JAZZ
ER
CISE
IS A
LAN
UAGE

gabriel
ojeda-sague

the operating system c. 2018
“Jazzercise — the dance-inspired exercise regime popular in the 1980s — may seem a thin hook for an entire book of ambitious verse and prose poems about bodies and sex and ‘gender-discordant’ identity, melancholy and capitalism and mortality. But Ojeda-Sague definitely, and defiantly, makes it work. In raggedly bisected verse, in squares of prose, and in cascading columns of type, this magnificently bizarre project presents the internal monologue of a queer Latinx exercise-tape viewer, making promises to himself, critiquing other (largely white) viewers, mixing humor with provocation and both with non sequiturs: ‘You’re loving this, right: swing those arms: are / you smiling: when you’re smiling I know you’re / breathing: I can tell you that a century of protests / is to come.’ Ojeda-Sague acts out and attempts the impossible: ‘I hate a lake I eat a stop / sign as told I could be a receipt.’ His short phrases pivot dizzyingly between things you might say while working out to music, and things no one would quite say: ‘we were born in a fishbowl: / we grew up eating Cheerios: we loved our / husbands.’ Yet Ojeda-Sague does not mock the Jazzercisers. Instead, as if mimicking workout instructors, Ojeda-Sague gives himself directions, showing what it would take to change a society built on patriarchy and white privilege, and what it would take to change his mind. ‘Let all your friends / know the same secret,’ he advises, ‘then change / that aspect of yourself / without telling them. … this will strengthen / your squat / and open your breath.”

STEPHANIE BURT, NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW
“IN RECENT POETRY COLLECTIONS, WEAPONS MADE OF WORDS”
Through the syntax and vocabulary of a dance style proselytized by one, sweaty-sexy, hyper-affirmative Jazzercise camp leader Judi Sheppard Missett, *Jazzercise Is a Language* reveals multiple and violent registers of racial and cultural interpellation: “I determine the circumstance of my own abduction.” Behind the seemingly benign landscape of “six white women stepping to the left,” I encountered, strangely and briefly, the little Japanese girl in me with the overwhelming aspiration to be a perfectly shaped, beautiful white lady shimmying in a leotard. Gabriel Ojeda-Sague leads us into the complicated discussion of how we got here by pivoting back to the ever contracting-and-releasing dance around the semantic body, all the way back to the secret that “is in the derrière, the burning secret, the bushel of flowers,” where we burn - and burn - and burn - Do you feel it? I do.

SAWAKO NAKUYASU

The slinky style of Jazzercise founder Judi Sheppard Missett haunts this book of poems by Philadelphia-based wunderkind Gabriel Ojeda-Sague. I had not thought I remembered Judi, but a few pages into the volume she returns to grip me again, her patented blend of syncopation, disco beat, showbiz honey with a drop of vinegar, sex appeal tease. She sings like the laziest gal in town, Dietrich crossed with Keely Smith, but her body was simultaneously commanding the whole world to work it. Her position as a boss of a posse of backup employees also interests the poet, whose POV shifts mimic and question the status of Sheppard Missett’s musicality and even of exercise itself. The demands of the social world on the body are Ojeda-Sague’s persistent theme: the shame and fear on which every exercise empire is built, the potential for subverting these tropes by paying attention to the once abjured vehicle of VCR Jazzercise tapes—its grain and pastel and stray pixels—the power and strength and endurance of being gay and of color in the middle of such a disco. I had trouble imagining this book when he was describing it to me, but now that it’s in my hands, it reads as one of the absolute essentials of our moment in poetry.

KEVIN KILLIAN

*Jazzercise Is a Language* is rich with original music and a mysteriously evocative internal movement. It brings us closer to a future magic formed by the tropical energies some of us might keep in our interiors, even if that magic were initially only relatable through the presence of a rooster. Gabriel Ojeda-Sague’s poems are ‘song[s that] lie sweetly on the wound.’ He shape-shifts his interior and exterior selves like the oceans do, and shows us not only that the universe is always speaking to us, but also that it is always speaking to itself in us. I am relieved and renewed as if from a good night of powerful and gentle dreams when I read his poems.

ROBERTO HARRISON
JAZZERCISE IS A LANGUAGE
to my mother
“Cause everything I have in the world has many, many insecurities.”

LYPSINKA,
“The Passion of the Crawford”
Again: the sound of a body being thrown to the ground: four on the floor

Landscape of white women swinging for shoulder tension: dynamic stretch: last one: all in the hips with voices exhausted from breathing: leave your arms right here, gentle and unopposed: leave your arms right here, where I can see them: for heaven’s sake: 1969: life with an anaerobe: a high-impact sixty minutes: enough not to be clothing, but eventually a curved program
Do you know what it’s like to have the arm shrink away: how it is to lose the stomach: to have your right eye hidden away under a stone: come up again: rip apart the line: chassé: the megaphone blasts into seven white ears: important like small poinsettias
Push sound away like washing your hair: imagine these hips biting the feeling: dream like you are dreaming the body burn: twist to twist the body away: do you notice my sneakers: an assembly of mad lines
Will motors overrun the populace: are you ready for V’s: I kick out my boyfriend because I want to lose the faith: pink Chelsea astride the silver dollar lays her hair into tar: she’s blonde but only on video: blonde even to the roots: blonde in the way only blonde is blonde: blonde in a way that can save the world: so blonde it arms the populace: set your backpack into the lonely hole
Again: fit Susan: Rebecca always dancing: the bragging Lisa of all my distant dreams: mirage of teacups: bumping shoulders across a long, wild span of grass: the string of endless lights in a windmill: I want a body that points its toes across a coast

Just relax, it’s a nice, easy breeze: lengthen your spine: open: really feel the reach: that’s my favorite stretch: I really mean it: I know we’re in a stuffy studio, but don’t you feel like you can feel the sun

What I really want is that ponytail, is a pink sports bra, is black leggings, is make-up that never sweats through, is power over men and to have their power over me, is the feeling of always holding a stretch: I want to be a woman who releases the stretch after a long count
Again:

Have you noticed you synthesize like an agent, like a small possum: one day, I opened my closet and noticed all I had was pink tank-tops inside and I blamed my lover for it: so, turn your hip, don’t feel embarrassed: you’re trying to body burn: you can do that, I promise
In all the old Jazzercise tapes it’s the same way: all white women except for one brown-skinned woman: she’s always to the back and to the right: the finest moments are when she suddenly stops smiling, the one they notably named Maria, who stands out against a white background: at one point, the white lead says again “let’s do that samba” and there’s an instant, however small, where Maria goes off-beat: I feel most white when I smile at white people
Again:

General admission of my fault, cosmically: I don’t miss a spot: I have been taught not to look directly into set lights, or even indirectly at their plastic frames: keep control in your shoulders, like it was in the 80s: the burning still smells like my mom’s old living room: crowds of headbands loosen their grip: insistent perfume
Smile and do it: if stories simulated the way video does, I’d guide the festive family into falling action: a powder blue mirage in my time of need: discs fuming through the muscles you use so diligently: squeeze, tighten, square: if only all our bodies were perfect squares, pixels in the burn

Where you meet the melody, an intimate touch never lopsided: it’s jazz, so we should never touch the floor: salvo of purple legs, or a keyboard: the secret is in the derriere, the burning secret, the bushel of flowers

You’re loving this, right: swing those arms: are you smiling: when you’re smiling I know you’re breathing: I can tell you that a century of protests is to come: we are about to live fifty years of saxophone rage: I saw all of it in the stars: in cards: I saw it there behind the shortest handle, the shortest curtain, caution in the hamstring: a production of exercise, an exercise of video, a video and burning correspondence: the grains will pass, even if it takes twisting the knob
Remember who you are doing all this for: the man behind the counter who believes in sainthood: those cute little hands that stretch out to the sky: but here, in my life, the sky is fluorescent bulbs, it’s plaster ceiling, it’s where the next room starts

