Shaping Grief: A Lesbian Poetics of Dismembering

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ABSTRACT

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A lesbian poetics of dismembering, as I argue, is a creative process that disorients from general notions of body and memory. Through examining such a poetics, found across a selection of lesbian works of grief, I critique the modes by which the state coerces, co-opts, and mobilizes a certain crafting of the body and memory in efforts to amass and concentrate power, as well as how desire and grief are taken up both in service of, and counter to, such statecraft operations. I aim to both emphasize and take part in a lesbian poetics that destroys the very terms of empire–fleeing its own uptake and offering nothing to fill this gap; no balm for this uncertainty.

Dedication

My craft practice derives from grief's heft. The artworks presented here are dedicated to a lost beloved–your sweet and brief being is the air of this world, always.

And, the words and all of the spaces between are dedicated, obviously, to the gushing, soft, and flickering out of my first and forever love, in and through our own dismembering, together and beyond.

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Introduction

"*New Ending. All over the world the beautiful red breezes went on blowing hand in hand.*"[1]

The very notion of lesbian contains a kind of loss within it. Not because the actual existence of lesbians is in decline, but because the record of our having existed is always in ruin. Of course, within a matrix of misogyny and homophobia, the origins of our spaces, styles, and stories are often first to fade from wider cultural memory or identity, and their traces are felt as hauntings within heterosexualized architectures. But further, I will argue that, at its core, what is termed *lesbian* is an opening, a space that gapes after a rupture in sedimented meaning. Lesbian comprises loss or lost-ness because it is not whole; it is not a thing, but a movement that tears at whatever is symbolically fixed. It strays from power. Monique Wittig famously wrote that lesbians are not women:[2] in breaking from heterosexual social organization, lesbians forge cracks in taxonomies of the normal. The term itself is fleeting; lesbian is taken up, hammered down, celebrated, co-opted, denounced, and misunderstood in perpetuity. Whereas neoliberal forces seek to contain and domesticate that which gathers here, lesbian has evaded fixity, is always a transitivity to otherness. Lesbian introduces the trouble, and what is made here is always ephemeral, because one cannot record into permanence what is a crack – only that which fills it in, again and again.

My research/creation thesis takes up lesbian works of grief: Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien,*[3] the AIDS Memorial Quilt,[4] and Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries,*[5] reading for a *lesbian poetics of dismembering*: crafted disruptions of body and memory, toward tracing out shared shapes or forces of lesbian desire and grief. The work is both interrupted and informed by the relationships across central textual/textile forms: paradox, grid, and list.

My creative component takes up quilting, dyeing, paper and bookmaking to produce a series of 'bodies of grief' that take part in the lesbian poetics I refer to throughout this written work. My craft practice takes up the the materiality of remains toward making minute and transitory memorials, briefly grasping the sensory or affective imprint of a thing. As my selected texts make evident, I am interested in all that is made possible through the forms of the quilt and the book. I consider both techniques of containment as modes of being with the structure of grief – a structure of sheer ineffability, beyond language, beyond narrative, and beyond memory. Both quilts and books tend to be taken up as vessels for these very notions: they contain and maintain information that is meant to carry memory (history, tradition) into the future. Yet, they are assemblages of bound fibre–they are essentially fleeting; bound for decay. Taking up these

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[1] Anne Carson, *Autobiography of Red* (Vintage, NY, 1998), 32.

[2] Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," *The Straight Mind and Other Essays (*NY: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1980), 32.

[3] Monique Wittig, *Le corps lesbien,* Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1973.

[4] NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, 1985.

[5] Dionne Brand, *Ossuaries,* McLelland and Stewart, 2010.

age-old crafts is an engagement with literal archives of knowledge and metaphysical archives of the ancient information held in cloth and fibre, in cuts of felted wool, wisps of cotton and strands of silk. I engage these techniques in ways that break from hegemonic craft and cleave open possibilities for craft as grief ritual. The series shared here contains three quilts and a book made with overlapping elements: dyed silk and cotton scraps, milkweed floss, sheep wool, cemetery hawthorn branches, Japanese indigo that I grew last summer, salt and rust, needles and thread. They do not tell stories, they are the feelings of – and extensions of – place. *Untitled II* is a book that signals our being amid the terrain of writing in the absence of words, subjects, or story. The odd etchings and embedded flecks of silk in its fibrous pages become something to be read. The quilting on *Passage* – that which technically marks it as a quilt as such – is text, barely legible in my painstakingly hand-sewn scrawled cursive. The silk tops of *Untitled I* and *II* reveal makeshift battings of sheep wool, milkweed floss, and dyed fabric scraps – meaningful ecologies stripped of context and shredded into soft and strangely fleshy middles. The quilted lines of *Untitled I* go on and on, unfinished as tangles of knots extending beyond the piece. All of these pieces reiterate similar techniques and materials, their remnants and shreds sharing past lives, coming from the same harvest or vat. Images of these works will punctuate the writing that follows.

A lesbian poetics of dismembering, I suggest, is a creative process grown from within grief which disorients from general notions of body and memory. I consider this lesbian poetics – where 'lesbian' means something like rupture, and 'poetics', from the Greek 'to make– ' as a craft of disruption. The selected works engage with the matter of melancholic grief: they reproduce its very structure as a force of disorientation, which veers from meaning and affects the body. Grief is precisely ineffable and uncontainable. I'm interested in any attempts made to write into its chasm in ways that replicate its materiality, its disorderly circling; its weather–not towards covering over the empty space through which it emanates, but without ends at all. All writing engages with ruination: converting the world to words is a violent process, a series of small deaths. Writing is a quiet funeral: a process of making that facilitates encounters with loss as it produces, and grieves, its own losses. The lesbian works I engage here are exemplary of certain techniques for writing into the form of grief, tending also towards materialities of death and decay, violence, as well as the desire pulsing throughout.

The craft of disruption is also a rupturing of craft itself. Hegemonic craft, meaning that which is bound to and reproduced by neoliberal institutions of Art and regimes of capital more broadly, serves to reinforce norms. Craft, here, becomes a "machine for regulation, estrangement, [and] sanitization."[6] In the craft of writing, a key mechanism is that of narrative: the structuring of time and space that claims to represent reality. Traditional narrative climbs, peaks, and settles, effecting a catharsis that "[purges] an audience's revolutionary emotion."[7] It organizes the very space of possibility for feeling. It draws the limits around an entire culture's imaginary. Narrative

[6] Fargo Nissim Tbakhi, "Notes on Craft: Writing in the Hour of Genocide" *Protean Mag,* Dec 8, 2023.
[7] Ibid.

writes its world as the world. Through narrative, craft animates only certain forms of bodies and memories, preserving empire by stifling feelings and histories of dissent. A lesbian poetics of dismembering moves against such machinery, and seeks only to wedge further open all those cracks already punctured by lifeworlds of resistance. Its poetics is irrevocably in tension, this careful making of fracture. My work hopes only to deepen the tension, to heighten its contrast, and to take part via my own material practice.

Buckets of ink have been spilt over Freud's murky dyad, mourning and melancholia, in the decades since its publication in 1917. I am as interested in his distinction as in its crumbling, provoked by both his own revision and the ways that the work has been popularly taken up. I am, however, most interested in the ways that the body of grief – a body suffering from the pain of loss, and a body that cannot quite be parsed from loss itself – seems to have absconded from its own field of theorization.[8] Whereas Freudian mourning centres on the psyche and its rehabilitation, grief is essentially a force affecting the body, made clear by its etymological proximity to gravity–both stemming from *gravis* (weighty). "[Grief] begins with a pressure on the body, a dragging the body down to earth like gravity."[9] For Freud, successful mourning requires the gradual removal of one's psychic investments from the lost object, and their reinvestment elsewhere. Mourning is essentially work–the work of memory,[10] and only through such work can the psyche become "free and uninhibited again."[11] Mourning gradually transforms the object of loss into memory. The subject in mourning must delimit itself from this lost other in a process of decathexis, by which the ego's libidinal attachments are divested and redirected onto a different, living object. Melancholia, then, names the pathological form of mourning, or refusal to mourn (remember), by which the process is cauterized, transpiring into a psychic split. This formulation hinges on teleology, imbuing time with meaning through constructed end goals. The condition of melancholia signals a subject's failure to decathect: having failed to separate itself from its lost other, the subject thus identifies its own ego with/as the object of loss. This process of identification loops, interminably. The work of separating self and other is what enables anything to become incorporated as an object of memory. Thus, mourning not only shares a temporality with the work of memory but is essentially the same process.

Mourning takes time. Melancholia, in its looping, adheres to time; time without progress or point–sheer disorientation. Distinct from the arc of mourning, which skews toward a return to normalcy, both grief and melancholia resist the meaning provided by ends. I will take up both terms not as interchangeable but intimately connected, where melancholic grief is bound to the body, time(-lessness), and (refusal of) memory. Thinking grief (*gravitas*) as primarily a force or

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[8] See Laura E. Tanner (2006) and Eugenie Brinkema (2014).

[9] Eugenie Brinkema, "The Illumination of Light", *The Forms of the Affects* (Duke University Press, 2014), 73.

[10] Jean Laplanche in Brinkema, 57.

