

A PERIOD
OF
NON-ENFORCEMENT

LINDSAY MILES

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LINDSAY MILES

the operating system digital print//document
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edited and designed by ELÆ [Lynne DeSilva-Johnson] with Orchid Tierney



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This text was set in Steelworks Vintage, Europa-Light, Gill Sans, Minion, and OCR-A Standard.

Cover Art uses an image from the series “Collected Objects & the Dead Birds I Did Not Carry Home,” by Heidi Reszies.

[Cover Image Description: Mixed media collage using torn pieces of paper in yellow, beige, pink, white, and yellow tones, a black and white print of a maple seed pod, and a small background pattern of stylized flowers in pen with the book’s title overlaid in yellow.]

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A PERIOD OF NON-ENFORCEMENT

The poetic propensity to list. A series of requests or conversely demands. In actuality, a letter, addressed. I am to express gratitude; it is good for me. Kneel preferably on hard wood, in a thin gown. The gown is to be pale in color and second-hand because of the desirability of being poor. Nudity is feared for its resemblance to knowledge.

My maternal grandmother, Ethel, was, for fifty-eight years, a proud member of Trinity Baptist Church at the corner of Granville and 49th in Vancouver where she now rests in burnt fragments below the earth. She kept a journal, the prayer's extension: each day, three things she was grateful for. The prayer demands repetition and she gave it, writing often about the ratio of sun to cloud, visits with the grandchildren and exceptional cribbage scores. As an artifact, clipped and sanguine. She would take my young head in both hands, fingers curled into a light grip and pull me toward her. She would speak into my forehead. Hands blue and translucent, I remember them being like loosened rice paper.

Happiness is a subject so obvious as to be beyond capture. It is an idea, truly free. Anne Boyer writes,

And happiness had always seemed the province of the idiotic and immoral, which is why I wanted it so-much so- often so-all-of-the-time. There are many things I do not like to read, mostly accounts of the lives of the free.
(*Garments Against Women*)

Flannery O'Connor counts herself among the idiotic. Stupid defined as not God, not everywhere all at once. There is something in the debasement of self, the dissolution of ego that is super attractive, in the way that impossibilities are hot. To flatten oneself in service, free from the competition, away from a preoccupation with my own intellect which is aggressive and not new. Feet up on a different scale. And which avenue is more kind? One's secular best? Bent and bending to the will of God?

When I was a small child, I had a very logical question about stepping on grass and injuring God. In the adult way, I was delivered a vague response. Following logic was one of the mistakes I had made.

No doubt hell is a more earthly seeming thing, struggling to visualize the disembodied souls hanging in a crystal for all eternity. (O'Connor, *A Prayer Journal*)

The suspension of disbelief that it is this quiet (on a Monday in the city). Faint squawk of the occasional bird and the erratic burp of the refrigerator. A jet passes somewhere in the distant overhead.

Head up, eyes on the light fixtures and failing paint, to the blue- grey sky. Aware of the crowns of buildings across the alleyway: brick chimneys, brown shingles, white trim. During prayer, the palm of one hand cradles my chin, fingers fanned across my lips. There is little in the way of content. My prayers are short, more about silence than anything else. The typical plea for a fucking break, and then, down beat of the head on the final note, I return to my feet. Back to life.

My roommate has been gone for seven days. I wash my body with the exception of the hair on my head and apply Tom's deodorant to the degree of moistening my pits and little else. The woman who co-owns a coffee shop near my house is, predictably, sad. Her expression appears to fold in on itself like a person's solemn, steady descent into a cross-legged sitting position. A folded red bandana is the circumference of her head and the implication of effort. A sticker on the espresso machine reads: *You don't know what it means to miss New Orleans*. I do not actually understand prayer. I do not remember how to do it, believably.

My dream has built a wall around the corner from a flag. Fragments of crystal and jagged rock, nine or so stories tall, cohere a few feet above the earth. Something like a cliff levitating above the lakeshore. My fingers cling to the slits between rocks; I am hanging from the wall and edging toward the other side. Space feels slivered. I am not especially scared, though there's urgency behind my limited movements. I know nothing of the other side. Like a schoolyard game, I dream depth into the shallow waters at my feet. A fall would be devastating. I stay anchored to the wall.