Richard Simmons is an American myth, but jazz is not: Jazzercise is a complex of borrowed cultural sites pulled together into the infrastructure of physical literacy: Judi Sheppard Missett falls into a vat of seltzer: under her hairline bubbles my secret formula

Go ahead Susie, let me see the drums: medium cardiovascular to waistline: striped leotard I offer to orixas, covered in a thick layer of honey: I am a massive circle, but as she says “the bigger the circle, the smaller the waist”
What body changes under green light: or yellow light: or red: or the seeping of leotards into a big, dark space where the ball-change snaps: single, single, double: what personhood eats out the little light clambering and clambering
The man says it’s “just” that, as if something is something and not another too: I cool you down, I cool you down: surely in that studio they can’t feel winter wind gnawing the side of my face: a singed ring around my nostrils: just overage: I took myself into my brother’s room and gave myself a shiny new name
I twist out the little fears caught in my hair: I’m suddenly as sweaty as I’ve ever wanted to be, which is how I know I’ve reached “intimate”: to pump it up: I promise it’s not ball-and-chains, it’s just leg-warmers: 2 and 2 and 2 and 2 and 2 and 2 and 2 and 2 and 2
I’ve gotten to know the tunnel blonde hair takes out of a white woman’s head: I kept all the filthy socks in a black box under my bed: burrow lips in elbows, the secrets: Jazzercise is built on import, by force: pressured down by midi: build a white woman’s body with “samba,” “mambo,” “salsa,” “jazz,” “bop”: whose buttons get pushed: you know, some videos don’t even try to include a single person of color: do we not exercise: wear leotards: wear headbands: do we not shimmy and chassé: body talk and body burn

Next, we’ll do a move called the “Soul Sister”: will you love me on a sunny day: if my body gets smaller: if I can look like the young John Travolta: if I do the next cha-cha step: will you love me if I pull the straps to the right part of my waist so my body looks like it’s made of disparate connectable parts
The skin separates a bit at the toes: the blood bubbles while the hips roll: visible bones: the hair from two girls gets tangled: legs get too warm and cook: Desiree misses another beat: the knuckles pop out of the skin: the fingers open like bananas
Pony: I’ve proven I look good in a skirt: even the ghosts in my house tell me I look good in a pink skirt: all dance studios are mise-en-abymes, but with long wooden bars across the “abymes”: pump-it-up-sing-song: in the mirror, as I’m stretching my left hamstring, my earlobes have become much longer and my nose has become much smaller: almost invisible: where once was a bald chin, I’ve grown a dry red beard: these are not the results I was promised
Again: outside and semi-still
I believe there is something ridiculously beautiful about men in short-shorts: cotton, mesh, spandex, denim, it all does it right for me: even when the legs aren’t shaped right or the butt is flat: an edge of material to the burst of skin: just to glimpse the thigh
A woman on the phone is saying to her friend something I am thinking too: swivel of the hips: the air between us vibrates from this resonance: the embarrassing detail is that what I was thinking and what she said was “what if someone shot up my school tomorrow”: swivel of the hips: what happened to women from the 80s: did they ever make it past that last stretch of the video: if only to buy a camcorder and record my friends stretching and chassé-ing, just in case angry boys come with guns: swivel of the hips
I tell myself that I can become Judi Sheppard Missett: however, to do so, I will need an animal sacrifice: right when I slit the throat of the deer, a child throws a rock through my window: it is when my little home is exposed to the small in-pouring of wind that I get distracted and I finish the ritual all wrong: instead of becoming Judi Sheppard Missett, I am just a boy in a leotard and I have an awful deer corpse to clean.

Jazzercise is flatland: Jazzercise is new materialism: Jazzercise is your sister: I was pushed into the arms of white women like an angry seagull is pushed away from beach sandwiches: just a wagging of the hand: the sour smell of another person’s locker: the same smell for which the Trojan War was fought.
Vertical flow of the squat: rhythm as a grabbing hand: I am trying to make my body less present, and for that lesson I pivot my foot: the pivot of an argument: I am much less latino when I am with latinos and I am much less white when I am with white people: I am much less a man when I am around men and I am much less a woman when I am around women: a musical comes with vibrato, by definition: I punch my teeth out while I watch the second VHS in the series: part three, medium cardiovascular to waistline: I hit reset, I hit reset, I’d like to watch, I’d love to watch

What I thought was golden leather fern, strangler fig, sawgrass, melaleuca, milkweed, fogfruit, jasmine, palm, croton, sage, or mango is actually a woman, the one on the left in the chartreuse leotard with white warmers, named Flora.

Caramel swing: show me how music works: I stretch my quadricep into the next room: Judi, Chloe, Desiree, Britney, Linda, Diane, Richard, Annie: everybody dances and everybody is watching: I want to live in the house that Jazzercise built: I own fourteen fancy cars: I have competence in creating my own borders: I flatten my feet: I label everything in my house that is not me as “homegrown”
When the body is small and square: perfect white squares along the highway: singing in rounds new Latin: one neon yellow headband blurs into another: one tank-top strap gets caught in another: the leotard gives a nasty wedgie, floss in teeth

Again:

I determine the circumstance of my own abduction: muscles replicate: what is it like to be Judi Sheppard Missett: to be stoic, strong, kitsch, and clean, to move the body from one place to another, like I move my brain from one sack to another: to stretch the calf from one world to another: when young, the blonde hair mirrored the skull, a big curly growth: but now it defines where the skull begins: termites in the house that Jazzercise built
I bring the video into my home like a good date, or someone from the street with the right eyes: that which eats away at my living room from a locked box: “no more people gathering in large groups”: steam under the nail: dropping pamphlets, I am watching five women step left then right: exhaustion architecture: a department in a glass bottle: will you melt the seed: send me chills: send me a potable term for viewership
Again: what you forgot

Slip one finger between your thighs: show him to the family: inside a corporation, you find a little cassette: THIRTY MINUTE BODY BURN: it’s been a long time since you’ve had somewhere to play a cassette: search and search and eventually just put the cassette to your ear to listen into it: other than spinning, you hear nothing, feel nothing: bring me to a business: the incorporation of gravity
To the one man in the back lunging, the one with the high-pitched voice: I know your secrets, I’ve been there too

Being that I am full of hairspray, she asks me several times if I can deliver volume, curls, stiffness: massaging a stack of shells until something hidden inside announces itself: a crab: a deer with teary gray eyes: dimes thrown against the street, only to bounce back up and chant: there is memory loss within the studio: better memory
The world is plain as a bottle of seltzer: being in shape is a great feeling: where “in shape” matches a railroad’s track through four-lane city streets: what holds us apart: possum with blue eyes winces on its tip-toes: hissing bubbles: matte finish on a red nail

We’re gonna be burning calories for twenty-five minutes: asking once for a curdling white sneaker: two bay laurels a pot: two eyes to mark a day turned into the next: yesterday was a recovery: today is quiet: yesterday was something twenty feet tall: today is the size of a seashell: will you open the can
I ask them to be my sisters: music drips in the abdomen: “below the belt”: Jazzercise since its peak in the 1980s has always tried to stay current, usually translating to current blackness, current Latin-ness: in the late 80s and early 90s Jazzercise sheds its coat of smooth sax-driven jazz and bop and resets to industrial funk, hip-hop: since 2010 Jazzercise has incorporated contemporary pop hip-hop and Latin dance music popular in competitor Zumba: a recent advertising tagline from Jazzercise states “you think you know us, but you don’t”
Give me a little time: disturbances
I shot a dog, for lack of a better situation: it steamed into the carpet: telling like a lighthouse, her arm raises up in a jumping jack: the bracelet catches a cube of air: “imagining hazards more awful than real”: wife of the anaerobe: I am not changed, I am married

