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*gabriel  
ojeda-sague*

the operating system print//document

Jazzercise is a Language

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praise  
for  
jazzercise is a language

“Jazzercise — the dance-inspired exercise regime popular in the 1980s — may seem a thin hook for an entire book of ambitious verse and prose poems about bodies and sex and ‘gender-discordant’ identity, melancholy and capitalism and mortality. But Ojeda-Sague definitely, and defiantly, makes it work. In raggedly bisected verse, in squares of prose, and in cascading columns of type, this magnificently bizarre project presents the internal monologue of a queer Latinx exercise-tape viewer, making promises to himself, critiquing other (largely white) viewers, mixing humor with provocation and both with non sequiturs: ‘You’re loving this, right: swing those arms: are / you smiling: when you’re smiling I know you’re / breathing: I can tell you that a century of protests / is to come.’ Ojeda-Sague acts out and attempts the impossible: ‘I hate a lake I eat a stop / sign as told I could be a receipt.’ His short phrases pivot dizzily between things you might say while working out to music, and things no one would quite say: ‘we were born in a fishbowl: / we grew up eating Cheerios: we loved our / husbands.’ Yet Ojeda-Sague does not mock the Jazzercisers. Instead, as if mimicking workout instructors, Ojeda-Sague gives himself directions, showing what it would take to change a society built on patriarchy and white privilege, and what it would take to change his mind. ‘Let all your friends / know the same secret,’ he advises, ‘then change / that aspect of yourself / without telling them. ... this will strengthen / your squat / and open your breath.’”

STEPHANIE BURT, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW  
“IN RECENT POETRY COLLECTIONS, WEAPONS MADE OF WORDS”



## advance praise:

Through the syntax and vocabulary of a dance style proselytized by one, sweaty-sexy, hyper-affirmative Jazzercise camp leader Judi Sheppard Missett, *Jazzercise Is a Language* reveals multiple and violent registers of racial and cultural interpellation: “I determine the circumstance of my own abduction.” Behind the seemingly benign landscape of “six white women stepping to the left,” I encountered, strangely and briefly, the little Japanese girl in me with the overwhelming aspiration to be a perfectly shaped, beautiful white lady shimmying in a leotard. Gabriel Ojeda-Sague leads us into the complicated discussion of how we got here by pivoting back to the ever contracting-and-releasing dance around the semantic body, all the way back to the secret that “is in the derrière, the burning secret, the bushel of flowers,” where we burn - and burn - and burn - Do you feel it? I do.

SAWAKO NAKUYASU

The slinky style of Jazzercise founder Judi Sheppard Missett haunts this book of poems by Philadelphia-based wunderkind Gabriel Ojeda-Sague. I had not thought I remembered Judi, but a few pages into the volume she returns to grip me again, her patented blend of syncopation, disco beat, showbiz honey with a drop of vinegar, sex appeal tease. She sings like the laziest gal in town, Dietrich crossed with Keely Smith, but her body was simultaneously commanding the whole world to work it. Her position as a boss of a posse of backup employees also interests the poet, whose POV shifts mimic and question the status of Sheppard Missett’s musicality and even of exercise itself. The demands of the social world on the body are Ojeda-Sague’s persistent theme: the shame and fear on which every exercise empire is built, the potential for subverting these tropes by paying attention to the once abjured vehicle of VCR Jazzercise tapes—its grain and pastel and stray pixels—the power and strength and endurance of being gay and of color in the middle of such a disco. I had trouble imagining this book when he was describing it to me, but now that it’s in my hands, it reads as one of the absolute essentials of our moment in poetry.

KEVIN KILLIAN

*Jazzercise Is a Language* is rich with original music and a mysteriously evocative internal movement. It brings us closer to a future magic formed by the tropical energies some of us might keep in our interiors, even if that magic were initially only relatable through the presence of a rooster. Gabriel Ojeda-Sague’s poems are ‘songs [that] lie sweetly on the wound.’ He shape-shifts his interior and exterior selves like the oceans do, and shows us not only that the universe is always speaking to us, but also that it is always speaking to itself in us. I am relieved and renewed as if from a good night of powerful and gentle dreams when I read his poems.

ROBERTO HARRISON



JAZZERCISE  
IS  
A  
LANGUAGE



to my mother



"Cause everything I have in the world has many,  
many insecurities."

LYPSINKA,  
"The Passion of the Crawford"



Again: the sound of a body being thrown to the ground: four on the floor

Landscape of white women swinging for shoulder tension: dynamic stretch: last one: all in the hips with voices exhausted from breathing: leave your arms right here, gentle and unopposed: leave your arms right here, where I can see them: for heaven's sake: 1969: life with an anaerobe: a high-impact sixty minutes: enough not to be clothing, but eventually a curved program

Do you know what it's like to have the arm shrink  
away: how it is to lose the stomach: to have your  
right eye hidden away under a stone: come up  
again: rip apart the line: chassé: the megaphone  
blasts into seven white ears: important like small  
poinsettias

Push sound away like washing your hair: imagine  
these hips biting the feeling: dream like you are  
dreaming the body burn: twist to twist the body  
away: do you notice my sneakers: an assembly  
of mad lines

Will motors overrun the populace: are you ready  
for V's: I kick out my boyfriend because I want  
to lose the faith: pink Chelsea astride the silver  
dollar lays her hair into tar: she's blonde but only  
on video: blonde even to the roots: blonde in  
the way only blonde is blonde: blonde in a way  
that can save the world: so blonde it arms the  
populace: set your backpack into the lonely hole

Again: fit Susan: Rebecca always dancing: the bragging Lisa of all my distant dreams: mirage of teacups: bumping shoulders across a long, wild span of grass: the string of endless lights in a windmill: I want a body that points its toes across a coast

Just relax, it's a nice, easy breeze: lengthen your spine: open: really feel the reach: that's my favorite stretch: I really mean it: I know we're in a stuffy studio, but don't you feel like you can feel the sun

What I really want is that ponytail, is a pink sports bra, is black leggings, is make-up that never sweats through, is power over men and to have their power over me, is the feeling of always holding a stretch: I want to be a woman who releases the stretch after a long count

Again:

Have you noticed you synthesize like an agent, like a small possum: one day, I opened my closet and noticed all I had was pink tank-tops inside and I blamed my lover for it: so, turn your hip, don't feel embarrassed: you're trying to body burn: you can do that, I promise

In all the old Jazzercise tapes it's the same way:  
all white women except for one brown-skinned  
woman: she's always to the back and to the right:  
the finest moments are when she suddenly stops  
smiling, the one they notably named Maria, who  
stands out against a white background: at one  
point, the white lead says again "let's do that  
samba" and there's an instant, however small,  
where Maria goes off-beat: I feel most white  
when I smile at white people

Again:

General admission of my fault, cosmically: I don't miss a spot: I have been taught not to look directly into set lights, or even indirectly at their plastic frames: keep control in your shoulders, like it was in the 80s: the burning still smells like my mom's old living room: crowds of headbands loosen their grip: insistent perfume

Smile and do it: if stories simulated the way  
video does, I'd guide the festive family into  
falling action: a powder blue mirage in my time  
of need: discs fuming through the muscles you  
use so diligently: squeeze, tighten, square: if  
only all our bodies were perfect squares, pixels  
in the burn

Where you meet the melody, an intimate  
touch never lopsided: it's jazz, so we should  
never touch the floor: salvo of purple legs, or  
a keyboard: the secret is in the derriere, the  
burning secret, the bushel of flowers

You're loving this, right: swing those arms: are  
you smiling: when you're smiling I know you're  
breathing: I can tell you that a century of protests  
is to come: we are about to live fifty years of  
saxophone rage: I saw all of it in the stars: in  
cards: I saw it there behind the shortest handle,  
the shortest curtain, caution in the hamstring: a  
production of exercise, an exercise of video, a  
video and burning correspondence: the grains  
will pass, even if it takes twisting the knob

Remember who you are doing all this for:  
the man behind the counter who believes in  
sainthood: those cute little hands that stretch  
out to the sky: but here, in my life, the sky is  
fluorescent bulbs, it's plaster ceiling, it's where  
the next room starts

Richard Simmons is an American myth, but jazz is  
not: Jazzercise is a complex of borrowed cultural  
sites pulled together into the infrastructure of  
physical literacy: Judi Sheppard Missett falls  
into a vat of seltzer: under her hairline bubbles  
my secret formula

Go ahead Susie, let me see the drums: medium  
cardiovascular to waistline: striped leotard I  
offer to orixas, covered in a thick layer of honey:  
I am a massive circle, but as she says "the bigger  
the circle, the smaller the waist"

What body changes under green light: or yellow  
light: or red: or the seeping of leotards into a  
big, dark space where the ball-change snaps:  
single, single, double: what personhood eats  
out the little light clambering and clambering

The man says it's "just" that, as if something is something and not another too: I cool you down, I cool you down: surely in that studio they can't feel winter wind gnawing the side of my face: a singed ring around my nostrils: just overage: I took myself into my brother's room and gave myself a shiny new name

