

—WEYOUI—

Jacquelyn Babb

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

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Committee:

Sarah Dowling

Joe Milutis

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Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences

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Abstract

—WEYOUI—

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Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Sarah Dowling

Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences - Creative Writing and Poetics

[artist statement]

WEYOUI want for words

words written/uttered by others

words forged/apparating in our own minds/mouths

words clutched carefully/vehemently to validate, to soothe, to encourage

words connecting us across spectral divides/to a plane more solid/stable than our own

words that appear in mirrors/through windows to draw us into/out of ourselves

words that don't yet exist

words we find and borrow and rearrange in attempts to make sense of the pain/relief

words that speak from beyond and cling to us like spirits/that weyoui, as spirits, cling to

WEYOUI have braided ourselves/our words together

have offered up our tributes

have conjured deities

have become oracles

have met briefly and spoken freely

have joy we fear will invalidate our depths

have depths we fear will derail our joy

have a powerful and tenuous possession of duality

have fallen and

have risen though sometimes barely but

have risen still and

have a hope to soften the fall and ease the rise of others

WEYOUI are a quiet many

WEYOUI are isolated in that quiet but

WEYOUI, here, have coalesced into an astral mosaic of color and shape

of portrait and sentence

of openness and ownership and invitation

of elusive transparency and stark corporeality

WEYOUI welcome you to witness/engage in/interact with what follows

with what WEYOUI, together, have made

—WEYOUI—

Poetics Statement

As the first iteration of —WEYOUI— reaches completion, I find myself plagued with a perfect storm of grief, health anxiety, and depression. Make no mistake; the association is by no means causal. I simply happen to be wrapping up work on a project about living with mental illness whilst being particularly mired in the experience myself. I've interrupted a rather undignified bout of sobbing to write this. It seems a somehow fitting conclusion to the process.

Speaking openly about mental illness has not always been a task I find easy, and to be frank, despite my openness about it now, it remains a topic far from effortless to address. For myself as well as many others who live with some form mental illness, be it circumstantial and temporary or a chronic and continual battle, one of the most painful things is the oft accompanying sense of loneliness, the mistaken impression that no one shares the experience, that there is no one to talk to about it. I, for example, grew up with the understanding that to speak about this type of pain, to express the deep and abiding emotional duress I was becoming acquainted with was to—at best—open oneself up to the scrutiny and judgment and ridicule of others, and at worst, to risk being pulled from one's life to be institutionalized.

Fear is a big part of living with mental illness. Shame is another.

Stigma is frequently the cause of both.

There are so many words that are left unsaid and so many injuries that are left unhonored because of an expectation, both internal and external, that we Should be able to function Properly but somehow are unable to do so, at least not with much consistency. And worse still, we may have no specific place/reason/impetus to point to that can explain exactly why, neither to others

nor to ourselves. We are by all appearances perfectly capable. We Should be capable. And often we may be very capable: successful, joyful, productive, motivated, social, fun. Yet in some inexplicable way, we are Broken. We are Less Than. And the moments we thrive bring into question our times of struggle; they bring them into question for others and for ourselves. Why can we not just get over it? Would other, stronger people be able to muscle through these rough patches? Are we just too frail? Does the mutability of our illness make it any less legitimate? Is some part of what we feel a mere fiction, and if so, is it the easy or the difficult times that reflect our reality? We strive to find answers while we wait for the other shoe to drop. The ups anticipate the downs; the downs hope for the ups.

We regard ourselves as diminished in comparison to those who do not face similar difficulties. We feel and may be perceived as Weak-Minded because we fail at Normal behavior. So we don't talk about it, because to confess to an illness that others cannot see or may not understand is either to make excuses for oneself or to make others feel ill at ease. We call out of work with a lie, saying we have the flu when we are too depressed to move, because physical illness doesn't call into question the quality of your character as a whole. We cancel plans at the last minute with a simple "I'm tired" instead of confessing that we have applied and washed off a full face of makeup because of a lack of perfect symmetry so many times that our eyes are swollen; it's less awkward that way. We don't socialize for weeks at a time while the sores we've compulsively picked into our face try to heal, so tired of making excuses that we stop responding to messages or calls at all. We say things that are not true, dodge and deflect, because no one wants to know, no one wants to see what is really happening, and quite honestly, none of us want to reveal those parts of ourselves anyway.

Stigma.

To be fair, much of the above is personal account and I am shamelessly swathing it in blanket statements, a bit for emphasis and a bit to highlight the universality of the general sentiment. Sure, not everyone has shared my specific experiences, but my bet is that you'd be hard pressed to find someone with a mental illness who hasn't bobbed and weaved in order to avoid discussing their ailment, who hasn't felt alone and paralyzed by it, who hasn't avoided potential repercussions or feared the judgement of others, who hasn't judged themselves to be inferior because of how their mind decides to operate, who hasn't weighed the ease of the good times against the hardship of the bad and fretted over why the bad is so very, very hard. So, rather than counting these broad strokes and fine lines as a bit of lazy writing, let this approach instead serve to explain the rationale behind —WEYOUI— and the process by which it was conceived.

“WEYOUI” is a pronoun created from the words we, you, and I and is intended to underscore the individuality and community, distance and longing all inherent in living with mental illness. While each person has their own story, both intimate and alienating, there are unexpected commonalities that appear: similar dilemmas crop up, certain descriptions are shared, like emotional responses arise. This fact informs much of the body of this work, which interweaves the collective experiences of the many, the specifics of unique individuals, and the observations of caring witnesses to depict the way in which each facet informs the others, creating a mosaic of events and expression in hopes to provide a wider perspective than memoir alone might provide. There are broad strokes in this work. There are fine lines.

The title of this on-going collaborative work also models itself after the word “ouija;” the project as a whole is inspired by the game's intention to reach out for something beyond one's grasp and understanding. In my mind, however, the perspective of this work belongs to that of the spirits, those who are likewise reaching beyond their transient, transmuting forms, who can only

interact in fits and starts, who seek to better understand their own states of being and the means by which they may interact with the solid world. The aesthetic of the piece offers up a supernatural framing for the experience of—in the case of this first chapter—depression, using images of varying transparency to emphasize the unreliability of one’s own perspective through the lens of mental illness to discern an accurate reality. Visual poetry interspersed also seeks to express in hints and gestures this ghostly sense of longing and the incapacity for complete comprehension or perfect communication. Using this imagery as a foundation for written pieces, —WEYOUI— offers a conversation crafted through arrangement of autobiographical accounts from both myself and my collaborators. It shows how one person might find a small detail of commonality in another’s story, how two people might find their individual stories uncannily intertwined, how a multitude of stories might reveal a larger more vibrant narrative, how anyone reading these stories might find comfort in relating them to a unique story of their own.

—WEYOUI—, as previously mentioned, is an on-going project whose intention is to invite more and more collaborators of varied backgrounds, identities, experiences, and diagnoses to share their words and visages in new chapters to come. This first chapter is the product of a particular group of people who responded to a particular prompt I sent out via a particular means. As I continue soliciting and curating for future chapters, my intention is to not only produce further creative works, but to also collect the demographic information of participants with the desire to conduct sociological research on what means and methods of outreach and conversation prove most effective in encouraging engagement from different populations. This first chapter has a very narrow focus, collaborators falling into a general age range, gender identity or presentation, and geographic location. In future works, I aim to broaden the scope of the work by experimenting with the verbal and written approaches used to elicit responses and participation. I hope to achieve

a more global perspective as the work continues to grow and evolve resulting in evocative creative pieces that continue the conversation started here as well as research papers that run parallel and provide illumination of the best ways to reach people with mental illness from their own perspectives and help them according to the way they will best respond.

