

**PEAK** JOURNEY

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**PEAK** JOURNAL

2020

**Arts + Cultural**  
**Programming**  
— Montclair State University —



## Editor's Note

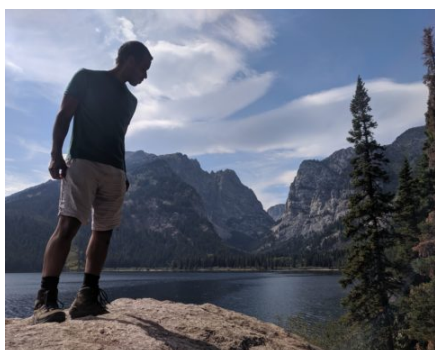
*I am imagining something experiential, something felt.*

## Claudia La Rocco

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What do I remember of who and where I was in early May, when I sent invitations out to Jeanine, Rashaun, and Simone? I was wanting something made of time and space, something embodied ... perhaps this is why the first people I thought of were dance artists. There are of course variations in what I said and wrote to each of them, and also things that repeated. This sentence is one of the repetitions: I am imagining something experiential, something felt.

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### A Score for Survival While Black

BY RASHAUN MITCHELL



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BY SIMONE FORTI



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BY JEANINE DURNING





## I am imagining something experiential, something felt.

BY CLAUDIA LA ROCCO



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Each iteration of the Peak *Journal* takes off, in direct and oblique ways, from a conversation with Jed, the sort of meandering, excitable conversation that leads one to believe there is a definite path to follow, without having a sense of what that path might be.



When I look back at the fragmented record of our exchange that exists in my notebook, one of those pleasingly cheap school COMPOSITION books with the blue marbled cover, I see this, scribbled in emphatic black ink:

“What is this moment? Completely cockamamie, who knows ... wrestling with the unknown ... which is performance, being in the studio.”

And this:

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*“The overall motif of the system is urgency” — the word urgency is circled twice — “if we were in some deluded moment when we thought we had all the time in the world — we now know we don’t.”*

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My handwriting is large and loopy, the way it gets when I am trying to keep up with an expansive speaker. I believe in both of these excerpts I am quoting (perhaps misquoting) Jed, but I can’t be entirely sure — it’s possible the words belong to Stephanie Haggerstone, who was also part of the call, or (even less likely) are something I thought in response to something one of them said.



I remember the idea of surviving, of dailiness. I remember Jed saying we could have a publication written entirely by one person, and certainly that we should do fewer pieces and make them longer. This felt right, to give the writers time to stretch out, to get lost, turn around, start again. To end with a space big enough for a reader to do these things as well.

I remember seeing Jed and Stephanie in domestic spaces, how there is something special and intimate about seeing colleagues in their makeshift offices. It can be unpleasantly easy to forget that arts administrators are humans — maybe especially when you are one of these administrators, when you are thinking (and not thinking) of yourself. The domestic space pushes against this forgetting.

I have now had the conversation with several people, that there is something to this long time of being apart from others, some of us truly apart from all physical contact, that something is emerging internally, this sense of returning to ourselves, our younger selves, ones not so fully shaped by the gaze of others, the company of others — as if we have



been inside of molds that now have cracked, and so we seep out in different, unpredictable directions. I think of how on some days, it seems impossible to be seen by others over a video call, and whether this is a product of also having to see oneself (that hateful little corner of the screen) or simply that we no longer have the endurance we did before, to be seen on a daily basis. I think of all the times someone says their connection is not good enough to allow for the video function to work, how many times this might better be understood as a metaphor for another sort of connection

*What is necessary to say now? What shouldn't wait? Whose voices do we feel the need to hear?*

Those are three questions I asked when reaching out to these contributors.

I had in my mind the memory of a late-night conversation with Rashaun, listening to him talk about survivalism. Where we do and do not expect to see Black people. Talking about what it would take to get out of Manhattan, where we were then. Understanding, as the conversation continued past the point of casual, that I was staring into a space of deep, unsettling inquiry.

I had in my mind Jeanine's practice of ongoingness, which I understand (or perhaps misunderstand) in part as a trusting in and of uncertainty — the promises and dangers of such an ethos. Thinking of her movement quality, the way a certain type of weathervane continually, deftly, delicately reorients, never quite settling. Thinking of a sort of dance that does not require an audience.

I had in my mind something I heard Simone say (or was this written, or am I imagining it?), a very early memory she has of escaping Fascist Italy with her family, how the memory is a bodily feeling, a sense feeling, the energy and tension in the car. And then Simone in rural Vermont, in Los Angeles, in fancy museums all over the world: how I have only ever experienced her, on the page and the stage, as utterly herself. How rare that is. How exquisite.

