

Chorish v Abolish



Cherish x Abolish

Cherish

Abolish

In memoriam

Ruth Wilson Gilmore	15
On Abolition	

bell hooks	19
Healing Male Spirit	

Dev Hynes	35
On <i>Negro Swan</i>	

Gilles Bertin	47
Interview	

Kuwasi Balagoon	57
Brink's Trial Closing Statement	

Toni Morrison	71
Strangers	

Zoé Samudzi	77
Ruthlessness and Sensual Ineptitude	

Jean Weir	89
To the Deranged	

Willem Van Spronsen	97
Final Statement	

Michael Kimble	103
Interview	

EZLN	
Words on the 26th Anniversary of the Beginning of the War Against Oblivion	115

Black Panther Party	127
Community Programs 1966–1982	

Jean Genet	133
On George Jackson	

George Jackson	143
Letters to Angela Davis	

Kanno Sugako	165
Reflections on the Way to the Gallows	

Marilyn Buck	189
The Freedom to Breathe	

Stevie Wilson	193
Interview	

Katerina Gogou	207
<i>Three Clicks Left</i>	

Cherish

- to hold dear
- feel or show affection for
- to keep or cultivate with care and affection
- to entertain or harbor in the mind deeply and resolutely

Middle English *cherisshen*, from Anglo-French *cheriss-*, stem of *cherir* (to cherish), from *cher* (dear), from Latin *carus* (dear, beloved)

Abolish

- to end the observance or effect of something
- to completely do away with something

Middle English *abolysshēn*, borrowed from Middle French *aboliss-*, stem of *abolir* (to abolish), borrowed from Latin *abolēre* (to destroy, efface, put an end to), perhaps formed from *abolēscere* (to shrivel up, be effaced, fall into disuse)

Ruth Wilson Gilmore

2012

Alright, I am an abolitionist. Abolition. Abolition is a plot against racial capitalism, which is all capitalism, not just some of it. It is a plot in a narrative sense. It is a plot in which the arc of change is always going resolutely toward freedom. It is a plot in a geographic sense. It is a plot in which we aim to make all space, not just some space, free in two senses. Free in the sense that it cannot be alienated, which is to say sold, by anybody to anybody. And free in the sense of non-exclusive—there is no boundary or border that we keep somebody in or keep somebody out. That is abolition, that's the plot, that's my plot. It is an internationalist impulse that is part of what many of us call the Black radical tradition, which is open for all.

bell hooks

Healing Male Spirit

2004

Men cannot speak their pain in patriarchal culture. Boys learn this in early childhood. As a girl, I was awed by a man in my church, a deacon, who would stand before the congregation and speak his love for the divine spirit. Often in the midst of his testimony he would begin to weep, sobbing tears into a big white handkerchief. The girls and boys who witnessed his tears were embarrassed for him, for in their eyes he was showing himself to be weak. When he wept, the men who stood beside him turned their eyes away. They were ashamed to see a man express intense feeling.

I remembered this beautiful man of feeling in the autobiography of my girlhood, *Bone Black*:

To her child mind old men were the only men of feeling. They did not come at one smelling of alcohol and sweet cologne. They approached one like butterflies, moving light and beautiful, staying still for only a moment. . . . They were the brown-skinned men with serious faces who were the deacons of the church, the right-hand men of god. They were the men who wept when they felt his love, who wept when the preacher spoke of the good and faithful servant. They pulled wrinkled handkerchiefs out of their pockets and poured tears in them, as if they were pouring milk into a cup. She wanted to drink those tears that like milk could nourish her and help her grow. To counter patriarchal representations of men as being without feeling, in both the books I write for adults and those I write for children, I have endeavored to create images of men that demonstrate their beauty and integrity of spirit.

Though we rarely use the word “patriarchy,” everyone knows how sexist masculinity has assaulted the spirits of men. Though wrong-minded in his im-

plied blaming of women for the emotional deadness males feel, poet Robert Bly called on men to find the Wild Man within in hopes that they would in a safe space let their hearts speak, that they would howl, and cry, and dance, and play, and find again the spirit within. Of course men who participated in workshops such as those Bly conducted, let loose for a while and then journeyed back to their patriarchal world, leaving the wild spirit behind. Any reader of Robert Bly's *Iron John* can hear the mother blame in his words. And Bly is right to demand that we all look at the role mothers play in deadening the spirits of boy children, but he fails to acknowledge that such mothers in their acts of maternal sadism are really doing the work of patriarchal caretaking, doing what they were taught a good mother should do.

It is highly ironic that we are now living in a time when we are told to question whether mothers can raise sons, when so many patriarchal men have been taught the beliefs and values of patriarchy by mothers, firsthand. Many mothers in patriarchal culture express their rage at adult men by directing anger at their sons. In *The Power of Partnership* Riane Eisler explains: "Some women direct their suppressed anger against men they feel are weak or vulnerable—their sons for example. The psychologist David Winter found that women living in countries or periods of extreme male dominance tend to be very controlling of their sons, who are the only males it is safe for them to vent against. Women in these circumstances are often subtly, or not so subtly, abusive of their sons." Many mothers in patriarchal culture silence the wild spirit in their sons, the spirit of wonder and playful tenderness, for fear their sons will be weak, will not be prepared to be macho men, real men, men other men will envy and look up to.

Much of the anger men direct at mothers is a response to the maternal failure to protect the spirit of the boy from patriarchal harm. In one of the family therapy sessions Terrence Real writes about in *How Can I Get Through*

to *You?*, a son describes that moment when patriarchal culture intrudes on the emotional bond with his mother, and her acquiescence. The son recalls, “She was telling me. Let me go, darling. Just let me go. We know that your father’s a brute. We live together in a world of refined feeling he can never understand. But you see, darling, I am helpless, aren’t I? What am I to do?” Every day mothers are ruthlessly and brutally terminating their emotional connection with male children in order to turn them over to patriarchy, whether to an actual unfeeling father or to a symbolic father. Boys feel the pain. And they have no place to lay it down; they carry it within. They take it to the place where it is converted into rage.

Learning to dissimulate, men learn to cover up their rage, their sense of powerlessness. Yet when men learn to create a false self as a way to maintain male domination, they have no sound basis on which to build healthy self-esteem. To always wear a mask as a way of asserting masculine presence is to always live the lie, to be perpetually deprived of an authentic sense of identity and well-being. This falseness causes males to experience intense emotional pain. Rituals of domination help mediate the pain. They provide an illusory sense of self, an identity. Poet and farmer Wendell Berry in *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* suggests that “if we removed the status and compensation from the destructive exploits we classify as ‘manly,’ men would be found to be suffering as much as women. They would be found to be suffering for the same reason: they are in exile from the communion of men and women, which is the deepest connection with the communion of all creatures.” Many men in our society have no status, no privilege; they receive no freely given compensation, no perks with capitalist patriarchy. For these men domination of women and children may be the only opportunity to assert a patriarchal presence. These men suffer. Their anguish and despair has no limits or boundaries. They suffer in a society that does not want men

to change, that does not want men to reconstruct masculinity so that the basis for the social formation of male identity is not rooted in an ethic of domination. Rather than acknowledge the intensity of their suffering, they dissimulate. They pretend. They act as though they have power and privilege when they feel powerless. Inability to acknowledge the depths of male pain makes it difficult for males to challenge and change patriarchal masculinity.

Broken emotional bonds with mothers and fathers, the traumas of emotional neglect and abandonment that so many males have experienced and been unable to name, have damaged and wounded the spirits of men. Many men are unable to speak their suffering. Like women, those who suffer the most cling to the very agents of their suffering, refusing to resist sexism or sexist oppression. Their refusal is rooted in the fear that their weakness will be exposed. They fear acknowledging the depths of their pain. As their pain intensifies, so does their need to do violence, to coercively dominate and abuse others. Barbara Deming explains: "I think the reason that men are so very violent is that they know, deep in themselves, that they're acting a lie, and so they're furious. You can't be happy living a lie, and so they're furious at being caught in the lie. But they don't know how to break out of it, so they just go further into it." For many men the moment of violent connection may be the only intimacy, the only attainable closeness, the only space where the agony is released. When feminist women insist that all men are powerful oppressors who victimize from the location of power, they obscure the reality that many victimize from the location of victimization. The violence they do to others is usually a mirroring of the violence enacted upon and within the self. Many radical feminists have been so enraged by male domination that they cannot acknowledge the possibility of male suffering or forgive. Failure to examine the victimization of men keeps us from understanding maleness, from uncovering the space of connection that might lead more men to seek

feminist transformation. Urging women to overcome their fear of male anger, Barbara Deming writes that men are “in a rage because they are acting out a lie—which means that in some deep part of themselves they want to be delivered from it, are homesick for the truth.” She explains that “their fury gives us reason to fear, but also gives us reason to hope.”

It has been terribly difficult for advocates of feminism to create new ways of thinking about maleness, feminist paradigms for the reconstruction of masculinity. Despite the successes of feminist movement, the socialization of boys—the making of patriarchal masculine identity—has not been radically altered. Feminist writing, whether fiction or theory, rarely focuses on male change. I am always disturbed when male students request references to literature that will serve as a guide as they struggle to interrogate patriarchy and create progressive identities, because there is so little literature to offer them. By contrast, I can offer countless references to any female student who tells me she is trying to critically understand and change sexist female roles. There needs to be more feminist work that specifically addresses males. They need feminist blueprints for change.

In a course on feminist theory I asked students to comment on a book, film, television show, or any personal experience that offers them examples of reconstructed, feminist masculinity. In a class of more than forty students there were few positive responses. Several students talked about the old John Sayles movie *The Brother from Another Planet* and his most recent film, *Sunshine State*. I called attention to Alice Walker’s novel *The Color Purple*. Often when this novel is discussed, Celie’s transformation from object to subject receives attention but no one talks about the fact that the novel also chronicles Mister’s transformation, his movement away from patriarchal masculinity toward a caring, nurturing self who is able to participate in community.

In feminist fiction radically new roles for men emerge. As a fantasy, *The Color Purple* provides a utopian vision of the process by which men who embody a destructive sexist masculinity change. In *The Color Purple*, Walker portrays the techniques of patriarchal domination used by males to maintain power in the domestic household, writing graphic accounts of abuse and terrorism, yet she also portrays the process by which the dominating male acquires a new consciousness and new habits of being. Her utopian vision of male transformation does not place the sole burden of change on men.

Celie also must change her attitudes toward men. She must not only affirm Albert's transformation, she must understand and forgive him. Her acceptance enables him to rejoin the community, to embrace a vision of mutual partnership. At the end of the novel Celie says of Albert:

After all the evil he done I know you wonder why I don't hate him. I don't hate him for two reason. One, he love Shug. And two, Shug use to love him. Plus, look like he trying to make something out of himself. I don't mean just that he work and he clean up after himself and he appreciate some of the things God was playful enough to make. I mean when you talk to him now he really listen, and one time, out of nowhere in the conversation us was having, he said, Celie, I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel like a new experience.

To change, Albert must understand why he has abused women. He locates that will to abuse in the trauma of his upbringing when he is coerced to choose against his true self as part of being indoctrinated into patriarchy. Dehumanized himself, it is easy for him to feel justified in dehumanizing others. Near the end of the book, Albert becomes a contemplative thinker who seeks to understand the reason for human existence. He says, "I think us here to wonder, myself. To wonder. To ast. And that in wondering bout the big things, and asting about the big things you learn about the little ones, almost by ac-

cident. But you never know nothing more bout the big things that you start out with. The more I wonder, he say, the more I love.” As a patriarch Albert was unable to love.

Unlike Walker’s fictional character Albert, most men are not compelled by circumstances beyond their control to change. Most men who are suffering a crisis of masculinity do not know where to turn to seek change. In the film *Antwone Fisher* (which is based on a true story), the troubled young black male expresses his crisis by saying, “I don’t know what to do.” A feminist future for men can enable transformation and healing. As advocates of feminism who seek to end sexism and sexist oppression, we must be willing to hear men speak their pain. Only when we courageously face male pain without turning away will we model for men the emotional awareness healing requires.

To heal, men must learn to feel again. They must learn to break the silence, to speak the pain. Often men, to speak the pain, first turn to the women in their lives and are refused a hearing. In many ways women have bought into the patriarchal masculine mystique. Asked to witness a male expressing feelings, to listen to those feelings and respond, they may simply turn away. There was a time when I would often ask the man in my life to tell me his feelings. And yet when he began to speak, I would either interrupt or silence him by crying, sending him the message that his feelings were too heavy for anyone to bear, so it was best if he kept them to himself. As the *Sylvia* cartoon I have previously mentioned reminds us, women are fearful of hearing men voice feelings. I did not want to hear the pain of my male partner because hearing it required that I surrender my investment in the patriarchal ideal of the male as protector of the wounded. If he was wounded, then how could he protect me?

As I matured, as my feminist consciousness developed to include the recognition of patriarchal abuse of men, I could hear male pain. I could see men as comrades and fellow travelers on the journey of life and not as existing

merely to provide instrumental support. Since men have yet to organize a feminist men's movement that would proclaim the rights of men to emotional awareness and expression, we will not know how many men have indeed tried to express feelings, only to have the women in their lives tune out or be turned off. Talking with men, I have been stunned when individual males would confess to sharing intense feelings with a male buddy, only to have that buddy either interrupt to silence the sharing, offer no response, or distance himself. Men of all ages who want to talk about feelings usually learn not to go to other men. And if they are heterosexual, they are far more likely to try sharing with women they have been sexually intimate with. Women talk about the fact that intimate conversation with males often takes place in the brief moments before and after sex. And of course our mass media provide the image again and again of the man who goes to a sex worker to share his feelings because there is no intimacy in that relationship and therefore no real emotional risk.

Being "vulnerable" is an emotional state many men seek to avoid. Some men spend a lifetime in a state of avoidance and therefore never experience intimacy. Sadly, we have all colluded with the patriarchy by faking it with men, pretending levels of intimacy and closeness we do not feel. We tell men we love them when we feel we have absolutely no clue as to who they really are. We tell fathers we love them when we are terrified to share our perceptions of them, our fear that if we disagree, we will be cast out, excommunicated. In this way we all collude with patriarchal culture to make men feel they can have it all, that they can embrace patriarchal manhood and still hold their loved ones dear. In reality, the more patriarchal a man is, the more disconnected he must be from feeling. If he cannot feel, he cannot connect. If he cannot connect, he cannot be intimate.

Significantly, Terrence Real suggests that most men do not know what intimacy is, that the "one-up, one-down world of masculinity leaves little space

for tenderness . . . one is either controlled or controlling, dominator or dominated.” He shares the powerful insight that “when they speak of fearing intimacy, what they really mean is that they fear subjugation.” This fear of subjugation is often triggered by the reality that boys parented by patriarchal women are controlled via their longing for maternal closeness. In maternal sadism, the manipulative woman exploits the boy’s emotional vulnerability to bind him to her will, to subjugate him. This early experience resides at the heart of many a man’s fear of being intimate with a grown woman. And it may explain why so many men in patriarchal culture seek intimacy with girls or women young enough to be their daughters.

There is little feminist discussion of maternal sadism in relation to boys because it has been difficult for feminist thinkers to find a language to name the power mothers wield over children in a patriarchal culture, where in the larger social context mothers are so powerless. Yet it may be that very powerlessness in relation to grown men in patriarchy that leads so many women to exert emotional power over boys in a damaging manner. For this reason single-parent homes where mothers are dysfunctional and maternal sadism abounds are as unhealthy a place to raise boys as dysfunctional two-parent homes, where maternal sadism is the norm. In the two-parent home, the boy child may be fortunate to have an adult male who serves to intervene against maternal sadism, who acts as an enlightened witness. Such intervention is absent in the single female-headed household.

Women are not inherently more loving than men; women may give care and still be emotionally abusive. There has been such a strong tendency in patriarchal culture to simply assume that women are loving and capable of being intimate, that female failure to acquire the relational skills that would make intimacy possible, often goes unnoticed. Most females are encouraged to learn relational skills, yet damaged self-esteem may prevent us from applying those skills in a healthy manner. If we are to begin to create a culture

in which feminist masculinity can thrive, then women who mother will need to educate themselves for critical consciousness. In the near future we may hope to have more data to show us the ways boys fare better when they have loving parents, whether together or apart, who teach them how to be intimate. Meanwhile let us create the space where males who lack relational skills can learn them.

As Zukav and Francis boldly state in *The Heart of the Soul*, “Intimacy and the pursuit of external power—the ability to manipulate and control—are incompatible.” Before most men can be intimate with others, they have to be intimate with themselves. They have to learn to feel and to be aware of their feelings. Men who mask feelings or suppress them simply do not want to feel the pain. Since emotional pain is the feeling that most males have covered up, numbed out, or closed off, the journey back to feeling is frequently through the portal of suffering. Much male rage covers up this place of suffering; this is the well-kept secret. Often when a female gets close to male pain, penetrating the male mask to see the emotional vulnerability beneath, she becomes a target for the rage.

Shame at emotional vulnerability is often what men who are closed down emotionally seek to hide. Since shaming is often used to socialize boys away from their feeling selves toward the patriarchal male mask, many grown men have an internal shaming voice. Studies indicate that patriarchal fathers are rarely killed by their children; mothers are murdered more, for the rage many males feel from father shaming is usually transferred to female authority figures. With females, especially, the wounded boy inside the man can rage with no fear of reprisals. The more intimate the relationship, the more likely she is to be both the target of the rage and the secret keeper, telling no one that he is addicted to rage. This is especially the case where the acting-out male is a son who is physically hitting a mother or weaker siblings. The violence of sons, especially adolescent boys, toward mothers is rarely talked about in

our culture. Now that so many adult single men return home to live with female parents or never even leave, there is a growing problem of domestic discord, both emotional and physical, that is covered up.

Intimate terrorism in male-female couple relationships is identified as a problem, particularly emotional abuse. Yet very little is said about the intimate terrorism between adult children and parents. The recent film *The Piano Teacher* graphically showed the sadomasochistic violence that can exist between an adult child and a parent, assuming the form of both emotional and physical abuse. In this film the adults shown are female, and audiences are allowed to interpret what they see according to traditional sexist notions of female competition. Yet in real life there is tremendous emotional abuse happening in single mother/adult son relationships that is not named. Women in patriarchal culture are trained to cover up and hide male abuse, all the more so when the culprit is a son and the victim his mother. These situations of unhealthy intimacy exist because of our cultural failure to teach women and men what intimacy is. And as long as women remain the primary parental caregivers, we will have the lion's share of the responsibility for learning how to be intimate ourselves and sharing that knowledge with male and female children.

Learning how to be intimate is a relational skill that teaches us the value of self-knowledge. Offering a broader, more meaningful definition of intimacy than the old notion of simply being close and vulnerable to someone, Gary Zukav and Linda Francis state that you "create intimacy when you shift from the pursuit of external power—the ability to manipulate and control—to the pursuit of authentic power—the alignment of your personality with your soul." In recent years there have been a number of self-help books published that urge readers to care for their souls. Such books by James Hillman, Thomas Moore, and Gary Zukav have been national bestsellers. Ironically, these men speak of the necessity of caring for our souls as though the path to that care

is the same for women and men. In the introduction to Thomas Moore's *Care of the Soul* he tells readers, "Fulfilling work, rewarding relationships, personal power, and relief from symptoms are all gifts of the soul. They are particularly elusive in our time because we don't believe in the soul and therefore give it no place in our hierarchy of values. . . . We live in a time of deep division, in which mind is separated from body and spirituality at odds with materialism. But how do we get out of this split?" Visionary thinkers believe that by exposing the way the logic of domination has created the split and choosing the model of interbeing and interdependency, we can begin the work of restoring integrity, and with integrity comes care of the soul.

Men caught up in the logic of patriarchal masculinity have difficulty believing that their souls matter. It is perhaps a patriarchal bias that leads Thomas Moore to suggest at the conclusion of his clarion call for all of us to cultivate soulfulness that "care of the soul is not a project of self-improvement. . . . It is not at all concerned with living properly or with emotional health." This need to deny the relationship of care of the soul to self-nurturance is itself indicative of the very binary splits in consciousness Moore critiques. There is no one who cares for her or his soul rightly who does not experience an enhancement of emotional well-being.

Men need to hear that their souls matter and that the care of their souls is the primary task of their being. Were all men seeking to uncover greater soulfulness in their lives rather than seeking power through a dominator model, then the world as we know it would be transformed for the better.

It cannot be a mere accident of fate that the visionary male teachers who are offering us messages about ways to care for the soul that will enhance life on the planet are men of color from poor countries, men who live in exile, men who have been victimized by imperialist male violence. Two men who come to mind are His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Vietnamese Buddhist

monk Thich Nhat Hanh. In *Ethics for the New Millennium* the Dalai Lama calls for a spiritual revolution. He shares his belief that all humans desire happiness and that a principal characteristic of genuine happiness is inner peace, which he links to developing concern for others. His soulful message echoes that of feminist thinkers who are telling the world that men can heal their spirits by developing relational skills—the ability to experience empathy, to care for others.

The existence of visionary male teachers who offer male and females spiritual guidance is a constant reminder to us that the hearts of men are transformed by love and compassion. Consistently, the Dalai Lama teaches us about the need to cultivate the practice of compassion. Whether males ever see themselves as working to end patriarchy, the fact remains that any man who chooses the way of compassion heals the spirit and moves away from domination. The Dalai Lama offers this wisdom:

Compassion is one of the principal things that make our lives meaningful. It is the source of all lasting happiness and joy. And it is the foundation of a good heart. Through kindness, through affection, through honesty, through truth and justice toward all others we ensure our own benefit. This is not a matter for complicated theorizing. It is a matter of common sense. . . . There is no denying that our happiness is inextricably bound up with the happiness of others. There is no denying that if society suffers, we ourselves suffer. . . . Thus we can reject everything else: religion, ideology, all received wisdom. But we cannot escape the necessity of love and compassion.

This is the care of the soul that males and females must attend to if we are to sustain life on the planet, if we are to live fully and well.

Most men in our society believe in higher powers, and yet they have learned to devalue spiritual life, to violate their own sense of the sacred.

Hence the work of spiritual restoration—of seeing the souls of men as sacred—is essential if we are to create a culture in which men can love. When the hearts of men are full of compassion and open to love, then, as the Dalai Lama states, “there is no need for temple or church, for mosque or synagogue, no need for complicated philosophy, doctrine or dogma, for our own heart, our own mind, is the temple and the doctrine is compassion.”

When contemporary feminist movement was at its most militant, those of us who worshipped male deities were often made to feel as though we were traitors. Yet many of us found it especially useful in maintaining our love for males and appreciation for the sacredness of the male soul to separate patriarchal ideology from the powerful images of nurturing and loving kindness embodied in male religious figures. Many of us who were wounded daughters from Christian backgrounds found it useful to meditate daily on the twenty-third psalm because it evoked for us the image of a father caring for our souls, affirming and assuring us that we would survive, that goodness and mercy would be accorded us and that the father would keep us forever in his care.

This image of loving fatherhood embodies feminist masculinity in its most divine form. Healing the spirit, caring for the souls of boys and men, we must dare to proclaim our adoration, to bow down not to the male as dominator, but to the male as embodied divine spirit with whom we can unite in love, with no threat of separation, knowing a perfect love that is without fear.

Dev Hynes

On Negro Swan

2018

1.

Orlando

This eases listeners into the album in a very gentle way.

That one's interesting because it's the first and only time I tried an experiment that was like: What would Marvin Gaye do? He would have his words written and know a refrain or two, but everything else was a one-take, just creating melodies up. I wanted to try something like that, because it gives you this weird connection to the lyrics; I wanted to see the words and then just fly and see what could happen.

2.

Saint

This track has a lot of different vocalists on it, what was it like putting them all together?

There are so many people on it mainly because I worked on it in different places—my old studio on St. Mark's Place, another studio in Midtown, and then the studio I'm in now, in Chinatown. The first voices you hear on the song are BEA1991 and Aaron of Porches, then it's mine, then it's Ava Raiin. Adam from Kindness is on it. All those folks recorded in completely different places. And the very first version of that song was started before *Freetown Sound*. It's just been constantly worked and tweaked.

3.

Take Your Time

This track has a very raw vocal take. What made you lean into a more unpolished sound?

That's probably the song on the album I did vocals for the *most*. Oh my god, it could have been over a hundred vocal takes over a two-year period. And every time it was one take. I have a thing about doing one-takes—in my own vocals, I never just drop in one note. I think that stems from the fact that, when I was starting out, I didn't know how to drop notes in. I know how to do it now, but it's just not natural for me. So if I get something wrong, I just redo the whole thing.

And this song was inspired by Robert Wyatt. There was an album of his that I had on cassette for so many years called *Old Rottenhat*, which has predominantly keyboard sounds. So I wanted something like that, with a simple melody but really nice. Also, Air is one of my favorite bands that people don't realize is one of my favorite bands. So it was like Robert Wyatt meets *Talkie Walkie*—era Air.

4.

Hope

This song boils down the optimistic essence of the album in a lot of ways, particularly in a spoken word part by Puff Daddy: “You give me that hope that maybe one day I'll get over my fears and I'll receive.” How did you get him on the album?

While working on that song, I started doing fake Puff vocals, because I thought it sounded like that to me. And then I was like, “It'd be kind of cool if it *actually* was Puff.” So I sent him a text, like, “I did this track, do you want to

do this vocal part?” And he replied, “Send it.” He sent back his vocals, like, 20 hours later. And he also sent an outro that he did on his own—I guess he just heard the rough version of it and felt like going in. It was actually way longer. I had to edit it, it was wild. I don’t know if I caught him on a good day with texting or whatever, but yeah, I feel pretty blessed for that one.

5.

Jewelry

The video for this track encompasses a lot of the album’s themes in visual terms, as a representation of black joy. How did it come together?

For the last couple of years, I had this notebook that had “Negro Swan” emblazoned on it, and it had pictures, thoughts, artwork, and all the things that eventually went into the album. I felt like this song captured something within the album, which is weird, because it’s maybe the most disjointed song on the album, with all these different parts. So I wanted a video that was very, very simple.

I had an idea of having a very distinct visual moment for each part of the song with the lyrics, so it grounds the song in a place. I had all these ideas, and I wanted Kai The Black Angel involved—he’s on the album cover and in the video and other videos that are gonna come out, too. He’s such a beautiful kid. There’s something special in his energy. I didn’t have an album cover before I did the video, and my label was going crazy because it was getting really, really late. But I just knew that everything that was happening in that video sums up the album, and there would be a picture that would happen. Luckily, I was right.

6.

Family

This track, among several others, contains spoken word from writer, director, and activist Janet Mock. Why did you choose her to be the narrator of this album?

I met her at Hollywood Bowl, when Solange was playing her show there last year, and we stayed in touch. I hit her up at a random time to be involved in something I was working on, but months and months went by, and schedules weren't working out. Then I was in the last week of mixing the album, doing little edits, and she hit me up, like, "I'm gonna be in New York for three hours tomorrow morning if you're around." And I was like, "Yes." So she came to the studio. I had the book and I was playing her stuff and talking about it, and I just pressed record. I didn't know if it would just be one moment or whatever, but we spoke the whole time, and she would write her thoughts in the book, and just say them out loud. It's funny, she didn't record to any music. So she still hasn't heard what her voice does. I need to send the album to her.

7.

Charcoal Baby

Though you're a great guitar player, you've sometimes backgrounded that skill on Blood Orange records. But this song features a pretty prominent guitar part. What was the thinking behind that choice?

The only reason there wasn't really guitar on the last couple of records—I mean, there is, but it's very sparse—is because I didn't have one. It was never, like, "I'm not gonna use guitar." At the end of *Freetown Sound*, when it goes into this acoustic thing, it's because I'd moved into the studio that was on St. Mark's, which used to be my lawyer's room, and he'd left his acoustic guitar there. So I used it.

But finally, through some blessings or luck, Fender made a guitar for me.

Which is so crazy, because as a kid I had one guitar and it broke, and that was it. So “Charcoal Baby” was one of the first songs that I did with that guitar because I actually had one. And I did a lot of crazy shit to that guitar sound. I put two different vinyl effects on it, warping at different speeds, so the guitar is, like, completely out of tune on the whole song, but the bass kind of keeps it locked in. Then, for the vocals, I wanted something that felt a bit more joyous for, quite simply, a celebration of black skin.

8.

