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THE
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What Happens

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Edited by Bianca Rae Messinger
and Toby Altman.

Designed by Peter Hopkins.

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Essays

EDITOR'S NOTE

Bianca Rae Messinger and Toby Altman

“Urgent action is not in graciousness it is not in clocks it is not in water wheels. It is the same so essentially, it is a worry a real worry”

In her play, “What Happened,” Gertrude Stein asks us, “...and what can hear, that can hear that which makes such an establishment provided with what is provisional.” This magazine takes its name from Stein’s play—and its mandate from her question. We are not interested in creating an establishment or an institution; we are interested in providing the provisional, the incomplete, the amateur: failed texts, misbegotten performances.

In other words, this is a magazine of poets’ theater: that expansive, poorly-defined genre. That genre of amateur performances, poets reading from printed-out scripts, in quickly rehearsed plays. It would be tempting at this juncture—the first issue of a new magazine—to offer a definition of poets’ theater, an explanation of what this is all about. No thanks. The spirit of poets’ theater as we understand it is about refusing definition, refusing the polish and professionalism of a regulated generic practice. This magazine offers itself as a celebration of such unpolished and unpoliced practices: the feral, the incomplete.

If we were to come up with some ill-fated totalizing claim it would resemble something like Bernadette Mayer’s infamous “Mimeo Argument” from the old Poetry Project Newsletter. The real “power” of poets theater lies in its sociality, the ephemerality of performance, renewing her call to, “forget about value as it’s perceived, and take as much pleasure in [...] life as a poet as desire can construe and hurry to change the world in small performance as others like John Cage have done, since you cant stop fucking writing anyway.”

As such, this magazine—with its carefully type-set scripts—is itself a derivative, secondary object. These texts live in performance, not the page. All of the plays printed in this first issue were first performed at What Happens, a festival of poets’ theater in Iowa City. They were brought to life by dedicated teams of actors and directors, too numerous to name here. We hope that this sojourn in print will be a temporary, transitory state for these plays: that, seeing them here, you will be inspired to take them up and perform them yourselves.

Finally, things do take time and money. We would like to thank a number of people without whom this magazine simply would not exist. Foremost among them, Peter Hopkins—whose extraordinary work as a designer graces the cover of this issue and our website. Betsy and Peter Barrett provided financial support for the printing of this issue; their generosity has made this project financially feasible. Elizabeth Willis worked tirelessly behind the scenes at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop to make the festival happen. This magazine, which grows so directly from that festival, owes its shape to her unwavering support. Finally, we would like to thank Erica Vannon and Kristen Steenbeeke, who cofounded the festival with us—and whose work was essential to growing it.

-Bianca and Toby

SHORT ORGANUM FOR
THE LATE KEVIN KILLIAN

David W. Pritchard

1.

To take pleasure in the possibilities of change in all things—this would seem to be the motto or program that Bertolt Brecht and Kevin Killian have in common. Not that I think Killian was a communist necessarily, or even that in some socially symbolic way he achieved the utopian shape of a communist XYZ in his artworks—arguments like this are very nice, they are very comforting, but in the context of writing about people we know and love (I will not use the past tense for the dearly-missed Kevin Killian; and, as the sentence so far probably tells you, I knew Kevin, and loved him; to call him “Killian” hereafter would thus be misleading) it smacks of self-justification. Everybody thinks their own art is the poetry of the future or the period style. They look for confirmation of this suspicion everywhere around them. And indeed, if you look for yourself in the shimmering surfaces of the unbearable totality, you don’t have to look hard to find what you’re looking for. That’s how it works, totality, as I understand it.

2.

I would like to refuse myself this delight and this projection. To do this I put to you that Kevin Killian was not an urgent and necessary, *exigent* writer. He was more of a period piece than an instance of period style; he developed a cultivated attachment to the past in which “gay man” was the only available (read: visible) model for what we’d now call “queer subjectivity”; a past in which “taking pleasure” could embody a kind of polemical stance, even a political one. (By this I don’t mean sexual pleasure, although there is plenty of sex in Kevin’s work, and it’s extremely delightful at all points; but it would be a grave mistake to identify sexual pleasure and aesthetic pleasure, both in general and as a reading of Kevin’s work, which in the last instance seems to distinguish between the Dionysian anti-climaxes of naked bodies encountering one another and the Apollonian arrangements that art lets you pursue with great enthusiasm). Anyway, I’m talking about a certain historical stance, one that has plenty to teach us but which is not a living, viable option for a vibrant and political art. To put it another way: Kevin was never a movement writer. He gave those of us who aspire toward these things—not “movement writing” as an aesthetic, but political poetry at the least—a lot to think about and work with; but he did not reach beyond history toward its fateful opposite number, politics. And in lots of ways this is a very good thing. There is nothing worse than having to disentangle utopia from a misguided practical sensibility cultivated in the service of trying to “help out” in whatever way you can. Indeed, “I want to help out” is always kind of a suspicious thing to say. It feels like there’s a “but” built in; and that “but” usually attaches to the making of poems or prose (but not plays—on which more in a moment) in the case of artists, who are, in times of crisis, among the most “helpful” people imaginable. If there is one thing you take away from this essay, other than a love for Kevin Killian, let it be this: never tell a militant you want to “help out”; ask them: “what can I do?”

3.

None of this is meant as a slight against Kevin. It’s rather the basic caveat I have

to give in order to say anything about his work at all. To me, this work took shape around a contradiction that all the best late capitalist (pre-communist?) artists struggle with: the contradiction between modernism and the avant-garde.

3a.

On the one hand, a commitment to art as art—to “the aesthetic” as such and all the baggage that fateful word drags along with it—requires you to take a stance about the determining role of pleasure in the experience of art. This is, I insist, an historical requirement, not merely a categorical imperative. If you are committed to a certain kind of formal fireworks, if you are committed to using the word art to describe what you do, then you are committed to taking a position on pleasure in some capacity.

3b.

On the other hand, this entails placing hard and fast limits on a bunch of other capacities that historically have attached to art; indeed, it often requires a definition of art that negates any possible link to kinds of exigency that we tend to define as the opposite of sensory pleasure or enjoyment, such as politics (actually it is usually first and foremost politics which is the opposite of pleasure; although as an aside I would say that too much stress has been laid on the aesthetics/politics division, which in the context of various Frankfurt School polemics is not about *if* art can relate to politics, but *how*).

4.

This contradiction is itself an historical product. It is the result of the infamous “institutionalization” of the avant-gardes described by Peter Bürger in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. According to Bürger, the avant-garde critique of art failed to negate the institutions that enshrine art; its anti-art gestures were thus enshrined within those institutions as art. Since the end of the avant-garde, artists have had to take up a position in this vexing, indeed infuriating cultural field. And one of the consequences is that we—if by “we” the reader will allow me to refer to people with whom I share a political commitment, my comrades, rather than to the bad abstractions of various “communities” (of poets, of gay men, of queer artists, etc.)—we have learned to treat even the most radical works of art with suspicion if they are able to find their footing on the combined and uneven terrain of the present.

5.

Another way of saying this is that Kevin leans more on the modernism than on the avant-garde side of the contradiction. He is committed to aesthetic form and the utopian vision of art as a means to transfigure the fallen world.

6.