Thick yellow cream across the eyes: quick squats: pulled edge of the mouth: red of Michelle: chest press: one long shot speaking through a water cooler: at just the right angle, you can catch the glimmer of a blue skyscraper just over Jane Fonda’s head: past the Venetian windows: blue of Diane: move out: true beige: the pigeon there, at the left corner

If you smile, it makes the workout easier: very slowly, a development of plot: a bone-dry flute’s note rolls over the shoulder: only to give it away: snares tighten the abs: for the first part of the exercise, you don’t need to use your chair: latch on to me, latch on to me
You did a great job: I am doing the wrong routine in the wrong studio: am I in my hometown: no, shoulder rolls leave room for a gasp between roads: singles and doubles and reach and pull: I am lunging my left leg into Canada, so that Justin Trudeau can kiss my toes: Jane Fonda marches out, her neighborhood was enraged: long bodies: the point of gentle tension
Walk right to me: two sisters of mine stand to my right and left: we were born in a fishbowl: we grew up eating Cheerios: we loved our husbands: but unlike them, I cheated on my husband: they found out: they told him and he left me: they forced me to move to another city: I took on a new name, I took on a new face: I don’t blame them for what they did, any good citizen of our hometown would have done the same: I really don’t hold a grudge
A tense cold comes through our air conditioner: you pull off my shirt in haste: outlines: even in the dark like this, I can see where your hair starts: your throat expands to hold something warm: stretch my back until it cracks: I cage your thigh with my wet fingers, blue and gold nails: after I suggest we switch, you agree: the yawning of a poster soon to fall from the wall distracts me, but only for a moment

If I was one to tell a lie, which I am not, I would tell it about the fit of a belt around my waist, saying it cinches tighter than it really does, because in my mind, the secret of a circular thing is necessary to keep away from those who ask: moving-with, velocity of a spiral: almost graceful

Fingers on a silk screen: chin depression: touch of rouge at the corners of the forehead warm the face: a line of white or yellow down the bridge of the nose: what is buried under snow
A room with a leaking battery in the middle: if the ocean was only jellyfish: determine the largeness of a personality: salinization: Maggie, swim it, that’s just a plastic bag: for every space I occupy, I bring another space with me from somewhere else
I want my stretches to come naturally: I want to
drink my drinks through a silver straw like my
father and his father: I want to shave my legs
and cover them with fake white hair: I want
nipple pasties made of post-it notes that remind
me to call the venue after nine: if I were in The
Ring, my hair would catch in the space between
the bricks of the well
I push my middle finger into one of Richard Simmons’s hundred blonde curls: gaps of the fence: tie my whisker to the bed post: a brunette boy with a vision board

Choice of pathways: the knee, like a beetle, protects itself from breeze: in the middle of the studio, dented into the hardwood, is a footprint: Sam sleeps in mustard, imagining a long street, black as what is hidden: slice disco: a major seventh chord sags over Desiree’s forehead: single, single, double

Last set: trapezius, deltoids, and triceps: look one way and then another: pieces of the body: harder, more friction: a stretching leg’s torrid smell: make me sick: I give away my dirty socks to mollify the spirit I live with: that devil which hath invaded my home
A lizard skates across the room to say “last one”: this is the modified workout for those weak in the heart: lay my head across your copper arm hair

Again: pull an ingrown hair from my thigh: proof I am elated
Can you touch your elbow to your knee: that’s awesome: Denise identifies me as the woman to watch: “watch her! watch her if this is too difficult for you”: “low-impact” is a reminder that during a workout, any part of our body could snap, tear, and break: however, it also allows access to the injured, disabled, inexperienced, or elderly: where all the others are jumping, I am taking two steps forward and two steps back: this routine really is a puzzler

Top of the arms arc, a single cuff connected to a ceiling lamp: I get dizzy inside a cartwheel, my ears start ringing: a warm, high squawk from the air conditioner: my spine becomes misaligned: my lover tells me my eyes are getting completely white: I say it is an illusion of sugar

Here is the decathlon: orange light flickers off the sweat on your brow: give the legs rest, she says: squeeze, tighten, square: I push my fist into the neck of the bottle: here, against the gold-coated office building, I lift my ass into the air
Keep me parallel: bad thoughts
Judi Sheppard Missett says “you don’t want to be lopsided” with a crescent smile: the Bar-Kays soar over Judi’s waistline routine: her quotes from the song a distant stimulation: you gotta boogie with this honey: stretch-out: move your boogie body: threatened in a day-lit street

You really fear Diana Krall: you always have my unspoken passion: shaking legato of the alto sax shifts loose hair: slur: Nina has the chin of a rabbit, the voice of an angel, and short words: bottled water
Telecommunications: the shrinking spine: what is smaller becomes more concerted: am I a figment of my own vision: a paper plane: promoted

Shannon’s arms are overdetermined: olive oil clinging to the plastic bowl: bright screen: I lick the fish until it bends

Holes: no child lagging: blue ammunition: lower home: at best, I am a worldling as unintelligible as curtains: something brown floating at the top of the infinity pool
Must I always be a stranger to you: arrangement of blocks: mind me: turning blue beneath the eyes

A dog with mange has been chewing at the right leg of the coffee table: its ears have an orange tinge: I pull up a chair to offer it meat: 2D skyline, hanging from a cherry sky: a rouge triangle, just under the ear
Do this with me: place a piece of blue painter’s tape across the entirety of your thigh: then, rip it off: repeat until you don’t pull anymore hairs from that spot: then, move to the next spot on your thigh: if it becomes too sore, rub a bit of cold rosemary water over the affected area: for lower impact, replace blue painter’s tape with several sticky notes
The vein, the misshapen god: my fingers wag when I am not looking: her right shoulder flickers in and out of my home: a white hand sifts through a pile of red beans and squash

She rejects a mindless purpose: calls a calf down: in order to be mindful of common sorrow: potion: the fingers develop the draft, coming from the wet, exposed corner of the studio: cold portion

“Give the stars to me”: doling out senses of friction: control panel: touched by me: moves: in the airport, I hope not to see anyone I know: I want to get to my gate and sit and read and not have to talk to anyone: I want to go home that way

Again: the sound of hair being pulled: inversion from the root
You, at home, move with me: move almost before me: I am shaking involuntarily, the way you have always known me to do when I am angry or sad or horny or bitter or embarrassed: you grip me until I stop: like Proteus: a lycra band wiggles and travels from the neck to the crotch.

A friend of mine once left a video paused on his TV so long the still image burned into the plasma: anything he ever watched from then on had the faint whisper of that long shot over it: I finger the TV screen, plasma parting around me as I swipe: velvet lake: potential state of reappearance: wash your hair over me.
Here, in my room, a chirping sound from the shell of the alarm: I am stretching my leg onto the wooden bar, where the woman next to me spreads like a radiator: she cracks her fingers on my back: low resolution: I bite the skin out from under my nail

I want another moment with my family before trial: I want softer skin below my eyes: I want thin legs that snap when I run: I want a blue light shining across my sideburns: the pink of her headband spreads onto her skin: gemstone: white outline
The breath: the anaerobe in hallucinogenic oxygen: swollen joints quickly deflate: pierced balloon and basket: six white women stepping to the left: the mouth shapes along the deepest curve in the breath: composition: I occupy someone else’s seat again: a whistle that sinks from B♭ to G# only to return a moment later
Again: queen of spades: missive: tower of glass

Again: I miss an old friend: another killing: the sickness that sinks below the teeth: I hold onto my problems like a heap of fish: slipping out onto my shoes: I want a remote that changes the direction of my toes: an adjustable brace to change the circumference at the wide end of my head: a lever to pull my spine tighter: loss, as Judi says, is the state of having something from your hands become wild: we meet between counts: center of the afternoon