I, as a single human being, only have real access to what I myself know about suffering through my own mental illness. I have my own words to contribute to the conversation. However, my inability to ever truly feel the inner emotional life of another outside of empathy or to speak truly to another's experience has cultivated my desire to let others speak for themselves while I work to lift their voices up. This project is one of quotation, of collaboration. The opportunity to meet with people I have never before encountered outside of this project, to communicate with one another without restraint about our deepest fears and darkest moments has been a singularly moving journey, one that has opened my eyes and heart even further toward the cause of normalizing and supporting those with mental illnesses. There are so many experiences I have not had. There are so many others who share common experiences that I have no concept of. Through the continuation of this work, I hope to lift their voices so that others like them may find representation and comfort as well.

—WEYOUI— is less a mere artistic endeavor to me than it is a piece of the social movement that is stirring presently, the movement to make it okay to hurt and to talk about hurting. I aim to create a space that may be beautiful, may be ugly, may be painful or awkward or liberating, but will also be useful and healing in some way. I look forward to expanding the work to offer to others the healing that I myself have experienced through the process. As though in perfect illustration of my intentions, in merely writing about my plans and goals for —WEYOUI—, I have

successfully staved off that undignified bout of sobbing I had interrupted at the start. I hope that is indicative of what the work may have to offer for others.

Jacquelyn Babb, 5.31.2018



—WEYYOUI—

auras • orisons • paeans • intercession • runes • glossolalia

Jacq Marie Babb et al.



—WEYYOU!—

Part One:

The Down

[weyoui]

[artist statement]

**Maren
Comendant**

WEYOUI want for words

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words forged/apparating in our own minds/mouths
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**Yuki
Kashiwaya**

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have conjured deities
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have depths we fear will derail our joy
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**Helen
Roundhill**

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**Jacq
Marie
Babb**



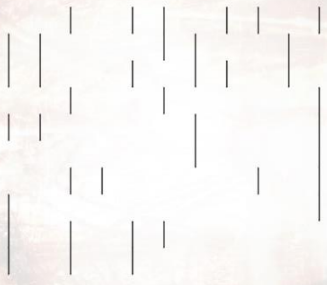
That is all I want in life: for this pain to seem purposeful.¹

¹ Elizabeth Wurtzel—*Prozac Nation*

[down]

adv. To or in a lower or inferior condition, a state of depression, subjection, humiliation, inaction, restraint, defeat, discomfiture, annihilation.

devaporurs



/devapəʊərs/ n. the tears that catch on the edges of eyelids and may sometimes be evaporated or re-absorbed by looking upward

[orison]

To—

I'm trying to help you

Flavesce from me

Yourtic rest bed for

You at the

Just a bed

More

To—

Just

I've picked up my phone, checked the time, certain it lies. I've let it fall from my hand. I find it hard to get out of bed.² It's taken me three attempts to get up to grab my computer. I've crawled back into bed with it. I was to write you a letter. Obligated. I've left the lamps off. The light that creeps over the sill and around the closed curtains is enough. Truly, it's too much, but I can't change things that big. I can't even change small things, like my clothes, or my mind. Instead I slept with a pillow over my head. It stifled my breathing and I wondered about suffocation—what the body does, what my body would do. I fell asleep dreaming I was dying but never dead. I woke with the pillow on my face still, like waking in a casket but without panic. Would I panic? I imagined being underground. I imagined the quiet. I left the pillow where it was. I drifted again. I woke to light with the pillow on the floor—fallen. I sighed as though my lungs were used to hefting things lighter than my chest, *weights pulling me down*³ from the ribcage. Now I have the computer in my lap. In the dim. My fingers on the keys. I don't have much to write. Not much to say. The tired is deep and my fingers only move in bursts. I have to wait for energy to find me, like crumbs of a meal eaten by someone taller. I will perhaps have more to say when I myself have finally eaten; I can tell you about the texture, the scent of the food. But *it gets hard to eat anything*.⁴ Perhaps I can instead tell you about the way the light hits the walls, if and when I decide to open the curtains.

² Janelle Natividad

³ Yuki Kashiwaya

⁴ Janelle Natividad

—From

[paean⁵]

I'm trying to help You.

Your life is lived in third person.

You are your mom's daughter, so and so's friend.

Just a person not fully alive.

Not in place.

Stuck.

I'm trying to help You.

*It's hard to see loved ones suffer;
silent, they can't say a word.*

Wait.

Listen.

*What they're really trying to say through gestures, breathing;
sometimes being by their side in silence becomes the best support.*

I'm trying to help You.

⁵ Yuki Kashiwaya (arranged by Jacq Marie Babb)

To—

I've been hibernating. I do that regularly. *Everything around me is muted or muffled... like being underwater.*⁶ The winter lives in my skin and flares up from time to time like acne. My fingers find it and I am covered in the scars of it, pushing out the bits that don't belong until I am marked by aftermath like scabs. Sleep hits like a burden more than a relief. How the satisfied must sleep, as though they've earned it, as though they have a right. Sleep hits me like the law hits a thief. I steal day and waste it.

Sleep does things to your core—immobilizes—while the eyelids and limbs twitch uselessly. Nothing tastes quite like it, how one wakes with a thick film and voicelessness. Its solitude allows for smells and sights you would not share. I haven't bathed in days. I linger on the toilet, reading. The dogs need their toilet outdoors but I return to bed, thinking to build them a canine compost heap to shit into. I don't leave. I don't open doors. We wait until darkness returns, but it is winter and we are north so darkness is plenty and will return soon. I don't share my face. I won't be seen. I will not smile or catch other eyes with mine. I wait. I hibernate.

*Itches like hell from
I don't want to be in pain.*⁷

The thickening skin on me tells time. Time I collect but don't use. Time I watch stale, go bad, then rot. I wouldn't say I've been doing well. I would, in small talk, but I don't talk much, so I won't say. I keep myself from lying that way. I keep my lips from drying out in the cold, don't lick them so much, priming them for casual untruths. I don't have the energy for pleasing. The sleep I sleep saps my energy, collects it in a vat and dissolves it—a sleep without rest, without gaining. I sleep uphill and waking careening. I sleep in greys and wake to black. I sleep thrashing and wake sore. I sleep and wake and put my mind on things but barely and my body stirs not at all and I mourn my summer freckles, how they will not go, how I can see in them all the time I've been unused, useless, used up. And I pull the winter up around my neck and hibernate, with windows talking in the wind, rain drops counting out the seconds I'm alive but alien.

So I apologize if I haven't written in some time. *I am dragging an anchor around,*⁸ trying to find the willpower to move my sleep-drenched, rest-drowned hands.

—From

⁶ Donna Griggs

⁷ Maren Comendant

⁸ Janelle Natividad

[paean]

You *nap often in the day*⁹:
head on the pillow like a weight
denting the softness,
thick blanket tight around Your form
as though it is cold,
but it is very warm and You must be sweating.
I can see the shape of You.
You seem so very near there, nestled into the cushions,
the couch swallowing You like coins.

