



# WITCH LIKE ME

sunnylyn thibodeaux



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edited and designed by ELÆ [Lynne DeSilva-Johnson] and Orchid Tierney



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For my mama, who always said *it can't be taught*

For my daughter, who's had it since the beginning





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I am here as I am here  
– Gerrit Lansing

Our dreams are a second life  
– Gerard Nerval

Oh heavens

high above                      how  
orchestrated  
are      your      hands  
for this l o n g  
n o t e      to carry  
                                 til morn

How reflective

the night  
                                 sky  
when it's  
                         weighted  
                                 with such of

s t a r s

the gods are angry still  
it'll be a slow moon  
                                 to rise



# What Better Time to Open Up the Zohar?

*for David Meltzer*

Lorca's in the tub singing  
about the rescue of America  
in some gospel sounding croak  
I'm staring at the framed Berman  
image for Luna's cover recalling how  
it functioned as some sort of 12-step  
program's guide during a bad run  
The way you chuckled with sincerity  
and good tales of the bad runs  
of famed poets. Spinning  
the light to assure I knew I was  
in good company. I'd give a left  
just to be Lamantia hiding from you  
on the other side of the street  
It would ensure that you're still here  
and I could tell you of Lorca's songs  
and how she views the world exactly  
the way you would've taught her to

## Saint Joseph's Day

I caught Frida Kahlo  
over my shoulder  
as I waited for results  
at the doctor's office  
Unsure what to make of  
her company I treated myself  
to a lesson in Japanese whisky  
and the pronunciation of Turkish  
wines. My problems are likely  
tethering. My problems likely  
have histories. The rest of my  
feelings were held in the curl  
of my toes. I spent a lot  
of money in the shops. Thinking  
about Frida and Reverdy and  
Valrhona chocolate – the veil of health  
as death rows on someone's shore

We all do dress ourselves  
one last time

## Dream Encounter 11.27.18

We were in a wood—some form of me and others, many men. There were winding roads, unlit. Rural living. People were dying – a slow paralysis set on by others. Suspense. Suspicion. An over-sized ox and a pumpkin to match. A young vagrant stole a Santa Cruz deck and the elder man whose eyes I saw through took his clunky pick-up down an unpaved stretch where he met the fallen ox blocking the way. A narrator spoke, “you know what’s happening. It’ll go quick. You cannot feel your legs” and numbness took over as he sat stalled in front of the dead. The young vagrant’s limp form was carried – blonde hair, muscle shirt – back beyond the wooden structure to a pit where his body could be dumped amongst pine needles and autumn leaves. Someone threw the truck into reverse.

# The Approximate Thought as It Goes Astray

*after John Wieners*

Silver streaks of light  
against a hazy blue

Raw gas in the wind  
Workers with grand-maw beads  
under hard hats in September sun

There is no thing such as silence  
white noise shiftings

muted fade outs  
of man's progression

All across the skyline  
are shimmers of this lie  
pounding asphalt  
Birds take flight

A jet leaves a trail

We all have some other place  
we must learn to be

## Lucky Charms

It is midafternoon. You are adrift  
My head flutters with smiles of the dead  
My heart aches. The rain let up  
for a brief spell of warmth. More  
to come tomorrow. Atmospheric river  
sweeps in before we send it south, where  
people are drowning sorrows in drink. Drunk  
as a way of living. It could be mid afternoon  
when the sky shifts to slate, a banjo rips  
A neighbor is dead. His smile keeps me  
company in the process of grief. We prepare  
for rain with buckets to catch the drops  
from a grand hole up above. In the cloud  
formations I can see his teeth and legs  
He was all teeth and legs. It is midafternoon  
There is a banjo. And a hole



## “It’s not time for light”

Dark grey flame stretching south  
broken striations for a song  
Chill is damp between walls  
                silence, mojo rising

We will wake to bomb threats, a negative balance,  
little bird with his chest thrusts and bobs  
City inspector will be out again to survey the habitability  
of our habitat. One garbage can and two pots catch rain  
                plaster specks, mossy growths