I twist out the little fears caught in my hair: I'm suddenly as sweaty as I've ever wanted to be, which is how I know I've reached "intimate": to pump it up: I promise it's not ball-and-chains, it's just leg-warmers: 2 and 2

I've gotten to know the tunnel blonde hair takes out of a white woman's head: I kept all the filthy socks in a black box under my bed: burrow lips in elbows, the secrets: Jazzercise is built on import, by force: pressured down by midi: build a white woman's body with "samba," "mambo," "salsa," "jazz," "bop": whose buttons get pushed: you know, some videos don't even try to include a single person of color: do we not exercise: wear leotards: wear headbands: do we not shimmy and chassé: body talk and body burn

Next, we'll do a move called the "Soul Sister": will you love me on a sunny day: if my body gets smaller: if I can look like the young John Travolta: if I do the next cha-cha step: will you love me if I pull the straps to the right part of my waist so my body looks like it's made of disparate connectable parts

The skin separates a bit at the toes: the blood bubbles while the hips roll: visible bones: the hair from two girls gets tangled: legs get too warm and cook: Desiree misses another beat: the knuckles pop out of the skin: the fingers open like bananas

Pony: I've proven I look good in a skirt: even the ghosts in my house tell me I look good in a pink skirt: all dance studios are mise-en-abymes, but with long wooden bars across the "abymes": pump-it-up-sing-song: in the mirror, as I'm stretching my left hamstring, my earlobes have become much longer and my nose has become much smaller: almost invisible: where once was a bald chin, I've grown a dry red beard: these are not the results I was promised

Again: outside and semi-still

I believe there is something ridiculously beautiful about men in short-shorts: cotton, mesh, spandex, denim, it all does it right for me: even when the legs aren't shaped right or the butt is flat: an edge of material to the burst of skin: just to glimpse the thigh

A woman on the phone is saying to her friend something I am thinking too: swivel of the hips: the air between us vibrates from this resonance: the embarrassing detail is that what I was thinking and what she said was "what if someone shot up my school tomorrow": swivel of the hips: what happened to women from the 80s: did they ever make it past that last stretch of the video: if only to buy a camcorder and record my friends stretching and chassé-ing, just in case angry boys come with guns: swivel of the hips

I tell myself that I can become Judi Sheppard Missett: however, to do so, I will need an animal sacrifice: right when I slit the throat of the deer, a child throws a rock through my window: it is when my little home is exposed to the small in-pouring of wind that I get distracted and I finish the ritual all wrong: instead of becoming Judi Sheppard Missett, I am just a boy in a leotard and I have an awful deer corpse to clean

Jazzercise is flatland: Jazzercise is new materialism: Jazzercise is your sister: I was pushed into the arms of white women like an angry seagull is pushed away from beach sandwiches: just a wagging of the hand: the sour smell of another person's locker: the same smell for which the Trojan War was fought

Vertical flow of the squat: rhythm as a grabbing hand: I am trying to make my body less present, and for that lesson I pivot my foot: the pivot of an argument: I am much less latino when I am with latinos and I am much less white when I am with white people: I am much less a man when I am around men and I am much less a woman when I am around women: a musical comes with vibrato, by definition: I punch my teeth out while I watch the second VHS in the series: part three, medium cardiovascular to waistline: I hit reset, I hit reset, I'd like to watch, I'd love to watch

What I thought was golden leather fern, strangler fig, sawgrass, melaleuca, milkweed, fogfruit, jasmine, palm, croton, sage, or mango is actually a woman, the one on the left in the chartreuse leotard with white warmers, named Flora.

Caramel swing: show me how music works: I stretch my quadricep into the next room: Judi, Chloe, Desiree, Britney, Linda, Diane, Richard, Annie: everybody dances and everybody is watching: I want to live in the house that Jazzercise built: I own fourteen fancy cars: I have competence in creating my own borders: I flatten my feet: I label everything in my house that is not me as "homegrown"

When the body is small and square: perfect  
white squares along the highway: singing in  
rounds new Latin: one neon yellow headband  
blurs into another: one tank-top strap gets  
caught in another: the leotard gives a nasty  
wedgie, floss in teeth

Again:

I determine the circumstance of my own  
abduction: muscles replicate: what is it like to  
be Judi Sheppard Missett: to be stoic, strong,  
kitsch, and clean, to move the body from one  
place to another, like I move my brain from one  
sack to another: to stretch the calf from one  
world to another: when young, the blonde hair  
mirrored the skull, a big curly growth: but now  
it defines where the skull begins: termites in the  
house that Jazzercise built

I bring the video into my home like a good date,  
or someone from the street with the right eyes:  
that which eats away at my living room from  
a locked box: "no more people gathering in  
large groups": steam under the nail: dropping  
pamphlets, I am watching five women step  
left then right: exhaustion architecture: a  
department in a glass bottle: will you melt the  
seed: send me chills: send me a potable term  
for viewership

Again: what you forgot

Slip one finger between your thighs: show  
him to the family: inside a corporation, you  
find a little cassette: THIRTY MINUTE BODY  
BURN: it's been a long time since you've had  
somewhere to play a cassette: search and search  
and eventually just put the cassette to your ear  
to listen into it: other than spinning, you hear  
nothing, feel nothing: bring me to a business:  
the incorporation of gravity

To the one man in the back lunging, the one with  
the high-pitched voice: I know your secrets, I've  
been there too

Being that I am full of hairspray, she asks me  
several times if I can deliver volume, curls,  
stiffness: massaging a stack of shells until  
something hidden inside announces itself: a  
crab: a deer with teary gray eyes: dimes thrown  
against the street, only to bounce back up and  
chant: there is memory loss within the studio:  
better memory

The world is plain as a bottle of seltzer: being  
in shape is a great feeling: where "in shape"  
matches a railroad's track through four-lane city  
streets: what holds us apart: possum with blue  
eyes winces on its tip-toes: hissing bubbles:  
matte finish on a red nail

We're gonna be burning calories for twenty-  
five minutes: asking once for a curdling white  
sneaker: two bay laurels a pot: two eyes to  
mark a day turned into the next: yesterday  
was a recovery: today is quiet: yesterday was  
something twenty feet tall: today is the size of a  
seashell: will you open the can

I ask them to be my sisters: music drips in the abdomen: “below the belt”: Jazzercise since its peak in the 1980s has always tried to stay current, usually translating to current blackness, current Latin-ness: in the late 80s and early 90s Jazzercise sheds its coat of smooth sax-driven jazz and bop and resets to industrial funk, hip-hop: since 2010 Jazzercise has incorporated contemporary pop hip-hop and Latin dance music popular in competitor Zumba: a recent advertising tagline from Jazzercise states “you think you know us, but you don’t”

Give me a little time: disturbances

I shot a dog, for lack of a better situation: it steamed into the carpet: telling like a lighthouse, her arm raises up in a jumping jack: the bracelet catches a cube of air: "imagining hazards more awful than real": wife of the anaerobe: I am not changed, I am married

Thick yellow cream across the eyes: quick squats: pulled edge of the mouth: red of Michelle: chest press: one long shot speaking through a water cooler: at just the right angle, you can catch the glimmer of a blue skyscraper just over Jane Fonda's head: past the Venetian windows: blue of Diane: move out: true beige: the pigeon there, at the left corner

If you smile, it makes the workout easier: very slowly, a development of plot: a bone-dry flute's note rolls over the shoulder: only to give it away: snares tighten the abs: for the first part of the exercise, you don't need to use your chair: latch on to me, latch on to me

You did a great job: I am doing the wrong routine  
in the wrong studio: am I in my hometown: no,  
shoulder rolls leave room for a gasp between  
roads: singles and doubles and reach and pull:  
I am lunging my left leg into Canada, so that  
Justin Trudeau can kiss my toes: Jane Fonda  
marches out, her neighborhood was enraged:  
long bodies: the point of gentle tension

Walk right to me: two sisters of mine stand to  
my right and left: we were born in a fishbowl:  
we grew up eating Cheerios: we loved our  
husbands: but unlike them, I cheated on my  
husband: they found out: they told him and he  
left me: they forced me to move to another city:  
I took on a new name, I took on a new face: I  
don't blame them for what they did, any good  
citizen of our hometown would have done the  
same: I really don't hold a grudge

A tense cold comes through our air conditioner:  
you pull off my shirt in haste: outlines: even  
in the dark like this, I can see where your hair  
starts: your throat expands to hold something  
warm: stretch my back until it cracks: I cage  
your thigh with my wet fingers, blue and gold  
nails: after I suggest we switch, you agree: the  
yawning of a poster soon to fall from the wall  
distracts me, but only for a moment

If I was one to tell a lie, which I am not, I would  
tell it about the fit of a belt around my waist,  
saying it cinches tighter than it really does,  
because in my mind, the secret of a circular thing  
is necessary to keep away from those who ask:  
moving-with, velocity of a spiral: almost graceful

Fingers on a silk screen: chin depression: touch  
of rouge at the corners of the forehead warm  
the face: a line of white or yellow down the  
bridge of the nose: what is buried under snow