I google grace and its definition and get several. A short prayer before meals. The quality of being thoughtful. Charming. A change in direction taken in music. A period of non-enforcement. The refining of movement. I learn women have always torn pages from their notebooks. I hook the neck of my sweatshirt around my right shoulder and read this line through the faint but genuine sensation of choking: *The secret to life is that everyone must sew it for themselves.*

In the Toronto neighborhood of Brockton, there is the downcast face of Saint Helen speckled in gold and a spire extending up into the sky. The spire is visible from the third floor of the YMCA at College and Dovercourt; the spire is visible from the Dundas Street bridge where an auto body shop stands gorgeous and without allegiance above the tracks. Late in life, Saint Helen found three crosses in the dirt. She brought all three crosses to the bedside of a sick woman. She had the sick woman touch each one consecutively, waiting for the touch that would heal her. Saint Helen can be seen loosely gripping a large cross in the majority of her portraits; she was without want except for the true cross which was her want. She made her desire singular, and this is what O'Connor wanted in 1946 when she wrote,

The desires of the flesh – excluding the stomach – have been taken away from me. For how long I don't know, but I hope forever. It is a great peace to be rid of them. Can't anyone teach me how to pray?

On a therapist's coffee table, repeated: *three things I am grateful for*, each instance separated by three black lines signaling space to write. Again, I am thinking about the saints, this time Dymphna who is unbelievably young in her paintings, fifteen, which is the age she was murdered by her father for refusing to marry and hence refusing to fuck. Patron saint of insanity, Dymphna ran away from her Irish home and opened a hospital in Geel, Belgium before, as Nell Zink might put it, she stopped dying. She has a shrine in Massillon, Ohio. Due to a recent fire, pilgrims and visitors meet across the street in a school gymnasium. I tell my therapist, *it is impossible to connect with the spirit of my dead grandmother in this fucking city*. She nods gravely.

I switch positions. I fold into child's pose, allowing the cold to scale my spine and collect at the base where my shirt lifts to expose two inches of skin. I move again. This time, my body takes the shape of a 'C' on the rug. I conceal myself entirely in blanket, and my breath becomes sharp and audible.

Now, in the company of my roommate, I sip beet juice and
reddden my mouth. In my mind, I form a prayer.

Brigid Brigit Brighid Brede Bride
Lead us from the skinny quality of winter
Let our days be the span of you
Loose with heat
Emboldened

A woman strolls across an open field. Puts forth her finest imitation of leisure. She is free in the way that one is uniquely free in the minutes directly succeeding captivity. The woman passes, to the west of the field, the pressed, forest-green awnings of the warden's house, under which the warden must sit with his wife in the evenings, awake to the breeze. Kids bussed to the nearest school. Awnings like the implacable air of a prison guard. In *The Golden Notebook*, Lessing's Anna comes to the quiet horror of a realization after canvassing for the British Communist Party in a working-class neighborhood of London in the early 1950s. *England is full of women going mad, alone in their houses.* Going mad in the proximity of awnings.

CBC Radio is on quietly in the kitchen, drifting in and out of my awareness, and I hear a voice ask: *Are you the best person you can be?*

The free woman in the dream reaches the road and disappears from view.

Outside, the sun has dropped below the city's shingled line. Light affects the sky above the rooftops, in gradient with grey, a crude blend. It has begun to snow.

AFTER-WORDS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



LINDSAY MILES is among the winners of the 2017 Blodwyn Memorial Prize. Her work has appeared in *Poetry is Dead*, *Bad Nudes*, *Plenitude*, *The Maynard*, *Self Care for Skeptics* and *Emerge: The Writer's Studio Anthology*. With a Creative Writing MFA from the University of Guelph, Lindsay is the author of the chapbook, *Aloha Motel*. She lives in Toronto, Canada.

LIKE AN ABSURD AND DELICATE ROOM
A CONVERSATION WITH LINDSAY MILES

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

Hello! My name is Lindsay Miles and I write and do community support work in Toronto, Canada, land of the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. I think one can learn a lot about a person from their stated goals so here are a few of mine: 1) to cook simple meals for people that I love on a regular basis, 2) to be radically kind and curious, 3) to be routinely identified by strangers and acquaintances as a Long-Haired Butch, and 4) to sometimes succeed in inhabiting language like an absurd and delicate room.

Why are you a poet/writer/artist?

