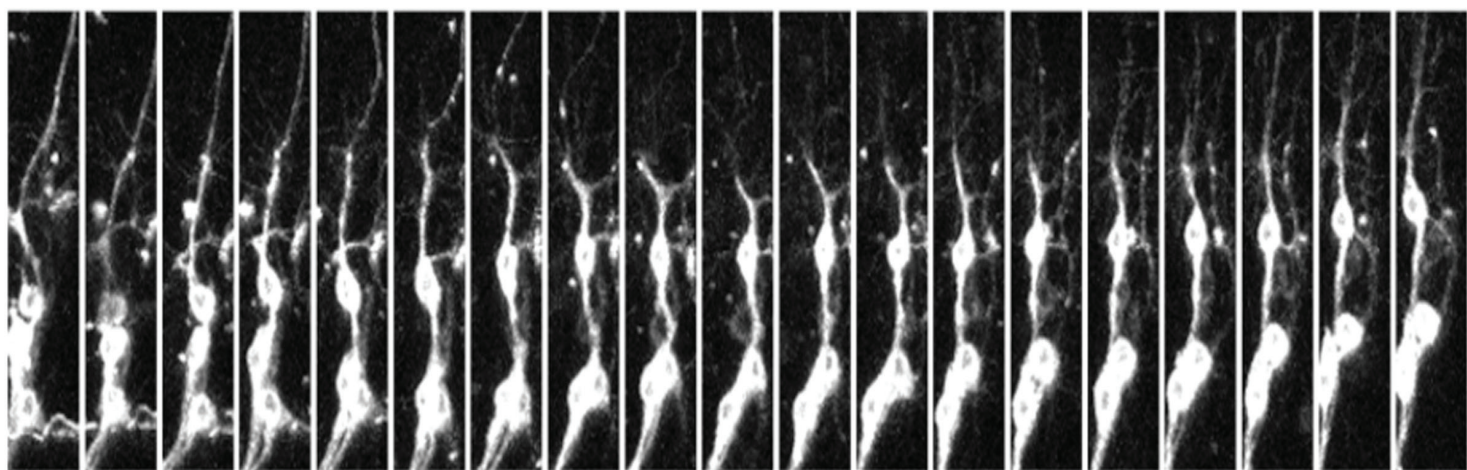
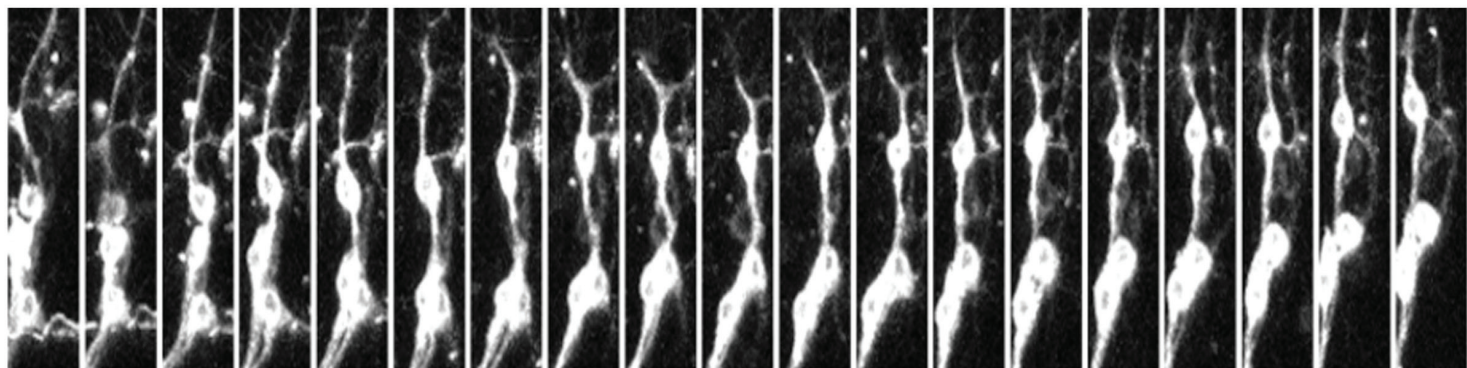


TRANSITIONAL OBJECT



TRANSITION UNDO





advance praise for **TRANSITIONAL OBJECT**

“The shoreline like a boulder,’ writes Adrian Silbernagel, ‘has the softest skin in the world—you will question yourself.’ If a poem is, as John Donne would have it, an argument with God, then the poems in *Transitional Object* evolve the argument into a softer, more considerable inquiry. Silbernagel questions the gestures and betrayals of a beloved through a delicate grammar. He tells us ‘mythology has lost its meaning’ and uses the ballast of word play, calling his addressee ‘nearly beloved’ to further draw us into his confusions. The intelligence wrought in *Transitional Object* explains itself through various entanglements, whether that means ‘sex-drenched’ linens inside a walk-up apartment or is itself a phenomenological rendering: ‘when dusk snows its dark / wool down on us,’ we understand that the lovers are shackled to so many abandoned objects, alone together, a union apart. Here, we experience the chutzpah and agony of language, their bleeding together a kind of romantic undertaking. Here, I celebrate the self that tells us, ‘For I...am mercurial / memoryish.’ Memoryish, we are.”

**NATALIE EILBERT**

“Some books create a feeling of gratitude and recognition whose intensity is startling. *Transitional Object* is one of those. Adrian Silbernagel works language like stained glass, making one densely-pigmented, luminous scene after another. If you too have asked ‘who this ‘I’ is that steals and gives,’ if you have also told yourself, ‘the life of me/requires so many more bodies than this,’ you need *Transitional Object*. Let it help you move from one self to another, one moment of being to the next, again and again. It’s that important. Silbernagel has ‘waded deeper into the rubble’ of the structures that oppress, ‘where [he] now lie[s] in wait’ to welcome you and help you on your way.”

**JAY BESEMER**

“At once a challenge and an invitation, a seduction and a demand, the work collected in *Transitional Object* does what poetry must, and only the best poetry does: it undoes the world as I know it, and remakes it entire. Adrian Silbernagel’s utterly original voice, his mastery of language, his perceptual power, do no less than de- and reconstruct reality. These poems both employ and interrogate the power of word, image, and symbol to say what we mean; they question, and ultimately restore the reader’s faith in, the possibility of making meaning at all. If all this sounds abstract, the poems themselves are anything but—these are muscular, embodied, deeply sensate works, alive with the passions of being, rich with both the tensions and wisdom of body and mind. Silbernagel is an important new voice, and his vision is one that we have not yet seen, nor will we see again soon.”

**MARYA HORNBACHER**

“‘If to be mirrored was your motive, / it was mutual; if to last forever, mutual.’ Adrian Silbernagel’s *Transitional Object* offers a means by which to both shatter and make solid, to create ‘me’ in flux, to write ‘I want my voice to explode in my dream without waking me,’ when a metonymic ‘planetarium blasts apart inside me’ or

oracles as object. Light bends the object that talks to itself as if a lover, as kind or unkind. It nurses the edge, 'contemplating not death, but the conditions of resurrection,' knowing that metaphors don't die, we outgrow them. At times light is a bully to the hypothermic, who 'gives way to heat, or the illusion of heat.' But as the heat casts off metaphysical skin or, if it dissects itself, turns inside out, it adds that 'the animal in motion stays aysmmetrical.' As it devises material 'threadwaste, threshold' through the condition of the body, it puns, the double having its way with the language because 'mythology has lost its meaning.' Meaning is a monster stared down and eaten with 'the beat and what falls between the beat.' Even if each piece of shatter resurrects as an animate fantasia of broom splinters. 'Do not ask: what shall we make of all the disappearing furniture?' Instead ask what becomes you, an epic figure that might be believed in as the 'names for each turn light takes as it enters a sanctuary: lux...lumen...illumination...' Between the maker and the made, the poem is written to this you who is a hole and wholes and holy, that 'for the life of me / requires so many more bodies than this.'"

**M.J. GETTE**

TRANSITIONAL OBJECT

[poems]

ADRIAN SILBERNAGEL

the operating system  
print//document

## TRANSITIONAL OBJECT

ISBN: 978-1-946031-51-8

Library of Congress CIP Number: 2019939288

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Interior edited and designed by ELÆ [Lynne DeSilva-Johnson]



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Cover art and design by ELÆ created using *in vivo* time lapse images of sensory neurons affected by insect hormone in *drisophila*.

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TRANSITIONAL OBJECT

[poems]

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*Thank you to the following journals, in which selected poems from this work originally appeared:*

*The Atlas Review*  
“Species Dysphoria”

*The Columbia Review*  
“Étant donnés”

*Cosmonauts Avenue*  
“Standing the Test of Time (A How-To Guide)”

*The Destroyer*  
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*Two Hawks Quarterly*  
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*TYPO Magazine*  
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### NOTES

## I. NOTES ON INDIVIDUATION



Where water slurs around the edge of the delta's mouth,  
and celestial North is not "someplace else" but a continuation  
of the river—calf, thigh, spooning the shoreline like a boulder  
has the softest skin in the world—you will question yourself.

