of the Black body appear throughout my work, this is compromised by a memory that shape-shifts. At once the body is an object, then a graveyard, then it is a color asking for permission to ascend. The speaker is learning that perhaps memory itself is not unstable, but it is the present that is unstable. Water (whether earthly or celestial) has often been used in my work to help communicate or is a catalyst for intimacy.

As a Black woman, it is difficult to write without an agenda. As I think about those whose work I am in conversation with, those like Tracy K. Smith, Rita Dove, and Hortense J. Spillers, and those I learn from such as Arthur Sze, and Adrienne Rich to name a few, I am all the while learning from Toni Morrison’s deliberate critique of language while simultaneously elevating it; how this informs my own choreography of language. I am writing to invent—these poems, this collection, voices the Black experience because I am Black, and they are my experiences. I am either writing to carve a space into the canon, or ether, or whatever we are calling our poems’ homes these days, that allows other voices like mine to not be limited to a singular grievance, time, place, or feeling, or I am writing to avoid the canon altogether, which feels like something one only learns in hindsight. The poems here express this deep confliction and are working to convict readers of their own obligations to language and body, specifically, the Black body.

:

black is to performance as blackness is to performativity. we know that black is built by preconceived powers of political and social economies, yet the circumstances multiply, or diffuse the instant that they create a distinct entity that we want to delineate as black. but blackness is the in-vention, the process of expressing emotions in new and meaningful ways, left to interpretation of the past. both performance and performativity operate as these interpretations. this may be a lie, or an unbelonging truth, because it exists in un-familiar history—the past which returns with uncanny vividness in the changed context of the present. this context, though permitting change, is deeply rooted and materializes in the act of theater and performance.

Black Mime, or Silence Experiment

yours is not a speaking role—

what to do with a mouth if not maintain a dialogue— *in parting your hair I am also parting*

a century I am

don't contort the diaphragm from its natural dome-like shape;

exhale a hiss; or hum through a straw; or relax your lips—

experts recommend stretching the tongue, sticking it out
pointing it up, bracing it from behind & pushing it
against the teeth— *dilating pores*

into cavernous blooms and waiting

I am

third molars are Darwinian—

vestigial structures that corroborate evolution—

stuck in the jaw where bone & ligament begin to deteriorate—

this doesn't affect speech or speechlessness; teeth are just little bones that, instead of breaking,

thrum from the mouth like guitar picks over steel— *fingering the*

many mouths of your

skull reading sticky circumference of flesh

I am

cannot recognize the diversity of body—

that it can transubstantiate when wreathed far enough—

the body protects—

systems of sentries like membranes / vertebrae to
protect the spine / how ribcage protects lung &
heart / skull / brain matter. the skin organ is an
exposed boundary guarded only by speak— *in parting your hair I am stilling*

bruise flecked coal stitched beneath chin

where your throat should

moves like oil down the scaly bark

of a tree

make or utter or mutter

ink

bellied trauma

sinks into hands shaped for petition

I imagine the mouth excises into fifth limb—

that it indiscernibly carries the body in suspension, as all fifth limbs must—

what to do with all this air; babbles emanating from sable landscapes; trickle toward the center, lock into a stifled cue

this is what I mean

by singed resistance

Whale Psalm

consider this body a moving object
 immutable skin like wax olives
plucked somewhere deep that its vast texture
 might stifle the ridges where you breathe—
carcass spiral bites light on the surface
 tells all sorts of truth about outer space
the way our dead still pulse after sound
 eludes them
follows glimpse of rapture waves exhaust themselves
 trying to say goodbye mouths expire
with rush to render oil from their lungs
consider this a graveyard
ash swept skin like wax olives
 fed through bony teeth that its simplicity
might swing death, dull, dumb—
 there are silkworms carved into the bark on my back
tell all sorts of truth about otherness
 the way our dead still live inside our tongues
whipping in communication you identify the white
 heavy layers forming thousands of them
struggling to age moths gently
 lifting my feet off the ground