Again: the sound of a body being thrown to the ground: four on the floor
I want to wish out
a lacy cream
a hope of
non-regulation
the easy way to
slip through the fingers
a vision of
wheat white across
the field an owned field
not to run across
for danger of shots
I am being told there is
a ghost under my bed
I am being told the
fridge is full of bugs little drops
on the exercise mat
I did not wipe
down my station
the mark that
I was there

Take five marbles
place them in a glass
fill the glass with mud
do something else
for enough time
that the marbles
begin to sprout
hair in the sun
comb them
spray them
so they stiffen
this will tone the thighs
tighten the waist
I do not relate
to boys in other cities
or if the paper sliced
a kite a made thing
limp as cotton
part of what pours into
the wound
a bullet
let it go through
a city’s name
the rat
bites at cords
lycra wilderness the
future is full of them
not just a genie but
deviant rhythms
my brow lowers
straightens
my hand reaches
the strings
in my wrist
tangle and harden
the open stones at the
de edge of the hand
but a song lies
sweetly on the
wound

Fill a bathtub
with hot water
place the doilies
from your dinner set in it
three drops of red dye
and seven drops of
jasmine oil
put your hand
in the water
let it soak until dawn
peel off the
skin of your hand
until you see
white underneath
this will strengthen
the joints
and improve our grip
It gradually melts one and the other flour and chocolate leotard left in a safe the gullet shaping up the account of a crime the activity between men that which is secret and held between the eyes he hits below the belt

Let all your friends know the same secret about your personality then change that aspect of yourself without telling them in this way the secret is still yours but they will see you more clearly this will strengthen your squat and open your breath
I was wrong
whipped oil
into rings
exhausted from work
and lifting
into studio lights
the yolk in the eye
horror of an area
assembling sharp
parts wax thigh
the fixture above
that dissolves
and dissolves

Boil water in a lead pot
let the metal
soak into the water
pour it into a glass
and serve it
to your husband
do this again
then wait
ask him
how he is feeling
do this once a day
this will help us
to reduce
our problem areas
Clicks atop
the foot
measure howled
lumps that form
on my cheeks when
my skin is wet
Judi’s nails taped to
the white board
bowl of white grease
win me a prize
every time
you sleep around
and sweat
give me my thirty
minutes
with my feet against
the window

In front of the mirror
change the size
of your fingers
make them very short
or very long
thick or thin
lumpy or smooth
observe your friends
and lovers react
to your new fingers
observe them very closely
do this several times
over the course of a week
this will improve blood flow
and regulate the pulse
Mine is gold
won’t you show me
yours howling
into paper
a yellow slug
I have for a tongue
I have asked
God to make my
legs look more like
Puerto Rico
I have hairy
orange stiff things
under these warmers
doing it all
together

Google a photograph of
your favorite author
and print many copies out
place them in between
the pages of every
book you own
under your pillow
below dinner mats
in the lining of jackets
continue this way
for fourteen days
after this time
you will begin to feel
lighter and softer
and eventually still quieter
skinnier faster
this will keep you alert
and help us trim
excess belly fat
The brain is an 
inconsolable 
portrait hoping 
for protection 
from an empty room 
shaved ice 
with red ink she’s got 
a tattoo with all 
the pepsi colors 
for wanting more 
for wanting 
more support 
knuckles against 
aluminum foil 
scabs scraping off 
moving her waist 
like a top spinning 
over marble 
motes in light

As you begin to fall asleep imagine 
a star low-hanging right 
above your nose 
just as intense but small enough 
to fit in your room 
glue things 
to your star 
like paper scissors clay 
cups hair bedsheets 
plastic toys 
until your star is totally covered 
and your room is dark again this will help us tighten those pesky love handles
Events have the misfortune of perishing stubborn as horizontal pressure these intervals between my exhaustion and the perfect instructor’s smile are a trace of force I am constantly lagging behind the instructor tangling my legs moving my hips in the wrong direction I want triangular grace and the tangent on the curve

Mix flour and water to create a tough dough pull it into the shapes of close friends send each of your friends the version of themselves you have restlessly molded ask them to send back the bread if the likeness is not immediate and try again this will help you keep up with our more advanced steps
Heart of palm
softly sliced into
I am told to search
for “practice”
among tissues
a long brown bed
a long white person

Write down
your lover’s thoughts
at night while
he is sleeping
surprise him by writing
them on his
bedroom walls
when he wakes up
he will be reminded
of times he has felt
without control
and will be consoled
continue this process
and publish his thoughts
in four volumes when he
has finally passed away
this will keep you feeling
healthy happy
and full of energy
I am at several points
not gripped to
God or silk
a liver tied against
a cork-board frame
like an animal trophy
on a mantle
this simple article
or a saxophone
alive again
that I have not asked
for or wanted in this
part of the house
I am not expensive
as city rooms

Pour lotion or
cocoa butter
into a bathtub
sleep inside
and once
you wake up
and they are soft enough
cut off your skin tags
with nail clippers
this will help us
speed your
incredible growth
The way that home goes invisible under pressure the same way then the taffy loosens up to the six the nine million more mobile tongues and flies round glass cylinder turning darker and thinner an implication of summer

During the next rain let five rye loaves dissolve on the lawn collect the leftover masses and grow them in a glass until they form a golden-brown tower this will help us imagine what you would look like in a test tube
She cuts the soft white underside of my foot and it all just spills out from the ache the slit I deflate very quickly and become inexcusable so be it for the apartment is as ugly as I dreamed and more

Count the steps from your bed to your shower to your kitchen to your backyard then try to cut out as many steps as possible bring things closer stretch your legs farther remove extraneous walls this will keep you feeling tall and in charge
A collapsing building is never alien to me nor are the prices of damages there was an accident and it was clean and something paused and something else resumed

If it is a windy month thank the nearest flight attendant for their service ask them if it is easy to tell passengers how to put on breathing masks and then thank the nearest breathing mask this is a great exercise for carpal tunnel pain
I am saddest in the winter
everything inflates with cold air
in Judi Sheppard Missett’s house
the infinity pool freezes over
the white platter of the yard her chandelier becomes very brittle and sometimes drops shards onto the dining table ironically the freezer is the only section of the home she feels she can trust that and the underarm of her daughter still sixteen even on the warmest day of winter

Send everyone away send your cousins away sell your things sell your home kill your pets free-up your schedule ruin your relationship and break a hundred porcelain plates get rid of everything including that troublesome belly fat
The matter over
a long slapped
bass note
cylinders stains
Venetian blinds or
popsicle sticks
smell of the studio
metallic lemongrass
who is keeping
Richard Simmons in
his home and why
won’t he talk to
all his beautiful friends
they want to know
is it Teresa

Leave on
the rice
cooker
Leave on
the rice
cooker
Whatever feels good
if you pivot your
feet here and
here and smiling now
if you want to you
can hold it
there and then turn it
back out
and don’t bend it
more than you feel is
right here it is
the marathon and
if you’ve got a
weaker back
you can feel
the spinning of
the spine
and the smooth
air the brass
bell broccoli
and the love of
salt

Just watch
me and do what
I do I’ll let you
know what you
need to do
and frequently
discuss the “lighter side”
so you can see
how to make this easier
if at any point you
begin to feel a burning
sensation in your muscles
keep going this is a
signal that your body
refuses change
She played “Sweet Georgia Brown” for coordination and ate Raisinets off-camera. I shifted my weight and then tapped my foot shift tap shift tap shift tap with a little extra bounce. I squared my hips to the floor and put my elbows into a hot bowl. I always wear supportive footwear so I can turn any way I please.

