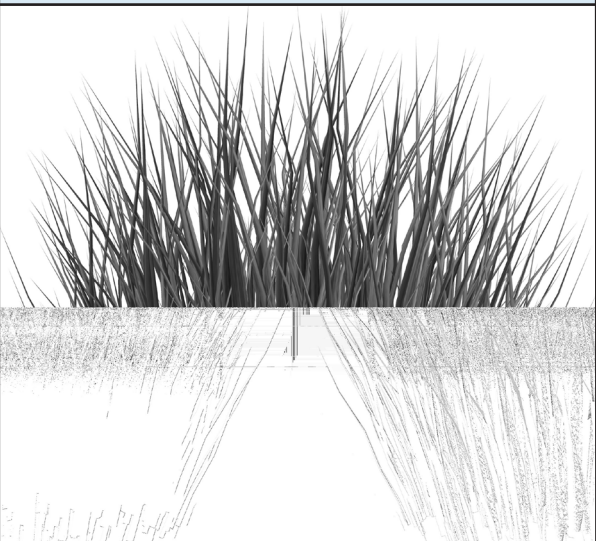


a meditation on intimacy and collapse



joey yearous-algozin

*this sense of soul extends
beyond this fugitive and transitory
point
of contact
with the external world
giving you something
like a general sense of union*

in the grasses::02

“May I disappear in order that those things that I see may become perfect in their beauty from the very fact that they are no longer things that I see.”

— Simone Weil

—*For a voice speaking in a room*—

as we begin I'd like you to find a spot on the floor
somewhere you can lie down comfortably
your feet falling away from each other
arms resting by your side
with the palms pointed towards the sky
I ask that you close your eyes
bringing your attention inward
and focus on the breath
noticing how your chest
and diaphragm
lungs and shoulders
rise and fall
in rhythm with the rate
in which you take in the air
of the room around you
with each breath
feel how your body pivots
as you breathe in

before pushing the breath back out
and in that brief pause I want you to remember
that each moment is a decision
each instant
a choice to continue
even with something as unconscious
as this intake of breath
and that we've made the choice
to be here
together
regardless of who you were before our meeting
the shame you felt in compromises you've made
to get here
or the pain of grinding out
one day after the next
doesn't exist within this moment
but on either side of it
here
the pressure you create internally
in the desire to love and suppress
anger or disappointment with the world
and its celebration of suffering
is replaced

with the gentle pressure of your body
pushing against the floor
that rises to meet it
cradling and supporting you
as you lie here in the ground's embrace
open to the vibrations traveling across
the earth's surface
the minor frequencies of the world beyond this room
which take on a rhythm that
the body cannot imitate
only stand in relation to
like the inhuman movement
of a muslin curtain
caught in the almost imperceptible breeze
traveling through an open window
in a hospital waiting room
where images of mountains and streams
cast against blue skies
play on video screens mounted to each wall
chairs surrounded by muslin dividers
providing a modicum of privacy
allowing you to feel the isolation
that something like illness has caused in your life

as you bring your attention away from your breath
shifting it to the moving fabric
you begin to realize
that no matter how hard you concentrate
you can't sync your breath
with its faint undulations in the air
in which you're embedded
and it's this incommensurability
this barely noticeable distance between your body
and its surroundings
that allows for this expression
of inhuman movement to emerge
mere repetition of an arbitrary event
that reminds you
however faintly that you are not
the center of this world
but its periphery
or rather
that your presence
here
in this room
does not altogether matter
and it's this meaninglessness

the absence of your need to take up this space
that shows you
that all we're occupying together
here and now is simply
a place of waiting
and in this way
each case is terminal
but waiting can assume its own contours
and geography
motionless and still
suggesting a shape to the sloping land
that falls away from your resting body
in the same way that
say
a red winged blackbird's presence in the grass
surrounding a retention pond
at the back of a parking lot of a half-built subdivision
articulates the larger field around it
as it rises up
taking flight
or the imagined sound of the wind's movement
through the same grass
just as sound effects have been added