[11] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," trans. Joan Riviere. In *Freud: General Psychological Theory,* ed. Philip Rieff, (New York: Touchstone, 1991), 245.

pressure recenters the body as that which bears the weight of loss, and reveals a formal relationship shared across grief and other forces such as desire, weather, violence, and disorientation. Together, these forces coalesce a lesbian poetics of dismembering that apply pressure to common notions of body and memory, splitting each open for further examining.

As grief drags the body down to the earth, I begin in the dirt of the cemetery, looking at the ecologies of grief in Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien.* Following Wittig's own remarks on the novel, I discuss her use of paradox in structure and content as a device for fracturing narrative and destroying the possibility of a body and its work of mourning. Grief in *Le corps lesbien* is a force that moves like weather in and through the body, and is lined with a desire as engulfing as the book's general atmosphere of decay. I engage closely with the work of Teresa de Lauretis on the limitless form of lesbian desire, arguing that *Le corps lesbien* writes an atmosphere of paradox that reveals lesbian grief and desire as sharing one form. In my second chapter, "Grid, Point, Patchwork", I explore the form of the grid through the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Diverging from traditional monuments, the Quilt renders a material refusal to make meaning out of mass queer death. I propose that the sheer disorientation produced by this grid renders the Quilt a commons of grief, more a site for becoming lost amid the pointless infinitude that is queer death than a memory aid to facilitate mourning. Finally, my third chapter "Accounting for Loss" takes up the form of the list by engaging with Dionne Brand's long poem entitled Ossuaries, which catalogues an endless index of objects lost to the atmosphere of totalizing violence that is the colonial, carceral world. I argue that Brand's listing reveals not only an attempt to remember but also the crucial practice of forgetting such violence: a somehow hopeful practice that skews toward some other time: one that lives in all the blank spaces between the page's lost objects. Taken together, these selected works reveal the modes by which the shapes of lesbian craft gather towards a general disruption of sedimentations of meaning, a profound fissure in the forces of violence that lay claim to this world.

With a focus on this lesbian poetics of dismembering, I critique the modes by which state and capital coerce, co-opt, and mobilize a certain crafting of the body and memory in efforts to amass and concentrate power, as well as how desire and grief are taken up both in service of, and counter to, such statecraft operations. I aim to both emphasize and take part in a lesbian poetics that denies and destroys the very terms and tools of empire–fleeing its own uptake and offering nothing to fill this gap; no balm for this uncertainty.

Why build a world atop this one? A crack in the edifice for wind to pass through is already a happy ending.

Untitled I, Abby Maxwell (2024).
Silk, cotton, maple bark, acorn, apple bark, iron, sheep wool and shredded fabric batting

Untitled I, Abby Maxwell (2024), details

I. Atmosphere of Paradox: Wittig's *Le corps lesbien*

Sometime before its publication in August 1973, the pages of Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien* were "spread flat on the ground", a collage of fragments not yet organized into what she felt to be the first of its kind: "a book totally lesbian in its theme, its vocabulary, its texture, from the first page to the last, from title page to back cover."[12] When its title came to her, she laughed aloud," for one can laugh even in anguish." As she later remarked, "can you realize how hilarious it was for me?…'lesbian' by its proximity to 'body' seemed to me to destabilize the general notion of the body… a kind of paradox but not really, a kind of joke but not really, a kind of impossibility but not really."[13] The (kind of) paradox that is *the lesbian body* is not only the novel's title but its general atmosphere: as the text unravels, its inundating force fractures the common senses of sex and desire, life and death, body and world, language and meaning, beginning and end: disheveled beyond recognition. Throughout the following chapter, I will analyze Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien,* tracing out the development of a lesbian poetics of dismembering through the use of paradox.

Wittig begins with the blank space of the page: "this space that may at any time become an abyss for all writers, an abyss from which one always takes the risk of not rising."[14] She feels the emptiness of the page more potently, in this moment, for the paucity of lesbian literature preceding her own. The title comes to her first, which provokes the use of cold, technical lists of body parts to punctuate the text: "THE LESBIAN BODY THE JUICE THE SPITTLE THE SALIVA THE SNOT THE SWEAT THE TEARS THE WAX THE URINE THE FAECES THE EXCREMENTS THE BLOOD THE LYMPH THE JELLY THE WATER THE CHYLE THE CHYME THE HUMOURS THE SECRETIONS THE PUS…"[15] The list, at first, indexes *the lesbian body*, fortifying its categorical difference. However, Wittig's incessant enumeration provokes the complete deconstruction of its very possibility. By the novel's end, the titular body sputters and weeps, oozing out of and folding in on itself at once: "*I* melt, *I* disintegrate *I* am burnt up m/y wretched mistress you devour m/e too precipitately."[16]

In writing a "totally lesbian" book, the terms of the lesbian and the body are imbued with uncommon senses, resignified as a violent opening; a dismembering of the enclosures of self, desire, and body. Throughout, the narrator *I* recounts erotic memories shared with her lover, addressed in the second person. Each brief story is given the space of a page, a mere glimpse into

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[12] Monique Wittig, "Remarks on The Lesbian Body" (Self-Published, year unknown), 96.

[13] Ibid, 100.

[14] Ibid, 98.

[15] Monique Wittig, *The Lesbian Body*, trans. David Le Vay (William Morrow and Company Inc, 1975), 28.

[16] Wittig, *The Lesbian Body,* 162.

the relationship between *I* and You–and, in nearly every passage, their sexual acts unravel into their destruction of each others' bodies: "You turn m/e inside out, *I* am a glove in your hands."[17]

In its original French, Wittig names her protagonist 'J/e'; she is slashed open as she speaks herself into being. 'J/e' is translated into pure slash for the English version – just the pronoun '*I*' in italics. This slash or line, for Wittig, is "a sign that helps to imagine an excess of 'I', an 'I' exalted in its lesbian passion."[18] Along with her body, the very possibility of 'I', the speaking subject, is torn open, turned inside out, and made into thing. *I* finds herself more outside herself: fused with her surrounds. For Wittig, this '*I*' signifies the violence of lesbian passion, where each word "[attacks] the order of heterosexuality", and "lesbianizes" or violates common notions, symbols, and characters.[19] She remarks that "nothing resists this '*I*' … which spreads itself in the whole world of the book, like a lava flow that nothing can stop."[20] *I* and You do not name two subjects, two lesbians, or two bodies. Rather, each becomes the other at every turn of the page: assemblages of being in decay. Wittig writes: "this '*I*' and this 'you' are interchangeable. There is no hierarchy between '*I*' and 'you' which is its same. Also the '*I*' and the 'you' are multiple. One could consider that in each fragment they are different protagonists."[21] This "sweeping subjectivity"[22] disrupts the organization of difference, veering from signification. "Indeed, it is hard not to slip amid so many splits, so many ecstatically partitioned bodies."[23] And, as meaning drifts and gushes, *the lesbian body* diffuses into an atmospheric paradox.

/ *Interstice: PARADOX*

Paradox, or beside (*para*) common belief (*doxa*), constructs a state of uncertainty from within a concept. Paradox actualizes through a constitutive tension, where each of its elements subvert the given meaning of others. Meaning is a social phenomenon: socialization gives weight to common sense because it is not innate, but taught. The process of socialization fabricates innate meaning, ordering all things into categories to make sense of the world, and to make this sense common. These categories tend to come in sets of opposing pairs, such as good/evil, male/

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[17] Ibid, 86.

[18] Wittig, "Remarks," 100.

[19] Ibid, 104.

[20] Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (NY: Harvester/Wheatsheaf, 1992), 100.

[21] Wittig, "Remarks," 104.

[22] Seth Clark Silberman, "'I Have Access to Your Glottis': The Fleshy Syntax, Ethical Irony, and Queer Intimacy of Monique Wittig's Le corps lesbien", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies,* vol. 13, no. 4 (Duke University Press, 2007), 470.

[23] Silberman, 473.

female, self/other, body/world, life/death, order/chaos. Paradox interrupts binary sorting, pricking holes in the entire logical system–empty spaces in which alternative, even incongruous signification might arise. This process can be physically startling: its violation of common sense disturbs the body as it disrupts the very notion of what is true. Paradox does not resolve tension, but deepens it. Its form is against resolution and, thus, against narrative. Narrative requires a reader, and relies on common sense. Paradox is necessary for poetry, and poetry is made of paradox: the placing of words with and against each other induces collapse, allowing space for other genealogies of meaning, of being. Paradox is an earthly form or force, sheer tension across verbal matter, in motion, forever. Paradox is unstable, unfixed, and, thus, anti-identitarian. All of history is paradox: a set of forces in tension, circling. What becomes "common" is created instrumentally; it has a context and a use. Thus, history and/as paradox render all conclusions uneasy, all assumptions unsettling. Paradox is a perturbation beneath the paved grounds of signification.

/ Asymmetrical Symmetry

In *Le corps lesbien,* paradox violates the truth of the body itself. The book is a body in fragments, at first, sprawled out on the author's studio floor. This grid of textual limbs and fasciae could be pieced together in endless configurations. Wittig opts to duplicate each passage, writing for each an other that takes "slightly different form and meaning", thus creating a kind of "asymmetrical symmetry". She writes: "the book is thus formed in two parts. It opens and falls back on itself. One can compare its form to a cajounut, to an almond, to a vulva."[24] The book's format is a paradox, a story whose shape erodes at its own ability to 'tell'. Because each fragment contains a renewed iteration of narrator *I* and her lover You, and because their bodies are reassembled with each page break, no developments take place–every shift, claim, or feeling is as brief as its passage. Stitched together as if scenes in a cinematic montage, each little scrap of text flickers and goes out, its afterimage touching the next.