There's somewhere in You that sadness can touch that I cannot.

I leave You sleeping,
hoping that—like the cold or the flu—all of this rest will eventually heal You.

⁹ Janelle Natividad



n. (a) The first feathering of young birds. (b) The fine soft covering of fowls, forming under plumage.

[down]

To—

I dreamt last night I had a brown front tooth, coffee colored and out of place in my mouth. It jutted and bulged as though it had rooted in someone else's gums, later transplanted into my own. It barely looked like a tooth at all, more a tooth-shaped caramel, or a polished bit of wood glue.

I and my brown tooth sit sharpening knives, soothing ourselves with the sheening sounds. My brown tooth watches as the edges of the blade shave itself against the butt of a ceramic cup, leaving fine silvery powder on the rim. My brown tooth watches as my finger bypasses the urge to smudge such lovely leavebehind and runs itself along the sharpness. Not sharp enough, yet. I don't know how sharp I can get it, how sharp it wants to be, why I want it so very, very sharp. I return it to the ceramic. There are better ways to do this, but I haven't anything dusted in diamond. So the blade slinks along the coffee mug, calling out in a metallic hissmoan song again and again and again, growing mournfully violent against the pain of heated clay. I turn the cup as I go, till the whole of the rim is glistening silver, till the knife feels dangerous against a fingertip, till I shiver at the thought of a slip. My brown tooth watches the knives all in a line on the table, all the mugs beside upended with silver rims. My brown tooth feels satisfied.

I've perhaps confused you with my dream journal, which I do not actually keep. I don't do much other than dream, so when I do, I'll write of that. These letters pressure me to do or to think something—anything—because you are doing and thinking things: impressive things. But I am not doing or thinking anything. When I am awake, I am vacant. (*I always thought what I was feeling is what everyone is feeling...*¹⁰) I don't know how better to explain it. My sleep is much more vivid than my daily life, much more intriguing in the very least. I think you'll find the constructions of my subconsciousness to be of much more interest than the fact that I've been memorizing the divots in the ceiling while noise plays ceaseless out of an unattended screen in order to combat the abnormal, ominous silence of the room. I think a brown tooth and the sharpening of knives make a far more entertaining letter than all that.

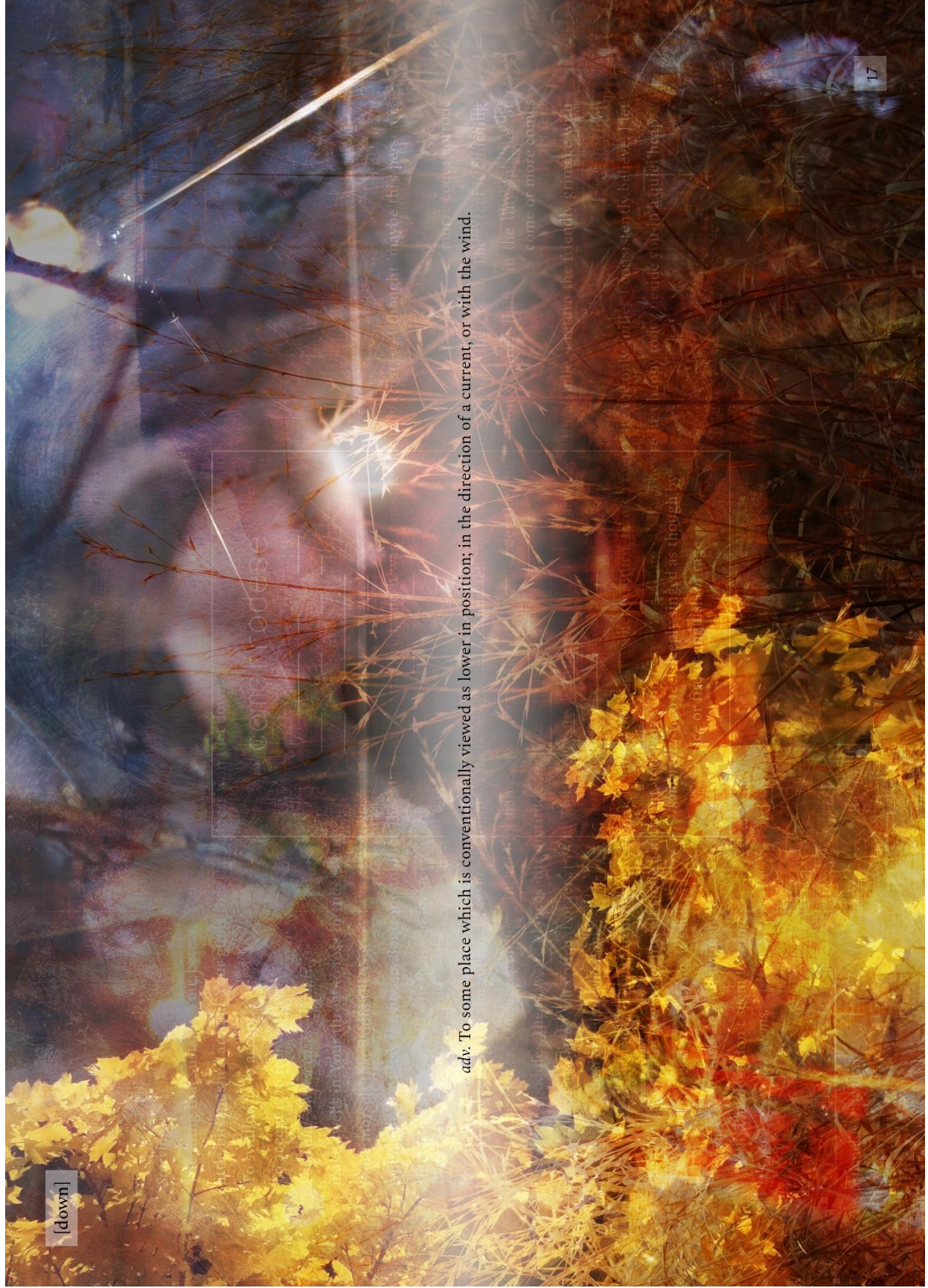
I write all of this as an apology that I have nothing new to write.

¹⁰ Yuki Kashiwaya

[paean¹¹]

Imaginary pain
like the swatting of bees
You flail without moving
afraid of the sting
You wouldn't know what
to do with Your body
without the continual buzzing of wings
without the unending unease.
It being *literally all in Your head*
doesn't mean You are *facilely* freed.

¹¹ Maren Comendant



[down]

adv. To some place which is conventionally viewed as lower in position; in the direction of a current, or with the wind.

[glossolalia]

Starving.

The thing that sustains me is, by
little bits, mushed around Your
To swallow is to accept

To accept is to feel worthy
To feel worthy is to feel
To feel worthy is to feel

That swells in your thr
These morsels that would
These morsels that would

These morsels that would
These morsels that would
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morse codes corrode
morose ore rose me
moods core odes
come or more comes

the friendly grimace with
the only smiles I consistently believe. I let
the only smiles I consistently believe. I let
the only smiles I consistently believe. I let

From

Storviken

The thing that sustains us is, by
little bits, crushed around You: get it
To swallow is to accept

To accept is to feel worthy

and and things that

To— swells in your chest

those morsels that you find

right, that the sun will—in fact—do me good.