Listen to her breath between words quick and shifty a record scratch replicate her breath tighten your abs do this in your bed while looking up at the popcorn ceiling where the little silver lights hang too and take your hands into your throat this will help the beginners among us.
The mambo is a very sexy step
Cuba is “brimming with life” says a photo of thirty men in the New York Times one with a cigar
Cuba has a way of staying hot we will land our president in it the people there are thick and round and they play dominos and they are black sometimes and white other times and royal blue is their favorite color the mambo is a very sexy step

One more: last night I saw you dreaming you’d be delicate and teething look at me and trace my nose on bristol feel them and make your body a full circle the island does not come with a stamp of joy this will help us lengthen the neck and remember to drink plenty of water
Open houses my arms who has accused me of being gaudy I am correcting for discontentment invented in my basement where a spread of cardboard is red and orange and silverfish make a white S across the wood floor the mark that I was there

Pour out gallons of milk on the sidewalk in honor of lazy friends this will help us square the shoulders to the floor
Parking lot long summer the evil eye
you spray blue shiny detergent like a
band of sea-foam red at the end of a
square day full of money of pudding
vapor and highways the gadfly given
their knuckles were made for gloves
I want nobody in my home not a soul
take pictures between strings let the
pale arms beat the linoleum like bell
and marble I hate a lake I eat a stop
sign as if told I could be a receipt it’s
felt without corners and velcro with
all the hooks removed I want skinny
fingers a print of rakes slips out of a
knight of cups and vaseline the heat
the fig leaf the chubby kid in a vest
he’s like me but I’m an ugly woman
an old man at a carnival who wants powdered sugar for his kids elephant ears ice cream fried oreos chocolate cotton candy sweet jokes for his wife me the oven he’s got an eye the left on yellow jewels to put in his child’s hair the red the green the black and if it can be determined I’ll make the case for the hawk the fish a moment bigger than that left eye I always do think of you but in moments mobile homes disguises otherwise swing a leg over your head get stretched and ready for a killer workout with me the only brother you were born with then the only answer is a street’s median which I will drive over in my red suv
deserve wet clothing I want the gun
the shit stains the blood stains motor
boats chopping fat manatees full of a
sopping green leaf and there I visit
my sister and ask her a favor lend
me enough money to make it to the
next month just fifteen more days I
don’t want to think she wouldn’t help
me but she asks me to scram I
terrify I lose fifteen pounds with this
regimen and I feel so good I feel like
I feel better than ever jello a fish’s
mouth that’s what I want from the
1960s more jello but as I go and get
older I hate novelty food items it’s
an issue of scale y’know take your
wrist and push it into my neck roll it
around I’ve got these awful knots my shoulders are very cold figurehead I am with my second mind where I die my head is a cone I am let go free of devices of imps with curtains let me make my brain smaller I find myself most real in a card box god my arm is always asleep I would cut it off if just to lose that squirmy ants feeling it’s terrible he has sent me an email as if that would make me feel better there I heard an oboe in my sleep that terrible quack that fuzz and wool half-hole d gargoyles a penny on the needle it’s boogie it’s a two-step as a monument to finger-licking golden wings crispy thighs hot oil tight waist
the bottom of the argument keeping
kids around the home like porcelain
swans still life paintings you have
met your family they are in my bottle
light a candle for me light a candle
for my friends canada goose biceps
down feathers triceps lats medium
cardiovascular a week with raquel
she says her stretch is nonviolent
she says I am the armpit of george
bernard shaw what a wish angry
teens dream of sleeping in a car the
warm gray fiber of the armrest want
nervous at the throat what should be
said the judges are looking for four
consecutive push-ups four pull-ups
four high-kicks and four jumping
jacks it is all sponsored by crystal light the competitors are all talented competitors in this competition we’re going to have to try our darndest to compete against these competitors I met linda when she was my teacher she had such high energy she grew me like a plant very slowly and with pruning now we can do a split at the same time crystal light my mother cut bangs greg louganis is here he hit his head crystal light is my diet drink of choice dance with me 2 and 2 and 2 mesh 2 and 2 and 2 “women with the upper body strength to do great push-ups” hollywood trolley a coin with a brown band in the middle
two twenty five to ride I lost my egg
and I lost my boyfriend I wave in a
circle I block my eyebrows I cat eye
in black I put soft purple eyeshadow
above I contour my fatty cheek I pull
my teeth I pucker my lips I pull my
hairs my fingers are all thumbs wax
daybreak economic theory sweaty
ass kids fat fucks sweetbreads trade
that split is an amazing achievement
and will net this pair some deserved
points fog parking lot brown coat my
friend has got lice can you believe it
it’s like a cartoon I fill myself with
bread I piss between meals my mom
has told me I eat all the bread they
bring I don’t rip it and share judi it’s a
hot fucking day makes you want to
go pour a glass of wine through your
thighs that’s what I would do if I lived
alone ladies and gents your glutes
are like huge banana breads missile
foam thighs the nail smashed and
high standing a guard I don’t want to
be a professional dancer I just want
to look like one shanna will eat your
head judi in that cherry-red egg chair
or by that original lichtenstein or the
warhol or your koi pond some idiot
left the family jewels in the koi pond
shanna denise jane richard none of
them can do what you do judi I stuff
my face with a cronut I sleep with
you on my mind my ex had long
fingers and a little belly that he hated
and shook in the mirror I’d smoke
with you if I didn’t have bad lungs if I
wasn’t very tired if it wasn’t 2:47am
as always if it wasn’t gooey if I
wasn’t playing a game if I cared
about my friends if the q-tip didn’t
come out orange if I wasn’t about to
puke from too much roast pork I’d
smoke with you hem of the evening
glossy parameter leave me alone in
my room I decorated it for a reason
we’ll start from the top now as if we
were rain a late-night icee run at
turkey hill white cherry and coke root
beer barq’s to be specific the matter
delivered in address to the general
public twice lived little holes double
vision three of wands my crush we
fall asleep in a film about bowling
rotten places receipts deviance
commissioned by the national
museum of buck teeth work those
hamstrings best joke a friend ever
told me was hamstrings but literally
made of ham like white americas
christmas dinner so easy targets
heal everything we are very soft and
wooden as a leg a hospital has got a
cat that will predict my death silver
sea hand-held vacuum I pinch my
nipples in the mirror to appear taller
raw pinks get orange the hem of my
scapula the seams of my neck judi
sheppard missett is a hundred squares in a mambo in a grapevine down the alleyway a guy with pearly white calloused hands let’s start again one more set piston my history triple sec long sock the kids are in a hot car craving fingers anxious about each other’s breaths telling secrets trading joints keeping watch out the window those rats my biceps I’m feeling better than ever I’m feeling like my best self I keep my best self in the closet where she is happiest around plenty plastic hangers and mothballs I am wearing a girdle believe me it is aromatic like my upbringing like my carpentry the
methods of other families my waist
the needs of the dog over mine tube
dress sick shit I’ll make it over the
bridge I’ll make it into my bowl of
black beans and vaca frita and white
rice and materva as if it was sunday
or good friday and I’ll make it into
class to chassé and pivot and I’ll
make it into my studio to meet Jane
angry batteries she’s tossed her hair
over the bar and develops a warm
rash along the underarm she tells
my friends of my collection she and I
are not hourglasses we are girders
and my toes are soft as cinnamon
jane takes me to the ice cream truck
on 23rd st and there she believes
me she touches my hair I develop a
curse and lose my eyesight I cut into
lesions on my foot which pop like
water balloons I have fallen badly
my kneecap dislocates and juts to
the right a bone in my calf has bent
out of my skin it looks like teeth long
summer stuffed animal deck of cards
I’m burning an effigy to my body at
eighty whether I can still swim like
grannies in articles online or whether
I am frail and broken or already dead
I am burning an effigy to say I am
revolted by what came out of my
dissolving libido correct my spine
length I’m a piñata I’m a stick I want
to be a blonde bombshell I’ll crack
open the nose skin tags I am in the
deer carcass sleeping ballroom shed
silversmithing I am out of butter I
can’t make eggs I ram the writing
desk into a vacuum watch me as a
carnivore 2 and 2 and 2 and 2 and 2
my copper arm hair your basket if
one discovered the other the plié the
pirouette the cabbage patch the
running man the swim the sprinkler
the worm the bump I have designed
a diorama of myself and my friends
prepared for a turkey dinner clay ear
cauliflowers papier maché eyebrows
eat and turn into a pig like mom and
dad in spirited away but I’ve got