What is notable here is that this foundational paradox is only revealed to be paradoxical through its resonance with the matter of the text–the novel's body is violated by its own unfolding world. Ecology penetrates the body in a violent intimacy; the paradox not only invades this binary of body and world but turns it inside out. Body asks to be entered, world answers, always inundating and splitting the body open from within:

> "The soil of the garden slides between your teeth, your saliva moistens it, you feed m/e with it your tongue in m/y mouth your hands on m/y cheeks…*I* liquefy within and without…a very strong smell of moist earth spreads around. *I* see plants rooted in the fibres of m/y muscles."[25]

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[24] Wittig, "Remarks," 104.

[25] Wittig, *The Lesbian Body,* 72.

Garden soil invades the body, intestines are inundated and split open by seawater, skin is blistered and broken by nettle stings, mouths are filled with sand, eye sockets are stuffed with flies. At times, the human characters turn into cats, birds, and snakes. *I,* You, and these earthly elements are blurred into one unparseable assemblage: self, other, body, world, desired object, lost object. World entering world, destroying world, grieving world.

Wittig's paradox calls attention to the state's precise configuration of the body, a construction that bolsters its own claims to power. This body is figured through a calculus of produced antagonisms–gender, race, sexuality, nationality, class, ability, and so on. Such an evaluation must conceptualize the body as fixed; an enclosed, discrete being. If certain value thresholds are met, the body is interpellated as such within the national body politic: worthy of state recognition or citizenship–worthy of life. A body politics centred around eugenicist sorting practices is utilized by states as they attempt to extend their reach, categorizing its people by worth, expunging any threats from within, and fortifying its borders to defend from the perpetual risk of its outside. Neoliberal statecraft functions by rhetorically recoding the revolutionary sense of freedom, as in the liberation from and breakdown of hegemonic, concentrated power, into a hyper-individualist freedom, as in liberation from the burdens of collective responsibility; freedom to consume in an unfettered market with truncated social welfare. Statecraft really is a craft: it is the creation of a narrative, it sets up false plots that produce catharsis, distracting its people from the fact of their own vanishing access to power and support.

With the rise of neoliberalism, gay and lesbian activism diverged from its radical beginnings in the gay liberation movement toward a politics of assimilation focusing on securing the rights to conform and to consume. Such a project required the co-optation of state operations of sorting: anyone unable to comply with the new standards of homonormativity were ostracized from the community. Even within the critical world of *queer,* a term born in 1990 as a critique of the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian as identity categories, a liberal tendency is evident. As David L. Eng, José Esteban Muñoz, and Jack Halberstam argued in 2005, "mechanisms of normalization have endeavoured to organize not only gay and lesbian politics but also the internal workings of [queer studies] itself, attempting to constitute its governing logic around certain privileged subjects, standards of sexual conduct, and political and intellectual engagements."[26] Queer, for queer studies, must be firmly understood as "a political metaphor without a fixed referent."[27] However, in the two decades since this essay was published, *queer* has not only joined the ranks of identity categories but has been singularly mainstreamed and resignified as a synonym for progress, propping up the imperial efforts of liberal states. As I write, Canada- and US-backed Israel drops bombs on Palestine under the pink-washed banner of liberal democracy, explicitly and horrifically revealing the state to be nothing other than an apparatus of genocide paired with a carefully crafted narrative. Simultaneously, queer and, most

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[26] David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz "Introduction: What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" (Social Text, Volume 23, Number 84-85, 2005), 4.

[27] Ibid, 1.

drastically, trans rights are being deteriorated by the exact same political entities claiming that destroying Palestinian land and life is a move in the direction of global progress.

The political and intellectual promises of queer studies have yet to be delivered on: *queer* all too quickly, and predictably, "collapses back into 'gay and lesbian' and, more often than not, a 'possessive individualism' that simply connotes 'gay,' 'white,' and 'male.'"[28] Despite its inception as an analytic, deconstructive tool geared towards dismantling the entire field of normalization, the use of *queer* has devolved into a placating balm, smoothing over the cracks of a dissonant and violent social world. The authors ask: "is 'queer liberalism' no longer a paradox?"[29] The paradox structuring *Le corps lesbien* mirrors this question–its tension is only revealed as such through the book's text. Within neoliberal thought, *the lesbian body* presents perfect logic: the body is imagined in and through rigid identity categories–a certain notion of the body is the central figure of any politics. For Wittig, the title in its articulation must produce anguish, as should 'queer liberalism' for all those invested in queer's use as a tool of critique.

In "Desiring Tension: Towards a Queer Politics of Paradox", Antke Engel argues that the use of paradox allows for a structural or aesthetic challenge to fixed binary oppositions and, further, is significant in queer politics as a mode of "dynamizing tension."[30] The paradox, for Engel, renders tension as "a circular dynamic driven by the prevalent simultaneity of incompatible elements," thus placing such elements in an ongoing relation of tension, a "reconciled irreconcilability," a constant struggle.[31] The paradox of *the lesbian body*, a phrase in decay, actually makes palpable its own interminable relation; an ongoing tension that moves in a circle rather than as a line connecting two poles.

The structure of the paradox is especially apt as a force of *Le corps lesbien* in its tracing of the shape of grief. It enables a way in to thinking grief that does not seek to represent it through narrative, but enters through its form. The book's architecture, its asymmetrical symmetry, affects the body as if a force of gravity. And, the book's atmosphere, its weather, its ecology – as well, a force that drags the body down to the ground and splits it open – produces a painful disorientation, veering from common sense toward a kind of endless circling. Grief is a paradox, a constant tension, logic's outside–and *Le corps lesbien,* in its content and form, tells of a grief that is more the world grieving itself, in violent passion. It is a force of weather, eroding any edifice or narrative of the body. The cajounut-shaped storyline does not reconcile, but folds in on itself: loss makes more loss. The lost body of the book is open, mingling with the world, rolling in nettle and swallowed by seawater and lying on the damp earth of the cemetery. In rupturing the body, *Le corps lesbien* refuses mourning; remaining with death and decay

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[28] Ibid, 12.

[29] Ibid, 10.

[30] Antke Engel, "Desiring Tension: Towards a Queer Politics of Paradox," in *Tension/Spannung*, ed. by Christoph F. E. Holzhey, Cultural Inquiry, 1 (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2010), 250.

[31] Engel, 243.

interminably.

/ The Desire of Desire

In "The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian: The Fantasy of Castration and the Signification of Desire," Teresa de Lauretis emphasizes the constitutive roles of castration and fetishism – both of which are theorized in Freudian psychoanalysis as exclusively male – in producing lesbian desire.[32] Freud theorizes castration as deriving from the inaccessibility of the mother's body, the original lost object of desire. Castration is, thus, the condition of possibility for all desire. Freud defines the female, in contrast to the male, by her condition of inherent lack. She has no shot at attaining the paternal phallus, this master signifier that marks (sexual) difference and signifies desire. She is effectively already castrated (lacking, lost), and is, therefore, unable to enter into desire except as its object–and she *is* enduringly its object, her body the natural lure of male desire.

As de Lauretis clearly states, the framing of desire here is "set in the perspective of normative heterosexuality (which indeed both psychoanalytic practice and theory strive to retrieve or induce in their subjects)."[33] However, through reading lesbian texts that express fantasies of castration and effectively speak a desire that is "not masculine, nor *simply* phallic,"[34] she proposes that lesbian desire must have its own object-signifier. She proposes the fetish: an object and signifier of desire, and an abstract entity that becomes sexually charged through a desiring fantasy. This fetish could be anything metonymically related to the lost object of desire–the (whole) maternal body, an object that was never there in the first place. This fetish is "at once what signifies [the lesbian's] desire and what her lover desires in her."[35] Desire is propelled by that of the other, simultaneously affirming and eliding their separation. In other words, "the lesbian fetish is any object, any sign whatsoever, that marks the difference and the desire between the lovers."[36] For Bersani and Dutoit, "the objects of our desires are always substitutes for the objects of our desires"[37]–there is no stable, original object; the entity signifying desire emerges precariously and remains so. Lesbian desire is, then, "an unending displacement and reinvestment of the drive from an originally lost object…onto the signifiers of desire itself." So lesbian desire is limitless: the desire of desire. These desiring lines have no terminus–"What one desires is her lover's perverse desire; her fetish, in which her castration or lack of being is both acknowledged and denied, also mediates the other's fantasmatic access to her originally lost

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[32] Teresa De Lauretis, "The Lure of the Mannish Lesbian: The Fantasy of Castration and the Signification of Desire," *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire,* (Indiana University Press, 1994).

[33] Ibid, 220.

[34] Ibid, 222, original emphasis.

[35] Ibid, 228.

[36] Ibid, 228.

[37] In de Lauretis, 229.

body."[38]

For de Lauretis, the fetish of lesbian desire is linked to the whole 'female' body, where female, for her, bears anatomical specificity. I would adjust her claim to argue that this body need not be 'female' but 'lesbian', which is as a term anatomically meaningless, but significant as it is situated in relationship to this very desire, which spirals on and on, boundless and in process, to no end besides moving in common thirst.

