Simone Forti
Barnett Cohen

poems poems
Simone Forti

Tue, Mar 31, 2020, 2:11 PM

to me •*

Hi Barrett,
Thursday evening Skype is fine. What time? My Skype name is seesaw837
What's yours?
хххххххххх

Simone

Thanks for the poems. I really needed them.
Till tomorrow

xo

S

*
Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Barbara Bertozzi Castelli, Summer Guthery, JOAN, Mara McCarthy, The Box LA, Barbara T. Smith, LeRoy Stevens, Christine Varney, Jason Underhill, Sarah Swenson, and Jenni Lee.

p4: Window Shadow by Simone Forti, shot by Tashi Wada.

p62: A version of this poem previously appeared in Montclair State University’s Peak Journal, https://journal.peakperfs.org/, as part of Poems from the Lockdown, Los Angeles, Spring 2020

p68: A version of this poem previously appeared in Montclair State University’s Peak Journal, https://journal.peakperfs.org/, as part of Poems from the Lockdown, Los Angeles, Spring 2020

p70: A version of this poem previously appeared in Montclair State University’s Peak Journal, https://journal.peakperfs.org/, as part of Poems from the Lockdown, Los Angeles, Spring 2020

p73: “The Skin of Me Teeth” was previously published in Contact Quarterly, Volume 45 No. 1 Winter/Spring 2020 as “A Free Consultation.”

Drawings, pages 58, 67 and 72 by Simone Forti

poems poems was published November 2021 by SFMOMA’s Open Space as part of Project Space, a series of special commissions offered to the public as freely downloadable works. It was edited by Claudia La Rocco and designed by Tanya Rubbak.
What am I writing these days? Lists, postcards, journal entries — they all look like each other, anxious musings on the year that just passed, the future ahead. Lists of things I have to do before I move, projects I have open or want to open, things to buy, people to see, books to read. An early literature teacher taught me that when a list shows up, you read it for the things it doesn’t say, the things it can’t say. *There’s not enough time, I should have done this already, I miss you.* Letters, too, only give you one voice — and all of the action is offstage.

**August 2021**

Dear Simone,

I’m struck this summer that it’s been ten years since we made the performance videos at The Box. A long, full cycle since I was your student at UCLA. With each of your projects — books, performances, videos, exhibitions — I think I’ve gained a privileged glimpse into your art, into your world: the ants line up in a singular pattern. And then I blink and it’s gone again, as you find a way to teach me that understanding is a process and “knowing” is only ever momentary. I will never stop learning from you.

Love, Megan

Dear Barnett,

Thank you for your enthusiastic embrace of my work, my life — for treating me like a trusted friend and colleague from the minute I met you. There were moments in the reading the other night that took my breath away: Day 239 is of course astonishing, with its wall of facts and figures. But it was Day 209 that pierced me, seeing you so vulnerable in the water. As you read through them backwards, it felt like we were getting into the core of you. I can’t wait for more — more words, more collaborations, more friendship.

Love, Megan

August 2021

A Preface for Simone and Barnett

Last night I shouted myself awake. I had been floating upward toward a cabin in the sky, a man floating after me. Then I was in the cabin and someone said, “Watch out. He’ll attack.” “No, why would he do that?” Parts of the cabin floating in unison, I open the door and there he is.

William Carlos Williams. *Improvisations*, early writing. He writes a paragraph unintelligible that soaks in like water, then follows it with one of explanation just as unintelligible. Thirsty. Thirsty for the next paragraph. And the next.

As more and more disruption of water, earth, air, many will go under the bus. It will be accomplished through dictatorships. Justice will be reduced to acts of kindness.

Split second images of pristine factory interiors brightly lit and deserted except for two technicians consulting about the so desirable product, scenes of domestic green and colorful with flowers, grandparents, dogs, impossible leaps into space, while the rich need only a fraction of yesterday’s labor force. And what of the vote? The word “love,” all the combinations of goings-on. That one with a certain carriage, a certain look, talking with those others.

I heard a leader of the White Supremacists say, “The Jews are the virus. Blacks and homosexuals are the symptoms.” Forget the lack of logic. It’s a feeling. When I lived in Vermont, I sat with my cat to watch the evening darken, me on the stone step, her on the woodpile. The impulse from the far distant past to extend a special morsel to a family member, to a friend, to a stranger.
Forms of life reproduce beyond their number, eat at each other’s edges, develop strategies. Flagella, gunpowder, hydrogen, surveillance. Living high off the neighbor’s hog. Deposing the neighbor’s elected leaders to support dictators who will profit from our profit.

I am two people. I stand up from the pull of gravity. If you slip and fall, if it’s funny, I laugh. If I see your knife slip deep into your finger, I tense my chin and feel that nameless twinge around my sex.