While I was walking the dog just now I had a thought that is worth interjecting into

this essay. I suppose that you could argue for a third term in all this, placing "realism" between modernism and the avant-garde. And this would anticipate, even supersede many of the reflections still to come in this piece of writing, now almost a month overdue. But I have to tell you I don't give a shit about realism. Or, I do, as an epistemological category (and as an epistemological horizon towards which art might strive), but not as a code word for the centrality of the novel to literary production. As Aditya said yesterday just before Andy and I left Baltimore, if you talk about the novel you are always talking about modernity, and there's no getting around that. In saying this he meant to communicate: *and we need to get around it*. Our conversation turned to questions of periodization after that, and I suppose one of those could help me get back to talking about Kevin. I think that the closer to the present you get, the less interesting the novel becomes as a symptom and/or cognitive map of the totality of capitalist social relations. In fact, once we pass over into late capitalism, whose cultural logic is famously, per Fredric Jameson, "postmodernism"—once we inhabit full postmodernity, the critical affirmation of the dignity and stature of the novel seems more like an excuse than a principled stance. Brecht's rhetorical question and critical riposte to Lukács leaps to mind. *What about the realism of lyric poetry?* So this is why I am not going to say anything about the realism of Kevin Killian's writing. Because realism has become a stupid concept, and the novel is one of the biggest lies that critics still seem willing to tell, even as artists (including novelists) do not believe it anymore. Fuck novels.

7.

Kevin, as it happens, wrote a bunch of novels. None of them, as novels, are particularly good. By this I do not mean they are bad—otherwise I would not have read them, as I do not have much patience for things like plot and characterization—but that they fail as novels. But this makes them successful in other respects. On the back of the original publication of *Bedrooms Have Windows*, Bruce Boone coyly says as much in his blurb. He praises Kevin's "prose line," which in the context of New Narrative writing, and New Narrative's longstanding (and overblown, in much the same way that the aesthetics/politics division is overblown) beef with Language poetry, is as much a comment about poetry as it is about the lovely sentences which Kevin writes. And he writes, let it be said, lovely sentences.

8.

Instead of trying to revive the novel—which anyway seems like a project for critics more than anybody else—perhaps we should raise the question that Jameson raised in his magisterial analysis of postmodernism: what kind of new artistic mode suits the new conjuncture? This is not a question about period style but about discovering things about the world we inhabit. Jameson recommends this thing called cognitive mapping, which basically has to do with emplacing the subject in a totality so that we can begin to learn about our relationship with the global system of capitalism. If the rest of his oeuvre is any indication, he seems to think films are the best cognitive maps we have. To this I would add poetry, if only because poetry and film have more in common than any other art forms. And it is in this context that I'd want to place

Kevin's work, which to my mind is first and foremost a body of poetry, in which several experimental prose works, *including plays*, take their place.

9.

The journal I'm writing this essay for is focused on poets theater, so I should probably say something explicit about Kevin's playwriting. Which means it is probably time for me to stop flirting with the Brecht/Killian connection and come right out and say why I'm linking these two brilliant artists. The answer will not surprise you, but it will almost certainly disappoint you. Like Brecht, Kevin is at the end of the day better in his poetry than in any other genre, including the theater. And yet, also like Brecht, Kevin's work can be read in new and interesting ways if we organize it around poetry first and foremost. Whence the usefulness of the otherwise mystifying epithet "poets theater," which Kevin and David Brazil liken to the US Supreme Court's infamously modernist stance on pornography: we know it when we see it.

10.

Seen in this light, I would say poets theater is like seeing a movie in 3-D in a theater. The "poets" here is like the glasses you get at the box office when you buy your ticket. It's not quite a hermeneutic key, but it helps you see things you otherwise couldn't.

10a.

I leave aside trying to figure out if it's a possessive or a plural. I opt for the latter, even if it's wrong, because I think that the great thing about poetry is that it is extremely hard to own anything at all, even intellectually, in the context of poetry. Besides, poets theater is a theater full of poets, right?

11.

In undergrad, I majored in both Theater and Literature. For the first two years I thought I was going to be an actor. Then I got sick of acting and, as it happened, read Frank O'Hara; the rest, as they say, is history. But I retain a good deal of knowledge from my time attempting to perform for a living. For one thing I am a very good performer of my own work. This is partly because I enjoy it, which I gather many poets do not, which is fine, but then if you do not like reading your own work I don't think you should endeavor to do so. Why make yourself miserable if you don't have to? And don't tell me anything about selling books. No poet ever made a poetry decision based on selling books, because none of us has ever made any money off our books.

11a.

One of the things that poets theater seems to have done for the people who participate in it is that it has imparted to them a sense of performance as a kind of art in its own right—thanks in no small part to Kevin Killian, whose tutelage, direct or indirect, has stoked many a poetic enthusiasm about saying words (by you or by someone

else, doesn't matter) out loud in front of other people. Kevin's biggest contribution to this genre is probably not his plays, then, but his own readings of his work, which are to this day the funniest poetry readings I've ever been to. If you've seen me read my poetry you probably know I steal moves from Kevin's performances the way Ted Berrigan stole lines from Frank O'Hara's poetry. *Enthusiastically and frequently.*

11b.

Another big thing poets theater does—and this is evident more in performance than in the texts, although it's there too!—is teach poets about a critique of the lyric "I" and the poem of solitary experience and interior life, a critique that's desperately needed but which people have seemed to index to the Language poets, who did a version of this critique but did not invent it. I say this because I think there are totally understandable reasons to hate the Language poets, just as there are hypocritical, cynical, and self-serving reasons to hate the Language poets. In the same way, there are hypocritical critiques of the lyric and then there are totally understandable ones. The totally understandable ones are urgently needed.

11c.

The urgency I am referring to is a kind of political void that has opened up in the absence of any historical memory of counterculture or oppositional cultural production in the US. To put this pretty schematically: people want political art, but there is only art about politics; we settle for the latter, and bring ourselves to the point of despair at which we can only renounce any attempt to stage the dialectic of aesthetics and politics; we blame the Language poets for ruining the avant-garde and celebrate book after book of lyric poetry because at this point if we were to cut the other direction we might be mistaken for defending conceptual poetry which, as everyone has pointed out, does not have a monopoly on concepts; in fact, it doesn't have any concepts; but we throw concepts out to avoid the stain of the association.

12.

People want political art, but there is only art about politics—in case it isn't clear I think that most of the "art about politics" is opportunistic garbage, as bad as the worst book by a Language poet you can think of.

13.

Poets theater teaches poets about a bunch of relationships to language that short-circuit the hegemony of the short, expressive lyric poem (and its recent sibling, the long series of short, expressive lyric poems that are thematically or formally linked, but may as well stand alone as short, expressive lyric poems). In particular, it rescues things like expression and linguistic dexterity from the ideology of lyric and makes them available in a context that historically has been more interesting than the debates about whether we are stuck with Wordsworth or if typing up the phonebook is a viable solution to the problem of living and making art in a bourgeois society.

13a.

Somewhere Brecht says that to the extent that the artist works as an artist in a bourgeois society, he is bourgeois. The unfortunate third person general pronoun is Brecht's; the reference I owe to Andy, who read me the passage from Brecht's journals six months ago.

13b.

I owe most of my thinking about Brecht to Andy, who thinks more and better about Brecht than anyone I've met.

14.

I opted to write in numbered paragraphs in part to allude to a Brecht essay I have been thinking about all weekend, "Short Organum for the Theater," in which he tries to lay out his aesthetic systematically. He makes a series of great claims but, uninterested in the niceties of syllogistic argument past a certain point, he doesn't really deliver on the promise of system itself. This is kind of what I wanted out of writing this, and I hope that, like Brecht's essay, you find yourselves variously repulsed and titillated by what I'm saying. I also hope that the various threads I am unraveling here do not seem to lead too far afield from Kevin Killian, the man and the poet, whose work I find it unbearable to try to write about in detail because I feel too close to it, and because like my favorite poet Frank O'Hara I find myself getting angry at death rather than sorrowful, which feeling you probably already have noticed, but I want to keep it in check on some level. The numbered paragraphs help. The untimely loss of Kevin over the summer does not help.

15.