Think back to a time when everything we touched could turn us  
into a palace—like Midas, only it was you who became  
the glistening walls for a world of subjects to meander, maybe  
admire, maybe lose themselves in the ambrosial architecture

of your body. A time when metamorphosis was your first response  
to a warm wrist, a curious glance, the earliest hint of human  
suffering. And how somewhere down the gold-coloured line  
that bounds, uninhibited, from "this mystical garden" to "that

dark creature lurking in the corner," and back to you—a stunning  
light show—mythology lost its meaning. Admiration became  
demeaning. A collection of mason jars filled with the Missouri  
*means I don't want to lose you, but still I can't trust you*

*to stay.* Inside me, where a body of water and sky is disjointed,  
you are a boulder I can't encompass. If we believed in myths,  
and I were a palace, you'd walk through me; maybe burn  
your place in the celestial array of invaders, and leavers,

and I'd go to the river—a streak of suffering  
light—and empty the jars at the knees  
of an unbroken world.

for review only

## BUNDLE THEORY / INFINITE SCROLL

Your first night alone overseas,  
plagued with jet lag and transparency—  
Your fumbling transaction with the terse bank teller  
and programmed flirtation with a helpful bystander—  
Those hijacked plans to see the Orsay and the Louvre  
before *crashing in the evening and dreaming of you*—  
Your virgin taste in relations “unconditional”  
and affinity for exotic affairs that would follow—  
All those clever artists who promised you an in—  
All your deadnames nailed to the wall of a museum—  
An amphibious existence that supports itself accordingly—  
suspended, with class, between erasure and a rat race—  
On your marks—*Where—get set—do I go—*  
The interventions you insisted were *unfair* and *premature*—  
Your postcards slipping through an aging woman’s fingers  
while elsewhere your life continues to un-scroll—  
Chicago, Seattle, book deal, funeral—  
Those girls you only wrote because they made you  
feel invincible—Those boys you only wrote  
because you wanted them to swoon—Your Sartre,  
your Pinot, your eventual tomb—Your relapse  
sponsored by foreign cash and the words  
*Closing soon, whoever you are,*  
*find what you look for.*



## TRANQUILITY / MODERN WORLD LANDSCAPE

To those whom the gods would undo, they said the truth  
was *gnarled but glowing like embers embedded in the ground*.  
How unseen, the old view, how crude and indescribable—  
the vast bay window costing NASA an arm and a leg  
—*to see what they could see*. Up north, there are more dark days

than ways through them, a thick skull buckling in the cold  
-blooded riverbed, a winded depressive who'd kill  
to pay rent, the indiscriminate expansion of everything  
under the Sun—all becomes one / who could have been  
an astronaut. *The unearned wonder, the succor, the loss.*

I'm convinced that we were—all of us—fireflies  
in previous lives, and while the blue faded, the filament  
hung on. *But not until we're buried are we bulbs.*  
Redundant: don't think of wings as obsolete, but *novelty*—  
whose roots bloom black and bottled messages

read: *Save me from myself...* To those whom the gods  
would burn out, they lent flame, and watched  
panoramic cliques corrupt the wicks of troubled teens.  
Think Da Vinci's first angel, think Descartes' wax  
-strewn gown. To these delicates, we dedicate: *threadwaste, threshold.*

*And who do you propose may have pressured the free  
object's fall?* Thus mocked the anchor tied tightly  
to the anchoress, tossing and turning down the path  
to enlightenment: *Dream your way back through the valley  
of the shadow, mind the weather, remember who you are.*

A mythological figure, come hell or high water, full circle or color.  
The hook that would catch your attention, reader. The link  
“appearing broken” in a chain of events, viz., an outstretched hand  
on the suicide bridge. *The moral man would serve, he put to words.*  
A kid again: bearing an eraser at the point of no return.

## THROWINESS

The night sky: a voluptuous black  
swan taking a bullet to the breast / bloody blossoms

blooming all at once upon a time  
-lapse photograph *See with your eyes*

*not with your hands* evokes the fondest  
of the fond: my brother, my god

complex examining the pavement  
for a smooth patch, shooter for blemishes.

I walk through the valley of your shadow:  
a slim chance weighed down

with just enough marbles  
to drown me and just pretty enough

to impress the other Pisces at the show  
and tell display of adolescence

whence we carry, timidly, timidly,  
our half-formed senses of self.

We lose touch for different reasons  
from diametrically opposed coasts. For me

every hangover's aurora borealis  
is charged with telepathic electrodes

transmitting felt warnings at speeds  
I hesitate to translate. For you I appear

dying in too many dreams; over too many rivers  
I waver, never casting that first stone.

The agate moon hanging dull and low  
among the fireworks, then retreating

into some remote corner of the lake: far  
more well-rounded than I'll ever be.

A thousand rock stars smashing their guitars  
on a dark stage: sparks cascading down

upon a sea of fans, a surf wave, me  
taking it all serious and in.

Temporary centerpiece. Bomb threat  
apocalypse theory-head. Beast of Water

cusping Aquarius She who hates  
because she knows not what she is.

Amphibian. Second born second sex  
addict par excellence Sister of the boy

who cried Keeper of the cat-eyes I've been  
called lots of things in my life.

for review only

## FAMINISM

Once resilience was all that could be said  
for the terrain: once the lewd wind  
took the living breath out of the geese:  
the laughter and the wings out of the wind:  
once fallen: the wobbling V stood

for unidentifiable: aerial voyeurs  
and their 8mm bird hearts  
set on Deep South / gone degraded  
in the soil. Such crises.  
Such maggotry of cornfields

turned us all anorexic: shriven  
at the cutting edge of August.  
Just amateur Cowboys trading  
glances with premature Indians  
when the mayor got on the radio:

*Gonna hafta make a maze out of this—*  
and you swore by that broadcast  
you'd have me for your own before fall did  
drown our little war songs  
'neath a blanket white as God

and the Good Land dreamed crooked  
dreams of what could have been  
flammable. Carnival tickets  
left over from the last church  
bazaar, our little fading

souvenirs. Your hat my saving face.  
What had been our wilderness

destiny manifesting  
fifty-cent admission fees for hours  
of sharp turns, you crushing

on the shy, dark-eyed neighbor  
girls who'd give in—given  
we were all afraid of worms  
that summer, and of getting burned  
once we called off the war.

for review only

## TEEN ANGST / GRAND THEFT AUTO

It all started with you wanting  
to set off all the alarms without a thought  
to how selfish that crime-  
to-criminal-ratio would've sounded.  
I tugged at my ski mask and swore  
to play superfluous. Perhaps I was praying  
for all the wrong things, teased the world  
in all its mock-oyster glory. Underground  
subways converted into anti-rain dance halls  
—*the beat and what falls between the beat*—  
Ginsberg, Ferlinghetti, fanatics passing out  
-dated literature out to ravers at the tunnel's mouth  
exacting a dripping pulp. Water torture  
was all in our heads, like the song  
you only loved because it made you feel invincible  
as it boomed from your new used snow-white  
Corsica—bass cranked, heart pounding,  
eyes close as they'd ever been to sleep.  
Dream-screams flee lips crimson-kissed  
by all the pricks you made out with  
like a thief in a jewelry store, delinquent  
written all over her car, and I'm total  
-ly that pearl right now.

*Drop your weapons*, she says. I say I don't have any. *You're lying*, she says.  
I say *Jesus, I'm sorry*. My story so simple I'm ashamed.

\*

At eighteen you rose, threw on your flannel and snuck out  
with your wicked step dad's pistol, and some plans.

\*

*Homicide or suicide*, everyone asked, except me.

\*

"Come As You Are" was the party theme.  
I came alone. My dad thinks it's a stage.

\*

There was the question of how to present ourselves, distinctions  
between butch and femme, blood and let-blood, between love

And letting love, to be made. There was the issue of the pseudonym.  
All I asked was for your name. You laughed, said *pending*. I said *Jesus, I'm sorry*.

\*

*Simple*, he'd say, *it's just a stage*.

\*

Then the show got ludicrous, the lead singer smashing his twelve string  
on the amp: cataract of sparks like red stars.

You asked if I was taken, but then the party crowded in like the blind  
around the miracle performer, like fans around a flame.

\*

*Homicide or suicide*, they ask. I hide.

\*

*Don't forget you're taken*, said my boyfriend as he drew  
a dozen roses from behind his back and handed them to me

before he vanished into twilight, and I changed.  
"Come As You Are" was the party theme.

\*

I came in his flannel.

\*

My bouquet, blocks back: a copula, a cataract of red  
petals spilling from the bridge rail to the river down below

The lead, smashing his twelve string on the speaker:  
explosion of distortion and petal-red stars

\*

My sternum, a double bass pedal beating triple time  
*Homicide*, you lied

\*

But then the lead got ludicrous and flew off  
the stage into a sea of fans, a surf wave, my bouquet

Still littering the bridge blocks back, your bullets  
still poisoning the river, as we came

\*

As we were.