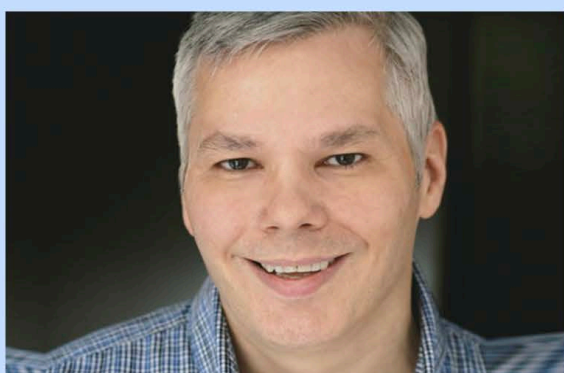
*I hope you're doing well in this fast-moving time full of danger and promise*, Simone wrote in a June email. I've thought of these words often since then. Of getting larger by being small. Of something experiential, something felt. The wind rushing through and past the trees.



Photo by: José Carlos Teixeira

**Claudia La Rocco's** work explores hybridity and improvisation, moving between poetry, prose, and performance. Her books include the selected writings *The Best Most Useless Dress* (Badlands Unlimited), the chapbook *I am trying to do the assignment* ([2nd Floor Projects]), and the novel *petit cadeau* (published in print, digital, and live editions by The Chocolate Factory theater). With musician/composer Phillip Greenlief she is *animals & giraffes*, an experiment in multidisciplinary improvisation that has released the albums *July* (Edgetone Records) and *Landlocked Beach* (with Wobbly; Creative Sources). She edited *I Don't Poem: An Anthology of Painters* (Off the Park Press) and *Dancers, Buildings and People in the Streets*, the catalog for Danspace Project's PLATFORM 2015, for which she was guest artist

curator. She has been a columnist for *Artforum*, a cultural critic for WNYC New York Public Radio, and from 2005-2015 was a critic and reporter for *The New York Times*; her writings have been widely anthologized, including in *Imagined Theatres: Writing for a theoretical stage* (Daniel Sack, ed. Routledge) and *On Value* (Ralph Lemon, ed. Triple Canopy). La Rocco has received grants and residencies from such organizations as the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Creative Capital/Warhol Foundation, and Headlands Center for the Arts. She is editorial director of Open Space, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's live and online commissioning platform, and teaches writing at the University of the Arts' Dance MFA program. Her *Quartet* is forthcoming from Ugly Duckling Presse's 2020 Pamphlet Series, and she is at work on her second novel, *The Ongoing Sea*.



**David DeWitt (senior editor)** spent almost 20 years as an editor at The New York Times, including many years working on the Arts desk handling articles in dance, theater, music, and other forms. He also wrote film, theater, and television reviews for the paper and last year taught creative nonfiction through Syracuse University. David is a member of the Screen Actors' Guild and Actors Equity.



# Score for Survival While Black

BY RASHAUN MITCHELL



## I

In first grade, learn about Noah's ark. On the bus home, watch the rain pour down. Think about what you'd take with you, what you'd preserve. Your family, your friends, your white German shepherd, Angel. When the clouds open briefly and a shaft of light descends, believe it is a real angel coming to save you because you're not prepared for the end of the world. Your backpack contains an empty lunchbox, your favorite calculator, a sheet of stickers, your workbook, and some pencils. Draw your house with all of your possessions, half submerged in the spillover from the flooded channel at the end of your street. Draw your green punch buggy floating away. Use a forced perspective.

Later, when your little world does end, you will leave this home and part of yourself behind. Loss is your teacher. The journey south will take you to a landlocked part of Georgia where the roads are red clay and the water hangs in the air, thick like your bushy hair. Here, nature tells you exactly who you are. You are an outsider. You don't know how to run barefoot in the fields. You've never seen hairy ants the size of your thumb. You are not ready. You are not ready. You are not ready.



While you shell the pecans on the porch, conjure up your own make-believe worlds. When the bowl is full, draw elaborate maps of these faraway places. They don't smell like the pig farm down the street. There are no snakes, no tall, tick-filled grasses. No sticker briars, no bush branches that adults use for switching you. In these fantasies, there are no punishments because there is no danger.

Yet be prepared for your imagination to crack like the shell of a nut, because here in the rural South, danger is everywhere. It is 1985 and segregation lingers in these parts, so only venture out to the yard, the neighbor's, the church, and the corner store. "Out there" is not a place for you. To help you understand, *really* understand your place, the switch is your teacher. It's brutal, but it works. Choose wisely. Snap off the right size branch. Too big and it will sting too much; too small and the adults will choose for you, raise the stakes.