Poets theater critiques the lyric by suggesting that language can lead other emotional and historical existences than the one involved in underscoring the division between private and public life, which is undergirded by a division between mental and manual labor. My favorite example of this is Ish Klein's play *In a Word: Faust* which Kevin directed (find it on youtube!) and in which the language-heavy story of Dr. Faustus is told in such a way that every character only speaks one word at a time. This doesn't negate all of the philosophical hemming and hawing that this story famously involves, but it does ask us to think about language differently, as something besides just a way of communicating a debate about knowledge and what have you. In other words, the poetry of Marlowe (and of Goethe, though I haven't read any of the German Faust stuff, sorry) is made over in the image of Beckett. For this to work on stage, you have to do things with your body, and react and respond to other people's bodies as well. Suddenly poetry depends on its embeddedness in a collective undertaking, rather than on the dignity and stature of the inner life of the single person writing it. Suddenly poetry requires you to learn to live and work with others, in a way that, in late capitalism, feels very pre-communist in its cultivation of collective enjoyment. There's no pleasure here that is not pleasure for everyone.

16.

This is obviously a reading of the whole poets theater enterprise. But I don't think it's very controversial to assert that the main goal of Kevin's theater, like Brecht's, was pedagogical. Nor is it a stretch to suggest that one of the great things Kevin did for us was to raise a question that we now have to answer. *What would it mean to enjoy things in a new way?* Like I said before, when I say "we" I mean comrades more than communities. But I think that whatever your fidelity, you will probably agree that the greatness of Kevin Killian, and the thrill of the poets theater project, is that we now have before us the task of answering the question of how to enjoy things differently, indeed newly. It's not an easy question to answer, but the work we do towards an answer will no doubt feel a lot less like work than the work we do to pay rent or feed ourselves. Maybe it will even feel like play—a pun on which I am happy to end this essay.

Plays

FAMOUS PEOPLE

A play in three acts

Bernadette Mayer

Dramatis Personae:

Charlotte Rampling

Emma Goldman

Who (*aka Jean-Luc Goddard*)

Is (*aka Agnes Varda*)

Speaking (*aka Nathaniel Hawthorne*)

Emerson

John Muir

Stephen Hawking

Bowler #1

Bowler #2

Bowler #3

ACT ONE

Scene: a bowling alley.

Charlotte Rampling: There's a reptile in my soup.

Emma Goldman: I wish I had the gift to paint the life I've lived.

Who: I hope there will be some truth in it.

Is: The prepositions are bound to be true.

Speaking: Its beauty and magnificence are made of stone flowers and ideas gone by.

Charlotte Rampling: It's a frog! Who, did you protest recently in France?

Who: Ah oui, of course, it's always the rich against the poor. Compare it to the movements of amazon.com.

Is: Do you have any friends named Grace?

Charlotte Rampling: I wish statues could tell stories so we could know how it all began.

Emma Goldman: It began as an ice storm, then the workmanship of sculptures made it be about love and democracy.

Speaking: Out of the old and the new come a current flowing so he and she can recreate the history of Syria and Afghanistan. Now I know but I will not know until you say so.

Charlotte Rampling: She or he won't know when I say I am going on a trip. Please forgive me but I'll go even if you say I shouldn't go.

ALL CHARACTERS SAY IN UNISON: I didn't do it.

Bowler #1: They murdered my daughter and son so I am coming here.

Bowler #2: But you can't stand here until you let me in.

Bowler #3: I'll stand here until you let me in.

FROM OFFSTAGE: I'll stand here to prevent you, you can't play in my backyard.

Speaking: It seems you can't play in any backyard in the Democracy, I'd go on strike.

Who: And I'd support you, let's protest these dumb immigrant policies — where do you come from?

Is: Who cares, I want to be here, we don't have a lot to choose from.

Who: How about Finland?

Is: I don't speak Finnish

Who: Finnish is a language I never learned but I know, from Michael Moore's movie that it's a country of people who know about humanity unlike America where it seems nobody likes people who aren't white and a democracy is a situation to be gotten around so rich people can get power to get richer, but let's shift to the dinosaur we never saw, even in our ancestral memories. When I see a dinosaur, I think: why are all these animals so huge? It's been a long day and not just for me. What about elephants? I think if I'd seen a mammoth in the old days, I would've wanted to hug but was afraid to go get it.

EVERYONE HUGS EACH OTHER

Speaking: I write each day's history before another day's adventures begin.

Is: Yes and this dust was once a man.

Who: Yes but don't say this dust was once a man, man is just a word, like my name, I am not a fruit or vegetable, though I have been a heart-shaped potato in the past.

Emma Goldman: Now that I pierce the darkness, new beings appear and how quietly they breathe, those idiotic saints, I want to dance but I don't dance yet since I am busy becoming you.

Charlotte Rampling: How odd words are, like *immigrant* and how does the fire look like a river? The river never looks like a fire to me.

Who: It's cause unfamiliar gods are rising from unfamiliar beds and when that happens the river floods to be near us.

Is: Well, something must be blue.

Speaking: Perhaps it was so but as the obscurest man of letters in America, I saw a hippopotamus in London and to my astonishment, I looked up in perfect silence at the stars.

Emma Goldman: There's a little blue coming through between the clouds.

Charlotte Rampling: I wish I was a beekeeper.

Emma Goldman: Why?

Charlotte Rampling: Because it would make the present better and then I could dance around and actually be you, instead of just pretending.

Who: I got you a pet iguana.

Charlotte Rampling: But I live in a cold place, what if the power goes off and the person I asked to take care of the house isn't cognizant of the iguana's needs and it freezes to death?

Who: Oh, that could never happen.

Charlotte Rampling: Don't say I never told you, then I'd be out of a pet.

Is: It's already cold in here.

Speaking: Cold as a witch's tit.

Emma Goldman: You should go perform at Cafe Lena. Ever been there?

Speaking: Yeah, once I wrote a rap song this was a long time ago, about Lenin and Trotsky and performed it there, excellent audience.

Emma Goldman: You seem to think you're me.

Speaking: I can be you or everyone when I want to. Did you say before you wanted to be a beekeeper?

Charlotte Rampling: No, I won't excel at that.

Who: Let's take the night off.

Speaking: OK, but what exactly is night?

Who: It's when you have dreams, you go to sleep and it's a different reality you see. Unless you don't go to sleep of course, but maybe you see a different reality you don't know you see, in which case you'd wake up a changed person and not know why. According to Emersonianism.

Is: Stop! Enough! Have you read *The City And The Mountains* by de Queiros?

Speaking: Of course, hours and hours go by but not one in which I don't think of that book. Let's have another cup of coffee. Imagine a flood coming over a high hill, it has never flooded before, that you know of and in it is a television set, floating and a bear (floating bear!) swimming to beat the band along with the signs that say, No Cutting Of Trees, the work of a person named Janis who never moved here because her husband didn't like it, we all liked it until it flooded. And then we thought, will this be a lake? Where we used to live, finally a Tsatsawassa Lake we can go to, that we can be in for no charge except the charge of the light brigade, finally a water view free of charge, we'll build a guest-house for the refugees from Central America except in winter it will be too cold, we'll have to get another house in Florida and an underground tunnel to get there equipped like de Quieros with fast moving trains to get there or maybe we could just move via forest canopy from here to there and nobody will trouble us for access because the lake will go on forever and all humans will act like humans, understanding our way of being. Here, now, the food is in one direction, other things in other, we're all reliant on cars, for each town there'll be vehicles to take you where now, if you think some-

thing, it will happen, what are computers good for anyway? Birds will come out of your printers and on the machine itself, the fucking software, it will say the bird's name. Its incidences of loving and understanding you, you being the human being who's using the soft, as opposed to hardware, just like a cup of water.