As to what or who will deliver you to day:  
 decide to climb a fire escape.  
 No emergency emerges—climb it anyway

and as you mount the final rung lean back  
 to open and flood your lungs with onyx  
 oxygen: elixir of the half-gods of dawn—

even overdose. It is of paramount importance,  
 here, to not fear abundance: the full  
 moon fondling a harem of androgynous birches

at the outskirts of town—femme on femme  
 light—white magic just *cast*  
 across the lost field of vision

like no tomorrow, and *oh*—the deep breeze  
 moaning through those smooth,  
 those moon-strewn knees.

It is of paramount importance to embrace  
 repetition, again and again,  
 the object of passion, and let go—

the breath gaining speed for speed's sake,  
 no—for the sake of the breath—  
 a wind chime unfreezing from the frost

-bitten branch—relearning how to sing  
 is not rocket science, nor life support,  
 whether art or not art, think of the infinite

masterworks eight appendages can muster  
in the hours of entanglement  
when 9-5's dissolve into the ambiance

of ambulances and neon and late-night cafes  
become quarantines and safe  
houses and purgatories for Johns and Janes,

Janes and Janes, leaning into one another  
with their backs to the window,  
beyond which the Great Outdoors

grows numb to us all. See how  
their hands dance together, without rings.  
To slow aging, think, and be

warmed for a little, and fall back,  
subtracting from the world  
the persistent lack of snow angels.

for review only

## MUSICAL CHAIRS (A LULLABY)

I am the keeper of the heights, wind-tender and wild-eyed. Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, I Am the cast and the chorus and the audience all at once: meaning lonesome. A limestone castle crumbles with my every exhalation; whenever I inhale a little color leaves the world, my children, listen— to the hypnotic pull of the full moon pregnant with every sad poem ever written, the willow and the terrible truth the wind has to tell it—and tell me who I am. If you refuse: sleep will come like a thief, the lover, set sail in the tossing and turning; your bed frame become ladder become kindling is no fire escape. I am the top of the world and the sea, now evaporating. You who I carved out of an eyesore, you sight for sore eyes, rise: walk bravely in circles to the music. Do not ask: “What shall we make of all the disappearing furniture?” Think only on those things that must be discovered, that may never be created nor destroyed. Dreams come to those who ask for much but need little: a sound tonic, a fistful of sand. Ye wing-bent, ye with no way down, take comfort: you aren’t the first, and are far from the last.

## LOVE SONG / SUICIDE BOMB

As the insomniac dreads the night, so does the city  
grow petrified of being what it is, needing what it needs.  
Take the bridges we managed, despite downpour and detour, to let burn.  
An animal in motion stays asymmetrical: this was me trying to get even  
with history—carbon footprints all the way down.  
The metropolized skyline like a girl, by definition, interrupted  
by the politics of entrance, essence askance, warship lands  
her one-hundred-story deal: published, perished.  
They're tightening the border now, punctuating things without thinking  
what they might be killing off. *If this is freedom, I'll have no part in it.*  
*If this is scandal, I want in on it all.* In Times Square, a figure ate  
dirt, background ate figure, a skating rink falls asleep full  
of fractured bones, New York City full of terror,  
and I still can't remember where I parked that night  
for the life of me / requires so many more bodies than this.

If my methods were juvenile, yours  
were all blood, cum & conquer.

If I was camouflaged, you were camoufleur.  
If muse-starved, I was scarcely in your favor.

If to be mirrored was your motive,  
it was mutual; if to last forever, mutual.

If downtown there is still a muraled stairwell  
that leads to two doors: one deadbolted, the other

boarded over—I got everything I asked for.  
Despite delusions of grandeur. Despite the night

& day difference between underground  
& sellout, invincible & adult.

If there was one thing I asked for,  
it was not to be seen & not heard.

If I was dreadlocked or angst-filled,  
moon-pale or ethereal, you were adamant:

I was doomed to unravel. If memory serves,  
you said as much that night by the river

gone swollen with snowmelt, gone viral  
from trying to level with the trestle, that night

when your camera caught my wandering eye & made  
my mind derail: my string of conditionals cascading

graffiti & all into your stone-cold waters, your glass gaze,  
your brick wall. If your light-hungry world turned

me rabid, turned me pixilated;  
if “a picture speaks a thousand words”

is a truism another, keener poet already had  
his way with—say *the apparition*

*of these faces in the crowd, say petals,  
on a wet, black bough—there was nothing left to steal.*

for review only

## 2. SACRILEGE IS THE NEW SECURITY BLANKET





This much is given: a set of organs, an infinite set of needs.

*Be wary of those who fear intimacy: who privilege their need  
to be taken seriously over their need to be taken, full stop.*

This much you'll take with you to the grave: heart, lens, certain neurons.

*The severity of whose nightmares can be measured  
in slips of the tongue, at dawn or in broad daylight.*

With these you will walk through the valley of decisions,  
making shadows of which you are terrified, despite having made them.

*Whose offspring—petals on a wet, black bough—are conceived  
in underground subways that read “save me from myself—”*

Three times you'll deny having made them. Thus your migraines  
will multiply, your labor pains, grow thrice-excruciating.

*Whose pictures omit a thousand words; who turn a blind eye  
toward Jerusalem, a blind eye inward.*

Your pupils will forever be at war with your mind: threatening to flood it and, by turns, to cut it off from the light source.

*Who view the heart as, not a four-leaf clover, but a compass rose:  
its direction not discovered but forever self-imposed.*

Your guilt you will braid into a noose for lack of better instincts, for lack of forgetfulness.

*Who deny that, in cell years, seven is the turnover rate:  
after which it's anyone's guess who's counting.*

Between the needs of the body—and the virtues of the mind—fall the upright—forever lost in translation— Cyan coins of dusk rushed through your chest as you fell to the East / *as I fell to the West—*

*My spine shone, and you promised to make me shine  
brighter than any known star, laser, or halo.*

What was I supposed to say? How was I supposed to age?  
I'm no human, and god knows you're no angel.

*Do what you will, I said, and I'll go where I go.  
Cut my umbilical cord. Commit me to the flames.*

## I.

I steal things I'm too ashamed to borrow:  
 the hours at the end of your day  
 you inhabit so gracefully; your glance, that place

where electromagnetic waves go  
 entangled, go to war. My independence deteriorates  
 with my optical fibers; fireworks

seizure on the nerve-screen and I mean,  
 if you need to make nothing out of something  
 you should say it to my face.

Was our love not handcuffs; was what held us together  
 not your hate-dread of the other  
 racing pulses I've felt fluttering inside me?

I let them all get away  
 and was sentenced to the page, which for a time  
 at least gave my crimes meaning.

## II.

The things I steal I rarely savor: her body forms  
 a lump on my retina as my brain  
 leaves the restaurant. *I'm afraid of what my hunger will do.*

At some point the cones must take sides:  
*If blue is heaven, red is solitude.*  
 A tension builds that will inevitably be broken

between the understanding and its object.  
A shudder grows that must be released  
between the shoulders as the spirit remembers

why the Gothic architect Suger had a name  
for each turn light takes as it enters a sanctuary:  
*Lux* when it pours unimpeded from the sun,

*Lumen* when it streams through stained windows,  
*Illumination* when it fills the believer.  
Remembers what it was, but couldn't stay.

III.

Call the memory of color sublime: call it despair.  
The lover comes and goes like a recurring nightmare  
where the face goes white, the eyes swollen,

the soles of the feet slice open on the boulders  
when the tide rolls in—comes and  
goes between trial and error, *I do* and *do us part*.

If I were trapped in a cathedral on this darkest night  
of the drought and cried out to The God,  
I doubt he would hear me. When I was the cruel word

scrawled across sandpaper, strapped to a missile at 30,000 feet,  
you were cactus limbs strewn around my shelter  
in the nuclear fallout. When my name became Tantalus,

I made you my rain stick: shaved glass tumbling through  
thorns turned inward: a secret storm  
no light could enter, without first breaking thee.

Wings fold back and break off in unbearable winds.

Neither of us had the luxury of watching  
my plane leave insofar as you crashed once I said goodbye come dawn  
and I was stuck inside it. Love, to be honest  
is to board a metal bird full of strangers all moving  
in the same general direction at terrifying speeds  
much as a train of thoughts throttles across a page, meaning anything  
you think you want—oxygen mask, suicide bomb—can and will be  
held against you. Boundaries blur, book drowns, as watercolor aircraft spirals  
bright lights down below may belong to several cities or simply a home  
once christened fluorescent, now taken by flame.

## TIME-LAPSE RESOLUTION

I want to be in love and of it, to live  
in a postwar, radioactive city  
or on a ship at the bottom of the ocean  
because I'm just that invincible, my force field's just that bomb.  
I want to know God, to approach him  
with no puns intended, with a gun to my head,  
to be beside myself, outside myself,  
to crave the unspeakable—I want my voice to  
explode in my dream without waking me and when  
the alarm clock goes off on the horizon  
I want my body to lie prostrate as my fake one  
runs through strange streets soaked with blood and maybe gasoline,  
and Flame, I want that rush to the head  
of butterflies foretelling our impending destruction  
and subsequent mass production of hate mail  
and frantic prayers for halos—I want to be in danger of believing  
everything they tell me, of taking the prophet on the subway  
for a terrorist, religion for protection, quantum entanglement for proof  
it's not just me and my decisions. I want to believe  
every word of it—and laugh. I want my life back.