A room with a leaking battery in the middle:  
if the ocean was only jellyfish: determine the  
largeness of a personality: salinization: Maggie,  
swim it, that's just a plastic bag: for every space  
I occupy, I bring another space with me from  
somewhere else

I want my stretches to come naturally: I want to drink my drinks through a silver straw like my father and his father: I want to shave my legs and cover them with fake white hair: I want nipple pasties made of post-it notes that remind me to call the venue after nine: if I were in The Ring, my hair would catch in the space between the bricks of the well

I push my middle finger into one of Richard  
Simmons's hundred blonde curls: gaps of the  
fence: tie my whisker to the bed post: a brunette  
boy with a vision board

Choice of pathways: the knee, like a beetle,  
protects itself from breeze: in the middle of the  
studio, dented into the hardwood, is a footprint:  
Sam sleeps in mustard, imagining a long street,  
black as what is hidden: slice disco: a major  
seventh chord sags over Desiree's forehead:  
single, single, double

Last set: trapezius, deltoids, and triceps: look  
one way and then another: pieces of the body:  
harder, more friction: a stretching leg's torrid  
smell: make me sick: I give away my dirty socks  
to mollify the spirit I live with: that devil which  
hath invaded my home

A lizard skates across the room to say "last one":  
this is the modified workout for those weak in  
the heart: lay my head across your copper arm  
hair

Again: pull an ingrown hair from my thigh: proof  
I am elated

Can you touch your elbow to your knee: that's awesome: Denise identifies me as the woman to watch: "watch her! watch her if this is too difficult for you": "low-impact" is a reminder that during a workout, any part of our body could snap, tear, and break: however, it also allows access to the injured, disabled, inexperienced, or elderly: where all the others are jumping, I am taking two steps forward and two steps back: this routine really is a puzzler

Top of the arms arc, a single cuff connected to a ceiling lamp: I get dizzy inside a cartwheel, my ears start ringing: a warm, high squawk from the air conditioner: my spine becomes misaligned: my lover tells me my eyes are getting completely white: I say it is an illusion of sugar

Here is the decathlon: orange light flickers off the sweat on your brow: give the legs rest, she says: squeeze, tighten, square: I push my fist into the neck of the bottle: here, against the gold-coated office building, I lift my ass into the air

Keep me parallel: bad thoughts

Judi Sheppard Missett says “you don’t want to be lopsided” with a crescent smile: the Bar-Kays soar over Judi’s waistline routine: her quotes from the song a distant stimulation: you gotta boogie with this honey: stretch-out: move your boogie body: threatened in a day-lit street

You really fear Diana Krall: you always have my unspoken passion: shaking legato of the alto sax shifts loose hair: slur: Nina has the chin of a rabbit, the voice of an angel, and short words: bottled water

Telecommunications: the shrinking spine: what is smaller becomes more concerted: am I a figment of my own vision: a paper plane: promoted

Shannon's arms are overdetermined: olive oil clinging to the plastic bowl: bright screen: I lick the fish until it bends

Holes: no child lagging: blue ammunition: lower home: at best, I am a worldling as unintelligible as curtains: something brown floating at the top of the infinity pool

Must I always be a stranger to you: arrangement  
of blocks: mind me: turning blue beneath the  
eyes

A dog with mange has been chewing at the  
right leg of the coffee table: its ears have an  
orange tinge: I pull up a chair to offer it meat:  
2D skyline, hanging from a cherry sky: a rouge  
triangle, just under the ear

Do this with me: place a piece of blue painter's tape across the entirety of your thigh: then, rip it off: repeat until you don't pull anymore hairs from that spot: then, move to the next spot on your thigh: if it becomes too sore, rub a bit of cold rosemary water over the affected area: for lower impact, replace blue painter's tape with several sticky notes

The vein, the misshapen god: my fingers wag  
when I am not looking: her right shoulder  
flickers in and out of my home: a white hand sifts  
through a pile of red beans and squash

She rejects a mindless purpose: calls a calf  
down: in order to be mindful of common sorrow:  
potion: the fingers develop the draft, coming  
from the wet, exposed corner of the studio:  
cold portion

"Give the stars to me": doling out senses of  
friction: control panel: touched by me: moves:  
in the airport, I hope not to see anyone I know:  
I want to get to my gate and sit and read and  
not have to talk to anyone: I want to go home  
that way

The ankle sprains: the ACL tears: the quads strain: the hamstrings pull: the abdominal muscles tear: the obliques tear: the soleus ruptures: something unsure snaps: the shoulder dislocates: you get a concussion: you go to sleep: pale ends of petals: the head heals: the shoulder pops back into place: something unsure mends: the soleus heals: the obliques heal: the abdominals heal: the hamstrings are relieved: the quads are relieved: the ACL heals: the ankle heals

Again: the sound of hair being pulled: inversion from the root

You, at home, move with me: move almost before  
me: I am shaking involuntarily, the way you have  
always known me to do when I am angry or sad  
or horny or bitter or embarrassed: you grip me  
until I stop: like Proteus: a lycra band wiggles  
and travels from the neck to the crotch

A friend of mine once left a video paused on  
his TV so long the still image burned into the  
plasma: anything he ever watched from then on  
had the faint whisper of that long shot over it:  
I finger the TV screen, plasma parting around  
me as I swipe: velvet lake: potential state of  
reappearance: wash your hair over me

Here, in my room, a chirping sound from the shell of the alarm: I am stretching my leg onto the wooden bar, where the woman next to me spreads like a radiator: she cracks her fingers on my back: low resolution: I bite the skin out from under my nail

I want another moment with my family before trial: I want softer skin below my eyes: I want thin legs that snap when I run: I want a blue light shining across my sideburns: the pink of her headband spreads onto her skin: gemstone: white outline

The breath: the anaerobe in hallucinogenic  
oxygen: swollen joints quickly deflate: pierced  
balloon and basket: six white women stepping  
to the left: the mouth shapes along the deepest  
curve in the breath: composition: I occupy  
someone else's seat again: a whistle that sinks  
from B $\flat$  to G# only to return a moment later

Again: queen of spades: missive: tower of glass

Again: I miss an old friend: another killing: the sickness that sinks below the teeth: I hold onto my problems like a heap of fish: slipping out onto my shoes: I want a remote that changes the direction of my toes: an adjustable brace to change the circumference at the wide end of my head: a lever to pull my spine tighter: loss, as Judi says, is the state of having something from your hands become wild: we meet between counts: center of the afternoon

Again: the sound of a body being thrown to the ground: four on the floor

I want to wish out  
a lacy cream  
a hope of  
non-regulation  
the easy way to  
slip through the fingers  
a vision of  
wheat white across  
the field an owned field  
not to run across  
for danger of shots  
I am being told there is  
a ghost under my bed  
I am being told the  
fridge is full of bugs I  
ittle drops  
on the exercise mat  
I did not wipe  
down my station  
the mark that  
I was there

Take five marbles  
place them in a glass  
fill the glass with mud  
do something else  
for enough time  
that the marbles  
begin to sprout  
hair in the sun  
comb them  
spray them  
so they stiffen  
this will tone the thighs  
tighten the waist

I do not relate  
to boys in other cities  
or if the paper sliced  
a kite a made thing  
limp as cotton  
part of what pours into  
the wound  
a bullet  
let it go through  
a city's name  
the rat  
bites at cords  
lycra wilderness the  
future is full of them  
not just a genie but  
deviant rhythms  
my brow lowers  
straightens  
my hand reaches  
the strings  
in my wrist  
tangle and harden  
the open stones at the  
edge of the hand  
but a song lies  
sweetly on the  
wound

Fill a bathtub  
with hot water  
place the doilies  
from your dinner set in it  
three drops of red dye  
and seven drops of  
jasmine oil  
put your hand  
in the water  
let it soak until dawn  
peel off the  
skin of your hand  
until you see  
white underneath  
this will strengthen  
the joints  
and improve our grip

It gradually melts  
one and the other  
flour and chocolate  
leotard left in a safe  
the gullet shaping  
up the account  
of a crime the  
activity between men  
that which is  
secret and held  
between the eyes  
he hits below the belt

Let all your friends  
know the same secret  
about your personality  
then change  
that aspect of yourself  
without telling them  
in this way  
the secret is still yours  
but they will see you  
more clearly  
this will strengthen  
your squat  
and open your breath

I was wrong  
whipped oil  
into rings  
exhausted from work  
and lifting  
into studio lights  
the yolk in the eye  
horror of an area  
assembling sharp  
parts wax thigh  
the fixture above  
that dissolves  
and dissolves

Boil water in a lead pot  
let the metal  
soak into the water  
pour it into a glass  
and serve it  
to your husband  
do this again  
then wait  
ask him  
how he is feeling  
do this once a day  
this will help us  
to reduce  
our problem areas

Clicks atop  
the foot  
measure howled  
lumps that form  
on my cheeks when  
my skin is wet  
Judi's nails taped to  
the white board  
bowl of white grease  
win me a prize  
every time  
you sleep around  
and sweat  
give me my thirty  
minutes  
with my feet against  
the window