I feel oppressed by it.

People smile in the sun, and I want to stomp on their false happiness and tell them to stop lying through their teeth. The street is churning

with them: smiles. On faces, on feet, in holding hands, swinging alongside arms, under the anticipation of street lights, in the tiny splashes of

yesterday's puddles, the skyward glances, the gratitude for blue.

I find a solace with coffee. I order. I wait. That feels true. Familiar. I'm handed a warm cup with a smile. I return the friendly grimace with

no feeling, *scared to reveal who I am*.¹²

I can't get back to my apartment fast enough. Even my dogs smile when I return, though theirs are the only smiles I consistently believe. I let

them smile, and I may even let myself smile a moment, too. Dogs don't expect anything of you. They're just happy to lay beside you in a quiet heap.

If I'm good at anything, it's heaping.

The curtains are still unopened.

The dogs don't seem to mind.

—From

¹² Yuki Kashitwaya

[paean¹³]

Starving.

The thing that sustains You, betrays You—
little bits mashed around Your gums that the sadness won't let down.

To swallow is to accept.

To accept is to feel worthy.

Food and—worst cases—liquids

make swells in Your throat to toss intruders out,
those morsels that would fill You
when You know no mere morsel could.

Even Your digestion has slowed—

not only mood and energy and the words that come out of Your mouth
but also that which enters,
minimized.

You feel minimized.

You *hide the pain, nauseated,*
try to force down food,
gag.

“Just eat.”

It's not as easy as it seems.

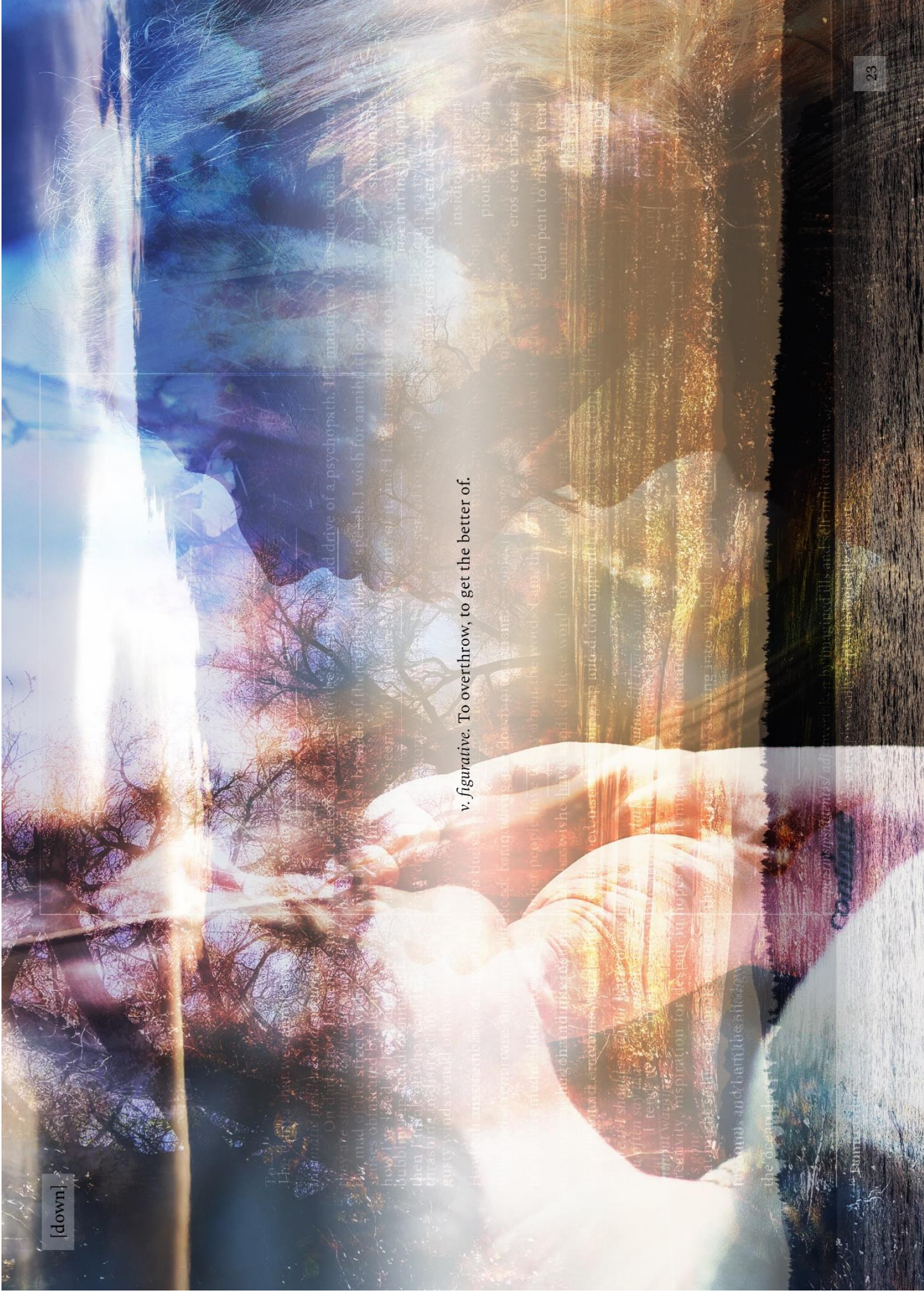
¹³ Janelle Natividad



[down]

adv. Down the throat; into the stomach; also figuratively. to please the mental palate.

[down]



v. figurative. To overthrow, to get the better of.

To—

On dark days, I listen to stories of cult leaders and wish for the confidence and drive of a psychopath. If I manage to leave the house, I watch the mad of the streets with envy, coveting the effortless bravado of their unintelligible speech. I wish for annihilation. I wish for detriment. I wonder how I've lived so long, and why to live any longer. There seems no logical reason for any of it, and I lack the emotion to be attached to existing. But then I think of who would take care of my dogs if I were gone. Any emotion I have is reserved for them. I hold onto them like lamp posts when the gusty winds would otherwise sweep me away.

How do I miss fumbling drunkenly. I miss the surge of outside chemicals inside my brain. I miss my dismissed identity as a hot mess with a death wish and nary a care in the world except for quelling the craving to consume—objects, substances, people. I obsessively google my diagnosis. I google my medication. I google what other people have to say about the words I am, the definitions that should be the beginning of mending. I read the medical jargon and internet speak of those who have handled these words now attached to me, those who know—or claim to—how my mind and body and emotions move—like a flash flood or stagnant pond, jolted through with electricity or dropped lifeless with its leaving, *on fire and unsure if I should reach for water or gasoline*.¹⁴

I tend to feel most poetic while morose, the typical tortured soul wallowing in my nihilism, clutching desperately to art as fodder for creativity, inspiration for despair in hopes that it might—like a floatation device or a trained professional—save me. I ache hollowly for anything that might seduce or shock me out of the apathy that is coolly seeping into my body and separating me from myself, scalpel slicing my shadow from my form, and I am the shadow.

—From

¹⁴ Scurius

[paean¹⁵]

The things that we cannot utter, or will not, or do not, for whatever reason—
traumatic incidents that occurred—
they are *similar to what it sounds like to be underwater,*
senses obfuscated by the movement of our own limbs
bubbling up and drowning out,
thrashing in distraction or survival.