Vulture Baby

I was curious about the title of this song, especially coming after “Charcoal Baby.”

Where does it come from?

I don’t think anyone can hear the lyrics I’m saying on this song. I’m basically talking about an artist—who shall not be disclosed. But I read an interview with them talking about how they were done with hip-hop culture and wanted to go back to . . . actually, you know what, this could be applicable to a lot of artists last year, now that I think of it. It’s about white people who have got their cred by flirting with rap culture, and now they’re gonna show their country roots. I thought it was kind of a funny trend. It was almost like, as PC culture was rising, white people were suddenly like, “Oh shit, maybe I shouldn’t be on this Migos track.”

9.

Chewing Gum

This is the most hip-hop track on the record. Can you explain what it’s about?

Essentially I’m creating a really insane metaphor about the feeling of being tired of being outraged, and tired of being angry, and tired of fighting, all those

things. It's about seeing people do all that stuff and get riled up, maybe even for the first time in their lives, and not even judging them but just feeling deflated about that. So it's about *that*, but I'm using metaphors of oral sex.

Why did you choose to feature A\$AP Rocky and Project Pat?

For a large chunk of time, I was living at Rocky's house in L.A. So he was around, and he fucked with it, which is kind of how that happened. With Pat, I felt like I needed someone actually from Memphis to touch it—if I was gonna honor that, I needed an O.G. to be there.

10.

Holy Will

You've touched on the idea of religion on past albums, and how people love the hope it gives them. Is the gospel performance by singer Ian Isiah here meant to evoke that feeling?

Yeah, that whole moment is super, super deliberate. "Holy Will" is like church on Sunday after going out Saturday. It's the cleanse. I always loved the Clark Sisters, and me and Ian Isiah would always be singing stuff, and one day we were in L.A. and decided to fuck around. The skeleton of the track is a one-take of me on guitar, and Ian and Eva singing the Clark Sisters' "Center of Thy Will" live. When it kicks off, it's so far from what you think would be on a Blood Orange album, but as it progresses, when the synths come in, I wanted to pull you back into familiarity with things that you do associate with me. It's not intentional, but I've realized that every Blood Orange album has a cover song on it. It just happens, somehow.

11.

Dagenham Dream

Like “Orlando,” this song also explicitly references being bullied and beat up as a kid. Why did you decide to focus on those details here?

Dagenham is a town where I’m from in Essex, and this song is directly about one of the moments when I got jumped as a kid. I was in the hospital, and when I got out I cut all my hair off, stopped painting my nails, wearing makeup, all this other shit. I stopped it all. I went to school, and I remember my English teacher started crying when they saw me. That’s always really stuck with me. So this song is essentially about that and how I used to skateboard to escape. The song is kind of murky, almost like a memory. And with all the street sounds, I wanted to have this Cocteau Twins feel to it, even Smashing Pumpkins, which was one of my favorite bands growing up. I was trying to get back into that mode.

12.

Nappy Wonder

This song feels like an extension of “Dagenham Dream” in a really organic way. How are the two connected?

It’s like “Dagenham Dream” but older, and this time it’s more explicitly about skateboarding—just the escapism that I found through skating through the years, even now. The song itself was written really quickly. I tried all these different experiments for the album; a couple of times I booked studios for myself, which I’d never done before. I would just bring a hard drive—but not a computer—and use whatever was in the studio to make a track. Then I would take it back to the hard drive. So one day I was waiting for Andrew Aged from inc., and Fai, who sings on the album, to arrive in the studio, and I’d had this

keyboard loop that I'd made in Rocky's kitchen the night before. So in the hour while I was waiting I just made that song really quickly and didn't think anything of it. But then they got there and they all fucked with it, so I was like, "Shit, maybe this is a track."

13.

Runnin'

On this one, Georgia Anne Muldrow sings, "Everybody goes through it / You're gonna be all right," but that feeling is offset by your part, which touches on loneliness and loss. What is the intention behind that counterbalance?

Georgia Anne Muldrow is one of my favorite musicians in the world. "Runnin'" is so cool to me because I always had this theory that the person who starts the song isn't necessarily the person who finishes it; I've always felt that something can be finished by other people, whether it's a few days or multiple decades later. Lyrically, I was in a dark place on that song. But once she got on it, it turned the whole meaning of the song around. That sums up why I love having people's input on stuff. It's so crazy how things can turn and move and go to a different place that I alone could never, ever create.

14.

Out of Your League

How did you connect with the Internet's Steve Lacy for this song? What excites you about his work?

He's awesome. Talented. We've known each other through social circles and had been trying to link, so that was a fun one. I was in LA and I went to his mum's house in Compton and brought this drum machine—it's funny, be-

cause it broke two days after, so that's the last track it was ever on. We just worked on shit in his bedroom. That song is cool because if you heard that me and him were doing a song, you'd probably think I'd be on keys and he'd be on bass, but he's playing keyboards and I'm doing all the bass.

15.

Minetta Creek

This one is named after a New York landmark, a creek that ran through Washington Square Park along to the Hudson River. How did this song come about?

To me it's like a cousin of "Desirée" from *Freetown Sound*. It's the same kind of environment and world, this New York thing. This song was actually saved by Solange. It wasn't gonna be on the album, and she rode for it, so I kept it.

16.

Smoke

This final track has a more hopeful bent to it lyrically, especially in the refrain, "The sun comes in / My heart fulfills within." Was it important for you to end the album on that note?

Yeah. Halfway through working on that song I realized it was the last song on the album. I booked a studio, and they just had an acoustic guitar, so that's why that song is just that. That song is one of my favorites from the album. It has complexity to it but it's also very simple. I really love that. I very rarely have songs that can straight-up be played on one instrument and just sung, and you get the idea of the song. But this is one of them, and I'm stoked on that fact.

Gilles Bertin

Interview

2019

You say you grew up in a family in which you felt cramped. Why was that?

My parents were not happy. My father worked a lot, my mother had cancer. I realized that jobs don't stop people from being unhappy. That model didn't suit me and I didn't want to reproduce it.

Hence the punk rock?

Yes. Music, from the start, has been a refuge. I started to mess around with punk because it was the DIY era. All of a sudden anyone could become a musician and artist. I let myself get carried off by that current. Punks were angry, rebellious people. Like me.

To the point of leaving home?

I left home at 18 because I couldn't take it anymore. I went to Bordeaux and started hanging out with punks. We started our band Camera Silens. We lived in squats. We survived. Sometimes we crashed here, other times there. I found a family for myself.

Were you happy, despite the hardship?

Those were the first real moments of happiness in my life. When you're 20, you don't care if you're hungry and haven't got any idea where you're sleeping that night. The important thing is to be with people you feel close to. Camaraderie.

What was your relationship to drugs then?

I'd smoked practically nothing, and then immediately discovered heroin. It came gradually. Heroin's like a painkiller: you forget your problems and feel cocooned.

Did you sense an addiction developing?

No, because I took it occasionally and festively at first. The first two, three years, it wasn't the main engine of my existence. The important thing was being in a band and making music. Then I started living with my friend Didier, who participated in the Brink's heist. It turns out he was dealing drugs and I started selling, too. As soon as we started dealing heroin, we used more and more. This allowed me to buy myself an instrument, an amp, and there was always the will to continue making music. This is when my addiction was born.

How did you manage social life?

When you become really addicted, you dissociate and start to pull off little acts of delinquency. And that's when things start to spin, because after a week of daily dope use, you start to feel withdrawal symptoms. The more you take, the harder it gets. My drug use stopped abruptly when I did nine months in jail. I'd been thinking only of immediate pleasure, which is characteristic of all delinquents and immature people.

What was prison like?

Since I was addicted to heroin when I got there, I was sick for a good ten days. Fortunately I reunited in prison with my buddy Didier, with whom I'd been dealing, and his brother-in-law Inaki, the Basque. We promised ourselves to never touch the stuff again. And when the symptoms started to go away, I stopped taking pills, thanks to those two friends and a few others. There are good people in prison. Even the thugs. When I was released I didn't relapse. I started making music and doing crime—petty then moderate then grand.

The robbery . . . was it for fun?

We had to do something with our days, so we replaced one adrenaline rush with the next. To avoid thinking too much. We had zero desire to hurt anyone. But it's true that I dug adrenaline—it's pretty intoxicating. More than the money, it was about always being on the alert. The lifestyle was childlike. We weren't seasoned crooks.

You reveled in some youthful crime . . . and then you become a father.

Yeah, it happened really quickly, in the middle of all that madness. I discovered by chance that I'd become a dad, but it was too late. Too late to backtrack. And besides, I was incapable of being a parent. I liked things how they were. And three months later, I had Nantes police on my ass after a robbery in a jewelry store. So I went underground in Toulouse.

Why Toulouse?

Because there was a whole network of anarcho-Basques who helped us hide. Before escaping to Spain I did try to put the pieces back together with my partner, but it didn't work. So I came back to Toulouse. And we started back up with crime, all the way up to the Brink's robbery.

Did the prospect of being sent back to prison worry you?

We weren't anticipating our futures. I was only thinking about immediate pleasure, right now. Pretty common with delinquents and immature people.

Did you have any idea what being on the lam would be like?

Absolutely not. We said to ourselves: "Let's act now and think later." It was like a challenge, and we also wanted to get talked about a bit. We didn't really care what the future had in store for us. The only thing that mattered was to make an impression.

Was there an activist dimension to this heist?

Nihilist yes, but not political. We were super proud of this little snub to the capitalist system. But that's about it.

Does that kind of act create strong ties?

Yes, but it also generates enormous tension. We had a few difficult moments. This is also why when we got to Spain, we split up. I needed a breather. So we distanced ourselves from each other. We didn't even say goodbye.

What was it like to be on the run?

At first, we just read the newspapers and laughed a lot. And then we took off for Spain. I hooked up with my punk friends from Toulouse and we had a huge, two-month-long party, right up until the end of summer. And then I stopped thinking about it anymore.

Were you afraid of being spotted?

I didn't worry about much. I partied, and Spain at that time was a paradise for revelers. It was the dawn of ecstasy—pretty fun.

And what happened that fall?

At the end of the summer, Inaki and Didier got apprehended at the border. Shortly before that I'd tried to bring my partner Nathalie and my son back to Barcelona. And it turned out that the Spanish cops showed up right away. I understood then that it was over and that we had to cut ties with France. We knew full well that after this wave of arrests we could no longer set foot there.

That got to you?

Yes, I felt adrift for a long time. My buddy Philippe, who had left with me—he and I grew lonely. Until I met Cécilia, through music, in Barcelona. She's the catalyst that helped me put myself back together. After a year, we decided to go to Lisbon to open a record shop. It's in Portugal that I found my place in society. I had legal status, I had work. Things were great until 1995 when I got sick and discovered that I had AIDS. Since there wasn't yet any triple-therapy, I assumed I was going to die. The question of whether or not to return to France came back up, but Cécilia dissuaded me from doing it. And it's true that turning myself in made no sense: at that time, my life expectancy didn't exceed three to four years. I had cirrhosis of the liver. I couldn't even imagine myself in the future. All that would've happened was that I'd die in prison.

At that time, too, you were also living in constant fear of being caught?

Yeah, there were lots of moments of serious paranoia. Especially when a French citizen recognizes you at the store. I was afraid they'd report me or mention it to their friends and the word would spread. Rumors travel fast through Lisbon. It was a difficult time. I thought that eventually the pigs were going to show up.

And at that point, your state of mind had evolved, right?

Indeed. I didn't want to leave Cécilia, and cause her any trouble on my account. I was really scared. And speaking of scared: I had no idea what fear even was before this. Basically, I'd been evolving without realizing it. I'd discovered what empathy is. But it came quite late. I told myself: I no longer think like I used to. I no longer have that criminal's reflex.

And what did Cécilia make of all this?

Cécilia knew everything. But our understanding was that if the cops showed up one day, she knew nothing.

How does someone with such an unsettled past manage to form bonds with people?

I didn't really make friends in those days. You can't be a liar if you're divulging nothing. And when we don't share much about ourselves, we remain distant. So my social life was all Cécilia. We had friends in Portugal but I considered them mainly to be Cécilia's friends, inasmuch as they even considered me one of them.

And what about the loot?

I spent everything really quickly. My haul was 1.8 million francs. But when we arrived in Portugal, two years after the heist, there wasn't much left. Maybe 150,000 francs . . .

Is it expensive to run?

Yeah, and everyone agrees. You have to rent apartments, put down deposits. And if you've got dirty money, you spend it quickly. You know the phrase: "ill-gotten gains are short-lived."

Did you ever try to reconnect with loved ones?

I got back in touch with my father when we returned to Barcelona, after having been gone for ten years. I felt this need to find out what was up back in France. I needed to know how everyone was doing. It was hard: in our first call, he told me that my mother was dead and that Nathalie [Bertin's first lover] was dead, too.

He agreed to speak with you?

Yeah. He wasn't angry, he just couldn't understand.

And your son?

We had no connection. I gathered he was being raised by his grandparents. My father sent me some photos, but I didn't contact my son directly. What would be the point? I'm a father on the run, wanted by the cops. But he knew everything.

In 2011 your second child, Thiago, was born.

It was such a big jolt of joy. And then really quickly the question arose: what are we going to do? I should probably surrender.

But there was a statute of limitations?

Of course, but contrary to what's been written, that would only have taken effect in 2024. I would've still needed to wait seven more years, which would have changed everything. I just couldn't.

But were you ready, by choosing to turn yourself in to the French police, to deprive yourself all over again of getting to watch a child grow up?

Right, but what else could I do? I couldn't go on forever like that. And more than that, I'd just been cured of hepatitis C, which meant that my life expectancy was extended. Cécilia agreed with me—we were tired of this life. We didn't want to continue to raise our child in a cloud of secrecy.

Do you regret what you've done?

Yes and no. That life allowed me to meet Cécilia and to have beautiful experiences. I learned new languages, I read books, I created myself. I only regret the violence of the robbery. The rest is just my life.

You wrote a book?

A complete accident, following an encounter with Jean-Manuel Escarnot. It was published by Robert Laffont—they offered to do a book and I accepted. But it's not to settle scores.

How are you feeling these days?

Much better, but it's not easy for everyone. My partner is having to deal with the aftermath of all this. I feel much lighter. I'm in decent shape, and mostly free of baggage. I'm at peace with myself. It turns out that being on the run wasn't the kind of freedom I'd been craving. It's hard to live when you're hounded. You're never completely yourself.

What did you make of the verdict, a five-year suspended sentence?

A tremendous relief—we'd all assumed I was going to prison. Even my attorney wasn't feeling hopeful. But like he said, the court didn't judge the man who carried out those acts, but rather the man he'd become.

Kuwasi Balagoon

Brink's Trial Closing Statement

1983

For the record, i'll say right now, that this place is an armed camp. It has the trappings and props of a court. A state-issued clone in a black robe, an ambitious state-issued clone at the state table, a fenced-off area, and a section for spectators with a smaller section for members of the press, who can listen to an opening statement, and between them not one mentions anything i said about America being an imperialist empire that among other things holds New Afrikan people in subjection, or that the U.S. government, while hypocritically speaking of human rights in places like Poland, never mentions the political prisoners it holds and calls grand jury resisters. The state-issued prosecutor objects, the state-issued court sustains, and the media that pats itself on the back and hypocritically calls itself free erase whatever notes they might have taken automatically and take their places beside the state-issued court and prosecutor. Although i think the press is capable of following instructions, the ruling that politics have nothing to do with this case is enough. A reporter, Van Sickle, describes the opening as a list of grievances. That New Afrikan people are subjected to living in reservations administered by an occupation force calling itself police and being systematically beaten out of wages, liberties, and our very lives is not news, and that the media is just so many state-issued clones is not news either. Their job all along has been to present the state in a false light and instill fear in the population, so that people will find fascism acceptable. And call it democracy. Under no stretch of the imagination, twist or turn, summations or evaluations can a racist, imperialist country call itself a democracy, without its victims, its enemies, calling it anything more than a hypocrisy.

Taking up a couple of other rows in the court are the pistol-packing, armored plainclothes cops paid to keep an eye on things. On the roofs and in the surrounding areas there's more, and a herd of hastily deputized armed clones in gas station attendant uniforms, as well as German shepherds, and of course the usual guards. There's a lot of iron in here, state-issued iron. And in the hallway leading to this theater there's more state-issued clones with state-issued iron and metal detectors to make sure that all the iron that enters these state domains, this imperialist theater, is state-issued. They wish to have us believe or act as if we believe that war is peace—as the press apparently believes that ignorance is strength.

Other than that are the people who braved searches, having their pictures taken and filed away by the fascist, to come here to actually be as they are designated, supporters and spectators. And one group of people that stinks of the trappings of this court is designated a jury. Among them some wear sunglasses while in our midst—another has children who have Black friends whose homes they visit but who never visit them at home, and who has Black friends himself who never drop by. Another who thinks we are so ugly she turns and looks at the wall while we ride by in police cars. None of these people are racist or have any prejudice, and we know this because the court asked them, and they said they didn't, all of them. None of the potential jurors were racist or infected by racial prejudice, and showed this to the satisfaction of a racist court.

Had i not taken the position that no court in the imperialist U.S. empire had the right to try me as a criminal, i would have not held both positions. However, i believe that the people of Rockland County and elsewhere deserve an explanation of the event, the expropriation and related actions that took place on October 20, 1981. Not a mere criminal defense in relation to it, that type of legal mumbo jumbo could have matters more confused than ever. An ex-

planation, on the other hand, by someone who might have given them directions on the subway in New York City or sweated through a basketball game with them or shared a dance floor should make things clear factually, as well as let people in Rockland who are not already our friends, and everyday people throughout the confines of the U.S., know for sure that it is not the people but the United States government and its oppressive apparatus that we are at war against.

The media said that on two separate occasions members of the Black Liberation Army jumped out of vehicles shooting randomly in incidents where one guard and two policemen were killed. On the face of it, it doesn't appear random at all according to that line. Either the guerrillas and the people around not participating were lucky; the armed money courier and the two policemen were very unlucky; or the guerrillas were armed with guided bullets. Obviously, none of this was so, but it was broadcast far and wide for a long time to taint not only people who might be jurors but everybody in a land where a war is going on between oppressed peoples and the oppressors. It's clear the guerrillas intended to shoot police and that's who they shot. They shot the enemy.

Expropriation raids are a method used in every revolution by those who have got to get resources from the haves to carry on armed struggle. When George Washington and company crossed the Delaware, it was to raid the British, to take money, supplies, and arms, even though he was financed by the French and owned slaves. Joseph Stalin robbed banks when he was fifteen to support revolutionary struggle. The Sabate brothers in Spain were obliged to empty the tills of banks to resist Franco during the Spanish Civil War. When Carlos Marighella in Brazil or the Tupamaros in Uruguay expropriated from banks to finance their struggles, it was clear to the press they were revolutionaries; this government sent counterinsurgency specialists to help

the juntas and dictators they resisted and expropriated from, just as they've done in regards to Argentina. But here in the U.S., the government doesn't acknowledge the collection of revolutionary compulsory tax as the work of revolutionaries, just as the British do not acknowledge the IRA, just as Israel doesn't acknowledge the PLO, and just as the South Africans do not acknowledge the ANC. It's too close. The British called Washington a criminal and issued a reward for him dead or alive, just as the Americans put a price on the head of Twyman Myers. The state must deny revolution and call revolutionary acts and revolutionaries something else, anything else—bandits, terrorists. The state must suppress revolution and say they are doing something else. Rather than argue that there's no need for revolution and be confronted with Harlem, the South Bronx, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Newark's Central Ward, North Philadelphia, etc. They say there is simply not a revolution, as if there is no reason for sweeping the oppressors from power. Revolution is always illegal and revolutionaries are always slandered.

There are clearly more than a few points that the state has pushed for reasons, beyond the legal, that clearly go past the objective of getting convictions. The first lie is that Peter Paige, the Brink's guard and money courier, was gunned down without a chance to defend himself or surrender—in order to portray the Black Liberation Army as cowardly and cold-blooded, blood-thirsty.

The BLA is an organization that takes credit for preplanned assassinations. In our history there are numerous instances of ambushed police where credit was clearly taken, where communiqués were issued to the media who do not broadcast them completely, if at all, because the government has directed them not to. These ambushes have always been retaliations for terrorist acts against Black people—these acts have always been responses to murders, brutalizations, and threats against Black people, Third-World

people, or their forces of resistance. Never has a guard or a bank teller been shot down as part of a plan; no unit of the BLA has ever done this, including the unit involved in the expropriation of October 20, 1981. Our war is not a license and the BLA reserves assassinations for those who are combatants in opposition to the revolution and those who direct them. Money couriers are safe so long as they do not put their bodies and weapons in between someone else's money or try to shoot their way out of a source of embarrassment or into a promotion or an early grave.

This is because the goal of an expropriation is to collect revolutionary compulsory tax and not casualties. A unit is no better off with a guard killed. Shots are signals that alert more police more quickly and directly than an onlooker's phone call. Guerrillas prefer to take the weapons from the holsters of guards or pick them up after they've been dropped and complete the action without anyone except guards and guerrillas being any the wiser. Had Peter Paige not acted the fool, he would've lived and his coworker would not have been injured.

War is expensive, you know that; you don't pay taxes once. And no matter how much money a unit may get from an expropriation, that unit as well as others will have to engage in other expropriations in the course of a protracted war. The BLA doesn't want a situation where guards believe they will be shot whether they comply or not, because then there would always be shootouts. Dead guards don't bring us a step closer to land and independence and don't add a cent to a war chest. At the same time, the BLA doesn't want guards to believe for an instant that they have any reasonable alternatives outside of compliance.

The only parties that benefit from a bloody shootout during an expropriation are the bankers, the bosses of the armored car corporations, and career counterinsurgency experts. The first two put their money, or what they label

their money, before the lives of guerrillas, as well as their employees; the third, without New Afrikan, Puerto Rican, or Mexican fugitives to justify raids in those colonies, could find themselves in fatigues in the wilds of the Dakotas laying siege to Native American colonies. Paige died for his bosses not for himself, his family, or his fellow workers.

State clone Michael Koch issued another slanderous attack for the state. At one point in his testimony he says that one of the combatants says in regards to Kathy Boudin, "Fuck her, leave her." On one episode of *Today's FBI*, a band of "terrorists" takes a truck of 1.6 million dollars and purposely leave one of their comrades. On one episode of *Hill Street Blues*, a radical band gets 1.6 million dollars from another truck. In the FBI fiction the radicals mow down the guards as a matter of course; in the *Hill Street Blues* fiction, the beautiful white girl, when faced with life in prison, serves up her comrades for a deal that sounded not unlike a slave auction, with time being the medium, rather than money. Koch meanwhile hasn't gotten a contract as a writer or an actor—I tell you, there is no justice in this world.

There's no record of the BLA leaving comrades in hostile areas on purpose. When comrades are wounded, attempts are made to carry them. The state contends that Marilyn Buck was wounded and taken to Mount Vernon with the unit in question. The state wants to have it both ways.

The BLA doesn't work that way. We have a saying: "The lowest circles in hell are reserved for those who desert their comrades." The BLA has a history of aiding the escapes of comrades from prisons and other detention centers. The state-issued lie that any of us said anything to the effect to leave anyone who had participated in any action with us is designed to portray us as users and racist. For the state to project that piece of propaganda at the same time that it lines the roofs with rifle-toting clowns, posts guards at each block and intersection, and transports us in armed convoys without red lights is not only

an insult to us but an insult to anybody outside the state who hears it. Every day we come to court there are scores of fat middle-aged cops crouching behind trees, phone poles, and cars, guns at the ready. This is not because they think we can break out of handcuffs, waist chains, and leg chains, and then dive out of closed car windows and sprint to the next county before anyone notices what is going on. They do this because the BLA does not forfeit comrades into the hands of the enemy and does not forfeit those who struggle beside us into the hands of the enemy. There are enough instances of aided escapes, attempts at escapes, and fierce battles to avoid capture to make it clear how we feel and how we deal.

They say that veteran police officers responding to an incident where one guard was mortally wounded were convinced to put a shotgun away by Boudin, but Waverly Brown didn't have a shotgun. They say he was the first to go in any event, that O'Grady was loading his weapon when someone ran up to him shooting, but didn't he have six shells in his weapon when he responded? And if he was reloading, doesn't that mean he fired six times and, for all practical purposes, missed. Lennon says he watched O'Grady get shot but didn't Lennon have a pistol that was loaded, as well as a shotgun? Why didn't he shoot the man who ran up and shot O'Grady? Why was Keenan so far away from the action? And didn't hit no one? Why is it that so many police officers converged on the scene so soon after the battle?

Once they got a couple of suspects who had surrendered, who were outnumbered, handcuffed, they got tough at the action, but i suggest that they lost heart! That the odds were too even, that Koch has been spinning his yarn to his coworkers for two years, took a circular approach to the roadblock, because the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. Do you believe that he lost an opportunity to shoot someone who had been shooting at other cops because some lady's scream broke his concentration? Or that

another cop, John McCord, missed his opportunity to shoot Marilyn Buck, because just as she drove up he dropped a shell and by the time he reached down to pick it up, she zoomed right past him? What was so important about that particular shell, outside of it being a catalyst for a fish story? Why would an experienced cop and bodyguard like O'Grady try to load every shell into his revolver when someone is running up to him to kill him? Why does the state insist that we swallow all of this?

How did those cars that had been spotted and noted get out of the area? Well, i'll tell you why; it was because the cops who got paid so much a week wanted backup in a big way. This was discernable war. One group of soldiers in opposition to another group of soldiers. One group of soldiers who ate and slept at the front and another who may not have witnessed colonialism contested so aggressively before. i don't know. The state says there were six people coming out of the back of the truck, with pistols and an automatic rifle, and counting Koch there were five cops with revolvers and two shotguns. The insurgents left one pistol at the scene of the expropriation, one pistol and one shotgun at the scene of the roadblock. i don't think there were any supermen or saints around that day battling it out on Route 59, or Mad Dog Killers or Cowboys, i think there were only men, mortals, one group called niggers and the other group called pigs. Lennon, during his hypnotic session, when he described a Black man running up to O'Grady shooting, didn't describe that Black man as a "terrorist" or "robber," he called that man a nigger, "a big nigger." He'd taken his mask off while in the car weathering the storm, and he had to push a dead nigger away from the door to get out of the car.

Gribetz, the perfect representative of the United States, a pimple of a man, has tons of evidence that has been labeled, marked, and stored for two years. He has two Browning gmms, the Doberman pinscher of pistols, no prints on

them, no bullets from them in bodies, but it's important. He has a shotgun, or a picture of one, also, and shell casings that can't be placed on anyone, but it's important too, because niggers are only supposed to have spears. He's got expert witnesses giving expert testimony and opinions on prints and glass. Ms. Clark had five kinds of glass on her, two, in the "expert's" opinion "consistent" with Brink's brand glass and Honda glass, and three other kinds of glass. They mention two pistols and a shotgun of mine, which had a part missing, by the way, as if it's evidence. When the fact is that i should have had a bomb or at least a grenade. He's got a witness who remembers—when he asks, "Did you happen to see a white male with brown hair, a brown beard, and a big nose." He's got lots of witnesses. He's got clothes, pieces of bullets, pictures of bullets, pictures of cars, trucks, and everything but our masks.

He has ski masks, and he has his own public official mask, his civil servant mask. But he doesn't have ours, we've thrown them away. We are not going to act like wayward citizens in a democratic society before a just court with the duty of administering justice. We act like ourselves. New Afrikan and anti-imperialist freedom fighters in an imperialist empire that colonizes and commits genocide against New Afrikan, Native American, Puerto Rican, and Mexicano people, before an impostor in an armed camp.

In an effort to deny the issue of New Afrikan Independence that is part and parcel of the October 20, 1981 action, the state has presented its politics that we are to be confronted with. The politics of imperialism, based in their myth of justice in their colonial courts, whose function somehow should be participated in by its victims, as if this whole scheme of things is in the interests of the oppressed. It's legal to oppress and illegal to resist.

At the helm of this myth are the police, who *are* the government after six o'clock p.m., are of a species above that of mortals. Whose racism is less than the general society's, whose competence and heroism is beyond us all and

is the apex of all culture. When, in fact, police are at best only human and are tools of the state who are employed to maintain an unjust, exploitative, oppressive system that holds New Afrikan and other Third-World peoples under subjection and in a colonial relationship.