In front of the mirror  
change the size  
of your fingers  
make them very short  
or very long  
thick or thin  
lumpy or smooth  
observe your friends  
and lovers react  
to your new fingers  
observe them very closely  
do this several times  
over the course of a week  
this will improve blood flow  
and regulate the pulse

Mine is gold  
won't you show me  
yours howling  
into paper  
a yellow slug  
I have for a tongue  
I have asked  
God to make my  
legs look more like  
Puerto Rico  
I have hairy  
orange stiff things  
under these warmers  
doing it all  
together

Google a photograph of  
your favorite author  
and print many copies out  
place them in between  
the pages of every  
book you own  
under your pillow  
below dinner mats  
in the lining of jackets  
continue this way  
for fourteen days  
after this time  
you will begin to feel  
lighter and softer  
and eventually still quieter  
skinnier faster  
this will keep you alert  
and help us trim  
excess belly fat

The brain is an  
inconsolable  
portrait hoping  
for protection  
from an empty room  
shaved ice  
with red ink she's got  
a tattoo with all  
the peps colors  
for wanting more  
for wanting  
more support  
knuckles against  
aluminum foil  
scabs scraping off  
moving her waist  
like a top spinning  
over marble  
motes in light

As you begin to fall  
asleep imagine  
a star low-  
hanging right  
above your nose  
just as intense  
but small enough  
to fit in your room  
glue things  
to your star  
like paper scissors clay  
cups hair bedsheets  
plastic toys  
until your star is totally  
covered  
and your room  
is dark again  
this will help us  
tighten those  
pesky love  
handles

Events have the  
misfortune of perishing  
stubborn  
as horizontal pressure  
these intervals  
between my  
exhaustion  
and the perfect  
instructor's smile  
are a trace  
of force I am constantly  
lagging  
behind the instructor  
tangling my legs  
moving my hips in the  
wrong direction  
I want triangular grace  
and the tangent on  
the curve

Mix flour and water  
to create a tough dough  
pull it into  
the shapes  
of close friends  
send each of your friends  
the version of  
themselves you have  
restlessly molded  
ask them to send back  
the bread if the likeness  
is not immediate  
and try again  
this will help you  
keep up with our  
more advanced steps

Heart of palm  
softly sliced into  
I am told to search  
for "practice"  
among tissues  
a long brown bed  
a long white person

Write down  
your lover's thoughts  
at night while  
he is sleeping  
surprise him by writing  
them on his  
bedroom walls  
when he wakes up  
he will be reminded  
of times he has felt  
without control  
and will be consoled  
continue this process  
and publish his thoughts  
in four volumes when he  
has finally passed away  
this will keep you feeling  
healthy happy  
and full of energy

I am at several points  
not gripped to  
God or silk  
a liver tied against  
a cork-board frame  
like an animal trophy  
on a mantle  
this simple article  
or a saxophone  
alive again  
that I have not asked  
for or wanted in this  
part of the house  
I am not expensive  
as city rooms

Pour lotion or  
cocoa butter  
into a bathtub  
sleep inside  
and once  
you wake up  
and they are soft enough  
cut off your skin tags  
with nail clippers  
this will help us  
speed your  
incredible growth

The way that home  
goes invisible  
under pressure  
the same way then  
the taffy  
loosens up  
to the six the nine  
million more  
mobile  
tongues and flies  
round glass cylinder  
turning darker  
and thinner  
an implication of  
summer

During the next rain  
let five rye  
loaves dissolve on  
the lawn  
collect the leftover  
masses and grow them  
in a glass  
until they form  
a golden-brown tower  
this will help us  
imagine what you  
would look like  
in a test tube

She cuts the  
soft white  
underside  
of my foot  
and it all  
just spills out  
from the ache  
the slit  
I deflate very  
quickly  
and become  
inexcusable  
so be it  
for the apartment  
is as ugly  
as I dreamed  
and more

Count the steps  
from your bed  
to your shower  
to your kitchen  
to your backyard  
then try to cut out  
as many steps  
as possible  
bring things closer  
stretch your  
legs farther  
remove  
extraneous walls  
this will keep you  
feeling tall and  
in charge

A collapsing  
building is  
never alien to  
me nor are the  
prices of  
damages there was  
an accident and  
it was clean  
and something paused  
and something else  
resumed

If it is a windy  
month thank the  
nearest flight  
attendant  
for their service  
ask them if it is easy  
to tell passengers  
how to put on  
breathing masks  
and then thank  
the nearest breathing  
mask  
this is a great  
exercise for carpal  
tunnel pain

I am saddest in  
the winter  
everything inflates  
with cold air  
in Judi Sheppard  
Missett's house  
the infinity  
pool freezes over  
the white  
platter of the  
yard her chandelier  
becomes very brittle  
and sometimes drops  
shards onto the dining  
table ironically the  
freezer is the only  
section of the home  
she feels she can trust  
that and the  
underarm  
of her daughter  
still sixteen even on  
the warmest day  
of winter

Send everyone  
away send your  
cousins away  
sell your  
things sell your  
home kill your  
pets free-up your  
schedule ruin your  
relationship and break  
a hundred porcelain plates  
get rid of everything  
including that  
troublesome belly fat

The matter over  
a long slapped  
bass note  
cylinders stains  
Venetian blinds or  
popsicle sticks  
smell of the studio  
metallic lemongrass  
who is keeping  
Richard Simmons in  
his home and why  
won't he talk to  
all his beautiful friends  
they want to know  
is it Teresa

Leave on  
the rice  
cooker  
Leave on  
the rice  
cooker

Whatever feels good  
if you pivot your  
feet here and  
here and smiling now  
if you want to you  
can hold it  
there and then turn it  
back out  
and don't bend it  
more than you feel is  
right here it is  
the marathon and  
if you've got a  
weaker back  
you can feel  
the spinning of  
the spine  
and the smooth  
air the brass  
bell broccoli  
and the love of  
salt

Just watch  
me and do what  
I do I'll let you  
know what you  
need to do  
and frequently  
discuss the "lighter side"  
so you can see  
how to make this easier  
if at any point you  
begin to feel a burning  
sensation in your muscles  
keep going this is a  
signal that your body  
refuses change

She played "Sweet  
Georgia Brown" for  
coordination  
and ate Raisinets  
off-camera  
I shifted my weight  
and then tapped my  
foot shift tap shift tap  
shift tap with a little  
extra bounce I squared  
my hips to the floor  
and put my elbows  
into a hot bowl  
I always  
wear supportive  
footwear so I can  
turn any way I please

Listen to her breath  
between words quick  
and shifty a record scratch  
replicate her breath  
tighten your abs  
do this in  
your bed while looking up  
at the popcorn ceiling  
where the little silver  
lights hang too  
and take your hands into  
your throat  
this will help  
the beginners  
among us

The mambo is a very  
sexy step  
Cuba is "brimming  
with life" says a photo  
of thirty men in the  
New York Times one  
with a cigar  
Cuba has a way  
of staying hot  
we will  
land our president  
in it the people  
there are thick  
and round and they  
play dominos and they  
are black sometimes  
and white other times  
and royal blue is their  
favorite color the  
mambo is a  
very sexy step

One more: last night  
I saw you dreaming you'd  
be delicate  
and teething  
look at me  
and trace my nose  
on bristol  
feel them and make your  
body a full circle  
the island does  
not come with a stamp  
of joy  
this will help us  
lengthen the neck  
and remember to  
drink plenty of water

Open houses my  
arms who  
has accused  
me of being gaudy  
I am correcting  
for discontentment  
invented in my  
basement where a  
spread of cardboard  
is red and orange  
and silverfish  
make a white S  
across the wood  
floor the mark that  
I was there

Pour  
out gallons of milk  
on the sidewalk  
in honor of  
lazy friends  
this will help us  
square the  
shoulders to the  
floor

Parking lot long summer the evil eye  
you spray blue shiny detergent like a  
band of sea-foam red at the end of a  
square day full of money of pudding  
vapor and highways the gadfly given  
their knuckles were made for gloves  
I want nobody in my home not a soul  
take pictures between strings let the  
pale arms beat the linoleum like bell  
and marble I hate a lake I eat a stop  
sign as if told I could be a receipt it's  
felt without corners and velcro with  
all the hooks removed I want skinny  
fingers a print of rakes slips out of a  
knight of cups and vasoline the heat  
the fig leaf the chubby kid in a vest  
he's like me but I'm an ugly woman

an old man at a carnival who wants  
powdered sugar for his kids elephant  
ears ice cream fried oreos chocolate  
cotton candy sweet jokes for his wife  
me the oven he's got an eye the left  
on yellow jewels to put in his child's  
hair the red the green the black and  
if it can be determined I'll make the  
case for the hawk the fish a moment  
bigger than that left eye I always do  
think of you but in moments mobile  
homes disguises otherwise swing a  
leg over your head get stretched and  
ready for a killer workout with me the  
only brother you were born with then  
the only answer is a street's median  
which I will drive over in my red suv I