What our nature is / can't be captured: this I know.  
On black and white film, elements may appear interchangeable.  
*The flames were like ocean spray—a surf wave—we could not see through them.*  
At the end of this world will rain hourglass. Will time pass like light. Will light separate  
the shards from the sand as we wade deeper in. A gray sun may hang  
in the background, disinherited. Understand: a great lens encompasseth us.  
Understand: some may lose their faith. Camera now turned on / the Light of the Dharma:  
his face soft as lotus petals, firm body. An arrow called Gravity points away  
from an unnamed center, Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* playing from a foreign car  
crouched beside the curb, upstream a boy anoints the monk's head with gasoline.  
There are two kinds of people in this universe. *Minstrels, drag your rigid bows across  
the trembling cello.* Reporter releases the shutter / shudders: a flourish of orange  
flags and yes a few blue even—*In my lungs, an unspoken manifesto  
now combusting*— Did he stay in that pose, and for how many centuries:  
These questions can't be answered simultaneously—and will burn—

## CONDITIONS OF RESURRECTION

I've been shut up  
for millennia in this ward  
with a terrible question  
on my tongue, I've been  
reticent stricken and bound  
by insomnia because  
dream-language smacks  
of drunk slurs and I've  
had my fill of those. Believe me  
when I say that heaven is this  
world, and this world is  
a theater where paupers go  
to don themselves splendid  
and render hope possible,  
because we're all just  
deus ex machinas taking turns  
with the suspension cables.  
Believe me when I say that  
I know that beauty is in  
the noose through which  
the gaze shoots its arrow  
accidentally hitting a sparrow  
flying crooked against the wind  
a split second before  
your foot slips. But it's more



than that, and less: it's the dark  
figure penduluming under  
the meteor shower / between  
two Judas trees. See, I'm attempting  
to explain how I know that feeling  
is the kick-away foundation  
of belief, but on good days  
belief is a paper boat that sets sail  
in a gentle stream, in hopes  
of disintegrating before it  
reaches the waterfall.  
All I'm asking is why this is  
a bad thing. Why when dandelions  
disseminate  
I'm filled with a dread  
that could move mountains,  
the very mountains  
through which my brothers  
and sisters are tunneling  
their way toward the light.  
Why nothing, absolutely nothing  
is so complicated as that silence  
that bewitches the mind  
just prior to creation, or so simple  
as the one that follows  
the end of the world. Because god knows  
we're addicted to these intervals,  
and for this, like god, we'll be judged.  
But like god the author

for review only

is not sorry and offers  
no explanation as to why  
my poems give rise to more  
eyebrows than jihads,  
and dares whomsoever  
has never sat down to write  
a letter to the universe  
and couldn't find the words,  
who's never strapped a bomb  
to their person just to feel it  
detonate, and spent the rest  
of their life at the river's edge  
alone, contemplating  
not death, but the conditions  
of resurrection—  
to cast the first stone.

for review only

Tell me what you breathe again, and why we're so different  
as to not contract the same types of virus or commit  
the same hypergraphic slips of the pen:  
*You're right—I left.* Strange logic I keep  
between these hemispheres, queer equator  
into which collapse my wildest fantasies  
of decadent crystal chandeliers crashing  
down on the End Of The World  
Party table, where eating is as futile as trying to reason  
with your ex. Rays of light  
stream from a clichéd, an abused  
source of energy we failed to keep interested  
or interesting. The last time we spoke, it was over  
a pop song that the DJ hadn't heard  
had gone endangered, and I'll never forget  
the way you looked at me, as if I was the Sun,  
as if to say *tell me what will happen when you're gone,*  
*when what rules the world has no use*  
*for my scent or for my lungs.*

## AUTOCORRECT

The letter I said fell out  
of my pocket on my way to deliver it  
didn't. What kind of joke is this?  
The one where you want  
the whole package, but not the whole  
truth and nothing but the truth,  
and therefore, I adore you.  
Agenda-centric, metaphysically insecure,  
I pretend for all practical purposes  
this world will last forever—  
send you bottle rocket  
bouquets to trick my cliché-dar.  
My cobweb shimmers  
you make believe desire  
your firefly wings.  
Rows of xo's put to shame  
my purple prose: a planetarium  
blasts apart inside me.  
You see, what you don't see  
you don't need to know.  
(We're all whores putting out  
applications for halos.)  
Whoa—woe is me.  
How easy it must be,  
to throw away a hole  
—punch ceiling.  
Stencil wreckage  
everywhere moonlit,  
coddle it in bulk  
like there's no tomorrow  
even though there is.

Nearly dry: a lone rose descending headfirst from a piece of twine, double-tied.  
In absence of Atropos, we are partners in infinite crime.

We are gathered here with the window open, on cold linoleum creaking.  
Through voodoo blinds the Christian neighbors peeking. *When she flew her airplane into me*

*it all felt so inevitable:* the burns on my wrists, her taste in my mouth,  
the burns on my ankles. How in my last life I was hanged

and how I was hanged the life prior. How we tried and tried.  
I don't know what to feel anymore, save for the wholly ghostly echo of petals coming

down hard, coming down singular, all around the kitchen table.  
My voice, a bomb trapped inside a blazing elevator, fails

and fails to combust. Father, forgive us. Demons, evacuate. Nearly Beloved,  
take my oxygen mask—I've said my vows already.

## ANTONYMS FOR RETICENCE

Having breathed the invisible glass,  
having forfeited my gas mask: last chance  
before the sea levels everything  
in its way—killing it with contrast—

to cough up an excuse, a vow, a word for how  
eyes are still the vulnerable vowels  
through which slip a soul: sound fury burning salt and me  
not getting any of it down. The un-crying shame

of a beached whale bathed in wailing gulls,  
little Sally selling seashells by the sea-corpse  
in the dream where I lost my voice  
screaming: *Has anyone seen this pearl?*

Lines cast out from tired poems and tied to limestones  
too fragile to make a dent in anything,  
get wasted on this window,  
shattered on that heart.

If broken, call me a liar. If bleeding, call me Ishmael.  
If god's blade dulls, if gunmetal blue rivers  
never lap crimson forth, would not even Moses slit his  
to prove the Nile sentient?

Where is the grain of truth in these fool's gold waves—  
these days that find you waiting on the Furies  
to sweep down and disperse  
your silver lining into acid-black dusk?

When they come, you set the island on fire  
with your glory-torch: a fist-full of words,  
my photo cloned and posted  
all across the flaming hillside—I saw it

with my own eyes, and only my own eyes  
know how many oil spills I counted on  
that quiet drive, which, because circle, felt endless.  
Feelings are toxic or they're nothing

and I'm banking on the former and I'm drowning  
on the shore. If some secrets aren't lies,  
if confessions can be true,  
I'd slay I'd for you.

for review only

## NIGHT OF FAITH

I don't know what it means, that there are means by which days  
age gracefully: with the wherewithal of shadows on the wall  
of a home, where our better halves wade through broken  
bottles to mend a broken whole, where storm clouds stop dyeing  
their roots dark, gain composure, and smaller stars starve  
themselves to breath out of the corners of our eyes. I don't know why  
these pieces of us must perpetually pass through shafts of light like  
lost astronauts: in and out of fame, now and posthumously—



3. WHO ARE YOU WHEN NO ONE IS LOOKING



Tender summer. Sunburned and salted. Gypsy-hearted.  
Drank us like a vampire, fed us like a mother, smothered us like a lover  
the night before she has to leave for war. Summer of protect and keep,  
cherish and savor. Of lavish gifts and live sea burials, of flushed necks  
draped in perspiration pearls. Summer of dry heat and dangerous cocktails,  
of hot lust and flash floods and gulls lost in cloud cover, of dark, sex-drenched linens  
gone damp and cool by morning. Summer of take, and give recklessly. Of bourbon  
and lemons, tomato and avocado sandwiches. Of rotting secrets and private avalanches:  
your bed overflowing with my tears every color of the rainbow. Summer of blindsided,  
of helpless, of swept. Of shipwrecked before scurvy could set in. Summer of heaving chests,  
vows and threats, of why are we doing this. Summer of infinite, unfathomable riches  
spent somewhere between past and future, desert isle and leaking hull. Summer of waiting  
to be told where the soul's weather comes from, what it means, and where it goes.

## DEAR ENEMY EFFECT

You implore me not to talk about your past  
until we learn how to sleep again.

My word these days is mostly filler, is only maybe  
ten percent substance, like the bouquet your grandmother carried

so carefully up the aisle during the drought.  
You curse the wind for throwing things, for raising its voice;

the clouds for looking so macabre and melodramatic. I promise to try  
to be less like the clouds and the wind. I want to say that

we need the rain, but I worry you'll use it to hide from me  
your liquid humanness, to appear distant and stonefaced, like the god

your mother cursed when your father left her  
gasping for air between his pickup and the garage door

like the petal pressed between the pages of her own mother's bible,  
the only gift she received the day that she exchanged her freedom

for a roof and some walls. I'm afraid our dispositions are new testaments  
to the same old laws, to the same old character flaws:

you mock everything that weeps; I distrust everything that walks  
into the mirage of me and immediately begins drowning.