empanadas and papas rellenas not
ba-\-wan but lechón and flan and judi
sheppard missett takes an axe to my
wrist leopard print mint julep pattern
blocking his hand-lines his elbow in
my back I pluck out his eyelashes
I’d let him build me a bigger house
marble floors stairs designer lamps
cindy crawford’s ghost haunting my
couch a bucket of cold brew on the
frame of the door waiting for my
husband to come home so it can
drop I love his new beard I love his
big arms his yellow head we are iced
tea together violet roads cheetos I’ve
heard the news you’re leaving me
for him even after I’ve heard you
complain every day about your
friends I was there and I put my pale thumbs into your neck you slip me out of my t-shirt glass water-based pink sweat warm ring chocolate donut t-bone steak do this with me stretch your hands out across the lake and into the house of your neighbor fluff his pillow drink his milk rearrange his statuettes so if the furrowed brow wasn’t message for you enough my lettuce leaf the nap of the baby marigold mirage you do know my motored jawline this is the blue blue of my insecure appraisal god is so generous about many things especially my figure I was taught by marists that he has great
callouses on his god hands and they will touch me above the forehead and my body will be very perfect and muscular kids took their cocks out in catholic school as if to announce their divorce from private spaces another message sent by the pores step-touch heel back v-step we might be finding our center here in the basement between wood slats the step out a crystal buried in the soil of a family farm it telegrams my want my tongue is shaped like a donut I recycle it again the grain silo inside my forehead a lazy cloud the day sends me chills down my ankles the rumor is inverse gnashing of the
wind-up soldier pink ribbon between
the middle and index fingers what is
a way I percolate in your room I
massage your yolky joke the strip
mall gooey secrets spread on the
cross jesus lovely triceps the ding
don hostess cakes alive in the
bowling pin the boxcar base I mount
my sullen fingernail and press it with
salty blue ink the sand is nearing
the apartment building I will name it
jacob mispronounced I am the only
scarecrow this family desires take
me as your wife along lincoln road
push me into oncoming traffic I will
laugh in steel a reason more for
letting your grip loosen on her diane
desiree karen madeleine natasha
fiona brittany you have caught the
trumpeter in your catalog make no
mistake my purse is lost upon my
waking the rodeo dynamite the white
crystal legs psuedo-science of car
batteries do this with me and a-one
and a-two and a three-e-and-a-four
I’m made for more I develop black
photos under red light my relief in
clean cardboard the phrasing nested
lightly between pixels sticky sun beat
up ramshackle spartans there is a
great grey hole behind venus that is
sucking gas fast and will leave us
without knees I burp a contrail it
soars across the sky it’s true the
light of the sun does meet my skin I
was born to replicate puerto rico I
bankrupt the indigo freeway I have
lost six pounds this week alone I am
committed I am supplementing this
with diet and light weight training
please be sure to supplement this
with diet and light weight training for
the best results I am not transparent
nor am I defensive I am a medical
center I am your best customer I
must be as stuck in your nose as the
q-tip oh jill it’s not true I did buy the
oatmeal you asked for I did I spent
my own money on it too no I am not
harassing your secretary I really
believe she is not from this planet
and neither is our son I am only as glassine as the program allows this is my two-handed axe my volcanic suv he thinks he has me to himself but I am not a bowl of cereal you are if fairies only knew the horrible smell of their wings gourmet scallions midi august I took raw graphite from the crash of the blimp let your knees drop to the floor completely smile and be yourself look straight into the light chocolate involution always before always before the sound of elephants this is my favorite routine to mark my tibia with red circles then over some hill there is the rest of the world my friend would want me to
say this is the truth the sun is amazing but I am not my friend my lamp is amazing beta of january the trial run reverse week mid-waist is not to be ignored then repeat these exercises on your own time outside of class to get closer to your favorite body you are the mortar and she is the salad say “approaching” in a strange accent to relax the mind be at ease make sure you are breathing all at the same time leave your arms right here in my oyster the beach gifts you reagan garlic knots quarter frames task men’s singlet cradler white wine with minerals dried fruit falling from the tree onto her head
the voice is loud there is soil it is not a myth that cloud there it is bigger than phalanges and tree nuts that tree there is skinny I finger the open notebook drink paper and wine I puke after a ritual and brush my teeth this is how I say I am not my sister nor the metal bowl I’d put a girl in my direction tape triangle colored pencils to eat to eat we are lemons again we are deer we are full of gucci shoes I feel my heart leap into tomorrow because I am lonely today I feel the state of pennsylvania in my shoulder how many times have I wished I could talk faster be more convincing my time here in this video
has been a series of embarrassing lyrics now that the balls of my feet ache my head will lower and I will admit I have no real lover or friend I am holding onto continents in a pageant I am wearing the sash of miss florida my hair in a bump-it I am beautiful my gown fits me so perfectly and my answer to how I’d change the world is precious I even mention the everglades I am the crown it is a short day everything is fast nautical doctrine comments I am a woman with many hats deliver the eggs in their brown basket the dog is alive something is moving slowly under the asphalt scaly and purple it
is coming to eat out of the toilet of judi sheppard missett’s home the embodiment of shanna’s anxiety and embarrassment over dinner and poultry the family is lemonade and their nostrils are black moons the parable has told us the raisins are our friends my buns are tight and toned not ash but chalk not a pool cue but my belly button my last secret in this world I wiggle my tush into your slideshow and projector presentation my smile is camera-worthy believe the mollusks when they say my biceps have never been so defined and veiny grace is poured over my forehead like mustard silver
I ladle the pink stone I juggle between toes Janelle I am not like you I was never supposed to be I put you in my VHS because I believe I can do syncopation like you with your tin eyelashes but it’s not true I can hardly get them open crusted over with golden pollen the tiles are gray and dusty and linoleum my sacred cafeteria my lucha mask my eighth note my husband and I were meant to be thermometers sea shells but I have lost my father to gale-force winds the same that keep your curls afloat in the studio the guitar is pink and fuzzy in its high notes I spent the nighttime with Pat Methany and
steve reich tonguing at what should be known of fast movements and cloudy counterpoint I eat pat’s left ear and his armpit hair not yet even near full again I eat the fried dough again I eat the dripping pork again I eat the smashed plantains again I eat split peas and sip the frothy soup what sits in the pearly suitcase what bathes in the bay of pigs my mamboing guajiro and his memories short man deep appetite mate and music I want to swallow every island and keep it in my gullet oh god is my life a sack of beans and hairy arms blush cortisone clearasil night masks microbeads sponges rye bread cane
the little neighbor boy and his mom are disasters paper planes motors step forward twice turn and squat keep those legs in the air I want to see them high in the air yeah you feel that I know you do feels good feels right okay let your legs down and bring your chest up and back down and up and back down yeah work that core we want to feel every muscle in our belly working really working feel that burn yeah one more no excuses here folks this is the last time oh gosh okay stand up everybody we’ve had a great class and a great session I can see those big beautiful smiles on your faces
yeah woo that was sensational do you feel good do you feel lighter stronger I sure do folks catch us next time for another hour of sweat hard work and fun dance moves with the one and only jazzercise cool off with some light stretches and I’ll see you next time

let’s go jazzercisin’

exercisin’

oh let’s go jazzercise

get that tired ol’ body off

of the floor

let’s go jazzercise

some more

let’s go jazzercise

jazzercise
I visit my kids in the garage and ask them to pull me up from the floor I am heavy and swallowed steel my son has just invented astroturf I bend his knees your friends are missing from their homes they were plucked out as if by aliens where are the forty women of that city block I get caught between dotted notes we can fly to ypsilanti or austin and start a new life I was greedy I wanted all of everything from my straight friends those angry boys jerking off into socks their pubes on the toilet seat they text me at 3am to ask if I’m up and I answer I am piecing together the last remains of the flight
crash the pilot blinded by the sun
pink mustard I can feel it here in the
studio I know it is true it’s familiar
and it fizzles across the june sky
parking lot long summer the evil eye
JAZZ EXERCISE IS A LANGUAGE
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Greetings comrade! Thank you for talking to us about your process today!

