

dyke line break

written by Kimberly Alidio | January 7, 2019



For almost two decades, I live in a house with one human and one dog. At some point I did live with one human and two dogs. But only for a little while. For most of this period, I live in a house with one human and one dog. I move to a new city. There, I live in a house with one human – a different one –, one dog – the same one –, and six stuffed animals. One of them is a good conversationalist. He urges me to count the stuffed animal who's been with me for two decades as part of the household. So to summarize, I live with one human, one dog, and six stuffed animals.

A whisper behind a hand: *Of course the stuffed animal is really the projected self.*

The stuffed animal is real. Not figuratively real, heightened, or amplified through a device. Not a device. Not a function of artifice or magic or psychoanalytic theory or somatic ritual or relativism. Not a function of a diagnosed psychological condition or disclosed trauma. The human I live with points out that on the subject of trauma, we are each thrown into one of two polar axes: mythic allegory or pathology.

He's neither nor. The stuffed animal is a persona. Not the persona of his human companion: his own. He has rituals and certain clothing by which he becomes himself. He is always himself but not always ready to be watched. When he is ready, he encompasses all. Through performance, the stuffed animal is cosmos.

The whispering continues: *This is fun. But at the end of the day...* Okay, the stuffed animal can be a device just for the sake of this conversation. Let's say the stuffed animal is figuratively real. But the figurative is not dress up.

The human is not real. It is an inherited desire to harmonize, achieve, and gain safety from wrath, neglect, punishment, detention, various experiences of death, withdrawal, scandal, slander. One morning after weeping on the bus about white supremacist poetry, I read

[an extermination order for the Herero, a native people of what is now Namibia, using a tactic that resurfaced decades later: concentration camps

All I do feeling this history again in my body is cycle through another scene: uniform glasses, looping anger, subjection, repression. I remember fascism perfected in colonial administration and exported home. Rehearsing confrontation.

Have you ever written a formal history out of fragments of infinite fragments?

And their infinite real and infinite figurative meanings?

Have you ever found your ancestor's name in a museum of natural history?

Have you ever found your death warrant in state record?

Have you seen the future in an archive?

Does the apocalypse leave an archive for the damned?

What of History is real if it is nightmare?

*

I am a human, I guess, who is an afterlife of catastrophe generating performative, interfacing text

[a medium a place a species an agent of frustration a setting an event a tree a compact portable property intimate personal a love letter flesh hair container physical limit discrete pieces bound together a geography a compromise a circulation

Let's touch the material – print documentation, access, organizing, ordering, archiving, reading, writing, institutionalizing, publishing, teaching, reviewing, researching – to feel it fixing in time what's ephemeral

Material text and living transmission pickle and are pickled. Fixing in time what is ephemeral is very much an impulse to archive and to go into the archive. "Archive fever" is maybe elementally a desire to say more than has been possible to and do more than has been possible with a lover, kith, kin, place, or idea that has come and gone.

In the archon's house, I've been a white-gloved guest with photocopying and scanning privileges. There are limits to written language in representing the quotidian and ephemeral. But I've been taken into a confidence. I've made occult discoveries that iterations of imperial authority are languaged with vulnerable desire.

Resonance, obligation, and mutuality glue and engine empire. Hopelessly, the archon's management of desire, grief, anger, and apathy tries to liberate modernization and efficient production. Containing traumatic paralysis or disavowal requires call-and-response. There are performative

capacities of text trembling relative to dynamics of spectator-performer-space-time-sound-gesture.

Anecdotal reportage of facial expression, body language, and gesture grows unruly attachments and affections. Affective relation enacted in the act of exchange between writer and addressee – Conjoining disparate narrative threads – Inquiring after what is required to be legal and legible – Nakedly attempting intimacy, truth-claims, generative relations, and efficient economies of scale – Crafting arguments on non-linear sets of precedent formed by accumulated letters likely to be misfiled (“... but you said, I swear,...”) – A question from another world – how do I explain what it means? – The pull to recreate, to revisit, to marry something past (witnessing) with emergent time.