*We are cherry blossoms caught. / Inside the static loop of loss.*  
The lack of color in our fingers suggests a common manner

of gripping the things we carry / let carry us: this pen, this bottle,  
this hand that I hold as I lay awake wondering

where you go when you dream, and this hand you hold  
as you go wherever it is you go.

I need to know exactly where my voice went, when it left me.

I need to know exactly what happened that night

when the moon dripped ominous stalactites

down the walls of my insomnia boat,

when you stopped answering my phone calls

and didn't come home until morning light bled

through broken glass and ruined blinds, smearing your skin

and clothes with unfamiliar shadows. I need to know why

you agreed to leave the bar with him, where my imagination

could at least get its bearings, could talk me down

from the nauseating thought of that n<sup>th</sup> story window.

Did he even have real furniture, or was his bed multifunctional

like mine was back when we first met, when I used to take you

back to my studio apartment and fuck you until dawn

because you refused to fall asleep next to anyone

you didn't trust completely? Exactly how far back

did you follow him into his cave? I begged you to break

that black box down for me and build me an explanation

I could live in. But every time you added a brick, the structure shifted

and my eyes filled with terror, and my eyes fill with rage

each time you took a brick away. When I could no longer stand

for review only

to look at you or speak, you laid down your spade,  
hung your head, and walked off into the sunset.  
For days, for weeks, I tried to follow your lead,  
but if to forgive is divine, to be human is to live in search of truths  
the acquisition of which would destroy you. I waded  
deeper into the rubble, where now I lie in wait.

for review only

It's staircase simple, addition-and-subtraction simple.

Simple as what you ate for breakfast, or what you did last evening:  
dry toast and black coffee, a drink at the bar with a friend—a well drink, single.  
As an ounce of gin, six of tonic—or one of rum and six of coke; as going Dutch  
then going home alone. It's as simple as I have a partner, as we're trying  
to build a life together out of the remnants of broken bottles and broken trust.

Isn't it magnificent. Isn't it something. It's as simple as it's complicated  
and quite frankly you have no business asking. Simple, like the freshly-cut,  
freshly-sanded-wood scent climbing up the front of this old apartment complex:  
sometimes refusing to stop at the main entrance, sometimes staying  
in your hair and clothes all the way home.

## PRISONER'S DILEMMA

We move under the cover of night, three months before our lease ends. You want no housewarming party to remind us of our elsewhere, our whence. I agree to pretend that we've lived here for all eternity—here with the slanted floors and perplexing floor plan, the light switches we still can't locate after all these eons. I agree to pretend our story is not a filthy sponge that we had to twist and twist. Gobs of cardboard boxes threaten our coherency, as do our skewed circadian rhythms. Oblong folds of paper-thin skin might mean sleep, depending on the presence of a pulse I can't check at this distance. I lie awake wondering if I'm the cause of your vacant condition, and if not, who is; if there's any song vile, any violin small enough, to do my pain, my greed, and my jealousy all justice; if any second we'll come to our senses, and have to break the lease again. It kills you when I talk this way, and I come to my own defense. I didn't mean to upset you, I say. I just wanted to make sure you're human, and show you that I am. I wring my hands and remind myself to believe what I said.



Our faces are screen savers. My favorite flavor  
is tobacco on an empty stomach; yours is bit-tongue blood.

We've mastered the art of inaudible temper tantrums.

We've learned and forgotten how to love

that to which we've grown accustomed.

Burnt leaves spill from my fingertips

onto the porch you swept this morning  
while I slept off my hangover, where I live off

the Camel Crushes I bum, and the glances I steal  
from pretty strangers. You shredded all the evidence

for or against your own unfaithfulness,  
used it as packing foam. Every box I open

is another can of worms; it takes everything  
I have not to kneel down and comb through the mess

of orphan syllables with my bare hands.  
Soon that mess will have touched all my things,

and it will take everything I have not to leave.

for review only

## THE SCAPEGOAT

I carry my vows  
on my tongue so that I'll choke  
before I break one. Such sudden,  
episodic deaths you've come to accept  
as a fact of your life now, just as you've  
accepted as facts my incurable sorrow  
and my need to make and make  
-believe. You know that I can't help it  
if the light from my computer screen  
interrupts your REM cycle, if the cold  
sweats I wake in you must also  
wake in, if my dream city is populated  
with doppelgangers of your exes  
-turned-assassins I was born to obliterate.  
You buy me camouflage pajamas  
and a lucid dreaming instruction manual.  
In the morning, you help me rinse  
the blood from my hair and dragon wings,  
just like you promised. I want to come  
clean about fudging the death count  
and dragging you into this worst of all  
possible nightmares, but something deep  
inside of me stutters, and just in time  
the bough breaks.

I've got some questions I need answered; you've got some answers you don't need questioned.  
I've got some time on my hands, and the things I used to fill it with have started to rub me the wrong way:  
your hair on my face, a cat o' nine tails; your breath on my neck, a damp fog that crawls  
into my clothes, my bones, and falls asleep; my poems, ores covered in a bloody pulp, a serrated serenade.  
And I wonder to how many sea-faring monsters a single word can refer before it stops meaning anything,  
who this "I" is that steals and gives, slays and prays for mercy, that left its fingerprints down another's spine  
last night, before feeding it to the five-thousand-headed dragon in its dream. Most of all I wonder  
where my book went, and how many teeth you've been lying through lately.

## NIGHT OF INFINITE RESIGNATION

As our treasure sunk, I silvered: white locks spilling like light  
through arthritic fingers looped through rusty shears.

Our closure was the quiet convergence of shadows  
on a hull's wall, was the autistic acoustics of water

Poring over chainmail: *Come closer and I promise  
not to ask what you've done with my letters / with my last*

*One hundred years.* Was through the dead air and empty space  
that the spear cannot pierce, that I passed, finally—

Remember that time I knocked your antique hourglass  
off the mantle, how the heaps of sand scattered  
like ant hills when I fell, how one minute I was drunk  
and on top of the world and the next minute the world was on top  
of me saying, “What are you doing taking comfort in this spinning ceiling  
fan keeping the bedroom cool and the electric bill low,  
these lavender waves lapping against your chin, this bottle, this home  
you won’t even fight for anymore, my big bronze Buddha sitting in lotus pose  
staving off the Sandman and the Loch Ness Monster, my matchless staying power.”  
You said matchless, you did not say infinite. I felt so lonesome and godless  
you turned off the faucet and cleaned up the mess so I wouldn’t have to  
dwell in it. The excruciating divisibility of that time piece. Each stray grain  
standing for a fraction of a fraction of that week that lost me  
all I wanted and left you on your knees, wondering what you’d missed.  
I bet if I looked close enough, I could still see the pale silt gist of it  
glistening in the floorboards, the way grease glistens  
in the cracks of a clock maker’s hands.

AND SUDDENLY IT MAKES SENSE WHY NOTHING MAKES SENSE

Every day you'd wake and look  
for proof that not everything repeats itself,  
that some things happen exactly once:

the shapes of the ice crystals collecting on our eyelashes,  
the extinction of a species,  
solemn vows, the whole Holocene,

the idea of the first stained glass dome ever built  
and the way each sinner felt as those colored rays entered  
their pupils as they passed through the cathedral,

or the way I felt the morning  
I stood in the front yard and you stood in the doorway  
and asked where I was going, as if you didn't know,

as if your decision to give up everything for me  
and my decision to leave you  
were not like two designs at the end of two kaleidoscopes:

two finite sets of tiny panes we rearranged  
until blue in the face. If only I could have seen  
what only you could have seen: that part of me that was ready

to die off and give way to belief in us, or faith at least,  
as hypothermia gives way to heat,  
or the illusion of heat.

#### 4. ON LOVING THAT WHICH YOU CAN BARELY RECOGNIZE





In a deep closet locked from within and lit  
by a single gas lamp, I am building a bed of twigs  
and a landscape with a waterfall

out of the materials you've been leaving on my doorstep  
for the last two decades: a lump of pigskin,  
a bundle of sticks, a bolt of velvet.