Such a difficult question! I think I'm a poet because I do not understand time and I want to swim inside moments, observing what climbs up out of them. I think I'm a poet because I'm hungry for a small measure of control. I appreciate the physical and emotional jolt of a good poem, and I appreciate, with language, the endlessness of the project of precision.

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)?

I think I first used the words "poet" and "writer" for myself about five years ago while enrolled at The Writer's Studio at Simon Fraser University on the West Coast of Canada. I was in the midst of several significant shifts at the time (I had recently come out), and I recall that both my sexual and literary identities worked together to solidify and situate my creative practice. They worked to ground this practice in collective and individual histories of experiment and refusal.

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)?

To me, a poet, writer or artist is in the business of failure. She tasks herself with a relentless series of contradictory assignments; she must simultaneously clarify and muddle. The artist must openly self-reflect. As for my own cultural and social role, I see it as nascent and, in many ways, yet-to-be-determined. That may be a cop-out, but I need more time.

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?

A Period of Non-Enforcement was unusual for me in this regard. It began as one long piece of lyric prose, a kind of distracted and distractible essay. It was only later that I broke the text up, rewrote and rearranged it into a series of lyric fragments. One of my struggles, in this piece and more generally, is to trust my own curiosity, to give it sufficient space and time to be a gathering and guiding force in the work. I believe curiosity can be its own thread, supporting disparate pieces into a body of work that spins around its own logics and concerns.

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?

From the beginning with *A Period of Non-Enforcement*, I knew I wanted to write my own messy, pagan take on a prayer journal, inspired as I was by the prayer journal Flannery O'Connor wrote while at Iowa Writer's Workshop in the late 1940s. In this fractured text, O'Connor appears desperate, questioning openly, pining for the evaporation of everything in and around her that is not seen to be in service of a singular God. In her complexity, she cannot know. With such brazen and affecting examples of not-knowing in writing, I felt inspired to write into some of that deep doubt and mystery myself.

What formal structures or other constrictive practices (if any) do you use in the creation of your work? Have certain teachers or instructive environments, or readings/writings/work of other creative people informed the way you work/write?

There are too many people and environments to name, but: for the insertion of somatic rituals, CA Conrad; narrowing in on the materials of writing (my desk, a pen, the quality of the light), Betsy Warland; for a rigorous attention to the line, Dionne Brand; getting more and more clear, Kevin Connolly. A summer mentorship two years back with poet Heather Christle fed my love of prepositions along with long, writing-laced walks. I have a rotating cast of poems, sometimes upwards of fifty, taped to one of my bedroom walls, all in loose sequence, all in various stages of revision. I mark up the poems in pen while taped to the wall. I take the inoperable ones down (or try to)!

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.

“A period of non-enforcement” is one of the definitions of grace. I was brought to the word through this interest in the language of prayer. Of all grace’s definitions and there are several as I note in the text, “a period of non-enforcement” shared something for me with the practice of poetry, namely, the manipulation and suspension of time. I wanted the title to reflect one of poetry’s demands, which is creating and ambulating inside different arrangements of time. Generally speaking, I fear titles, struggling with their potential to prematurely define and constrict how a piece can be read. With *A Period of Non-Enforcement*, however, this wasn’t the case. It just fit.

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

This particular work bears some nostalgia for me. Writing my attempts at prayer represents an exercise in matrilineal inheritance, a process of connecting back to ancestral mechanisms of gratitude and acceptance. Writing these attempts represents one attempt to be well, one piece of a creative practice and intergenerational relationship to the unruly animals of self-doubt and self-loathing. I have written more than one piece that asks: what has Grandmother hidden in the language?

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

A Period of Non-Enforcement does circular magic; it does nothing and in that way is busy constructing fragments, scenes in various states of

emotional excavation. This book resembles a radio cutting in and out, attempting to hold multiple connections with self and world, the present and the past. *A Period of Non-Enforcement* is busy with its own limitations and puts that imperfect process on display.

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?

My hopes for *A Period of Non-Enforcement* are quite modest, namely that the book finds its way into the hands of a small group of spiritually lusty people, people hungry for more questions than they are for answers, those of eclectic and searching faiths. I hope the book can validate and encourage, in some small way for this small group of readers, those creative and spiritual practices most murky and peripheral. In terms of my own creative practice, as always, I hope to calm the chaos of my mind which is, in fact, not chaotic but remarkably patterned. So... I hope to break some of those patterns up and open with a widening array of syntactical encounters!