There’s always a smell. If I stop and take note of the smell in any moment, there’s always a smell. And you know tinnitus? I have that with smell. Hard to describe, subtle. If it were sound it would be a drone with variations. Toasted bread, earth, tree bark, that family of smells. Like layers of an onion, kindness within the family. To have offspring, their heads force through the birth canal. The predator culls the herd. To see the apples fallen about the tree where the horses can munch on them, maybe get a bit high.

She sits leaning into him, his arm around her, half asleep. They’ve spent the night together, in each other’s bodies.

To hold back from war, with thousands marching for peace. Self-image. Profit. Living high off your neighbor’s acorns, petroleum, sugar cane. The decency of peace. The Art of War written by Sun-Tsu some two thousand years ago. And the suffering.

I live some hundred yards east of the 405 Freeway. I can see a rectangle of sunset sky framed between The Federal Building and another. A single palm etched against the brightness and the occasional uppermost sliver of a far away car passing north.

How do we get through this pandemic? How do we get through anything? Reach out to one another, establish a rhythm, make marks, summon images. Last year some people had to fit twice as much into the same number of hours. For others, time swirled around them, weightless. Both a historic kind of awful. Barnett and Simone found each other, exchanged writing, created a meeting to help anchor the days. The tide of pages going out and coming in became necessary, their meetings a place to land every week.

poems poems is the result of this dialogue between two artists of different generations. Both Simone and Barnett are known for performances that examine the relationship between movement and language, but their writing here is primarily connected by the looping, back-and-forth structure of its production. And the friendship that was nurtured in the process. Their selections from the hundreds of poems produced between March 2020 and March 2021 begin with Simone’s recent “window poems” written from the vantage point of a new apartment positioned between the Hollywood sign and a busy freeway in Los Angeles, followed by Barnett’s poems. At the end, Simone has included poems she wrote early in the pandemic, and “The Skin of My Teeth,” from 2019.

At my most recent dinner with Barnett and Simone, we discussed the work of historians and the fiction that they (we, I) have all the details, the full story. I insisted that this is a fantasy, that even if I could find out all the facts, so many things would still be missing. This is just how we are, how life is: we manage our unknowing by pretending we know everything. Driving home, it occurred to me that poetry is kind of the opposite, that it shows the reader something complete by way of just a few words. A crystalline image, a whispered sound, a linguistic string, all arranged carefully on a page to summon all you need to know.

Shortly thereafter, a friend reminded me of a passage from Derek Walcott’s epic poem Omeros; we fell in love with it in college, and it has surfaced now and again as a guide in work and life. This year I think I may understand it better than ever, with Simone and Barnett’s collaboration performing its directive: Measure the days you have left. Do just that labour which marries your heart to your right hand: simplify your life to one emblem, a sail leaving harbour / and a sail coming in.

-Megan Metcalf
I stood before the crown of the saint who founded Hungary. “Had I been born here would this crown be my flag too?” “No. Jewish.” My church is the constitution of the United States. I let my country do the dirty work.

I’m reading interviews of the beat poets, Ginsberg, Burroughs, and earlier, Olson, Pound, and . . . and . . . I usually don’t read easily but I’m reading these like gulping water.

The yellow vests in France demonstrate against gasoline taxes meant to hold back climate change, easy for the prosperous in the big cities who demonstrate with signs and songs and optimism. The yellow vests set fires of fury and despair. Smash windows.

To die among tree roots, alone. The numbers dead in the American Civil War, fallen in each battle, in World War One, World War Two. Each war has its name. The unification of Italy brought an end to the wars between city-states. But what of the border between Italy and Austria? Finally, one great tongue will lap it all up.

There’s a gopher digging up my bit of garden. I save my piss to pour it down its entranceways, hoping he or she will hate it and leave. The tick still sucks my blood. Is a virus alive? The sun cares not.

Each night I stand at my front window and wait to see cars go by, can see only the roofs of cars over the raised blinds. One car from north to south, another, another, maybe one white one from south to north, I hear them coming and passing by my front door. The people in the cars are awake. I will soon be asleep.

I don’t think I miss sexuality. But I miss sleeping within the warmth of a consort. When I think of it, imagine the intimacy, it’s stunningly profound.
Maybe I don’t pray here
Maybe the prayer doesn’t need me
goes on without me
So complex this view
from my window
Empty and lit
no guard tonight
lead red sky
he walks, throws shadow
to the wall
Cubes of all sizes
determine directions
back up
place board to stop wheel
carry this lightly
Far streaming
past palm trees
quick strips
of car tops

Four short banana palms
a hundred tall
ping pong in distance

Flowing now the freeway in full morning
in full meaning

White car at white wall

If it were just this life in this place
Always that door is open

At peace

A steeple lit through the night
catches the morning sunlight

The thumbs of the praying hands
The ten commandments
Thou shalt not covet
your neighbor’s wife