> "you are the water which comes and goes in the closest confines of m/y body m/y very glorious one m/y most eternal beloved, it seems that you are that which engulfs m/e now and for ever…"[39]

At once, the limitlessness of desire and its mirrored melancholic expanse are affirmed in Wittig's *Le corps lesbien,* as each passage repeats the process of fetishistic cathexis, imbued with lack that, in its excess, turns deadly. You and *I*'s sinuous lines of desire run on as unending sentences, withholding fulfillment. With each aphorism's decline into bodily destruction, Wittig emphasizes the trace of violence contained in desire, and with that, the melancholic lament of its predestined, and recurrent, loss. Desire is sustained eternally here via bodily dispossession–fluid and organs strewn across the textual floor: "*I* make holes in you with m/y fists, *I* pierce you through and through, *I* curse you in the excess of m/y adoration, *I* dismantle you…"[40] Whereas each paragraph seems to start fresh with its personae momentarily whole again, actual redemption is beyond the limits of possibility. Or, more accurately, the possibilities of *the lesbian body* are beyond the limits of redemption.

All poetry is pressure; a force that cleaves open meaning, symbol, and signal.[41] Sheer paradox, poetry brings together many forces to produce spirals of tension, to erode at common sense. Wittig's poetics speaks through the shared shapes of lesbian desire and grief, two forces in tension, and crafts a kind of wind that makes more of itself endlessly. As Édouard Glissant writes in *The Poetics of Relation,* the world's poetic force, "kept alive within us, …never runs dry because it is its own turbulence."[42] As desire and grief are placed, poetically, in the proximity of a shared field, their paradoxical tension is dynamic; on the move. Glissant: "The expression of this force and its way of being is what we call relation: what the world makes and expresses of itself." The atmospheric paradox that shapes Wittig's work is an expression of the world's poetic force; in tension, the world activates its own reproduction.

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[38] Ibid, 251.

[39] Wittig, 125.

[40] Wittig, 142.

[41] As poet Dionne Brand says in *The Shape of Language*: "Poetry is pressure on the unknown, putting different things together to make new meaning."

[42] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 159.

Wittig's lesbian poetics of dismembering is a craft of disruption that affects (and destroys) the body, atmospherically. A collapse of meaning does not portend a new world atop this one–a gap cannot ossify as such. The text is a series of moments that pass; the sense of constant loss transpires from its structural brevity. The intervals between the text, the line breaks and the page breaks speak. Like air or breath, the space around each letter or word gather. Each page performs another iteration of violent passion, desirous grief; the erotics in/of decay. In its reiteration, Wittig's paradox disintegrates the doxa under which desire and grief are thought as separate, revealing the form of their movements: two limitless forces in tension, tracing out one common shape. Eventually, the book ends. Wittig: "It's not the foundation for a mode of life. It has nothing to do with social life…I am just describing a moment."[43] The book is not a balm, but a body, opened up.

[43] Wittig, "Remarks," 102.

Untitled II, Abby Maxwell (2024)
Cotton and egg carton pulp, silk scraps, milkweed floss, acorn ink, iron, silk yarn

Untitled II, Abby Maxwell (2024), details

III. Grid, Point, Patchwork

"I began the Quilt in my backyard with the name of one man, a man I loved. The Quilt has grown and is now a monstrous thing—a terrible burden of truth and beauty and love."[44]

The material form of a memorial speaks to the story of loss it recounts to its visitors. Traditionally, public memorials tend toward the forms of statues or columns of polished stone, inscribed with the names of the dead. The literal construction of such a permanent and impermeable space dedicated to public mourning appears to substantiate Freud's theorizing in *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917), wherein mourning is figured as an active process to be worked through in order to return to daily life. One's ego is fully absorbed in this process, which occurs outside of the quotidian and thus requires a distinct time and place. The memorial becomes this containment: its sheer materiality renders an otherwise immeasurable and disorienting grief restricted and approachable. However, the conventional memorial, cast in stone, would only be constructed for iterations of public mourning that are recognizable as such– for those sanctioned by the state as the "deserving dead."[45] Marginalized communities forge other modes of memorialization, and the forms they take trace the differences in social relationships to the dead, and to endings more broadly. Any memorial serves as a holding place for a certain version of memory–the story of an event or person or object, represented specifically so as to be remembered specifically. It shapes the way in which a certain story lives into the future. This chapter takes up a close engagement with the shapes and stories of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, and rereads it as a commons of grief whose form erodes its ability to contain memory or tell a story of queer death that facilitates Freudian mourning. As I argue, this work takes part in a lesbian poetics of dismembering, fracturing common notions of memory as it forms a grid, another shape of grief, and lives not as a memory aid for public mourning, but as an actual fragment of the infinite middle of queer loss.

A very queer memorial, the NAMES project AIDS Memorial Quilt is a fabric monument that spans the size of sixteen football fields when unfolded in its entirety. Since its launch nearly four decades ago, it has been terminally in process: growing, decaying, and in transit around the United States. By now, the Quilt contains over 44,000 panels, each one dedicated to a person or group lost to AIDS-related illness. Activist Cleve Jones had the idea during a march on the day of the thousandth AIDS-related death in San Francisco alone: November 27, 1985. He recounts the very moment in his memoir, *When We Rise:*

"We had some ladders there and people climbed up the grey stone façade of the Federal

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[44] Cleve Jones, *When We Rise: My Life in the Movement* (New York: Hachette Books, 2017), 379.

[45] Rico Franses, "Postmonumentality: Frame, Grid, Space, Quilt," *The Rhetoric of the Frame: Essays On The Boundaries Of The Artwork,* ed. Paul Duro (1996), 257.

> Building with rolls of tape and the posters bearing the names of our dead. We taped the names to the wall…I got to the edge of the crowd and looked back over their heads at the patchwork of names that now covered the wall. It looked like a quilt."[46]

So the AIDS Quilt was born, a mass of pieced panels, each one "the approximate size of a grave"[47] and bearing both the objects and literal remains of those they named: the sequins and leather and condoms and teddy bears, and the ashes.

Jones writes: "Even the word had power for me. Quilts. It made me think of my grandmothers and great-grandmothers."[48] As this invocation anticipates, the NAMES project was "held together at the seams by female staff,"[49] signalling another iteration of a general tendency, termed by Ann Cvetkovich as the "lesbianization" of care-taking, affective labour, and the labour of activism during and beyond the AIDS crisis.[50] There is resonance across Cvetkovich's version of lesbianization and that of Monique Wittig, as was discussed in the first chapter. Wittig's lesbianization terms the process of splitting or slashing subjectivity, portrayed in *Le corps lesbien* as its lesbianized narrator, J/e or *I,* "continues to find her/self outside her/self in relation to her 'very beautiful' Tu". To lesbianize, here, is to violate common notions, to "attack the order of heterosexuality,"[51] and to slash open any narrative attempt at re-membering the lost body. The lesbianization of the Quilt project, then, refers to both the labour expressed through its material form, which contains within it the abyss that is lesbian loss, and, pace Wittig, the violation of any subject of the Quilt, and, thus, the fracturing of its ability to tell a story of queer grief or facilitate the work of mourning. This lesbianized text, like AIDS itself, makes literal a common condition of fracture across gays and lesbians–and across all bodies. Thus, throughout this chapter I will explore the AIDS Quilt as another expression of a lesbian poetics of dismembering that is intimately tied to otherwise queer modes of (un)making.

The Quilt was widely critiqued within AIDS activism for banalizing the crisis and its immensity of gay death, and for contributing to a normalizing project which sought to launder

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[46] Jones, 289-90.

[47] Jones, 301.

[48] Jones, 162.

[49] Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Remains of the AIDS Quilt", *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 238.

[50] See Ann Cvetkovich, "AIDS Activism and Public Feelings: Documenting ACT UP's Lesbians", *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Duke University Press, 2003), 156-204.

[51] Monique Wittig, "Remarks on The Lesbian Body" (Self-Published, year unknown), 104.

the American image of homosexuality.[52] Jones opted for a quilt because it symbolized, for him, "warm, comforting, middle American, traditional family values."[53] He hoped to persuade the public to associate those most affected by AIDS – the majority of whom were part of multiply marginalized groups such as poor, racialized, immigrant, drug user, and gay and lesbian communities – with such values. To perceive them as full human beings, worthy of life. Jones' sentiment aligned with wider moves toward a liberal politics of assimilation, which the radical coalition ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) crucially opposed, alongside many other liberatory gay and lesbian organizations.[54]

Jones and the NAMES project wanted to facilitate mourning within their communities, a task that many activists considered as oppositional to the work of resistance. Activists exclaimed "Don't mourn, organize!", producing the false dichotomy pulled apart by Douglas Crimp in his well known 1989 essay *Mourning and Militancy.* Crimp argues for their inseparability and uses the Quilt as the key example of the psychic work of mourning, where each panel "symbolizes – through its incorporation of mementos associated with the lost object – the activity of hypercathecting and detaching the hopes and memories associated with the loved one."[55] But, could the Quilt as a whole engender the process of working-through that constitutes healthy mourning? Perhaps at the scale of the single panel, with its certain story; its beginning and end. The material work of sewing cloth strips into the shape of a name might activate this processing of loss, its labour of memory, and allow for the possibility of transformation/transference. However, as it is pieced together into a gridded Quilt, the patchwork of names and remains becomes more like a commons of the dead and dying, outside of ordinary time. The shape it takes is disorienting. It is more maze than memorial: a body made of many bodies, a folding, shifting, and growing assemblage of death that rends any attempts for remembrance to scraps.