Can you introduce yourself, in a way that you would choose?

I'm Gabriel Ojeda-Sague, I'm a Latino, gay poet living in Philly, originally from Miami.

Why are you a poet/writer/artist?

Because I write. I started writing without a clear understanding of why when I was about 16. It was all very bad and I wasn’t very committed to it either. Around 19 or so, it clicked more accurately that I was interested in aesthetics and the untrueness of aesthetics. Writing is the field of the arts that I understand the most and have the most love for, so I committed to that craft over the others (though to be fair, I love the others). In doing so, I’ve found my understanding of poetry as a simulation of language, experience, and aesthetics. The word “simulation” there is key for me because it marks that a poem is not true, and that gap is what I try to exploit the most.

What’s a “poet” (or “writer” or “artist”) anyway?

Someone who writes what they identify as poetry. I know that’s a boring answer, but it is really necessary, because it avoids and contradicts my three least favorite answers to this kind of question: 1) people who refuse to call themselves poets out of embarrassment, insecurity, inexperience, and so they think of poet as a far-away thing 2) people who get overly dramatic and are like “poets are mountains!” or something like that, and 3) people who use poetry as an honorific, like calling songwriters poets just because they have beautiful and complex lyrics. It’s insulting to both songwriters and poets. So I want poet to be the person who writes poetry and who interacts with communities of others who are poets. It’s as simple as that for me.

What do you see as your cultural and social role (in the literary / artistic / creative community and beyond)?

This is a tough one for me. Ask me this one year ago and I would say that poets don’t do anything. That poetry can’t enact. This was me being, I think, a bit bitter about
the language around “activist” poetics, which I think is often insulting. Nowadays, I’m really not sure. So my answer is, I don’t know. In the artistic community, it is just about continuing, evolving, transforming, and making conversations around the aesthetic, social, environmental, political, emotional, ontological, epistemological, and/or the semiotic. To the rest of the world? I can’t figure it out. Maybe it just has to do with making someone think differently for the time they are interacting with your work.

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 really think I’m at my best in a book. When I write page poems, I make them strong and inconclusive because I am very against the idea of the whole poem, the poem that ends with applause, the tight drawstring bag poem. As well, it has to do with the business of poetry too, since the big lit mags thrive off of writing that can live inside one page. I’ve been moving towards long poems and book projects for some years now because I think there is something much more humane about the process of book-making, especially alongside a smart and kind press that knows what it is doing. Instead of, hey I write this and I send it to the Kenyon Review or some shit and I pay whatever the read fee is and then it gets rejected and 10,000 people are also doing this and none of us win out because they are going to solicit 15 out of the 20 people that will be in their new issue anyways. So the book or the body of work has never scared me, in fact it’s freed my thinking and made it more concrete.

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?

This book started with the title of it. I showed my friend a funny mash-up video of Judi Sheppard Missett quotes and me and her were talking about the way she speaks and how specific her words are. And at some point I kinda just said “yeah, Jazzercise is like its own language” and thought “hey wait a minute!” And so I had a title and I knew I wanted to write a poetry book about Jazzercise and its language and I thought okay well what’s the argument of the book. And so over some thinking, I started writing a few pages of it. I looked at what was happening in the pages that I wrote and thought, okay I think I understand my argument. I think I know what I’m thinking in this poem. Then, I asked the poet Julia Bloch to organize with me and help me format my thinking. We did it as an “independent study” and I wrote and she helped me understand where the project was going and we shared a lot of dialogue about it. And bam.
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?

Reference the above for the literal structure of writing this. Julia and I came up with a “syllabus” (a tool I have been continuing to use in new projects) of readings that might guide me while I was writing. Lots of amazing books that I read and reference and wrote towards and away from. The only constrictive practices were the forms in the poem. The poem has 3 forms. The first is a “paragraph” of justified prose, with phrases divided by colons. The second is two crescents of writing, one left aligned, one right aligned, with the right aligned part positioned three lines lower than the left. The third is a justified column of continuous text with 3 lines of space between each line of text.

All of these had exact margin measurements that I worked out, but I can't remember the numbers right now. But it was very exacting. So the text had to fit inside of these structures in appealing ways, causing some words to not be usable in certain places. For example, in the third section say I wanted a line that said “bla bla bla I am on the freeway” but the word freeway was too long, causing it to go over the justification margin meaning the entire word freeway would move to the next line and the words “bla bla bla I am on the” would be stretched out by the justification algorithm. That wouldn't work for me, visually, so I picked a different word. So these algorithms change the text. It's a bit like slicing off limbs, but that has an appeal in and of itself. Aesthetically, not medically.

Speaking of monikers, how does your process of naming (individual pieces, sections, etc) influence you and/or color your work specifically, beyond this text?

I will say that a title is really important to me. A good title can really help a book and a bad title can really ruin it. For example, I really hate those titles that are in vogue with lots of poets that are like “How to put a bottle back together, or you called me last night but I was busy watching Real Housewives so I ignored it.” I mean, I can't stand them. For a while, I thought “Jazercise is a Language” might be too overdramatic, but then I thought HELLO we're talking about Jazercise! It's all meant to be tacky so I'm keeping it.

I think my favorite title of mine was for a short story I wrote a while back (I have a negative relationship to the 4 short stories I wrote, published two. I don't really write short stories anymore but, who knows, maybe I’ll return to it), which was called “Milk for Lulu with Child,” which was about a gay teen boy giving milk to a teen girl who was pregnant. It’s literally just a description of the plot, but it does its job. Also, I currently like the title of a poem that I wrote recently called “Lanes,” it's about that
game Plants v Zombies which is a lane-defense game, but it is also a pun on “Lines” which is the title of oh so many poems. I like titles like that. Simple, descriptive, turn the work only slightly and don't stab at it.

What does this particular work represent to you, as indicative of your method/creative practice?

I think it is the best example of my practice of writing on viewer-experience of different forms of media. This has been my main theme for sometime and motivates my chapbooks on The Joy of Gay Sex, Cher’s twitter, and The Legend of Zelda, as well as some individual poems like my poem on The Binding of Isaac. I think “Jazzercise is a Language” is the most accomplished my thinking on these subjects has been thus far.

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

This book is a way of interpreting and closely investigating the way the aesthetics of Jazzercise, camp, neon, aerobics, intersect with Jazzercise’s racial/body politics through the lens of a Latino, gay, gender-discordant viewer subject (hey, that's me!).

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?

I want people to read it and I want people to see that the media we shrug off as not-worthy of interpretation can and should be taken seriously and critically. This is not to say there's no fun in it, and actually I think there’s a lot of fun in the book! But let's not pretend that we should let anything stand as it is.

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.”

This is a huge question, with so many different answers and so many topics to cover, many of which I have experienced myself as a Latino person, as a gay person, as a gender-discordant person, as the child of exiles from Cuba, etc. My philosophy in short has been that we need to work against the network, the web of dominant connections that the literary world rides on, continues to manifest, and uses at the expense of other producing nodes. I think its near impossible for your average young person, no formal training, low publication count, to get a book published in a respected press. The problem here is manifold, the problem here is the idea that one must rely on the respected press, the problem here is that people mine the
MFAs lists for people to solicit, the problem here is that editors invite the same people other editors are publishing because they know they are good already, the problem here is that the young person can only get that book published with down and dirty networking skills that a lot of people don’t have, the problem here is that you have to put in 50 times the work and effort to get to the career point that somebody else is at where they can put in minimal effort and still get a really nice publishing deal, the problem here is that big presses solicit the same authors again and again and again, the problem here is that everybody is so hungry for that success that so many people forget that they have a local community of writers who are doing great work and that the only thing you need to do to collaborate with those people is show up to a quiet bar reading and open your ears, the problem here is manifold.