Lost angels on the streets  
begging for acknowledgement  
their eyes hazily reflecting neighbor's  
Christmas lights. We will nod  
in passing. I've got nothing to give  
but the knowledge that they are there. Winter  
will burn us into early deaths. Our lung, your mind-game,  
his needle. The good that has come  
through this place is stitched heavily into fabrics  
and stories. Stitched deep beyond thread. There was  
good before someone dropped  
the albatross from our sky. Fellows  
got places they aren't even  
sure exist. As waters rush round  
we got notions  
and a shelter of street

## Dream Encounter 12.10.19

We were in a large banquet hall of sorts, long tables of large groups. Maybe a wedding. Maybe a memorial. There was something grand about the space, high ceilings, lights shimmering diamond like, but the tables were made of plastic. Clark Coolidge, wearing large-framed thin-wired hipster glasses, sat across from me with someone over his back, possibly massaging his shoulders, by the northeastern silhouette it may have been Jason Morris. At the right end of the table Duncan McNaughton excused himself. A concerned Coolidge said, "Someone should attend to Duncan." With understanding I rose and grabbed two knives— one a Tiger Edge slicer and the other dinnerware. I walked to the back of the room passing anonymous semi-formally dressed bodies and waited just outside the bathroom door while Duncan with his back to me faced the urinal. "Did you bring the knives?" he asked as he angled himself slightly left to face me while one hand stayed low and the other holding a partially-visible peeled banana to his heart. "It is time to cut off this extremity," his voice flat and dryly humorous. "Whose?" I asked. "D.A's"

# There's Static When You Drag Your Feet for Sound

*for Anselm Berrigan*

If not for the draft  
from the old windows

sitting askew in the frame  
you could think it's summer

Dull hours of floor games  
and Fantasmagory reading

I cringe at NPR's interview  
about power and greatness

Crunching loud on seeded  
crackers and black

garlic so that my head  
sounds out something

different than the reality  
that keeps catching

like dust in ice  
cold beams of sun

# The Space Between Sound

I've got riddles to tell  
That North Star in the east is actually Venus  
before dawn. There's a trajectory  
the father and messenger will follow

Over seas women've known  
a call unlike the others. We are water  
in our pull. We are hidden oranges  
and sprigs bounded by carnelian  
Venus rising from spilled seed

This here red ribbon on the bed  
shapes itself like a staff. It came  
with a gift of chocolate from a mother  
Some nights little sleep rests  
Some hours stars twinkle in appearance  
through atmospheric dust smearing edges  
we cannot see. White blue streaks. In out flex

An orchestration beyond measure  
and complications we've piled upon  
by our own ignorance. Debris in light and  
sound. Fragments. Some cross over

It is omens that all come down to alignment

March 23, 2017  
*for Joanne Kyger*

How do you right a poem  
when the sky is bursting forth  
with radiant blue and  
the clouds are formed  
with that of a sculptor's hand  
and somehow you, in your absence  
from this earth, are everywhere  
The sparrow bobs  
The wind chime tones  
The palms bend  
And the news hammers  
home that things are way  
out of control

[come back]

## Dream Encounter 1.2.19

A  
TOR  
MENTI  
NGBLUEB  
YANYOTHER  
NAMEWOU  
LDBEG  
RIE  
F

# A Well-Respected Man

*For KK*

With time handed over  
sun and clear blue morn  
the clank of metal and cement  
as the workers break down scaffolding  
with street and safety talk. Spanish  
words I only recognize fragments  
of while waiting for the digital  
tune to alert that the cycle is complete

Don't spend too much time with the lines of the hand  
stories aren't told that way

There is time  
and fresh ribbon  
for the Royal  
that leaves holes  
in place of Os

Franz Schubert's The Trout tones as an anthem set for a bugle  
in its digital calling. The whites are ready to be hung

The sunflower seeds  
planted last Monday  
have busted their black shells  
green sprouts

My neighbor  
is coughing, never opens his window  
for the chill. He can be heard  
through the walls. Smell his habits  
seeping in  
My mind drifts to Kevin

how I wanted to talk about the shadows  
in Spain. The histories. Streets  
how I wanted to talk. More. Again

The lace curtains  
need a wash after the traffic  
has sent its dust for a dozen years