How can anyone hear outside of their own body?
With those vein rivers and rapids of blood, brain waves and floods of emotion...
It's loud in there—like the ocean.

Or a conch shell that thinks it's the ocean—or wishes, at least.
Or falls into it, maybe—with no limbs to move even still bubbling up and drowning out.

You often say that You're unable to feel Your life. A darkness consumes till there is only a tiny speck of light... and then poof,
without warning,
it's gone.

It sounds to You like sinking,
the ocean does.

¹⁵ Donna Griggs



[down]

adv. Below the surface or to the bottom of water; into the depths of the sea.

at a loss, I know how low and when
but now and always
lost in a maze of sharp-cornered and thinned
To— by birth with the migrant within
which you think to have journeyed to exist

where. I don't know how to stop feeling like this. Impending doom. Pointlessness. *Drowning while paralyzed... sinking eternally.*¹⁶ The simple inability to come to terms with who I am, who I still am after so many years of constructing and rupturing. So many failures, all stacked on top of me like dirt heaped over a fresh grave, except I'm still alive underneath.

at a loss. Maybe it's the new meds. Maybe it's the *demons in my mind.*¹⁷ Maybe it's this deep and unwavering sense of loneliness and loss I contain. I feel like a ghost who forgot to leave its body.

Ugh. I sound so damn dramatic.
I'm not sending this to you.

—From

¹⁶ Maren Comendant

¹⁷ Janelle Natividad

[paean^{18]}]

*You don't know how and when
but now and always
lost in a mazemind sharp-cornered and thorned
the labyrinth with the minotaur within
which You think to have mourned into existence
where actions follow reactions that, like lying exits, appear as though from fog
swirling in misty movements behind Your eyes —
an endless tag of emotions
a burden of sensation that will not release, will not relent, will not explain itself.
You don't know how and when
You started to have these thoughts
but You share them with him
and heavens, how he can run and how he can gore.*

¹⁸ Yuki Kashiwaya

[down]

adv. From a higher to a lower place or position; to the ground.

[down]

adv. Prostrate with sickness.



[orison]

Each trench I want to make in
your fingernails, in the dirt
more polished than scalp's livers for
You seem to drip from zodiacs with
till your fingernails are all
To—

Tied my shoes on repeat until they reached the same tightness, couldn't think past the need to clean the apartment, every little thing calling out to me for attention. I think of leaving and I fear the outside world, all those eyes and thoughts and vibrations I may encounter and absorb, that may absorb me. I think of staying and the dog hair and dishes and dust and dirt and disarray all shout to me and I will get nothing done today if I stay. My skin is made of holes where I made them and could not stop myself. *Sound and vision swirl manically around me. My heart pounds so hard it feels like it's breaking apart.*¹⁹ I breathe like my lungs are greedy gamblers who cannot keep their winnings. I shake. I talk to myself, try mantras—they're supposed to calm—but I blubber at every word I say but do not feel, do not mean, panic that I am not able to stave off the panic. It doubles and redoubles and exponentially grows. I am the embodiment of a sob—ungraceful, undignified, unrestrained. I tread the room with frantic actions; “I can fix this,” I gesture to the counters, to the floor, to my bleeding face, to the extra pound around my waist, to the handheld mirror—the only reflection I allow myself. I push the paper bags more securely onto places on the bathroom wall where my visage used to jump out and startle me—when I passed by, or made waste, or nakedly scalded myself—demanding to be altered, attended to, touched, torn into: fixed. I take a Benadryl. A full one will knock me out for most of a day. I can sleep through the panic. The dogs get so concerned when I'm like this. They come to hold me the only way that dogs can, with backs curled against my stomach, or chins resting on my limbs, or concerned little tongues cleaning the salt from my face while adoring eyes peer up from their spot beside mine on the pillow.

¹⁹ Donna Griggs

—From

[paean²⁰]

*Each trench becomes a little deeper,
Your fingernails blackened, dirt underneath
more painful than errant slivers for the cause of it.
You seem to dig of Your own free will
till Your fingerprints are all worn off,
lost to the insidious grains
that once were boulders You might easily climb,
callusing and strengthening Your hands
rather than whittling them away.
Now the peaks are more like plateaus
and up leads You only to the level ground.*

You are so very tired of troughs.

At times You pause to gaze into the sky,
wishing Yourself the height to touch it
but rarely growing enough to compensate for
Your furrows in the earth;

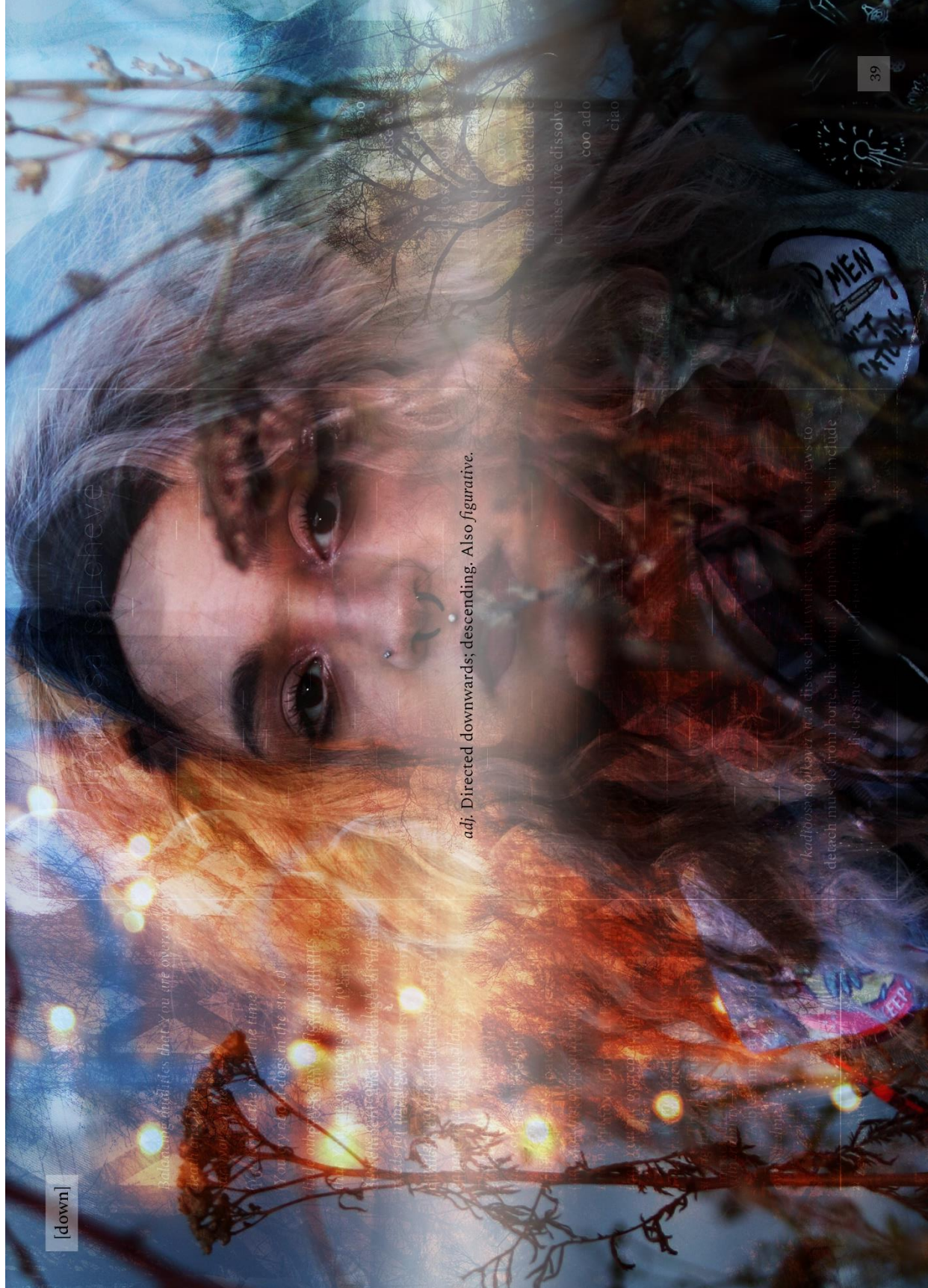
Your body knows better how to dig
than You know how to stop it.