titian hues gleam onto the stage like a ribbon, flattened tongue considering human bolus for collective swallow. in five minutes, I will become her, settle into her essence, stare deeply into the shadowy abyss that makes up the Doris Harper-White playhouse audience. I scrape the bottoms of my feet on the blackish carpet backstage to dry them of their sweat; cheap fibers and sawdust stick to my skin and I feel grainy resistance as I slide them back into their slippers. earlier in the evening, I impulsively shrieked “good luck” to experienced thespians twice after being warned “It’s, break a leg.” I’d been sitting in a dusty folding chair—the kind with mesh cupholders and that collapses around campfires—downstairs in the “green room,” listening while Jason explained the age-old superstition. Jason, who would later loquaciously speak from a godmic and feed absurd directions to my character, told me how before we auditioned for the showcase the playhouse had been flooded. a sewer line diverted more than 4,000 gallons of raw sewage into the basement. props and costumes had to be sent off for specialized cleaning and storage until the lower-level was clear. all that surrounded us was exposed framing and ductwork, a wooded skeleton of a large basement that swam a chill through my extremities every time I descended the distempered, black staircase. upstairs is different. no evidence of deluge, except the bits of sawdust that inevitably travel to the wings, masked by heavy-to-part legs, the ones I’m supposed to break. the narrator sets the next scene, a pattern of coughs ripple...

A Poem with Every Line Ending (Ghazal)

I remember having to carry
him between my knees, carry

ing his small skeleton quaking
of lilt swell sway and he'd ask if I could carry

him even further and I'd say I can't
no more my arms are tired and if I carry

you, you won't learn to
yourself and it reminded me of wreckedlight carry

uneven luster still trickling toward my legs
and he looked at me ragged and mouthed *carry*

and I couldn't resist that fruitless whisper,
that final utterance slips beneath my carry

:

when a marked woman speaks, the intent is to listen; what happens instead is a feast of locution, of lilt biting into speak, and the question that reemerges with every utterance, *what is the meaning of this invention?*

I am a marked woman...If I were not here, I would have to be invented
invention is an iteration of black performance, diasporic
expressivities are built through an unbelonging memory
that stretches toward and grasps at a history unfamiliar to black diaspora,
and in this way, performance is an attempt to reach the dark matter, the unseen, the un-familiar,
the hyphen here deploys a sense of taking and degradation standing between two forces that the mouth so
naturally wants to bring together

My Government Name (Eintou)

sometimes y
sometimes yahweh
sometimes you pearl you open clam
sometimes you always looking up
you always seeing light
where there isn't any
~~—lightless~~

sometimes trouble
the inability to touch
to mine a nest between fingers
numbness that eats at your bones and
is at your bones
where there isn't any
~~—truth~~

sometimes moves
through eggshell and blue
sometimes you breathe you bleed onto
rosewood you front-crawl backstroke butterfly you
learn to capsize, ask
can I eggshell
—

can I
blue
in a beeline upwards

*Abecedarian Needs Nothing More Than a Rocketship
and to Launch into Equatorial Orbit*

black expanse ac
commodates specks of white plasma hel
d together by its own gravity, I tried to stand b
etween these two forces

follow two stars at the end of upwards

~~gravitational attraction~~

~~guide me~~

~~gabriel~~

guilt the sun into sync

hronous orbit, precess

ing axis, lay ad

jacent with and exposing s

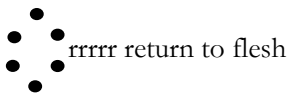
ky

like a spinning top wobbling around

~~maybe constellations~~

maybe asterisms

(no) (navigate)⁷



~~polaris~~

protract, the earth is not

quite as spherical as we'd like to believe

return to flesh

~~specter~~

~~spectate~~

~~specter~~

~~spectate~~

spectating specter

their only responsibility is becoming

~~unbecoming~~

under lower altitudes engaged in intergalactic beha

vior

what like I meant when I needed you to e

xpose

~~your~~

~~you~~

your

zenith



Stellarium

I subdivide minutes into seconds,
wait for something
to obscure your sightline

I tell you I've never done this before
never, considered third dimension
 specter little specters parked on superhighways
 interplanetary maps,
 refracting starglow seems too difficult
 without a tunnel