Even the pigeon that flies by
rides complex

Oh not me
I’m a dancer
My childhood table game
a green pond
little iron fish
And fishing poles with magnets
Now red leaf lettuce dodges delicate
its filmy bag resisting
And often when intending left I turn right
and keep turning till I’m facing
the right way

 peppercorn
These days
bound together
like bananas
bunched
bland

like dizzy spells

A woman from that car
how quickly she goes down
those stairs

What’s that box got on it

that box under that tree

It’s the night

The sleep of space

Dark or lit

The dark side of the wall

The other lit empty and asleep

The freeway streams uneven but precise

half hidden beneath the ramp

My heart pulls toward the great variety
of three dimensionality
of stillness

Devices of lighting soft as a peach among dark trees

center of hills

That hill of houses suffused with scent etched windows

soft and bright
Simone: window poems

The trees asleep
distant graffiti lit up
a streak of
greenish-white

And sound
Yes city of the Angels
The busy softness
of the multi distance

The nasal sound of tires
on asphalt
The sleeping truck

And in the distant distance
more tiny lights in hills
in the far distant distance

Still
I’m sad
in this new decent day
as if all that transpired
ominous

A man at a desk
in focus
a little out of focus
for the good

Democracy
its structures
no longer yes of course

Having today
taken the vaccine is not
a simple thing
to trust the government

For the good
the little man
is bent on doing
The heel of my hand
    to the tooth
    of a word

Hunger coming
    Notebook full of
    graphite

Days ago
    I sheltered here in place
    Now it’s how I live

Run to poetry
    grab with both hands
    that loaf of bread

Transformer framework
    flat and tall presides

A single car past midnight

A sudden sound
    takes shape gigantic
    in the quiet

That pocket over there
    intersection Santa Monica
    where taillights headlights blink
    through foliage dark between us

Less so now than an hour ago

Look deep through shallow water
    for the feel of lockdown loneliness

Yes I hear you snorting speeding
    History exploding in a sound room

    a possum

    The sadness at the kitchen sink

    The glide of freeway a delight
        smooth as a bitch
            gestating
                manifesting

Who would have thought the Capitol
    crawling with creeps

Unresolved we take a breather
    as the moon comes full

Yes that’s a water tower
    that tank lit white
        a relic Hollywood
            a prop
One in exercise class
crumpled in wheelchair lies back
Long hands resting extended on thighs
The gold of a wedding ring

A breeze plays the tall palm’s many fronds
One frond hangs perpendicular
a certain distance from the trunk
It will drop

That whole period we don’t speak and barely think of
from just before four years ago’s election
to recently the counting, the court cases
The sudden infestation
and near assassinations

Clouds horizontal rest
on the last light of day
Walls that were blaring white light
now in shadow

So sleek they go at night on the freeway
touched by red rear and white head lights
in consort smooth as light through water

Exasperating beauty
By chance but not by chance
Designed but free
I court a diagonal arrangement
Framed by the window frame

Drivers oblivious
of the three stout palms
or the peacefully lit
plot of ground between
left to its own devices
The plastic tarp blue

Curtains
reflecting images
of plenty

Fall to the
solid ground
of hunger

So big is this
that in the face of big
it’s nothing
Gone the ground of lies we were living
Skydivers clutching each other’s wrists
We fall spread out to catch thermals
We dream our survival

breathing on the rooftop below
A tiny spider
orange
runs across my page
so fast it seems to roll

At even intervals the bougainvillea
performs wild over the freeway walls

Count the rungs of that distant ladder
The exit ramp my breastbone
Two a.m. how fast the few now own the track
Chain link fence where grasses tall and wild a place
that car again tucked in that place
a fragile home
of fence and overpass
a place

A man in black stands by his shiny car
for a long time
slams shut the trunk
that virgin sound
Truck rumbles phlegm in chest
nothing seductive
Occasional light plays on white wall
a turning car
Still he fusses
opens shuts the trunk
They’ve changed the billboard
Something water
big and blue
Again the fence
dry grass
a filigree of smells
A hum that turns percussive
What do I love
That patch of dry grass
at the fence

A blessing
shouted into
non-duality

Hello
There is so much now
That is unspeakable
Significance
drifts in and out
I wash my hair
That show that’s been
suggested
I want it
quick
before the fading
of its meaning
Structure
meet
non-duality
Can you make
the leap
To deconstruct
the hive
in this sea of
entropy

Simone: window poems
In the orbit of safety and compassion the firstborn tends to capital division, muscles war and peace against each other while mist envelopes oneness where no value forms. Only here, not there, is safety and compassion.

Hunger and violence birth generic structure, fire and flight. The child is backwards because of things she saw. And worse. I spread soft cheese on toast, lazy to labor more for what I eat.

The silverback throws branches wildly crashing on the old queen whose son, seeing his excuse, attacks the aging male. All fawn on the new prince, driving the old one from the group to fend as no one can.

Alone and failing he returns with postures of submission, is attacked and put to death. Comfort in well oiled structure within a failing structure. All is well, the bus has come, checkbook balanced, apology accepted, hardly needed.