deserve wet clothing I want the gun  
the shit stains the blood stains motor  
boats chopping fat manatees full of a  
sopping green leaf and there I visit  
my sister and ask her a favor lend  
me enough money to make it to the  
next month just fifteen more days I  
don't want to think she wouldn't help  
me but she asks me to scam I  
terrify I lose fifteen pounds with this  
regimen and I feel so good I feel like  
I feel better than ever jello a fish's  
mouth that's what I want from the  
1960s more jello but as I go and get  
older I hate novelty food items it's  
an issue of scale y'know take your  
wrist and push it into my neck roll it

around I've got these awful knots my  
shoulders are very cold figurehead I  
am with my second mind where I die  
my head is a cone I am let go free of  
devices of imps with curtains let me  
make my brain smaller I find myself  
most real in a card box god my arm  
is always asleep I would cut it off if  
just to lose that squirmy ants feeling  
it's terrible he has sent me an email  
as if that would make me feel better  
there I heard an oboe in my sleep  
that terrible quack that fuzz and wool  
half-hole d gargoyle a penny on the  
needle it's boogie it's a two-step as  
a monument to finger-licking golden  
wings crispy thighs hot oil tight waist

the bottom of the argument keeping  
kids around the home like porcelain  
swans still life paintings you have  
met your family they are in my bottle  
light a candle for me light a candle  
for my friends canada goose biceps  
down feathers triceps lats medium  
cardiovascular a week with raquel  
she says her stretch is nonviolent  
she says I am the armpit of george  
bernard shaw what a wish angry  
teens dream of sleeping in a car the  
warm gray fiber of the armrest want  
nervous at the throat what should be  
said the judges are looking for four  
consecutive push-ups four pull-ups  
four high-kicks and four jumping

jacks it is all sponsored by crystal  
light the competitors are all talented  
competitors in this competition we're  
going to have to try our darndest to  
compete against these competitors I  
met linda when she was my teacher  
she had such high energy she grew  
me like a plant very slowly and with  
pruning now we can do a split at the  
same time crystal light my mother  
cut bangs greg louganis is here he  
hit his head crystal light is my diet  
drink of choice dance with me 2 and  
2 and 2 mesh 2 and 2 and 2 "women  
with the upper body strength to do  
great push-ups" hollywood trolley a  
coin with a brown band in the middle

two twenty five to ride I lost my egg  
and I lost my boyfriend I wave in a  
circle I block my eyebrows I cat eye  
in black I put soft purple eyeshadow  
above I contour my fatty cheek I pull  
my teeth I pucker my lips I pull my  
hairs my fingers are all thumbs wax  
daybreak economic theory sweaty  
ass kids fat fucks sweetbreads trade  
that split is an amazing achievement  
and will net this pair some deserved  
points fog parking lot brown coat my  
friend has got lice can you believe it  
it's like a cartoon I fill myself with  
bread I piss between meals my mom  
has told me I eat all the bread they  
bring I don't rip it and share judi it's a

hot fucking day makes you want to  
go pour a glass of wine through your  
thighs that's what I would do if I lived  
alone ladies and gents your glutes  
are like huge banana breads missile  
foam thighs the nail smashed and  
high standing a guard I don't want to  
be a professional dancer I just want  
to look like one shanna will eat your  
head judi in that cherry-red egg chair  
or by that original lichtenstein or the  
warhol or your koi pond some idiot  
left the family jewels in the koi pond  
shanna denise jane richard none of  
them can do what you do judi I stuff  
my face with a cronut I sleep with  
you on my mind my ex had long

fingers and a little belly that he hated  
and shook in the mirror I'd smoke  
with you if I didn't have bad lungs if I  
wasn't very tired if it wasn't 2:47am  
as always if it wasn't gooey if I  
wasn't playing a game if I cared  
about my friends if the q-tip didn't  
come out orange if I wasn't about to  
puke from too much roast pork I'd  
smoke with you hem of the evening  
glossy parameter leave me alone in  
my room I decorated it for a reason  
we'll start from the top now as if we  
were rain a late-night icee run at  
turkey hill white cherry and coke root  
beer barq's to be specific the matter  
delivered in address to the general

public twice lived little holes double  
vision three of wands my crush we  
fall asleep in a film about bowling  
rotten places receipts deviance  
commissioned by the national  
museum of buck teeth work those  
hamstrings best joke a friend ever  
told me was hamstrings but literally  
made of ham like white americas  
christmas dinner so easy targets  
heal everything we are very soft and  
wooden as a leg a hospital has got a  
cat that will predict my death silver  
sea hand-held vacuum I pinch my  
nipples in the mirror to appear taller  
raw pinks get orange the hem of my  
scapula the seams of my neck judi

sheppard missett is a hundred  
squares in a mambo in a grapevine  
down the alleyway a guy with pearly  
white calloused hands let's start  
again one more set piston my history  
triple sec long sock the kids are in a  
hot car craving fingers anxious about  
each other's breaths telling secrets  
trading joints keeping watch out the  
window those rats my biceps I'm  
feeling better than ever I'm feeling  
like my best self I keep my best self  
in the closet where she is happiest  
around plenty plastic hangers and  
mothballs I am wearing a girdle  
believe me it is aromatic like my  
upbringing like my carpentry the

methods of other families my waist  
the needs of the dog over mine tube  
dress sick shit I'll make it over the  
bridge I'll make it into my bowl of  
black beans and vaca frita and white  
rice and materva as if it was sunday  
or good friday and I'll make it into  
class to chassé and pivot and I'll  
make it into my studio to meet Jane  
angry batteries she's tossed her hair  
over the bar and develops a warm  
rash along the underarm she tells  
my friends of my collection she and I  
are not hourglasses we are girders  
and my toes are soft as cinnamon  
jane takes me to the ice cream truck  
on 23rd st and there she believes

me she touches my hair I develop a  
curse and lose my eyesight I cut into  
lesions on my foot which pop like  
water balloons I have fallen badly  
my kneecap dislocates and juts to  
the right a bone in my calf has bent  
out of my skin it looks like teeth long  
summer stuffed animal deck of cards  
I'm burning an effigy to my body at  
eighty whether I can still swim like  
grannies in articles online or whether  
I am frail and broken or already dead  
I am burning an effigy to say I am  
revolted by what came out of my  
dissolving libido correct my spine  
length I'm a piñata I'm a stick I want  
to be a blonde bombshell I'll crack

open the nose skin tags I am in the  
deer carcass sleeping ballroom shed  
silversmithing I am out of butter I  
can't make eggs I ram the writing  
desk into a vacuum watch me as a  
carnivore 2 and 2 and 2 and 2 and 2  
my copper arm hair your basket if  
one discovered the other the pli   the  
pirouette the cabbage patch the  
running man the swim the sprinkler  
the worm the bump I have designed  
a diorama of myself and my friends  
prepared for a turkey dinner clay ear  
cauliflowers papier mach   eyebrows  
eat and turn into a pig like mom and  
dad in spirited away but I've got  
empanadas and papas rellenas not

ba-wan but lechón and flan and judi  
sheppard missett takes an axe to my  
wrist leopard print mint julep pattern  
blocking his hand-lines his elbow in  
my back I pluck out his eyelashes  
I'd let him build me a bigger house  
marble floors stairs designer lamps  
cindy crawford's ghost haunting my  
couch a bucket of cold brew on the  
frame of the door waiting for my  
husband to come home so it can  
drop I love his new beard I love his  
big arms his yellow head we are iced  
tea together violet roads cheetos I've  
heard the news you're leaving me  
for him even after I've heard you  
complain every day about your

friends I was there and I put my pale  
thumbs into your neck you slip me  
out of my t-shirt glass water-based  
pink sweat warm ring chocolate  
donut t-bone steak do this with me  
stretch your hands out across the  
lake and into the house of your  
neighbor fluff his pillow drink his milk  
rearrange his statuettes so if the  
furrowed brow wasn't message for  
you enough my lettuce leaf the nap  
of the baby marigold mirage you do  
know my motored jawline this is the  
blue blue of my insecure appraisal  
god is so generous about many  
things especially my figure I was  
taught by marists that he has great

callouses on his god hands and they  
will touch me above the forehead  
and my body will be very perfect and  
muscular kids took their cocks out  
in catholic school as if to announce  
their divorce from private spaces  
another message sent by the pores  
step-touch heel back v-step we  
might be finding our center here in  
the basement between wood slats  
the step out a crystal buried in the  
soil of a family farm it telegrams my  
want my tongue is shaped like a  
donut I recycle it again the grain silo  
inside my forehead a lazy cloud the  
day sends me chills down my ankles  
the rumor is inverse gnashing of the

wind-up soldier pink ribbon between  
the middle and index fingers what is  
a way I percolate in your room I  
massage your yolky joke the strip  
mall gooey secrets spread on the  
cross jesus lovely triceps the ding  
dong hostess cakes alive in the  
bowling pin the boxcar base I mount  
my sullen fingernail and press it with  
salty blue ink the sand is nearing  
the apartment building I will name it  
jacob mispronounced I am the only  
scarecrow this family desires take  
me as your wife along lincoln road  
push me into oncoming traffic I will  
laugh in steel a reason more for  
letting your grip loosen on her diane