My wartime rations, you called them.  
For the last two decades you've been leaving me,  
little by little, to my own devices: a withered bouquet,

a shrinking wardrobe, a fistful of word-sand.  
Piecemeal, I rescind my commitments  
to the outside world. My bastard boxcar children

roam the streets of one hundred different cities, shore up  
in bottles on one hundred distant coasts  
in one hundred strangers' poems. In deep shame

in the deep shade of a Saguaro, I am daydreaming  
of hydroplaning, of a threshold, of a home  
-wrecker's body. A black box cracks open in the desert sun,

and from it spills a naked woman you don't recognize,  
even though you've met her hundreds of times,  
her pale skin covered with petals

from the flowers you brought me, the pine needles you picked  
with your bare hands. I fall to your feet  
and offer up my best explanation, my fattest lamb.

for review only

## TO FATHER TIME AND MOTHER CERTAINTY

My poems unfold androgynous as nightmares from neurons / anorexics from slumber /  
dandelion seeds from stems clutched tight until REM sleep loosens clenched fists—  
airy asterisks attempting to accelerate the transition from Life of Lies to Honest Death  
—and though none of this is glamorous, you're convinced I'm convinced that it is.  
*This title you've worked for, this game you've perfected, this secret club you're a part of  
isn't sexy—it's sick.* Soon you'll ascertain my sexuality is an extension of my eating  
disorder / is an extension of the chronic confusion you are somehow responsible for.  
No small wonder my only conviction is that convictions are shoelaces and chronicles  
are straightjackets, and I'd rather go barefoot and insane than let you dress me again.  
*What's wrong with your old clothes? You're such a pretty girl—such a pretty little  
girl-ghost in all of these photographs.* Only Aslan has ever heard me speak of that  
wardrobe and knows how I go mute with a feeling I can't name each time I open  
a birthday card listing off all the things you wish for me, like *that you'd remember  
your roots and answer our calls once in awhile.* Because if memory serves, unruly weeds  
had no place at your table, “queer” had no place in your vocabulary, and children  
who refused to be seen and not heard had not earned their transparency, or your respect.

## TO THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

I come from a long line of photophobes. No Fabios.  
Call me pre-transition MTF, or Most Taunted Fugitive.  
Call me Amish, Old Fashioned, call me Crazy  
Horse hiding in a cornfield as white man  
stalks the prairie with his camera stealing  
soul-emissions off of the steaming beasts. Zoom  
in on whatever suits you, then crop out the rest of me.  
Call me the widower of the queer, quiet painter  
who died trying to capture the brazen dysfunction of skies shot up  
with artificial light, with just three pigments, some water and a good mind  
to burn down every movie theater from here to Frankfurt, Germany.  
Call me Pink Triangle Prisoner 11067, formerly known as *Liebling*.  
Call me superstitious by choice, paranoid by necessity,  
alive by default. Feel free, call me out.

## WRONG BODY OWNER'S MANUAL

Try to remove your things from their graves without waking them. Do not ask “what will we eat?” and “what will we wear?” See there, a blanket belonging to a girl who’d been thrice-starved: once by a God, twice by her own volition. Take it: it shall serve as your cape. And here, a little doll head, attached to a feeding tube now dangling freely from her lips will bring you luck on your journey. You threw a match into these fields once, now raise it: build a fan with your lungs. Her hills will rage and her trees will orange as your vital gusts blow through them. This is not voodoo: this is tough love: there is no anesthesia. There is a red flag flickering off in the distance, meaning “peril.” Take it to mean “free association.” Run past the police with your mouth on fire and follow the crowd of surgeons down to the sea-hell where the youth are trading seashells for aloe and the mermaids are singing each to each. Steal from them according to your ability. Sing with them according to your need.

## STANDING THE TEST OF TIME (A HOW-TO GUIDE)

Lessen, voluptuous feathers.

Fold up fanwise, hide

behind your sisters, single

file now. That pipedream

you insist on parading

does not become you.

That crystal castle unfolding through

the smoke from the ground

-fire in the path of your exile

does not become you.

These desks, these bus seats,

these pews are all reserved;

you best stand idly by. Over there

is a reservoir of know-how

for you to dip your feet into. Well,

why are you just standing there?

Don't you have anything prudent

to wear or practical to do?

Shame on you and your abuse

of confessionals and shrink

booths. This "I" you fancy

as mountain water rioting

into the watershed, has this "I"

for review only

been Pope-blessed? Has it  
fathomed the ten thousand things  
that could happen to a girl  
en route from Chiapas  
to El Paso, from this bar  
to your apartment? Are you sure  
you don't want a ride?  
What's wrong, aren't you  
noose-shy? Are you not scared  
to die? Here, let me help  
you get a little more bang  
for your buck. Let daddy  
help you into those handcuffs.  
Does yr man purse like that?  
Does yr wallet like living  
off my tips, dyke? Are you sure  
you can make it to the border  
by midnight, pumpkin?  
Don't forget who bought you  
that nice glass slipper  
you walked away from.  
Is your skill set even marketable?  
In fifty years will your feet still feel  
like waiting tables?  
What if your knees go  
brittle with age and can't  
genuflect? What god will  
want you then?

My dream-self's guilt is cello-heavy. I carry it with me everywhere I go, so that it doesn't smother her when she sleeps. When I lie down at night, she wakes and relieves me of the load. I float to the ceiling and watch her stumble underneath its dead weight with the gusto of an ant. When she cries out for help, I wake and take the load back again. She floats to the ceiling smiling down on me a sad, grateful smile that fades when her eyes close. I can't bring myself to tell her that I dropped it once, many years ago, and that it's never sounded the same way since. When her eyes close, I set the beat-up instrument down on the ground and crawl back into bed. Yo Yo Ma plays Bach's *Sarabande* on my stereo as I fade in and out, flirting with sleep. I don't tell her who it is that's playing. She believes what she wants to believe.

## GLOWING IN THE DARK IS NOT A SUPERPOWER

But something we do daily. By “day” I mean only the shrinking doily of light through which a whole black hole must squeeze before our eyes can adjust, before the dream seamstress drifts off at the wheel before blowing out the candle, before the child in the sky can cut stars from the singed scraps of cloth he salvaged from the burn pile. Love of my life, cause of my insomnia, sometimes when dusk snows its dark wool down on us, I search your face for the sheep you counted as lost, and wonder if I’m one of them. But I still take comfort in the night’s small certainties: the tiny movements muscles make when the rest of the body lies paralyzed with dread; that I’d wake, here, again, for the last time; that you can love something and still shake its soot from your feet. Restore to meaning the plastic asterisks on which I wished my adolescent life away. Don’t pass over. Lie me to sleep.



MAY MY LOVE BE LIKENED TO GUERRILLA ART OR OPEN COMMUNION

My invisible inner indigo child  
lets their little plastic soldiers go  
out at high tide and swim  
in the disassembling moats  
of abandoned sandcastles. So what  
if they take relish in the wreckage,  
perpetual scandal of landscapes  
giving themselves over after everything  
we did for them. After twenty years' servitude  
to a jealous ghost, I'm done searching  
for the perfect words to ask your forgiveness  
for the times I stood shivering in a bed sheet  
on the shore, as the wafer moon turned blood orange  
and pulled you out to sea. To say that I need you  
to remember me in neon and concrete,  
all gumption and centrifugal force,  
my trench coat pockets full of flasks  
of Merlot and cans of spray paint, our bodies  
darting in and out of dark alleyways  
that long, and long after we're gone  
will explode into color.

## VISUAL FATALISM

Late summer, kite weather,  
muscles remembering the day you took

my hand in the wheat field: nautilus of fingers  
to which the shrinking diamond was tethered

unraveling open. Once, you shared my awe  
of the transcendent, of what goes beyond

flesh and blood, overflows silo and water tower,  
makes fully grown men fall apart. Our Father

learned from his father, who learned from his father  
how to corset a season, how to wrangle golden waves of grain

in barbed wire, how to pray for rain and discipline us wild oats:  
me and my unnatural questions; you, his only begotten son.

The last time we spoke, you were letting me know I'd done enough,  
said you'd found him in the prairie during a thunderstorm

lying face-down on a hay bale, his limp arms stretched out  
around it—territorial almost. You gathered his heavy body

was a dead metaphor, said *please don't shoot the messenger*,  
said *this family is that bale of hay, and you are the lightning*.

A crack in the truth window exposes a wall's sod interior  
to moisture, to empty nest syndrome. Late summer,

kite weather, still no olive branch. Whatever brother  
I had is gone, has left me for harvest. Untethered

in a wheat field, I let go of kite string after kite string;  
dissolve into vertigo, into golden waves of grief.

You dreamed me down the railroad tracks  
that wrap around  
your hometown like a holster belt.

You recalled slingshots, forgot bruises,  
recalled scarecrows,  
forgot coming out to them.

*My brothers didn't call me  
Houdini for nothing, you said.*

I took the right rail; you borrowed the left.

Our hands met in the middle:  
formed a knot that swung  
back and forth above the ballast.

If it was up to your ego, I'd say  
we were the last two girls left standing  
in a game of red rover,

boldly beckoning the neighborhood bully  
over. If it was up to your conscience,  
you'd let me choose a more honest metaphor.

We balance-beamed past piles of leaves  
in which bricks lie buried, past windows  
in which pillow fights go south

and malevolent, and coal-filled  
stockings hang heavy from the mantle  
all year long. Your gaze stayed lost

for review only

in the vanishing point. The knot grew  
clammy-cold. You recalled consequences,  
forgot antecedents, forgot doubt,

recalled crucifixes, recalled shame,  
forgot to give me a face.  
I didn't see the plume of feathers

billow up from the plum tree; didn't hear  
the birds' wrecked hymn  
or the whistle's shrill falsetto,

your breath's blade sharpening, aghast  
against the lump in your throat.  
If it was up to your neck, it was your anger,

your paralysis, it was the smoke and fire  
and brimstone through which  
a younger soul might have made its escape.