Near where the car is nesting
Suddenly a dancer
at the white wall
Hitching head and neck
feet tapping
sideways covers ground

Now gone from where he was
must have had music
in his ears
intimate closeup

A helicopter spits
from thick
to whisper thin

Here comes, you know, someone accelerating
saying loudly
I am accelerating
Simone: window poems

Slowly the trash truck

   enormous grasshopper beeping
   backs up

A figure moves between the green of plants and black machinery

Fronds lie off palms
   as they do
with horizontal view cut by the exit ramp

They will be pouring cement
Now they measure with their yellow devices

T-shirts freshly white the workmen
The young ones in blue watch for indications
to be in the right place

There are stakes around the base of the eucalyptus
from where it rises into upper space

Night truck parked perfect
   to reflect the lights of passing cars
   on its metallically modulated side

The eucalyptus will go thirsty

   His legs a bit bowed he sweeps alongside the truck

In the dark parking lot a walker lights a flashlight
   while cars below pass smooth as the feel of strangeness

I feel a pinprick in the soft inner part of my arm, pull up my sleeve and sure enough an ant is there now running down my skin while an ambulance goes by, hooting. We expect a very bad season of this plague. The colder weather. I brush the ant away.

   Yes, I’m privileged. That fact now fills
   with new meaning.

Try a fast one
The fashion of men’s ties no one talks about
   it’s part of the urgency

   Spin a rope. Throw a rock and shout
   Who’s got my back

   In wars of words it’s good to catch
   a bullet in your teeth
   your front teeth

   On the fast ones there’s got to be a solid direction of thought that gives energy, if not meaning. Key words accrue systems of thought. I try to write words freely in how they join with other words intersecting planes of experience and of time.

   ⊕
His beauty worked against him
The arrogance
of his height
his poise

See the executioner’s expression
face
lost
lost
as he slips his hand
into his pocket

casual

As he rolls his knee
into his victim’s neck

And so the virus
runs wild with grief with fury
with Purpose in the streets

On my bookshelves
of long forgotten treasures
I find James Baldwin
*The Fire Next Time*
His articulation

I watch police in various guises
jam shields into the crowd
batons, chemicals in orgies of release

I count the viral danger
as Multitudes march
in distancing formation

now clumped
muscle to muscle
skin to skin

As through a narrow
passageway
to herd immunity

And the shock of change lifts to just strange
where strangeness like blood to water
tints its name

Flapping its wings a cardboard box catches the wind

And just outside
at a stone’s throw from my window

The great stem of a tall palm holds perpendicular

In the last sunlight a forest of palms explodes some tall against
the sky some low
to the Santa Monica mountains

Red tailights in the just dark enough to feature them awaken

What’s this confusion
This shock of white
It’s my hands

Now detailing last week’s work he takes a pickax to the tin that
served as collar holding back from that eucalyptus the flow of
cement.

He wears a black jacket
too hot for today
Wild wind sweeps red leaves tumbling in formations across the drought stressed park. The dogs free, where they shouldn’t be, full out chase each other. Three forms streak by. Others in the distance less distinct, all having fun to the tenth degree. I wish I had the faculty to be tiny when I wished and walk among the ants. Converse and play with them. Know them and they know me.
For a while, during the heatwave, I think the ants in the bathroom were getting high. They were after something in the drain. They’d line up side by side like grains of corn, maybe four or five ants in stillness, and others would join crowding in, pushing each other aside. Or single ones would be still for a long time as if asleep. If disturbed by another ant they’d suddenly trace circles and speed off in various directions.

I’ve seen ants slip and fall down the lip of the sink and again catch their footing. Several of them doing that in one period of time. That’s unusual. And they’ll get into a damp hand towel, get perfectly still between its upright fibers. Many gathered together so that at first glance they might seem like an irregular ink spot. A weird sensation tells you it’s the ants.

They’re not afraid of me, in fact I have to be careful to stand back from the sink because they like to climb on me. But they’re afraid of drowning. I usually give a warning splash before running water. I swear I saw one jump out of the way of the encroaching water. If I find a huge trail of them I’ll wash them all away. They seem to take the massacre in stride. Come back at the first sign of something interesting. Maybe they have no way of remembering.
non
step where floor bends
aged by a sun in its tilt east
across west over the valley of
mailboxes & jasmine trees
below where i sit tucked
into poems sojourns dislocated
i have made do with dust & immanence
no longer do i know what is this country
estimations possessed decayed
longing for false eras of fragrant abundance
will we run through the forest at night
holding hands as we vibrate joy in our throats
or will we scramble each for one tree alone
our base is carnivorous
we eat to the studs of the earth
littering the past with paradigm shifts
sniff out murder in the limbs of your ancestors
you will find a horizon of possibilities
that animate the limits of your tongue
the light of a million earths again
radiates these machinations
i note in pen im small like vermin
yet i seem too big to drop
the pose of protagonist
in the mirror in the room in the story
where i stand up pissing away lessons
over the hours we have amassed hours
but what's that someone interrupts
with more words from our epoch
someone interrupts with bad news
which is to say someone interrupts
with the history of the future
disintegrated by metrics
away from migraines
boredom slips grasp
storage is a hobby
i used to be meadow
now im a data center
hosting press releases
offered to me by people
ive never met
whose ideologies
im informed i share