/ The Work of Memory

In "Against Melancholia: Contemporary Mourning Theory, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, and the Politics of Unfinished Grief," Greg Forter writes that "mourning helps us to relinquish *real* objects by building *psychic memorials* to them—the memorials we call

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[52] Activist Steve Abbott argued that the Quilt was only successful as a public memorial because "it can also be read as a memorial to a dying subculture, i.e. "We didn't like you fags and junkies when you were wild, kinky and having fun. We didn't like you when you were angry, marching and demanding rights. But now that you're dying and have joined 'nicely' like 'a family sewing circle,' we'll accept you." (Abbott in Sturken 1992, 91).

[53] Cleve Jones in "Gert McMullin—Sewing on the Frontline—From the AIDS Quilt to COVID-19 PPE," June 22, 2021, in *The Kitchen Sisters Present,* prod. by Nikki Silva & Davia Nelson, *(*18:12-18:16), https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/gert-mcmullin-sewing-on-the-frontline-from-the-aids

[54] ACT UP distributed flyers at a Quilt display in Washington D.C. that read: "Before this Quilt grows any larger, turn your grief into anger. Turn anger into action. TURN THE POWER OF THE QUILT INTO ACTION" (1988, in Gould 2002, 182).

[55] Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Melancholia"*, October* no. 51, 1989, 7.

'memories.'"[56] Both memorials and memories are laborious constructions. The erection of the memorial, it seems, supports or expedites the otherwise psychic work of mourning, which *is* the work of (erecting) memory. And, in his examination of Holocaust memorials, James E. Young argues that "the more memory comes to rest in its exteriorized forms, the less it is experienced internally."[57] The memorial, then, exists in time and space as memory aid, supporting the work of mourning, and as an object of memory in itself.

Public memorials are designed intentionally: they function as the memory store of a population. The production of sanctioned forms of memory, and the active erasure of others, is a crucial mode by which states maintain control. Physical memorials serve this function; for example, monuments declare the lives lost to battles or attacks, reifying public commitments to imperial militarism and the machinery of war. But this calculus of coerced memory and imposed denial is enforced in other, more insidious ways, such as through gradual, yet fundamental, rhetorical shifts and resignifications paired with the dismantling of independent forms of media and communications together forming a "narcotizing blanket of small lies."[58] In the current context, the combined forces of corporate power, the drastic rise in right-wing extremism, and the ever-sinister pacifying forces of liberalism converge as a "mass gaslighting" or historical amnesia. Liberal media narratives, rightwing book bannings, and far-right conspiracy theories all take differing forms as they contribute to the same project of coercive memory.

Theories of nationalism often draw on the "uniquely powerful forms of memory generated in the crucible of the nation-state."[59] French historian Ernest Renan argues that the nation is not constituted via certain objects of memory, but through forgetting: "the act of forgetting…is an essential factor in the creation of a nation."[60] Erasure, denial, and obfuscation are imposed by the state in the effort of normalizing its very existence and therefore expanding its own power, its control over territory and citizens. Forgetting is a kind of memory-making: the gap does something. The banned book, its empty slot on the library shelf, is felt.

The public memorial is, then, a tool used by the state as it crafts its narrative of benevolence, reaffirming its incontrovertible presence. It is built directly atop the field of memory, paving over other versions of its own history and those of other lifeworlds it seeks to capture. The Memorial Quilt is a work: each panel is a labour of mourning. And yet in its assembling, the names and bodies and losses and remains it contains become maze-like, imbued with a generalized sense of lost-ness that forecloses all parsing or delimitation. The cloth-scape is

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[56] Greg Forter, "Against Melancholia: Contemporary Mourning Theory, Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, and the Politics of Unfinished Grief." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14, no. 2 (2003), 139. Original emphasis.

[57] James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning.* Yale University Press, (1994), 3-4.

[58] Vicky Osterweil, "Remembering As an Act of Revolt," *All Cats Are Beautiful,* Substack, Mar 14, 2024.

[59] Jeffrey K. Olick, "Introduction," *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection,* Duke University Press (2003), 13.

[60] Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation? (Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?, 1882)," *What is a Nation? And Other Political Writings.* Columbia University Press, (2018), 251.

always moving and never ending; unable to be fixed or forced into a certain shape, to denote a certain version of history. The Quilt, in its entirety, refuses any sanctioned memory of AIDS, of mass queer death or the queer life that remains. To be remembered by the state – the exact force inflicting the relentless death-making that is its precondition – is to be of service to its self-making tale, to become a line in its narrative that writes itself into and as the past-present-future, and atop all worlds as the world. *The Quilt has grown and is now a monstrous thing.*

/ Interstice: GRID

The grid is a boundless homogeneity: as a structure it prefigures infinite sameness. As Rosalind Krauss has put it, in both form and logic, the grid is anti-nature, anti-development, and anti-narrative. Krauss: "The absolute stasis of the grid, its lack of hierarchy, of center, of inflection, emphasizes not only its anti-referential character, but – more importantly – its hostility to narrative."[61] The intensities, contexts, and limits required by narrative are rendered impossible by the grid. The grid just *is*: it "extends, in all directions, to infinity."[62] The grid is taken up as a technique of ordering, accounting, and representing the world. Colonizers employ grids to establish control over territory, dividing land into gridded plots and assigning a master to each unit. Whiteness and its colonial operations impose grids on the imaginary–the white world is pure grid, all its objects abstracted and scaled via cartography, speculation, grids of taxonomy and genealogy, 3D grids and GPS. Sara Ahmed: *"*things seem 'straight'…when they are 'in line,' which means when they are aligned with other lines."[63] Grids, as a cultural technique, "have become the basis of a mediatization of space from which hardly anything can escape."[64] The grid *is*–and this is-ness is totalizing. Its pattern is "one of extending distribution and total saturation."[65] It is an absolute void, its being is a shape that is infinitely empty–it is "open to nothing and exposes and frames it,"[66] and yet is still a form which *is* something. This something is boundless homogeneity: as a structure it prefigures space as infinite sameness.

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[61] Rosalind E. Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-garde," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1986), 158.

[62] Krauss, "Grids," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths,* 18.

[63] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology* (Duke University Press, 2020), 66.

[64] Bernhard Siegert, "(Not) in Place: The Grid, or, Cultural Techniques of Ruling Spaces." *Cultural Techniques: Grids, Filters, Doors, and Other Articulations of the Real*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop- Young (2015), 120.

[65] Eugenie Brinkema, "1. the grid (GPS & the bee as geometer)," *Life-Destroying Diagrams* (Duke University Press, 2022), 176.

[66] Brinkema, 177.

Fig 1.1: The AIDS Memorial Quilt, first displayed on the Mall in Washington on Oct. 11, 1987.

/ Names Grid

> *"The canvas walkways of the Quilt had left behind a haunting afterimage of the grid on the lawn within which the Quilt had been unfolded."*[67]

A quilt is sometimes a grid: its patchwork top and quilted lines of thread often takes this shape. The grid is significant to the tradition of quilting, desired for its structural integrity as well as its aesthetic satisfaction. When it is laid out for exhibition, the AIDS Quilt takes a gridded form at multiple scales: its grave-sized panels are pieced together eight at a time to form squares, which are then tethered in groups of four to create larger squares. These larger squares are separated by white canvas walkways, giving the entire Quilt a kind of "rigid, visual structure…a scaffolding or framework."[68] The canvas walkways were chosen to allow every panel to be viewed up close by visitors. Without them, one could not walk amongst the larger squares without stepping directly onto the Quilt itself. The walkways, then, at once frame the Quilt – a framing that produces a sense of order amongst the panels that, lacking borders, are unparseable

[67] Jones, 379.

[68] Franses, 259.

and cannot be clearly 'read' – *and* construct within it a grid; somehow both homogenous and disorienting in form. The walkways exist to allow for reading the Quilt but, paradoxically, they frame its very unreadability; its failure to represent all these lost bodies, and its inability to contain or retain public memory.

The Quilt-assemblage "invites wandering, looping, arabesque and squiggle."[69] Fragments of its stories emerge through interaction, "but never in the same order. There is no prescribed sequence, no last panel that brings closure to the others." In his seminars on the psychoses, Jacques Lacan refers to "the quilting point" as the point at which "the signified and the signifier are knotted together, between the still floating mass of meanings."[70] The quilting point, then, becomes a meaningful point of reference amid the otherwise amorphous middle of narrative. Lacan suggests that "everything radiates out from and is organized around this signifier, similar to these little lines of force that an upholstery button forms on the surface of material. It's the point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively."[71] So, all meaning is made laboriously: not a given, but handcrafted. In the absence of a knot, meaning cannot become tethered. Yet, in its presence – amid the physicality of the quilting point, and the labour caught up in its tying or sewing – what is also made visible is the fact of one's own positioning amid this uncertain middle. What lives between the knots?

