

# *poems poems*

Simone Forti

Barnett Cohen





**Simone Forti**  
to me ▾

Hi Barnett,  
Thursday evening Skype is fine. What time? My Skype name is  
seesaw537  
What's yours?  
xoxoxo Simone

Tue, Mar 31, 2020, 2:11 PM



Share this email



**Simone Forti**  
to me ▾

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

## *Acknowledgements*

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*Drawings*, pages **58, 67** and **72** by Simone Forti

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Acknowledgements

## *A Preface for Simone and Barnett*

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 you and 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

August 2021

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

Dear Claudia,

Thank you for caring for and tending this space, for keeping it "open" despite trials and complications. For recognizing that an open space *requires* trials and complications, dissenting voices, diversity, and self-determination. Your support has been the greatest gift, giving me the chance to try new things while offering real, deep listening — which is what editing is in the end. An act of love.

Love, Megan

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 lattach." "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 tinnititis? 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* 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

## *The Skin of My Teeth*

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 pros-  
perous 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

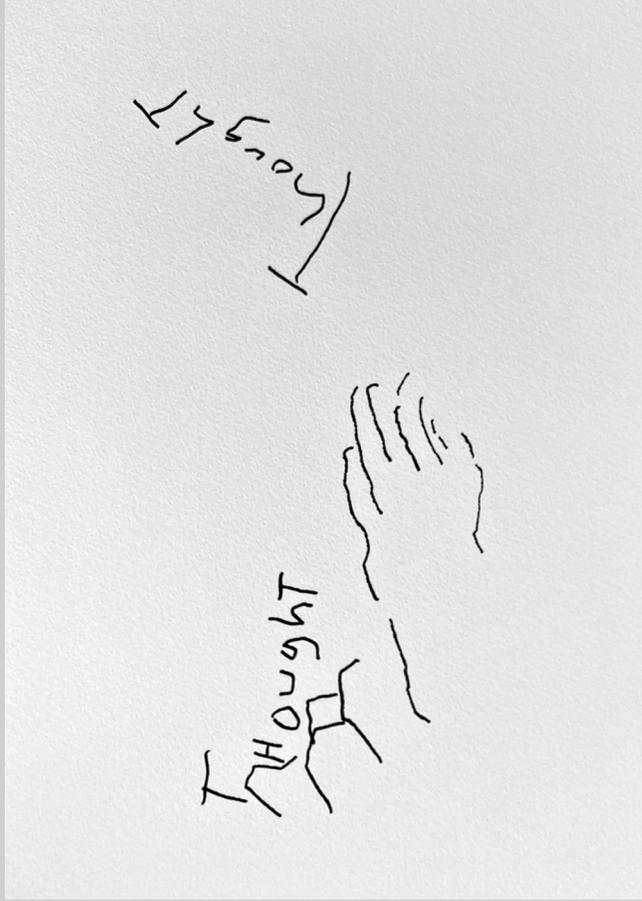
Cubes of all sizes

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



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  
complex of hills

That hill of houses suffused with scent etched windows  
soft and bright

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

For the good  
the little man  
is bent on doing  
to trust the government



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

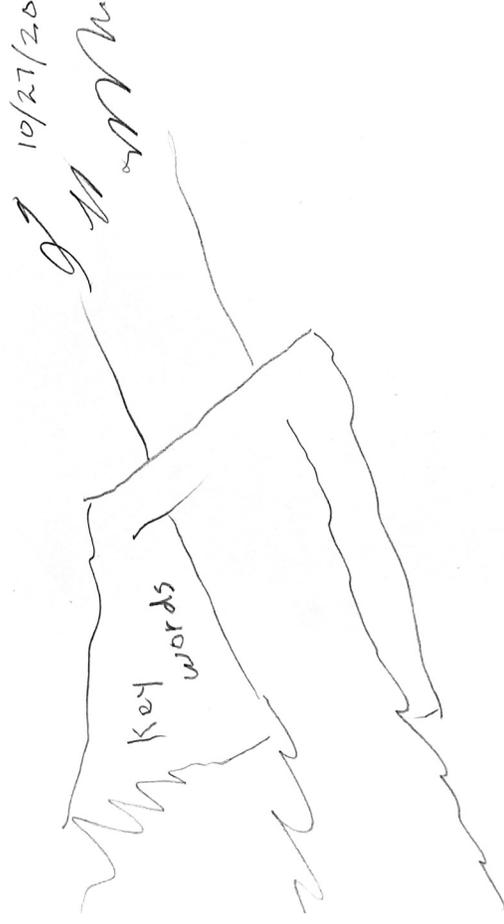
Drivers oblivious  
of the three stout palms  
or the peacefully lit  
plot of ground between  
left to its own devices  
The plastic tarp blue

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

I wash my hair  
drifts in and out

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



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



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 taillights 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



**Barnettcohen**  
to Simone ▾

Hi Simone,

Hope you're catching some of these spring-like breezes this evening. They make summer feel like an occasional hoax played on weekends.