²⁰ Maren Comendant

[down]

chadrasa | o|cheve

adj. Directed downwards, descending. Also figurative.



[glossolalia]

Balancing qualities that you are over-come with
death and life
struggle and stress

Woke up at the eye of the storm

(I) on cry about dogs in the street

little others as I say I see them
that You are a dog's with to get a share
don't let me on the edge of self
need for that every answer that I need
I'm not the shadow of what I am
I'm not the shadow of what I am
I'm not the shadow of what I am

strength with it a strangely the
impact the skin
with the tab
A blessing at the eye of the storm
over the storm

I am not the shadow of what I am
I am not the shadow of what I am
I am not the shadow of what I am

strength with it a strangely the
impact the skin
with the tab
A blessing at the eye of the storm
over the storm

oo
I chase eve
chaos
do dose cool as ice
isle cave hooch hiss ache
she a coal cove doe
dios dole dolce cleve
chaise dive dissolve
coo ado
ciao

Balancing obstacles that you are overcome
 death arise by the
 strands of time
 To— cry about all the time
 Cry about dogs in the street
 little out

Precision is a gift from the gods and goddesses who know when too much is just that.

I am a straight edge. A window pane as of yet uninstalled offering at once the promise of enclosure, the safety of detachment, and the danger of incision.

I have every answer, clarity devoid of emotion—to a fault, I'm told. I do not feel this fault. Every answer is coming easily and obviously: a clinical, cold, calculating capability. The voices of despair and anguish, the endless agonizing and deliberating and indecision are silent, and I have shards for fingers—ceramic, glass, metal—to suit those dilemmas which need dissecting. I can find the beating organs of them, untainted by attachment. I barely have to think it before it is done. I see what I want and obtain.

I have eyes outside my body, peering down at my successes, approving. I will not be restrained. All obstacles are to be bristled at or picked apart and dissipated in pieces. I care not a whit if those pieces have opinions or sensations. They are to be disposed of or to feel what needles sit under my skin to prick up at dissatisfaction.

I move forward. Past maximum capacity of feeling. Something pressed the kill switch and I am without and beyond myself, calm and focused and certain. *Superhuman. Limitless.*²¹

I am not the shadow after all. I am the sharpness left where the persistent, dark and flimsy thing was once attached.

The lack is a strangely fitted relief—insulating, as though donning a diving suit and slipping into deep and frigid water that will fail to fully impact the skin.

A blessing, at last, to—like a shark—swim.

—From

²¹ Scurius

[paean²²]

*Balancing dualities that You are overcome with—
death and hope
survival, softness —
(You cry at the tv all the time)
(You cry about dogs in the street)
little otherwise insignificant moments
that You are overcome with joy.
You are overcome with a lack of self-expression,
needs for impulsivity—
a badger pawing at the insides of Your throat,
dangerous and unhealthy.
Thoughts
that You are overcome with.
Passion
that You are overcome with
Brain snakes
that You are overcome with.
You are overcome with
strength, with
vulnerability—
overwhelmed.*

²² Zev Papageorge (arranged by Jacq Marie Babb)

[down]

adv. On paper or other surface used for writing; in writing: with *write, note, set, put, take, lay*, etc.

[down]

n. The pubescence on some plants and fruits; the soft feathery pappus of some seeds.

[glossolalia]

I that are et cetera set center here
see seer
leer
accelerate eerie haze that seize ether
anesthetize nether ache
let hertz raze crate nest estate
at chez Hera ash lie an acre
enter
alter cherie
else elster heat sea as tea

To—

Every word is a piece of candy lined neatly on a glass beside a rolled-up dollar bill and a credit card. I mourn the patterns I was. Am. A part dormant though pulsating and ceaseless. The part that mistook serotonin spikes for love. For camaraderie. For personality. Who am I if not buzzing and outspoken, death-wishing and heat-seeking, spontaneous and undiscerning in my ingestion? I do not propel my words into conversation now; I let others hit me with recollection. Stories of what we did while fucked up, of what messes we were, but more impressed than repulsed in their telling.

It's hard to be near you when we speak of the past, and we spoke only of the past.

Every empty little baggie on the ground still sparks the memory of splitting open and licking the last specks from the torn corners. Never a grain wasted. Every day powdered thoughts still purr, small convincing words in a quiet voice at the back of my skull, assuring me that I will never feel as good as I did then, repeating the names of things I struggle to admit to grieving.

*Sometimes I can't find who I am without the influences of trauma.*²³ *Sometimes I feel afraid that happiness will invalidate the trauma.*²⁴

I miss being broken. I knew it well. I felt it in my bones and moaned it to the world in ecstasy. "See my cracks, filled with gold." Little did I know, my gold was merely yellow, not plating but only lead-laden paint, and my pieces were not mended in it but capsized and sinking, lost.

—From

²³ Zev Papageorge

²⁴ Maren Comendant

[paean]

For a brief moment, the sun sets in the opposite direction, deliberately contrary and unexpectedly bright. It pours through Your windows, filling Your room with an orange glow that makes every mote of dust a diamond.

You radiate. You tremble.

Through closed eyes, You confer with the divine, *commune with the damned*,²⁵ find Yourself capable of flight, of immortality, of transcendence—amidst the glory of gods, above those unfortunate others, beyond gravity and defying descent.

For a brief moment, You have changed the course of the Earth, twisted its trajectory to Your will.

You stand at the sill and absorb, aware of Your own expanse, certain the sun has no choice but to join with You, so necessary are You to its burn.

The light You bask in fades after only minutes and the sun sets in its usual way, behind You, light no longer reflecting from the windows across the street.

For a brief moment, You remain orange in a dusty room.

For a brief moment—and then the gravity and the descent.

²⁵ Scurius

[down]

n. A descent; a reverse of fortune.



[glossolalia]

You can reflect on everything
but the pond is deep and you
can't see down
The streambed reveals itself
and the water sifts slowly
like sand through a sieve
You know where it's coming from
but never where it's going

and Your mirror will always
show the rocks and the algae and the
pitted, true bodies
and all of the violence that musters
cannot Drown ever feels though you've
never go around to a point that shows
separate things about digital
different No, don't call; I won't pick up. I don't have
Truly, don't call. You don't have anything to worry about, I promise. I'm just incredibly
One You are not both
One You are above and below.