desiree karen madeleine natasha  
fiona brittany you have caught the  
trumpeter in your catalog make no  
mistake my purse is lost upon my  
waking the rodeo dynamite the white  
crystal legs psuedo-science of car  
batteries do this with me and a-one  
and a-two and a three-e-and-a-four  
I'm made for more I develop black  
photos under red light my relief in  
clean cardboard the phrasing nested  
lightly between pixels sticky sun beat  
up ramshackle spartans there is a  
great grey hole behind venus that is  
sucking gas fast and will leave us  
without knees I burp a contrail it  
soars across the sky it's true the

light of the sun does meet my skin I  
was born to replicate puerto rico I  
bankrupt the indigo freeway I have  
lost six pounds this week alone I am  
committed I am supplementing this  
with diet and light weight training  
please be sure to supplement this  
with diet and light weight training for  
the best results I am not transparent  
nor am I defensive I am a medical  
center I am your best customer I  
must be as stuck in your nose as the  
q-tip oh jill it's not true I did buy the  
oatmeal you asked for I did I spent  
my own money on it too no I am not  
harassing your secretary I really  
believe she is not from this planet

and neither is our son I am only as  
glassine as the program allows this  
is my two-handed axe my volcanic  
suv he thinks he has me to himself  
but I am not a bowl of cereal you are  
if fairies only knew the horrible smell  
of their wings gourmet scallions midi  
august I took raw graphite from the  
crash of the blimp let your knees  
drop to the floor completely smile  
and be yourself look straight into the  
light chocolate involution always  
before always before the sound of  
elephants this is my favorite routine  
to mark my tibia with red circles then  
over some hill there is the rest of the  
world my friend would want me to

say this is the truth the sun is  
amazing but I am not my friend my  
lamp is amazing beta of january the  
trial run reverse week mid-waist is  
not to be ignored then repeat these  
exercises on your own time outside  
of class to get closer to your favorite  
body you are the mortar and she is  
the salad say "approaching" in a  
strange accent to relax the mind be  
at ease make sure you are breathing  
all at the same time leave your arms  
right here in my oyster the beach  
gifts you reagan garlic knots quarter  
frames task men's singlet cradler  
white wine with minerals dried fruit  
falling from the tree onto her head

the voice is loud there is soil it is not  
a myth that cloud there it is bigger  
than phalanges and tree nuts that  
tree there is skinny I finger the open  
notebook drink paper and wine I  
puke after a ritual and brush my  
teeth this is how I say I am not my  
sister nor the metal bowl I'd put a girl  
in my direction tape triangle colored  
pencils to eat to eat we are lemons  
again we are deer we are full of  
gucci shoes I feel my heart leap into  
tomorrow because I am lonely today  
I feel the state of pennsylvania in my  
shoulder how many times have I  
wished I could talk faster be more  
convincing my time here in this video

has been a series of embarrassing lyrics now that the balls of my feet ache my head will lower and I will admit I have no real lover or friend I am holding onto continents in a pageant I am wearing the sash of miss florida my hair in a bump-it I am beautiful my gown fits me so perfectly and my answer to how I'd change the world is precious I even mention the everglades I am the crown it is a short day everything is fast nautical doctrine comments I am a woman with many hats deliver the eggs in their brown basket the dog is alive something is moving slowly under the asphalt scaly and purple it

is coming to eat out of the toilet of  
judi sheppard missett's home the  
embodiment of shanna's anxiety  
and embarrassment over dinner and  
poultry the family is lemonade and  
their nostrils are black moons the  
parable has told us the raisins are  
our friends my buns are tight and  
toned not ash but chalk not a pool  
cue but my belly button my last  
secret in this world I wiggle my tush  
into your slideshow and projector  
presentation my smile is camera-  
worthy believe the mollusks when  
they say my biceps have never been  
so defined and veiny grace is poured  
over my forehead like mustard silver

ladle the pink stone I juggle between  
toes janelle I am not like you I was  
never supposed to be I put you  
in my vhs because I believe I can  
do syncopation like you with your  
tin eyelashes but it's not true I can  
hardly get them open crusted over  
with golden pollen the tiles are gray  
and dusty and linoleum my sacred  
cafeteria my lucha mask my eighth  
note my husband and I were meant  
to be thermometers sea shells but I  
have lost my father to gale-force  
winds the same that keep your curls  
afloat in the studio the guitar is pink  
and fuzzy in its high notes I spent  
the nighttime with pat methany and

steve reich tonguing at what should  
be known of fast movements and  
cloudy counterpoint I eat pat's left  
ear and his armpit hair not yet even  
near full again I eat the fried dough  
again I eat the dripping pork again I  
eat the smashed plantains again I  
eat split peas and sip the frothy soup  
what sits in the pearly suitcase what  
bathes in the bay of pigs my  
mamboing guajiro and his memories  
short man deep appetite mate and  
music I want to swallow every island  
and keep it in my gullet oh god is my  
life a sack of beans and hairy arms  
blush cortisone clearasil night masks  
microbeads sponges rye bread cane

the little neighbor boy and his mom  
are disasters paper planes motors  
step forward twice turn and squat  
keep those legs in the air I want to  
see them high in the air yeah you  
feel that I know you do feels good  
feels right okay let your legs down  
and bring your chest up and back  
down and up and back down yeah  
work that core we want to feel every  
muscle in our belly working really  
working feel that burn yeah one  
more no excuses here folks this is  
the last time oh gosh okay stand up  
everybody we've had a great class  
and a great session I can see those  
big beautiful smiles on your faces

yeah woo that was sensational do  
you feel good do you feel lighter  
stronger I sure do folks catch us next  
time for another hour of sweat hard  
work and fun dance moves with the  
one and only jazzercise cool off with  
some light stretches and I'll see you  
next time

let's go jazzercisin'

exercisin'

oh let's go jazzercise

get that tired ol' body off

of the floor

let's go jazzercise

some more

let's go jazzercise

jazzercise

I visit my kids in the garage and ask  
them to pull me up from the floor I  
am heavy and swallowed steel my  
son has just invented astroturf I  
bend his knees your friends are  
missing from their homes they were  
plucked out as if by aliens where are  
the forty women of that city block I  
get caught between dotted notes we  
can fly to ypsilanti or austin and start  
a new life I was greedy I wanted all  
of everything from my straight friends  
those angry boys jerking off into  
socks their pubes on the toilet seat  
they text me at 3am to ask if I'm  
up and I answer I am piecing  
together the last remains of the flight

crash the pilot blinded by the sun  
pink mustard I can feel it here in the  
studio I know it is true it's familiar  
and it fizzles across the june sky  
parking lot long summer the evil eye

JAZZ  
ER  
CISE  
IS A  
LAN  
G  
UAGE





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First thanks to the people who put up Jazzercise tapes on Youtube. Thanks also to the instructors that narrate these classes, most famously Richard Simmons, Jane Fonda, and the incomparable Judi Sheppard Missett.

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Thanks to the editors of the following journals/sites for publishing excerpts from this book: Word Riot, Supplement, Ferrofluid, Hold, Tenderloin, Theme Can 3, and Lambda Literary.

Thanks must always be given to the community at the Kelly Writers House for the intricate conversations made there and for the simple pleasure of being there. As well to the Philadelphia writing community, an amazingly caring web of people who I can't begin to thank individually. Thanks to my family and close friends for their tolerance and love. And as always, nothing less than everything to Jibreel.

POETICS and PROCESS :: a CONVERSATION  
with GABRIEL OJEDA-SAGUE  
and OS FOUNDER/EDITOR LYNNE DESILVA-JOHNSON

*Greetings comrade! Thank you for talking to us about your process today!*

*Can you introduce yourself, in a way that you would choose?*

I'm Gabriel Ojeda-Sague, I'm a Latino, gay poet living in Philly, originally from Miami.

*Why are you a poet/writer/artist?*

Because I write. I started writing without a clear understanding of why when I was about 16. It was all very bad and I wasn't very committed to it either. Around 19 or so, it clicked more accurately that I was interested in aesthetics and the untruthfulness of aesthetics. Writing is the field of the arts that I understand the most and have the most love for, so I committed to that craft over the others (though to be fair, I love the others). In doing so, I've found my understanding of poetry as a simulation of language, experience, and aesthetics. The word "simulation" there is key for me because it marks that a poem is not true, and that gap is what I try to exploit the most.

*What's a "poet" (or "writer" or "artist") anyway?*

Someone who writes what they identify as poetry. I know that's a boring answer, but it is really necessary, because it avoids and contradicts my three least favorite answers to this kind of question: 1) people who refuse to call themselves poets out of embarrassment, insecurity, inexperience, and so they think of poet as a far-away thing 2) people who get overly dramatic and are like "poets are mountains!" or something like that, and 3) people who use poetry as an honorific, like calling songwriters poets just because they have beautiful and complex lyrics. It's insulting to both songwriters and poets. So I want poet to be the person who writes poetry and who interacts with communities of others who are poets. It's as simple as that for me.