When i was growing up, the bulk of programs on TV were Westerns, where the heroes shot down endless rows of Native Americans, while calling them Indians, Redskins, and what not. There were other Westerns too, like *Gunsmoke*. Marshal Dillon shot fifty-two people a year and was the central character in *Dodge City*. i never remember seeing the mayor, preacher, or schoolteacher, only Dillon and his friends—Doc, Chester, and Miss Kitty—and i thought they were my friends too.

Now, Matt Dillon is Chief McCain on the cop show *McCain's Law*, and even Captain Kirk is a cop! Westerns have been replaced by cop shows. There are twenty-nine hours of cop shows on TV each week. There are more cop shows on during prime time—and all the other times on TV on any week—than any other type of program. There is not a single program on TV other than comedies where a Black is the central character. We are portrayed as sidekicks of cops, snitches, and sources of humor, without exception.

This is all in the interest of images. Pictures say a thousand words; they say what seems to be a fact over and over in ways that can't be countered by reasonable argument, without investigating reality. White racism does not for the most part care what really goes on inside New Afrikan colonies, or even recognize that we do indeed live in colonies. But because white racism is politically and morally bankrupt, it is concerned about its image. That's why people familiar with Newburgh, Harlem, and Overtown can ignore the issue of colonialism, even while Reagan speaks of free enterprise zones, *Bantustans*! That is why the U.S., with jaw-shaking righteousness, can say that it doesn't have colonies, while planning to turn the beautiful island of Puerto Rico into an industrial park.

These people who judge us should take a city bus or a cab through the South Bronx, the Central Ward of Newark, North Philadelphia, the Northwest section of the District of Columbia, or any Third World reservation and see if they can note a robbery in progress. See if they recognize the murder of innocent people. This is the issue, the myth that the imperialists should not be confronted and cannot be beaten is eroding fast, and we stand here ready to do whatever to make the myth erode even faster, and to say for the record that not only will the imperialist U.S. lose, but that it should lose.

i am not going to tell you that the Black Liberation Army's ranks are made up of saints; it is clear that there have been impostors among us who have sold out and are worse than the enemies history has pitted us against. And i am not going to tell you that there's no virtue among money couriers or policemen. However, i will tell you now and forever that New Afrikan people have a right to self-determination and that is more important than the lives of Paige, Brown, and O'Grady or Balagoon, Gilbert, and Clark. And it's gonna cost more lives and be worth every life it costs, because the destiny of over thirty million people and the coming generation's rights to land and independence is priceless.

Toni Morrison

Strangers

1998

I am in this river place—newly mine—walking in the yard when I see a woman sitting on the seawall at the edge of a neighbor’s garden. A homemade fishing pole arcs into the water some twenty feet from her hand. A feeling of welcome washes over me. I walk toward her, right up to the fence that separates my place from the neighbor’s, and notice with pleasure the clothes she wears: men’s shoes, a man’s hat, a well-worn colorless sweater over a long black dress. The woman turns her head and greets me with an easy smile and a “How you doing?” She tells me her name (Mother Something) and we talk for some time—fifteen minutes or so—about fish recipes and weather and children. When I ask her if she lives there, she answers no. She lives in a nearby village, but the owner of the house lets her come to this spot any time she wants to fish, and she comes every week, sometimes several days in a row when the perch or catfish are running and even if they aren’t because she likes eel, too, and they are always there. She is witty and full of the wisdom that older women always seem to have a lock on. When we part, it is with an understanding that she will be there the next day or very soon after and we will visit again. I imagine more conversations with her. I will invite her into my house for coffee, for tales, for laughter. She reminds me of someone, something. I imagine a friendship, casual, effortless, delightful.

She is not there the next day. She is not there the following days, either. And I look for her every morning. The summer passes, and I have not seen her at all. Finally, I approach the neighbor to ask about her and am bewildered to learn that the neighbor does not know who or what I am talking about. No old woman fished from her wall—ever—and none had permission to do so.

I decide that the fisherwoman fibbed about the permission and took advantage of the neighbor's frequent absences to poach. The fact of the neighbor's presence is proof that the fisherwoman would not be there. During the months following, I ask lots of people if they know Mother Something. No one, not even people who have lived in nearby villages for seventy years, has ever heard of her.

I feel cheated, puzzled, but also amused, and wonder off and on if I have dreamed her. In any case, I tell myself, it was an encounter of no value other than anecdotal. Still. Little by little, annoyance then bitterness takes the place of my original bewilderment. A certain view from my windows is now devoid of her, reminding me every morning of her deceit and my disappointment. What was she doing in that neighborhood, anyway? She didn't drive, had to walk four miles if indeed she lived where she said she did. How could she be missed on the road in that hat, those awful shoes? I try to understand the intensity of my chagrin, and why I am missing a woman I spoke to for fifteen minutes. I get nowhere except for the stingy explanation that she had come into my space (next to it, anyway—at the property line, at the edge, just at the fence, where the most interesting things always happen), and had implied promises of female camaraderie, of opportunities for me to be generous, of protection and protecting. Now she is gone, taking with her my good opinion of myself, which, of course, is unforgivable.

Isn't that the kind of thing that we fear strangers will do? Disturb. Betray. Prove they are not like us. That is why it is so hard to know what to do with them. The love that prophets have urged us to offer the stranger is the same love that Jean-Paul Sartre could reveal as the very mendacity of Hell. The signal line of *No Exit*, "*L'enfer, c'est les autres*," raises the possibility that "other people" are responsible for turning a personal world into a public hell. In the admonition of a prophet and the sly warning of an artist, strangers as well as the beloved are understood to tempt our gaze, to slide away or to

stake claims. Religious prophets caution against the slide, the looking away; Sartre warns against love as possession.

The resources available to us for benign access to each other, for vaulting the mere blue air that separates us, are few but powerful: language, image, and experience, which may involve both, one, or neither of the first two: language (saying, listening, reading) can encourage, even mandate, surrender, the breach of distances among us, whether they are continental or on the same pillow, whether they are distances of culture or the distinctions and indistinctions of age or gender, whether they are the consequences of social invention or biology. Image increasingly rules the realm of shaping, sometimes becoming, often contaminating, knowledge. Provoking language or eclipsing it, an image can determine not only what we know and feel but also what we believe is worth knowing about what we feel.

These two godlings, language and image, feed and form experience. My instant embrace of an outrageously dressed fisherwoman was due in part to an image on which my representation of her was based. I immediately sentimentalized and appropriated her. I owned her or wanted to (and I suspect she glimpsed it). I had forgotten the power of embedded images and stylish language to seduce, reveal, control. Forgot, too, their capacity to help us pursue the human project—which is to remain human and to block the dehumanization of others.

But something unforeseen has entered into this admittedly oversimplified menu of our resources. Far from our original expectations of increased intimacy and broader knowledge, routine media presentations deploy images and language that narrow our view of what humans look like (or ought to look like) and what in fact we are like. Succumbing to the perversions of media can blur vision, resisting them can do the same. I was clearly and aggressively resisting such influences in my encounter with the fisherwoman. Art as well as the market can be complicit in the sequestering of form from formula, of

nature from artifice, of humanity from commodity. Art gesturing toward representation has, in some exalted quarters, become literally beneath contempt. The concept of what it is to be human has altered, and the word *truth* needs quotation marks around it so that its absence (its elusiveness) is stronger than its presence.

Why would we want to know a stranger when it is easier to estrange another? Why would we want to close the distance when we can close the gate? Appeals in arts and religion for comity in the Common Wealth are faint.

It took some time for me to understand my unreasonable claims on that fisherwoman. To understand that I was longing for and missing some aspect of myself, and that there are no strangers. There are only versions of ourselves, many of which we have not embraced, most of which we wish to protect ourselves from. For the stranger is not foreign, she is random, not alien but remembered; and it is the randomness of the encounter with our already known—although unacknowledged—selves that summons a ripple of alarm. That makes us reject the figure and the emotions it provokes—especially when these emotions are profound. It is also what makes us want to own, govern, administrate the Other. To romance her, if we can, back into our own mirrors. In either instance (of alarm or false reverence), we deny her personhood, the specific individuality we insist upon for ourselves.

Robert Bergman's radiant portraits of strangers provoked this meditation. Occasionally, there arises an event or a moment that one knows immediately will forever mark a place in the history of artistic endeavor. Bergman's portraits represent such a moment, such an event. In all its burnished majesty his gallery refuses us unearned solace, and one by one by one the photographs unveil *us*, asserting a beauty, a kind of rapture, that is as close as can be to a master template of the singularity, the community, the unextinguishable sacredness of the human race.

Zoé Samudzi

Ruthlessness and Sensual Ineptitude

2019

“There’s a correlation between a man’s sensual ineptitude
and his ruthlessness.” —Jeff Clark

I don't understand why we pretend that most of us don't have daddy issues, why the discussion of these paternal traumas are reserved for cruel jokes about women's poor choices in partners or the apparent origins of our sexual promiscuity. When I asked my friend Jeff about the origin of this reflection, he told me it was about his own late father. He wrote to me:

My biological father was a charming man—a professional musician who was performative and gregarious as well as highly invested in pornography and sexual conquests. I know from two women who were sexually intimate with him he was a terrible lover. And he could be abusive and cruel with his wives and girlfriends, as well as with me.

It feels like an inscrutable paradox to me that coupled with his extravagant sociality he was also totally rigid as an intellect, hostile as an interlocutor (when challenged in conversation), and homophobic. He was also prone to lying. While the music he made had forms of beauty to it, his sense of personal fashion was tacky, he didn't know how to cook, his apartments were dark and musty, and their decor was ugly. He had a track record of plowing through wives, girlfriends, dates, sex workers, but he didn't have any female friends, and he despised his mother, who despised him in turn.

If he had no capacity for attentive physical tenderness nor skills with which to bring sensual pleasure to a sexual partner, then he certainly had no ability to maintain a love-bond with any woman, a fact which has proven true his entire life. I feel like this lack of regard for the somatic-emotional welfare of his lovers in turn deepened his hostilities and self-loathing. In a hotel room in the middle of one night in the '80s I heard him slap a woman and tell her that if she ever left him he'd kill her.

While we surely do not all have the same kind of father, I think we are still indelibly marked by this ineptitude in some way. While many of us are carriers of some dormant pain, one that has settled into our bones and our subconscious and presents itself in subtle and sometimes undetectable ways, others relate to this treachery as if looking through beer goggles or a viewfinder or a kaleidoscope—it can artificially beautify or it can manipulate or distort or disorient.

At the end of 2018, we were captivated and horrified by the images of the group of Central American migrants traveling northwards into the United States. A white female commentator, in a now-deleted tweet, noted the Pulitzer Prize-worthiness of one photograph in particular, rather than the horror it captured. It is a South Korean photojournalist, Kim Kyung-Hoon, who captured that devastating now-viral image of a mother near the United States–Mexico border fleeing from teargas fired by the American military with her children.¹ (Kyung-Hoon ended up being awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Photography along with the photography staff of Reuters for their “vivid and startling visual narrative of the urgency, desperation and sadness of migrants as they journeyed to the U.S. from Central and South America.”) John Edwin Mason reminded us that the 2018 winners of the Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize were four white photographers who captured portraits of non-white people.

As fascism was reaching a fever pitch in Europe, Walter Benjamin wrote that our “self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure.” The aestheticization of politics—the extraction of images, figures, phenomena from innately political subject matter—is the calling card of fascism, a treatment of the world as a

container for objects that can be consumed, appropriated, redefined, exploited in service of a totalitarian control. It isn't that we cannot find beauty within the apocalypse (or, per Jimmy Johnson, the apocalypse of the apocalyptic settler imaginary and its material destructions of indigeneity). Rather, it is the horrific realization that the optics of the apocalypse are not always understood as being the real-time illustrations of our barreling towards apocalyptic condition. The aestheticization of politics is coupled with a normalization of the political condition because the dissemination of those images is often understood as "awareness raising." But how does one raise awareness about a social ecology or racialized environment collapsed within the colonial imaginary as, per Saidiya Hartman, "the visual clichés of damnation and salvation"? Is this awareness-raising or a notice of eviction/demolition—a crassly memetic reminder of lands and liberties "targeted for destruction and elimination"? A better awareness would be a cognizance of how these memetic and viral images traumatize individuals and communities who are their perpetual subjects. And that all of us consuming such images are actually the subjects of the image, not simply the audience.

Allen Feldman writes that "aggressive technologies of image making and image imposition, whether used by 'terrorists' or the state apparatus, do not simply refract or record an event, but become the event by materially transcribing a political code onto the built environment, cultural memory and the politicized body, and by immersing spectator-participants in fear provoking simulations of space-time actuality."³ And then Jane Blocker, on images of/from the 1994 Rwandan genocide, writes that because of the western world's "technologies of surveillance, its ubiquitous media, its free press, its Christian heritage, and its military power," it "imagines its own witnessing, it conceives of that witnessing in terms that are both photographic and godlike: as itself unseen, as omniscient, disembodied, and disinterested." It is a way

of seeing, a “technology of witness,” that is marked most notably by blindness because “the ‘white ones’ cannot understand what they were sent to witness.” A confrontation of the image becomes an exercise of developing a grammar of image contextualization as it relates to the formation of one’s own self as opposed to also an extension of selfhood and humanity to the photographed Other.⁴ It is, for example, “the visibility of [Black bodies that] served as justification for capture,”⁵ as it is also the constant photographing of Chinese immigrants in 19th-century United States that informed the development of race-making and racial gatekeeping as a central component of American immigration law.⁶

When we think about the circulation of photographs from Abu Ghraib in early 2004, the intention of showing photographs of black-shrouded and -hooded, stress-positioned, leashed, anguished, and tortured men (Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh, most famously), was to inform American audiences exactly what their tax dollars were going towards in the maintenance of the unpopular Iraq invasion-cum-neverending war.⁷ But the photographs were initially created in service of the degradation and humiliation of those incarcerated people, and the international broadcasting of those photographs neither facilitated the closure of the facility nor the release of those men. So, in considering what Kimberly Juanita Brown describes as “photographic humanitarianism,”⁸ why are we sharing obviously traumatizing and objectifying images of racialized *bodies* (as opposed to “racialized *people*”) if we’ve no specific purpose apart from some abstracted notion of awareness (oftentimes about conditions of which we are well aware)? Who is the beneficiary of this apparent act of goodwill? The infliction of violence upon non-white *bodies* (again, instead of “non-white *people*”) is an integral component of white psychosex-

uality: it is a conditioned pleasure and an internalization and reproduction of a photographic gaze which is a raced and classed and gendered patriarchal-paternal warfare in itself.

“Sentimentalism, a cultural form that has always been a major presence in American life, has metastasized in recent years, especially since September 11, 2001,” write Mark Reinhardt and Holly Edwards.⁹ In this War on Terror moment, the trafficking in suffering—a surveillant form that bears particular importance for nation-state identity—is an attempt to make such suffering meaningful and legible. But where constant identity-based suffering exists, for whom do these images exist as edification? How might this edification exist contra a politic of empathy and care, and how does our reliance on disseminating images of violence actually foreclose the cultivation of those care-full ethics and praxis? How is it profitable to share those images, from which death merchants profit? And where (photographic) seeing is central to believing but the “authority of photographic witnessing has been corroded by competition from television, film and other media,”¹⁰ what is meant by this photographic treachery, in this post-truth moment where image falsification and misdescription are so rife and easy? In this age of even more democratic social media?

I now see this type of man everywhere in the world: the man who is outgoing, flirtatious, has social capital, is obsessed with women and with making selfish use of their bodies, yet who demonstrates little awareness of what a woman’s emotional or erotic pleasures and needs might be—and one who also, crucially, doesn’t actually demonstrate any capacity to revere or respect or even acknowledge the boundaries or lived experiences or intellectual/artistic production of women. These men are often in positions of authority. They’re cops, coaches,

executives, performers, ministers, etc.—almost as if to survive the unconscious knowledge that they're incapable of fostering pleasure they must focus instead on acquiring power.

And the ones who commit abuse with their physical and/or institutional power can't be sensually gratifying because in order for us to be gratified by a lover we've got to be seen, held, tended to, sometimes served, with our boundaries and limits respected. Yet each time a malevolent man fails to detect the indicators of genuine pleasure in our eyes and bodies, which is to say, every single time, his animosity is rekindled, and he must substitute for this pleasure he cannot give us its opposite, which is contempt or pain or servitude.

Robert Bergman's *A Kind of Rapture* (which draws its title from a line in Toni Morrison's foreword) is stunning because in flipping through its pages, I found myself trying to describe each portrait with a synonym of the word "sad," an admitted sign of my own limited vocabulary and imagination. Morrison's foreword describes the function of strangers: that "the stranger is not foreign, she is random." She is someone whom we ought to treat with care and empathy. It is the stirring of multiple selves within our singular self (Self?) "that summons a ripple of alarm." And this affective stirring leads us to reject this stranger: "It is also what makes us want to own, govern, or administer the Other." In the page following the foreword is a provocation-invitation by Isabella Gardner. In it, she describes love as a reciprocated recognition, a meeting of and interaction between "two solitudes," a "democracy of universal vulnerability." By this logic, Sharpe's wake work and Hartman's care ethic, abolitionists' transformative justice, Black feminism's citation and representation ethics,¹¹ indigenous communizations would serve to establish this nation-state's very first democratic social processes. Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa¹² describes

a democratization in Bergman's image-making, writing that his portraits compel him to discover "how to respond to the mystery of this stranger without seeking to reduce him to some manageable position on a calibrated index of difference from which [he] might separate [himself]." The beautiful complicatedness of Bergman's portraits (and one might question whether they border on exploitative), Wolukau-Wanambwa continues, is that they force us as viewers "to occupy a liminal position between holding and being held, between beholding and being beheld. In that reciprocal conjuncture, we are confronted not merely by what we do not yet know of one another, but more pressingly by the question of what we owe to one another." To paraphrase, the portrait itself contains both an image and an ethic.

None of this is at all to pretend that we cannot and/or should not attempt to capture, recreate, stylize images of violence—that's something of an unrealistic ask in the fascism-friendly times in which we live. But the documentary form is not the detached and disaffected and objective image-making project we're taught to believe it is. It can be powerful and cathartic and humanizing and empathy-making; and it can also (and even simultaneously!) be as selfish and sadistic and exploitative and insidious as the abusive and negligent sentiments and impulses that traumatize us and haunt our own lives and worldviews.

The callousness and carelessness, the ruthlessness and calculatedness, the objectification and de-subjectification, the dominating maleness, the externalization of inherited harm, is our way of knowing the world. It is an investment in a system forged by—and a perpetuation of—the hurt that came to be the "objective reality" imposed upon us by a visual language exclusively (at first) and still dominated by white men. And yet we seek to "diversify" and "include" (in ways that ultimately insulate instead of displace whiteness) rather than wonder whether this thematic and canonical narration is unreli-

able: whether this white gaze is conceived of, maintained, and re-socialized by unreliable narrators because it is the meted-out harm and a democratization of patriarchal pain (inasmuch as, now, just about anyone can take and share a photograph) that informs our sightscape. The diversification of images does not actually counter, to quote M. Neelika Jayawardane, this “overabundance of a problematic gaze”: it is perhaps a salve, a temporary one, but no kind of permanent resolution.

Notes

1. And we mustn't forget Decolonize This Place's reminder of the linkage between art institutions and state violence—the vice chairman of the Whitney Museum of American Art, Warren B. Kanders, purchased defense manufacturer Safariland in 2012, the very corporation that produced many of the tear gas and smoke grenade canisters fired at 39-year-old Honduran Maria Meza and her twin daughters and so many others.

2. From *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*:

The surveys and sociological pictures left me cold. These photographs never grasped the beautiful struggle to survive, glimpsed the alternative modes of live, or illuminated the mutual aid and communal wealth of the slum. The reform pictures and the sociological surveys documented only ugliness. Everything good and decent stood on the ruins of proscribed modes of affiliation and ways of living: the love unrecognized by the law, households open to strangers, the public intimacy of the streets, and the aesthetic predilections an willful excesses of you black folks. The social worlds represented in these pictures were targeted for destruction and elimination. The reformers used words like “improvement” and “social betterment” and “protection,” but no one was fooled. The interracial slum was razed and mapped onto homogeneous zones of absolute difference. The black ghetto was born. *The captions transform the photographs into moral pictures, amplify the poverty, arrange and classify disorder* (italics my own).

3. "On the Actuarial Gaze: From 9/11 to Abu Ghraib" (2005).
4. "A Cemetery of Images: Mediations on the Burial of Photographs" (2005).
5. See: Patrice D. Douglas' "Black Feminist Theory for the Dead and Dying" (2018).
6. See: Anna Pegler-Gordon's "Chinese Exclusion, Photography, and the Development of U.S. Immigration Policy" (2006).
7. See: Peggy Phelan's "Atrocity and Action: The Performative Force of the Abu Ghraib Photographs" in *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis* (2012).
8. "Regarding the Pain of the Other: Photography, Famine, and the Transference of Affect" in *Feeling Photography* (2014).
9. "Traffic in Pain" by Mark Reinhardt and Holly Edwards in *Beautiful Suffering: Photography in the Traffic of Pain* (edited by Mark Reinhardt, Holly Edwards, and Erina Duganne) (2007).
10. Ibid.
11. These ethics prioritize co-production and co-generation over attempts to possess and enclose a tradition of creation born out of collectivity.
12. "Can Robert Bergman Teach Us to See Again?" in *Aperture* (January 15, 2019).

Jean Weir

To the Deranged

2016

These pages are for the deranged, individuals not submerged in habit, regimented by protocol or banalized by identity, who refuse to be controlled, “facilitated,” or herded into numerically-oriented deadlines. They want to encounter those who can still raise their voices and howl with joy in a subdued world where the ironic smirk of the all-knowing has replaced the wink of complicity and laughter has dissolved into a kind of hiccough, a punctuation mark to round off the glib remarks of the eternally detached. They would like to meet those who combine destructive tension with wisdom, and, armed with creative devilry, venture into the poisoned jungle of capital to hack it down and let life surge forth.

The deranged are neither dumbed down by habit nor blinded by the “greatest show on earth.” Rather than run around for a cause to support they are fighting for their own cause, egoistically conquering moments of freedom, subverting and attacking the existent with all means, knowing that Chaos is life and that Reason continues to generate monsters.

The authoritarian organizations of attack in the not-too-distant past were products of Reason, but they didn’t get the chance to put their ultimate goal of managing power into effect. These structures have seen their day and old schema have given way to flexible projects of social control. It is precisely in this terrain that recycled Marxists and certain anarchists/libertarians are finding common ground, to the point that you can be an anarchist one day, a post-marxist the next, and if the stomach resists, mutate into an indigestible hybrid. The anarchist aesthetic is more appealing, but the radical left has so many fascinating theories . . . The labyrinthine tomes of these aspirants-to-power-

turned-cohabitants-with-the-existent are more seductive these days, their workerist verbiage now extinct along with the proletariat.

Social control is becoming self-control: large numbers released from the prison/factories and mines of western Europe—thanks to neo-slavery and digital technology these now function (almost) perfectly on the other side of the planet—require order from within and the suppression of individual tensions. This has led to the development of an “anti-authoritarian” practice and a “non-hierarchical” politically correct language that has been generally accepted regardless of ideology, which has taken a back seat. The internalized fear of a raised voice, someone speaking out of turn, the intrusion of an idea or critique into the smooth machinery of dissenting consensus is turning thousands of people into bored and boring participants in the same old designs of the same old minorities concealed behind the wall of resigned participation that can even embrace aspects of well choreographed street “violence” or neighborhood initiatives. There has hardly ever been a conscious decision to experiment some of the insurrectionalist methods that have appeared in embryo in the struggle in recent decades. These have rarely been taken up and addressed in deliberate attempts to provoke rebellion, preferring to subjugate anarchy to alliances with the leftist forces—that welcome them with open arms, of course—pouring all their creative/destructive potential into the dead end of patching things up.

Beyond all that, there is an elsewhere that is almost tangible but continues to elude us. It is dissipating into thin air, leaving a dissolute state of ennui tainting rebel visions and dreams. We have done it all, seen everything before. Stormed the heavens. Entered the prison gates and come out again, relatively unscathed. “The movement is at a low ebb.” “We need new ideas, new methods to transport us into the field of battle once again.”

In spite of that, attacks on capital and the State by individual and small

groups of anarchists have been practically the only ones perceptible alongside the huge spontaneous revolts that have shaken the ground almost everywhere on the planet in the recent past. And this anarchist attack has not just been addressed at the structures of power but also against the enemy within, both in the form of citizen/snitches and a stagnant movement whose only strength is addressed at attempts to denigrate or recuperate the rebels, the uncontrollables.

However, the anarchist movement as a whole cannot be seen as a privileged point of reference for the necessary destruction of the existent. If the (apparently) floundering capitalists were to throw out buoys to those gasping to stay alive in the deadly seas of economic megalomania, how many anarchists would be among the first to reach out to grab one? What better than a bunch of organizationally obsessed anti-authoritarians to (self) manage the new wild capitalism's eternal swindle of "fixing things," now that formal authority is out of fashion and the politician has moved from inveterate clown to obsolete clone?

That is why the time to attack is now. There is nothing and no one to wait for. To act now, with determined projectuality where our destructive tension is the defining factor in our lives, not something that appears every now and again out of the blue. In the era of "use and discard," flexibility, snap decisions and about-turns, there is little desire to think things through, discuss strategies and methods, identify an intermediate target and act towards the destructive culmination of the attack.

The production of trivia has led to a trivialized world. Some of what loosely defines itself the anarchist movement has fused with the urban subculture, dissipating tensions into a social whirl of benefit gigs and various forms of anaesthetic from music to "soft" substances to dull the pain.

For those in the logic of a horizontal attack on the workings of power

(which are complex and always in a desperate battle to maintain equilibrium and consensus) on the other hand, the objectives are specific, they do not have “revolutionary” connotations but insurrectional ones. A few comrades, an analysis of the objective in question, simple means of communication, a minimal organizational proposal and above all the decision to see the experiment through to its destructive climax. An informal insurrectionalist movement is above all a methodology of self-organized attack, not a fixed organization. It does not require numbers in order to exist. A few comrades might enter relations of affinity and decide to move against a particular objective, in an insurrectionalist intermediate struggle. But they are not acting in a vacuum, they wish to stimulate conscious rebellion by the exploited, not just wait for the next riot to explode. Not desiring to increase in number as a group, they propose the creation of minimal self-organized formations that could multiply and widen into a generalized attack on the existent at any moment, but don’t have to wait for this before attacking themselves.

An informally organized projectuality of destructive action directed against class enemies or their structures refuses mediation, delegation or negotiation. It can have NO COMMON GROUND with political parties, unions or any other fixed political or armed structures, as these are antithetical to and enemies of freedom. The concept of alliances or a common struggle is absurd. Parallel lines never meet. If they do, one or other has lost its essence. Anarchists who end up making political alliances in the illusion of numerical strength are traitors: of themselves and what they say they stand for and of the rebels they had enchanted with their cries of freedom, to become nothing more than witless allies of the boss class.

Time is running out. We must rescue our anger, our bad passions, from the swamp of tolerance and political correctness, focus our hearts and minds on the great challenge that is bidding us, break out and encounter our future

comrades and accomplices, the exploited, the angry ones, the rebels. They are all around us but will remain invisible like ourselves until we come out into the open with unequivocal words and above all, actions.

The workings of capital are there to be found if we look for them, far from the propagandistic *fausse pistes* and staged ego-trips of trumped-up puppets and showmen. Most of the materials necessary for attack are available on the shelves of the supermarkets and are simple household objects waiting to be appropriated. The rest—the “hardware,” the accomplices, the solidarity—will come forth from the reality of the struggle itself and the new paths it reveals.

Willem Van Spronsen

Final Statement

2019

There's wrong and there's right.

It's time to take action against the forces of evil.

Evil says one life is worth less than another.

Evil says the flow of commerce is our purpose here.

Evil says concentration camps for folks deemed lesser are necessary.

The handmaid of evil says the concentration camps should be more humane.

Beware the centrist.

I have a father's broken heart.

I have a broken down body.

And I have an unshakable abhorrence for injustice.

That is what brings me here.

This is my clear opportunity to try to make a difference. I'd be an ingrate to be waiting for a more obvious invitation.

I follow three teachers:

Don Pritts, my spiritual guide. "Love without action is just a word."

