

# INTRODUCTION

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You say it's a voice — a braid of voices — that's absolutely necessary, urgent, and eminently listenable

That a voice making space for itself rings true.

I listen to the gestures and expressions of a body open to me.

I hear an echo of my own story as I tell it.

This is how you and I once sat in a parked car outside MASS Gallery and talked for hours about our relationships to trees.

This is a response to a question you've heard in yourself and in me: where is the writing that hears?

Women and femme writers are a cosmos as they step to the mic and show up on the page.

“radiate like a sullen machine”<sup>1</sup>

Multivocal writing comments on itself as it's composed.

“Step 6: Hold heat you can see”<sup>2</sup>

“What she looks at wears her heat”<sup>3</sup>

“Perhaps she is amused at her sentient sneakers”<sup>4</sup>

Insists on space for its operations.

*“slice me open into a geode of blood right now no big deal”<sup>5</sup>*

A voice that insists on itself works on itself.

“scorching/ through my resources/ especially flesh”<sup>6</sup>

It might doubt itself

“poised for the catch”<sup>7</sup>

An expansion feeling out all variants of limit

“years of privation/ that let me rise”<sup>8</sup>

“How I still think I could be born of a woman/ Skin unbroken”<sup>9</sup>

“Did she run her tongue through the open spaces”<sup>10</sup>

A voice talks to itself and to me all at once. To us.

“a beautiful fiction for them,/ and you all became story.”<sup>11</sup>

“I pray for you, but it turns into a prayer for me”<sup>12</sup>

Am I part of an *us*?

A poetry reading can feel like an awkward date with an entire room.

“Why hasn’t Mamó found the people who will love her”<sup>13</sup>

Being drawn into a confidence, into an *us*, that isn’t supposed to gesture in response or to ask questions.

“an abjection evenly tested”<sup>14</sup>

In so many circles, fellow writers across genders and sexualities misuse our attention to speak over us and project fantasies onto us.

“doily/ print fabric fun to touch so elegant and chic your cherry on top of everything all of your power”<sup>15</sup>

To be honest, I’ve stopped going to a lot of readings.

“You can feel the heat from his hand, and you think to yourself that’s it, he wins.”<sup>16</sup>

I might have given up tenderness to the toxicity with a double absence

“A serpent with a forked tongue that can talk, while I cannot?”<sup>17</sup>

By turning to the poem on the page and the screen and away from any body reading it, and by turning my body away from the poem

“I build my body of desire/ for one thing or another—”<sup>18</sup>

However miniscule the scale of things in small press circles, power amassed through prize-winning and publication is precisely entangled with poetry’s powerful intimacy and tenderness

“currency: language”<sup>19</sup>

“my thorns can plunge bone deep”<sup>20</sup>

This is how this braided power functions on and in me

“The snakes used each other’s body as a pillow”<sup>21</sup>

I numb out to voices so used to taking up the mic and monopolizing it

“the hair of a woman/ who decides/ if my family will eat”<sup>22</sup>

I am too receptive without sovereign deliberation.

“your submission to/ survival”<sup>23</sup>

I’ve gotten used to having my attention seized by a highly prized writer exposing their vulnerability for the purposes of grooming mine

“You’ll find beauty becomes violent/ when you run out of things to say”<sup>24</sup>

“when she closes them in a heavy book, nothing stains/ the page. Heat, of course”<sup>25</sup>

I’m struggling with how to direct my receptivity to writers and their writing

“Your green dress lit by the dawn”<sup>26</sup>

So I can show up for you and for myself. For us.

Our listening for one another is not just intent but anticipation.

“(i bugged my lungs/ to find out what was inside)”<sup>27</sup>

I know intimacy by the pleasures of associative, fragmentary conversation

“Something — unspoken — flows through us”<sup>28</sup>

I feel like telling you everything and the desire anticipates that everything I could say will come out queer and genius in response to your listening

“foolish and terrified because/ it feels like these letters/ will arrive forever”<sup>29</sup>

By way of shapeshifting.

“*Be the gold grain of my womb*”<sup>30</sup>

A field of power. A gathering of readers writing. An echoing.



## NOTES

1. Howd, p. 77
2. Griffitts, p. 73
3. Kitaiskaia, p. 27
4. Elliott, p. 33
5. Ransom, p. 23
6. ortiz, p. 86
7. Hackley, p. 54
8. Torrez, p. 5
9. Pate, p. 28
10. Mendoza, p. 113
11. Pace, p. 13
12. Figueroa, p. 97
13. Figueroa, p. 96
14. Goehring, p. 24
15. Nguyễn, p. 19
16. Ruiz, p. 12
17. Mendoza, p. 113
18. Ilersich, p. 3
19. Johnston, p. 85
20. Urieta, p. 91
21. Westerberg, p. 48
22. Johnston, p. 85
23. Nguyễn, p. 20
24. Newsom, p. 4
25. Douglass, p. 74
26. Guo, p. 45
27. Zaccagnino, p. 71
28. Mendoza, p. 114
29. Kraay, p. 101
30. Ruelle, p. 90