Some things collect like that  
when given proper placement

A Lou Rawls' record and another cup of black coffee  
should clean the slate enough for remembrance  
The hand carved pipe. Frankincense  
Tobacco Road shifted light

Farewell Transmission now opens

*The whole place is dark*

and he is here. And not  
at the same time



## Future Weather or Beside the State Capital

There's a history that I've known  
and neglected for torment  
that can't be let go. There are song birds  
that throw their voices and clouds  
that send dragons down

In and out of the wood frame  
wasps make their way  
a buzzard circles high

There are so many past lives  
that we've shook hands with  
and those we've stepped over  
(persons prescribed to you)  
We've neglected the energies in the room  
Everyone has an image they hold on to  
of themselves  
of you

It never matters how time changes us  
mannered. diseased. heightened  
They hold on for an understanding  
of themselves. Fear at its base  
for the clouds could take them  
and the birds could hold their tongues

## Today's Poem

The parakeet sings and chuckles from his cage  
which needs a good cleaning. MRI results  
were emailed before bed on the day the doctor  
is not in. I feel I'm intelligent enough  
to decipher good news in the mix. But I am  
no scientist

My neighbor has let me know  
she cannot make the building meeting  
I scheduled to discuss our hopes of staying  
housed as our landlord gears up for 95 and has  
slowed in cashing our checks. Sometimes 3 months  
at a time. One must be strategic in consumeristic  
tendencies. Her grandfather traveled yonder  
way out in Connecticut and she'll return when  
all settles. Things may fall down before they settle  
I want to tell her, but I offer assistance however I can  
Blanket gestures are often overlooked. But worse is  
the blanket oversight – when people are too self-consumed  
to acknowledge your struggle. They struggle with recon-  
ciliation of their own needs vs the world.

The app  
on the phone tells me the rain will hold off for several more  
days, but clouds will stick around. I want quiet time  
to reflect on my health. Or to take hold of my health. Or  
to quit thinking about the complications of this life and the  
number of days left to us. What would it look like  
if we left this place. If I stayed high all the time  
How would I change my perspective if the doctor  
called with bad news again. How tired can one be  
and still give it everything

## Morning Survey

My slanted ear  
picks up a telephone's ring  
not digitally compromised  
but old school  
bell and hammer dings  
I can never tell the direction  
from which sound travels  
the monster garbage  
eating truck swallows  
all pleasantries  
the preschool windchime gone  
the sparrows' tweets  
the notes of Belle & Sebastian through the screen  
At some point  
I threw a seed in a pot  
It has since sprouted  
but I cannot recall its genus  
likely a lemon seed I spit  
from my water 3 years ago  
It stands a foot tall  
with its glossy green  
leaves but can't really say  
if bearing fruit is  
in its future  
A neighbor  
put out a knife set  
in its butcher block  
orchestration along with  
a box tv set and a sleeping bag  
nearly making the street  
inviting  
How have we come to view

necessities as disposable  
How have we come to view  
disposables as necessity  
The garbage monster ate  
every thing in a series  
of grumbles and crunches  
and has moved  
down the hill  
Somewhere  
in front or behind  
left or right  
a baby  
is crying its heart out

There was a trial run in a new home. Carriage house like. White paint peeling. It sat alone on the land. East Bay somewhere. No neighboring buildings. There was a muddied pond/marsh/moor in the backyard with a deadened apple tree to the right hanging over. Still with apples. The surrounding land was browned with drought-stricken weeds. I climbed the tree. A limb broke off and splashed in the murky shallow water startling a black wild boar. I was afraid the hollowed branches wouldn't hold me and was unsure how I got up. I walked back to the rear staircase facing the tree. Through the uncurtained windows I could see that John Colletti came to visit. We had no furniture and someone I didn't care for lived upstairs.