John Brown, my moral guide. "What is needed is action!"

Emma Goldman, my political guide. "If I can't dance, I don't want to be in your revolution."

I'm a head in the clouds dreamer, I believe in love and redemption.

I believe we're going to win.

I'm joyfully revolutionary. (We all should have been reading Emma Goldman in school instead of the jingo drivel we were fed. But I digress.) (We should all be looking at the photos of the YPG heroes should we falter and think our dreams are impossible, but I double digress. Fight me.)

In these days of fascist hooligans preying on vulnerable people in our streets, in the name of the state or supported and defended by the state, in these days of highly profitable detention/concentration camps and a battle over the semantics,

in these days of hopelessness, empty pursuit and empty yearning, we are living in visible fascism ascendant. (I say visible, because those paying attention watched it survive and thrive under the protection of the state for decades. [See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States*.]) Now it unabashedly follows its agenda with open and full cooperation from the government. From governments around the world.

Fascism serves the needs of the state and serves the needs of business and at your expense. Who benefits? Jeff Bezos, Warren Buffet, Elon Musk, Tim Cook, Bill Gates, Betsy DeVos, George Soros, Donald Trump, and need I go on? Let me say it again: rich guys (who think you're not really all that good) really dig government (every government everywhere, including "communist" governments), because they make the rules that make rich guys richer.

Simple.

Don't overthink it.

(Are you patriots in the back paying attention?)

When I was a boy, in post-war Holland, later France, my head was filled with stories of the rise of fascism in the '30s. I promised myself that I would not be one of those who stand by as neighbors are torn from their homes and imprisoned for somehow being perceived as lesser.

You don't have to burn the motherfucker down, but are you going to just stand by?

This is the test of our fundamental belief in real freedom and our responsibility to each other.

This is a call to patriots, too, to stand against this travesty, against every-

thing that you hold sacred. I know you. I know that in your hearts, you see the dishonor in these camps. It's time for you, too, to stand up to the money pulling the strings of *every* goddamn puppet pretending to represent us.

I'm a man who loves you all and this spinning ball so much that I'm going to fulfill my childhood promise to myself to be noble.

Here it is, in these corporate *for profit* concentration camps.

Here it is, in brown and non-conforming folks afraid to show their faces for fear of the police/migra/Proud Boys/the boss/Beckies . . .

Here it is, a planet almost used up by the market's greed.

I'm a black and white thinker.

Detention camps are an abomination.

I'm not standing by.

I really shouldn't have to say any more than this.

I set aside my broken heart and I heal the only way I know how—by being useful.

I efficiently compartmentalize my pain . . .

and I joyfully go about this work.

(To those burdened with the wreckage from my actions, I hope that you will make the best use of that burden.)

To my comrades:

I regret that I will miss the rest of the revolution.

Thank you for the honor of having been in your midst.

Giving me space to be useful, to feel that I was fulfilling my ideals, has been the spiritual pinnacle of my life.

Doing what I can to help defend my precious and wondrous people is an experience too rich to describe.

My trans comrades have transformed me, solidifying my conviction that we will be guided to a dreamed-of future by those most marginalized among us today. I have dreamed it so clearly that I have no regret for not seeing how it turns out. Thank you for bringing me so far along.

I am antifa. I stand with comrades around the world who act from the love of life in every permutation. Comrades who understand that freedom means real freedom for all and a life worth living.

Keep the faith!

All power to the people!

Bella ciao

Audio manifesto: bit.ly/38p4wA7

Don't let your silly government agencies spend money "investigating" this one. I was radicalized in civics class at 13 when we were taught about the electoral college. It was at that point that I decided that the status quo might be a house of cards. Further reading confirmed in the positive. I highly recommend reading!

I am not affiliated with any organization, I have disaffiliated from any organizations who disagree with my choice of tactics.

The semiautomatic weapon I used was a cheap, home-built, unregistered "ghost" AR-15, it had six magazines. I strongly encourage comrades and incoming comrades to arm themselves. We are now responsible for defending people from the predatory state. Ignore the law in arming yourself, if you have the luxury. I did.

Michael Kimble

Interview

2015

Could you tell us a little about yourself?

There's not much to say about myself, there's nothing unique about me or my situation. I'm a proud Black gay anarchist that sincerely wants to bring about radical change, and when I say radical, I mean extreme and I don't think nothing can be more extreme than the total destruction of this social order, system of domination or whatever you want to call it.

What was life like growing up in Alabama? What sorts of obstacles and struggles did you have to face?

My life in Alabama, at least the early years of my existence, was beautiful. I was born and raised in the Black community of Birmingham, Alabama called Powderly (Westside) and it was rural, dirt roads, hogs, etc. At about seven years of age our house burned to the ground and we relocated to another neighborhood on the Westside called Westend. It was considered a middle-class neighborhood. We owned two houses in this neighborhood. Both of my parents worked. But little did I know, being so young, that my parents were having problems in their marriage and financially. Eventually, my parents divorced and we lost the homes. Me, my sister, and three brothers moved with our mother to the Southside for about three years and then to the Northside to the housing projects. This is when I began to have social problems. I was ostracized by the kids in the projects, but never being a wimp, I never allowed anyone to beat me up without fighting back. After the kids learned that I would fight back I was accepted as a peer. That was my biggest obstacle,

being accepted or fitting in. In the projects there was a lot of gay (drag queens) people in my peers' family, so it was nothing unusual. The thing was, would you fight. Outside was different.

Could you talk a bit about why you got locked up in the late '80s?

I got locked up in 1986 for the murder of a white guy that wanted to do harm to me and a friend who was out one night walking. We had our arms around each other and this guy started fucking with us, calling us fags, niggers, and all kinds of disrespectful, homophobic, and racist shit. When he attacked after confronting him, I pulled a pistol I had on me and shot him. The media tried to turn it into a racially motivated murder and all kinds of things. I really didn't know any of this until I had a chance to view my Pre-sentence Investigation Report (PSI) and this was after I had already been in prison awhile. I took the case to trial and received a life sentence and here I am 29 years later, still in prison because of a homophobic racist. I have no regrets about it.

You've talked before about your political development while in prison—from communism to anarchy. Could you tell us about how that happened? Were there experiences, events, relationships, or writings that pushed you in the direction of anti-authoritarian action?

Yeah, I became a communist in my early years as I've said before, because it spoke to the oppression of Black, gay, poor people and of course prisoners, and espoused the idea of creating a world free of these oppressions. I became a part of the New Afrikan Independence Movement (NAIM) which was very vocal at the time and it seemed that all the warriors from the Black Liberation Movement was part of the NAIM. And they were active in the prisons as far as legal (lawsuits, letter, phone campaigns, education) support and visiting prisoners. And of course, they participated in cultural programs as well

in the prisons here in Alabama. Also around this time the ABCs had begun to be visible through their support of “political prisoners/prisoners of war” from the previous decades’ movements (BLA, BPP, UFF, anti-imperialists, WUO, etc, so I started receiving literature and newspapers (*The Blast*, *Love & Rage*, *Bulldozer*, *Fifth Estate*, etc.) and started to learn about anarchism and it resonated with me. Shit, I was against authority, against oppression and started to see the contradictions between statehood (government) and freedom. Anarchism was/is talking about doing away with all this, and putting into practice now and not waiting on the future. And I’ve been a staunch anarchist since.

Does being gay affect your ability to organize and struggle collectively in prison?

No doubt. First, you have to understand the mindset of prison, which isn’t much different than on the outside, just smaller. On the one hand, you have the belief that being gay equals weakness, then on the other you have guys putting up a front as being very macho as a form of defense in a world of predators and/or you have guys that are political that are coming from a religio-cultural-nationalist orientation. These last guys mentioned are the guys most likely you’ll be interacting with doing any organizing. And many of them are gang members and are what is called O.G.s (Original Gangstas), gang members who are not as active in gang culture as when they were younger but still has a connection to it and are looked up to by younger gang members. All the stigmas on the outside are magnified, but one can still work with most of these guys if one has built a reputation as being one who will stand up and not take shit from anyone, pigs or prisoners, and sincere about what they say they are about. They know, they live around you daily for years. But again, it’s a struggle in and of itself just getting past all the psychological bullshit floating around in these guys’ head. You know, they’ve been told for years that some-

thing is wrong with being gay, non-conforming to traditional gender roles. So, being gay kind of blunts your voice and efforts. But as an anarchist, I rage on because of my own self-interest in bringing about disorder on the inside and contributing to the total annihilation of prisons and the system that birthed them.

What was it like being a revolutionary prisoner in the '90s, when much of the anti-imperialist movement had fallen apart and the anarchist struggle was only beginning to pull itself out of its multi-decade lull in the US?

To tell you the truth, I was so caught up in battle in these prisons I was not really focused on the outside happenings. I was preoccupied with trying to build on the inside. Of course, we were reaching out and felt the decline, but people were still trying to interact with us. I wasn't expecting too much out of the burgeoning anarchist movement since it was obvious that it was in its infancy.

Have you noticed any changes in the methods and forms of anarchist prison solidarity since you got locked up?

My experience with anarchists on the outside has not been that extensive, but from what I've observed, has been anarchist groups such as the ABCF which was most active around prisons, has been material and emotional support mainly for those of the old, established movements, organizations of decades past, whom they classify as political prisoners/POWs. That has changed to a large degree, now you have anarchists who are into the material, emotional support, but also demos, attacks against prisons, etc. That's something I never saw in the 1990s in the U.S. It's about becoming accomplices now.

You've expressed criticisms of the Political Prisoner/Prisoner of War (PP/POW) concept before. Can you elaborate on why you oppose the label and your experiences with the concept and its proponents?

First, the concept being used by most groups is based on the United Nations (UN) definition of who and what constitutes a PP/POW, so definitely I have a problem with that. As a matter of fact, I reject it. The UN is just another state institution based on domination and control of populations. Then the concept as practiced is elitist, discriminatory, and creates celebrities, and really just legitimizes the state and its legal system. The U.S. has over two million bodies in its warehouses, but only about 100 are considered PP/POWs by the groups. It's a joke. It overlooks the men and women who are fighting in these prisons and suffering because of it. Oh, I've had debates about all this with anarchists. It caused our correspondence to end. I get a headache talking about it just as I do religion. Recent anarchist struggles have had prison as a central focus, both because of the state's targeting of anarchists and because of anarchists taking offensive action against prison society.

Are there actions or struggles that have been inspiring to you recently?

The support and solidarity that was shown and given to the Free Alabama Movement (F.A.M.) here by anarchists who put on demos around the country, the June 11th events, the solidarity I've been given in the last year or so, and the actions carried in solidarity with prisoners and against prison society around the world, the banner drops, the weekly noise demos in California at the jail is all inspiring. I'll just be glad when I see that kind of constant stuff going on here in Alabama.

What are your feelings on the recent anti-police struggles occurring in the U.S.?

I'm loving the anti-police demos, rebellions. I was listening to the radio a few nights ago when it came across the air that two pigs had been shot in Ferguson. I was so excited that I didn't even go to sleep that night. I'm glad that young, Black people in Ferguson hadn't allowed these race pimps to extinguish their righteous anger and desire to fight, and inflict retribution on the pigs. I'm thinking that we will see more of these attacks in the near future, because the pigs are not stopping murdering Black folks. What choice to we have other than to fight back? That's two actions of retribution. NY action and the Ferguson action. There's more I'm sure I haven't heard of.

In some of your writings, you express an opposition to civilization. Could you talk about that and how it differs from a critique of the state and capital alone?

I don't think one can separate a critique of the state and capital from a critique of civilization. Civilization gave birth to the state and capital, which brought all kinds of oppressions and tools to manage that oppression such as surveillance, greed, domination, and all the other shitty things people find logic in doing to each other and the environment. Civilization is explained away by capital as being advancements in efficiency and quality of life, but remember the life expectancy of a Black male in the U.S. is about 25 years. He is expected to be dead or in prison by 25 years of age. Civilization has caused a disconnect between people and the earth. Civilization has given birth to all kinds of diseases; drugs that don't cure anything but have you buying them to "manage" the disease, feed their greed; pollution; patriarchy; racism; prisons; etc. Civilization is the root cause of the misery which we term oppression and must be dismantled, ruthlessly and utterly destroyed.

How can anarchists build stronger relationships with comrades on the inside?

Through interaction, listening, becoming accomplices, treating prisoners as equals and not romanticizing prisoners' situations. There's nothing noble about being in prison. Just showing revolutionary solidarity and all that entails. I keep saying this and will continue to do so: people need to check out Os Cangaceiros, you know, the group in France during the 70s, 80s, 90s, to see how one form of solidarity looks.

What would you like to see from U.S. anarchist struggle in the coming years?

I'd like to see anarchists becoming more active through building genuine comradeship, friendships with those of us inside and see more attacks against prisons, companies, institutions that erect, sustain, and profit off of people being kidnapped and held in prison. Also I think it's time for anarchists to start building something for those anarchists that are leaving the prisons through parole, End of Sentence (E.O.S.), or otherwise. Some of us will be needing housing, clothes, etc. once out. You know, something we can plug into. Most times we have to apply at a halfway house and that's a whole new problem because all the ones I know of are religious oriented and require one to participate in religious shit.

Struggle in Alabama prisons is heating up. What's going on there currently?

Well, we just had a national call-in day for the distribution of condoms since STDs seem to be a major problem among prisoners. Then on March 1, 2015, the F.A.M. called for a work strike (shutdown). It lasted three days and only at one prison (St. Clair). I'm kind of pissed about that. Why only three days? It was supposed to be indefinitely. I started a hunger strike on the 2nd of March to show my solidarity and didn't get word that it was over until like the 9th or 10th. The explanation I'm getting for the shortness of it all is that this

was a test run to show guys what to expect. Shit, we (Holman and St. Clair) just had a shutdown in January of 2014 and it lasted fifteen days, so the guys know what to expect. But again, I wasn't there so I don't know, but I suspect that some "reasonable" and "responsible" prisoners talked "sense" into the rebels' heads and squashed it.

Here at Holman in the lockup unit guys are protesting the replacing of hot meals with sack lunches if you have your tray slot open. So, there's been a lot of urine and feces thrown, and fires burning. The pigs have backed off of that for now, but we're waiting to see what's next. I've come off of my hunger strike.

Anything else?

Yeah, I think as we see more struggle on the outside the more you'll see shit popping off on the inside. Anarchists have to be ready for this and need to be thinking about what they are willing to contribute to the destruction of the state by attacking prisons. Let me back up to the second question you asked. Don't get me wrong, there was grave injustices inflicted against me while growing up in Alabama. There was certain sections I wouldn't go through because most likely I would be arrested, simply for being a Black person. Even in the 1980s there was what was called "Jew Town," a street of stores that still had "Whites Only" signs in the store windows. But I felt safe in my hood. Plus, I really didn't have any reason to go to these places that was antagonistic towards people of color. But you know what, when I was about 12 or 13 years old a whole bunch of us kids used to go bike riding through these racist neighborhoods and not one of these bigots said anything. Oh yeah, they gave us these nasty looks, but shit, we didn't give a fuck. We were bad asses and did basically whatever.

Now, being gay was something else. I was fucked with through ridicule by friends and family, but it wasn't like it was with race antagonisms. Although it was accepted by the folks in my hood to be gay, right next door in the other hoods was different. People ridiculed, harassed, and even beat up those that they saw as gay. I've been called many names and had a lot of fights growing up. But you know, I got locked up so young and this was not my first time being locked up. I had been going through the juvenile system for quite a while. So, I was saved from a lot of the stuff on the streets. Yeah, jail saved me from the streets, but not from all the shit that goes on against gay folk while locked up. I never had witnessed a rape, but I have witnessed cruelty. You know, as kids we look for all kinds of reasons to put other kids down. We look for differences and along with the prejudices society has put in our head, it's not hard for us to find. This world is so sick that if it doesn't understand it, can't control it, it tries to destroy it. And kids are being taught this at home, church, school, just about everywhere they turn. No wonder there's such a high rate of teenage suicide.

EZLN

Words of the Indigenous Revolutionary Clandestine Committee-General
Command, in the voice of Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés, on the 26th
Anniversary of the Beginning of the War Against Oblivion

2020

Good afternoon, good morning, good evening, good day to everyone,
to the *compañeras* and *compañeros* who are Zapatista bases of support,
to the *compañeras* and *compañeros* who are Zapatista *comandantas* and
comandantes,
to the Zapatista autonomous authorities,
to the *compañeras* and *compañeros* who are *milicianos*, *milicianas*, *insurgen-*
tas and *insurgentes*,
to the National Indigenous Congress–Indigenous Governing Council,
to the National and International Sixth,
to the Networks of Resistance and Rebellion,
brothers and sisters in Mexico and throughout the world:

Through me, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation speaks.

Canek said:

I read in a book that in the old days, the rulers wanted to call together armies to defend the lands they governed. First, they called up the cruelest men because they supposed that these men were accustomed to blood. So they drew their armies from the prisons and the slaughterhouses. But it turned out that when these people stood face to face with the enemy, they turned pale and threw down their arms. Then the rulers turned to the strongest men—the stone masons and the miners. To these men, they gave armor and heavy weapons and sent them out to do battle. But again, the mere presence of the enemy instilled weakness in their arms and dismay in their hearts. The rulers wisely then turned to men who

were neither strong nor fierce nor bloodthirsty, but were simply brave and had something rightly to defend—the land they worked, the women they slept with and the children whose laughter delighted them. And when the time came, these men fought with so much fury that they drove off their enemies and were forever free of their threats and persecution.

(From Ermilo Abreu Gómez, *Canek: History and Legend of a Maya Hero* [1940])

Sisters, brothers, *hermanoas*:

Twenty-six years ago, on an afternoon like this one, we came down from our mountains to the big cities in order to challenge those in power. At that time, we had nothing more than our own death—a double death, because we were dying a physical death and also a death of oblivion. We had to choose: whether to die like animals or die like human beings who struggle for their lives.

So it was that when dawn broke on that January 1, we had fire in our hands.

The big boss we faced then is the same one who despises us today. He had another name and another face, but he was and is the same ruler.

We rose up and a space was opened for the word. So we opened our heart to the hearts of other sisters and brothers and *compañeros*, and our voice was met with support and comfort from all the colors of the world from below.

The big boss engaged in tricks and deception; he lied and continued with his plan to destroy us. Just as the big boss does today.

But we resisted and kept the flag of our rebellion hoisted high. With the help of all the colors of the world, we began to build a project of life in these mountains.

Doggedly pursued by the strength and lies of the big boss, then as now, we have kept firm in our work of building something new. We have made mistakes and errors, it is true. We will surely make more on our long journey.

But we have never given up.

We have never sold out.

We have never given in.

We sought all possible means to make words, dialogue and agreement the path to constructing freedom with truth and dignity. But then as now, the big boss played deaf and hid behind lies. Now as then, under the big boss' rule, disdain is the weapon carried by his soldiers, police, national guard, paramilitaries and counter-insurgency programs.

All the big bosses who have come before, and those who are in power today, have done the same thing: they have tried and continue to try to destroy us. Every year the big bosses console and deceive themselves with the idea that they've done away with us for good—that there are no Zapatistas any more, that there are very few of us left who resist and rebel, that perhaps there is only one Zapatista left. They celebrate this triumph each year and congratulate themselves saying that they've gotten rid of those indigenous rebels. They say we've been defeated.

But every year, we (*nosotras, nosotros, nosotrosas*) Zapatistas show ourselves and shout: Here we are!

And each year, there are more of us.

As any person with an honest heart can see, we have a project for life. In our communities, schools and health clinics flourish. We work the land collectively. We support each other collectively. We are a community, a community of communities.

Zapatista women have their own voice and their own path. Their destiny is not one of violent death, forced disappearance, and humiliation. Zapatista children and young people have healthcare, education and many different opportunities to learn and have fun.

We maintain and defend our language, our culture, and our way of life.

We remain firm in our commitment to fulfill our duty as guardians of Mother Earth.

We have done all of this thanks to the strength, the sacrifice, and the dedication of our organized communities, and also thanks to the support of the individuals, groups, collectives, and organizations around the world. Our obligation to them is to build life with their support. That is why we can say, with no shame, that our advances, our achievements, and our triumphs are due to their support and help.

The mistakes, errors, and failures are ours alone.

But just as our lives have grown and advanced, so has the strength of the beast that wants to eat and destroy everything—that machine of death and destruction called the capitalist system. The beast's hunger is insatiable, and it is willing to do anything to make its profits. It gives no thought to the destruction of nature, entire peoples, millenarian cultures, or entire civilizations. The planet as a whole is being destroyed by the beast's attacks.

But the capitalist hydra, the destructive beast, tries to hide behind other names in order to attack and defeat humanity. One of the names behind which it hides its project of death is “megaproject,” which means the destruction of territory—the entirety of a territory, including the air, water, land, and people.

The beast uses the megaproject to snarf down entire peoples, mountains and valleys, rivers and lagoons, men, women, *others*, and children. Once it

finishes its destruction in one place, it's off to another territory to do the same thing.

The beast's trick—its deception—in hiding behind these megaprojects is to fool people into thinking that it stands for progress, that thanks to these megaprojects people are going to have wages and all of modernity's advantages.

Now, in speaking of progress and modernity we have to remember someone from the National Indigenous Congress who was murdered this year: our brother and *compañero* Samir Flores Soberanes. We remember him now because he was always asking for whom all this progress was for. Our brother Samir always asked where the path of progress led, if “progress” was the sign worn by the beast of the megaprojects.

His own answer was that that path led to the destruction of nature and the death of the originary communities. He voiced his opposition clearly and organized with his *compañeras* and *compañeros* to resist, without fear. And that's why the current Ruler had him killed. He was murdered by the bad government because its job as overseer is to make sure that the beast, the overall Ruler, gets its profits. But neither the overseer nor the Ruler will admit that these megaprojects sow death wherever they are built.

A few days ago, our Zapatista *compañeras* held an International Gathering of Women Who Struggle. They have told us, taught us, and educated us about what they saw and heard during that gathering, and what they have described is a hell for women and children. They told us about murders, disappearances, rape, contempt, and diabolical violence, all of which occur within the “progress” of supposedly modern civilization.

A few days ago we were also with our *compañeros* of the National Indigenous Congress–Indigenous Governing Council, and then at the Forum in

Defense of Territory and Mother Earth. During these gatherings we listened with concern to what people talked about: deserted villages with their populations expelled from their homes; illegal criminal massacres and sometimes “legal” ones as it is often the government itself which carries out such barbarities; little girls and boys abused and sold off like animals; young people, men and women, whose lives are destroyed by drugs, crime, and prostitution; the extortion of small businesses, sometimes by thieves and sometimes by politicians; contaminated springs, dried up lakes and lagoons, trash-clogged rivers, mountains destroyed by mining, forests laid to waste, animal species gone extinct; whole cultures and languages killed off; *campesinas* and *campesinos* who before worked their own land and now work as peons for a boss; and mother earth slowly dying.

As the Zapatistas that we are, we declare that only an idiot could say that the megaprojects are good things—and idiot or a cunning villain who knows he is lying and doesn’t care that his words hide death and destruction. So the government, and all of its defenders, should state clearly which they are: idiots or liars.

A year ago, in December of 2018, the overseer who now rules over the plantation called “Mexico” carried out a sham in which he asked mother earth’s permission to destroy her. He had a handful of people there dressed up like indigenous peoples and they laid down chicken, liquor, and tortillas as an offering to the land. The overseer thinks that with this charade, mother earth has given him permission to kill her and impose a train that should really be named after his own family. This shows his contempt for originary peoples and for mother earth.

But he didn't stop with that. He then challenged the originary peoples, saying he didn't care what we thought or felt, that whether the indigenous peoples "like it or not," he was going to do what he was told by his boss, the real Ruler, that is: capital. Just like the overseers during Porfirio Díaz's time. That's what he said and that's what he's still saying, because just a couple of weeks ago he carried out another sham—a supposed referendum—where people were only told great things about the megaprojects but none of the tragedies they bring for people and nature. Even so, only a few people participated in the referendum to vote in favor of the megaprojects.

If that's how he disrespects the thought and feeling of the people, he'll be equally disrespectful of nature and our communities. And that's because his boss doesn't care about people or nature, but only about profits.

When the government says "like it or not," what that really means is, "With you all dead or alive, we're going to do this. We as Zapatista peoples take this challenge seriously, that what he is saying is that he has the force and the money on his side and who will dare to oppose his orders. He is saying that he's going to do what he chooses, not what the peoples choose and he doesn't care about their reasons. We as Zapatista peoples take up our part in that challenge. We know that the current overseer for the powerful is asking us a question. He's asking us:

"Are the Zapatista peoples willing to lose everything they have gained in their autonomy? Are the Zapatista peoples willing to suffer disappearances, imprisonments, murders, slander, and lies in order to defend the land that they keep watch over and take care of, the land where they are born, raised, grow up, live, and die?"

And with these questions, the overseer and his security forces put this challenge to us: "dead or alive, you will obey."

In other words, he is asking us if we are willing to die off as a societal alternative, as an organization, as originary peoples of Mayan roots, as guardians of mother earth, as Zapatista individuals.

We, as Zapatistas, do things our own way and on our own calendar. We also made an offering to mother earth here in our mountains: instead of liquor, we offered her the blood of our fallen in the struggle; instead of chicken, we gave her our flesh; instead of tortillas, we offered her our bones, because we are the people of corn. We made her this offering not to ask permission to destroy her, or sell her, or betray her, but just to let her know that we will defend her—and we will give our lives to do so, if necessary.

We did some accounting of how many people it would take to defend the land. It turns out that one Zapatista is enough: one Zapatista woman, or one Zapatista man, or one Zapatista other, whether they be old, young, or just a child. One Zapatista dead set on defending the land so that mother earth knows that she was not abandoned or left alone. One person dead set on resistance and rebellion is enough.

We went to the collective heart that we are in search of one Zapatista person willing to do anything and everything to defend her. We didn't find one, or two, or one hundred, or a thousand, or ten thousand, or one hundred thousand. We found an entire Zapatista Army for National Liberation willing to do anything and everything to defend the earth.

So we have our answer to the question asked us by the overseer. Our answer is:

“Yes, we are willing to die as guardians and *guardianas* of the earth. Yes, we are willing to be beaten, imprisoned, disappeared, and murdered as Zapatista individuals.”

The overseer has his answer, then. But, as is our style as Zapatistas, our answer carries with it a question for the overseers:

“Are the bad governments willing to try to destroy us—at *whatever cost*—to beat us, imprison us, disappear us, and murder us?”

Sisters, brothers, *hermanoas*,
compañeros, compañeras, *compañeroas*,
we call you to this task—
as the National Indigenous Congress–Indigenous Governing Council,
as individuals, groups, collectives, and organizations of the national and international Sixth,
as networks of resistance and rebellion,
as human beings:

Ask yourselves who of you are willing (*dispuestos, dispuestas, dispuestosas*), to stop this war on humanity, each of us from our own geography, on our own calendar, and by our own ways, and when you’ve thought about it and you have your answer, let the bosses and overseers know. Every day, in every corner of the earth, the beast asks humanity the same thing. Only the answer is missing.

That’s all.

From the mountains of Southeastern Mexico,
in the name of all of the Zapatista women, men, and *otroas*,
—Subcomandante Insurgente Moisés

Mexico, December 31, 2019–January 1, 2020

Black Panther Party

Community Programs

1966–1982

- 1 Alameda County volunteer bureau worksite
- 2 Athletic programs
- 3 Benefits counseling
- 4 *The Black Panther* newspaper
- 5 Black Student Alliance
- 6 Center for Independent Living (CIL), East Oakland branch
- 7 Child development center
- 8 Community facility use
- 9 Community Forums
- 10 Community health classes
- 11 Community Pantry (free food program)
- 12 Consumer education classes
- 13 Copwatching
- 14 Disabled persons services (transportation and attendants)
- 15 Drama classes
- 16 Drill team
- 17 Drug/alcohol abuse awareness program
- 18 Employment referral service
- 19 Free ambulance program
- 20 Free busing to prison visits
- 21 Free children's breakfast program

22	Free clothing program
23	Free cooperative program
24	Free dental program
25	Free employment program
26	Free film series
27	Free food program
28	Free furniture program
29	Free health clinics
30	Free housing cooperative program
31	Free optometry program
32	Free pest control program
33	Free plumbing and maintenance program
34	Free prisoner commissary program
35	Free shoe program
36	GED classes
37	Geriatric health center
38	GYN clinic
39	Home visits (via SAFE)
40	Intercommunal Youth Institute (becomes OCS by 1975)
41	Junior high and high school tutorial programs
42	Laney Experimental College extension site
43	Legal aid and education
44	Legal clinics/workshops
45	Legal referral services
46	Liberation schools

47	Martial arts program
48	Nutrition classes
49	Oakland Community Learning Center
50	Outreach preventative care
51	Pediatric clinic
52	Program Development
53	Programs for teens
54	Senior switchboard
55	Seniors Against a Fearful Environment (SAFE)
56	Sickle Cell Anemia Research Foundation
57	Son of Man Temple (becomes Community Forum by 1976)
58	Teen council
59	U.C. Berkeley student health program
60	VD preventative screening and counseling
61	Visiting nurses program
62	WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) programs
63	Youth diversion and probation site
64	Youth training and development

Jean Genet

On George Jackson

1970

Every authentic writer discovers not only a new style but a narrative form which is his alone, and which in most cases he uses up, exhausting its effects for his own purposes.