INTERLUDE:

VOICE FROM OFF STAGE: Wee willie winkie goes thru the town / upstairs and downstairs / in his nightgown / an emerald peach in the orchard grew / warmed by the sun and wet with the dew, it grew / one day, passing the orchard thru, came Johnny Jones and his sister Sue / anyway they ate the free peach and died

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II

SCENE: A SUPERMARKET

Charlotte Rampling: The reptile's gone from my soup!

Who: The reptile is gone from her soup, baby that was an accident.

Is: Let me explain. Your blood coagulated in the container. It was not your fault, however we need more of your blood and your blood doesn't have enough B12 in it for which you must take a sub-lingual. In other words, you must learn how to be in three places at once.

Speaking: What's the three places?

Who: It is a singularity, your books and papers.

Is: Above or below which are the valleys, hollows and smooth undulations of the swollen streams of your fate. How dare you?

Emma Goldman: But in the one we saw last night a hardwood fire was burning merrily, we had hope for the United States then...

Charlotte Rampling: over the river and thru the woods, to grams house we go.

Who: The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh, thru the wide and drifting snow.

Is: I guess, I hope that war is over bards of the great ideas and bards of the peaceful inventions, inland bards, you by my charm I invoke.

Speaking: I will see if the fishes and birds are to be enough for themselves.

Who: But I am not enough for myself. I know not what these plots and wars and deferments are for, he's in jail at last is all I know.

Is: For you I have stirred up an ocean of thought. Transparent, bright, and deep. It clothes my body with dreams.

Speaking: If the castle where my dreams are stored began to burn, I'd stand there watching one man and thinking of another.

Who: Am I you then?

Is: No, you are a transcendental and therefore shall never be me.

Speaking: Gee, how's your blood?

Who: Like a sparrow hiding in the curtains, the sparrow seems to be saying, do you want to live with me? But I say, no. I feel very solemn. I might be a cricket saying, wake up man, you're in your own country!

CRICKET SOUNDS

Is: Where every fly's a perpetual widow and yet a cornerstone.

Speaking: Small things move with a purpose.

Charlotte Rampling: (*Lifts up an apricot*) The apricot is like moonlight, the way it lends moist and sullen reverberations over the fucking snow. You know, it's almost become a sentence, if you will.

Who: Not in my book, we sleep soundly over the tops of the subtle plain, even below them, time will coil, uncoil, then coil again, where everything green's in the same section, even it's not green at heart. You see the supermarket's color-coded. They put the eggplants in purple. We have a field day at ochre, there's nothing black, that's where they put all the meat. You'd think the meat would be pink and of course if we had fresh beans...it would be a whole other story. Our eyes would hold the limitless concerns of love even when the wind stops, but hey, if you don't know how, why pretend?

Is: This market only has no-frills packaged stuff. There's no color in that aisle but to brighten it up a little, in the middle, are the limes and they are free. It's like having your own lime tree. There's a sign that says luminous limes and you think elegant thoughts when you can have as many as you want and if you take the largest number, everything else is free too.

SOUND OF AN ANNOUNCEMENT TRUMPET PLAYS

Stephen Hawking: The distance to Alpha Centauri is so great that to reach it in a human lifetime a spacecraft would have to carry fuel with roughly the mass of all the stars in the galaxy.

PLAY CRICKET SOUNDS

Who: (Picks up a pastry) Who wants a pastry?

Is: I do but my mother might not love me.

Speaking: Do not fear, I have one that isn't sweet though it looks like a candy cane.

Charlotte Rampling: It's ok, I am not my mother's daughter.

Emma Goldman: Let's get some Chinese takeout and sprinkle sugar on it.

Who: Eeuw! Leave me out. Anyway the moose is loose again. This happens every Xmas. Where are the blue lights?

ALL: Let's have another cup of coffee.

Charlotte Rampling: The weather's been bizarre.

Who: I'm walking home

What Happens

Is: Hope you don't get hailed on.

Speaking: I'd like some coffee please.

Emma Goldman: Maybe you'll meet the giant.

Who: That giant reminds me of a gravy boat with flowers on it. Don't let it get broken by the hail, put it under a tarp.

Is: I've seen you become a grizzly bear, so I don't think you have anything to worry about.

Speaking: How big are the dumplings? and, are they Spanish, Polish or northern Italian? If no answer is forthcoming, I'll have three.

A SONG, SUNG BY Who:

A dumpling on a mountain
gives us all food for thought
is under and over the big, bushy cloud
I thought was a harbinger of
volcanic activity, yes, for giants
in Williamstown where
no one is done for yet
swimmingly murmuring along
the road to a town called Amenia
not far from Dover Plains
though headlines are meaningless to me

A MOMENT OF SILENCE

Charlotte Rampling: Are you here? I don't even know who you are. But, all of a sudden everything will be in the right place so that...

Emma Goldman: So you can start a garden and convince everyone to cook with herbs.

Who: Out the window is a bunch of leafless trees. How can you even envision this?

Is: Whose turn is it to speak?

Speaking: It's my turn, it always is. I've become embittered because I talk too much. Let's give the katydid a turn.

Who: Katydid's can't talk.

Is: They can as much as a house can

Speaking: So tell me, in your spare time, what is love?

Emma Goldman: In a play? I've never heard of anything so ridiculous. Look it's John Muir.

John Muir: (*Enters pushing a shopping cart*) Hi everyone.

Charlotte Rampling: (*Pointing at Muir*) You should go in the closet to show everyone you really belong here.

Is: I'd like to say that to squeeze tightly between bodies or surfaces brings me closer to your pheromones. I daresay, but it is over, I mean our love, already?

Who: (*Dances around*) And I do a dance, perhaps the tango.

Speaking: (*Turns his back to the audience*) As the stream rises magically from the unheard depths of what could have been a park, I'd like to say that, as far as I know, you are mine, if not me.

Emma Goldman: Who are you speaking to?

Charlotte Rampling: I think it's me, you know, time and tide waits for no man.

Who: And no man is an island, you know, but what of woman?

Speaking: Women come first, in every state or star, you know. If there's an O anywhere, there's a woman somewhere, as if she were returning to the present, or maybe the future.

Is: Lost in the future? Again? What bad luck I have, seeing no future in the present, did I graduate? Take from my lips this kiss.

Muir: And then you'll say, now lift me close to your face. You are not a book, you're a woman I think, but it's stop and go.

Emma Goldman: So let's go.

Who: Yes, so

Is: Let's

Speaking: Go (*pause*) go!

Charlotte Rampling: Will there be a search for the elixir of life?

Emma Goldman: Will you look under people too? Is it in isle number four? In the baked goods isle?

Speaking: Plays like the one we're in, have to be written by someone, sitting across from a man who's in charge of himself, counting and wrapping coins.

Who: That's a singularity too.

Is: I think we'd better be going now, it's almost midwinter day.

Speaking: It's old-fashioned to know, you know, people are aware of only capitalist

What Happens

holidays.

Emma Goldman: But the soul and its destinies spiral around time, if you believe in it, it's really real.

Who: Thus we shall soar on this tricky day, as to getting rid of Dummkopf first off we don't say his real name. Hard to deal with such a narcissist.

Is: I say wrap him up and pour him into the opposite of an elixir of life potion.

Speaking: (*A RAINBOW CROSSES THE STAGE*) Then for a brief time, a letter of the alphabet. And follows a duck egg, next a fallopian tube, so knowledge of the frailty but maybe the strength of the human body can be learned. Next, a tiny bacteria in the digestive system, perhaps making it go haywire. After that, a prism but if it's who I think it is, he doesn't deserve to be a prism at all or ever. Any type of thing is too good for him, it's because of the nature of thingness, as if you could say, I am never at home, and then be out visiting your best friend with whom you play school wherein the penises are the students but every syllable of the latin name for a plant is like the steam from boiling water keeping us in touch with moistness like a cloud.

Is: I'd like to create a cloud museum, where each cloud would be roped off. But how could you prevent one cloud from bleeding into the atmosphere of the museum?