The AIDS Quilt has no points: it lacks the specific sewing or knotting techniques known as quilting–the labour was too great. In fact, it is technically not a quilt at all, but a single layer of piecework. Jones gave the Quilt its name as it evoked, for him, his matrilineage, care, warmth, and tradition. However, he could not contain the significance that it would come to hold in the world. Death has no point or meaning, and so neither does grief. It is the site of meaning's collapse, its shadow. There is no knotting up, no tethering of grief–a little death, it is sheer force, dragging the body to the ground.

The grid is potentially infinite. The Quilt's staff still receive around two hundred panels each year, and sections of it are constantly moving around the US to be put on display.[72] Since 1995, thousands of its panels have been photographed for a digital archive. The general public can now scroll through the Interactive AIDS Quilt, zooming between the homepage, a distorted, rainbow mass, and its individual panels.[73] Because fabric inevitably frays, tears, and fades at the whim of weather and time, digitization sought to render the Quilt immortal. Even with its digital

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[69] Eric Sonstroem, "Repetition and the Work of Hypertextual Mourning: Ryman's 253 and the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt" *Invisible Culture*, 2004.

[70] Jacques Lacan, "The Quilting Point," trans. Russell Grigg, *The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses 1955-1956* (Norton, 1993), 268.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Bryan-Wilson, 239.

[73] Visit www.aidsmemorial.org/interactive-aids-quilt

doubling, however, the Quilt remains a living, decaying document. There is a panel that reads "THE LAST ONE" hanging in the NAMES warehouse, "waiting for the day that the disease has been eradicated."[74] On that day, the Quilt would be complete and ready for preservation. But, rather than a tribute to those lost to an eradicated virus, the Quilt has morphed from "an active, highly visible memorial to a suspended monument to the fading of the HIV crisis from the public eye."[75]

Some quilts are made of other quilts: a quilt is all reiteration. Making a quilt is always an encounter with decay: always at the threshold of living and dying. These grids will inevitably fail. Whether commemorating a loved one, shrouding a dead or dying body in its transition, or blanketing a living body and, thus, becoming the holding place for all the dead skin cells and affective sheddings of the everyday, quilts contain the complexity of being in-between.

Though not a quilt, The Quilt is a threshold, too–an infinite set of passages. Its assemblage is polyvalent, "opening up space after space in which it is possible to become lost."[76] A lesbian poetics of dismembering: its grid blurs the bounds of a body, rupturing memory as each name bleeds into the next. Like Monique Wittig's pages spread out on the floor, the AIDS Quilt was unfolded onto the US state capital lawns, mingling with dirt, and became a commons of grief. People gathered there. They spoke the names on cloth into microphones in no given order, and they held one another. When repeated, the names of the dead turn to noise, no longer fully able to signal a person, but living in the air like a hum, the knell of grief's atmospheric force. The Quilt will inevitably disintegrate, joining at last the thousands of dead it names, but its afterimage will forever haunt these lawns. Not a memorial, really, but the imprint made in grass when a million grieving people gather to read a text on death that never ends.

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[74] Bryan-Wilson, 242.

[75] Bryan-Wilson, 237.

[76] Sonstroem (2004).

Passages, Abby Maxwell (2024)
Silk, cotton, indigo, hawthorn bark, marigold, milkweed floss batting, quilted text

Passages, Abby Maxwell (2024), details

II. Accounting for Loss: Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries*

"after consideration you will discover, as I, / that verbs are a tragedy, a bleeding cliffside, explosions, / I'm better off without"[77]

"I was just wondering how to describe the world without a verb," Dionne Brand remarks to an audience after a reading from *Ossuaries.* Across her prolific body of work, from poetry to fiction to film, Brand interrogates the shapes that language takes in the formation of narrative – its "racist alphabets"[78] – toward crafting modes of language for Black being. She posits that narrative is structurally antiblack and counter to any project of liberation.[79] Narrative utilizes Black being instrumentally, always making the Black body act as a vehicle to its own progression and rendering Black presence – as presence; as being – unintelligible. Through her practice of poetry, Brand seeks to "produce a grammar in which Black existence might be the thought and not the unthought, it might *be.*"[80] *Ossuaries* is a long poem that refuses verbs, and thus takes shape as a list of objects. It writes only what is here. However, it continuously alternates between two 'heres', two speakers separated by time–the first, an unnamed 'I' who exists somehow in the future, a possible other time, and Yasmine, a revolutionary living amid and fleeing the violent immediacy of the present. In opting for the form of a verbless indexing of what exists and, thus, of what will be lost, Brand's poetics makes visible only the impossibility of fully accounting for loss; the impossibility of rendering either the lost body or its memory whole or fixed through its being written down.

An ossuary is a chest, box, building, well, or site made to contain the bones of the dead: what remains of the body finds the ossuary as its final resting place. *Ossuaries* holds its towering pile of bones – all the residue of the absolute violence of the colonial project, its bleeding cliffside – carrying it toward new, or other, forms of time. Desire lives and dies here, too–the desire for the lost body, and the tension across a desire to remember everything and to forget: to become part of the remnants of an entire world's decay. A melancholic text, *Ossuaries* lives both at the centre and in the ruins of violence, written from the perspective of the remainder. Its objects of loss are distinctly named–each one separated by comma and blank space. It is not that those taking inventory "cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost,"[81] for it is precisely the act of seeing the mass death imposed by colonial capitalism that provokes melancholic looping. The loss is too big to be counted: it is infinite because nothing escapes the totalizing weather of violence. *Ossuaries,* temporally, marks the end of knowable time. 'I' exists in the possibility of a new time, yet peers somehow back into ours. Rather than place emphasis on its memory, and

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[77] Dionne Brand, *Ossuaries* (McLelland and Stewart, 2010), 14.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Brand, "The Shape of Language," *Graham Foundation*, 5 Mar. 2024, Youtube, (18:30-19:30).

[80] Ibid.

[81] Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia,* 245.

mourning, 'I' incites a practice of forgetting as they exclaim: "go on / go on, the brilliant future doesn't wait".[82]

As I will argue, Brand's *Ossuaries* crafts a lesbian poetics of dismembering, engaging the shape of the list to draft an index of what has been and will be lost, revealing therein the impossibility of such accounting. As its speakers fracture temporal and corporeal limits, *Ossuaries* writes from the fissure of common notions, expressing the body and memory as lost objects among others and, in its relentless listing, reveals the underworld of such loss as desire itself, stirring amid the otherwise omnipotent weather of death-making.

/ Poetic Pressures

Crafting against language is, as a practice, a profound engagement with the materiality of meaning–its alphabets and the effects of its shapes and gaps on the body, the way its arrangements shift the feeling of the atmosphere. Brand: "Poetry is pressure on verbal matter, pressure on air, sustained pressure on space."[83] *Ossuaries* carries this pressure, depicting violence as a force of weather inflicted upon the world of the text. Brand's use resonates with what Christina Sharpe calls "the weather" in her text, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being:* "the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack."[84] *Ossuaries* accounts for the extractive operations of colonialism and racial capitalism, listing the material traces felt by and held in the Black body, all of which persist beyond the reign of empire itself. Such brutality is both carried by weather and is weather: "each square metre of air so toxic with violence…the coarseness / of daylight, the brusque decisions of air…"[85] In "Situating the Ecological in Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries*," Titilola Aiyegbusi argues that the poem insists on the joint consideration of both "the marginalized 'other' who is perceived as less human, and…'the other than human' entities co-existing in the ecosystem."[86] The weather, and the world, here, are the atmospheres of violence to which the Black body is confined, as well as yet another entity or body bearing the traces of destruction and despair. Brand is concerned with the entwined relationship between the twofold catastrophes of antiblackness and ecological collapse. Here, *Ossuaries* resonates with Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien,* in which environmental elements such as wind, insects, light, spores, and soil exist as sensing bodies, while also inflicting the actual rupturing of our protagonist's bodies themselves. An air of violence tinges the swarming desire for life imbued in the ecological. And, again forming a disorienting symmetry, a peculiar desire is divulged by this opening, the slit of the

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[82] Brand, 105.

[83] Brand, "The Shape of Language," (18:30-19:30).

[84] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being (*Duke University Press, 2016), 121.

[85] Brand, *Ossuaries,* 10.

[86] Titilola Aiyegbusi, "Situating the Ecological in Dionne Brand's Ossuaries" *Canada and Beyond: A Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies 10,* 2021, 77.

bodily partition made by violence. This desire of desire maps the underside of a relentless grief that *is,* in this brusque and toxic air:

> "I spread prickling sheets on narrowing beds, / stretched out beside one person and then another / the night dew we collected at our throats, cackling, … obviously my rainy rainy eyes, my earth-filled hair, / all this I brought across sticky bitumen highways…"[87]

What lives in the cracks made by the violence of weather? What "good thing"[88] could weather such atmospheres?