Many people would be amazed to hear that the epistolary narrative was still capable of affording us a resolutely modern mode of expression; yet if we merely juxtapose (one after another) a certain number of George Jackson's letters, we obtain a striking poem of love and of combat.

But even more surprising, when we read these letters from a young Black in Soledad Prison, is that they perfectly articulate the road traveled by their author—first the rather clumsy letters to his mother and his brother, then letters to his lawyer which become something extraordinary, half-poem, half-essay, and then the last letters, of an extreme delicacy, to an unknown recipient. And from the first letter to the last, nothing has been willed, written or composed for the sake of a book, yet here is a book, tough and sure, both a weapon of liberation and a love poem. In this case I see no miracle except the miracle of truth itself, the naked truth revealed. George Jackson is a poet, then. But he faces the death penalty. I shall talk about that.

A court of justice, a certain number of jurors protected by uniformed guards, by plainclothesmen, by informers, by the whole of white America, will decide whether Jackson and his brothers killed a prison guard. The jurors answer yes or no. If they answer yes, a very strange operation begins. The judges must pronounce sentence—either a death sentence, a life sentence, or a sentence of time to be served. What, then, is this intellectual operation

which changes a simple act (a murder, if there was one) into something quite different: into another death, or a life sentence or a period of time served?

How these two facts are linked together—the initial and hypothetical murder, and the sentence pronounced—no one knows, no one has yet said. This is because the courts, in America as elsewhere, are tribunals of authority, a crude authority which adapts itself very well to the arbitrary.

Yet this sentence, once pronounced, must be carried out. It will be carried out by and upon the Soledad brothers, upon George Jackson, and in this way: either by proceeding from his cell to the gas chamber, or by living twenty or thirty years in still another cell.

A guard is discovered—murdered.

A jury answers yes or no to indicate the murderer.

The murderer dies in his turn, or lives in a cell for thirty years in order to justify a sentence that has been *pronounced*.

To understand the significance of this book as a weapon, a means of combat, the reader must not forget that George Jackson is in danger of death.

If a certain complicity links the works written in prisons or asylums (Sade and Artaud share the same necessity of finding in themselves what must lead them to glory, that is, despite the walls, the moats, the jailers and the magistracy, into the light, into minds not enslaved), these works do not meet in what is still called ignominy: starting in search of themselves from that ignominy demanded by social repression, they discover common ground in the audacity of their undertaking, in the rigor and accuracy of their ideas and their visions. In prison more than elsewhere one cannot afford to be casual. One cannot endure a penalty so monstrous as the lack of freedom without demanding of one's mind and body a labor at once delicate and brutal, a labor capable of "warping" the prisoner in a direction which takes him ever farther from the social world. But . . .

It might be supposed that as the site of absolute malediction, prison, and at its heart the cell, would enforce by its misery upon those confined there a kind of solidarity required by that very misery, a merciful harmony in which all social distinctions maintained in the free air would be abolished.

Prison serves no purpose. Do we imagine that at least it can strip its inmates of their wretched social differences, that under the surveillance of a cordon of guards, Black or white but armed, there develop behind its walls, in its darkness, certain new relations between the prisoners, whoever they may have been during their moments of freedom?

That is an idealistic hope which we must avoid or get rid of. George Jackson's book tells the brutal truth: in prison, in a cell, the white skin of the prisoners becomes an image of complicity with the white skin of the guards, so that if white guards superintend a hell in which white men are jailed, the white prisoners superintend another hell inside that one in which Black men are jailed. Now the security of the guards, their independence—their time off duty, their visits to town, their family lives—grant a certain respite to the white prisoners; but the fact that these prisoners must be constantly confined, never distracted by the world outside, means that they employ all their time and all their imagination in maintaining the hell in which they confine the Black prisoners.

Few prisoners, on the whole, escape the tendency of a complicity with certain guards: it is a kind of nostalgia for the social world from which the prisoner is cut off (a nostalgia which makes the prisoner cling to what seems, in his prison, closest to the social order: the guard. As for the guard, the motives which lead him to accept the game between certain prisoners and himself are many and complex). Now would this complicity have too much importance, when its meaning is abatement, a temporary weakness likely to be revoked, abruptly halted—on the occasion of a riot, for example. But in the

United States, this complicity has a different meaning: the complicity of the white prisoners with the guards exasperates and intensifies what constitutes the basis of relations between white men and Black: racism.

This racism is scattered, diffused throughout the whole of America, grim, underhanded, hypocritical, arrogant. There is one place where we might hope it would cease, but on the contrary, it is in this place that it reaches its cruelest pitch, intensifying every second, preying on body and soul; it is in this place that racism becomes a kind of concentrate of racism: in the American prisons, in Soledad Prison, and in its center, the Soledad cells.

If, by some oversight, racism were to disappear from the surface of the United States, we could then seek it out, intact and more dense, in one of these cells. It is here, secret and public, explicable and mysterious, stupid and more complicated than a tiger's eye, absence of life and source of pain, non-existent mass and radioactive charge, exposed to all and yet concealed. One might say that racism is here in its pure state, gathering its forces, pulsing with power, ready to spring.

The extravagant adventure of white America, which is the victorious expansion of Victorian England, is doubtless exhausted, it will dissolve and fade, revealing at last what is cheerfully devouring it: the Black nation which was caught within it, itself traversed by liberating currents, liberating movements, producing long screams of misery and joy. What seems new to me in this Black literature is that now we hear almost no echoes of the great Hebrew prophets. From Richard Wright to George Jackson, the Blacks are stripping themselves of all the presbyterian and biblical rags: their voices are rawer, blacker, more accusing, more implacable, tearing away any reference to the cynical cheats of the religious establishment. Their voices are more singular, and singular too in what they seem to agree upon: to denounce the curse not of being Black, but captive.

Is that new?

Incontestably.

George Jackson's style is clear, carefully pitched, simple and supple, as is his thinking. Anger alone illuminates his style and his thinking, and a kind of joy in anger.

A book written in prison—in any place of confinement—is addressed chiefly perhaps to readers who are not outcasts, who have never been to jail and who will never go there. That is why in some sense such a book proceeds obliquely. Otherwise, I know that the man who writes it need only take, in order to fling them down on paper, the forbidden words, the accursed words, the words covered with blood, the unwritten words of spit and sperm—like the ultimate name of God—the dangerous words, the padlocked words, the words that do not belong to the dictionary, for if they were written there, written out and not maimed by ellipses, they would utter too fast the suffocating misery of a solitude that is not accepted, that is flogged only by what it is deprived of: sex and freedom.

It is therefore prudent that any text which reaches us from this infernal place should reach us as though mutilated, pruned of its overly tumultuous adornments.

It is thus behind bars, bars accepted by them alone, that its readers, if they dare, will discover the infamy of a situation which a respectable vocabulary cannot reinstate—but behind the permitted words, listen for the others!

If the prisoner is a Black man captured by whites, a third thread runs through this difficult web: hatred. Not the rather vague and diffuse hatred of the social order or of fate, but the very precise hatred of the white man. Here again, the prisoner must use the very language, the words, the syntax of his enemy, whereas he craves a separate language belonging only to his people. Once again his situation is both hypocritical and wretched: he can express

his sexual obsessions only in a polite dialect, according to a syntax which enables others to read him, and as for his hatred of the white man, he can utter it only in this language which belongs to Black and white alike but over which the white man extends his grammarian's jurisdiction. It is perhaps a new source of anguish for the Black man to realize that if he writes a masterpiece, it is his enemy's language, his enemy's treasury which is enriched by the additional jewel he has so furiously and lovingly carved.

He has then only one recourse: to accept this language but to corrupt it so skillfully that the white men are caught in his trap. To accept it in all its richness, to increase that richness still further, and to suffuse it with all his obsessions and all his hatred of the white man. That is a task.

And it is a task which seems contradicted by the revolutionary's. The revolutionary enterprise of the American Black, it seems, can come into being only out of resentment and hatred, that is, by rejecting with disgust, with rage, but radically, the values venerated by the whites, although this enterprise can continue only starting from a common language, at first rejected, finally accepted, in which the words will no longer serve concepts inculcated by the whites, but new concepts. In a revolutionary work written by a Black man in jail, certain traces must remain, then, of the orgiastic and hate-ridden trajectory covered in an imposed solitude.

Having emerged from his delirium, having achieved a cold revolutionary consciousness, Sade still kept something of that obsessional delirium which nonetheless led him to his revolutionary lucidity.

This is also evident in the letters which follow.

In prison, George Jackson must still be sure to fortify in himself what sets him against the whites, and to elaborate a consciousness so acute that it will be valid for all men.

It was almost predictable that having reached this stage of self-discovery, his revolutionary consciousness should meet and come to terms with the Black Panther party. Thus it is without equivocation and without any mystery that he names it and abides by its directives in the course of his last letters. For myself, who have lived with the Panthers, I see George Jackson in his place there, fighting at their side with the same conviction and the same talent as his brothers accused of murder, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

If we accept this idea, that the revolutionary enterprise of a man or of a people originates in their poetic genius, or, more precisely, that this enterprise is the inevitable conclusion of poetic genius, we must reject nothing of what makes poetic exaltation possible. If certain details of this work seem immoral to you, it is because the work as a whole denies your morality, because poetry contains both the possibility of a revolutionary morality and what appears to contradict it. Finally, every young American Black man who writes is trying to find himself and test himself and sometimes, at the very center of his being, in his own heart, discovers a white man he must annihilate.

But let me return to the amazing coherence of George Jackson's life and of his *unwilled* book. There is nonetheless one rather disturbing thing about it: at the same moment he was living his life (a kind of death or higher life), without his realizing it, by letters and certain notations in his letters, he was also writing his legend, that is, he was giving us, without intending to, a mythical image of himself and of his life—I mean an image transcending his physical person and his ordinary life in order to project himself into glory with the help of a combat weapon (his book) and of a love poem.

But I have lived too long in prisons not to recognize, as soon as the very first pages were translated for me in San Francisco, the special odor and texture of what was written in a cell, behind walls, guards, envenomed by hatred,

for what I did not yet know so intensely was the hatred of the white American for the Black, a hatred so deep that I wonder if every white man in this country, when he plants a tree, doesn't see "negroes" hanging from its branches.

When this book comes out, the man who wrote it will still be in his Soledad cell, with his Soledad Brothers. What follows must be read as a manifesto, as a tract, as a call to rebellion, since it is that first of all.

It is too obvious that the legislative and judiciary systems of the United States were established in order to protect a capitalist minority and, if forced, the whole of the white population; but these infernal systems are still raised against the Black man. We have known for a long time now that the Black man is, from the start, natively, the guilty man. We can be sure that if Black people, by the use of their violence, their intelligence, their poetry, all that they have accumulated for centuries while observing their former masters in silence and in secrecy—if Black people do not undertake their own liberation, the whites will not make a move.

But already Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, the members of the Black Panther party, George Jackson, and others have stopped lamenting their fate. The time for blues is over, for them. They are creating, each according to his means, a revolutionary consciousness. And their eyes are clear. Not blue.

George Jackson

Letters to Angela Davis

Angela,

1970

I am certain that they plan to hold me incommunicado. All of my letters except for a few to my immediate family have come back to me with silly comments on my choice of terms. The incoming mail is also sent back to the outside sender. The mail which I do receive is sometimes one or two weeks old. So, my sweet sister, when I reach you, it will be in this manner.

... I'm going to write on both sides of this paper, and when I make a mistake I'll just scratch over it and continue on. That is my style, completely informal.

Was that your sister with you in court? If so, she favored you. Both very beautiful people. You should have introduced me.

They are going to take your job, I know they are—anything else would be expecting too much. They can't, however, stop you from teaching in public institutions, can they?

They hate us, don't they? I like it that way, that is the way it's supposed to be. If they didn't hate me I would be doing something very wrong, and then I would have to hate myself. I prefer it this way. I get little hate notes in the folds of my newspaper almost every day now. You know, the racist stuff, the traditional "Dear nigger" stuff, and how dead I am going to be one day. They think they're mad at me now, but it's nothing compared to how it will be when I really get mad myself. . . .

Pigs are punks, Angela. We've made a terrible mistake in overestimating these people. It reflects on us badly that we have allowed them to do the things they have done to us. Since they are idiots, what does that make us. I just read Bobby Seale's account of that scene in Chicago (*Ramparts*, June '70). It started in San Francisco with that "flight to evade" charge. One of the

pigs commented that “this was so easy.” But it shouldn’t have been. Brothers like that are the best of us. It shouldn’t have gone down like that. We should never make it easy for them—by relaxing—at this stage of the educational process. Examples are crucially important. Well that’s the name of the game right now.

I have ideas, ten years’ worth of them, I’d like all those brothers on Fiftieth Street to be aware of them. Tell Fay Stender to give you a copy of my thoughts on Huey Newton and politics. . . . At the end of these writings, titled “Letter to Huey Newton,” there should be a note on revolutionary culture and the form it should take in the black Amerikan colonies. That was the best section. Without that section the power would be lost. Fay and I don’t agree altogether on political methods. But that is only because we are viewing things from very different levels of slavery. Mine is an abject slavery.

I think of you all the time. I’ve been thinking about women a lot lately. Is there anything sentimental or otherwise wrong with that? There couldn’t be. It’s never bothered me too much before, the sex thing. I would do my exercises and the hundreds of katas, stay busy with something . . . this ten years really has gone pretty quickly. It has destroyed me as a person, a human being that is, but it was sudden, it was a sudden death, it seems like ten days rather than ten years.

Would you like to know a subhuman. I certainly hope you have time. I’m not a very nice person. I’ll confess out front, I’ve been forced to adopt a set of responses, reflexes, attitudes that have made me more kin to the cat than anything else, the big black one. For all of that I am not a selfish person. I don’t think so anyway, but I do have myself in mind when I talk about us relating. You would be the generous one, I the recipient of that generosity.

They’re killing niggers again down the tier, all day, every day. They are killing niggers and “them protesters” with small workings of mouth. One of them

told a pig today that he was going to be awful disappointed with the pig if the pig didn't shoot some niggers or protesters this evening when he got off work. The pig found it very amusing. They went off on a twenty minute political discussion, pig and his convict supporter. There is something very primitive about these people. Something very fearful. In all the time I've been down here on Maximum Row, no brother has ever spoken to one of these people. We never speak about them, you know, across the cells. Every brother down here is under the influence of the party line, and racist terms like "monky" have never been uttered. All of these are beautiful brothers, ones who have stepped across the line into the position from which there can be no retreat. All are fully committed. They are the most desperate and dauntless of our kind. I love them. They are men and they do not fight with their mouths. They've brought them here from prisons all over the state to be warehoused or murdered. Whichever is more expedient. That Brother Edwards who was murdered in that week in January told his lawyer that he would never get out of prison alive. He was at the time of that statement on Maximum Row, Death Row, Soledad, California. He was twenty-one years old. We have made it a point to never exchange words with these people. But they never relent. Angela, there are some people who will never learn new response. They will carry what they incorporated into their characters at early youth to the grave. Some can never be educated. As an historian you know how long and how fervently we've appealed to these people to take some of the murder out of their system, their economics, their propaganda. And as an intelligent observer you must see how our appeals were received. We've wasted many generations and oceans of blood trying to civilize these elements over here. It cannot be done in the manner we have attempted it in the past. Dialectics, understanding, love, passive resistance, they won't work on an activist, maniacal, gory pig. It's going to grow much worse for the black male than it

already is, much, much worse. We are going to have to be the vanguard, the catalyst, in any meaningful change.

When generalizing about black women I could never include *you* in any of it that is not complimentary. But my mother at one time tried to make a coward of me, she did the same with Jon. She is changing fast under crisis situation and apocalyptic circumstance. John and Fleeta's mothers did the same to them, or I should say tried. And so did every brother's mother I've ever drawn out. I am reasonably certain that I can draw from every black male in this country some comments to substantiate that his mother, the black female, attempted to aid his survival by discouraging his violence or by turning it inward. The blacks of slave society, U.S.A., have always been a matriarchal subsociety. The implication is clear, black mama is going to have to put a sword in that brother's hand and stop that "be a good boy" shit. Channel his spirit instead of break it, or to break it I should say. Do you understand? *All* of the sisters I've ever known personally and through other brothers' accounts begged and bullied us to look for *jobs* instead of being satisfied with the candy-stick take. The strongest impetus a man will ever have, in an individual sense, will come from a woman he admires.

When *Soul* did that feature on you, I discussed you with some the comrades. One of them asked me what my response would be if it were my job to guard your body (for the party) from the attack of ten armed pigs. I told them my response would be to charge. There would be eleven people hurting but you wouldn't be one of them. Everyone agreed it was the correct response.

As an individual, I am grateful for you. As the black male, I hope that since your inclination is to teach you will give serious consideration to redeeming this very next generation of black males, by reaching for today's black female. I am not too certain about my generation. There are a few, and with these

few we will keep something. But we have altogether too many pimps and punks, and black capitalists (who want a piece of the putrescent pie). There's no way to predict. Sometimes people change fast. I've seen it happen to brothers overnight. But then they have to learn a whole new set of responses and attack reflexes which can't be learned overnight. So cats like me who have no tomorrows have to provide examples. I have an ideal regarding tomorrow, but I live an hour at a time, right in the present, looking right over my nose for the trouble I know is coming.

There is so much that could be done, right now. . . . But I won't talk about those things right here. I will say that it should never be easy for them to destroy us. If you start with Malcolm X and count *all* of the brothers who have died or been captured since, you will find that not even one of them was really *prepared* for a fight. No imagination or fighting style was evident in any one of the incidents. But each one that died professed to know the nature of our enemies. It should never be so easy for them. Do you understand what I'm saying? Edward V. Hanrahan, Illinois State Attorney General, sent fifteen pigs to raid the Panther headquarters and murder Hampton and Clark. Do you have any idea what would have happened to those fifteen pigs if they had run into as many Viet Cong as there were Panthers in that building. The VC are all little people with less general education than we have. The argument that they have been doing it longer has no validity at all, because they were doing it just as well when they started as they are now. It's very contradictory for a man to teach about the murder in corporate capitalism, to isolate and expose the murderers behind it, to instruct that these madmen are completely without stops, are licentious, totally depraved—and then not make adequate preparations to defend himself from the madman's attack. Either they don't really believe their own spiel or they harbor some sort of subconscious death wish.

None of this should have happened as it did. I don't know if we'll learn in time or not. I am not well here. I pretend that all is well for the benefit of my family's peace of mind. But I'm going to cry to you, so you can let the people on Fiftieth Street know not to let this happen to them, and that they must resist that cat with *all* of their strength when he starts that jail talk.

When the menu reads steak we get a piece of rotten steer (I hope) the size of a quarter. When it reads cake we get something like cornbread. Those are the best things served. When two guys fight, the darker guy will get shot. To supplement their incomes the pigs will bring anything into the prison and sell it to the convict who smuggles money in from his visits. Now black people don't visit their kin in the joint much and those that do can't afford to give up any money. So we have less of everything that could make life more comfortable—and safe (weapons are brought in too). Pigs are fascist right out front, the white prisoner who is con-wise joins the Hitler party right here in the joint. He doesn't have to worry about the rules, he stays high. When he decides to attack us, he has the best of weapons (seldom will a pig give a con a gun, though. It has happened, however, in San Quentin three times to my knowledge. But they will provide cutlery and zip guns). The old convict code died years ago. These cons work right with the police against us. The only reason that I am still alive is because I take everything to the extreme, and they know it. I never let any of them get within arm's reach, and their hands must be in full view. When on the yard I would stay close to something to get under. Nothing, absolutely nothing comes as a surprise to me. There is much to be said about these places but I must let this go right now or I won't be able to post it until tomorrow. In the event that you missed it (my writing is terrible, I know), I think a great deal of you. This is one slave that knows how to love. It comes natural and runs deep. Accepting it will never hurt you. Free, open, honest love, that's me.

Should you run into Yvonne, tell her that I love her also and equally. Tell her that I want to see her, up close. Tell her I'm not a possessive cat, never demanding, always cool, never get upset until my (our) face and freedom get involved. But make her understand that I want to hold her (chains and all) and run my tongue in that little gap between her two front teeth. (That should make her smile.)

Power to the People!

George

Dear Angela,

May 21, 1970

I think about *you all of the time*. I like thinking about you, it gives me occasion for some of the first few really deeply-felt ear-to-ear grins. And I've had to increase the number of my daily push-ups by half. That will make me stronger. The contact has been good for me in a hundred ways.

But then my thoughts return to your enemies. They are mine too, of course, but thinking of them as your enemies calls up the monster in me, the dark, terrible things that I keep hidden in the pit, fanged, clawed, armored—they are more awful by far when you become involved. I've been finding and developing these things for many years now. As soon as you isolate, identify, and number your enemies I'll set these things loose on them. And you won't be disappointed this time, I promise, sweet sister. This time nothing will be held back. . . . Your enemies will be made humbler and wiser men.

Jon is a young brother and he is just a little withdrawn, but he is intelligent and loyal. . . . He is at that dangerous age where confusion sets in and sends brothers either to the undertaker or to prison. He is a little better off than I was and than most brothers his age. He learns fast and can distinguish the real from the apparent, provided someone takes the time to present it. Tell

the brothers never to mention his green eyes and skin tone. He is very sensitive about it and he will either fight or withdraw. Do you understand? You know that some of us don't bother to be righteous with each other. He has had a great deal of trouble these last few years behind that issue. It isn't right. He is a loyal and beautiful black man-child. I love him.

This shit is starting to thicken. Six in Georgia, two in Jackson, hard hats, counterdemonstrations, much like Germany in the thirties. That thing in Georgia and the one in Jackson were like turkey shoots. We die altogether too easy. Each one of those brothers has fathers, blood brothers, sisters, and mamas. But it's safe to assume that no positive response will be made, no eye-for-eye reprisal. Something very wrong has swept over us. We've grown so accustomed to seeing murder done to us that no one takes it seriously anymore. We've grown numb, immune to the pain. Charles Evers and the entire world knows who killed Medgar Evers, the murderer is still walking the streets. . . .

Perhaps I shouldn't even recognize people like Whitney Young except as enemies, but the shit that they sling around does fall on some of us and consequently must be counterpoised. He has now gone on record as thinking that we "should arm ourselves, but strictly for defense only." But then he goes on to contradict himself by commenting that if we used arms it would be like suicide. His words: "a beer can against a tank." Well, how does one defend himself from an attacker without at some point launching a counterattack—especially when guns are the choice of weapons! . . .

There is an element of cowardice, great ignorance, and perhaps even treachery in blacks of his general type. And I agree with Eldridge and Malcolm, we *are not* protecting unity when we refrain from attacking them. Actually it's the reverse that's true. We can never have unity as long as we have these idiots among us to confuse and frighten the people. It's not possible

for anyone to still think that Western mechanized warfare is absolute, not after the experiences of the third world since World War II. The French had tanks in Algeria, the U.S. had them in Cuba. Everything, I mean every trick and gadget in the manual of Western arms, has been thrown at the VC and they have thrown them back, twisted and ruined; and they have written books and pamphlets telling us how we could do the same. It's obvious that fighting ultimately depends upon men, not gadgets. So I must conclude that those who stand between us and the pigs, who protect the marketplace, are either cowards or traitors. Probably both. . . .

One way of indirectly detecting the traitor is to draw him out regarding our enemies' *enemies*. Young and all the other of those running dogs attack the white left. Young attacked the Chicago Seven and the other whites of the left who want to help us destroy fascism. So did LeRoi Jones on national TV in the company of Anthony Imperiale, a white racist KKKer, and a lot of high police officials. So what's happening with a guy who says he is for us but not against the government? Or one who says he's for us and against *all* whites—except the ones who may kick his ass? There is a great deal of cowardice and treachery and confusion here. The black bourgeoisie (pseudobourgeoisie), the right reverends, the militant opportunists, have left us in a quandary, rendered us impotent. How ridiculous we must seem to the rest of the black world when we beg the government to investigate their own protective agencies. Aren't the wild hip-shooting pigs loose among us to protect the property rights of the people who formed the government? I've been sitting in here ten years watching that kind of shit go down. It's always the same blacks. I am sure that it's intentional. They're not with us, you understand. Experience, trial and error, would have changed them if they were. Who is the black working for, who does he love when he screams "Honky"? He would throw us into a fight where we would be outnumbered 1 to 14 (counting the

blacks who would fight with/for the other side in a race war. War on the honky, it's just another mystification, if not an *outright* move by the fascist. I *don't know*, I don't pretend to clairvoyance, I can't read *all* thoughts, and I do know some whites that I wouldn't count as enemies, but if *all* whites were my enemies would it make sense for me to fight them all at the same time? The blanket indictment of the white race has done nothing but perplex us, inhibit us. The theory that all whites are the immediate enemy and all blacks our brothers (making them loyal) is silly and indicative of a lazy mind (to be generous, since it could be a fascist plot). It doesn't explain the black pig; there were six on the Hampton-Clark kill. It doesn't explain the black paratroopers (just more pigs) who put down the great Detroit riot, and it doesn't explain the pseudobourgeois who can be found almost everywhere in the halls of government working for white supremacy, fascism, and capitalism. It leaves the average brother confused. In Detroit they just didn't know what to do when they encountered the black paratroopers. They were so stunned when they saw those black fools shooting at them that they probably never will listen to another black voice regardless of what it's saying.

If I were at large and wanted to help revolutionize the black community so that in as short a time as possible it would be made ready to take up the vanguard in an *antiestablishment* war, I would start like this: 1. Lay my hands on some money any way I could. 2. Quietly, without even a hint of political flavoring, I would have my fronts open as many skeet, trap, rifle, and pistol ranges as I could rent space for in and around the black community. I would operate these places at cost and advertise. 3. Next door to these places (figurative) I would quietly, without political flavoring, open schools that deal with the close-order combat arts, ostensibly as a community project to keep the children off the streets. The real intent, of course, is to instill the "attack as defense" idea that we lost somewhere along the line. 4. Apart from the

two business ventures just mentioned, I would provide myself with printing or copying machines, and make the salient points of urban guerilla warfare, antitank warfare, and revolutionary culture as easy to get, as close to hand, as a glass of water.

Now that just-mentioned activity would be aside from the hard and seriously needed revolutionary work discussed early this morning, and the stuff you will find in the writings I mentioned in my last letter.

“One doesn’t wait for all conditions to be right to start the revolution, the forces of the revolution itself will make the conditions right.” Che said something like this. Write me and let me have it straight.

Power to the People.

I love you, little sister.

George

Dear Angela,

May 28, 1970

I sincerely hope you understand this situation here with me, the overall thing I mean, you probably do. I don’t want to be bash with you, the relative levels of our insecurity are too disparate for me to dwell on feelings, the warm, very personal, elemental thing. I can never express it in this form anyway, but I want you to know, and then we can get on with the work.

I have, like most people, a recurring dream. In this dream there is a great deal of abstract activity. Have you ever seen the pig they have named—General Something-or-other—. I don’t know why my mind locked on him, but part of this dream is a still shot of my trying to fit a large steel boomerang into his mouth. It switches then to a scene where me and two other brothers—T.G. and a brother named H.B.—are holding hands to form a large circle, in the ring. Inside the ring formed by the three of us is this guy. He’s wearing top hat

and tails—stars and stripes—beard and bushy eyebrows. The action part goes like this: Old Sam tries to break out of the circle; we stop him; after about ten tries—we're wearing track shoes—he's ragged as an old mophead. It goes on that way, scenes running into each other, overlapping, all very pleasing—wish fulfillment?—very gratifying stuff; but the high point, the climax—well, a tall slim African woman, firelight, and the beautiful dance of death. This wonderful woman didn't become part of my dream until last year sometime. I never thought this kind of environment could produce one like her, but at the same time I knew that things never could be good with me without her.