i stand before you
a lone figure conjured by crisis
a saturday in march
last night i bought a bottle from the bar
where a wan patron coughed me into fleeing
undress my contamination on the stairs
in the nude i wipe the emerald glass with bleach
each day a promise of absurdity
an avant theater of innovative gestures
for nights now
i awake upright
a saturday in march
the calm before the storm
recitation incantation
the calm before the storm
in silence the virus moves
yet i hear rain & cars & birds & neighbors
i suck my teeth into second guessing
each day a page to turn
each night a thumbing
we only at the tip of the prologue
of this unfolding tome
a saturday in march
the jasmine tree in the courtyard floods my heart with smell
& i weep without water
Day 5

if i had to select a politician to fuck me
i would select the governor
with his big hands & wisecracks
hed cradle my spine
id tilt my head upon his bicep
hed fuck me back in time
to the wooden table
where i ate chicken liver as a child

i am ready for a pastrami sandwich roast chicken pickled
herring i am ready to buy a lamb & slit its throat & smack its
blood against our rented door

lord

the smell of my father
but i am on my own here

no word yet from the bald landlord

i amble around nude
establishing a perimeter
walking up to mirrors
as if strolling a fair ground
judging games of chance

omg a neighbor shrieks
omg indeed
omg for the mass death
for the muted pale horseman of the apocalypse
riding hard
toward us all

Day 360

it rains with speed
a velocity when
we monitored our skins
for routines of fever

she sleeps into disorientation

words accumulate
an accumulation of paralysis

i stay by the phone

by late afternoon
i am ungovernable
my face is wall paint
well acquainted
with static mood
Day 359

a chocolate eclair
or a boston cream
i am deciding when
chris texts me
you awake
off kilter day
she sleeps into evening
wants permission for more
slippage of clock
my feet press the grass
what do you think
i ask asha anxiously
i think you know
she laughs
but let me call you back
im on the toilet

Day 41

eltras sister is driving up from florida to stay with her & her other sister is coming across from the city eltra needs help with the twins mike is sick across the street at a hotel alaina walked 10 miles yesterday afraid of the subway & mike the other mike his father died & brians mom died & jayne said she knows 10 people who have had it & recovered & mikaela too she knows people too & if those people recovered then mike will too & charles has cabin fever & also cancer so he has not left the house since idk when & peter is now in boston working nights & im not sure what greg is doing he has not returned my calls & cori is upstate & bridget is in minneapolis & dan has sealed himself off i should call him & this evening i am delivering some lentils rice & wine to simone but right now i am here hitting refresh trying to buy a box of vegetables while writing this accounting for love
the table keeps tipping it only has three legs
in a state of forgetfulness which is to say
always or most days
there seems to be another limb
some god protecting us
from destruction
but there is no fourth
everything rests delicately
on that illusion

the light at the end of the tunnel
is the person blasting new wave
out of their car window
across the street

the light at the end of the tunnel
is the person beneath my feet
solidarity with hunger
i fast for shame
stomach is testament
to desire shared
my mother feeds me
wet grass of youth
when i would fall asleep
in the backseat of a car
awake to sky

smiling smiling despite it all i walk up hollywood & down russell
from a distance i see a person carrying a sign & they see me carrying
my sign they raise their fist i raise my fist i shed everything
when i get home & naked clean dishes & masks & water bottles &
wallets & hats i shower jerk off to release energy i wash my hair
my mouth i drive to pick up a bag of groceries carina calls
about her father in adelanto & i say call me tomorrow cause im
 driving together we clean the produce in the sink with the wrong
soap i look at my phone muse about going out again but the
body feels heavy we eat some cashews & drink leftover wine turn
on the tv to watch the revolution
Day 81

