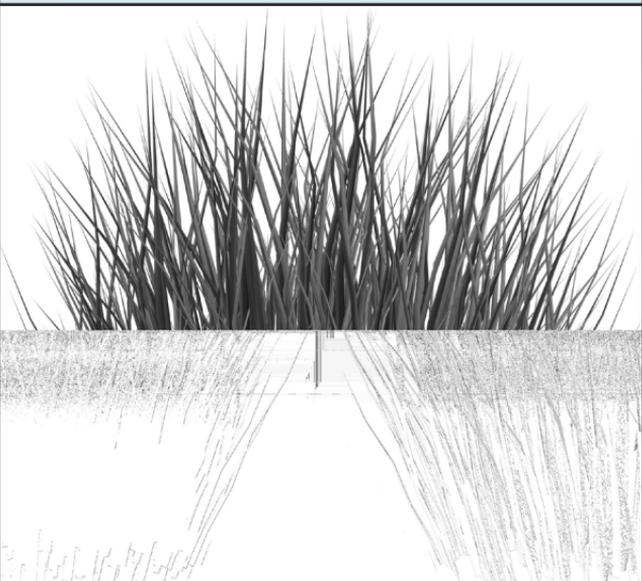




# a meditation on intimacy and collapse



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.

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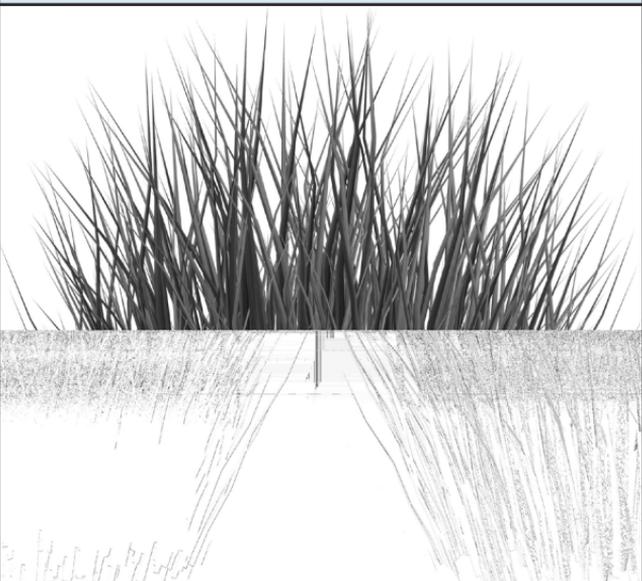
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