But I promised not to be bash with you. It's crazy, all women, even the very phenomenal, want at least a promise of brighter days, bright tomorrows. I have no tomorrows at all. The worst thing that could have ever happened to the woman in the dream was letting me touch her. I'll tell you the whole thing if we can ever find somewhere to relax. . . . Until then I promise not to bore you. You probably hear these devotions all day, and with your incentive factors they're probably all sincere devotions. Let me heap mine on you (with these pitiful little strokes of the pen) for the last time (unless seized by ungovernable impulse) with a statement made at the risk of seeming immodest; but I am modest and I hope that it is righteous for me to feel that—no one, and much more meaningful no black, wherever the hurricane has washed up his broken body, no one at all, can love like I.

In our last communication I made a statement about women, and their part in revolutionary culture (people's war). It wasn't a clear statement. I meant to return to it but was diverted. I understand exactly what the woman's role should be. The very same as the man's. Intellectually, there is very little difference between male and female. The differences we see in bourgeois society are all conditioned and artificial.

I was leading up to the obvious fact that black women in this country are far more aggressive than black males. But this is qualified by the fact that their aggression has, until very recently, been within the system—that “get a diploma boy” stuff, or “earn you some money.” Where it should have been the gun. Development of the ability for serious fighting and organized violence was surely not encouraged in the black female, but neither was it discouraged, as it was in the case of the black male.

Please don’t dismiss this yet. Let me rush to remind you that we have already established that bourgeois society has relegated women in general to a very distinct level of existence, even the slave woman. I’m not about to say they loved you better. Love doesn’t even enter this equation, but socially primitive bourgeois thinking and the sex mystique does. First, a woman wasn’t considered dangerous. Second, the most important experience in the Amerikan white male’s “coming into manhood” was entering the body of the black female. These two circumstances contributed to the longevity and the matriarchal status of black women greatly.

Add to all of this the fact that the black mother wanted to see her son survive in a grim and murderous white male society and the grotesque misshapen pieces come together.

I was saying that if the black mother wants her revenge she will have to stop teaching her sons to fear death. By default she dominates the black subculture, and her son must be the catalyst in any great changes that go down in this country. The head and the first, no one else has as much to gain.

Power to the People

George

Dearest Angela,

May 29, 1970

I'm thinking about you. I've done nothing else all day. This photograph that I have of you is not adequate. Do you recall what Eldridge said regarding pictures for the cell? Give Frances several color enlargements for me. This is the cruelest aspect of the prison experience. You can never understand how much I hate them for this, no one could, I haven't been able to gauge it myself.

Over this ten years I've never left my cell in the morning looking for trouble, never once have I initiated any violence. In each case where it was alleged, it was defense attack response to some aggression, verbal or physical. Perhaps a psychiatrist, a Western psychiatrist that is, could make a case against me for anticipating attacks. But I wasn't born this way. Perhaps this same psychiatrist would diagnose from the overreactions that I am not a very nice person. But again I refer you to the fact that I was born innocent and trusting. The instinct to survive and all that springs from it developed in me, as it is today out of necessity.

I am not a very nice person, I confess. I don't believe in such things as free speech when it's used to rob and defame me. I don't believe in mercy or forgiveness or restraint. I've gone to great lengths to learn every dirty trick devised and have improvised some new ones of my own. I don't play fair, don't fight fair. As I think of this present situation, the things that happen all day, the case they've saddled me with, in retrospection of the aggregate injury—all now drawn against the background of this picture you've given me—no one will profit from this, sister. No one will ever again profit from our pain. This is the last treadmill I'll run. They created this situation. All that flows from it is their responsibility. They've created in me one, irate, resentful nigger—and it's building—to what climax? The nation's undertakers have grown wealthy on black examples, but I want you to believe in me, Angela. I'm going to make a very poor example, no one will profit from my immolation. When that day

comes they'll have to bury ten thousand of their own with full military honors. They'll have earned it.

Do you sense how drunk this photograph has made me.

You've got it all, African woman. I'm very pleased, if you don't ask me for my left arm, my right eye, both eyes, I'll be very disappointed. You're the most powerful stimulus I could have.

From now on when you have books for me to read in preparing my motions and jury selection questions, send them through John Thorne, people's lawyer, he is less pressed. And I do want Lenin, Marx, Mao, Che, Giap, Uncle Ho, Nkrumah, and any Black Marxists. Mama has a list. Tell Robert to provide money for them, and always look for the pocket editions, all right? My father—you'll have to try to understand him. He'll be with me in the last days in spite of whatever he says and thinks now. I've told him that I love you, and I told him that if he respects me at all, and wants me to spare his neck at Armageddon, he must be kind to you.

I got a letter from him this evening wherein he called the pigs by their very accurate moniker—pigs—he'll be all right. I see your influence already. But back to the books. With each load of heavy stuff throw in a reference book dealing with pure fact, figures, statistics, graphs for my further education. Also books on the personnel and structure of today's political and economic front. I am doing some serious theory work for you concerning the case, dedicated to Huey and Angela. If you understand what I want, let me know. Sister, it's been like being held incommunicado these last ten years. No one understood what I was attempting to do and to say. We belong among the righteous of the world. We are the most powerful. We are in the best position to do the people's work. To win will involve taking a chance, crawling on the belly, naming, numbering, infiltrating, giving up meaningless small comforts, readjusting some values. My life means absolutely nothing without positive control over

the factors that determine its quality. If you understand, rush to send all that I've asked for. A load should come in each day. I've read it all, once anyway, but I need it now . . . and time has become very important. I want you to believe in me. I love you like a man, like a brother, and like a father. Every time I've opened my mouth, assumed by battle stance, I was trying in effect to say I love you, African—African woman. My protest has been a small one, something much more effective is hidden in my mind—believe in me Angela. This is one nigger who's got some sense and is not afraid to use it. If my enemies, your enemies, prove stronger, at least I want them to know that they made one righteous African man extremely angry. And that they've strained the patience of a righteous and loving people to the utmost.

I've stopped several times in this writing to exercise, to eat, and it has grown late. I want to get this off tonight. I must know as soon as you get this and the others. Are you sure about your mail? I can imagine that the CIA is reading all your mail before you get it and deciding what you should and shouldn't have. Big Brother. He is rather transparent. I have his number. I know he's a punk, he can't stop me.

Should we make a lovers' vow? It's silly, with all my tomorrows accounted for, but you can humor me.

Power to the People!

George

Dearest Angela (first among the equals),

June 2, 1970

This is the fourth attempt to reach you. The others were on paper like this. They all said, "I love you, African Woman," little else. I will continue to try to reach you in this existence that follows. They can't control this.

Once we have some lines established, I'll set down some of my thoughts, but we must hurry. So let me know through someone when I have reached you. The dates will tell you which letters have gotten through or at least they will tell me.

I sent a list of stuff that I needed in that line. If you don't get it, use Georgia's list excepting the Fanon and Ardrey, which I have coming from another quarter. Need reference books too on everything. I've asked my father to provide you with the money for this stuff. He will cooperate with you. But remember we want the pocket editions of everything. These pigs like to steal—if I lose something it's best if it's only something small.

You haven't much time for writing: This is understandable, but always confirm any letters you receive. I worry, and for good reason. There is a great deal of bullshit between us, concrete and steel, fear and barbed wire.

It will not be that way for long. The pig is a dying breed, he is finding it hard to *bluff* people these days. If you *really* need me, I'll rush to your side—right now, through steel, concrete, all that sort of stuff. They are inert, dead, lacking will and intelligence.

Our enemies from the pig right on up to the *Who's Who* level are idiots. Why do we tolerate them? They're not even really bad, because they have the strength which originates in the mind. We've been too merciful, too forgiving, too understanding, but those days are gone forever.

I've heard the term nigger 350 times today. Just a word—but I *don't* understand. All of the cons who use it are little, young, punk types. At least three are outright homosexuals. They're afraid and it's fear that's impelling them. They know that they're so far gone that they have nothing else to lose. They've talked away their lives already.

I guess it's the same way with the pig and the men who make pigs. They

know they've gone too far, that forgiveness is impossible. They cannot be reasonable now, because of yesterday's excesses. It's pretty clear, isn't it, what is coming. I accept it, it's beautiful. Tomorrow.

I like the way you do things, I like everything about you.

Love you,

George

Dearest Angela,

June 4, 1970

This is the fifth one of these (on legal paper). I hope one reaches you soon. . . . Very discouraging. But I'll never stop trying.

All of these brothers here with me love you. In fact, every black I've talked with concerning you who had an opinion at all agrees with me about you. . . .

One thing about this bothers me a great deal. Do you know (of course you do) the secret police (CIA, etc.) go to great lengths to murder and consequently silence every effective black person the moment he attempts to explain to the ghetto that our problems are historically and strategically tied to the problems of all colonial people. This means that they are watching *you* closely. I worry. If something happened to you I just wouldn't understand.

It's no coincidence that Malcolm X and M. L. King died *when* they did. Malcolm X had just put it together (two and three). I seriously believe, they knew all along but were holding out and presenting the truth in such a way that it would affect the most people situationally—without getting them damaged by gunfire. You remember what was on his lips when he died. Vietnam and economics, political economy. The professional killers could have murdered him long before they did. They let Malcolm rage on muslim nationalism for a number of years because they knew it was an empty ideal, but the second

he got his feet on the ground, they murdered him. We die too easily. We forgive and forget too easily.

Gentle and refined people, aren't we. We'll make good communists, if someone deals with the fascists for us.

That was a little bitter. Pay no attention to stuff like that. I have more faith in our resilience than is healthy for me.

If what I said about M. L. King is true, and I'm going to put it down as if I were positive that it is, he was really on our side (the billions of righteous), his image can be used. I mean we can just claim him, and use his last statements and his image . . . to strengthen ours. And Malcolm can also be "reformed."

I'm working this into my thing right now, I can use anything you have or can get that contains King's public statements or comments to notable people. I'll be easy with it, slip it in, like it was just common knowledge that King was a Maoist.

I sure hope you understand, sister, and hurry. This hour hand is sweeping like the second hand. I don't care. My credo is to seize the pig by the tusks and ride him till his neck breaks. But if fortuitous outcome of circumstance allows him to prevail over me—again—then I want to have this carefully worked-up comment prepared. I want something to remain, to torment his ass, to haunt him, to make him know in no uncertain terms that he did incur this nigger's sore disfavor. I need some facts and figures to dress this passion—*insist* where you have to, but get them to cooperate.

The lights went out an hour ago, perhaps an hour and a half. It's 12:45 a.m., June 5, and I love you twice as much as I did yesterday. It redoubles and double redoubles. I'm using the night-light in front of my cell to write this. You may never read it. I make this covenant with myself I'll never again relax. I'll never make peace with this world as long as the enemies of self-determination have

the running of things. You may never read this, and I may never touch you, but I feel better than I have for many seasons. You do know that I live, and I hope that by some means you have discovered that I love you deeply, and would touch you tenderly, warmly, fiercely if I could, if my enemies were not *at present* stronger. I'm going to stop here and do something physical, push-ups, finger stands, something quiet and strenuous.

Love you

George

Kanno Sugako

Reflections on the Way to the Gallows

1911

This is written as a record of the period from the time the death sentence was pronounced to the time I mount the scaffold. I shall write things down candidly and honestly in a straightforward fashion without any effort at self-justification.

In the women's prison in Tokyo. January 18, 1911. Cloudy. Needless to say, I was prepared for the death sentence. My only concern day and night was to see as many of my twenty-five fellow defendants saved as possible.

I boarded the prison carriage just before noon. From the window of the carriage I could see in the dim sunlight saber-bearing figures solemnly standing guard en route. They seemed to presage the verdicts of the trial, and I waited impatiently for the court proceedings to start at 1:00 p.m.

The time came. We climbed up to the second floor, then to the third floor, and then down again to the second floor to the courtroom of the Supreme Court. The security measures along the corridors and in the courtroom during the proceedings were extremely tight. The court was packed with people—lawyers, newspaper reporters, and spectators. I tend to get dizzy easily, so I felt a bit faint, having climbed many stairs and because of the stifling presence of the crowd in the courtroom. After I calmed down, I looked around at my fellow defendants. They were all sitting circumspectly, looking worried. They looked as if they were afraid to smile at each other. A pride of hungry lions. Their nails and teeth had been filed and smoothed down. There they sat before me. Twenty-five sacrificial lambs.

Soon the judges entered through the left door at the front of the courthouse. Will it be life or death? Many of the defendants' hearts must have beat faster. The clerk read the names of the defendants. Chief Justice Tsuru Jōichirō said a few words of instruction. Then, contrary to the usual procedure, he left the verdicts to the end and proceeded to read the lengthy arguments, sipping occasionally from a glass of water. As he continued to read, it became clear that he was arbitrarily linking even those who were clearly innocent to Article 73 of the criminal code. His sophism became increasingly blatant. My concern increased and finally overwhelmed me like a tidal wave. But until he read the verdict for each defendant, I kept hoping against hope that some, even one person, would receive a minimal sentence. But, ah, it was all in vain. . . . It was all over. Except for Nitta Tōru, who was sentenced to eleven years in prison, and Niimura Zenbei, who was given eight years, the remaining twenty-four of us were sentenced to death.

From the beginning, I feared that this would be the case, but the trial was conducted in such an unexpectedly meticulous fashion that I began to hope that it would be relatively fair. The verdicts came as a shock. I was so angry and upset that I felt as if my entire body were on fire, and I began to tremble.

My poor friends, my poor comrades! More than half of them were innocent bystanders who had been implicated by the actions of five or six of us. Just because they were associated with us, they are now to be sacrificed in this monstrous fashion. Simply because they are anarchists, they are to be thrown over the cliff to their deaths.

I was not the only person shocked by this unexpected turn of events. All the lawyers, prison officials, and police who had been present during the trial on the sixteenth and were privy to the truth about this affair certainly must have been shocked at these outrageous verdicts. You could read it on the faces of everyone in the court. The defendants remained voiceless and si-

lent; for the moment they were frozen in irrepressible anger. Then cold smirks appeared on their lips.

I wanted to comfort my fellow defendants, but I was so upset and angry I could not think of the right words. I could only mutter to myself, “What a shocking, lawless trial.”

Then the straw hat was placed on my head. Because we were marched out in reverse order of our arrival, I was the first to leave. As I stood up I thought of my comrades. Though they will mount the same scaffold as I, we shall never meet again. Some of them must certainly feel bitter toward us. But they are all my comrades.

We stood side by side as fellow defendants. Farewell, my twenty-five friends. Farewell, twenty-five victims. Goodbye!

“Goodbye, goodbye!” That was all I managed to say.

“Goodbye, goodbye,” they shouted after me. As I left the courtroom I heard someone shout “Banzai!” No doubt one of the zealous anarchists was shouting for the anarchist cause. As I stepped on the first step of the stone stairway someone shouted, “Kanno-san!”

When I returned to the detention room of the courthouse, I began to cool off and regain my composure. I felt somewhat ashamed of myself for getting so angry. But what an outrageous trial!

However, it should not have surprised me. My past experiences should have prepared me to expect this as a matter of course. We initiated our plot precisely because this kind of outrageous legal system and despotic political authority exist. It was absurdly foolish to hope, even for a moment, that the wielders of power—whose authority I do not acknowledge—might save my comrades simply because the court hearings were meticulously carried out.

Soon the prison carriage arrived. I left the dimly lit detention room. The blood-red face of Takeda Kyūhei, one of the defendants, showed in a small

detention-room window. He shouted, "Goodbye!" I replied, "Goodbye!" Someone else shouted "Goodbye!" One word filled with so much emotion. The late afternoon sun hits the prison carriage from the side. The carriage carries me to Ichigaya, on a route that I shall never see again.

January 19. Cloudy. Though I was furious, I must have been exhausted from the strain of the past several days. I slept soundly from early evening, and today I feel refreshed. I have received permission from the prison authorities to leave some of my possessions to my friends as mementos. I will leave my formal silk kimono to Sakai Mā-bō, the single-layer kimono to Hori Yasuko, the black cloak and the lined garment of striped muslin to Yoshikawa Morikuni.

I wrote postcards to the three lawyers, Isobe Shirō, Hanai Takuzō, and Imamura Rikisaburō, expressing my shock at the verdicts. I also wrote cards to Sakai, Hori, and Yoshikawa, telling them about the mementos.

In the evening, the chaplain, Numanami Masanori, appeared. He told me that one of the fellow defendants, Mineo Setsudō, came to appreciate the value of faith in an external power after he was sentenced to death.

The chaplain said he was impressed that Mineo showed no signs of fear or worry. He then urged me to seek solace in religion. I told him I could not be more at peace with myself than I now was. It is ludicrous for an anarchist who is against all authority to turn to Amida Buddha for peace and security simply because they face death. But I can appreciate Numanami's position as a religious leader and as a chaplain. I have, however, my own beliefs and peace of mind.

We had sailed into the vast ocean ahead of the world's current of thought and the general tide of events. Unfortunately, we were shipwrecked. But this sacrifice had to be made to get things started. New routes are opened up

only after many shipwrecks and dangerous voyages. This is how the other shore of one's ideals is reached. After the sage of Nazareth was born, many sacrifices had to be made before Christianity became a world religion. In light of this, I feel that our sacrifice is miniscule.

I told the court these thoughts on the last day of the trial. They are with me constantly. I am convinced our sacrifice is not in vain. It will bear fruit in the future. I am confident that because I firmly believe my death will serve a valuable purpose I will be able to maintain my self-respect until the last moment on the scaffold. I will be enveloped in the marvelously comforting thought that I am sacrificing myself for the cause. I believe I will be able to die a noble death without fear or anguish.

At night Tanaka, director of prison instruction, came to see me. He told me that my fellow defendants were fairly calm and serene. I was pleased to hear this. He also talked about instances in which people condemned to death faced their end admirably. I described the kind of coffin I wanted made for me and how I wanted to be dressed after death. I was afraid that the supporters of the emperor and champions of patriotism might dig up my corpse and hack it to bits. I did not want to look too shabby when this happened. After Tanaka gave me his blessings, Numanami brought me two pamphlets: the *Tan'ishō* and *Outline of the Blessings of Faith*.

January 20. Snow. Snow has settled on top of the pine trees and the dead branches of the cypress trees. The world has been covered in silver during the night. Since the beginning of the year there have been several short flurries, but this storm doesn't look as though it will stop soon. Let it snow, let it snow! A foot, two feet. Pile it up high. Envelop this sinful city of Tokyo in snow, like a city buried in ashes. Level the entire landscape.

I wonder what the defendants in the men's prison are thinking of now as they look out at the cold snow from the three-foot iron windows?

Snow. Full of memories. As I stare out the iron window and observe the gently swirling snow, memories of many years float past my eyes, the many times that I looked up at the same sky with all sorts of thoughts and feelings. A combination of happiness and sorrow quietly presses against my chest. I long for those days, but I realize that all things are ephemeral. Everything now belongs to the past. I don't know what will happen to me tomorrow. Now I do not have time to enjoy reminiscing about the past. Oh, yes, I have the time, but my time is too precious. I must use the time to read, to write. And there are things that I must think about immediately. My mind is preoccupied with thoughts of things that I must take care of. Why do I feel so restless and harried? I don't understand it. Is it because a stack of books is facing me? Is it because I can't see the people I must see to have certain things taken care of? Is it because I haven't written my last words to my younger brother? People tell me that I haven't changed at all, that I am still full of energy. But even though I am busy with all sorts of things, nothing gets done. Still, it doesn't matter. I'll do what I can and whatever's unfinished, I'll leave as it is.

Two or three days ago I got a letter from Sakai. He wrote:

I saw your letter of the fourth. I hope you will write your prison diary as forthrightly and courageously as possible. I admire you for not giving up your English studies. There is a saying that goes something like this: "For each day that a person lives, there is one day's worth of work." We all could die tomorrow, but I am studying German and French bit by bit as if I were definitely going to live till I am sixty. I don't know how many days or months you have left. If we look at our lives from the standpoint of the eternal universe's time and space, they last only a split second. Isn't it wonderful that we can spend part of that moment exchanging light-hearted letters like this?

I certainly am calm. Since September of last year I've been playing tug of war with the dictionary, trying to learn English. I go at it with a nervous sense of urgency but am making very little progress. I am only one-third into Reader V.

I had gotten so that I could at least read a magazine without much schooling. It is only natural that I cannot come up to the hem of those who have a formal education. However, what bothered me most of all was that I did not know a foreign language, and I wanted at least to be able to read one. Though I started to study on my own several times, poor health or something else always interfered. So I had not been able to do anything about this till recently. It was due in part to my lack of will power and patience but also to the circumstances I found myself in that only in mid-September did I decide that the time had come for me learn to read at least some simple English selections. I had to do so before I died. So I started with a Third-level Reader. Now, I don't know when I will be executed. I probably don't have much time left, so I guess I won't be able to master the language. I regret this very much.

This diary will be written without any falsehood or pretense. Sakai need not worry about this. It will reveal the naked Kanno Sugako, just as I am.

—I must copy down two or three poems from my other diary.

—What are we puny things fighting about—in the midst of eternal time and boundless sky?

—Born in a tiny country, I am sacrificing my little body for a glimmer of hope.

—What a nation! It takes pride in spilling the life-blood of a hundred thousand people over one inch of the map.

—Another day spent guarding the shadows created by the sunlight that comes through the barred window.

—I know that the cliff drops one thousand fathoms, yet I rush down the path without turning back.

- I lie motionless in the cold night bed and listen time and time again to the stealthy sounds of sabers.
- I lie on my back for half a day, looking through the three-foot window and watch the leaves of the cypress tree sway in the wind.
- The ginkgo tree in the winter exudes a sense of reverence. It looks like a holy man coming from the snowy mountains.
- This wretched love. It continues to smolder like the smoke that keeps rising from glowing ashes.
- My last day will soon come. I smile as I think about my life. I can think about it forever. Is the strong, courageous child of revolution the same person as the weak, frail, weeping child? Is this me?
- Don't ask where the seed that dropped in the field is. Wait for the east wind that blows in the spring.
- We lined up by the railing listening to the song of the seashore where Hatushima Island floated three *ri* off in the waves.
- Deep in the night the wounded person cries. Both the old and new wounds are painful.
- In coming and going, did I see through the straw hat, the pale face in the third window?
- His eyes said "forgive me," but my eyes were as cold as the ice in the northern sea.
- I cursed at the light and darkness that came and went through the iron window for two hundred days.
- The evening crow. It keeps solitary watch over the rain clouds floating slowly across the big sky.
- Autumn afternoon. In the hollow of the cherry tree two tiny frogs are having fun.
- The pillars of words in my heart. They collapse one after the other in the autumn wind.

- I remember when I said “I’m going to end my life at twenty-two” and cut the strings of the violin and wept.
- You and I. We go to our graves feeling as if our hearts are separated east and west by the sea.
- The cherry petals fall on the stone-covered path of the Daihikaku Temple. And the temple bell peals.

In the evening I received cards from Sakai and Tameko, Yoshikawa, and Kōtoku Komatarō. I wanted to jot down my thoughts after reading the cards, but it was more than I could do. As I reread what I’ve written so far, this diary strikes me as totally disorganized and fragmentary. It’s almost as if I’m writing down the mutterings of my dreams. It’s distressing. Should I stop altogether?

January 21. Clear. The sun is shining on the snow on the pine tree branches. It looks like a painting by Maruyama Ōkyo. An exquisite scene.

When Sakai started his Baibunsha, the first person to ask for help was a student in a women’s college. She wanted the Baibunsha to write her senior thesis. What a comment on our society—comical and disgraceful at the same time.

I hear that Sakai Tameko is attending midwives’ school. I admire her courage and initiative to begin studies at the age of forty. And I admire Sakai for helping his wife become independent and self-sufficient. I am sure this entails some inconvenience for him. Not every man would be so willing.

Kōtoku’s mother died on December 28. She caught malaria and then pneumonia and died ten days after she got sick. I was told that when she came to Tokyo in November to see Kōtoku, she had planned to visit me too, but because Ochiyo was with her she held back and left without seeing me. Even though Kōtoku and I had broken off relations by then, she and I still saw

each other as mother and daughter. When I heard that she had come all the way to Tokyo and did not visit me, I was hurt and felt she was being heartless. Now having heard what happened, I feel guilty to have thought ill of her even for a moment. I think of her with fondness. We were mother and daughter, and then we were no longer members of the same family. Now we have parted, never to see each other again. She had comforted me constantly with her letters and packages. The past is like a dream. Ah, life is like a dream. Time is the graveyard, and everyone is going to be buried eventually. It is only a matter of time. Here I am, weeping over the death of others. But I too will be buried soon.

I seem to have caught a cold. I have a bad headache, but I took a bath anyway. Bathing is one of the few pleasures of prison life. Visits, letters, and bathing. I have no family, am virtually alone, so I seldom have visitors or get letters. The bath we are allowed every five days is my greatest pleasure.

From the clear, blue sky the warm sunlight streams in through the barred window. Sitting before the desk, feeling relaxed after my bath, how happy I would be to simply melt away and fall asleep forever.

Yoshikawa wrote in his letter:

This day a year ago I was released from prison. Of the three of us who left prison that day, Higuchi Den is doing extremely well. In contrast, I am merely staying alive. Oka Chiyohiko went back to his old nest in Chiba and is struggling with cold weather and hunger.

I wonder why Oka was imprisoned. Are those who are successful right and those in the depths of despair wrong? What about Morioka Eiji, who lost his mind and jumped into an old well in Dairen? What about those people who abandon their principles like worn-out sandals because they fear government oppression and hope to save their skins? Isn't fate fickle? The

human heart is so frail. Let those who want to leave, leave. Let those who must die, die. New shoots sprout only after the mammoth tree falls. In the springtime of the intellectual world, those of us who deem ourselves to be pioneers need not look back to fall and winter. We must look forward. We must rush forward. We must rush toward the light that offers us hope.

It seems that the authorities are watching our comrades in the outside world with even greater vigilance. The trial's shocking and outrageous results show that the government is planning to take advantage of this incident to adopt extreme, repressive measures. Persecute us! That's right, persecute us! Don't you know that for every force there is a counterforce? Persecute us! Persecute us as much as you wish. The old way is fighting the new—imperialism versus anarchism. Go ahead: Take your piece of stick and try with all your might to stop the onrush of the Sumida River.

Chaplain Numanami comes and asks me, "How are you?" I reply, "Same as usual." He says, "You have peace of mind because your life is founded on faith in your ism, your cause. Some people may be chagrined about the whole affair, depending on how deeply they were involved in it. You were involved in the affair from the beginning to the end, so you must have been prepared to face anything." What he said pleased me. It was much better than his trying to convert me.

I am sure many fellow defendants are deeply distressed about what has happened. This incident is unprecedented in history, but the punishment is unprecedented too. This affair should not be labeled a conspiracy by the anarchists. Rather it should be called a conspiracy concocted by the public prosecutors. The invocation of Article 73 in the trial was truly idiotic. The public charges and the truth of the matter were totally unrelated, like a novel written by a third-rate writer. Only the five of us—Kōtoku, Miyashita, Niimura, Furukawa, and I—were involved in the conspiracy, the group that the prose-

cutor called the “reserves under Kōtoku’s direct command.” The prosecutors linked the others to the conspiracy simply because of the idle talks we had with them in the past, talks that were as ephemeral as smoke drifting in air.

The prosecution argued that the affair was a conspiracy of the anarchists—so-and-so is an anarchist, or so-and-so is a friend of an anarchist; therefore, they were participants in the conspiracy. Using this kind of outrageous reasoning, they went about arresting people. Rushing to fight for honor and fame, the authorities strove to bring as many as possible to the dock. They resorted to deceit, double-dealing, threats, and, in extreme cases, methods similar to the tortures used in the past. Some were questioned continuously day and night without rest or sleep. The prosecutors latched onto the common complaints that ordinary people, not necessarily anarchists, mouth about the government. They presented these casual discussions as if they were linked in a profound way to the conspiracy.