## Oh! You Pretty Thing

We've broken our spell  
with hollyhock and chrysanthemum  
having navigated darkness  
just some months ago  
    The speedy ants are carrying  
        mountains to their queen  
When we are serving so devotedly  
why do we take the abuse of men?  
As if we've forgotten to do for ourselves  
Navigation sits on the tips  
    of tongues if we allow  
        silence to let it form  
300 ants work the crevice  
under the Meyer lemon tree  
bring morsels to the reproductive  
element of the colony. Her needs  
are met. The work mothers do  
is witchcraft to some

## Rowing with the Experts

There's a peach sunset  
and a gas main break on the corner  
Things sit unnaturally at 74 on Feb 6  
Politics are pulling out  
  the guns  
Politicians are polishing  
  their fangs

I must constantly worry  
                                  about my breasts being groped  
  and cancer being found  
          Open my mouth to protest  
                                  to be told I am fortunate

*Sir, of all the blessings that befall me  
none of them actually has anything to do with you*

Redundancy of men only makes the arrogance  
all the more deafening

## It's a Lot to Take In

The devil's  
worked calluses  
into my hands  
achieving little  
to his vanity

The salt is pure  
from a pillar  
over there

No need  
to get worked  
up about it

She was warned  
wasn't she not?

It's all pleasure  
we seek. It's all  
love we need

The judgement  
is misplaced

His daughters  
gathered his  
seed  
to make  
their sons



## Dream Encounter 7.13.19

There was a group of people shuffling about in a rustic gathering space – a mess hall, basement, foyer. The walls were of a tan stone, with archways and low lighting. A fireplace burning. Some man was trying to get my attention. Trying to over talk another who had made a gift for me. The gift was some ancient looking pottery, a broken urn with blue and gold hues that could be stood either way – up or down and almost resembled an open-mouthed fish the way the broken side faced. I was trying to be conscientious about the fact that this was a gift, that this man with black hair and gemstone eyes was making an offering while the other man kept talking. I stunted the man's speech abruptly and took a seat at a long picnic table with the gift giver. Then I began to talk about the evening when I was twelve and he came to me uninvited, recalling every detail of my stiffened body, feeling muscles recall the defense of playing dead. His eyes were sapphire, peridot, topaz in the light from the fire. Shadows cast on the wall angled, creating chambers of darkness. He never spoke. The offering of a broken urn sat on the table. A fellow writer had come into the room to retrieve something for his daughter. I continued to recount the details despite being overheard. Almost wanting someone to know the secret I had been keeping.

## How Long with Nothing Dark as it Was

When we were feminists, we finger  
fucked a lot. Something shifted  
with age. Things shift  
(progress-based assumptions)

I remember knowing things  
Things we didn't talk about:  
How many chimes is considered acceptable  
when your spoon hits the tea cup stirring  
Why 88 was a better year  
How chocolate is best savored to melt

In the mirror  
recollection has shifted too  
reflections have tales of their own

My daughter sprouts past me  
and there're so many nuances  
to the roles I want to teach her  
stand firm your ground  
bend for the fallen  
know the language of your own body  
so pleasure holds firm a grip on pain

When we were feminists  
we unmasked the secrecies  
of stories we were told  
to gain the understanding  
that we were capable of anything  
and that it was them  
who were always afraid

## The Truths Have All Been Converted *for Lorca Ballard*

A book was given from above  
is how the story goes, one of the versions  
of mans' knowledge. We come  
from the earth in a way that is  
different than their kind. Our knowing  
spreads from a center  
where nerve endings  
cross in complexities – solar at least  
Enoch as dismissed was likely not  
a mother's decision. Raziel, keeper  
of mysteries, may appear to reveal  
things beyond our original scope

The willow bends to form embrace  
The dandelion floats wishes to cracks & crevices  
medicines for many ails  
There are things to know  
as modes of survival

(An army comes to land  
trumpets blast in afternoon sun  
quick! retrieval)

There is an entrance and an exit  
to every occasion, beginning and end  
There are no hooves here, but fire  
as mystery, magic and life  
The things to know were always right here  
Don't let them teach you beauty  
as anything different  
as anything the same  
Be as quick as you may be slow. There is all the time  
There is no time. In you  
is everything already

We Eat Cakes of Kings  
*for Shay Zeller*

Wolf  
    moon  
        hangs  
            over  
                bend  
                    of  
                        river  
                            Crickets  
                                chirp  
                                    and  
  mosquitoes  
  swarm. We  
  snuck two  
  green papayas  
  from a neighbor  
  's tree and four  
  blood oranges  
  from another