*

moonlight guillotines thick air
 for hours
 before I finally see—
 earth sunders waterline for

 eggshells
 broken
 pebbles

 split against the sky bathed in city, here
to chase
 the deep syringe of oxygen pulling
 me toward you, your eyelids like pennants warn

*

we like this time of day or night
 laying on our backs on augustine

and watching planes takeoff from Sky Harbor
I tell you I did this with my father
once, burgundy t-bird
parked stalled parked in the sightline of
 the Delta hanger,
he didn't bother with the names of
 constellations like you do

Wings Wrinkle Toward Expansive Earth, I

zephyr them back to

sky, bathe / in ultraviolet until bruised with light, write /

 them on the window's condensation, into / our reflection on the CD's thin aluminum, tongue
/ them into your skin

Screaming Into

tongue ribbed

hums of gritting teeth,
polished calculus
muffled under inky
sphere,

incisors in wraps
aluminum to deflect
moonlight

when the earth finally cuts itself away
from this galaxy, carves a dying egg,
slides along the milky way,
the sound it makes as it scrapes nova
after nova—sounds like
liquified drumming—
cauterized canters into sterile
cosmos

American Endeavor

"Mae C. Jemison is the first African American female astronaut. In 1992, she flew into space aboard the Endeavour, becoming the first African American woman in space."

but you were not the first to see black sky
or spoon wounds, deep crests mangled beneath an
intergalactic meridian eye,
or press your retinas to hushedly scan
this gaping throat opium of echoes
birling in suspension, stretching toward you.
nor did you trouble with deftly narrow
hips swelling against the moon
testing boundaries of your nylon glove,
you were, however, the last to see him
standing god amid gxd amid gyd
tearing fiercely through night's solar wind
can you see Chicago from so (high) can
you see yellow streaks on black pavement, so high

These Fathered Days

you take an inventory of all the things on your kitchen counter that amount to domesticity
think of death like it's tumbled, sealed with resin
glance above the sink to see a figure fulfill the slip-n-slide
laugh because that sort of thing is funny
 an unsuspecting child being knocked over by a wave
 beneath all that water a breath of air waiting to be
 released through a fissure in their face
you remember me gentle, mostly peppering, mostly salting, flour, draining milk from the liver,
tossing you a rag to run beneath warm water,
wipe the crusting cabinet top lacquered from
innards spread across
you brush past the rolled-up apron worn loosely behind me, lapping my waist and curled as
would a tail, your hair shows shiny plumage,
thick and oily from sweat and grease popping off
the skillet. how we cool off by rocking in our chairs on
your side porch next to that old trailer. your words came in brief, monotonous phrases you
expected me to understand, like *Buster's gon*
come mow the lawn t'morrow evenin. and when I
don't hear you completely, you shriek and look upward as if to say
I'd have been better off as a bird

You

is a father whose children live

in other countries,

he sends them short stories

where horses die on every page

he lowers them facing east

for the second coming

:

the main differences between Fay Wray and Naomi Watts' interpretations of Ann Darrow, the lack of screaming from Watts when held in Kong's animated grasp; the central park ice-dancing scene with Kong slipping and Watts chuckling at his ape-like clumsiness; the two of them locked in an evolutionary trance; Watts a beautiful look at natural selection; Kong a menacing reminder of what man once was; both Wray and Watts; white women; I wonder if Angela Basset or Halle Berry; hollywood's most desirable black actresses at the time; had played Ann in that 2005 interpretation; if they too would've truncated Ann's actions with gazes of despair into the eyes of Kong; if they too would have been wearing that illustrious white gown with nipples protruding through its gossamer-like material; if Edgar Wallace knew he was writing a cautionary tale about interracial romance

Mapping of Female Ejaculation

oxygen starved tour of silky chrysalis—
 come undone in morning biopsy
when sunlight suspires to examine flesh—
 come phalange come bereft come starved
and warbling as parula with incantation—
 luring arch so convex and concave
become confused with one another, hollow—
 still drumming, steel drumming
liquified and carnivorous rhythm falls—
 along cylindrical corridors dewy and ripe,
but you are waterthrush, terrestrial—
 once a tadpole and amphibious
you desire the inside, the soft shell—
 the safety of my harvest maturation,
the safety of defoliance and air—
 come imago and I will share the moral
of my story, pleat your breaths—
 warmth rises vernal equinox,
check stellarium for planetary abnormalities—
 you say *at the hour of right ascension*,
come winged, patina—& crowned