*

Persona, device, stuffed animal, human, text, dog, household – vexations we can agree to call *poetry*. But real in a way that is not *literature*.

I worry poetry is inextricably threaded with artifice, with tricks and sleights-of-hand. I worry it's read that way and worry even more it's composed that way. I worry there is a Reader ready to play in figurative waters as long as the shore is dry, rhetoric is a game, and the real is untouched. I worry my reliance on parataxis, for example, works on the assumption that *in reality* disparate things don't touch or associate on their own.

Let's try again. The stuffed animal is not a device. The stuffed animal is a form of the real inviting you to sidestep the rule of mutually agreed-upon, lowest common-denominator, baseline sense of the real. The figurative is not dress up. An experiment is not an infinity. There is no smorgasbord of literary devices to choose from. The generative text wears whatever it needs to perform, be read, and become itself.

Dance and performance theory offer four useful propositions:

[our gaze is as much a physical experience as a visual one

our bodies engage concepts, sensations, and knowledge in the process of seeing movement and this kinaesthetic consciousness

[influences and contradicts the way thought happens

[prosaic gesture becomes an extended movement which sets out a new trajectory in which we organize our memory and association

and performers are

[mobile body-archives

In one sense, a performance brings up and reconstitutes the past: a movement vocabulary made fluent through rehearsal and study of choreography scores and video technology.

I'm interested in these propositions as poetic attentions. What lyric arises in losing the bordered self centered in the logocentric sense of the body as having no language? What are the sensory and conceptual vocabularies emerging from the poet/writing body in the process of "seeing" movement?

How does the poet/writing body perform movement vocabulary and how can such movement vocabulary transmute into poems? Or are poems just trace inscriptions?

*

I am a human, I think, a queer child and a middle-aged dyke, a queer ancestor and a queer descendent.

If you get to know me, you and I might experience history sideways.

[There it is said the desire to lie with other women is a drive from the mother's blood.

Inheritance is embarrassing.

I wonder how poets find a line that suits them. Unlike Notley, I resort to prose as

a way out of my dilemma. TC tells me he isolates a phrase of a sentence he's drawn to and the line brings about another line finishing the sentence in his head in a completely new way. He reminds me of the six "s's" for line breaking. TC's "s" stands for Surprise.

I am recently told my *writerly* voice plays interestingly with the *personless* language of the state I dredge up and arrange. How to frame the language of the state with mortal, ecological vulnerability – a sustained crisis beyond *writerliness*? The settler colonial and carceral state is a piece of flesh in a gore flick.

We will vomit the guilt, self-denial and race-hatred you have force-fed into us right back into your mouth.

Real exchange in real time. Not memory.

Private and porous, vulnerability activates the text – all the dead things, all the hidden things –, turns gut instinct up to deafening decibel levels in an atlas of anger – with breath and musicality that's almost mechanical and definitely parasympathetic

[sharp breath of wildflowers

[made my earlobes burn

I complete the depressive cycle of actively aspirational queerness
trace the lettering on your band t-shirt

as my dress stops translating

and arrive at a sideways past in which I am an animal persona that is and has been and has never been a radical lesbian separatist.

[we were healthy, young female animals mercifully more alive than most

There's an uncanny even ghostly quality of dyke/ non-binary affective engagement. An important frame is the broken duration of temporality— how do our kinaesthetic engagements reach across time – a life-span, whether into post-menopause or the afterlife of youth suicide/ illness; and generations that aren't genetic – to dyke-y text, ephemera, and identity markers of gender and sexuality spectrums? A thing I love about dyke culture, literature, performance, and organizing is the thick context of personal histories in which marks and traces are embedded. Gossip, in a way. I'm interested in the prosaic movements of dykes creating relatively ephemeral spaces within the wide but hidden-in-plain-sight rhizome of radical feminism.