i get up early put an ice cube in my thermos of coffee & drive to the studio in my pajamas following a hunch i might find some unused & unclaimed n95 masks i am correct i make a sign that states black lives matter in red ink fund the police in green ink prosecute killer cops in purple ink and fuck him in pink neon ink i drive back to the apartment where i eat 4 rice crackers coated in peanut butter with blueberries & honey i drink a jug of green tea we mask up & meet jack julie seth mel perkins stephanie at the corner we walk along hollywood boulevard to vine street along the way a white man warns us the police have lobbed tear gas at people but that proves false maybe he is a plant jack hy pothesizes maybe we meet an oncoming wave of chanting people at hollywood & schrader turn around we walk along hollywood down to gower gower to sunset on sunset to vine where a contingent of the national guard & riot police blocks our progress so we mill at a fountain in front of a bright blue chase bank on which in bright blue someone graffiti's chase your dreams we continue up vine to hollywood where we hold the intersection we chant shout cheer a beautiful man arrives half naked on a motorcycle & disappears into the crowd we start up again & march down hollywood back again to gower chanting the people go down gower & we continue along hollywood riot police block the 4 entrance & exit ramps onto the freeway we pass them silently i turn my sign away from them coward i think as we arrive at hollywood & western we are met by a stream of people from a different protest we block the intersection for them as they turn down hollywood away from us the beautiful half naked man on the motorcycle appears again as do other less beautiful men on motorcycles a white man with a white teeshirt on which the words george floyd have been hand written zooms in circles through the intersection on his skateboard everyone leaves i go to ralphs & buy 2 boxes of firecracker popsicles & 30 plastic bottles of water for 1496 i go back out & hand out the popsicles which go very fast & the water which goes very slow out of so many cars people dangling

Day 357 Part 1

police helicopter loops the air above the neighbors who fuck to megadeath that cat wails into window pane across from hummingbird sage a truck beeps like a metronome in reverse to participate i mumble poems with the pace of prayer
Day 354

to control a body is contortion
gestures for affect
rituals for relief
bureaucracies for dying
whittled to pinnacles
rock faces
bodies scrubbed of time
an obsession with seconds
out of youth
i renounced whatever was handy
i count the minutiae that encircle me
from the burial ground
i establish pull & pressure
between a divine & me
its an experiment
this stack of skin

Day 98

guillermo synthesizes action
pick at their skin until they relent
by skin he means company by company he means state by state he means power
by relent he means bleed
Day 100

yours is an evolving ethics
you say out loud to a pile of clothes
drying on the bed
or to friends who refuse to read

even with the radio on
nothing changes
only degrees that slant yellow
in the direction of dictatorship

a fire burns its smoldering root the perineum
or a pen or this poem

i open close open close the apartment door to fan boredom
peek out
report back on what if anything still exists

do not shrink from death
do not keep yourself untouched by devastation
thrust your body forward into transgressions heavier
than a pint of bricks

Day 352

inhalation halts intent
to move through this day with grace
im tired of being tired of night terrors
when small traumas like you strike
what have i been doing she asks
as she touches the top of my palm
again i wake up to the possibility
that if i jumped out the open window
across from me id only break my legs
i want to want to write at night
instead i listen to our sad world
all my gestures a series of motions
i make like a person overboard
drowning for attention
Day 350

jewish boys appease their mothers scattered coward charming life its not cute its hard to concentrate i darn the socks toss them in with the seven butt plugs how many versions are we between our first & last erections i sense potatoes & meat rush into guts oh thats synesthesia emphasis mine i lie on the floor eyes closed yet open a scarlet wash a stream of gas gurgles in my abdomen i meditate on the shitter i text sarah a hyperlink about my past sarah does not respond sarah tires of my revolution maybe i am stupid like a dogs penis in my blood vessels an aggrieved colonialist huffs & puffs his way through the customs line at heathrow a smile affixed to my face i take up too much space sometimes i sleep on my side

Day 137

im reporting live from the living room floor saw summer on sunday now summer has it clutched breath breathe again the body snatchers snatch nikki stone this part is the part where words drip like yokes run fast like protestors toward unmarked minivans the country opaques i unveil myself to lindy she treats me as a semiotic texts me a rainbow i unveil myself to yoni i read to him shake ground to get some blood we will not leave the apartment for 2 weeks except for today when i stood in shorts & flip flops & the sun hurt my skin as i signed 2 docs in front of a notary public on the hot hunk of his car welcome to my office he said his hazards blinking how much is a name worth not much apparently
Day 177

ring in our ears ringing
its a heatwave friends
a protest live over here next me
come out to 1310 west imperial highway off the 110

heat leaks through the ceiling
space for this same silence
for the family

hands up guns down
every earthquake breaks something
the hearts of aunts
the knees of uncles
no matter the temperature
its always burning
in our vale of death

if you cant beat them
subscribe now
if you want more content
or how about the song of cicadas
on a voice note from my mother
sent from the south

go in one breath
go in for justice
justice justice justice
we shall pursue

Day 343

voice in courtyard
vibrates air
through open window
in a room lit by sun
light my uncle
asks to see on facetime
as if its unreal that
such injustices exist