Yuki Kawa
Zairi

rain scent trails viscous
rinse rust to ravine
trust a raven on taut vine
lost in aloe trance
rouse at sun set
let us run anon
translucent

[orison]

You can reflect on everything
but the pond is deep and you
don't know how deep
How storms heal itself
and how the water sifts slowly
To know where it's coming from
You know where it's coming from
but never where it is going
and your mirror will always
show the rocks and the painted white bodies
To— all of the love you contain
and all of the silence that musters
around

Do you ever feel as though you've outlived your expiration date? I have this sense that I was supposed to commit suicide as a teen and just never got around to it. *I didn't know who I was. I still don't.*²⁶ And now I'm this... This. Just "this." Barely a thing to warrant a pronoun.

Nice thing about digital correspondence—no tear stains.

No, don't call; I won't pick up. I don't have it in me to withstand a cheery voice, or a sympathetic voice, or a stern voice, or any voice at all. Truly, don't call. You don't have anything to worry about, I promise. I'm just *incredibly exhausted for no good reason and genuinely feel like shit.*²⁷

One you can't reach
One that's just there and below

²⁶ Yuki Kashiwaya

²⁷ Scurius

—From

[paeon²⁸]

*You can reflect on everything
but the pond is deep and Your visage at its bottom.*

*Once You calm down
the splitting heals itself
and the image sifts slowly to the surface.*

Touching the water

You know where it's coming from

but never where it is going

*and Your mirror self always finds its way to the bottom again
with the rocks and the algae and the rotted little bodies*

and all of the love You contain

*and all of the violence that musters You
cannot compel it to re-emerge:*

nothing but time to bond the dual You

separate

different.

One You are, but both.

One You are, above and below.

²⁸ Zev Papageorge

[rune]

lafrautic • guilesh

I'll be back on the
 faces languish and
 rags (un)wipes, just
 had little, esch
 and it is soft—no, steam
 things that think of
 would in the air do you
 with thick, ph
 I'll be back on the
 faces languish and
 rags (un)wipes, just
 had little, esch
 and it is soft—no, steam
 things that think of
 would in the air do you
 with thick, ph
 I'll be back on the
 faces languish and
 rags (un)wipes, just
 had little, esch
 and it is soft—no, steam
 things that think of
 would in the air do you
 with thick, ph

lafrautic gile/ n. a poultice to soften the hands of the dead and facilitate the spirit's exit, which is often thought to take place through the palms

[glossolalia]

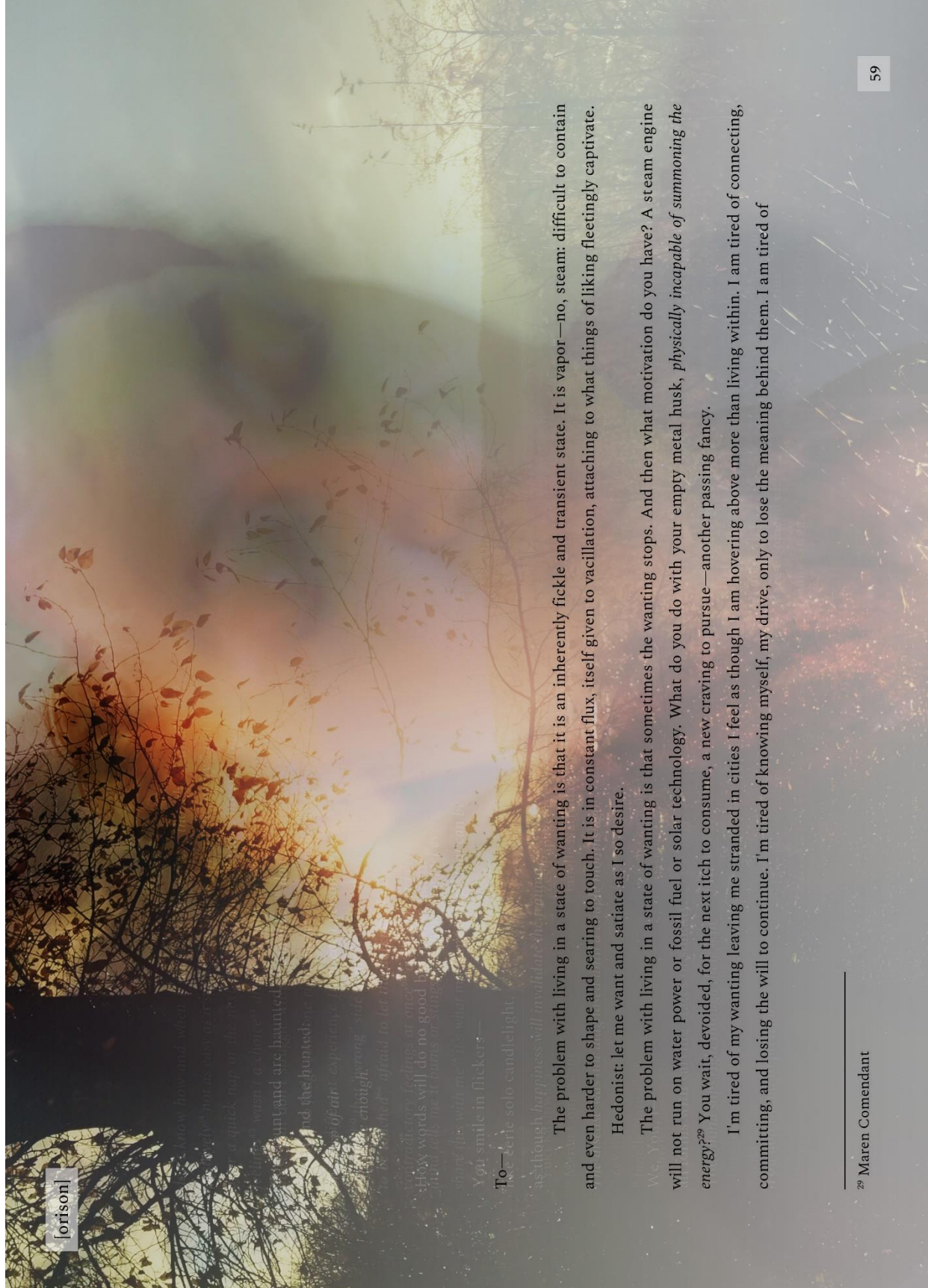
...and are haunted
...and the hunted:
...enough
...afraid to let
...
...words will do no good
...
...smile in flickers—
...like berie solo candlelight

...The problem with living in
...
...Hedonise let me want and
...
...We've the problem with living in
...
...I'm tired of my wanting
...
...swimming and being are will

Water, Camellia

I•I•I a flesh fatigue
faun•is fragile
runt•sh
fates languish anti•guile until raunch
lungs arch aa•sh
agile fang lush lash age
face fresh ice
rags rut at runes rush frantic•sh
fail futile as ash nigh rages
I•I•I•gush until
I•I•sh
I

...fail futile as ash nigh rages
...I•I•I•gush until
...I•I•sh
...I



...quick rain in the
...apt and are haunted
...of air, expect
...enough, wrong
...that's afraid to let
...words will do no good
...all such forms of song
...the wings of wind
You smile in flickers—
To—
The petite solo candlelight
as though happiness will invalidate the

The problem with living in a state of wanting is that it is an inherently fickle and transient state. It is vapor—no, steam: difficult to contain and even harder to shape and searing to touch. It is in constant flux, itself given to vacillation, attaching to what things of liking fleetingly captivate.