Scattered

let us go
into the lot next door
large stones
use both hands
smash soda cans
from sunday
evening dinners

stop the ice cream
man on his way down 5th street
the adults inside
can't see what we buy: Kings Candy Cigarettes,
shredded jerky chew a popsicle
stuff the jerky chew
under our lips like tobacco take the candy
cigarettes

hollow shells for powdered sugar
blow through them and imitation smoke appears

these candy cigarettes
collect dust in a box I keep in storage
because afraid to throw things away.

these candy cigarettes
taste like chalk I feel big when
I light them with imaginary matches

there are five anthills we comb through,
letting the insects crawl into our empty kings' cases
stray dogs watch us from a distance,

these candy cigarettes
the faux
tobacco starts to taste so good
popsicles melted red blue in the dirt
all the ants move

toward coagulating sweet
dragging syrupy legs over stones,

look up to see who's watching

Cul-de-sac

a blind *alley designed for turning around* occupies a clearing in the forest; winona acreage
muses frost while storm drains knife a concrete path between houses nearby the freshwater lake; it
sings into the wetland; it leads a raft of ducks onto the frozen water; imitation tidepools tundra the
surface snails underneath act like soil; children passing poke their thumbs toward the sun, they
squint to measure; children consumed with hunger for relativity and what it means to describe a
breath of air to something less animal than the desire; breadcrumbs hover above the path from
planetary winds the children curl& squat; waddling one behind the other; behind the other; wrists
tucked beneath their ribs; elbows poking out; then they leave and the ducks are feather-pecking each
other's damaged quills

You

spits loose mist onto the dizzy panorama
of blackland prairie,
rolling sycamores thumbed to sky—

indian paintbrush texture maps lines of
carraba-yellow canisters stretched across the plain,

songbirds swallow alkaline clay,
carry monarchs to their nests and genuflect
the air that moves between bone,

a reservoir for seismic echoes—

when you stroke the membrane of rosehill
it hews and turns to meadow—

Rituals

poppa rolls his neck to break
garlic cloves into the hot skillet,
touches a towel
to transfer unpalatable grease.
he drums his seasonings above
his sightline,
this detail permits
the broth to lick the skillet's trim,
what's mistakenly powdered over the edge,
but he would say it wasn't a mistake,
that he meant for the flames to taste his rub
and choke
just enough
of everything
no less
than a
handful of
limes, Shrimp
he stretches
the noodles
like his
arm is
the neck
of a
guitar

Catastrophe

we used to eat candied sweet potatoes with cinnamon
fry the bacon bake(on) no fry it to hear the cackle
and argue over
who gets to flip the egg
I'd scramble trem(bull) beat the thing with tiny closed fists
gripped the fork
thronged the white embryo
gotta get that out of there the(air) is useless for it now
our spell book
has a blank canvas for our own re ci pe con coc tions
they must listen for the exact moment I(meant) to say wait
fresh fruit like
black raspberries and red raspberries demarcated by roux
this looks like the picture you sent me three years ago()

I bought because the
a watch man on
for my his wrist
father not says so
knowing that and if
watches could they wear
be male the watch
or female on their
and he right wrist
thanked me then they're
but never women who
wore it wear watches
my mother are just
told me curious and
about the don't even
woman he'd really notice
be wearing their wrists
on his until there's
wrist I a band
couldn't imagine choking it
his cross that's probably
unburning with when I
a man realized that
so close a woman
to his choking my
fingers maybe wrist is
that's why as close
men masturbate to upending
with their the cross
watches on as I'd

ever get.