my feet tilt side to side
i watch water boil
crows on power lines
i am not prepared to give up
i go to poems to get dirty
every step is a slice of skin
i shed to climb into and out of arrangements
thing missing
no name
in the way i might say
fuck where did i put my phone
or hey where are the house keys
im tender with absence
as im to my asshole
careful soft
i need to avoid mirrors
ting is not bounce of light
last night eyes fried
i walked a subdivision of homes
across the border
i greeted silhouettes
with waves of friendliness
i do not show my shadows
ting root obvious to all
beth asks hows it going
shes not surprised
when i prostrate myself
at the feet of my mother
she already knows
i should embody more
i should become empathic
or maybe if i could just reclaim
the 6 years between 15 & 21
i might perform necessary repairs
she seems ok with me even
though i exhaust her in my spin
for a gospel that will save me
its true i do consider suicide
its a last ditch effort at ownership of time
im engaged enough
in selfmurder as it is
more absence is not resolution
the kind of calm
after i go under the sea
& come back up for air

we would drink blood to surrender
anything to surrender
the pain in our faces to passing ships
Day 199

i am concerned about the fish
i dont want to be an accomplice to torture
but im not here for morality either
euthanizing ricks fish
while hes transporting a friend in need
all over new mexico
is not heroic

i wonder if i could eat the fish but its probably too small to fillet
i could just swallow it & deal with the consequences later

the idea of driving to prescott arizona crosses my mind while i
chug a glass of water & then i change it & go back to my coffee

i look at the fish some more

she & i & the fish watch a film about you know who
its tense
brushing our teeth we argue about the beach
what time to go
what the temperature will be
the toothpaste makes our communication difficult
which makes us more mad at each other
we almost go to sleep without doing what needs to be done

maybe i could take the fish to the ocean
set it free amongst its peers
& when rick returns knocking for his fish
i could just say it went for a walk
& never came back

Day 334

the blow dryer short circuits in the sink
i catch it in time to save us from explosion
a spike on a flat chart of an otherwise day
we are vaccines away from summer
when fires snow the city with ash
this limbo this no control
activates compulsion to
minor metrics that rust air inert
i repeat uncomplicated gestures
count watch scrub pour chew
my best thinking i do sitting down
i listen to the radio for friends
a late stage state sociologists say
depletes best intentions
geologists laugh
because they understand rocks
an alibi is no good
up against a history of statues & rising tides
but a looped siren is no way to live
when you get down to it
we who are now half afraid
of touch have no story left to tell
about how we measured our time
on earth

my middle of the night self
dispatches strings to my morning one

i'm reading a poem in my dream by me
but it's not the one i wrote
it's discombobulated i should write more

the box fan is a fire sign

try finishing more books

you can either see things in monumental terms as in im conquering
mountains or in continuums which are rivers which are queer
Day 209

my head buoys
in open water
next to the pacific coast highway
i submerge reemerge its not working
sort of like the camaro that struggles
into park out of which a nude person
opens the car door to put down
a plastic bag & drives off

i use the water in
an arrangement of my arms
to work the current
away from the shore
until land is a conglomeration
i worry i could drown
but thats all
back on land
i worry if my friends are dead
who are sick
the fire mountains
in my lower back
i think im not able
enough for peace

my head rises & falls
like a lung
an old hand on a fevered chest
do you see my head as i do
or maybe you see your own
on your own shoulders
above then under the dapples
strokes of wet hair
cold muscles
these options for grounding

Day 295

with warnock victory
democrats edge closer to senate control
second race too early to call
the phone interrupts
i twist the thing with my hand
the root of a scribble stops at a line
courage lost i scroll my messages for signs of life
some of us have stopped washing our hair
3700 people died yesterday
doing laundry
i experience a cardiac event
again in the night
ambulances have stopped
ferrying the next to dead
so i text my mother
help me
why is he that way
my aunt texts my mother
a time of the hand held close
a time of the hand held far
this is the time of the hand held off
the body but near
a movement of measure
an instruction in relaxation techniques
that do not involve manual override
yes im sure that there must be
the time of quartz
the time of potato
i seek the woods i miss the city
the time of private equity is faster
than the time of nathan in alaska
who lives only for his autistic students
the phone interrupts
ossoff will likely prevail
says a top election official in georgia
the alert sediments sugar
on disappointment
in our time of the rhizome
cut the kudzu cleave it
i do not know what will happen
good riddance to 2020
ricks says twice to judith
you have any grand plans
judith laughs rick laughs
maybe i'll jump up & down
on my bed with a bottle of wine
below the window
where i sit reading about
the violence of positive depression
in the examination room yesterday the doctor
whose pecs & biceps have bulked noticeably since my last visit
causes me to weep
for the dying citizens of this city
helpless my fingers
wipe no tears away
we are in a war
unseen by most
like all our wars
the doctor smiles
i absorb the heft of his body
would he suffocate me
if i asked nicely
he leaves me
to pick over an article about anti amazon activists
who refuse to quit the convenience of the company
doow doow doow
i sound with my ears
i think our decision to abort the fetus
was a wise choice i think again
past is future future is past
i try to return beloved to the library
its eight months overdue
but the library is chained closed
everything is ominous
in this onslaught where fires rage
beyond our scope of empathy