[image
rooted in anti-
hierarchical anti-
capitalist
practices of self-
determination]

spiral bound
hair thick
black with silver
back cover thin
silky tie tucked into
belt buckle

[lingers in
analogue]

baseball jersey
direct gaze
simple mouth

[dispersed
material]

["negatives
lost"]

inside letters in
lezzy gang
vernacular

[wait for
viewers]
[ready

to wrestle]

[through
excerpts]

[a messy
collectivity]

details of moves
making a move
postscript political
solidarity work
and who's in jail

[hear loud
silences]

["recurs
through"]

body of the
letter it hurts
me she's hurt
you and other
fishy contenders

[rough
translations]

["how difficult
lesbian subjects are
to find"]

Lesbian separatism is something no one can fix or institutionalize for long, or even quite remember as real. TERFs and the worst of white womanhood push me out of the dream. Cassie gently replies, *They're not becoming extinct by losing people to death and trans – their dream of who they think they are is dying.*

Residue and desperation infect me.

Dear dyke archon, I seduce you into forgetting forgetting forgetting. Willful forgetting (by violence) will allow for willful remembering. (Scarring) other ephemera.

[encourages readers into a position of wilful erasure of Lacanian psychoanalysis from queer memory

// Or just letting go letting it fade stop bruising by sidestepping the punctum / Beginnings and endings and beginning again. And again. Bodies/ architecture/ floor pattern/ time/ duration/ space. Artifact is something that is apart from nature. Arte-fact. By skill – the thing made. Arte-norm. Arteriole. Artery. Movement.

Notes

Quotations marked by left-justification indenting and brackets are from:

- Gloria Anzaldua, "Speaking in Tongues" in *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (Kitchen Table Press, 1981, 1983), p. 167.
- Amaranth Borsuk, *Essential Knowledge: The Book* (t-h-e-b-o-o-k.com/)
- Lara Cox, "Reaching for Archive Fever: A Tall Tale about Queer Made in France." *Paragraph* 39: no. 3, (2016): 319–334.
- Clare Dyson, "[Mapping the Experiential in Contemporary Dance.](#)" *Contemporising the past: envisaging the future, Proceedings of the 2014 World Dance Alliance Global Summit, Angers, 6–11 July 2014.*
- Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," trans. Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics* 25: no. 2 (Summer 1995): 9-63;
- John Eligon, "Colonial Past Weighs on Germany" *New York Times* (12 Sept 2018), A4.
- Ariel Goldberg, "Incomplete Messengers: Notes on Heavy Equipment" *e-flux* 94 (October 2018).
- Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Crossing Press, 1982).
- Schneider, Rebecca. "[Performance Remains.](#)" *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (January 2001): 100–108.

References are made to:

- Robin D. G. Kelley, "A Poetics of Anticolonialism" in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (Monthly Review, 1972), pp. 19-20.
- André Lepecki. "[The Body as Archive: Will to Re-Enact and the Afterlives of Dances.](#)" *Dance Research Journal* 42, no. 02 (2010): 28–48.
- Alice Notley, *Coming After* (University of Michigan, 2005), p. 243.
- Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, Or Growing Up Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Duke, 2009), p. 52.
- Chea Villanueva, *The Chinagirls* (Lezzies on the Move, 1991) and the author photograph by Theresa Thadani.
- Catherine Wagner, "Six S's" in *Poets on Teaching: A Sourcebook* ed. Joshua Marie Wilkinson (University of Iowa, 2010), pp. 105-6.

Appearances by Cassie Mira, Sophia Terazawa, and T.C. Tolbert. Thank you for your presence here. Thank you to Addie Tsai, Ariel Goldberg, Brandon Shimoda, Carolyn Ferrucci, and Susan Briante for your generative attentions to this essay. Thank you to Clare Counihan, Jan Bernabe, and Sarita See for publishing a part of this essay at the Center for Art and Thought. Thank you to Janice Lee, Brenda Iijima, Michelle Detorie, and Soham Patel for inviting me to present part of this essay at the &Now conference at the University of Notre Dame, October 2018.