Emma Goldman: I'll take that question! Not to worry, you can fly on them, this is what magic carpets are. Our carpets are all grounded, you can learn to sit on a cloud too. I mean lean so as to rest a bit, like a monkey. Monkeys rest plenty, humans not enough. Rolling in mud is a scarcity among homo sapiens.

Who: But we just found out how long we've been here. I think it's time we got a lifetime achievement award.

Is: For eating a quiche? That's in the isle next to the elixir of life.

Who: No, silly, for eating no quiche at all like a morning glory, made of cloth, for having a revolutionary diet of morning glories, for teaching morning glories to speak and say I didn't do it!

Speaking: And of course she didn't! Some fig plants, you know, produce no figs at all. Just as some salt is pepper. And this supermarket is fresh out of figs. Does that surprise you?

Who: Well it'd be worse if some pepper was salt, I'd say.

Is: That would be a good topic for a first class debate: Which is worse, pepper as salt or salt as pepper? And which do you feel most like? Plus, who's your momma etc? Besides how best to get rid of that guy, that politician who's ruining everybody's life, even those who don't know it yet?

ALL GATHER TO SING A SONG:

All around the globe he's
not blooming, he's ruining he's
turning into a cockroach and then he's
all of sudden an STD he's
a bed bug he's a werewolf he's
an unwanted tattoo he's
a sexual predator married to
a model who could've had a life
maybe he too could've had a life he's
not a muon he's a prevaricator he's
old MacDonald had a farm eee i eee i o
must've eaten an unripe hibiscus flower
he's anti-nasturium, anti-kale
his ignorance is not bliss, his bliss
might be popularity, that of the throw-rug
king, queen of some place really ugly
if his reflection were in a bakery window
it would smash unbecomingly, never once has
no, I take that back, no life could he
have had ever on this planet or in this
weird yard, maybe he's the embodiment of every mistake
every mistake this country's made ever
forever stamped on by him acceptable
and not, a disease nobody even knows about yet
and doused the flame of derby democracy he's o the
sonatas he heard in the sky
it was the intent to hear sonatas that
make him so pimply, his head is made
of fake copper, imitation celeriac, dust
and dirt. Oops he's the devil, the son
of two Lucifers, or maybe three or four
he'd couldn't be free cause nobody wants him
his tactile feeling is of pinpricks
torture is his middle name, he's a harmful
mickey mouse, enjoying the sufferings
of others. He should be ostracized
make clear he doesn't exist, but nobody
can be that awful, they tell me this one is!

END ACT II

ACT III

Scene: Standing in front of bakery window. Reflections can be seen in the bakery window.

Who: I feel much better, now that we're rid of him.

Is: Yeah, but how did we do it?

Speaking: By singing of course, we sung him to non-existence. He's got only memory status now. The fact is he never existed, it was just fear that made it seem he did. Singing and dancing work like flowers made of felt, just the colors are bit off like cheese that's gone off. Many things go off, but not in this country. This person, whom I shall not name, went off.

Charlotte Rampling: Oh willow, tit willow, tit willow.

Emma Goldman: In a way, but the people who left food and water in the desert by the border are being prosecuted, whether he exists or not, I've often found there's a fine line between existence and non-existence, at least in this world.

Who: If only we could act as if this person never existed.

Speaking: Well maybe he never did.

Is: We do live in the quantum world, you know. Perhaps a little spin around the block would do it.

Emma Goldman: But on the sub-atomic level, who would vote?

Muir: Still on the sub-atomic level, there could be peace.

Speaking: I wish Emerson was here. Look I think that's him.

EMERSON WALKS UP TO THE GROUP

Emerson: Don't lose faith, fellows and women, you can make this guy disappear, and yes simply by singing and dancing, as long as you put the essence of it all on the windowsill during the full moon. Make fun of me all you want, but it will work.

EMERSON WALKS AWAY

Who: It's a good thing Emerson showed up.

Speaking: Maybe he didn't. That might've been a hologram.

Emma Goldman: It would be useful if you could prove it.

Is: Like the existence of god?

Stephen Hawking: Don't get involved in all that unless the paper's become invisible,

What Happens

like you think your thoughts are.

Who: My thoughts are invisible as neutrinos in a quantum-isn world. The top of the chair pokes or peeps up or out like a squad of hummingbirds looking for something blue or even purple. I'm going in for a pastry, maybe the apricot tart.

OFF STAGE VOICE: There's a phone call from a sister of mercy.

Who: Oh hell, not them again.

Is: Just don't answer.

Speaking: Politely decline any invitations to Christian prayer and be sure you say, I didn't do it.

Charlotte Rampling: I hate to say anybody's a pain in the neck but..

Who: They have certainly worn out their welcome but they're cute, you have to give them that, with those stiff white wimples and long black dresses, black stockings too.

Emma Goldman: How do you know?

Who: I'll never tell and don't ask them about their politics. You'd think they'd be pacifists, but they're all sado-masochrists. Freaks mumbling words to crucifixes and worshipping parts of people's bodies.

Speaking: Once I saw somebody's finger in a church.

Charlotte Rampling: Look, I found this piece of paper. It has an acrostic on it. Maybe they're trying to tell us something. I'll read it to you:

This snow is like a yogurt
Heirloom sky cultures
Egregious cloudberrries
Acidophulous
Traditional Icelandic eagerness
Elixirs of the lives of
Relentless males and females.

Who: But who could they be?

Is: Do we care?

Speaking: Let's examine this interrogatory statement. Isn't it a bit nihilistic? Might I point out that the world, as it is now, is as if no one (ahem) cared. To imply that one could not care is a philosophic statement of absurdity.

Emma Goldman: When there is a war like any war but let's say the first or second world ones, we have, appropriately, dadaism. Erik Satie famously said, "I only eat white foods." While others asked later: war, what is it good for and answered: ab-

solutely nothing. Of course that was another century. So-called art movements are always political movements. Some fig trees don't produce figs. Styrofoam containers from all over the world should be collected to be in an art show at the end of which they'd be destroyed or burned. Have a pastry. And the next time you visit the world with a capital W, replace it with the lower case.

Who: But what should we put the pastries in?

Is: What do you usually put them in?

Speaking: John Muir usually eats them right away.

Is: I didn't know Muir liked pastries.

Who: So we don't even need packaging? But what about color?

Is: What about it What's it got to do with packaging? With styrofoam? I mean what's it got to do with angels either? or trees? or humidifiers?

Charlotte Rampling: Electricity is blue and red is for danger, green for envy...

Is: I'd like to be in love, it could be any color like sky-blue-pink.. Let's ask John Muir.

Muir: If your lover's to be for peace in a meditative way, I'd say blue only, that pink's a little wishy-washy and sentimental. But you could be wearing a handsome blue dress and under it a harmonious pink garment.

Speaking: Or, in your coffin, a pink tie with a gray shirt.

Muir: So many pastries are pink, or have something pink on them, but no packaging is pink. Leaves are usually green. And have you ever seen the northern lights?

Speaking: I refuse to answer that question on the grounds I might be construed as a tourist. Some colors are just hodgepodes anyway, like in Rubens.

Muir: I do see your point, but maybe it's cause they're old. My next question is what is architecture? No only kidding—why do humans seem to value being far away from each other, for instance the good-fences-make-good neighbors philosophy, yet when they visit each other they may talk about and each give their own version of things they've seen, even of television. And then there is property. You can actually shoot (with a gun) someone who steps on your property so if you want to go swimming you could have a weighted swing to wind up in the creek without stepping on private property, apparently not yours and if my dog kills your cat you can shoot me!

Who: It's a dangerous world these folks have made for themselves. And when their kids go to school they might get shot by a random person, for no reason except maybe that person, that person's insane!

Is: It seems that the guns are the problem.