/ Interstice: LIST

"We like lists because we don't want to die."[89] A list is a peculiar form, a textual craft that promises a kind of ordering of chaos but inexorably fails the task. A list, like a grid, can never really fulfill its own potential, which is infinite. "Lists have no combinative rules, no necessary grammar regulating the order in which the various elements must be put together. And this means that they have no defined narrative stress, no center of interest." A list attends to the itemization of the world, its total representation. Yet its failure to be exhaustive, to comprehend or contain this totality, redefines the chaos as such, as unruly, unknowable. A list lists: its process is its form. The durational sense of list-ing imbues all lists with an unbounded temporal quality that "promise[s] the possible avoidance of end with not-yet-final accumulations of the 'next.'"[90] There is always the possibility of another item: always something to be added. A list lives in tension with the absolute finitude of existence: with death, with ending. Ending adheres meaning to being, and death is the absolute end of meaning. A list unmakes meaning, processually, as its form denies the certitude of finality. It unfurls, stretching out to take up the page and spilling over.

/ Counter-record

> *"I have nothing soothing to tell you, that's not my job, my job is to revise and revise this*

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[87] Brand, 34.

[88] In *ossuary XIII,* "if only I had something to tell you, from here, / some good thing that would weather / the atmospheres of the last thirty years" (103).

[89] Umberto Eco in Eugenie Brinkema, "The Ordinal (Death by Design)" *Life-Destroying Diagrams (*Duke University Press 2022), 34.

[90] Brinkema, "The Ordinal (Death by Design)" *Life-Destroying Diagrams (*Duke University Press 2022), 62.

bristling list, hourly…"[91]

Dionne Brand's use of the list extends into much of her work, most evidently in *Inventory* (2006)*,* an earlier take on the poetics of taking stock of damages done by antiblack, colonial violence. *Ossuaries* picks up the threads of her older work, reactivated by these shared concepts, shapes, and lines of flight. In an interview with author David Naimon, Brand recalls her grandfather's practice of record-keeping, tracking details "like what the sun would be, where it would be, what the wind would be that day, how far the sea would come in." She reflects that, "in a sense, that's my way of record keeping, if you will, if there is such a thing as a record, if by record keeping, we want to also trouble that word anyway, but if it is about recounting and if there are prohibitions against a certain kind of recounting, those are the very things that are to be recounted and have been recounted in my life certainly. That is the official record."[92] *Ossuaries,* then, extends the form of an ancestral practice–the list as an anti-colonial poetics; as counter-record. The list is proof of Brand and her kin having been witness to – having noticed, noted, and felt – atmospheric changes, all the forces of air, water, and light. And yet, as is revealed throughout *Ossuaries,* this mode of record-keeping by listing actually makes clear the endless fractures in memory–the gaps and silences, all that which remains unlisted and so unknown, that which propels this listing to endure, endlessly.

> "these chromatic scales, these calipers the needle / in the tongue, the eyes' eye, so / whole diameters, circumferences, locutions, / an orgy of measurements, a festival of inches / gardens and paraphernalia of measurements, / unificatory data, curious data, / beautiful and sensuous data…"[93]

Again reminiscent of Wittig, her juxtaposition of erotic vignettes and cold, anatomical lists, Brand's *Ossuaries* attaches fleshy, sensual adjectives to the stark language of quantification, producing a force of incoherence that spreads across the text. These enumerated units and apparatuses qualified by gardens, orgies and otherwise animated, affective modifiers fleshes out the constitutive incoherence already emergent in the form of the list. Christina Sharpe writes on *Inventory:* "The absence of a full stop after the poem's final word, *hourly*, alerts readers that this list keeps getting longer; at poem's close, the poet is still at her witnessing task."[94] In *Ossuaries,* too, each phrase is delimited by surrounding commas or line breaks; the finality of the full stop is never expressed, although at times expected or perhaps even desired by the reader, in need of breath. Its poetic world is the breathless atmosphere it names: "the atmospheres were breathless

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[91] Brand, "Inventory," *Nomenclature: New and Collected Poems,* (Duke University Press, 2022), 495.

[92] Brand in "Dionne Brand : Nomenclature — New and Collected Poems," Oct 1, 2022 in *Between the Covers,* hosted by David Naimon on Tin House, (1:16:20-1:17:13), https://tinhouse.com/podcast/dionne-brand-nomenclature-new-and-collected-poems/

[93] Brand, 16.

[94] Christina Sharpe, "Introduction," *Nomenclature: New and Collected Poems* (Duke University Press, 2022), xxxix.

there, / the bronchial trees were ligatured / with carbons…"[95]

Every item in the long poem enacts a cut into meaning, a cut into what is common, a cut into bodies, history, and thought. Every line is another gash that crafts a palpable startling, gathering as a painful, disorienting, and dense assemblage. Sharpe: "The correspondence between two parts of an utterance appears in syntactic and rhythmic repetition, and the build-up of parallel lines becomes a litany. The inventory is a ritual and an estranging device that is filled with surprises, repetitions, synthesis, and accumulation."[96]

Lists tend to serve as memory aids–whether a packing list scrawled in a notepad or the engraved names of fallen soldiers inscribed into a stone monument, lists are always an engagement with the work of memory, and an affirmation of memory's looming disintegration. *Ossuaries* itemizes the world into a list, only to then encourage its reader to forget it all, to be released from the forces of such violence and its toxic residue. A horizon is invoked, here–a possible juncture of time and space at which gravity "must give up its hold on us, …might relent someday, unpin us", allowing the 'we' of the text that is Black life to "morph as twig and ice and bark and butterfly, weed and spider…"[97] In this morphing, a disappearance via decay, there is no urgency to be re-membered: the rupture of memory and that of the body are forged by the same cut, and this cut might be a release from the totalizing violence of coloniality. To flee such violence, "gravity the jail guard, the commandante / of surfaces"[98] must unpin or unhook its captive bodies. In forgetting, there is the possibility of fleeing towards some other 'beyond' of time and place.

As Sharpe describes, the narrator of *Ossuaries* articulates to its reader a kind of hope– "that you never remember, these ossuaries, these days and years filled with abattoirs and bones…"[99] A practice of forgetting is carved out here, through a multiplicity of cuts and splits: a space that is memory's absence, the ground for a decaying or severed body, "'reported missing' again, missing again, / missing, again missing, / a body out of time, moving at a constant angle…"[100]

As critic Anne Quéma writes, Brand engages a writing of the past under the pressure of necropolitical violence–a form of statecraft theorized by Achille Mbembe reliant on the "creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead."[101] Yasmine is

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[95] Brand, 10.

[96] Sharpe, "Introduction," xxxix.

[97] Brand, 89.

[98] Ibid, 88.

[99] Sharpe, "Introduction," xlvii.

[100] Brand, 86.

[101] In Anne Quéma, *Dionne Brand's Ossuaries: Songs of Necropolitics* (Canadian Literature no. 222, 2014), 52.

ensnared by necropower, constantly escaping its grasp yet never able to fully outrun its calculus. As *ossuary II* begins, Yas wakes each day aching "to undo, to undo and undo and undo this infinitive / of arrears, their fissile mornings, / their fragile, fragile symmetries of gain and loss…"[102] Quéma argues that injecting the figure of Yasmine as a "self-compromising subjectivity" into the otherwise omnipotence of necropolitics constructs a poetic "body politic which wrestles with an overwhelming and noxious materiality…a sensorial, sexual, and speaking body."[103] The urges of this body, in its striving to make sense of the link between history and her own conditions of being, are revealed in scores tracing the underside of Brand's mapped violences. Yasmine's desire is expressed through a yearning to not remember but dismember memory toward hand-crafting other genealogies of literal bodies and of meaning itself. Another listing occurs, another stitching of names: "this genealogy she's made by hand, this good silk lace, / Engels plaited to Bird, Claudia Jones edgestitched / to Monk, Rosa Luxemburg braids Coltrane…"[104]

Desire, here, veers toward death, becoming through repetition something of an elegy for desire itself; a circuitous or melancholic desiring of desire. The sheer force of desire is one of disorientation. Brand's crafted phrases collapse in on themselves over and over again, as she writes the sensuality in/of decay:

> "the jugular notch I ate in kisses, / I devoured in kisses, / teeth-filled kisses, throat-filled kisses, gullet-stuffed kisses / so don't tell me how love will rescue me, / I was carnivorous about love, I ate love to the ankles, / my thighs are gnawed with love…"[105]

Ossuaries is a poetics of dismembering that "braids the good silk strands" of revolutionary feeling, twisting time up and wringing it out. Whatever spills out is what the infinite record tends, an accumulative report of the toxicities and traces held in bone, flesh, and skin. What is made evident is that the "gap between what has been done and an accounting of it"[106] is a chasm. In the shaping of a list, an endless study of these bones in boxes, Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries* crafts this very chasm in its matter and form, producing a lesbian poetics of dismembering that is also a rupture in atmospheres of antiblackness. A gaping hole in the ozone of coloniality, where craft is only that of statist narrative and capital's calculus, *Ossuaries* shapes a careful language in order to rend a space for Black being; for its thought, air, and time–"another time when time isn't measured…"[107]

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[102] Brand, 21.

[103] Quéma, 54.

[104] Brand, 52.

[105] Brand, 37.

[106] Sharpe, xxxviii.

[107] Brand, 95.