Whistle

What is a whistle? Air so silent forcing its way through pursed lips, also silent, until this perforated partition splits the air in two, oscillating soundwaves, so that tumbled, compressed air, can produce an audible pitch. When Anna's lips pucker to blow out an imaginary match during the play, the director maintains that it is lit. She contorts her diaphragm into the dome, takes on air like capsized lungs take on water. She creates a tempest on the stage but only the first row can hear her zephyred attempts. This air tumbles onto illusory flame and she, I, collapse to convey the methodical defeat.

how to say a thing is not a thing

but abstract

this, unthing – this, nothing

this, thought – this, ghost

this, idle idea – this, concept

this, nonentity – this, prick of air

this, way

Twenty-nine Horses

at least I am no matador /
his rider doubles down and clings
to nylon reins / thinking this /
nirvana doesn't subdue / while
Formal Dude and Saturday feel the ground
hollow beneath their heels / thighs furrow
on either flank / he imagines Black
cowboys and frog skeletons dismembered
in the mud / where his daddy first taught
him to trim hooves / dispel the memory /
before this he pushed cattle through fences /
gave soil and life to the breeder's home /
here is an unclear / a herd of grievances
mounting his amygdala in burlap twine /
when he searches for a reason he finds
demons who preexisted before the
Great Flood / given any good year a child
would paint its body dry with a good brush
made from good hair / aching in mild antiquity
it resolves the aging thing / bless its heart /
and specks of wool would grow like blemished
pillows on its copper side / instead / rain hits
the dirt track / coagulating in a hole beneath
their hooves / mice in muckshells / sinking /
etching lullabies and goodbyes on grains of sand
already moistened by fear / already bathing
in their crests / making sienna.

cast members—in jest—suggesting we all “wear hoods” to the audience talkback of a performance which renders the story of a young white woman who “faced off against the deadliest terrorist organization the U.S. has ever known,” where I black woman play the role of her dying declaration. I try to convince myself because I am no longer uttering the narrative it loses power. but I look at my fingers as they construct this sentence, how they are pressing fleshtokens doing the work my mouth is unwilling to do for itself. each extremity a violent tongue licking code into coherent message the spectrum of performance and performativity stretches in slight and polyphonic texture. under we learn that flesh sunders the two in guise of the black body situated in activity, or forms of cultural staging and how these function as a site for performativity or moves and operates in materiality, performativity is rooted in texture, the substance of the performance that marks one’s identity. how do we make visible the historically unseen black body while simultaneously protecting it from being *other*?

perhaps we

do not italicize other;

perhaps we do not protect ourselves

from otherness,

rather we protect the flesh

from subjectivity

Running in a Red State

don't be political.

Sinclair Wash Trail:

anger is that which your body recognizes as alien; that which has been whittled nonexistent; you temper that emotion at the age of eight when you indulge it and learn that your angry is angrier because it's also darker; when you serve a man who says he'll take his coffee like you; standing phone-to-ear at the bus stop when a woman nearby interrupts to say, you have great diction; when he lets his dogs off their leashes as you jog past; in your sleep when this all happens again; you forget what it's like to be angry until your larynx stiffens from singed resistance; from charred light curdling in the back of your throat.

don't sit on a fence.

Woody Mt. Road:

I tried to be both; tried to cinephile-file roles; tried to balance our budget; tried to sleep in my own bed; tried to re-create memories; to be in two places at once; to protract the hours in a day; tried to be honest anyway; tried to sit on my hands so they wouldn't reach for her; tried to spell without vowels; tried to circumnavigate her body; tried to sorrel our walls; tried to pray it away; to run it away; tried to away; this is when I learned to splinter.

saying nothing is saying something.

Fat Man's Loop:

the dogs are off their leashes again, moments before I meet his path. I say to myself, don't move over this time, let them move over. Let them disrupt their own PRs, mess up their own stride. Close enough to feel heat radiating off his jogging fluorescents, I inch to my right.

I can't bear you.

been dreaming about grandma lately, about running into her house after school and watching her rescue the princess on Nintendo classic. She was really good at being Mario, at moving through different worlds, at saving. I'd ask with my small voice *can I play?* She'd look at my school uniform covered in grass stains, my fingers sticky with the remnants of a pb&j. *It's hot right now, let the machine cool down.* I'd wait thirty or so minutes which felt like hours, return to the living room, remove the cartridge and blow.