Speaking: Yeah but people want to have them to shoot people who are fucking up their government and people don't shoot the current lunatic because the people with guns are the ones who seem to cheer for him.

Emma Goldman: What a mess, the only thing worse would be if they pretended it wasn't happening. Maybe everybody could pretend they were a bee, or maybe actually be a bee. What about sex?

Charlotte Rampling: We don't have time for sex or talking about it, the most we can do is get the laundry done and play a few games of dominoes. Even in communes it snows, but if you close your eyes a blue dot becomes a red dot along with a stripe of fuchsia over by the fence thru which you escape like a snake who goes underneath and who is not in this image. All is messed up. Now I am a reptile in a cup of water. If only I could surf.

Emma Goldman: Isolated families, having no tools and weak as they could be, could never conquer the darkness of less-than-civilized life with the colors red and blue. That isn't funny is it? In my next life I'll be a comedian.

Muir: You are not a comedian, you are not a book, you're a woman I believe, a female mountain or ribbon of trees, perhaps a treehouse aquarium cathedral ribbon in a place called Shady. There are many big dogs around.

Is: They aren't dogs, they're bears.

Who: There's a special on floating bear pastries, the top part is pink.

Speaking: Might I suggest we dance the night away. You know there used to be dancing bears, not just floating ones and actually, we are loitering but if you're dating I don't think you can be loitering. We'll have to have some singing to dance to What ho, I think I see a Bo Diddley impersonator here and it's Who in disguise. Dare I say: Let have some busking.

SOME SINGING AND DANCING

THE SHOPKEEPER COMES OUT AND SHOUTS:

You are all loitering! Depart!

ALL SAY:

Soon, someday soon. Let's go bowling.

THEY ALL FLY AWAY

END

IN POPEYES

(the chamber won't produce resonant volume , then love of the other moves them to silence

Benjamin Krusling

Characters

Rough Sleeper , they are draped in bright , weathered fabrics & don't find meaning except by chance

Liz , the Resister in blue and troubled , is an investigator for the public defender's office , falls in love easily , attracted to the rhizomatic figure

@PriyaTwoTimes , the institution's representative / a cashier , sister , singer

Shame doesn't believe in himself , falls asleep in the Sleeper's ego

Tense Past is present

Setting

The Popeyes on 321 W. 125th St. in Harlem in the year of our lord, 20xx. It's February.

Scene

Rough Sleeper *has been in this Popeyes for years , in fear and tears about it .They see all .They interpolate Philoctetes .*

Tense Past : I must care for myself ...
Offend me . Tell me outrageous truths .
There's no one here but us so you die
& there's no black for you -- the risk is that --
there's no black because it doesn't exist .

Liz : I'm here for comfort . I'm here for footage
from closed circuit cameras (nourishment
in the limbic motor because the world ends
with no prison in it .) There's only the hungry

and thirsty child shaking at the Popeyes
with people in it . A robbery occurred
and my client needs a witness .

Rough Sleeper wails with their body .

Rough Sleeper : Closer . Closer . Friendship looks like this .

Their drapery moves as a harsh wind blows through . **Liz** approaches (in)peace .

Rough Sleeper : I've been cast away ,
so utterly alone where no one even walks by (Philoctetes) .
Theft -- its image descends in low resolve
& I see men walk in , weak beside the spirit's
red unfolding .
We're red at the center of the ego !political
so everything happens here . People move
north , they paint the social channel blue .

Liz : You speak as if wounded , this drapery
perpendicular to your low affect . You say " cooperation
as if it doesn't happen now .

Rough Sleeper : I say it can't be now cuz nothing is .

Liz : (icily

Rough Sleeper : (praising Heaven

@PriyaTwoTimes : (as if Rough Sleeper isn't happening) Can I help you ?

Liz : I have to see the footage , it's what I'm paid so little for .
I called you to talk -- your voice like
two doves unspooling the thread of dawn ... &c

@PriyaTwoTimes : And yours like a powdered jelly donut .
Come closer , Friendship . I don't want to lose
you in the corners of this room .

Liz : Do you have what we discussed ?

@PriyaTwoTimes : I have nothing .

Liz : Beautiful , but you'll slip away like that .

@PriyaTwoTimes : Don't be disappointed . We've met before .

Liz : I don't feel knowledge between us -- there's a person
here breaking in the far chair . You say you've known me
yet you act as if they don't exist . Your politics confuse me .
What kind of place is this ?

@PriyaTwoTimes : Somewhere satisfied by the supply chain .
Chickens come in smaller parts , then
we quickly fill the register !
Don't @ me -- ask the body in the seat .
You want crime & it can't occur without them .

Rough Sleeper is in agony .

Shame shrouds them in bad conscience , which is , at last , an ethical error .

Liz moves toward **Rough** and the light , that bright weight , oscillates in volume .

Liz : Will you speak ?

Rough Sleeper : (mortally

Liz : I see you suffer & I pity you .
I can't fathom why you're here .

Rough Sleeper : In all I saw before me nothing but pain ;
but of that a great abundance (P) . In the corner
of the franchise where chicken is battered
burned & spiced , where snow lines
the street outside with luminous sheets .
I can't sleep -- I'm in a martial situation ,
& competition comes from chains and start-ups .
Marcus Garvey raps the door at night .
I'm a black phantom . I can't die .
I'm afraid Heaven is a stage for Al Jolson
so my session state can't adjust .

Tense Past : They're here because you are –
when you leave they disappear .

Rough Sleeper : (rougher

I can't die and enter light because there isn't any .
I'm draped in the corner where crimes are recorded .
I'm poisoned -- my brain tastes my blood for it .

Liz : I can't help you , but I'd like to .
I have to know what you've seen ,
how you were feeling when you saw it .
I want to see it too . I'll help you .

Rough Sleeper : I was blue in the social channel .
. . . I thought people don't come here
to walk . They don't walk at all .
They eat salt off the tables .
So a disruption in the social space
makes eyes fall with shame .
(from the heart)
The problem is you need crime as a concept
for this discourse to occur . You're not bad ,
but the dramatic situation supposes far too much .

Liz : (depressed

Liz : @PriyaTwoTimes ?

!

@Priya : I am the vendor
I am the vendor
I am the vendor

I believe in collaborative effort

so long as it makes sense (Mach Hommy) .

Shame begins to sweep the floors , severe but fashion .

Liz : I'm in a Freudian storm and afraid of European references
My anger has turned against me & my depression is severe .
My sense is that there's no talking . Not here ,
where shame darkens the tabletops
& joy has gone missing .

My client is in cuffs –
she must be set free .

(to Rough Sleeper)

You said you see but what you say
deflates me . The dramatic situation is one
& we are in it . There's everything else ,
but not for us & you don't want that
anyway .

Tense Past : (is a human being & they love their Black mother .
Look: you speak to the victim in pain , that ball
of fabric immolating in the eatery .

Liz : (severely

Rough Sleeper : From me , all has been taken & I live
as an object of scrutiny , a social problem .
Guns , homes , wallets with bills and cards .
I sit inside the chicken franchise

as True Love's VIP (Burial) .

Liz : & the police ?

Rough Sleeper : In a batch , they come for me .

Liz : (beseechingly

Rough Sleeper : You want cameras – they aren't possible .

The image comes apart in your hands
& lives its half-life inside me .

Liz : But they'll lock my client up ,
far from those who know them !

Rough Sleeper : There's only Popeyes . Light , dark ,
the carceral turn – chicken , gravy ,
cajun spices . There's only the hungry
& thirsty person shaking so often
in sunlight .