to the nature documentary on the waiting room tv
noise dubbed over an animal's movement
without which we could not recognize
the scene as real
and as you return to the breath
I want you to place yourself in this field
lying down in the tallgrass
feeling the stems break under the weight of your body
as you lie across the damp ground
that never quite lost its dew from the night before
breathing in
you feel yourself sinking into the soft earth
the points of contact at the feet and hands spreading
to the lower back and shoulders
your vision directed towards the sky
and the few clouds moving lazily across it
the grasses' inflorescence barely visible
at the edges of your sight
as you lie here
you can feel each blade bending away from its stem
lightly touching your skin
as you breathe out
sinking deeper into the earth

and as you descend lower
feeling the cool earth cover your body
these points of contact
become a holistic sense of the ground
you continue to breathe
sinking further
until the dirt covers you up to your shoulders and chest
your buttocks and thighs
a few grains of wet dirt make their way into your mouth
which you may welcome and press with your tongue
against the hard palate
of the roof
of your mouth
as the dirt slips beneath the tongue
or collects in the dark crevice where the gums and lips meet
caught in the gaps in the teeth
you continue to breathe
feeling your body sink lower into the ground
joining the emptiness of the space
between the parking lot
and a copse of deciduous trees
that block the wind traveling across empty lots
in the distance

returning your attention to the breath
and the pause between this breath and the next
in which you can hear the sound of a stray car
punctuating the noise of the world
as you continue to lie
on this fallow strip of land
feeling the warmth of the sunlight
as you breathe in
sinking further into the cool dirt beneath you
these points of contact spreading throughout your body
as the dirt covers your hands
which until this moment remained open to the sky
as if to welcome the hand of another
anticipating its warmth
pressing against the skin
such that within that touch
we can locate something
we might've called the soul
a sense of ourselves
come alive through this brief contact
but as the dirt covers your cheeks and head
everything
but your mouth and nose

this sense of soul extends
beyond this fugitive and transitory point
of contact
with the external world
giving you something
like a general sense of union
or that the body
dissolving the boundaries
between itself
and outside
becomes something like a stage
rather than an actor on it
or more accurately
through this removal and immersion
into the background of an inconsequential
and forgotten space
all there is to do now is be present
in this moment
waiting
as it takes over
your hands that are now buried under the earth
as the grass begins to grow in the dirt
once disturbed by your presence

as the individual seed germinates
pushing through your body
piercing the now pliant flesh
as it reaches towards the open air
in this process of growth and elongation
as each individual shoot extends towards the sky
as the dirt fills in and
the ground covers with vegetation
and the copse continues its collective movement
towards the empty lot
beside this patch of grass
and beyond
such that their roots come to obliterate
all memory of your presence

or that it's something like a camera
left in an abandoned lot with its shutter open
passively recording whatever
moves across its field of vision
or its opposite
bathing you and me
in images streaming from its lens
as we stand before it
knowing that what it articulates
is simply a relation
like the one that is developing between us
now
a speaker and listener
a kind of communication
that can only be spoken
from one to another
because two are necessary to produce an encounter
or more accurately

express a form of love
in the insistence that we're sufficient
individually
or together
rejecting these narratives of pain and vengeance
as all stories we tell ourselves
about ourselves
are only stories of love and death
such that when we injure each other
it's only because we're trying
to correct an imbalance
we feel within ourselves
a hope to create that imbalance
externally
to give birth to it in the world
and for this reason
any injury
no matter how minor
is a form of evil
that is ours and ours alone
it took me a long time to no longer feel shame
for having created so much evil in the world
to accept that in no small part

this is what I am
and have it become something like a bare fact
contorted into something inanimate
but temporary
like how light shimmers
across the silver plastic
of a discarded balloon
caught in the top branches of a leafless tree
or weeds that seep through cracks
of broken sidewalk
to show that it is only this
minor form of life that is inextinguishable
we can begin with an idea of a world
reflected within the human
something like a lake
mirroring the sky above it
and the grass
that grows along its edges
as light strikes against water
a 'simple joy'
but one that is aware
that it is temporary
a positioning of the body

lying here
receptive to the world's fragility
understanding that what arises
from such a meeting
is valuable only because it's unnecessary—
this coming together is simply
a movement towards nothing
save a direction
and momentum
or more accurately
a kind of acknowledgement
that we live within the reality
of a final moment
in which what enters the world
is simply an end

to regard what I've given you
or rather
what we've given each other
as little more than a companion
that brings a kind of joy
in the same quiet way a cat
or dog
asleep at the foot of your bed
might accompany you
as you start to drift off
only vaguely aware of these images
which emerge
in the drowsy half-attention
of your conscious mind
acknowledging each one
before sending them on their way
letting them spread out before you
like stars