Even though one were to let them interpret these discussions as broadly as possible and define them as being conspiratorial, they can in no way be linked to Article 73. At most, the prosecutors might prove a plot to stage a civil uprising. But the prosecutors and judges who conducted the preliminary investigation questioned the accused in detail about anarchism. When the ideals of anarchism—and these were merely ideals—were expressed, the prosecutors concluded that because anarchism believes in absolute freedom and equality it perforce also naturally rejects the imperial family. Through such reasoning they managed to get their inferences into the records of the examination. They then used these theories and ideals, which have no relationship with the current affair, to entrap completely innocent people.

The more I think about this the madder I get.

You poor pitiful judges. All you wanted to do was protect your positions. To safeguard them, you handed down these verdicts even though you knew

they were unlawful and arbitrary. You went against your consciences. You poor judges, poor slaves of the government. I should be angry at you, but I pity you instead. Here I am bound by this barred window, but my thoughts still spread their wings in the free world of ideas. Nothing can bind my thoughts or interfere with them. You may live for a hundred years, but what is a life without freedom, a life of slavery, worth? You poor slaves.

At 4:00 p.m. I was taken to the visiting room. Four people were there: Sakai, Mr. and Mrs. Ōsugi, and Yoshikawa. Before the visit, I was told by the warden that I was not to speak about the trial. This must have been a governmental directive, based on the fear that if the truth about the outrageous trial got out, our comrades might vent their anger against the government.

I remember how Sakai and Ōsugi looked when we were together during the trial of the Red Flag incident in room 3 of the court of appeals. Today they looked no different. Both are healthy and vigorous. We spoke a word here, a phrase there. I tried to avoid meeting their eyes, which were filled with tears. I tried to laugh and chat casually, but finally when the time came to say farewell, especially when it came time to shake Yasuko's hand, the tears that I had been holding back poured out as if from a broken dam. We both cried and held hands for a long time. Oh, my dear friends, my comrades! When I blurted out "The verdicts were a surprise," Sakai said in anguish, "I expected you and Kōtoku to die for the cause but . . ." That's all he said—his heart was overflowing with emotion.

Today I wrote a letter to Mr. and Mrs. Ōsugi and cards to Messrs. Sakai and Yoshikawa.

January 22. Clear. Last night, for the first time since I was jailed, I felt depressed. The final visit from my friends was nerve-racking. Since June 2,

when I heard that our plot was uncovered, I have been convinced that I have to learn to discipline myself. Right now I feel like a worthless person—to be overwhelmed, even for one night, by such irrational feelings. I despair for myself. How could I be such a weakling?

Maybe it is only a natural reaction. Asian heroes say that one's face should not reveal feelings of joy or anger, happiness or sorrow. In a way, this is a highly admirable ideal, but at the same time it is hypocritical. Maybe an idiot or a sage can really transcend joy and anger or happiness and sorrow, but ordinary people are filled with such feelings. Only by lying or pretending can they live without showing feelings. I am a weak person, emotional to the extreme. I hate lies, I dislike pretense. I detest all things unnatural. I cry. I laugh. I rejoice. I get angry. I let my emotions have free play. I don't care how others measure my worth as a human being. I will be satisfied if I can end my life without lying to myself.

Today, however, I feel very good. The sadness of last night has vanished. I wonder why I felt so bad? I was overjoyed to hear that my fellow defendants in the male prison wing are ready to face death, displaying a fortitude worthy of anarchists. When I heard this, I felt as if I were floating on air. Since we are responsible for their plight, I was very worried about how they might react. We are all human. It's only natural that they might find it intolerable to be punished so harshly for the truly tenuous connection they had with the affair. I am really impressed that they have decided to sacrifice all for the sake of their principles. They are worthy anarchists, worthy comrades. I am truly happy. I am proud to be a believer in anarchism. I have nothing more to worry about or regret. The only worry that had been hovering over my thoughts like a black cloud has dissipated completely. Everything is as bright and clear as today's sky.

I wrote letters to Koizumi Sakutarō, Katō Tokijirō, Nagae Tamemasa, and cards to Okano Tatsunosuke and Watanabe Yayoko.

In the evening I received letters from our attorney, Hirade, and from Sakai. Hirade wrote:

I knew what the verdicts would be before the judge finished reading ten lines of the argument. Like all lawyers who hope for favorable decisions, I had clung until then to the hope that five or six of the defendants would get off with light sentences. But it was in vain. Hard as it was to remain in the courtroom, I did not want the two men I was defending to lose hope. So even though I found it painful, I stuck it out until the end of the proceedings. I even said a few words of encouragement to them. There's nothing that can be done about the application of the law, so let us leave the question of the verdicts' justness to the judgment of history. I don't think that you're the sort of person that requires words of comfort. I am tormented, though, when I think about how those who were not prepared to face the worst must have felt. I haven't been able to do anything since the eighteenth.

Even a lawyer feels this way. Is it any wonder that I feel tormented beyond endurance, me, their comrade, who is responsible for their plight? I wrote a reply to Hirade under the dim light-bulb.

January 23. Clear. I wake up every night at 2:00 a.m. when they come to change my hot-water bottle. Though I am drowsy, I can't fall back to sleep for two or three hours. I lie there thinking about all sorts of things. Last night when I woke up, I thought about a number of things—Sakai who came to see me the day before yesterday, my fellow defendants, my younger sister's grave, which is in Seishunji. When Sakai or Yasuko delivers the money to take care of the grave, as I asked them to, I wonder what that monk whom I detest so much will say. I don't believe in the superstition that the dead will be saved by the power of the sutra, so I tended to neglect sending gifts to the temple.

Whenever I visited my sister's grave, the monk always gave me a nasty look. As a result, I stopped going to her grave site to place flowers and incense and instead placed her favorite food and so forth before her photograph. This is just as silly, for, after all, the dead person's body has already turned to smoke or has decomposed and returned to its original atomic particles. I don't believe that the spirit survives and is pleased to receive flowers, incense, or other gifts. I did these things out of habit and for my own psychological satisfaction.

Given my current situation, however, I feel I ought to give the temple at least a little money to care for the grave. If not for me, then certainly for the sake of my younger brother, who is currently in America. When he re-turns to Japan one of these years and asks about our younger sister's grave, he would, without question, be crushed if he found that the grave had been neglected and allowed to deteriorate because it was looked on as the grave of a person without family.

Last night I thought about what should be done with my body after my death. After my last insignificant breath and when I have become a mere lump of flesh, I suppose it doesn't really matter what happens to my remains. But I hate the thought of being squeezed into a coffin in an awkward position with my legs bent under. I want a coffin in which my body can be laid out flat. The day before yesterday, when my friends visited me, I asked Warden Kinose, who was present as an observer, to get me a full-length coffin. I expect the coffin will be finished before long. I had also wanted to be in my good clothes. If by chance someone were to dig up my coffin and expose my body, I didn't want to look too unseemly. Now, however, I've decided it would be more natural for me to be dressed in my ordinary clothes. It doesn't matter if my dress is torn or soiled.

I had also asked Section Chief Iizuka to let me take a bath on the morning

of my execution, but this morning I told them to forget about that too. I don't care about the headstone. Truthfully, I really don't care if they burn me and scatter my ashes in the wind, or if they throw my body in Shinagawa River. But I suppose they couldn't do a thing like that. So if I am to be buried, I really want to be buried next to my younger sister. As I said, I don't like that temple, so I have arranged to be buried in the convict graveyard in Zōgegaya. This will be the least trouble. The day before yesterday when Sakai and Yasuko asked me if I had anything I wanted taken care of, I told them where I wanted to be buried.

This morning I wrote cards to the Baibunsha and to our attorney, Hirade. I asked the people at Baibunsha to arrange to have a new wooden tablet set up by my sister's gravestone when they went to the temple.

Thinking about the grave, I was reminded of the prosecutor Taketomi Wataru. I met him three years ago after the Red Flag incident. At the time, we clashed over my request to have the wording of my pretrial statement corrected because there were inaccuracies. We ended up getting angry at each other. Then the following year—that is, two summers ago when I was imprisoned and charged with a violation of the press law in connection with my work with the magazine *Jiyū Shisō*—the same prosecutor tormented me. He was extremely mean and devious in questioning me and pressed the case against me in a merciless fashion.

When the current affair broke out, I was initially examined by him, but I was determined not to say a word, since I disliked him so much. In fact, I even thought of killing him and bringing him along with me to the land of the dead if I got the chance. Later, however, he talked about his life—about his mother and how he had worked his way through school—and I began to feel sympathetic toward him and abandoned any thought of killing him. I, too, shared my feelings with him, and we parted amicably.

Several days later he came to me and said, "I find it interesting that you don't want to say a word to me about the affair. I won't try to make you talk about it. Instead, won't you tell me about yourself? Wouldn't it be a novel idea to have me, whom you detest so much, write your life story? I really would like to do it."

I imagined that this would be his way of repaying me viciously, but no matter who writes about me it's highly unlikely that anything good will be said. I have been a maverick and haven't followed any straight and narrow path. Thanks to my stubbornness and determination not to knuckle under, I succeeded in not becoming a prostitute or a textile-factory worker. But the story of my life would not elicit the sympathies of anyone except, perhaps, kind-hearted people concerned with social problems. I have given up any hope of winning people's understanding. My story is bound to be told in a slanted way, and I might as well have it told as unsympathetically as possible. So, in the end, I told my life story to the prosecutor almost as if it were a novel.

When we discussed things unrelated to the current affair, the prosecutor impressed me as a cheerful person, free of sinister intents. I didn't see anything hateful in him. I can vividly recall his face as he listened avidly to my story. He would say, "It really is like a novel," and kept repeating, "You and I must have had some strong ties in our previous existence." In the end, he told me, "If by chance you are executed, or if you happen to die before me, I promise to bring flowers and incense to your grave."

His eyes seemed to say that he was not merely flattering me. So I thought he might visit my grave at least once. When I mentioned this to someone, they laughed and said that he was probably just superstitious about the entire thing.

If I could return as a ghost, there are so many people, beginning with the

judge of the Court of Cassation, that I would like to terrify. It would be wonderful to scare them witless and make them grovel.

Early this morning, I had an interesting dream. I was with two or three people whom I can't recall now, and we were walking on a path in a field by a brook. When I looked up, I saw the sun and the moon, about three feet apart, vividly etched in the blue sky. The sun was the same color as the moon, and it was not fully round but was shaded by a third. The moon was about ten days past the new moon. I told my companions that when the sun and the moon appear together it means a great calamity is about to befall the nation. Then I woke up. Maybe my brain is somehow injured, but from way back I've often dreamed all night long. I've never had a dream like that, though. A crescent-shaped sun and moon. I wonder what all this means?

Nowadays, every morning when I get up I think in amazement, "Oh, am I still alive?" That I am still alive feels like a dream.

I heard from Tanaka, chief of moral instruction, that over half of the defendants condemned to death have been given a reprieve. Their sentences were probably reduced one degree to life imprisonment. The verdicts were so unjust that this came as no surprise. Still, it is delightful news. I don't know whose sentences were reduced, but it must be those who had very little to do with the affair; those people who, in my opinion, were completely innocent. They must be overjoyed, since, even though they were condemned unjustly and arbitrarily, they were facing the death penalty.

The authorities first hand down these harsh sentences, then reduce them, touting the action as an act of the emperor's benevolence. They try to impress the people of Japan, as well as those of other nations, that this is an act of justice and mercy. Are we to admire this kind of clever scheming? or condemn it as artful politicking? Still I am really happy that my comrades' lives

have been spared. To be fully satisfied I would like to see all others saved except for the three or four of us. If I could take the places of all of them, I would be happy to be broiled to death by being trussed upside down or have my back split open and have molten lead poured into me. I am willing to suffer any kind of torture and punishment.

Someone told me an interesting story about Tanaka who was a samurai of Aizu-han. Tanaka was captured and condemned to death in 1872. On his way to the execution grounds he was unexpectedly given a reprieve. It is a story that intrigues someone in my situation a great deal.

Tanaka is tactful in tailoring his talk to fit the person he is talking to. He does not say anything mentally upsetting but simply comes up with timely and appropriate stories. I am impressed. It is the fruit of years of experience.

Five letters arrived. They were from Sakai Mā-san, Koizumi Sakutarō, Minami Sukematsu, Kayama Sukeo, and Tomiyama. Mā-san's is a beautiful picture-card of flowers and grass. She has written in pencil, "I understand you are giving me something. Thank you very much. Goodbye." I can just see her big eyes, fair face, and adorable figure. She is really a lovable child.

Koizumi wrote, "I am writing this as a farewell missive. On New Year's Eve when I got drunk at Chikushi-kan I wrote the following poem for Shūsui:

Before I lift the sake cup, I think only of the relationship with beautiful princesses.

After I am drunk I understand the bitter search.

Tonight my dear friend is in prison.

Where will the spirit that haunts his dreams be at the end of the year?

I also started to compose a poem for you, but I failed to do so and completed only one phrase: 'How pitiful. This enlightened age derails the talented lady.'"

He has been of great help to me during the past two or three years. I read his letter over and over, and was overcome with emotion. Please stay well. Live for a hundred years.

I am writing this under the dim electric-light bulb. I can barely move the brush, which is cold as ice. It is difficult. The call for us to go to bed was issued sometime ago. The lonely wind is blowing past the window. I guess I will call it a night.

January 24. Clear. I wrote to Messrs. Sakai and Masuda, and Ma-bō. I asked Sakai to send my younger brother in America some mementos from me.

The court's verdict, consisting of 146 pages, arrived. I plan to send it to my comrades in the United States. Yoshikawa sent me the *Suikodo-Kensō*.

I feel distressed after reading the hyperbolic, twisted reasoning of the verdict. I cannot get my spirits up to write today. A postcard from Yoshikawa arrived.

At night I wrote letters and cards to the four lawyers, Isobe, Hanai, Imamura, and Hirade, and to Messrs. Yoshikawa, Minami, Kayama, and Tomiyama. [In her letter to Yoshikawa she wrote]:

Yesterday I heard that more than half of my fellow defendants were reprieved. When I heard the verdicts, which were completely unexpected, I was so bitter that the blood in my whole body flared up as if on fire. Now, I am very happy that some of the defendants have been saved. They must be the people who I was certain were innocent. After hearing the news I felt that half the burden on my shoulders had been lifted.

Marilyn Buck

The Freedom to Breathe

2004

I am skinny-dipping. Stripping off my clothes, running into the water, diving down naked to disappear for a few breaths from the shouts and sounds of the world. Shedding clothes, embarrassments, care. The surface breaks as I return for air. For a few moments, I am free, opened, beyond place, beyond space.

And then I am here. I breathe deeply, fully clothed in a compulsory uniform inside walls that do not vanish before half-closed eyes, seated during an officially-sanctioned time for Buddhist group meditation. My breath joins those of the women around me, travels across the walls and over the barbed wire. Freedom of breath cannot be measured, contained or punished—as I breathe, my aliveness asserts itself, even laughs at its constraint. Yes, in this place it is an elusive joy, but I feel it now, as surely as I feel the knots of anxiety loosen in my shoulders.

The primary function of prison is to deprive the citizen of her freedom; there is no other lesson. To be excluded from society is supposedly the greatest loss one can suffer. Prison is the wall that separates and deprives, behind which the prisoner disappears from life—from family, from friends, from all that is loved. And without freedom of some kind, the human spirit shrivels, collapses into despair or bitterness. How easy it is to succumb to resignation, to gather anger to fill the spaces between the bars, between the interstices of one's own ribs—to isolate one's heart, and only then gain a perverse comfort.

In the first years of my sentence, I was awash in bitterness; every day I mourned the loss of my world. I was angry, but above all, fearful. I shut myself

off, afraid that if I were to let my guard down in prison, even for a moment, I would be left defenseless; I might lose my essential self to the anonymity of concrete cell blocks. I walked prison halls fearful, dreading collapse. The self I clung to was a rigid, fragile thing.

Many prison years passed before I decided to try sitting, and only then did I really begin to breathe. My heart became less constricted; the dharma path opened. I grew less afraid of what could happen to me.

Deepening my breath, lengthening my spine, I learn to discard my preconceptions and expectations—all the many hopes and fears and attachments that have given shape to my life. I learn to lay aside anxiety about what I am missing, what I do not have, what might happen to me in here. I confront the fact that I am, in truth, uncertain about whether I really want to release my fears, my anger. I am conflicted. Without the armor of my anger and self-righteousness, I become intimate with the many forms of suffering in this prison world—and so I feel vulnerable, exposed.

Each day presents a new confrontation with reality. I want to run; instead, I breathe. One breath—the freedom to choose my response in that moment. In sitting, I encounter joy; I know that through this practice I can arrive at a place of genuine peace.

The path is before me. It is my choice to follow.

Stevie Wilson

Interview

2019

We're glad that you're out. We know that you recently got released from solitary, I believe on October 17. Right?

Yeah, I got transferred from Smithfield and I'm now at SCI Fayette. You know, sometimes when you're an ally behind the walls . . . it means more than being an ally, being an accomplice actually. And it was a situation where a prisoner was attacked by two guards, and I kinda had an accident that we did online and the administrators found out about the accident. I was behind it and so they moved to get me out of the way and kind of bury me in the hole. But thankfully, because of the support that I had outside, it applied pressure on them and they got me out of the hole, but they transferred me to another prison. So now I'm—I was three-and-a-half hours away from my family. Now I'm six hours away from my family, about 40 minutes south of Pittsburgh.

Wow. So this is basically in direct retaliation against organizing on the inside, right?

Definitely. It's something that's to be expected though. When you do this type of work behind the walls, it's not about being an ally. You will become an accomplice and so whatever they're doing to that person they're going to try do to you also. I knew at one point they were trying to bury the young man in the hole because when they attack us, they try to flip it and say, you know, and say that we attacked them. So they'll bury him from six to nine months in the hole. And because we were successful in getting him out of the hole into a safer prison—"safer," ain't no prison safe but it's safer than the one he was in—you know, I became a target after he was gone. And I was able to go

bother them and I did once again because of people like Critical Resistance. I was able to come out of the hole, I did about two months battling with these people. We were able to come out of the hole and be placed at Fayette now. But the work doesn't stop. The work doesn't stop, you know?

Yeah. Do you have a sense that this is also an indirect attack on the self-organized abolitionist study groups inside, as well?

Yeah, I think. I'm gonna tell you something: that prison was a little different, where many of the groups that we were doing were actually taking the place of programs that they had actually discontinued, right? So there was a lack of programming there. We were putting together the transformative justice group and it was something that they liked, they gave us space for it. They gave us space for it, you know. And what's happening in Pennsylvania is because of the, the rehabilitation programs have been gutted. The educational programs have been gutted. There has been a space opened up for prisoners to initiate groups, right? And so we that's what we did at Smithfield, and here at Fayette it's kind of the same thing now. There people don't have anything to do and the prison wants to them to do something. So once again, there is an opening for us here.

So tell us a little bit more about the abolitionist study group inside that you help run. Can you tell us about what y'all do?

Well, the first one we called 9-9-71, obviously in reference to Attica and it was a general abolitionist study group. We started with something like "Are Prisons Obsolete?" by Angela Davis and what we do is we do a chapter reading and then we would come back and we have discussion questions. We focus a lot on definitions because this is the first time many people were hearing about abolition. When you think of a world without prisons, they

thought we were crazy. You know, the first thing out of their mouths, “what are we going to do with the murderers and rapists and things like that?” And so we had to really talk about basic definitions and things like safety and community and things like that. So that was the largest group because it was more generalized. We also had a group called Circle Up, which is a transformative justice group, most of those men there were under the age of 25, about 23 young men. And they were doing a program called Circle Up and it was talking about transformative justice. How we apply, inside the prison and in our families and our communities. SAS was a Queer Abolitionist group. That group we started because it was sometimes difficult to talk about those types of issues in 9-9-71. Alright. So we had a group that went through *Captive Genders* and *Queer (In)Justice* and works like this from an abolitionist perspective. And then we also had a Bold Type Books book club which ten prisoners were involved in. Bold Type Books used—it used be Nation Books—would send in a book each month, for the discussion questions and we would meet as a book club. That has been taken over by Haymarket books now. So here at Fayette we’re going to be doing it and Haymarket books will be providing the books for us. So we’re happy to have that program still continue.

That’s awesome. I mean, can you tell us more about the importance of studying for you? It seems like it’s pretty much part of the programming—which is not a good thing, you’re saying—but it’s also part of abolitionists studying together with folks inside.

Actually, the first thing is to understand that many people in prison don’t have a strong academic background, right? We didn’t have very good experiences in school. And so what I found was that it was easier to copy out chapters of books and to work through them together. Especially thinking about about definitions, thinking about how this activist work applies to your particular life,

your experiences. Zines were really big for us because it was more intimidating to give someone a book that 200–300 pages long—if they read this, they probably wouldn't pick it up. But if I gave someone a zine and it was three or four pages long, they could take a week and read that and we'll come back and we discuss it. So I tell you, the zines play a major role in the work inside the prison. Also, because even for me to disseminate zines and books, it's less costly and the administration doesn't see it. If I went out into the yard and tried to give out ten books, I wouldn't make it. But if I have ten zines there, I can give them out, you see? So part of it also is knowing the inside of here—because, remember this much: learned prisoners are an affront to the PIC. Okay? So you have to do things on the sly and on the slip sometimes; so these came in really handy here. So it was a lot of meeting with people. It was about definitions. It was about meeting people where they are. All sorts of other things too, you know? Some people don't read well, so we had to sit in groups and read but they can express their experiences, they can talk about their experiences. So I think it was important. I think one thing that's very surprising to me is that you have to explain that prisons are unnecessary to prisoners. That was the thing that was most surprising to me because we're sitting here every day. We realized how this doesn't work, but people think there's no alternative to this, you know, and some of them you can convince, there is an alternative to this. There really is. We see it every day. Abolition is not something that is far, far away; actually, some of it is here today, but everybody doesn't get to be a part of that process. You understand what I'm saying when I say that?

There's also a way of undoing the ways that the prison itself is pretty much naturalized inside. Even though, of course, folks face the brutality of imprisonment and captivity, there's still a way in which you're saying that's naturalized, right? That it's still fully normalized?

What I'm trying to explain to people when I say "abolition"—and this is why I asked that question, because I want them to understand that abolitionism is not something that's always in the future. I was explaining to them that if someone—a white, wealthy person breaks the law? Okay? What are the chances of this person being put in prison? It's not gonna happen. Same if a guy had a substance abuse problem and this guy is 21 years old, is white, he lives in the suburbs, has a substance abuse problem, he breaks into his neighbor's house, burglarizes the house, gets caught, and gets locked up. Are they going to keep them locked up? No, they're probably going to send him to some drug treatment place, that's what's going to happen. That's abolition! That's abolition. Instead of locking him up, we'll go to send you where you need to be: treatment. You see: that is abolition also. So I'm trying to explain to people that no, the solution isn't always "call the police," it isn't always jail or prison. There are other ways we can deal with harm. And so when I explain it that way to them, then they see, "Oh, it's here—abolition is here now," it's just that everyone doesn't get a chance to be a part of that process. How can we open it up to everybody? If a person is getting high and then the committing crimes to get high, then why would we lock that person up? That's not the issue. We don't call the police and lock them up. No, then let's get them help with their substance abuse problem. And that's abolition, you know? So my task, a lot of time in here, is actually translating the work for the people in here. And that's one area I think we're not doing too well in. Stuff that's being published—you see what I'm saying?—I don't think is actually accessible to a lot of people behind the wall.

Stevie, I wanted to ask you precisely about this point. In your writings also you consider yourself a translator, right? And you just stated that just now: the necessity of translating queer abolitionist theory to other prisoners is one of the key things you find yourself doing. I wonder if you could talk, one, a little bit more

about that; but also, do you find you are also translating and thinking theoretically inside for those on the outside? So in that sense, it's sort of a two-way process of translation, right? Rather than a one-way process?

Yeah. I think one of the things that I learned early on is the necessity of translating . . . I found that many of the works that I was reading—when I gave the book to someone else or an article to someone else—they really didn't get it. And when I broke it down, they got it. And so that was kinda like the way my study groups changed because it was no longer about giving people the assignment and coming back the next week and that we just assumed that we were ready. It was actually about creating questions that would test the comprehension of the study group members. And part of it also was that it was important for me that they were able to apply what they were learning to their lives, or actually hold it up to their lives. "Do I find it to be true? I'm reading something by this author and they're saying 'It's X, Y, and Z'—do I find that my experiences are X, Y, and Z? Do I have another way or am I seeing something else?" I'll give you example. For instance, when we talk about organizing behind the walls. A lot of times what you hear is about divisions, gangs, racial divisions, and things like that. Well, I'm in Pennsylvania and that's not the case; in Pennsylvania it's really geographical. It's that people are Philadelphia versus Pittsburgh or Harrisburg versus Allentown. And so when we would read certain things that would talk about the divisions based upon gangs and race it didn't apply to Pennsylvania. So guys would say, "This doesn't apply here." Well, tell us how it does apply? "Well, you know, it's really geographical. You know how it goes down." And so I would have to tell people who are working in Pennsylvania that this is not how it goes in Pennsylvania. It's not about gangs or race, it's more about geography. A black guy and a white guy from Philly gonna get along better than a black guy and a black guy from Pittsburgh, and this is how it is. And so I think that works both ways. There's some things

that we thought we need to let people outside know so that we could work together better. And I think people outside, you should think about how to make the work more accessible. Oftentimes the work is not written towards prisoners or written for prisoners. That's not the audience. The audience is other academics, you know, or some other journal. I'm asking myself, "Who writes for prisoners? Who writes for prisoners?" And that's a big thing. And I think that that's why if we could get over that or we could somehow learn how to get around this, then we would see many more people in prison declare themselves abolitionists and work with people toward abolition. We would see it.

So it seems like, on the one hand, you do think about translation as a two-way process, right? Inside and outside. Because I assume that, you know, a part of what you're saying is that folks on the outside aren't necessarily understanding the theory that's happening on the inside, right? So that's why I was trying to push back on this sense that translation is a two-way process, right? We have to translate stuff going in and stuff coming out, but we might even think about translation as an abolitionist practice in some ways, right? To continually undermine the walls and cages that seek to continuously separate us. Right?

Yeah, and two points about that. One is another comment on the issue of working and work. We'll talk about abolition and work strikes, and I was trying to explain to people—abolitionists outside—that that doesn't work in Pennsylvania. I was trying to explain that to them. That it's not like down south where, in like Alabama, the guys work and they don't pay them, right? Well in Pennsylvania they work and some of these guys make \$150 a month and that's all the money they have coming in and they aren't willing to go on strike. You understand what I'm saying? And so I had to explain this to people on the outside, why a work stoppage doesn't work in Pennsylvania. I think one

thing that we have to think about also is that different things work in different regions. We can't say what works in California or Arizona is gonna work in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Because Pennsylvania and Jersey are right next to each other and they're very different as far as the prison systems and the culture. And so I think that's important, too. Just going back to one more point: the other thing about translation is that my background personally is that I worked for eleven years in nonprofits before I was incarcerated. And so what happened was I was used to dealing with a population where I had to do the same exact thing. I worked in aid service organizations and I'd be dealing in the field with people and I had to do the same exact thing. I was trying to explain what people needed, to these administrators, right? And I was trying to explain what the administrators wanted to the people being served. And so I found myself in that same position. I think that's why I still have that skill where I'm able to talk to other prisons about abolition, and then talk to abolitionist activists outside and say, look, this is what we need, or can you do this? So I think that I was prepared for this, because of the type of work I did before I was incarcerated. I think that's why I have this viewpoint, but I just realized that if the communication isn't there between us a lot of times, for people inside and outside; there's not really good communication and good context. And I've said this before: if someone says that you're involved in the American prison movement or you are a penal abolitionist and you're not in direct contact with somebody inside of the prison, you are wrong. You're wrong. I don't understand how you know what's going on. If you're not in direct contact with somebody you're writing or talking to, emailing or something, I don't know how you even know what's going on inside these walls. I don't understand it. I think that's a problem. More communication needs to happen. Better communication needs to happen.