Untitled III, Abby Maxwell (2024)
Silk, cotton, indigo, salt, iron, sheep wool and milkweed floss batting

Conclusion

"Welcome to new time."[108]

Now I must find a way to write a conclusion to this study of unendings. I write from particular circumstances. There is a great shaking-off occurring: the world is shaking off all its unworldly parts–the parts that want to write time down, inscribe certainty into dirt, wind, and feeling. I write from one cluster of the student intifada, the global student-led uprising for Palestinian liberation. Last night, attempts were made to topple downtown Montreal's statue of Queen Victoria and thirty-five cops were deployed in full riot gear not to quell a riot but to merely stand guard over her metal form. To protect this symbol of the state, Canada's claim to these lands incarnate. A queen eternally great if long dead, yet still requiring a mob of armed statesmen to tidy up her image. When we exit our inherited slots of spacetime – our sanctioned sites of inhabitance such as 'work' or 'school' or 'home' – our bodies, together, morph into a threat. Thus, toppling these memory aids to the state's legitimacy necessitates its absolute exhaustion of resources in retaliation: the state must always demonstrate its impenetrable monopoly on violence. Its own version of the story must be upheld at any cost.

Participating in the breakdown of such memorials and other sites of statecraft and flow of capital – the Parliament, the Consulate, the bank, the port, the university administration – shifts time. Suddenly, the hours in a day or days in a week are senseless; suddenly the ends of meeting demands and the directionality of negotiations are unintuitive. Temporalities of resistance move ecologically because they are born of the earth itself without demarcations; circuitous, swelling and receding, living and decaying. I write from what queer Palestinian writer Fargo Nissim Tbakhi names the "long middle of revolution"–an infinitude amid the timescale of this place, but which carries the possibility of endings situated in some other spacetime, like the possible time of *Ossuaries.* New time, situated at the level of the ground. Tbakhi writes:

> "The long middle is not a condition of time; we might be nearer to the end of revolution than the beginning, we might be nearer liberation than defeat, but our experience and our actions exist within the frame we can see, the frame of the long middle. Liberation is the end, but it is a geographical end rather than a temporal one, a soil and not an hour. We move *towards* it— sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, but always. It is the location by which we orient our movement. We know it because it gets closer, not necessarily because it comes sooner. (And liberation moves too, it has its own sort of agency, it can dance a little, as you stare through the hole in the fence you've just cut you might feel a hand on your shoulder, someone standing by your side like a friend, liberation letting you know what it feels like, that you're

[108] Lizzie Borden, dir. *Born in Flames*. First Run Features, 1983, Accessed 2024.

going the right way.)”[109]

When the AIDS Quilt was unfolded into a grid across the lawns of the US Capitol, the belly of the beast that is US imperialism, it did something other than its founder Cleve Jones had intended. The AIDS Quilt, frankly, failed to normalize homosexuality or improve the conditions of life and death for queers in America or beyond. It did not make the US government or society any less tolerant of mass queer death. Still, as an immense patchwork of names covering the lawns of the National Mall, its symbolic power is potent. It has gathered masses of people across communities to engage in public, collective grief centred around a community textile project. Yet, I would argue that its disruptive capacity lies in how it briefly shifts the timescales of those interacting with it: its gridded mass coaxes its readers inward to get lost within its lines. Here, the infinite middle is made tangible. Its grid is a force of disorientation; its commons is a maze, and in any spectator’s attempt to read its vast text on death, they risk becoming lost. The pure illegibility of its form deteriorates narrative time. This grid maps out its losses, a crafting of the very materiality of lost-ness. And the other time it reveals, this new time of liberation, is felt most forcefully in the Quilt’s gridded afterimage, impressed upon a place that empire attempts to lay claim over; a landscape of grass and dirt.

The end of liberation is a soil and not an hour. Or, as Dionne Brand writes, “I do not believe in time / I do believe in water /… / Water doesn't end…” The end of liberation is the earth itself, a continuity like water or dirt. As Brand’s *Ossuaries* takes stock of the world, listing the violences contained in and amongst its ecologies, what becomes clear is the chasm between the capacity to count and the atmospheric scale and texture of colonial violence. It needs an ending: the list cannot end, not in the spacetime of Yas nor in that of the poem’s unnamed speaker. For the time being, the soil of that other time is sensed in the fissures and white space of the list–all the iterations of desire, a force evading the weighty ambience of grief, and all the minor triumphs of destruction threatening the concrete and granite terms of the state.

This soil, this other time, is what the lesbian poetics of dismembering writes toward: not ending as in resolution, but ending as in death: the exiting of this world via an uncertain passage, a total opacity. Very little can be written on the place one goes after death, but one can attempt to convey the feeling of the immense fissure in-between, the threshold in which grief resides. Grief drags the body to the ground: it is a pressure that cracks the body open, it is the substance of lost-ness.

Lesbian; of a place. Of Lesbos, an island of dykes, or rivers of magma born through fracture, retrospective signals to underground movement. A dyke, geologically, is a gash that reveals the shifts. For all the local seismic activity of its past, Lesbos is now an island of petrified forest: “carnal rock” coloured distinctly by its soil’s minerals and contaminants into hues of

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[109] Fargo Nissim Tbakhi, “Notes on Craft: Writing in the Hour of Genocide,” *Protean Magazine,* Dec 8, 2023.

bruise, pus, blood.[110] An island of open wounds. Monique Wittig's *Le corps lesbien* writes the lesbianized subject as the open wound; the split subject, 'J/e' or '*I'*. Ecological forces destroy the bodies of Wittig's You and *I,* and yet at each page break the characters return, re-membered and ready to be pulled apart again, and again, and again. *The lesbian body* is unveiled as a paradox and a vast field, opened up as each passage is written down. Both desire and grief exist on this field, always in tension: two limitless forms/forces.

> "The pink flowers of the heather are visible in the spaces between your bones and all around you. Once again *I* am seized with the desire to take you in m/y arms to kiss your eyes your mouth your clavicles your sternum … *I* stay still even when night is come when the chill and the dew make m/e shiver when no warmth from you reaches m/e while *I* am in life while *I* wait for the cold to overcome m/e so as to remain here with you m/y so adorable one in this cemetery in the open air m/y bones mingled with yours."[111]

The cool night air, graveyard dirt and blooming heather interlace with Wittig's You and *I* as their own bodies merge, becoming each other in violent passion whilst becoming the elements of the world itself. Every passage contains the body's total breakdown: it is remade as the page is flipped. Its temporality is like a coil; sinuous, unchanging, and abiding.

The material practice I've developed alongside my research has been scattered. I have struggled to maintain it: I have gone whole months without starting a vat of dye or foraging for branches or taking a photo. When I finally pulled myself together enough to brew a sumac and borage eco-developer for some film, I made some error along the way and ruined the whole roll. I planted seeds in the community dye garden and then, in my failure to consistently water in the following days, almost nothing came up. I completely forgot how to chain stitch a book together, and I left my dye pots out on the balcony for so long they moulded over and rusted. I feel that I've lost whole limbs since I began this project: entire storeys of this building; hunks of interiority; lovers, friends, family members; scraps of myself and this world. The great shaking-off occurs at every scale: body; home; work; the damned university; this city, its pavement; this country, its fictions; the globe and its empires. It might be that the only possible certitude is that which flickers and goes out. Land and air and water resist being claimed through the tools of fire, smoke, heatwaves, storms, and tremors: there is colossal death in these shifts. In our grief we land on the ground and mingle with its soils. Quilts and books end up in piles. Still, we craft towards the possibility that one day "gravity must give up its hold on us", or that we will construct modes of flight amid its force, like *I* briefly becoming an insect:

> "*I* lose m/yself in your geography, m/y trunk palpates you searchingly, clinging to you thus by m/y six feet *I* begin m/y delectable one to flap m/y wings against your

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[110] Sabrina Imbler, *Dyke (Geology)* (Black Lawrence Press, 2020), 5.

[111] Wittig, 156.

> back, a fine powder of a dazzling blue spreads over your shoulders into your hair, m/y movement gains effect, *I* disengage you from the ground, *I* lift you up, *I* tear you away, *I* carry you off flying sound asleep above the sea."[112]

The lesbian poetics of dismembering, as I have argued, is a mode of craft that erodes at common notions, destroying the possibility of order as it relies on irrefutable sedimentations of meaning. The lesbian is an original rupture in a world that forges sense out of the codes of heterosexuality. Through the lesbian craft assemblages I have traced, commonly held versions of the body and memory are split open, because they do not serve the necessary project of liberation, this movement toward its soils. The state and capital coerce, co-opt, and deploy a certain writing or crafting of body and memory in order to maintain its claim to the expanse of spacetime. It operates on certain forms of desire and grief that serve its ends of normalization. A lesbian poetics of dismembering destroys these tools, cracking state terminologies open, evading its own co-optation, and offering nothing to fill in the gaps. It lesbianizes; transgresses; ruins the order of empire. This lesbian poetics is upheld by Wittig's *I,* "which spreads itself in the whole world of the book, like a lava flow that nothing can stop."[113] While it portends no salve for this wound, one can assume its opening would feel like the earth; the "beautiful red breezes… blowing hand in hand,"[114] or the beyond-this that Brand writes:

> "beyond this there must be oceans, there must be / telephones, there must be notebooks with data, / there might be the curve of snows and rains / the bends in roads, the horizons or the sunrises…"[115]

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[112] Wittig, 152.

[113] Wittig, "The Mark of Gender," *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 100.

[114] Anne Carson, *The Autobiography of Red* (Vintage, NY, 1998), 32.

[115] Brand, 88.

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