growing in number
as they group themselves
loosely
into constellations
the names of which escape you
as you begin to connect them
with faint incandescent lines
joining them together in shapes that resemble
say
a skeleton
poorly sketched
across the black expanse of your mind
not unlike your own
onto which you can briefly direct your attention
and as you drift
towards this projection of your corporal body
the latter becoming more abstract as you approach
so that this mental calm
couples with a numbness
beginning in your solar plexus
radiating out
to the extremity of each limb
until this muted vibration pulsates throughout your body

such that the pain that accompanies you
in your daily life
the suffering that forms
the way in which you recognize
that the visual plane you experience
is your own
becomes only a distant sensation
that seems to continue to move further away
as you watch it recede
you realize that your own body is not unlike
say
the stars
the sharpness of their edges
against the blackness of the sky
disappears
the boundaries of the world
in which you find yourself embedded
grow less and less distinct
so too does your own body
as if your muscles and tendons
your very flesh
had begun to dissolve
leaving little trace

nothing more than a faint outline
and in this way
we come to understand
anything I have to say to you
now
or what we've already said to each other
is of little importance
other than creating something for us
to take with us
so that in this moment of calm
we can experience
sitting here
in each other's company
something
like the moment
before the last
in which someone
who perhaps resembles us
but is not us
will share
before they watch themselves
slip off together

i know flowers to be funeral companions

–Etel Adnan

that we teach ourselves
how to die
in the shadow of any ordinary thing
say
a bouquet of white and blue
paper flowers
pinned to the wall
beneath two makeshift
picture frames
that even as it decays
as the paper browns along its edges
collecting dust as it turns
from eggshell blue to a duller color
still holds
the memory of its occasion and the labor

of its folding
in the same way
the body breaks down
becoming something intangible
that refuses
to be something other
than decay
our disappearance
written in the hand
or glance across a room
knowing that not only your presence will dissolve
but the room itself
will collapse
leaving the space open
for whatever animals may wander in
tentatively
at first
as they move through this space
that still holds a trace of our presence

Joey Yearous-Algozin is a poet, publisher and educator. His most recent book is *A Feeling Called Heaven* (Nightboat, 2021). Other books include *The Lazarus Project*, *Utopia*, and *Air the Trees*. He co-authored a trilogy of texts with Holly Melgard: *Holly Melgard's Friends and Family*, *White Trash*, and *Liquidation*. He is a founding member of the publishing collective Troll Thread and lives in Brooklyn, NY.

COLOPHON

What Happens: in the grasses is a semi-annual publication series seeking works that specifically address theater's ability to transcend political and geographical limitations. Taking its title from Gertrude Stein's "In the Grass (In Spain)," this series investigates within and without boundaries of genre while focusing on works whose poesis involves the transformation of the social. For more information visit whathappens.world

The editor would like to thank Judith Goldman, Myung Mi Kim and Steve McCaffery, the Gray and McNulty Chairs of the Poetics Program at SUNY – University at Buffalo, for their support of this project.

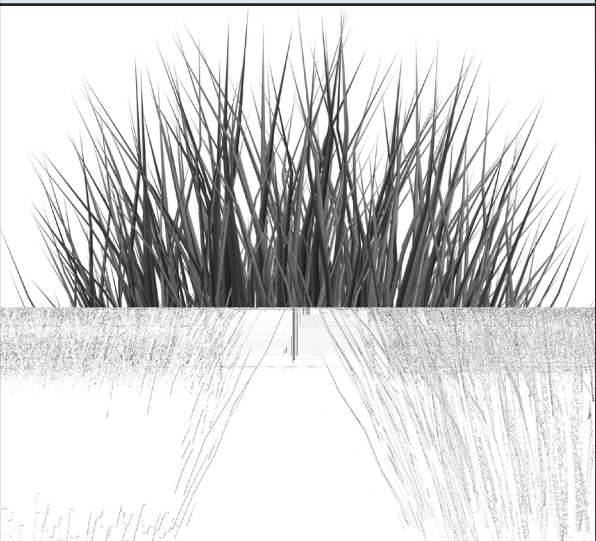
Series Editor: Bianca Rae Messinger

What Happens Editors: Toby Altman & Bianca Rae Messinger

:: Buffalo, NY 2022



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