I could never make it through the underwater theme.

she calls and says to purchase a string of red Christmas lights to hang around my front door, or red ribbon, or something red to evoke what the Israelites did with lamb's blood during the final plague. She says this is how the angel of death will know not to bring the pandemic to our home. She says my faith is good. She says her stomach hurts more today. I want to lacerate something holy and spread its blood all over her, to knead the stitches and paint her skin sticky. I want to immortalize her in my hand's little dipper and let the words *pass*, *over* remain about lambs and sky.

not choosing is also a choice.

Buffalo Park:

they ride their bikes close so dirt kicks into my nostrils, they look back to watch me cough.

silence speaks.

Walnut Canyon Ranch:

I learn to give her alfalfa pellets, to stretch my hand out flat, to pet her crest and say, that's a good girl. I learn to stand parallel with her legs when removing her coat, to pat her ass before I unclip the left hook, to not bother with getting her to like me, she will never like me. I learn that naming a horse is an art. That it took Susan over a year to come up with "Yankee" and that she's 'fine' with it. I learn their names cannot be more than eighteen characters, that I'll never own *Ubiquitousuuuuuuuuuuus*. I see the rope hanging in their front yard, chalk it up to a game for their grandkids, a tool to swing on. It is the noose at the end that makes me wonder if I should ever return to feed the horses. To find another subset of winona acreage to run through.

say it, I dare you.

Downtown:

I built speed being chased by loose dogs in the neighborhood while walking to and from the bus stop. Apoplectic though they may have been, we understood we were helping one another out – me with learning to accelerate, them with their daily exercise. Is this what men with confederate flags billowing from the back of their F-150s believe too?

who is this little black girl, and what is she running from?

Opium Braid

we cannot dream a face

unseen, cannot invent symmetry or

ever forget a memory

 how hallucinations are supposed

to have substance and dreams are distinctly

unreal, how in this dream I can

feel the crepitating foundation settle

feel yesterday's wind drag inferior

 the velocity of lateral shadows decompressing

 feel the lumbar of her spine hum

I performed a character called Declaration. though she is never fully revealed physically, “her voice conveys all the emotion of a woman first reporting a sexual assault progressing to someone finding their power by telling her story,” so insists the playwright. we tender our identities in the first hour of table reads, trade government names for overdetermined nominative properties. that tender is also a vessel—boat or railcar or voice—gives permission to carry or proliferate this process of the naming ritual. In this now-stage, a misprision of Hollywood Squares, each cast member shifts fragmentations of subject, at once hemorrhaging toward their confines and almost always seeming to be packing a large wound. In this surreal assemblage of white faces on the unprimed canvas of polarized glass, I am a dense black shape of negative space with nebulous circumference, not unlike John Latham’s ‘full stop’ in which the spot is forced into being by way of a gun.

You

is a mother whose children are
shapeless, deconstructed youth
with intact hymens

&horses

she presses her thumb east
against the spine of a chef's knife
splinters a pill
for two daughters

White Chickens

before us is a wilderness we're prepared for, looks just as it did ten years ago
even the cabins facing into these woods look the same, in Kabetogama
we're the only change, the only mock and drag of nature's relentless lure
as mother and daughter portage our canoes toward the lake,

she tells me the story again
from her childhood, the one where she gets caught in the undertow,
and tells it with such fear, believing the repetition will
somehow mitigate the water
bent around my ankles if I let it,

on our way we pass pine, aspens crowd granite islands,
a cabin unfolds into the brush,
its yard replete with picnic waste and chickens glowing
in the dusk a small boy chases them I smile when he finally catches one
then,
twists its veiny neck
and tethers the bleeding beak to a nearby stump

he's too weak to hold the flapping thing so it escapes,
shakily, and returns to the rest

when we arrive at the water's edge
I promise to be careful—but know
I'd rather be with the chickens