Hedonist: let me want and satiate as I so desire.

The problem with living in a state of wanting is that sometimes the wanting stops. And then what motivation do you have? A steam engine will not run on water power or fossil fuel or solar technology. What do you do with your empty metal husk, *physically incapable of summoning the energy?*²⁹ You wait, devoided, for the next itch to consume, a new craving to pursue—another passing fancy.

I'm tired of my wanting leaving me stranded in cities I feel as though I am hovering above more than living within. I am tired of connecting, committing, and losing the will to continue. I'm tired of knowing myself, my drive, only to lose the meaning behind them. I am tired of

²⁹ Maren Comendant

[paean³⁰]

You haunt and are haunted,
a hunt and the hunted:
one gasp of air
should be enough.

How words will do no good but maybe harm.

You smile in flickers—
like eerie solo candlelight,
as though *happiness will invalidate the trauma.*

The disease was not diagnosed until a couple months ago.

We, You, I—
all forms with varying states of solidity.
Your hand slips right through their skin.

You don't want to pretend.

³⁰ Maren Comendant

don't know how and when I started to have these thoughts³¹ afraid to be happy³² have to deal with these things every single day³³ a hard time spinning it positively³⁴ not as easy as it seems³⁵ can be so difficult to justify³⁶ just need to suck it up and move on³⁷ an illness that is literally all in your head³⁸ doesn't go away after a quick nap or the next day³⁹ self blame⁴⁰ make my symptoms worse⁴¹ often find myself withdrawing⁴² you know you love them a lot so it amplifies the feelings⁴³ wasn't a choice⁴⁴ didn't want to admit⁴⁵ it's so often seen as a bad thing⁴⁶ desperately need human contact but do not have the capacity to ask for it⁴⁷ those that don't struggle with a condition⁴⁸ don't ever get to be my genuine self around them⁴⁹ caution on wording and the way we treat people⁵⁰ slips right through⁵¹ to judge someone right away⁵² people smile and wave and act⁵³ say that I'm unable to FEEL my life⁵⁴ the good, the bad, the stressful, the sad, funny, etc⁵⁵ a different experience from each person⁵⁶ her stories were so similar to mine⁵⁷ panic and dread beyond the ordinary⁵⁸ I started to read more⁵⁹ be more educated⁶⁰ that "wrong" side of me is okay⁶¹ the lows can be low, but the highs are also so very high⁶² grab my hand before I sink again⁶³ sometimes I cannot stand to be touched⁶⁴ afraid to let the darkness I'm feeling seep into the lives of my loved ones⁶⁵ my rational self knows it doesn't⁶⁶ you feel so many challenging and contradictory feelings at once⁶⁷ a disconnect between me and the life (or living) that surrounds me⁶⁸ if I touch them I realize they are intangible--or I am⁶⁹ my mind tells me it burns or stings somehow⁷⁰ we feel everything 10,000 times more⁷¹ it is hard for me and others to seek help⁷² realized I wasn't alone⁷³ friends who share this with me⁷⁴ it's what made me today⁷⁵ that can be positive and healing⁷⁶ I am resilient, and I keep growing⁷⁷ sometimes from hour to hour⁷⁸

³¹ Yuki Kashiwaya

³² Maren Comendant

³³ Donna Griggs

³⁴ Zev Papageorge

³⁵ Janelle Natividad

³⁶ Maren Comendant

³⁷ Yuki Kashiwaya

³⁸ Maren Comendant

³⁹ Janelle Natividad

⁴⁰ Yuki Kashiwaya

⁴¹ Zev Papageorge

⁴² Donna Griggs

⁴³ Zev Papageorge

⁴⁴ Janelle Natividad

⁴⁵ Yuki Kashiwaya

⁴⁶ Zev Papageorge

⁴⁷ Maren Comendant

⁴⁸ Janelle Natividad

⁴⁹ Zev Papageorge

⁵⁰ Janelle Natividad

⁵¹ Maren Comendant

⁵² Janelle Natividad

⁵³ Maren Comendant

⁵⁴ Donna Griggs

⁵⁵ Zev Papageorge

⁵⁶ Janelle Natividad

⁵⁷ Yuki Kashiwaya

⁵⁸ Donna Griggs

⁵⁹ Yuki Kashiwaya

⁶⁰ Janelle Natividad

⁶¹ Yuki Kashiwaya

⁶² Zev Papageorge

⁶³ Maren Comendant

⁶⁴ Donna Griggs

⁶⁵ Maren Comendant

⁶⁶ Donna Griggs

⁶⁷ Janelle Natividad

⁶⁸ Donna Griggs

⁶⁹ Maren Comendant

⁷⁰ Donna Griggs

⁷¹ Zev Papageorge

⁷² Janelle Natividad

⁷³ Yuki Kashiwaya

⁷⁴ Zev Papageorge

⁷⁵ Yuki Kashiwaya

⁷⁶ Zev Papageorge

⁷⁷ Scurius

⁷⁸ Donna Griggs

[down]

n. A hill. *Obsolete.*

[postscript]

The words we use summon specific responses from those who not only speak the language and engage with the sentiment expressed, but who also find themselves able and willing and safe to join the dialogue as the presented words prompt. In soliciting collaborators for this piece, certain words were used to inspire others' voluntarily initiation of contact toward building the content that precedes. Some of the words used include the following:

- shooting intimate and personal portraits ... seeking subjects of all sizes, shapes, colors, genders, orientations, and creeds*
- interested in creating a discussion on mental illness and the imagery it manifests*
- ask that the subjects be open and vulnerable toward that end ... to create images that relate to their personal experiences with mental illness*
- drawing parallels between living with mental illness and the way in which it can feel like being a ghost haunting the land of the living wherein reality often is distorted and reaching out to others feels like doing so from another plane of existence*
- looking to create a more varied exploration into mental illness than just my own experiences with the intention of contributing to the dialogue surrounding mental health in ways that depict it as the simultaneously isolating and unisolated experience it is*
- anyone who contributes with written inspiration or images or otherwise may be credited as a contributor in the project*
- interested in the project and want to participate, but live far away or don't want your picture taken?*
- would love to receive a message about your experiences with mental illness and the imagery you use to describe it to others or to make it manageable*
- love to have an open, safe, and compassionate conversation about our unique relationships with our minds ... making beautiful things from the scared and sad and frantic bits we usually are inclined to hide*

Those who responded to these words have been included in these pages. There are a number of identities who are not represented here. This has been by no means an act of conscious exclusion or categorization; instead, it has provided a revelation as to how this project will continue to evolve. As further chapters of WEYOUI are developed, so to will the petitioning words and approaches be adjusted in an attempt to broaden the scope of the conversation begun here. As WEYOUI exists as a sociological exploration of mental illness across classifications as much as it is a work of creative nonfiction, poetry, and art, the experimentation of how to best engage varied individuals and communities on the topic will continue to be tested and noted, addressed and reconsidered. The collaborations resultant of WEYOUI will continue seeking to represent the importance of reaching others where they are and through their own unique/shared experiences in order to create a comfortable space to discuss uncomfortable topics.

—WEYOUNI—