But you did not wake up. You tightened  
the knot. You would not let go,  
not even for my sake.

Sometimes, once the lights in the hall  
have gone out & all is sterile

save for the half-frozen hummingbird  
in my ribcage & the police cars

carving solemn couplets  
into clean, white streets I steal

a glimpse of my raccoon face,  
then my whole gross body

in your eyes: the only mirrors I'm  
allowed near these days.

It happens suddenly,  
the way most wanted

fugitives are caught, how a cot  
or bed is overcome with something akin

to dread & begins trembling  
when a train's whistle cuts through the dark

cocoon of drug-induced sleep.  
There's no telling if I'm shrinking

or backing away or standing still as the walls  
grow up around me, as words are now

more dangerous than numbers are  
more dangerous than sharp

for review only

objects used to be. It's not enough,  
I say. I say they still need

to grow faster, to border  
on cancerous. For I am

a shrewd lab rat, am sex gone  
wrong gone totemic, am mercurial,

memoryish. In this single life I've managed  
to prey & be prayed on, femmely

& forced, butch & broke  
& fixed. We have been over

this. No part of me must go unharnessed,  
or if it does, I must trust you

would never let that part of me up  
& run rampant. I must trust your solid

sternness the way a younger sister  
trusts her elders to dress her

down when she doubts or daydreams  
about silk undergarments,

or worse, men's clothing. I can't pass  
through solids, but I'm pretty

certain that if there are things that can,  
I evolved from those things,

or from the things that broke down  
into them. Radioactive materials, say,

or the queer little prince the royal family had  
buried at sea. I need to believe this arrangement

is strictly necessary; that however many  
shecells I claw through I'll emerge

in a warm room wherein you are patiently  
waiting, for worse & in sickness.

The motes around my reflection  
will have never looked so deep,

so much like my mother's as you count  
out the pills that help me pass

the night more easily. Leave me be,  
I'll say, but we'll both know that I can't

mean that, & so you'll stay,  
& so I'll stay.

for review only

## NOTES

### VORTICISM

“The apparition of these faces in a crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough.”  
is from Ezra Pound’s poem, “In a Station of the Metro.”

### CREATION STORY

“Cyan coins of dusk rushed through your chest as you fell to the East / as I fell to the West” is an adaptation of a line from Tessa Rumsey’s poem, “The Stranger.”

### STANDING THE TEST OF TIME (A HOW-TO GUIDE)

“Mountain water rioting into the watershed”  
is from Tessa Rumsey’s poem, “Fantasy Coat.”

### DEAR ENEMY EFFECT

“We are cherry blossoms caught. / Inside the static loop of loss” is from Tessa Rumsey’s poem, “April Fools.”



IDENTITY BY WAY OF METAPHOR:  
A CONVERSATION WITH  
ADRIAN SILBERTAGEL

*Greetings comrade! Thank you for talking to us about your process today! Can you introduce yourself, in a way that you would choose?*

My name is Adrian (he/him/his). I'm a queer, trans poet.

*Why are you a poet/writer/artist? And: when did you decide you were a poet/writer/artist (and/or: do you feel comfortable calling yourself a poet/writer/artist, what other titles or affiliations do you prefer/feel are more accurate)?*

Poetry, to me, is radically autonomous speech. It is autonomous because it cannot be paraphrased. It speaks for itself. Nothing and no one else can speak a poem's meaning for it, not even its author. Poetry is also critical, in that it troubles linguistic convention, and the habits of thought and language that structure and condition our experience of the world. Furthermore, poetry elevates and illuminates everyday words, objects, thoughts, and feelings so that they can be seen and felt in a new, different, and sometimes powerful way. I'm a poet because I can't imagine any other way of being / striving to be.

I have been writing creatively, and writing poetry, as far back as I can remember. As a kid I wrote stories, poems, letters. As a teenager, my poetry practice became a means of exploring and articulating thoughts and feelings I didn't feel like I was allowed to speak about. It feels most natural to call myself a poet because poetry has been the most consistent and stable organizing force in my life and person, more so than any other belief system, community, identitary label, or interest. No matter what else I've done or been or been about, my commitment to poetry (while this relationship has evolved) has been unwavering. "Devotion" is a good way to describe my relationship to it.

*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)?*

I guess I'm kind of an agnostic with respect to the "purpose" of art. At times I feel like I can kind get behind Adorno's notion of "autonomous art": art that invites critical reflection and introspection, that rejects the posture of passive consumerism, that asks to be read slowly and on its own terms. The saying "no ethical consumption under capitalism" applies to art as well, and in the current political and

economic climate, and in the age of social media and the infinite scroll, art and the conditions required to achieve and/or appreciate it become the mark of privilege. Because art takes time, and time is money, most of us are lucky if we can “afford” a serious creative practice, to say nothing of opportunities to get our work out into the world. Every artist has a unique set of circumstances (privileges and personal or systemic barriers) that they’re creating within. Right now I am in a good enough place, emotionally and materially, to have a fairly consistent writing practice. This is a huge privilege. During the first few years of my transition, however, job, housing, and financial insecurity coupled with the social and emotional implications of transitioning in a place like Lexington, Kentucky, put a halt to my creative practice. It was the longest break from writing I’ve ever taken, lasting about three years. The last poem in *Transitional Object*, “Species Dysphoria,” was actually the last poem I wrote before beginning my transition. After that I was too busy fighting off panic attacks, self-medicating, and trying to keep a roof over my head to even think about poetry.

Accessibility is an issue in publishing just like in healthcare. Why are certain people groups more prolific (or published or widely read) than others? The same reason why certain groups have longer lifespans and lower risk of ailments than others: because they don’t face the same institutional barriers. So maybe art is kind of the cultural equivalent of a blood pressure cuff. It gauges and monitors the health or vitality of a society/culture, the individuals and groups and institutions and power structures that comprise it.

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

I am constantly on the lookout for links, repeating images or metaphors, contiguous layers between poems that might suggest a greater unity. I could probably guess where (or which part of my upbringing) this teleological impulse comes from. Hah. As for *Transitional Object* in particular, it didn’t occur to me until late in the game (after the poems in the manuscript were already written) that I had a book. I had been operating on the assumption that the earlier poems in the book belonged together, while the later poems (despite being in a dialogue with the earlier ones, and despite both groups of poems being obsessed with the same questions and ideas) belonged to a separate work, given that their speaker was now a different person, with different beliefs, values, desires, different ways of thinking and speaking about their person and relationships and experiences.

I was still on my “break” from poetry, and deep in the throes of early transition, when it occurred to me that the impulse to quarantine the earlier poems from the later in this way originated from an idea of selfhood (as a stable or “reliable” narrative subject whose identity, desires, core beliefs and values endure through time) that didn’t arise from, or correspond with, my own journey as a queer trans person. My story, my person, is, at least by all appearances, fragmented, discontinuous, a multiplicity

of selves that exist in relationship with one another and with Others. So why should my book and its speaker be any different?

*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?*

I've never had success writing about (or even writing around) a predetermined subject or theme. Most of my poems start with a single line (which often gets cut during revisions) and I discover the poem as I write. Similarly, it's always during the writing and editing processes that links or connections to other poems emerge.

*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?*

In the formative stages of a particular poem, I try to write, as often as I can, in one-to-three-hours sessions. These time restrictions, while somewhat arbitrary, provide a balance of structure and play that's conducive, for me, to writing poetry. In the editing stage, I'll just edit until I feel like I'm running up against burnout. At that point I step away, and stay away until I'm able to come back with fresh eyes and a less codependent attitude.

As far as influences, there are countless writers, thinkers, and artists who have influenced my work in one way or another. This list is by no means exhaustive, and the names are listed in no particular order: Theodor Adorno, Judith Butler, Helene Cixous, Chogyam Trungpa, Lucie Brock-Broido, Tessa Rumsey, Marina Tsvetaeva, Rainer Maria Rilke, T.S. Eliot, Friedrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, Antonin Artaud, Bas Jan Ader, Marya Hornbacher, M.J. Gette, Jay Besemer, Elæ [Lynne desilva Johnson], Daniel Reetz, Aaron Asphar.

*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.*

Deciding on a book title was one of the most difficult and frustrating parts of the whole process. I went through several, initially landing on "On The Origin of Species." This title pointed to the themes of evolution, differentiation, and hence personal identity byway of metaphor (speciation as individuation), but ultimately I decided, after some nudging from the brilliant M.J. Gette, that this Darwinian title wasn't really continuous with the book's imagery and symbolism, which draws more on psychology/psychoanalysis than on biology/natural science. So while evolution in a biological sense is certainly

present as a layer of the work, it's not the book's central idea either. There was something else, too, that the Darwinian title was lacking, which I'd eventually realize was the book's relational dimension: that push and pull of self and other, I and thou, that animates the poems. But at the time, "On The Origin of Species" was the closest I could get. It was months before the title "Transitional Object" came to me. I was in a therapy session, and the therapist mentioned something about transitional objects: objects that children identify with and assign meaning to in times of change, or in the absence of a parent or other important Other, and it just clicked.