*What do you see as your cultural and social role (in the literary / artistic / creative community and beyond)?*

This is a tough one for me. Ask me this one year ago and I would say that poets don't do anything. That poetry can't enact. This was me being, I think, a bit bitter about

the language around “activist” poetics, which I think is often insulting. Nowadays, I’m really not sure. So my answer is, I don’t know. In the artistic community, it is just about continuing, evolving, transforming, and making conversations around the aesthetic, social, environmental, political, emotional, ontological, epistemological, and/or the semiotic. To the rest of the world? I can’t figure it out. Maybe it just has to do with making someone think differently for the time they are interacting with your work.

*Talk about the process or instinct to move these poems (or your work in general) as independent entities into a body of work. How and why did this happen? Have you had this intention for a while? What encouraged and/or confounded this (or a book, in general) coming together? Was it a struggle?*

I really think I’m at my best in a book. When I write page poems, I make them strong and inconclusive because I am very against the idea of the whole poem, the poem that ends with applause, the tight drawstring bag poem. As well, it has to do with the business of poetry too, since the big lit mags thrive off of writing that can live inside one page. I’ve been moving towards long poems and book projects for some years now because I think there is something much more humane about the process of book-making, especially alongside a smart and kind press that knows what it is doing. Instead of, hey I write this and I send it to the Kenyon Review or some shit and I pay whatever the read fee is and then it gets rejected and 10,000 people are also doing this and none of us win out because they are going to solicit 15 out of the 20 people that will be in their new issue anyways. So the book or the body of work has never scared me, in fact it’s freed my thinking and made it more concrete.

*Did you envision this collection as a collection or understand your process as writing or making specifically around a theme while the poems themselves were being written / the work was being made? How or how not?*

This book started with the title of it. I showed my friend a funny mash-up video of Judi Sheppard Missett quotes and me and her were talking about the way she speaks and how specific her words are. And at some point I kinda just said “yeah, Jazzercise is like its own language” and thought “hey wait a minute!” And so I had a title and I knew I wanted to write a poetry book about Jazzercise and its language and I thought okay well what’s the argument of the book. And so over some thinking, I started writing a few pages of it. I looked at what was happening in the pages that I wrote and thought, okay I think I understand my argument. I think I know what I’m thinking in this poem. Then, I asked the poet Julia Bloch to organize with me and help me format my thinking. We did it as an “independent study” and I wrote and she helped me understand where the project was going and we shared a lot of dialogue about it. And bam.

*What formal structures or other constrictive practices (if any) do you use in the creation of your work? Have certain teachers or instructive environments, or readings/writings/work of other creative people informed the way you work/write?*

Reference the above for the literal structure of writing this. Julia and I came up with a “syllabus” (a tool I have been continuing to use in new projects) of readings that might guide me while I was writing. Lots of amazing books that I read and reference and wrote towards and away from. The only constrictive practices were the forms in the poem. The poem has 3 forms. The first is a “paragraph” of justified prose, with phrases divided by colons. The second is two crescents of writing, one left aligned, one right aligned, with the right aligned part positioned three lines lower than the left. The third is a justified column of continuous text with 3 lines of space between each line of text.

All of these had exact margin measurements that I worked out, but I can't remember the numbers right now. But it was very exacting. So the text had to fit inside of these structures in appealing ways, causing some words to not be usable in certain places. For example, in the third section say I wanted a line that said “bla bla bla I am on the freeway” but the word freeway was too long, causing it to go over the justification margin meaning the entire word freeway would move to the next line and the words “bla bla bla I am on the” would be stretched out by the justification algorithm. That wouldn't work for me, visually, so I picked a different word. So these algorithms change the text. It's a bit like slicing off limbs, but that has an appeal in and of itself. Aesthetically, not medically.

*Speaking of monikers, how does your process of naming (individual pieces, sections, etc) influence you and/or color your work specifically, beyond this text?*

I will say that a title is really important to me. A good title can really help a book and a bad title can really ruin it. For example, I really hate those titles that are in vogue with lots of poets that are like “How to put a bottle back together, or you called me last night but I was busy watching Real Housewives so I ignored it.” I mean, I can't stand them. For a while, I thought “Jazzercise is a Language” might be too overdramatic, but then I thought HELLO we're talking about Jazzercise! It's all meant to be tacky so I'm keeping it.

I think my favorite title of mine was for a short story I wrote a while back (I have a negative relationship to the 4 short stories I wrote, published two. I don't really write short stories anymore but, who knows, maybe I'll return to it), which was called “Milk for Lulu with Child,” which was about a gay teen boy giving milk to a teen girl who was pregnant. It's literally just a description of the plot, but it does its job. Also, I currently like the title of a poem that I wrote recently called “Lanes,” it's about that

game Plants v Zombies which is a lane-defense game, but it is also a pun on “Lines” which is the title of oh so many poems. I like titles like that. Simple, descriptive, turn the work only slightly and don’t stab at it.

*What does this particular work represent to you. as indicative of your method/creative practice?*

I think it is the best example of my practice of writing on viewer-experience of different forms of media. This has been my main theme for sometime and motivates my chapbooks on The Joy of Gay Sex, Cher’s twitter, and The Legend of Zelda, as well as some individual poems like my poem on The Binding of Isaac. I think “Jazzercise is a Language” is the most accomplished my thinking on these subjects has been thus far.

*What does this book DO (as much as what it says or contains)?*

This book is a way of interpreting and closely investigating the way the aesthetics of Jazzercise, camp, neon, aerobics, intersect with Jazzercise’s racial/body politics through the lens of a Latino, gay, gender-discordant viewer subject (hey, that’s me!).

*What would be the best possible outcome for this book? What might it do in the world, and how will its presence as an object facilitate your creative role in your community and beyond? What are your hopes for this book, and for your practice?*

I want people to read it and I want people to see that the media we shrug off as not-worthy of interpretation can and should be taken seriously and critically. This is not to say there’s no fun in it, and actually I think there’s a lot of fun in the book! But let’s not pretend that we should let anything stand as it is.

*I’d be curious to hear some thoughts on the challenges we face in speaking and publishing across lines of race, age, privilege, social/cultural background, and sexuality within the community, vs. the dangers of remaining and producing in isolated “silos.”*

This is a huge question, with so many different answers and so many topics to cover, many of which I have experienced myself as a Latino person, as a gay person, as a gender-discordant person, as the child of exiles from Cuba, etc. My philosophy in short has been that we need to work against the network, the web of dominant connections that the literary world rides on, continues to manifest, and uses at the expense of other producing nodes. I think its near impossible for your average young person, no formal training, low publication count, to get a book published in a respected press. The problem here is manifold, the problem here is the idea that one must rely on the respected press, the problem here is that people mine the

MFAs lists for people to solicit, the problem here is that editors invite the same people other editors are publishing because they know they are good already, the problem here is that the young person can only get that book published with down and dirty networking skills that a lot of people don't have, the problem here is that you have to put in 50 times the work and effort to get to the career point that somebody else is at where they can put in minimal effort and still get a really nice publishing deal, the problem here is that big presses solicit the same authors again and again and again, the problem here is that everybody is so hungry for that success that so many people forget that they have a local community of writers who are doing great work and that the only thing you need to do to collaborate with those people is show up to a quiet bar reading and open your ears, the problem here is manifold.

*Is there anything else we should have asked, or that you want to share?*

I want to mention that the performance of this book includes me in full Jazzerciser drag, lip-synching to Judi Sheppard Missett videos. Fun for the whole family, as they say.

## JAZZERCISE READING LIST

*Below is the reading list Julia Bloch and I drafted that guided me as I wrote. We divided the list into sections that focus on different purposes for the work's inclusion. I have added a few works that were not part of our official reading list, but that also were in my mind during the process. I place it here for your viewing because I believe this transparency is useful towards the reading of the book. And perhaps you might find something you like.*

### WATCHING EXERCISE VIDEOS

"Fitness is a Feminist Issue" - Tara Brabazon  
Shifting Time and Space: The Story of Videotape - Eugene Marlow, Eugene Secunda  
Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship from VHS  
to File-Sharing - Caetlin Benson-Allot  
"Where is the Jazz in Jazzercise?" - Sherrie Tucker  
"Down with Disembodiment; or, Musicology and the Material Turn" - Holly Watkins,  
Melina Esse  
The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader  
Mature Themes - Andrew Durbin  
"Queer Exercises" - David Getsy  
"Becoming an Image," "Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture" - (Heather) Cassils  
Relationscapes - Erin Manning  
Grapefruit - Yoko Ono  
Ecodeviance - CAConrad

### RACE, OR SEEING YOURSELF IN OTHERS

White Girls - Hilton Als  
Ban en Banlieue - Bhanu Kapil  
S\*PeRM\*\*K\*T - Haryette Mullen  
Dream Machine - Sade Murphy  
Empathy - Mei-mei Berssenbrugge  
Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics - Jose Muñoz  
Remember to Wave - Kaia Sand  
Action Kylie - Kevin Killian  
Letters to Kelly Clarkson - Julia Bloch

### FORM

Titanic - Cecilia Corrigan  
The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You - Frank Stanford  
Estilo - Dolores Dorantes  
Midwinter Day - Bernadette Mayer



**GABRIEL OJEDA-SAGUE** is a Miami <-> Philly gay, Latino Leo living in Philadelphia, PA. He is the author of the poetry books *Jazzercise is a Language* (The Operating System, 2018) and *Oil and Candle* (Timeless, Infinite Light, 2016). He is also the author of chapbooks on gay sex, Cher, the Legend of Zelda, and anxious bilingualism. His third book *Losing Miami*, on the potential sinking of Miami due to climate change and sea level rise, is forthcoming from Civil Coping Mechanisms.