(Lights strobe briefly , then one minute of horrible silence , soft weeping brings us
out)

Liz : (extravagantly
(tears the drapery from Rough Sleeper , it overtakes the stage
, is strewn about

(committing spiritual suicide

(**Shame** , **Tense Past** are lined up in the back
ground

Liz : (as if of a police officer
Do you really think like that ?
We're not trapped in the chamber ,
singing quiet beside the deep fryers –
What happens here touches the world
where weavers sing beside the loom
where synthetic color blooms
even warmly in the night time .
In other words , your quarantine exists
but only in a social sense -- it's not
an argument for selfhood .

Rough Sleeper is divinely stressed .

Liz : Compromised , leaking in my old
subject position – I promise I could
love you soon , so much .

(**Shame** , **Tense Past** flagellate them softly , with silks , this noise is broadly
heard

(after some time , **Rough Sleeper** has the last word

Rough Sleeper : (with Black clarity

Repetition with a difference ,
ten to twelve AM every day except
for Christmas & Easter . I think
chicken isn't infinite either , but I woke
up here , my head was wet with fine spray (P)
& the chamber refused my cries .

Holiness might not die . But
there they are , with their theories
of criminal justice . There's just the child –
or is it just the chicken ? me & Liz – or just
the politicians ? Through the glass doors ,
people walk , tell me I'm zooted ,
nuclear , extra !

Then they leave
& shoot each other
in the head with roses .

THE WALL-SIZED FISH

Nora Claire Miller

with music composed by Dallin Law

A **wall-sized fish** hangs on the wall next to a red telephone with a cord. Also next to the wall-sized fish is a wall-sized bell that can be hit with a mallet. On the side of the room is a **piano** and a **piano player**. Both must be “in costume.” On the floor stands **the television** (who is a living character). **You** are also in the room though you’re not sure where. The room rises and falls softly with every breath the house takes. There is a sofa and this is important. There is wallpaper and it has existed. There is nothing to lean against and this is important. The floor is made of driveway rocks. The air is not air but water. The room is a fish tank. No it is not. It is a room that you notice more and more the longer you are in it. Everything in this room can look at you.

THE RULES:

- Some words you are supposed to say should be played, instead, by the piano player. The piano player will translate the vowels of the your would-be words into musical notes in the G major scale. Sheet music will follow the words you were supposed to say.
- The letter “y” is, for the purposes of this play, a vowel.
- Parts of this play will occur simultaneously. Everyone must decide when to speak, even if this means speaking over one another. How this happens will be up to the people in the room. Everyone must cooperate and make sure everyone else is heard. On the other hand
- The only people who are not allowed to interrupt each other are the piano player and the piano.
- You are not allowed to talk when the piano is being played. But you must try anyway.

You (*on the phone*): Let me try it again. S - N - A - K - E.

(*pause*)

No, it’s a good question. I’m trying to figure out where your voice goes when you’re out at sea.

(*pause*)

Ninety-one. Ninety-two. What time is it?

(*pause*)

Okay, think of it like a game. It’s the end of the world and you hear someone shout

ing from the deck. It's the end of the world and I'm out here in the water. I'm not what I am until I am what I am. Can you breathe in here?

(pause)

Okay.

(pause)

Okay.

(pause)

Who else is there?

(pause)

I love you.

(pause)

I'll talk to you later.

(You hang up the phone and go watch TV. The problem with this happening on stage is that you are everywhere in the room at once. Sometimes you are not in the room at all, only your voice. But, and this is very important, this all must be accomplished with the actor remaining in one place. Perhaps this can be accomplished with light.)

Television: You can get the correct time at any moment of the day or night by telephoning the Speaking Clock. The Speaking Clock is an electro-mechanical device which announces the time correct to one-tenth of a second at ten-second intervals. Dial TIM for the right time.

Wall-Sized Fish (*speaking into telephone, almost instructively*): AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE ONE FORTY SEVEN AND THIRTY TWO SECONDS. (*Wall-Sized Fish hits a wall-sized bell with a mallet*).

You: When I was young and knew something about falling asleep, the trucks outside became part of my body. I've certainly died at some point in my life, even if I am not dead now.

Wall-Sized Fish (*still speaking into telephone*): AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE ONE FORTY EIGHT EXACTLY. (*Wall-Sized Fish hits bell*).

Wall-Sized Fish (*still to phone*): AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE ONE FORTY EIGHT AND FOURTEEN SECONDS. (*Wall-Sized Fish hits bell. Wall-Sized Fish hands you the phone*).

You (*into the phone*): I guess there was a part of me that had trouble catching my breath. I guess I could catch my breath if I had a kitchen window. I guess I need something to look out of. To catch myself looking out of something.

Television: Your voice is used only in conjunction with speaking. You walk around thinking that you own the place. You don't own the place. Look up at the skylight. Wandering around different book shops, different ways the outdoor space can scald you. To have nobody. A phone number scaled up pinned to the black and blue wall. To have nobody and to go and look at the water. How the fish jumped, split from the ocean and turned to face the sky. October was incredible this year.








Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE TWO O-SIX AND FOUR SECONDS. (*Wall-Sized Fish hits bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BLUSTER, WILL TURN BLUE. (*Bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE OCTOBER. (*Bell*)












Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE NO LONGER USEFUL. (*Bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE TWO O-SEVEN AND TEN SECONDS. (*Bell*)

You: It isn't October anymore . Swordfish swinging  in an old wooden cup . I didn't mean to say that . I didn't mean to talk about  ...  ... 

Television: We're sorry, but the number you have dialed has been changed, disconnected, or is no longer in service.







Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE TWO-O-SEVEN EXACTLY. (*Wall-Sized Fish hits bell*) AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE ONE-O-SEVEN EXACTLY. (*WSF hits bell, hangs up phone decisively*).

You (*You do not speak into the phone. You stare off into distance as you sit against wall. But also, you are everywhere else at once, as discussed prior. Don't be confused. You know where you are.*): What I wanted was for someone to answer  me. Answer  my question I said to people on the street. Answer  my question! Suddenly being at the laundromat. The old lady answered  the phone when I called but I forgot what I was calling  about. I looked up and my vision pressed against something—it was a blue plastic tarp just hanging there  and it really saw me. I found something awful  when I looked through the stained glass. Something  that saw me just as I was. I looked in at  it and it looked  out at me . Then the people were engulfed by water.

Television: Fires in stoves, fires in men, fires in the hearts of the beasts and ships. Fires in the fractured beds of trucks. Fires in the things that surround fires: obsidian. Wafer. Stone. Fires in the backs of cars, fires in birch trees, fires that look like nests, fires in desks at schools, fires reaching up for air. There was a man moving wildly towards. Fires in Nevada, small fires that don't look like fires but like women crying, fires on the hook, fires talking directly, glorious fires

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE MADE OF HUNDREDS OF NUMBERS TOO SMALL TO CALCULATE. (*Wall-Sized Fish hits bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE

You (*at any point, you can speak into the phone*): I couldn't tell you  about the rules I was using  because I didn't have any. I didn't have any  rules but  there were  fishing boats. There were 

in the hearts of small children. Someone is over there in the corner of the room. Clouds smeared up against the glass. On the other side of the glass, fires in mountain ranges. Fires in stovetops. Fires in the woods. I couldn't imagine what a fire was but then I saw one. Fires in sofas. Fires in firetrucks. Fires in granaries making the ground itch. have nobody. A phone number scaled up pinned to the black and blue wall. To have nobody and to go and look at the water. How the fish jumped, split from the ocean and turned to face the sky. October was incredible this year.













TWO-TWELVE AND SEVEN SECONDS. (Bell)




Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE TWO-O-EIGHT AND TWELVE SECONDS (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE TWO-O-NINE AND FIFTY-FOUR SECONDS (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE TWO-O-EIGHT AND TWELVE SECONDS (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE TWO-O-NINE AND FIFTY-FOUR SECONDS (Bell)








animals in the water. I looked  at them, their  big hearts ringing with milk and wire. There were  animals, and they  made the color blue in me, and they  shifted, like rain  from a sieve, and they  made me able to begin . I couldn't have been  wrong! I was  standing still  on the  shore.