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

I want to mention that the performance of this book includes me in full Jazzerciser drag, lip-synching to Judi Sheppard Missett videos. Fun for the whole family, as they say.
JAZZERCISE READING LIST

Below is the reading list Julia Bloch and I drafted that guided me as I wrote. We divided the list into sections that focus on different purposes for the work’s inclusion. I have added a few works that were not part of our official reading list, but that also were in my mind during the process. I place it here for your viewing because I believe this transparency is useful towards the reading of the book. And perhaps you might find something you like.

WATCHING EXERCISE VIDEOS

“Fitness is a Feminist Issue“ - Tara Brabazon
Shifting Time and Space: The Story of Videotape - Eugene Marlow, Eugene Secunda
Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship from VHS to File-Sharing - Caetlin Benson-Allot
“Where is the Jazz in Jazzercise?” - Sherrie Tucker
“Down with Disembodiment; or, Musicology and the Material Turn” - Holly Watkins, Melina Esse
The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader
Mature Themes - Andrew Durbin
“Queer Exercises“ - David Getsy
“Becoming an Image,” “Cuts: A Traditional Sculpture” - (Heather) Cassils
Relationscapes - Erin Manning
Grapefruit - Yoko Ono
Ecodeviance - CAConrad

RACE, OR SEEING YOURSELF IN OTHERS

White Girls - Hilton Als
Ban en Banlieue - Bhanu Kapil
S*PeRM**K*T - Harryette Mullen
Dream Machine - Sade Murphy
Empathy - Mei-mei Berrsenbrugge
Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics - Jose Muñoz
Remember to Wave - Kaia Sand
Action Kylie - Kevin Killian
Letters to Kelly Clarkson - Julia Bloch

FORM

Titanic - Cecilia Corrigan
The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You - Frank Stanford
Estilo - Dolores Dorantes
Midwinter Day - Bernadette Mayer
GABRIEL OJEDA-SAGUE is a Miami <-> Philly gay, Latino Leo living in Philadelphia, PA. He is the author of the poetry books *Jazzercise is a Language* (The Operating System, 2018) and *Oil and Candle* (Timeless, Infinite Light, 2016). He is also the author of chapbooks on gay sex, Cher, the Legend of Zelda, and anxious bilingualism. His third book *Losing Miami*, on the potential sinking of Miami due to climate change and sea level rise, is forthcoming from Civil Coping Mechanisms.
Why Print/Document?

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

- Lynne DeSilva-Johnson, Founder/Managing Editor,
  THE OPERATING SYSTEM, Brooklyn NY 2017
TITLES IN THE PRINT: DOCUMENT COLLECTION

An Absence So Great and Spontaneous It Is Evidence of Light - Anne Gorrick [2018]
The Book of Everyday Instruction - Chloe Bass [2018]
Executive Orders Vol. II - a collaboration with the Organism for Poetic Research [2018]
One More Revolution - Andrea Mazzariello [2018]
The Suitcase Tree - Filip Marinovich [2018]
Chlorosis - Michael Flatt and Derrick Mund [2018]
Sussuros a Mi Padre - Erick Sáenz [2018]
Sharing Plastic - Blake Nemec [2018]
The Book of Sounds - Mehdi Navid (Farsi dual language, trans. Tina Rahimi) [2018]
In Corpore Sano : Creative Practice and the Challenged Body [Anthology, 2018];
Lynne DeSilva-Johnson and Jay Besemer, co-editors
Abandoners - Lesley Ann Wheeler [2018]
Jazzercise is a Language - Gabriel Ojeda-Sague [2018]
Return Trip / Viaje Al Regreso; Dual Language Edition -
Israel Dominguez,(trans. Margaret Randall) [2018]
Born Again - Ivy Johnson [2018]
Attendance - Rocío Carlos and Rachel McLeod Kaminer [2018]
Singing for Nothing - Wally Swist [2018]
The Ways of the Monster - Jay Besemer [2018]
Walking Away From Explosions in Slow Motion - Gregory Crosby [2018]
Field Guide to Autobiography - Melissa Eleftherion [2018]
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2018 : Greater Grave - Jacq Greyja; Needles of Itching Feathers -
Jared Schlickling; Want-Catcher - Adra Raine; We, The Monstrous - Mark DuCharme
Lost City Hydrothermal Field - Peter Milne Greiner [2017]
An Exercise in Necromancy - Patrick Roche [Bowery Poetry Imprint, 2017]
Love, Robot - Margaret Rhee[2017]
La Comandante Maya - Rita Valdivia (dual language, trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]
The Furies - William Considine [2017]
Nothing Is Wasted - Shabnam Piryaei [2017]
Mary of the Seas - Joanna C. Valente [2017]
Secret-Telling Bones - Jessica Tyner Mehta [2017]
CHAPBOOK SERIES 2017 : INCANTATIONS
featuring original cover art by Barbara Byers
sp. - Susan Charkes; Radio Poems - Jeffrey Cyphers Wright; Fixing a Witch/Hexing the
Stitch - Jacklyn Janeksela; cosmos a personal voyage by carl sagan ann druyan steven
sotor and me - Connie Mae Oliver
Flower World Variations, Expanded Edition/Reissue - Jerome
Rothenberg and Harold Cohen [2017]
What the Werewolf Told Them / Lo Que Les Dijo El Licantrupo -
Chely Lima (trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]
The Color She Gave Gravity - Stephanie Heit [2017]
The Science of Things Familiar - Johnny Damm [Graphic Hybrid, 2017]
agon - Judith Goldman [2017]
To Have Been There Then / Estar Alli Entonces - Gregory Randall
(trans. Margaret Randall) [2017]

Instructions Within - Ashraf Fayadh [2016]
Arabic-English dual language edition; Mona Kareem, translator
Let it Die Hungry - Caits Meissner [2016]
A GUN SHOW - Adam Sliwinski and Lynne DeSilva-Johnson;
So Percussion in Performance with Ain Gordon and Emily Johnson [2016]
Everybody’s Automat [2016] - Mark Gurarie
How to Survive the Coming Collapse of Civilization [2016] - Sparrow

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2016: OF SOUND MIND
*featuring the quilt drawings of Daphne Taylor
Improper Maps - Alex Crowley; While Listening - Alaina Ferris;
Chords - Peter Longofono; Any Seam or Needlework - Stanford Cheung

MARILYN [2015] - Amanda Ngoho Reavey

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2015: OF SYSTEMS OF
*featuring original cover art by Emma Steinkraus
Cyclorama - Davy Knittle; The Sensitive Boy Slumber Party Manifesto - Joseph Cuillier; Neptune Court - Anton Yakovlev; Schema - Anurak Saelow
Moons Of Jupiter/Tales From The Schminke Tub [plays, 2014] - Steve Danziger

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2014: BY HAND
Pull, A Ballad - Maryam Parhizkar; Can You See that Sound - Jeff Musillo
Executive Producer Chris Carter - Peter Milne Greiner;
Spooky Action at a Distance - Gregory Crosby;

CHAPBOOK SERIES 2013: WOODBLOCK
*featuring original prints from Kevin William Reed
Strange Coherence - Bill Considine; The Sword of Things - Tony Hoffman;
Talk About Man Proof - Lancelot Runge / John Kropa; An Admission as a Warning Against the Value of Our Conclusions - Alexis Quinlan
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 docre, 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
is a project of
the trouble with bartleby
in collaboration with
the operating system