Yeah. Communication, as you're saying, is a sort of translation—also geographic—that's happening not only inside and outside the walls but across different states, across different territories, different populations. I mean, it's certainly the case with the work strike, which you were mentioning; it was this constant process of translation, right? Which I think you see also as your theoretical and political practice inside. I think also what you would say, and what you also mentioned in your writing, is the importance of criticism, right? And self-criticism. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Yeah. I think it's very important. That's always there. I think it's important for us to all look at what we're doing and hold it up to critique. What I've found in this place is that people know their own pain. Everyone knows their own pain, what they're going through. So most people here talk about racism; anti-black racism they understand, but they don't understand misogyny, homophobia, and things like that. And so the thing is, I realized that people could see when they were being wronged but they couldn't see how they were wronging other people. They couldn't understand that they could be contributing to someone else's oppression. And so it's important for us, always, to look at what we're doing and to make sure we're not creating more oppression. It's always important for us to look at what we're doing and make sure we're not harming other people. I think it's about having a conversation about our values, and making sure we're actually sticking with our values, you know, and talking about them. I just think that they've missed that. Behind the walls we're not getting a lot of critique. And what happens is that the people on the outside—I've said this before—don't want to critique the people on the inside. Do you understand what I'm saying?

It's a totally one-sided approach.

You know, there's situations where someone will get on—like I'm having this conversation with you right now—someone is doing an interview and they're talking about something from prison, and they make a statement that's misogynistic or homophobic or whatever. And the person doing the interview will not check them on it. Well, I say, wait a minute. Wait, wait, wait. But they just let it go. And that does not help our movement at all because the thing is that we have many people who are saying they are abolitionist or they're against this prison or against this oppression but they only get one type of oppression. Their vision of freedom only goes so far. It's truncated. Their vision of freedom does not extend to other people who are not like them, or who are different from them. And so I think that a lot of times, I'm doing it from here. But I think that people on the outside . . . I call it freedom guilt. That's what I say. People on outside feel that they can't critique activists and writers on the inside, because "I'm free. Who am I to sit here and say something to them about what they believe or what they're going through?" You're part of the same movement! So if there's a guy—I don't care how much of an abolitionist or anti-prison activist you think he is—if he's saying something that's homophobic or misogynistic, you need to call him out for it. You just say, Listen man, oh wait a minute . . . And I think that's what's not happening and that's why I make that point because it's always important to realize that there's a hierarchy in here and when you're a queer, trans, disabled, neuro-atypical person here, you're at the bottom. And you will find people who are in this movement, who are behind the wall, who are activists, who will sell those people down the drain for some type of perk. So I think it's important to check people and say, "Listen, man, what are you doing?" What are you calling for, you know? In Pennsylvania we just had a piece of legislation that went up that said, basically, if you're life without parole—and we're trying to get rid of this thing—basically, if you committed a homicide and you're in X, Y, or Z cat-

egory, we'll think about getting you some numbers, but we're gonna shut the door on the rest of these people. And some people were for that. They were like, "Okay, yeah, that's what they're doing now—" I can't support that. I can't support that. Sometimes when we're thinking about what's being put forward, we have to be more critical. And I think that a lot of times, people outside are afraid—freedom guilt, or whatever it is—to say to people inside, "Listen man, that's real homophobic, that's misogynistic, that's just not abolitionist, what you're thinking." The only way people get better in this prison, behind this wall, is when people on the outside, who are our partners, hold us to higher standards. They gotta hold us to higher standards, they really do.

At the same time, it's not just denunciation and stepping back, right? You emphasize the BLA's practice of criticism and unity, how there's a way of criticizing that's not simply just pushing out, because otherwise . . .

First of all, when I say "critique" and "criticize" . . . I've always analyzed what I do as radical compassion, I always talk about radical compassion and I think it's important to understand that when I'm critiquing somebody, it's not because I'm trying to tear you down but because I want to make us better. You better. And so my critique actually comes from a space of love for the person because, honestly, I find it hard to even be concerned with you if I don't care about you. That's me personally. And if people do things and I don't really say anything to them, it's because I really don't care what they're doing; they're a very negative person and I don't want to get involved. That's just how I keep myself safe behind the wall. But what I'm saying is that my critique comes from a place of compassion for people. My critique comes from a place of love. It's not about tearing someone down; it's about building you up and building us up. So I do think there's a way that you can do it—the way that we should do it—that's about community. You know what I mean? I don't think

about tearing anybody down or putting someone out there or considering them disposable. “We no longer need you”—that’s not how it’s supposed to be. You have to meet people where they are and give them the opportunity, also, to say things that they feel, honestly, even if it is messed up. Because, well, if that’s how you feel, then let’s talk about it. But I gotta give them an opportunity and some ground so they can say that, you know.

Katerina Gogou

Three Clicks Left

1978

Our life is knifings
in dirty dead-end streets
rotten teeth worn-out slogans
dressing rooms
smell of piss and disinfectant
and fetid sperm. Torn-up posters.
Up and down. Up and down Patisson St.
Our life is Patisson St.
Detergent that doesn't pollute the sea
and Mitropanos who entered our lives
then Dexameni and chic women
gobbled him up.
We keep going.
All our life is craving, we travel
the same roads.
Humiliation-loneliness-despair. And vice versa.
Okay. We're not crying. We've grown up.
But secretly when it rains
we suck our thumbs. And smoke.
Our life is
hyperventilating
at conventional strikes,
snitches and patrols.
That's why I'm telling you

next time they shoot at us
don't run away. Stay in line.
Don't sell out so fast, dammit.
Don't. It's raining. Give me a cigarette.

Here too.
Especially here, the blacks
mop up spit from the street
with their tongues.
Here too,
especially here, the Asians
open the doors of hotels to the whites
and here the waiters
who immigrated in order to not become waiters
haul sandwiches on their backs
and the American dream
and here everyone else
devours the backs the sandwiches the dreams
of the immigrants
and here I am—my name's Katerina—
I was torn apart in public parks
I beat off at drive-in porn movies
I threw up blood and sour white salad
in the subway
and I silently wept when I dropped my last coins
into depressing slot machines.
But friend! There's something I'd love to drop
that would blow up all the fucking slot machines in the world.
That would blow all the world's sorrow sky high.

Buy everything sold in thrift stores
already used nine times
by rebels
whose heads were messed up by beatings
so they mutter about Jesus
by poets with shining heads
by women who got their partners off
and got snitched on yet they never broke.
Hey, friend, I'm in London today, June 1, 1977,
and me and all our crew salute you. Take care.

My friends are like blackbirds
seesawing on roofs of dilapidated houses
Exarcheia Patissia Metaxourgeio Mets.
They'll do whatever it takes.
Peddle cookbooks and encyclopedias
they'll build roads that connect deserts
be barkers outside Zinonos St. cabarets
full-time rebels who got cornered
and forced to pull down their pants
Now they take pills and drink booze so they can sleep
but nightmares keep them awake.
My friends are taut wires
on the roofs of old houses
Exarcheia Viktoria Koukaki Gyzi.
Your amateur political instincts leave them pinned up
like a million borrowed dresses
cigarette burns, strange headaches
ominous silence, and vaginitis
they fall in love with queers
STDs and late periods
the phone the phone the phone
broken glasses the ambulance and no one.
They do whatever comes along.
My friends are always travelling

because you give them no room.
My friends all paint with black
because you've used up all the red
They write in symbolic language
because yours is for bootlicking.
My friends are like blackbirds and wires
in your hands. At your throat.
My friends.

I want to talk in a cafe
where the doors are wide open
and there's no ocean
only unemployed workers
dust with sun and silence
the sun shining into my cognac
dust and tobacco smoke in our lungs
and today, brother, let's not
stress about our health
and don't even try to lecture me
about how I'm low
and wasting my life
just let the makeup the snot the tears
run freely down my face.
Just stare calmly at
my dirty
nails hair years
and at me
not giving a fuck about any of it.
Only the party, and for chrissakes
the party's been dirty so long
and you're a friend. A friend's friend
like Kazantzidis sings
and the cognac tastes like shit

and the contractor never showed up
though there's a room for illicit
sex upstairs.
Some day I'll hit on you
I usually do that when I'm drunk
—just to tear you apart—just to
see you with your pants around your ankles
and how you'd react
but they say you're different, you
get up and dance when they play your request
“They took sticks and they beat me . . .”
and in your hands, carefully, lovingly
you'll hold my brain, already
ready to break into a thousand pieces. It aches.
And when
they come to tell you
this is neither
the time
nor place
for that
pull out your knife and slash.
Nikos Koemtzis was right.

I'm telling you Nikos, no one's safe.
There's definitely gonna be trouble.
I'll tell you something,
there's a guy
who pretends
to be my friend.
He's followed me around forever now
lecturing me in his drawl
he chooses which men
I sleep with and which films I see.
I'm telling you, no one is safe these days
Everyone's on the hunt
one snitch rats out another
we're all rats
we all wear black wool coats and bellbottoms
and secretly read the fascist *Free World* to see what's up
Every guy wants another guy's woman
we're all entangled.
The dude behind me
seems to know.
He shaved his head like Kojak
and his watch works.
When I'm about to have a seizure
he snaps me awake with an injection: come on, I'm here, he says

and cracks a smile—all for naught—
he says he's an Indian
but I see no evidence.
The American who owns the bar across my street whistled at me
he said my man set me up, that
he's a Stalinist secret agent.
I'm not afraid—I bet the tall guy wants something from me
And anyway, I love him Nikos
I'm used to Kojak
he's my best friend
he's my trip, like junkies say
he buys me cigarettes and souvlaki
he thinks my poems are amazing
and he says "You're beautiful, don't ever change!"
You see? He makes me feel confident.
No. I'm not going out tonight.
Not.
Not.
Not.
Nope.
Nikos, don't call me anymore.

Young people!

Recruits!

Idiots!

Hey, fools!

FRESH BLOOD.

At THE BAGEION HOTEL

BRITANNIA GROCERY, in the

CABARET MIMOZA

GRAND ALEXANDER CAFE

OMONOIA. SUNDAY 5–9 p.m. at the SPORTS BAR.

Legs wide open

on benches by escalators

soldiers with shaved heads

beneath famously splendid blue skies

stitches and wrecked veins in their arms

olive pits in their stomachs

no one believed they were crazy or had ulcers

not one of them wanted to be a soldier

Manolis Angelopoulos and the Greek Guard

all mixed up

Asleep they each dream the same dream—

that their commanding officer

is actually queer

he dances like Zozo Sapountzaki

all the troops joke about
"Radio Combat Boot"
they use combs to count off the days—
so many, and then ONE more—
they're all obsessed with frontiers
they're all taught to hate communism
they all miss their women and their beds squeak
ears like wafers
they're all clumsy and forlorn in their mirrors
they mix up their words, hats like cookware
their feet stink
Saturdays they get drunk on whatever and they wrestle
they lift tables with their teeth
they face off like belly dancers
to songs by Theodorakis
and then they embrace and cry and puke
they curse
and yell that they're scared, they've got nobody
and that all the communists they've ever met were actually cool
and the whole week the whole month the whole time
they step all over each other, disgrace themselves, report to duty
They lie
they beg
for leave
so they can come get laid in Athens
and when they get leave, they arrive and destroy themselves
because they've got nowhere else to go.
None of them even believes their country needs them

and no one else does, either.
They squint bravely today, our
heroic youth, Sunday
in Omonoia, by the fountain. The escalator.
Olympiakos lost the match.
Leave IS OVER. GREECE.

That one
particular man
lived a precise life
of explicit action.
That's why
for specific reasons this
particular society
condemned him
to a shadowy death.

The streets are bustling.
The taverns full.
Today calls for
fried cod with garlic dip.
Binoculars are hanging
flags are greasy.
The sun beats down
the dip is thick.
A dung fly on a child's face
after the parade. March 25, 1977.

Like yours, my house
butts up to other houses
since the roads are narrow
and there are so many people.
Sometimes it feels like we sleep in the same bed
the way we live so close together
we share a toothbrush
and we eat the same food.
But when you go out
you leave all your dirty dishes
there's no other way to explain
why the sink's always full.
It doesn't matter though.
I do whatever I can
to show how much I love you.
I even stick on a fake moustache
and step out into the rain holding a fan
to make your kids laugh.
All I ask is that you don't talk about us.
And leave my daughter Myrto alone.
She was born like this.
Blue.

10 / The Origin of the Family

I got you, you fucking bastard.
I bum a smoke from your pack
and you give me a light.
I blow the smoke straight
into your faded old eyes
You check out my girlfriend so I ask
“You into her?”
You pull a photo from your ancient wallet.
It’s me at the age of five.
Standing on a chair
with a stupid bow in my hair.
Your voice breaks: “Just look at my girl—”
and you’re on the verge of tears.
Fucking bastard you won’t get me down.
Here comes my own daughter.
You thank her for the cake
and chew a bite of it slowly.
You’re scared.
Your veins are swollen
your temples throb
the chocolate you brought her
has melted in your shabby pocket, there must
be some stuck to your underwear now.
And once again it’s just the two of us.

You're a baby, a pensioner.
And me on that chair
with the same stupid bow.
With the same exact fear.
Five years old. Nineteen years old. Twenty. Thirty.
My whole life, dad.

When you wake up in the morning
and don't find pills, a sweater, and a bra
on the floor
and you slam the door
without hearing my frenzied "shut up!"
don't start to cry or try to find me
in that childhood photo where I'm looking at you.
I was never looking at you.
Not in my stupid writing, either. I've always lied to you. I lied
about how
people and colors and music were beautiful.
Tally up my daily wages
and you'll see how I've lived.
Calculate our rent and you'll see
I never had enough to pay it.
And how I burned candles at both ends
trying to find a way.
So go ask your dad
one last time for money
to help pay down this debt.
After that, wash your face
and don't let anyone tell you
something's wrong with your mother.
Just draw suns at the bottom of those

dumb bills

The kind only you know how to draw

and under that

in your funny childish script, write

PAID IN FULL! PAID IN FULL! PAID IN FULL!

How beautiful you are my dear
with the same navy skirt for twenty years now
your thighs full of varicose veins
but you don't care
in white sandals no matter the weather
without teeth—you've got a reason to not laugh—
the way you bring us pieces of cheese on a napkin
and for my daughter, little American dresses
that don't fit her
But how you ended up
your ears full of fluid—you've got a reason to not listen—
you walk out the door and get lost on
Great Alexander, St. Constantine, or Piraeus Street
when night falls.
I know you lose yourself in shop windows
and study coffee pots or framed pictures of kings
or gaze at the women of Votanikos
five minutes away from Omonoia, mother
where nothing's bought or sold
there's just booze, brothels, dogcatchers, and gas.
They throw chickpeas at you
and say Here comes the crazy lady
and that's why you never turn your lights on, mother
so you won't become a target—tons of rags and dresses

with rhinestones
orange and purple hats, fans
I used to take on tour
you took from me to wear at night . . .
I've lost you again, mother.
I heard you want to be a nun—that you're afraid of us.
They'll steal every damn thing you own and it's cold
winter's coming, in a while there'll be elections
you like elections, lots of people speeches fun
you think voting's great, you get upset and you ask
How will we do this year?
and you regret asking but you need answers
so I tell you, Hey, the Communist Party, mother! The C.P.! I feel ashamed . . .
You gaze up at the ceiling so you don't hurt my feelings
and trace shapes with your hand.
You're gone again. I can feel it.
You walk the tracks in Kolonos
and behind you walk nuns with their junk
trains filled with members of Parliament, feral cats, rooftiles
and yellowish laundry on clotheslines.
You no longer hear me. The C.P., mother!
Maaamaaaaaaaaaaaaaa . . .

Yeah. It's like you said.
If you search hard enough
you'll find two-story houses
with flowerpots out front
right near the ocean
and really cheap.
The mountains are beautiful too
with trees and rivers
a woman and a goat you'll be fine.
The thing is, we'd decided
to change the world
and that can't happen in the countryside.
We already told you.
We were looking for guns
we knew
that everyone dies
but some deaths weigh us down
they happen whenever they want.
So we decided
death to death
because we love life a lot.
I know there are endless shorelines
and forests near the sand
and that love is amazing.

But first we had to deal with the pigs.
You came over and smoked
staring at the floor.
You were vague and distant
blushing like a girl
not so much as one word
I didn't say much either,
just "Don't disappear on me"
and you answered, "Yeah, okay"
and left without your cigarettes.
I tapped on the pack
like I've seen
guys do
then I crushed it
with my hand.
Not my brand anyway, "dude."

Good morning, my dear doctor.

Don't—

Don't get up. Besides, it's nothing serious.

The usual.

Give me valium, quaaludes, tryptizol—you know.

Make me social

so I can get by in your world

and deal with your snitches

fuck me if you want

the prints on your walls are nice.

Take this cash

and give me a prescription

I'm losing my patience you dick

any second now I'm gonna blow a fuse.

But doctor—don't get up. I'll be fine. Thank you.

Good morning.

Listen, I walk barefoot thru a world
I'm trying to change, leaving
bloody footprints on the ground.
Slowly but surely I run out of energy
and today Tuesday 5 o'clock it's dark again.
The safety valves in my brain
have loosened, so be it. I feel like I'm eight again
on a boat bound for Tinos Island
and its miracles.
Angle iron, concrete, and cheap blankets
hermetically seal off people with zero
hope who lock themselves in stalls
to weep. I have to deal.
You go over everything you want to say, word
by word, and end up pale
yet determined at the meeting
waiting for the right moment
and you are indeed there, my brother
but you miss your chance—you lose your cool
you hear yourself shout:
Proletarians of the world, unite!
—everyone stares at you like they're watching
a western, and even though a cowboy never takes
his hat off, you nervously

try to take yours off but you've never even
owned a hat and you stare
at your shoes, embarrassed
completely alone
at this general meeting.
But you were right. At least one person was . . .

Now it's quiet . . .
The ocean's far away
and crows don't eat liver
that's been ruined by whiskey.
We can sleep in peace.
The Party is shattered
and Berlinguer
knit a big blanket
to throw over our class struggles.
Pipe down. In moderation is success. The class
that was supposed to change the world has gone to bed.
Now maybe we can dress up and pretend to be leaders.
Sleep . . . it's finally quiet. Our own time.
Beddy-bye, food, or fucking.
Hoodlums pray on our pillows
and the hitmen work for us.




The cardinal points of the horizon.
 Above. Below. Right. Left.
 Above, the sky and those we aimed at
 —at night they come and mock us in our dreams.
 Below, the earth and those who aim at us
 —they bury us before we're even finished.
 To the right, tourist islands banks and rock
 —offering electroshock from the hands of Raquel Welch.
 To the left, a Soviet ghost in a MiG-25
 chases us with a big rubber stamp
 —and we gather little bits of resistance
 against party verdicts at the Moscow Trials.

.....
 At the corner store
 I catch my breath
 but even here I've got to pay
 for the shopkeeper's tolerance
 an ex-cop selling copies of *People's Struggle*
 What can I buy that won't make me a pawn,
 you know what I mean?
 The cardinal points of the horizon
 disguised as banks pilots nurses Marxists
 are chasing us. I have to make a phone call.
 What's the number ...

Where can I stop and catch my breath.
Everywhere we go they've set us up.
Cops are trapped by their weapons
women by their sex
justice by its laws
organizations by their dissidents
doctors by electroshock.
Yeah, let's see a movie at the lliion tonight.
The protagonists there have red cheeks and
always win in the end.

She woke and with mathematical precision
made them a perfect breakfast.
From the top of the smartly polished stairs
she said goodbye: I love you, don't be late.
She shook out the rug, washed the cups and ashtrays
talking to herself, got food started in the pot
and refreshed the water in the vases.
She felt smart at the grocery store
smiled haughtily at the hairdresser
felt alienated at the cosmetics shop, and went and bought
a copy of *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (Cell Editions).
She was setting the table
lovely, smart, and up-to-date, when the
kitchen timer buzzed.
After the baby had gone to sleep
her husband grabbed her from behind.
She giggled like the lady in the commercial
and with an operatic, sultry delivery said: come with me.
He fucked her, came, and went limp.
He fell asleep, she tiptoed off
and washed the dishes, talking to herself
there was a burnt meat smell so she opened windows.
Lit a cigarette picked up the book and read:
"... only when women begin to make demands

will change be possible”
and further down:
OK, DEAR, BUT WHAT DID YOU DO TODAY?
WHAT DID YOU ACTUALLY DO TODAY?
Quietly she took
the Crockpot cord and went
and cinched it around her husband’s neck
and right beneath the feminist’s question
wrote: I STRANGLED ONE.
She dialed 911 and until the ambulance came
read her horoscope in *Woman* magazine.

No. No, man. I have no complaints.
 I like movies, too. What's playing?
 I'm a grownup and responsible for my actions.
 I've always done whatever I want to. The world's my oyster.
 And I'm always alone, you know.
 Check this out: one day I walked into a bar with
 bobby socks on
 and in the morning the bartender was calling me
 Baby, flat on his back.
 Then I went down to the subway
 and raced trains
 across the entire platform.
 Sometimes I won. For real.
 Another time, laughing my ass off,
 I rode on a chicken truck
 with a bunch of old people,
 holding a text written for famous actors.
 I did all this by myself, you know what I mean?!
 At night I'd put up illegal posters that said
 VIVA GLOBAL REVOLUTION
 and never once was I caught.
 I've even graffitied a flower pot 
 a flower  and a cloud  you know, really simple things.
 And I love every man I wake up with.

Say what? . . . hell no I'm not cold!
Listen.
I was in all those houses for rent
but I never rented one.
At night? Of course. I smoke a lot.
I lie in wait for whoever's still awake.
You know who I am—I married Yesenin
which is why Mayakovsky killed himself.
Furthermore
in the summer of 1920 at the Congress of the Peoples of the East
I sat between Lenin and Trotsky.
No thanks. Aspirin doesn't help me. Where do you live?
I ran the entire way
so must be early.
What time is it?
I've got to tell someone everything I've learned
and everything I've seen.
No way, brother. I've got no complaints. And nowhere to go.

Wage-labor capital
 and imperialism as the ultimate stage of capitalism
 betrayed revolutions
 Hey, comrade, we miss you so much . . .
 Time is worm-ridden
 nuclear tests, popular fronts, brothels
 (the Portuguese regime has fallen too)
 hyperproductive Catholics and the mafia
 have become multinationals, they forbid
 love, comrade.
 Like dogs on soccer fields
 agents climb our stairs
 anytime they want they
 can yank down our pants and fuck us
 peace and harmony and socialism in one country—
 but comrade, if you only knew the heavy loads we're carrying . . .
 No one could endure the Moscow trials
 you were left all alone
 people grew weary, that's when they were pounced on.
 But you already knew this.
 And so they'd fink. But you already knew this.
 January 1977 in China they butchered workers
 the news arrives like a poem by Mao
 (with blame placed yet again on the dead), but hey, comrade

why weren't you more careful?
It's the same over here. People hide out.
Two Communist Parties and thousands of androgynous "revolutionaries."
If you're a little too loose you just switch sides.
Don't worry though. We'll be alright.
It's just that sometimes I feel wiped out,
I've got no job, I feel like crying
and when I miss you the most
I "scold" you for being careless
I'm not ashamed to cry
and write poems
Comrade, you never betrayed me.
It's brutal here.

One morning I'll open the door
and go out to the street
like I did yesterday.
And all I'll think is
a bit about my father
and a bit about the sea—each has left me a little—
and the city. The city that's been left to rot.
And the friends who are gone.
One morning I'll open the door
like I did yesterday, jump straight
into the fire
yelling "fascists!!"
erect barricades and throw rocks,
with a red flag
held high, shining in the sun.
I'll throw open the door and—
not that I'm scared—
but what I need to tell you is I didn't make it
and what you need to learn is
how to stop going into the street
without a weapon, like I did—
because I didn't survive—
because then you'll get
turned like me

into drops of saltwater and
pieces of childhood
and red flags.
One morning
I'll open the door
and vanish
into a dream of revolution
into the vast solitude
of burning streets
into the vast solitude
of paper barricades
marked—don't believe what they say!—
Provocateur.

I feel free in these
vagabond shoes.
I turn the world upside down.
Whenever I want to
I can leave.
Like, when you drop your dentures
in a glass of water before bed
or whenever it's time for sex
or whenever you've got
childcare
or union obligations
or whenever they convince you
you're eating eggs with lemon sauce
when in fact they're feeding you shit
In my vagabond shoes I can walk
right over your roofs—
and no, kid, not like
that idiot with the broom, Mary Poppins—
You'd know what I mean
if we were on the same wavelength
Deep down I feel sorry for you cowards
but I don't have time to waste on you
I want nothing more to do with you
your freedom's

in the soles of these old shoes
Eventually you'll lick them
you'll weep and shout "holy shit holy shit"
these shoes
never rest, they never hurry
when I finally escape this place
Pavlos or Myrto can have them, we wear the same size
they won't wear out no matter how many nails
you dump on the roads
they'll kick you in the face
and one day, "fellow travelers" and "rebels"
you'll run desperately to the shoeshine stand
to get your own shoes transformed
but the polish
won't work
no matter what you do or how much you apply.
That's how bright our red is.

Big May sun
and heavy wind
collide on my forehead
political pamphlets in disarray
gaining weight and getting older
songs by Savvopoulos
my eyes—where are they? Where are my eyes?
Each day I learn to reject
yesterday's beliefs.
With your last breaths you'll shout about
Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg
Kronstadt and the myth of Sisyphus.
Flowers and colors
revolvers and homemade bombs
pointless movements—the same old plaque on my teeth—
Five gloved fingers squeeze my throat.
My friends' dreams and my own
drive me crazy, with repeated breakdowns
distraught weeping, drunken vomiting, and loathing
suicide attempts and futile resolutions
to change my life.
An endless stream of barbiturates
keeps you and me
in a woozy balance.

And up. Then down.
Outside and around back.
The system—the rotten system is to blame—
even my cat knows it's
the system that extracts and
spits out capital
Couples turn on each other and disappear
our comrades grow old waiting—
the kids—what big eyes they have—
riot squads, drugstores, taxis, the monopolies
the imperialism between even us
I can't make love to you
or anybody else. For three years I've been unemployed.
Let's not fool ourselves.
If we don't sign their documents
we won't be able to do a thing.
Night is falling.
The central committee kowtows
to the Maoists.
Night is falling.
The TV commentator
winks at me.
Night falls even further.
I'm still hanging in there.
I'm not signing.
Long live the 204th International.

Sometimes the door opens slowly and you walk in.
You wear an all-white suit and linen shoes.
You bend down and gently place
72 francs in my hand then you turn and go.
I've stayed put since you left
so you could find me again.
But it must have been a long time
because my nails are long
and all my friends are afraid.
I cook potatoes every single day
my imagination's shot
and when someone says "Katerina?" I'm terrified
like they'll want me to betray someone.
I've got a newspaper clipping
they claim is about you.
I know the reporting's a lie
because it says they shot at your feet.
They would never aim at your feet.
It's the brain they target.
Keep that in mind?

Three clicks left: an instruction to a machine-gunner to improve their aim by adjusting a machine-gun/tripod three notches to the left.

Dimitrios Mitropanos: folk singer of working-class origin who married the daughter of the Secretary of State.

Dexameni, Exarcheia, Gyzi, Kolonos, Koukaki, Metaxourgeio, Mets, Omonoia, Patissia, Viktoria: neighborhoods/areas/locations in Athens.

Stelios Kazantzidis: popular folk singer.

Nikos Koemtzis: killed three cops and injured eight other people in a barfight, allegedly because they wanted to dance during the performance of a song he'd requested. *Parangelia*, a 1980 film starring Gogou and directed by her husband Pavlos Tassios, is about the Koemtzis incident.

Manolis Angelopoulos: working-class singer of Romani origin admired for his songs about love and refugees.

Zozo Sapountzaki: singer and dancer in burlesques and musical comedies.

Mikis Theodorakis: lyricist and film-score composer with longstanding ties to the Greek Communist Party.

Olympiakos: professional soccer team.

Myrto: Gogou's daughter with Pavlos Tassios.

Tinos Island: an island in the Cyclades famous for an allegedly miraculous icon of Virgin Mary housed at Panagia Evangelistria church, to which many people make a pilgrimage each August 15.

Enrico Berlinguer: head of the Italian Communist Party from 1972 until his death in 1984. Opponents within the party claimed that he "turned a workers party into a sort of bourgeois revisionist club."

People's Struggle: leftist newspaper.

Dionysis Savvopoulos: singer-songwriter who in 1967 was jailed and beaten by the Greek military junta for his political convictions.

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Era of change