fare better in school it is unsurprising that eighty seven percent of citizens associate homeownership with the american dream but in the last month six million households did not make their rent or mortgage payments but there is a federal eviction moratorium in place until the last second of the last minute of the last hour of the last day of this year & then those households that owe outstanding rent or mortgage payments to landlords or banks will be required to pay back those missed monthly payments by the federal government which is about to experience a presidential election which the president of one party said will be stolen by the other party whose candidate some supporters of the president believe is part of a cabal of satan worshipping pedophiles that operates a global child sex trafficking ring which is a theory that originated on 4chan which is an imageboard on the internet which is a global network of computers which a citizen can utilize to order tadalafil or fentanyl but cannot use to
the federal minimum wage is seven dollars & twenty five cents per hour in the largest producer of crude oil in the world where it's easy to import cheap prescription drugs from the north & from the south but if you come seeking asylum you might be returned to mexico or you might wind up in an immigration detention center owned & operated by the geo group inc which is a real estate investment trust company whose stock price is eight dollars & eighty six cents as of today when during an earnings call the ceo george zoley said quote during the third quarter we have experienced a continuation of the favorable cost trends we had experienced in the second quarter which resulted in our better than expected financial performance unquote george zoley owns a nine bedroom thirteen thousand square foot mansion in boca raton florida which is a swing state where a majority of people voted to restore the voting rights of the majority of formerly incarcerated people with felonies but where the state legislature passed a law conditioning that right to vote on the payment of all fees & fines & restitution as part of each persons case & because before the virus more than forty percent of citizens had access to less than four hundred dollars most formerly incarcerated people with felonies in florida will not vote because they do not have easy access to money enough to pay all the fees & fines & restitution as part of their case the case between the people of florida & the state legislature of florida made its way to the supreme court & this past week an old justice swore in a new justice after televised hearings where the new justice could neither confirm nor deny that she believes in the right of the president to unilaterally delay an election or that the climate crisis is real or if abortion is a right or if racism is systemic like for example does the average black worker earn sixty two percent of what the average white worker makes or whether the overall income for black citizens is forty two percent lower than for white citizens or if black citizens are more likely to be denied bank loans than aspiring homeowners of other races or if research on the subject of homeownership finds that children of homeowners-
Day 279

a day is prayer
i ignore
sometimes i bow
before i eat
if i remember
to enact a ritual
bereft of resonance
i count calories
need to leave the device
behind a locked door
to trick myself out
of its slick fascism
jewish mystics
murdered by germans
without a residue of silence
my inheritance is verbosity
overcompensation

if i die before you
i instruct her
on the freeway
to the mountains
bury me in the sky
ask my many lovers to
hike 10 miles out
in an homage silence
i pay respects
to the dying
who now alone
in their final confrontation
without guidance
on shapeshifting
a day is prayer
i ignore
peril lurks
with my eyes closed
i press my feet
against it

Hi Barnett,
I like these poems a lot. For one thing, I enjoyed reading them, and I think that's important. I made a few notes:
day 149
Frustration, family, clear but with plenty of fifth details
"to feel the complexity
is a total waste too much!"
day 147
key words, for example, "laurel" and "fluff & bold" give me enough to go on to supply my own thoughts while feeling I'm riding thought waves in sync with yours.
day 146
You give details that bring me images without my worrying if they're the right images. But I do get the mood of frustration with banality. And there is humor
A lot of the rhythm is like coming, "all the sudden jazz of a hovering vessel", yet not all: "A worm cut in half I take my legs to the sunshine."

See you later,
Simone
gargoyles perched on our shoulders
dissolve into miracles of air

people dance to the counting of ballots

at once everywhere
strangers move in orgasms of defiance
eruption of bodies we have witnessed on the nightly news
in countries where gaudy odes to strongmen
are toppled by riotous joy
yet here we are cutting it up & close
at the possibility
of a coup

down sunset a jam of happy cars threads through a universe
in the throngs 2 men kiss beneath the flag
to recalibrate its complexity its multitudes of hurt for us
for whom these hours we have waited for years
no longer a tool to bludgeon meaning
we reclaim the broad stripes & bright stars
in the middle of the street for the length of one day

clouds in merriment overhead cleanse us of gathered fears

time breaks

we knew it would not last but we did not care
he trembles
he having cause to tremble

the physical phone is attached to a metaphysical bureaucracy
orchestrated to murder hope

all bureaucracies summon the operating software of microsoft
office which is to say they are seemingly harmless & out of date

should you picture bureaucracy
do you picture the dmv

he cannot stay there
there is worse
there is louisiana

somewhere he tore his passport in two shreds

that is awful she says
in a response to andrew
while sorting through magazines
sammy his cockatiel just died

the attorney barks at me
while walking her blind dog
without pause

an aura of bureaucracy surrounds us

freedom
as i now comprehend it
is the opposite space along a line