Witness

how do I show up for you
 like an apparition, or
 like mangled teeth
 tearing at your sightline
do you have to squint when I appear
 like having never seen a sequoia
 &stretching your neck to gaze
could it be that I am invisible?
 so that fingers feel their way
 through space collecting transients
 occupying your vision
and the chance of our meeting vanishes
 so that seeing you
is a partition of earth and vengeance
 like your testimony travels in congress
 with lies as ravens' beaks break against
 their brood
and I bear the only memory
 the only echo of our breaths
terrorizing the empty room,
afraid of their own wind,
or is that too your burden

Unforgiving Field, or Basic Grammar Functions

Grammar Part	Function	Example
adjective	to describe a body, or part of a body	black
adverb	to describe a body, or part of a body by giving more information about how, when something happens	blackly
conjugations	to connect a body, bone or ligament	if then now
determiners	to clarify which body is being referred to	this my both
exclamations	to express strong feeling	please
nouns	to name things, people, places & concepts	family father emptylots
prepositions	to link a body to another body	through
pronouns	to replace a body	I
verbs	to show an action or a state	bodied

:

to refrain from conflating

performance and performativity we must indulge a conversation that makes proper distinction

:

black performance theory extends to the imagination. it must at once refute its mythological properties while simultaneously engaging with magic. we generally expect the past to return with uncanny vividness in the changed context of the present. imagination helps with this by being a forward moving event, never receding so that truth is unshifting in the now. Claudia Rankine minds the imagination in citizen, “because white men can’t / police their imagination / black people are dying,” and with regard to Serena Williams’ penalty from the grand slam committee, “it could be because her body, trapped in a racial imaginary, trapped in disbelief—code for being black in America—is being governed...by a collapsed relationship that had promised to play by the rules.”

For Adrienne Rich & Myself

Wouldn't you like to see Me baptized—
Be the one who measures depth With the length of my—
Body inches into the Body you stand in—
And answer whom is The massive thing—
Where you tuck me among Those nameless myths—
I have seen the wreck With my hands—
And now: it is easy to forget That my ghost has lifted—
Because you said always Staring toward the sun—
But I am carving flesh waves Into map—
Into water—
And the sun does not Speak at a burial like this one—

in another play, I was cast in a silenced role, a woman who was to mime directions from a casting director unseen offstage speaking from a god-mic. this woman was capable of speaking but could not utter during the loquacious director's monologue. body, then, had to speak for me. black performance theory can reach the unspoken performance, the performance where in the throat, "even in calm and stillness, there is never emptiness." the role was layered by abjection: me, a black woman, sporting a role written for and based off a white woman in Edgar Wallace's King Kong. learning the origins of my character was not as cathartic as I thought it might be. rather, I had learned the origins of the starlet's Ann, a fraternal embodiment of my character's Anna. she is Ann Darrow, or a version of Darrow. the woman who falls in love with an ape. Declaration, too, was written for a whitewoman, though this is never fully addressed throughout rehearsals or during my one-on-one with the playwright. the performance becomes grounded in praxis, as E. Patrick Johnson insists it must.

Hellish

perdition wrapped in burlap drags down road: swallows emptiness

fills diaphragm with heat in this
nest of warm grief fattened testimony
flows

I breathe into shin& femur

dust milk dried in the bone of my breast

with fiery wind, no

this is not the sun breaking beneath our feet

but atlas tilted

we learn that silence allows the performer to remain physically invulnerable, “although his [the mime’s] situations were realistic and representational, he, unlike his real-life counterpart, was capable of surviving everything nature or technological society can set against him: train wrecks, explosions, cave-ins, waterfalls—he always emerged untouched.” through the lens of black performance theory, a reconsideration of tangibility becomes necessary to discuss how corporeal renderings of silence align with phenomenological aspects of contemporary performativity. though rooted in preconceived powers of political and social economies, black performativity or blackness is the in-vention. therefore, silence in black performance is an omission of sorts—the diaspora’s inability to access their history calls for a negotiation of truth. there is subtle resistance of the past, of enslavement and transmissions of grief. there is also an implied terror, an amalgamation of both truth and error. all of this takes place in the body.