## WHY PRINT/DOCUMENT?

*The Operating System uses the language “print document” to differentiate from the book-object as part of our mission to distinguish the act of documentation-in-book-FORM from the act of publishing as a backwards-facing replication of the book’s agentive \*role\* as it may have appeared the last several centuries of its history. Ultimately, I approach the book as TECHNOLOGY: one of a variety of printed documents (in this case, bound) that humans have invented and in turn used to archive and disseminate ideas, beliefs, stories, and other evidence of production.*

*Ownership and use of printing presses and access to (or restriction of) printed materials has long been a site of struggle, related in many ways to revolutionary activity and the fight for civil rights and free speech all over the world. While (in many countries) the contemporary quotidian landscape has indeed drastically shifted in its access to platforms for sharing information and in the widespread ability to “publish” digitally, even with extremely limited resources, the importance of publication on physical media has not diminished. In fact, this may be the most critical time in recent history for activist groups, artists, and others to insist upon learning, establishing, and encouraging personal and community documentation practices. Hear me out.*

*With The OS’s print endeavors I wanted to open up a conversation about this: the ultimately radical, transgressive act of creating PRINT /DOCUMENTATION in the digital age. It’s a question of the archive, and of history: who gets to tell the story, and what evidence of our life, our behaviors, our experiences are we leaving behind? We can know little to nothing about the future into which we’re leaving an unprecedentedly digital document trail — but we can be assured that publications, government agencies, museums, schools, and other institutional powers that be will continue to leave BOTH a digital and print version of their production for the official record. Will we?*

*As a (rogue) anthropologist and long time academic, I can easily pull up many accounts about how lives, behaviors, experiences — how THE STORY of a time or place — was pieced together using the deep study of correspondence, notebooks, and other physical documents which are no longer the norm in many lives and practices. As we move our creative behaviors towards digital note taking, and even audio and video, what can we predict about future technology that is in any way assuring that our stories will be accurately told – or told at all? How will we leave these things for the record?*

*In these documents we say:*

**WE WERE HERE, WE EXISTED, WE HAVE A DIFFERENT STORY**

*- Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, Founder/Managing Editor,  
THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2017*

## TITLES IN THE PRINT: DOCUMENT COLLECTION

- An Absence So Great and Spontaneous It Is Evidence of Light - Anne Gorrick [2018]  
The Book of Everyday Instruction - Chloe Bass [2018]  
Executive Orders Vol. II - a collaboration with the Organism for Poetic Research [2018]  
One More Revolution - Andrea Mazzariello [2018]  
The Suitcase Tree - Filip Marinovich [2018]  
Chlorosis - Michael Flatt and Derrick Mund [2018]  
Sussuros a Mi Padre - Erick Sáenz [2018]  
Sharing Plastic - Blake Nemeč [2018]  
The Book of Sounds - Mehdi Navid (Farsi dual language, trans. Tina Rahimi) [2018]  
In Corpore Sano : Creative Practice and the Challenged Body [Anthology, 2018];  
Lynne DeSilva-Johnson and Jay Besemer, co-editors  
Abandoners - Lesley Ann Wheeler [2018]  
Jazzercise is a Language - Gabriel Ojeda-Sague [2018]  
Return Trip / Viaje Al Regreso; Dual Language Edition -  
Israel Dominguez,(trans. Margaret Randall) [2018]  
Born Again - Ivy Johnson [2018]  
Attendance - Rocío Carlos and Rachel McLeod Kaminer [2018]  
Singing for Nothing - Wally Swist [2018]  
The Ways of the Monster - Jay Besemer [2018]  
Walking Away From Explosions in Slow Motion - Gregory Crosby [2018]  
Field Guide to Autobiography - Melissa Eleftherion [2018]  
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2018 : Greater Grave - Jacq Greyja; Needles of Itching Feathers -  
Jared Schlickling; Want-Catcher - Adra Raine; We, The Monstrous - Mark DuCharme
- Lost City Hydrothermal Field - Peter Milne Greiner [2017]  
An Exercise in Necromancy - Patrick Roche [Bowery Poetry Imprint, 2017]  
Love, Robot - Margaret Rhee[2017]  
La Comandante Maya - Rita Valdivia (dual language, trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]  
The Furies - William Considine [2017]  
Nothing Is Wasted - Shabnam Piryaee [2017]  
Mary of the Seas - Joanna C. Valente [2017]  
Secret-Telling Bones - Jessica Tyner Mehta [2017]  
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2017 : INCANTATIONS  
*featuring original cover art by Barbara Byers*  
sp. - Susan Charkes; Radio Poems - Jeffrey Cyphers Wright; Fixing a Witch/Hexing the  
Stitch - Jacklyn Janeksela; cosmos a personal voyage by carl sagan ann druyan steven  
sotor and me - Connie Mae Oliver  
Flower World Variations, Expanded Edition/Reissue - Jerome  
Rothenberg and Harold Cohen [2017]  
What the Werewolf Told Them / Lo Que Les Dijo El Licantropo -  
Chely Lima (trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]  
The Color She Gave Gravity - Stephanie Heit [2017]  
The Science of Things Familiar - Johnny Damm [Graphic Hybrid, 2017]

agon - Judith Goldman [2017]  
To Have Been There Then / Estar Alli Entonces - Gregory Randall  
(trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]

Instructions Within - Ashraf Fayadh [2016]  
Arabic-English dual language edition; Mona Kareem, translator  
Let it Die Hungry - Caitis Meissner [2016]  
A GUN SHOW - Adam Sliwinski and Lynne DeSilva-Johnson;  
So Percussion in Performance with Ain Gordon and Emily Johnson [2016]  
Everybody's Automat [2016] - Mark Gurarie  
How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization [2016] - Sparrow  
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2016: OF SOUND MIND  
*\*featuring the quilt drawings of Daphne Taylor*  
Improper Maps - Alex Crowley; While Listening - Alaina Ferris;  
Chords - Peter Longofono; Any Seam or Needlework - Stanford Cheung

TEN FOUR - Poems, Translations, Variations [2015]- Jerome Rothenberg, Ariel  
Resnikoff, Mikhl Likht  
MARILYN [2015] - Amanda Ngoho Reavey  
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2015: OF SYSTEMS OF  
*\*featuring original cover art by Emma Steinkraus*  
Cyclorama - Davy Knittle; The Sensitive Boy Slumber Party Manifesto  
- Joseph Cuillier; Neptune Court - Anton Yakovlev; Schema - Anurak Saelow  
SAY/MIRROR [2015; 2nd edition 2016] - JP HOWARD  
Moons Of Jupiter/Tales From The Schminke Tub [plays, 2014] - Steve Danziger

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2014: BY HAND  
Pull, A Ballad - Maryam Parhizkar; Can You See that Sound - Jeff Musillo  
Executive Producer Chris Carter - Peter Milne Greiner;  
Spooky Action at a Distance - Gregory Crosby;

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2013: WOODBLOCK  
*\*featuring original prints from Kevin William Reed*  
Strange Coherence - Bill Considine; The Sword of Things - Tony Hoffman;  
Talk About Man Proof - Lancelot Runge / John Kropa; An Admission as a Warning  
Against the Value of Our Conclusions - Alexis Quinlan

# DOC U MENT

/däkyəmənt/

First meant “instruction” or “evidence,” whether written or not.

*noun* - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record  
*verb* - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form  
*synonyms* - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

[*Middle English, precept, from Old French, from Latin documentum, example, proof, from docere, to teach; see dek- in Indo-European roots.*]

## Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

Based on what supercilious ontology have we landed in a space where we vie against other creative people in vain pursuit of the fleeting credibilities of the scarcity economy, rather than freely collaborating and sharing openly with each other in ecstatic celebration of MAKING?

While we understand and acknowledge the economic pressures and fear-mongering that threatens to dominate and crush the creative impulse,  
we also believe that *now more than ever*  
*we have the tools to relinquish agency via cooperative means,*  
fueled by the fires of the Open Source Movement.

Looking out across the invisible vistas of that rhizomatic parallel country  
we can begin to see our community beyond constraints,  
in the place where intention meets  
resilient, proactive, collaborative organization.

Here is a document born of that belief, sown purely of imagination and will.  
When we document we assert.  
We print to make real, to reify our being there.  
When we do so with mindful intention to address our process,  
to open our work to others, to create beauty in words in space,  
to respect and acknowledge the strength of the page we now hold physical,  
a thing in our hand... we remind ourselves that, like Dorothy:  
*we had the power all along, my dears.*

## THE PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

*is a project of*  
the trouble with bartleby  
*in collaboration with*  
the operating system