Clouds

stack stories

of cumulus

creatures

An elephant

shifts to cover

the circle of luminance above

and we

stuff our stolen

fruit like secrets family

keeps. The crook

of river

having shifted

long ago

depositing

remnants

of what came

here before we

stumbled forth

Little bands

march along

curves

forgetting

names

of all

the owners

of men

## Dream Encounter 3.2.19

A high-rise fragmented interstate. The other end is beyond the scope of vision. Slow the speed. Traveling west on the south's end past the broken-up single story hotel with its pasty white and mint green hues. More like sea-foam. She died there. Before they drug her limp form, brunette hair splayed about, to the pickup. The pickup isn't present. Parking spaces, some empty, some full, but not with the truck. We're looking from the highways up above. I've never found how to cross the bridge in all the years I've had this dream. I've known this place. But it's not how the town turns at that junction. It'll always be some form of night. Towering lights from stretched wooden street poles, purple tones with orange like reflections. It's come up before. The misdirection paired with determination. Driving over the city knowing that we cannot continue for the road drops. Road drops and she is dead. The young brunette neighbor with a toddler son someplace else. Somehow her brother was involved. The weight of it right there while I stirred my coffee.

## Electric System

We've got King tides  
and Alice Coltrane sweeping  
up the mood. It's Christmas Eve  
and Japantown is overrun with littered  
umbrellas and nitro puffs. Safeway smeared  
with footprints and a Salvation Army Santa playing  
a recorder with his little red collection bucket. An emergency  
landing at SFO. Rain is still pouring  
through a hole in the roof. 94-year-old  
landlord stopped in yesterday to say hello. Shit  
came out when he saw the gape. Get an estimate  
Rent hasn't been cashed making the account  
seem inflated for delight. Santa Tracker  
is running despite the government's  
shutdown over a lack of empathy and an orange  
man's temper tantrum. The spirit of giving  
doesn't live in everyone. It isn't supposed to  
Our shoulders are strong and we will continue  
to carry a sack of joy into the night  
across borders of religion and race  
because that one wish is the persistent hope  
that we make it to know love in its  
boundless array of faith. That we make it  
to know love

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**SUNNYLYN THIBODEAUX** is a teacher, neighborhood activist and poet. She is the author of *The World Exactly* (forthcoming Cuneiform), *Universal Fall Precautions* (Spuyten Duyvil, 2017), *As Water Sounds* (Bootstrap Press, 2014) and *Palm to Pine* (2011), as well as over a dozen small books including *88 Haiku*, *Against What Light*, *Room Service Calls*, and *What's Going On*. Originally from New Orleans, she lives and writes in San Francisco and co-edits Auguste Press and Lew Gallery Editions.

## WHAT HAPPENS. WHAT GIVES. WE'RE NOT ALONE. A CONVERSATION WITH SUNNYLYN THIBODEAUX

*Greetings comrade! Thank you for talking to us about your process today! Can you introduce yourself, in a way that you would choose? Why are you a “poet”/ “writer”/ “artist”? When did you decide to use the language you use for yourself (and/or: do you feel comfortable calling yourself a poet/writer/artist, what other titles or affiliations do you prefer/feel are more accurate)? What’s a “poet” (or “writer” or “artist”) anyway? What do you see as your cultural and social role (in the literary / artistic / creative community and beyond)?*

When I was young, I daydreamed a lot, and was fascinated with the old and the other. We all navigate the turns of our minds, feeling the darkness as it comes, as well as light. We cope in various ways and come to know ourselves adjacent to the energy of space and objects. Somewhere between wanting to float away with dandelion spurs or crawl into a sepia photo of a crowded attic, I found language more responsive when written in a notebook. It seems it was about the sixth grade when the light went on. I think I likely spent a long stretch of time admiring the Sunday funnies, and reading entire sections of greeting cards, wondering how language could play in ways that wasn’t spoken in my community. Then I read Poe and my chest opened to the dark fantastical world of those sepia photos and believed doorways in the bark. For the first time, my voice felt not lost in the cavern of the Catholic south. My mother bought me my first notebook. I felt less judged by ruled paper than by anyone I knew, so it stuck.