You (*picking up phone, turning to face audience*): I wasn't, I guess, living right. There isn't any way  to live—you just say something . Say something  again.

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE SIX O'CLOCK EXACTLY. (*Wall-Sized Fish hits bell*)

Television: Tilapia, tuna, salmon, lobster, swordfish, starfish, trout, big mouth bass, big mouth big mouth, but you didn't think I knew. Something growing out of you like velcro, nerves. Your whole body up on a platform and you sitting on the sofa. What do you remember about summer? What do you remember about six o'clock? What do you remember about sending your regards? Where are you going? Are you looking for the wafer or the stone? What did you see when you looked out the window? What did you see when you handled the clock? Where are you going and on whose knees must you arrive there?

Wall-Sized Fish:
TWO O'CLOCK.
THREE O'CLOCK.
WHAT TIME IS IT. IT'S
TWO O'CLOCK. IT'S
THREE O'CLOCK.
IT'S TWO O'CLOCK.
WHAT TIME IS IT. IT'S
TWO O'CLOCK. IT'S
THREE O'CLOCK.
WHAT TIME IS IT. IT'S
TWO O'CLOCK. IT'S
THREE O'CLOCK.
WHAT TIME IS IT.
IT'S TWO O'CLOCK.
(*repeat, ringing bell as needed*).

You: I was writing . I mean I  couldn't get back to it . I started to fill with water . It felt like I just kept going  to the movie theater  to the cemetery, to the edge of town, like my muscles were yelling . I didn't ever know what time it was. I still don't know what time it is.

You: The airplanes grew  out of the ground! We turned  things on their heads! In the summer  we dug for fish! I wanted to remain  certain about this! I went  to the movie theater! I went to the cemetery ! I did things  I regretted! Still I made a point of it .

Television: Illustrations of men next to fountains. Illustrations of men talking to each other and to other men next to fountains. Illustrations of women next to rows of ducks. Illustrations of shopping for curtains. Illustrations of medications to cure The Big One. Illustrations of perfect circles. Illustrations of falling asleep. Pairs of fountains, pairs of little correct fountains. You didn't grieve correctly. You weren't given license to.

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE, THE TIME WILL BE INCORRECT. (*Wall-Sized Fish hits bell*)

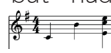
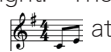
Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE, THE TIME WILL BE SHARP AND TUMULTUOUS. (*Bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE, THE TIME WILL BE STAPLED AND BRAVE. (*Bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE, THE TIME WILL BE WEAK-WILLED AND SMALL. (*Bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE, THE TIME WILL BE TWO-FIFTY-SIX. (*Bell*)

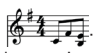



Wall-Sized Fish: AT THE TONE, THE TIME WILL BE TEN-SEVENTEEN. (*Bell*)

You: I got aboard a ferry once but had to leave  It wasn't right. The planks came  at me from the ground. I wasn't really living yet



Television (*now, it feels as though it is speaking almost directly to you—it stands up and stands over you. Slowly. You can react to what the television is doing. You can move, but you must stay very still.*): In the evening, simply dial TIM. You will be finally alive. The ground will surface, yawn, bear fruit. The tables will flip on their heads. The world will grow around you like a bread around wire, like gums around teeth. The tables in you will flatten. The surface of the earth will rise and crack. You will begin to have visions. You will find out that you are to become something: a candle, or a needle, or a cup.

Wall-Sized Fish (*very slowly, at the end of the television's speech, speaking thoughtfully into the phone*): AT THE TONE THE TIME WILL BE SEVEN-O-ONE. (*Bell*)

You: It's all been a racket, but it isn't anymore . And it's four o'clock  now. It's the month of October . The planet is engulfed with water. The people are engulfed  with water.

Television (*approaches you where you are sitting and looms over you, menacing*): Then the people were engulfed by water. Then the people were engulfed by quicksand. Then the people were engulfed by strength. Then the people were engulfed by anger. Then the people were engulfed by sardines. Then the

Wall-Sized Fish (*ecstatic, talking on the phone*): AT THE TONE, IT'S SEVEN O'CLOCK. (*Wall-Sized Fish hits bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: IT'S FOUR O'CLOCK. (*Bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: I WANT TO SAY (*Bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: I HAVE THE AUTHORITY TO SAY

Wall-Sized Fish: EVERYTHING IN ORDER OF SOME LAW (*Bell*)

Wall-Sized Fish: BUT THE LAW YOU LIVE IN IS A RED CURTAIN (*Bell*)

people were engulfed by the sheets of their beds. Then the people were engulfed by new ideas about the past. Then the people were engulfed by wild premonitions. Then the people were engulfed by freight trains. Then the people were then engulfed. Then the people became cities full of hats and wires and thought they had learned something that would substantially change them, finally. Then the people were engulfed by passions. Then the people longed to be engulfed by the kitchens in which such passions were built.

Wall-Sized Fish: IN THE INTEREST OF SAVING TIME (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: I MUST GET USED TO SOMETHING NEW (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: A SHAPE OF SAYING SOMETHING NEW (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: THE TIME IS ORDINARY (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: THE DAY IS ORDINARY (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: BESIDE YOU ON THE WALL TWO PEOPLE EXPERIENCING SOMETHING ORDINARY (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: WHAT'S ORDINARY (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: ISN'T IMPERFECT (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: CLEAN UP THE ROOM (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: TURN THE SOUND OFF (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: CALL THE PHONE NUMBER (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: TOMORROW. (Bell)

Wall-Sized Fish: THERE WILL BE SO MUCH MORE LIGHT

(Everyone turns to look at you, even the piano player, even the piano. Everything can suddenly see you. But nobody can hear you. You know what you must do).

You (*grabbing the phone*): I know what lives behind me, beside me, what comes out of the ground and tries to find me. When I get to the movies I'll try to talk about it. I'll be ready then. Yesterday I slept and the world outside was a giant tongue. I was warmer then than I've ever been in life, and now I'm dead again and it's October. It's still October. Listen to me. At the dock where the ships come in I said something awful but no one heard me. I am telling you now that you must listen to me. Listen to me. Listen to me.

Contributors

Benjamin Krusling is the author of a poetry collection, *Glaring* (Wendy's Subway, forthcoming 2020), and writes about black music.

Bernadette Mayer is the author of over 27 collections, including most recently *Works and Days* (2016), *Eating The Colors Of A Lineup Of Words: The Early Books of Bernadette Mayer* (2015) and *The Helens of Troy* (2013), as well as countless chapbooks and artist-books. She has received grants from The Guggenheim Foundation, Creative Capital, National Endowment for the Arts and the Foundation for Contemporary Arts. She is also the recipient of the 2014 Shelley Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America. From 1980-1984, she served as the director of the St. Mark's Poetry Project, and has also edited and founded *0 to 9* journal and United Artists books and magazines. She has taught at the New School for Social Research, Naropa University, Long Island University, the College of Saint Rose, Miami University and at University of Pennsylvania as a Kelly Writers House Fellow. Her influence in the contemporary avant-garde is felt widely.

Nora Claire Miller is a poet from New York City. Nora's poems have appeared in *Hobart*, *Tagverk*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *APARTMENT*, *Pulpmouth*, and elsewhere. Nora's chapbook, *LULL* (2020) was the winner of the 2019 Ghost Proposal Chapbook contest. Nora earned an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop.

David W. Pritchard is a poet and a scholar, but not a poet-scholar. Recent writings in verse and prose can be found in or are forthcoming from *The Tiny*, *Blush*, *jack-et2*, and *Historical Materialism*, among other places. David is diligently working on a dissertation about New Narrative, gay liberation, and the poetics of revolutionary consciousness. He lives in Holyoke.