Got my haircut today. Jenni says I look like I graduated from West Point. Hehehe.



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.



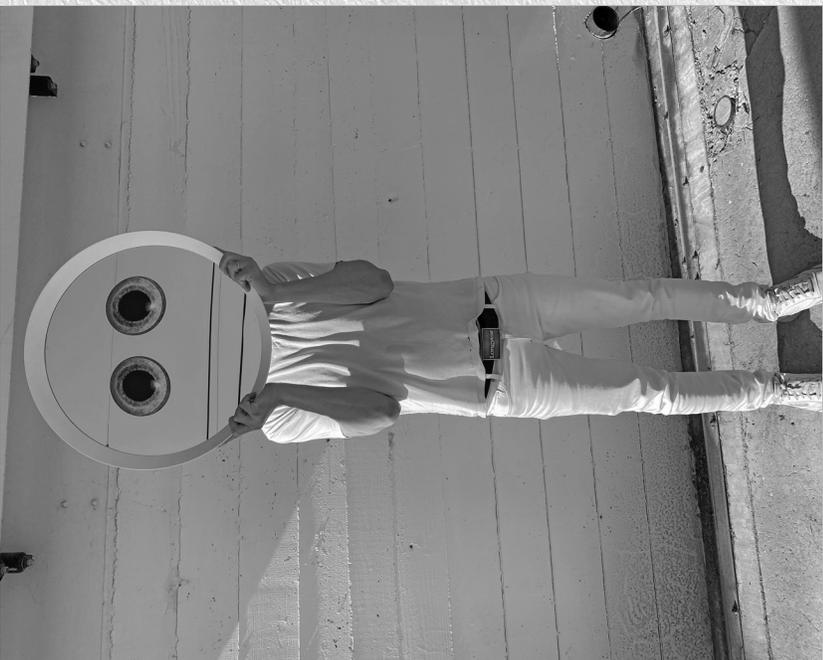
For a while, during the heatwave, I think the ants in the bathroom were getting high. They were after something in the drain. They'd line up side by side like grains of corn, maybe four or five ants in stillness, and others would join crowding in, pushing each other aside. Or single ones would be still 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 mas-sacre in stride. Come back at the first sign of something interesting. Maybe they have no way of remembering.



non



Day 365

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 whats 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

*Day 363*

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

*Day 1*

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 559*

a chocolate éclair  
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

*Day 75 Part II*

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

*Day 58*

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

*Day 557 Part II*

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 carry-  
ing 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

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 defund 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 hypothesizes 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 popsticks & 30 plastic bottles of water for 1496 i go back out & hand out the popsticks which go very fast & the water which goes very slow out of so many cars people dangling

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 tack 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

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

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  
thing 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  
thing 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

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

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

*Day 333*

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

*Day 201 Part 1*

my middle of the night self  
dispatches strings to my morning one  
  
im reading a poem in my dream by me  
but its not the one i wrote  
its 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 maintains  
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  
osoff 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

*Day 289 Part I*

good riddance to 2020  
ricks says twice to Judith  
you have any grand plans  
Judith laughs rick laughs  
maybe ill 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  
doom doom doom  
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 experi-  
ence 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 tahdig 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 its 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-

lemon rind commingles with anise on the tension of my thumb there is a residue of tiger balm from working her calf that complicates my inhalation of the morning bun summer sent us sugar sugar defend against jean is dead nora posted i am a boat to & fro on a sea without lines at el matador was the last time i saw her i think or at some party in her apartment off hillhurst we were acquaintances of the kind you make when you are new to a city i remember her chortle & the curve of her jet hair her viewing is on the internet i feel the specter of death has followed me for many years she captioned a post in december 2018 but this year it has come particularly close what am i doing i dunk the final bite of the bun in my coffee flick again to learn that mario is in the hospital first for his hip now with the virus is it unskillful to send lillies to a family of person i did not really know to honor a scratch of memory sending you lots of love hang in there mario i comment underneath a photo of some flowers in a hospital room



*Day 259*

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

*Day 276*

if you played an instrument

it would be the trumpet

simone says

not a piano nor a saxophone

when you ask why

she makes big hands

*Day 267*

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

*Day 247*

poem extends from the night  
  
document of sleep  
  
syntax between neurotransmitters  
recedes like tides between stones  
  
panic attacks to capture words  
a hand in honey  
  
from the deep