Let's talk a little bit about the role of poetics and creative community in social and political activism, so present in our daily lives as we face the often sobering, sometimes dangerous realities of the Capitalocene. How does your process, practice, or work otherwise interface with these conditions? I'd be curious to hear some of your thoughts on the challenges we face in speaking and publishing across lines of race, age, ability, class, privilege, social/cultural background, gender, sexuality (and other identifiers) within the community as well as creating and maintaining safe spaces, vs. the dangers of remaining and producing in isolated "silos" and/or disciplinary and/or institutional bounds?

I think it is important that all artists, poets included, occupy a diversity of roles in terms of activism and community engagement, and I feel weary of my own attempts to excessively explicate or confine those roles. That said, I think poetry has a role to play with the introduction of alternate modes of sense, of alternate ways of attending that can work against oppressive cultural standards. Poetry can offer up possibilities of being present, of being differently and newly inside one's body, which is itself a radical offering. When publishing across lines of systemic difference, I think this kind of alternate attending can expand our capacities to attune

and listen which can, ideally, support more sentient, care-braced modes of action.

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

Not really! Enjoy the book! If you feel so inclined, please share it with your people.

ABOUT THE COVER ART:

The Operating System 2019 chapbooks, in both digital and print, feature art from Heidi Reszies. The work is from a series entitled "Collected Objects & the Dead Birds I Did Not Carry Home," which are mixed media collages with encaustic on 8 x 8 wood panel, made in 2018.

Heidi writes: "This series explores objects/fragments of material culture-how objects occupy space, and my relationship to them or to their absence."

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Heidi Reszies is a poet/transdisciplinary artist living in Richmond, Virginia. Her visual art is included in the National Museum of Women in the Arts CLARA Database of Women Artists. She teaches letterpress printing at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of the Arts, and is the creator/curator of Artifact Press. Her poetry collection titled *Illusory Borders* is forthcoming from The Operating System in 2019, and now available for pre-order. Her collection titled *Of Water & Other Soft Constructions* was selected by Samiya Bashir as the winner of the Anhinga Press 2018 Robert Dana Prize for Poetry (forthcoming in 2019).

Find her at heidireszies.com

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

The Operating System has traditionally used the language "print:document" to differentiate from the book-object as part of our mission to distinguish the act of documentation-in-book-FORM from the act of publishing as a backwards-facing replication of the book's agentic *role* as it may have appeared the last several centuries of its history. Ultimately, we approach the book as TECHNOLOGY: one of a variety of documents across a range of media that humans have invented and in turn used to archive and disseminate ideas, beliefs, stories, and other evidence of production.

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

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

As a (rogue) anthropologist and long time academic, I can easily pull up many accounts about how lives, behaviors, experiences--how THE STORY of a time or place--was pieced together using the deep study of the archive: correspondence, notebooks, and other physical documents which are no longer the norm in many lives and practices. As we move our creative behaviors

towards digital note taking, and even audio and video, what can we predict about future technology that is in any way assuring that our stories will be accurately told--or told at all? How will we leave these things for the record?

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

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

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

THE 2019 OS CHAPBOOK SERIES

DIGITAL TITLES:

American Policy Player's Guide and Dream Book - Rachel Zolf

The George Oppen Memorial BBQ - Eric Benick

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Mass Transitions - Sue Landers

The Grass Is Greener When The Sun Is Yellow - Sarah Rosenthal & Valerie Witte

From Being Things, To Equalities In All - Joe Milazzo

These Deals Won't Last Forever - Sasha Amari Hawkins

Ventriloquy - Bonnie Emerick

A Period Of Non-Enforcement - Lindsay Miles

Quantum Mechanics : Memoirs Of A Quark - Brad Baumgartner

Hara-Kiri On Monkey Bars - Anna Hoff

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DOC U MENT

/dəkyəmənt/

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 *doce*, 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.*