I didn’t start calling myself a poet until my 30s as it would often shamefully waiver depending on context. Not loving labels, there are many categories I’d fall into, but poetry is one I definitely have come to own openly, mother and teacher ring as well.

*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? 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? 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?*

There are frequencies we catch signals of. Sometimes same signal, always

different reception. Writing these things down feels like an obligation. I could never, would never, sit down with an intention that was outside of the offering. It's like catching song in a wind. You receive it until you don't.

I tend to hear books as chapbooks. In other words, there's a run of the mind, and you can feel the change. You know when it's over. For me, that's often 20-30 poems. Over time you end up with these groupings and then you can maybe hear the hinges between the groupings. There's always some outlier work that lingers as a possible wing.

Understanding that, a book takes this internal ear, but also for me I need to physically see it in a sprawl. So, I like to spread it on the floor and watch it light up. There's a zone where the poems seriously zing and tell you where they want to be -- like some sort of chorus where the voices and tenors know their role in placement and so glide themselves. Too much of the hand can fuck with the ear (the internal).

Weirdly, just as I prefer to spread the poems on the floor to see the string, when I write I prefer to either touch a wall or also, be on the floor. I always write in a notebook and prefer to allow my weight to lean into a structure that provides assurance from the state of vulnerability.

*Speaking of monikers, what does your title represent? How was it generated? Talk about the way you titled the book, and how your process of naming (individual pieces, sections, etc) influences you and/or colors your work specifically. What does this particular work represent to you as indicative of your method/creative practice? your history? of your mission/intentions/hopes/plans? What does this book DO (as much as what it says or contains)? 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 think *Witch Like Me*, if having to have a physical appearance, would be some form of mirror-lake-portal phantasmagorical Cocteau mercury glove state. There's much observational elements happening in a form of now. But also, many reflective elements that seem to piggyback on the gathering mode. It was a strange time in my life, of having some health issues – breast cancer diagnosis, hearing loss, and a looming auto-immune disease. At no point would I ever intend to write a personal narrative regarding the journeys allowed. Things happen in all moments of life. Some things land in our net, some things circle back, all appear if and as they wish. I write what wants to be written in the moment, anything is fair game. No pretense.

Company sounds out in the head – a longing for the dialogue with those who've treaded previous. The brain as recorder seeks out the files of correlation. We replay those while working through our own discoveries.

Music, that in nature, and of personal choice, always filters in. As external reception is disjointed, internal rhythm is vital. Sometimes in writing about that which is observed consciously, there's subliminal composition that comes through, and a line of a song appears, and always becomes an essential thread in the poem. As if a conversation has occurred.

I grew up spinning a radio dial while pressing record, then would spend hours listening to the playback for a signal. We had psychics in the family and ghosts up and down the halls. We had an altar in one room, and a pool table and a jukebox in the next. Any path could be lit. I'm grateful to've been picked by the poem.

It's all a connection. We use words. What happens. What gives. We're not alone.

*Witch Like Me* as a title came from a sequential poem regarded as "Omitted Mythologies," which of course, has been omitted.

*What does it mean to make books in this time, and what are your thoughts around shifting into digital books/objects and digital access in general?*

The argument for the power of art has been ongoing for, seemingly, ever. Creativity proves to be healing. Wallace Berman's Art is Love is God.

Although, I prefer the tangible, digital functions as a new medium that only adds to the bounty of creativity. Inclusivity is not optional. And simultaneously it reduces CO2.

*Let's talk a little bit about the role of poetics and creative community in social and political activism, so present in our daily lives as we face the often sobering, sometimes dangerous realities of the Capitalocene. The publication of these volumes now falls during an ongoing global pandemic, intersecting with the largest collective uprising in US history, with Black Lives Matter, dismantling white supremacy, and abolition at the fore. How does your process, practice, or work reflect these conditions? I'd be curious to hear some of your thoughts on the challenges we face in speaking and publishing across lines of race, age, ability, class, privilege, social/cultural background, gender, sexuality (and other identifiers) within the community as well as creating and maintaining safe spaces, vs. the dangers of remaining and producing in isolated "silos" and/or disciplinary and/or institutional bounds?*

The fortunes of community on and off the page have been survival for many, with no doubt that there are experiences beyond any individual's comprehension. As artists, we work to uncover truths, those of our inner worlds and those of our outer. It is our responsibility to present the heart laid bare, to resist all constructs that obstruct our growth as individuals and as a whole. We must bridge gaps and defend human rights. Above all we must love. We are broken and have a lot of healing to do.