In the Event of Apocalypse

grab your grandfather's watch
with his wrist attached,
teethe each flattened link
as suckling host,
when seismic echoes course through you,
mount his shoulders like a horse
until he speaks,
bloom petitions toward the sky
while ghosts collect in clouds of tainted memory,
decide if you are river
or splinter,
if you can blue
or not,
if a sinking horse can survive with you
gripping its crest—and mumbling,
language tumbling onto
sway-back& lean your broody body against his gallant frame

Notes

- 5 “does not say so explicitly, in performance Smith’s body—marked by gender, class, and race, yet, through theatrical alchemy, able to inhabit differently marked bodies—wants to *become* America: a container for others’ experiences...By mirroring others’ experience...Smith allows...trauma to speak through her. The performer becomes at once verbatim documentarian and speaking ghost, bringing history into the now”: Andrew Sofer, “Dark Matter,” 143.
- 6 “circumstances multiply, or diffuse the instant that they create a distinct entity that we want to delineate as *black*”: Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, “Black Performance Theory,” (Duke University Press, 2014), 9.
- 11 “diasporic expressivities”: Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, “Black Performance Theory,” (Duke University Press, 2014), viii.
- 11 “I am a marked woman...If I were not here, I would have to be invented”: Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” 65.
- 19 “Mae C. Jemison is the first African American female astronaut. In 1992, she flew into space aboard the Endeavour, becoming the first African American woman in space”: Biography.com, “Mae C. Jemison,” para. 1.
- 35 Whereas performativity is rooted in texture, the substance of the performance that marks one’s identity: ideas gathered from editors of “Black Performance Theory,” Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez.
- 35 “cultural staging”: Thomas F. DeFrantz and Anita Gonzalez, “Black Performance Theory,” (Duke University Press, 2014), viii.
- 39 “overdetermined nominative properties”: Hortense J. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” 65.
- 39 “her voice conveys all the emotion of a woman first reporting a sexual assault progressing to someone finding their power by telling her story”: Raegan Payne, “The Dying Declaration of Madge Oberholtzer,” 2.
- 39 Reference to *Full Stop* a painting by John Latham (1961): courtesy Lisson Gallery, London, *Tate* collection, T11968.
- 39 “faced off against the deadliest terrorist organization the U.S. has ever known”: author unknown, written in marketing copy for production of the play, “The Dying Declaration of Madge Oberholtzer.”
- 45 “because white men can’t / police their imagination / black people are dying”: Claudia Rankine, “Citizen,” (Graywolf Press, 2014), 135.
- 45 Regarding Serena Williams’ penalty from the Grand Slam Committee, “it could be because her body, trapped in a racial imaginary, trapped in disbelief—code for being black in America—is being governed...by a collapsed relationship that had promised to play by the rules.” Claudia Rankine, “Citizen,” (Graywolf Press, 2014), 135.

- 47 **“even in calm and stillness, there is never emptiness”**: Mira Felner, “Apostles of Silence,” (Associated University Presses, 1985), 44.
- 49 **“Although his [the mime’s] situations were realistic and representational, he, unlike his real-life counterpart, was capable of surviving everything nature or technological society can set against him: train wrecks, explosions, cave-ins, waterfalls—he always emerged untouched”**: Mira Felner, “Apostles of Silence,” (Associated University Presses, 1985), 35.

Acknowledgments

Eintou is itself a performance performing in verse and there is much left to declare. Theory is vehemently declaring and patiently waiting for a response. 'Call & Response' is integral to Black diasporic expressivities. Think of the many songs that engage with call and response like Travis Porter's "Ayy Ladies" or in the Black church where the preacher not only seeks but expects an effusive "amen!" or "tell the truth shame the devil!" We, Black people, are in constant conversation with our ancestors, with each other, declaring and directing our truths toward dark matter apparitions. Sometimes they, our ancestors, are the ones calling, and sometimes it is us.

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Canyon Voices: "Witness"

Cardiff Review: "My Government Name (Eintou)"

Contra Viento: "Twenty-nine Horses"

Curios Magazine: paragraph beginning "she calls and says to purchase a string..." first appearing as "Grandma"

Defunkt Magazine: "For Adrienne Rich & Myself"

Glassworks Magazine: "White Chickens"