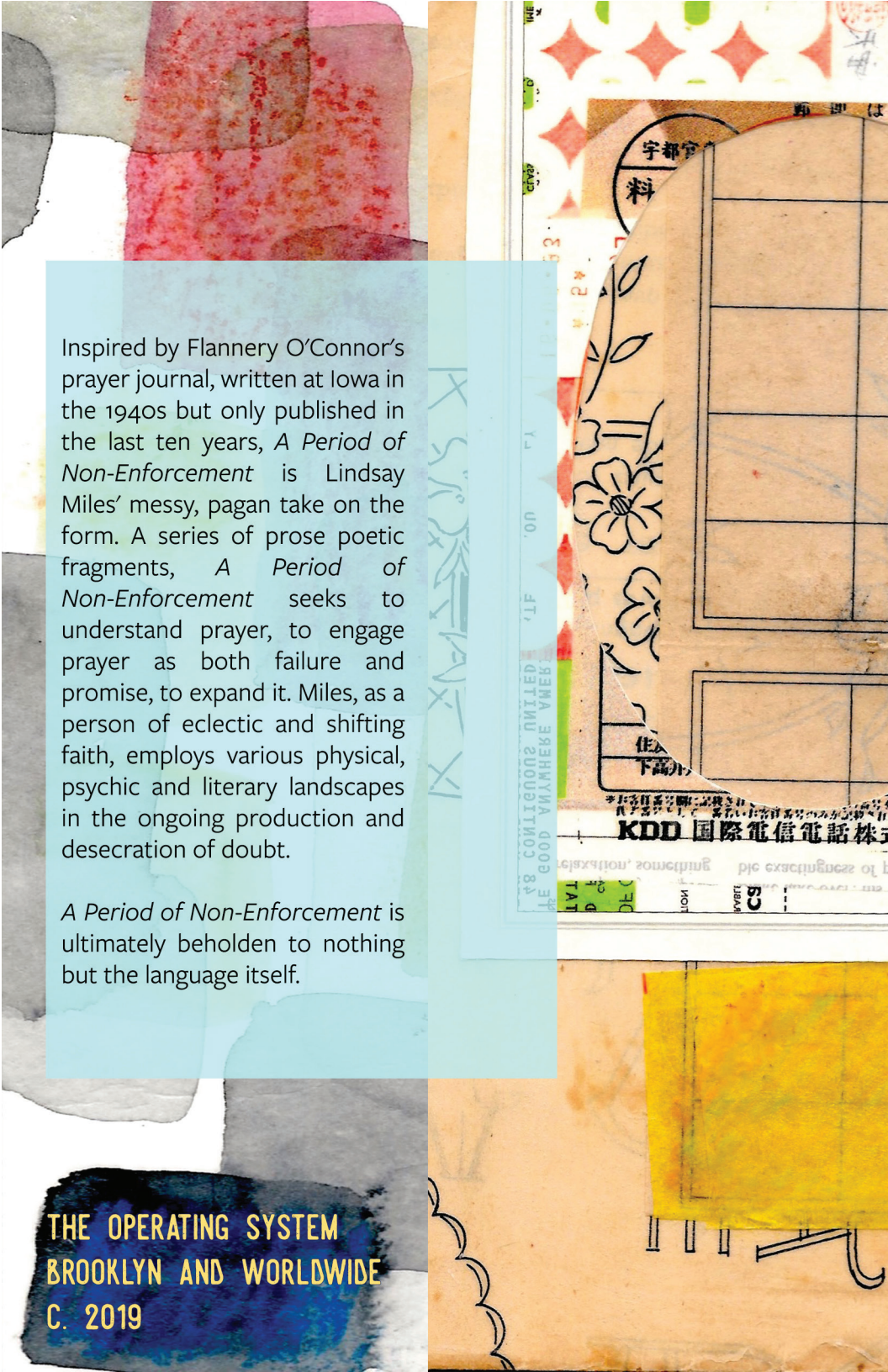
THE PRINT! DOCUMENT SERIES

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Inspired by Flannery O'Connor's prayer journal, written at Iowa in the 1940s but only published in the last ten years, *A Period of Non-Enforcement* is Lindsay Miles' messy, pagan take on the form. A series of prose poetic fragments, *A Period of Non-Enforcement* seeks to understand prayer, to engage prayer as both failure and promise, to expand it. Miles, as a person of eclectic and shifting faith, employs various physical, psychic and literary landscapes in the ongoing production and desecration of doubt.

A Period of Non-Enforcement is ultimately beholden to nothing but the language itself.

THE OPERATING SYSTEM
BROOKLYN AND WORLDWIDE
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