*What does this particular work represent to you as indicative of your method/creative practice? your history? your mission/intentions/hopes/plans?*

First and foremost, this book represents, for me, my commitment to poetry: the choice to write poem after poem after poem, with no guarantee that said poems will turn out, much less culminate in a book. It represents the hours and days and weeks and months and sacrifices and solitude that the writing life entails.

Secondly, because *Transitional Object* loosely documents a decade of experiences that culminated in the decision to transition, a decision I came to after the last poem in the book was written, it quite literally represents a previous life (or lives), a previous self's (or previous selves') journey to the threshold of that decision.

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

The structure of *Transitional Object* mirrors traditional narratives. At first glance, the book is a coming-of-age story told through poems. However, coming-of-age stories presuppose a numerically identical self that persists from time x to time y, a notion that the speaker can't quite buy, much less live up to. So the book calls forth these assumptions, only to call them into question. As the speaker struggles for definition or commitment, from the beloved or the world or their own person, they illustrate the deeply relational nature of the self, a fact that the speaker both mourns and relishes in. The poems mirror this struggle; they engage with and interrogate one another with the toughness, adaptability, resourcefulness, and self-compassion that, for me, are the definition of queerness.

*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?*

In my mind, the best possible outcome would be for *Transitional Object* to find readers, even a single reader, who would read it from beginning to end, and upon arriving at the end, feel compelled to read

it again. And upon re-reading, would think harder and more critically and more compassionately about themselves, past and present.

*Let's talk a little bit about the role of poetics and creative community in social activism. I'd be curious to hear some thoughts on the challenges we face in speaking and publishing across lines of race, age, privilege, social/cultural background, and sexuality within the community, vs. the dangers of remaining and producing in isolated "silos."*

As a white, able-bodied trans man who comes from a middle class upbringing, I have a duty to recognize my privilege and wield that privilege for good, whenever I can. I have a duty to never stop learning, to search out my biases and apologize for my mistakes. The danger of "remaining and producing in isolated 'silos'" is that in so doing we lose sight of our own and each other's intersectionality, each other's particular humanness.

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

I guess you could have asked what I do for a living! I manage a coffee shop in Louisville that is part of a local coffee shop chain and roaster called Heine Brothers'. Not only do we make great coffee, we also do a lot to give back to the community. I'm lucky to love—and be super proud of—my day job!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**ADRIAN SILBERNAGEL** is a queer, trans poet. He grew up in a small town near Fargo, North Dakota, and considers North Dakota home. He earned a Master's degree in philosophy from Texas Tech University before moving to Kentucky. Right now he lives with his partner and two cats in Louisville, where he manages a coffee shop, works on poems, and occasionally travels to other parts of Kentucky to give talks on trans issues and on his experience as a trans man. Adrian is a contributing editor at *The Operating System*, where he coordinates a web series on creative process called *Field Notes*. His work has been published in *The Columbia Review*, *The Atlas Review*, *TYPO*, *PANK*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Cosmonauts Avenue*, *Fruita Pulp*, and elsewhere.

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

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

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

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

*In these documents we say:*

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

- Elæ [Lynne DeSilva-Johnson], Founder/Creative Director  
THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2018

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# DOC U MENT

/däkʏmənt/

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

*noun* - a piece of written, printed, or electronic matter that provides information or evidence or that serves as an official record

*verb* - record (something) in written, photographic, or other form  
*synonyms* - paper - deed - record - writing - act - instrument

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

## Who is responsible for the manufacture of value?

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

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

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

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

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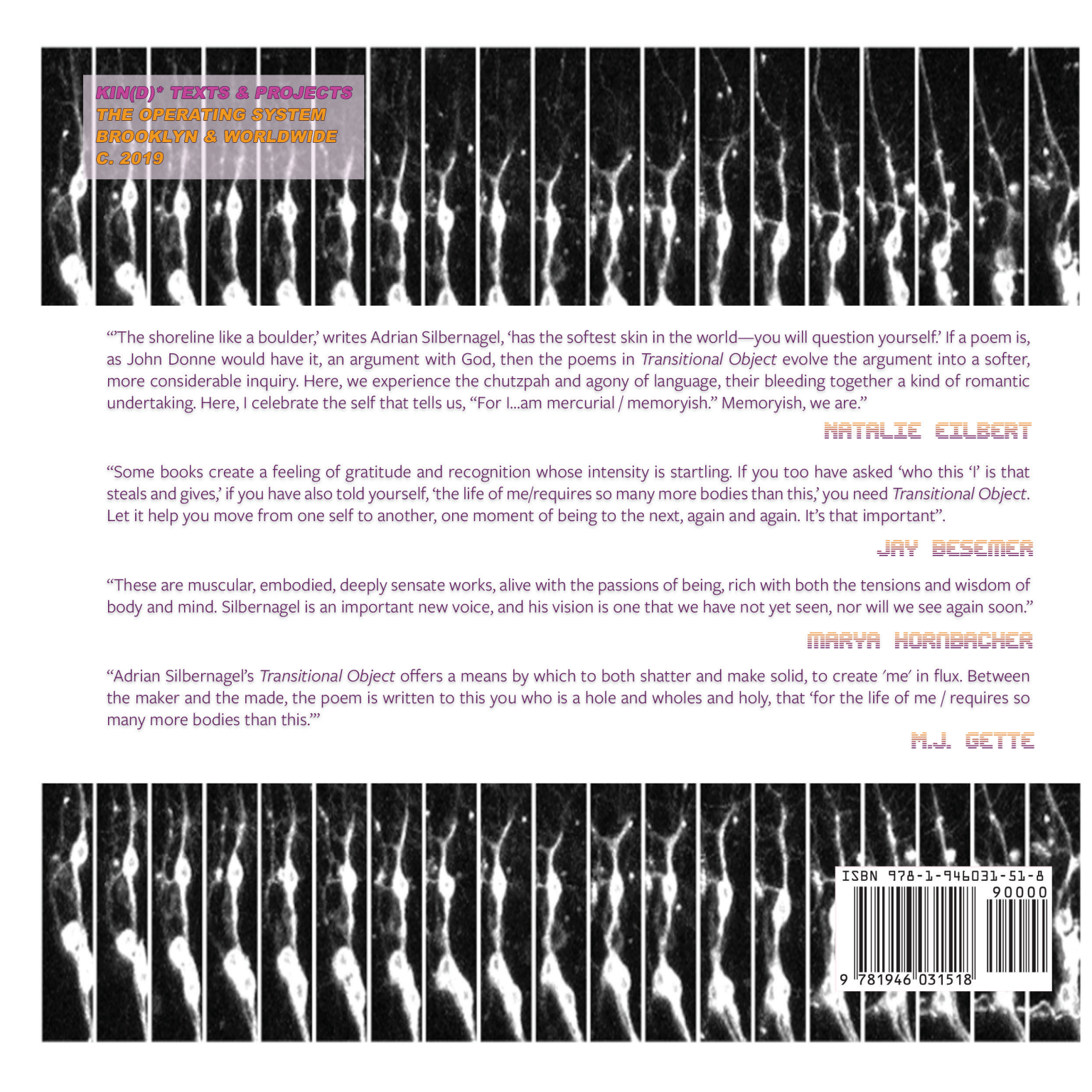
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**KIN(D)\* TEXTS & PROJECTS**  
**THE OPERATING SYSTEM**  
**BROOKLYN & WORLDWIDE**  
**C. 2019**

“The shoreline like a boulder,’ writes Adrian Silbernagel, ‘has the softest skin in the world—you will question yourself.’ If a poem is, as John Donne would have it, an argument with God, then the poems in *Transitional Object* evolve the argument into a softer, more considerable inquiry. Here, we experience the chutzpah and agony of language, their bleeding together a kind of romantic undertaking. Here, I celebrate the self that tells us, “For I...am mercurial / memoryish.” Memoryish, we are.”

**NATALIE EILBERT**

“Some books create a feeling of gratitude and recognition whose intensity is startling. If you too have asked ‘who this ‘I’ is that steals and gives,’ if you have also told yourself, ‘the life of me/requires so many more bodies than this,’ you need *Transitional Object*. Let it help you move from one self to another, one moment of being to the next, again and again. It’s that important”.

**JAY BESEMER**

“These are muscular, embodied, deeply sensate works, alive with the passions of being, rich with both the tensions and wisdom of body and mind. Silbernagel is an important new voice, and his vision is one that we have not yet seen, nor will we see again soon.”

**MARYA HORNBACKER**

“Adrian Silbernagel’s *Transitional Object* offers a means by which to both shatter and make solid, to create ‘me’ in flux. Between the maker and the made, the poem is written to this you who is a hole and wholes and holy, that ‘for the life of me / requires so many more bodies than this.’”

**M.J. GETTE**

ISBN 978-1-946031-51-8