## WHY PRINT:DOCUMENT? (AND WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR DIGITAL MEDIA?)

The Operating System has traditionally used 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 agentic \*role\* as it may have appeared the last several centuries of its history. Ultimately, we approach the book as TECHNOLOGY: one of a variety of documents across a range of media 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) information/materials, libraries, and archives 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.

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 lives, our behaviors, and/or 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 the archive: 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?

For all our years of print publication, I've said that "with these documents we say: WE WERE HERE, WE EXISTED, WE HAVE A DIFFERENT STORY", but now, with the rapid expansion of greater volume with digital and DIY printed media, we add: we ARE here, and while we are, we will not be limited in what we add value to, share, make accessible, or give voice to, by restricting it to what we can afford to print in volume.

Adding a digital series is the next chapter of \*our\* story: a way for us to support more creative practitioners and offer folks independent options for POD or DIY-zine-style distribution, even without our financial means changing -- which means, each book will \*also\* have archive-ready print manifestations. It's our way of challenging what is required to evolve and grow. Ever onward, outward, beyond.

Elæ [Lynne DeSilva-Johnson]. Founder & Creative Director  
THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2019

# BLOOM, MUTATION, ENTROPY, CATALYST, BRINE

In the fall of 2019, we posted the following call for digital chapbooks through our variegated Operating System networks:

How queer is climate change? What mutating futurities are possible in writings of the diaspora? How do we imagine evolving micro/macro/plant-based/insect-like scales of environmental disturbance? How salty is survival? What kind of archive is the ocean? What will become of history under water? We invite writers to submit works that speak to our ecological moment, apprehend change, reaction, and action in networked and local ways, and explore the multiple and the contingent.

This call for submissions centred around the metaphoric, the contingent, the liminal, and the fluvial. But most of all, it drew its strengths from the desire of and for the language of persistence. With so much at stake in the current motions of precarity—climate change, rising sea levels, ecological degradation, racial injustice, police brutality, and now the global COVID-19 pandemic—we wondered: how can we serve as decentred world citizens and retain the critical thrust of the archival through networks over nodal institutions and Big Poetry? What duties of care does form have to shared histories and collective memories? What nuances of language must we co-develop to imagine humane infrastructures?

The call for submissions drew many submissions that approached and reimagined the document as dispersive and fluvial. They were all radically beautiful and critically-engaging. Ultimately, we selected six manuscripts, which we felt reflected a momentary grappling for the micro-macro that forced us as coordinators to reimagine the frayed edges of our call.

The Operating System is committed to fostering open-resource and share-alike cultures for mutual aid, direct support, and radical organising. In the spirit of the wet archive, we encourage you to share, digitally store, print, and support authors via our Open Access library.

Curtis Emery and Orchid Tierney  
Digital Chapbook Coordinators 2020

## THE 2020 OS CHAPBOOK SERIES

### DIGITAL TITLES:

Recall - Lee Gough

The Woman Factory - Ava Hofmann

Kind Haven - Jacob Kobina Ayiah Mensah

Lichen Land - J Pascutazz

Enter The Navel: For The Love Of Creative Nonfiction - Anjoli Roy

Witch Like Me - Sunnylyn Thibodeaux

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PLEASE SEE OUR FULL CATALOG  
FOR FULL LENGTH VOLUMES AND PREVIOUS CHAPBOOK SERIES:  
[HTTP://WWW.THEOPERATINGSYSTEM.ORG/](http://www.theoperatingsystem.org/)



# DOC U MENT

/däkyəmənt/

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

## **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**

c. 2020 digital cohort

bloom.  
mutation.  
entropy.  
catalyst.  
brine.

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