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*The lesson learned: Nature is not your friend. Nature is the white man's domain. Do not trespass. Do not draw attention to yourself.*

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As soon as you are old enough, move to the big city. This is your place. There are people like you here. People who wear shoes. Really nice shoes. Survive the city by first becoming a student, then a starving dancer. A working artist who is still broke. Trek to Brooklyn for the minimum wage. Survive the heat of the moment, the falling in love and the inevitable break of your heart. Journey to the Bronx for the pulsing crowd. Let the beat reset you before you rest your head in Queens. Every day a different battle. Break your back in the daily grind. Find the medicinal heat patches in Chinatown. Let the burn settle into your skin. On Sunday dance again in the sweaty club. On Monday dance in the store window. On Tuesday dance in the dirty studio, then make your way to the roof to see the fires rage in the skyline.



Survive 9/11 by walking up the perfectly straight, man-made avenues. The smoke rises behind you. Look around to see ash-covered humans, making the same choice as you. Walk for miles. Doubt this choice again and again. But find safety in numbers. Think, perhaps your dance training can provide you with quicker muscular reflexes than most. Perhaps it gives you a sharper sense of space, of time. Perhaps it can make you a fitter survivor.

Your dance bag contains foot tape, a towel, and tennis balls for releasing tension in that lower part of your back, which will never fully heal. You are not ready. By nightfall, walk across the Triborough Bridge, back to where the brown people live. You are home, but you are not safe. Look back across the river, remember the ash-covered humans and the sense that moving is better than staying. Remind yourself of Octavia Butler's "Parable of the Sower." The story is your teacher. It informs you that the city is a target, a rich person's domain. Carry the trauma of displacement with you. It will help you later.

Continue to survive the city for more than 20 years. Become recognized for your talents. Hear that you have great rhythm, that your dancing is animalistic. Crawl like a panther. Do not expect to be seen as angelic or classical or refined.

## II

**M**aster your attitude. Learn to cope with being alone. Become familiar with token status. Realize that you can feel lonelier with others than by yourself. You must experience high doses of



stress, develop many ulcers. The bleeding pain in your gut will mask the hurt inflicted by those around you. It will give you thick skin.

Master your fear. If you can't even enjoy a long-distance run, how can you feel empowered to discover? The imagination cracks like a nut. Take the time to practice the body positions and guttural shouts you learned in self-defense class. The heel palm strike. The groin kick. The headlock release.

Prep your urban environment because disaster is already and always here. The streets are a jungle of potential police violence. The Great Outdoors is literally just outside your door. The apocalypse is here, and the government won't help you when the hurricane floods your city and your water becomes contaminated and the pandemic sickens your loved ones. Put a drop of bleach in each jug of water. It will kill most things and keep harmful bacteria from growing over the coming months. Start a garden in the abandoned lot down the block, or harvest some of the vegetables from the church plot.

Rely on yourself but seek out the wisdom of others. You cannot survive in isolation. Rally the troops. They are your new teachers. Help each other snuff out the shame of slavery and its proximity to the dirt. Seek out the remnants of the savage. Reclaim that word. Learn to hunt, fish, trap, and forage. Retract the elbow and focus the eye in your practice of archery. Conjure the precision needed to skin the animal and tie the knots. Grasp the flint and strike. Blow, and add more kindling. Most importantly, learn how to dress a wound, how to breathe into someone else's lungs. You are almost ready – but when the government collapses, all bets are off. Activate the neighborhood watch. Look to the rooftops. The pigeons will flock above. When they flip, that is your signal: Run. It's time to leave the city.

Head for the woods. Find a hideout. But first, read "Dies the Fire" and watch "Revolution." Imagine local, bigoted militias gone rogue. Study "Alone" and "Naked and Afraid" to get a mental picture of what it's like in the wilderness. These shows will tell you that you need a pot, a machete, netting, and a tarp. Don't worry that you don't see any contestants who resemble you. We are not prepared. We don't go into the wilderness, not anymore. You will have your life on your back. Your food, rope, book, first aid, weapon of choice. Learn to build a shelter. Learn to clock the sun in the sky. Look for the mysterious collecting of birds and insects to forecast rain. Your body is strong. Nature is stronger.

### III

**S**pace and time stretch before you. Air fills your lungs. Sweat drips down your face. Take in the dappled light in the morning, the strafing light of the afternoon. Sleep under the stars. Experience the freedom of anonymity. Still, when you encounter others, remember you are a visitor. You are always the only Black person. Your gear is not as expensive. But your survival bag holds a pocketknife, bug spray, water bottle, dried food, headlamp, water purifier, first-aid kit. You are ready. Unearth the stories you were never taught.

Go West. Look for the horse tracks of the Buffalo Soldiers. Walk along the paths they cleared through the old growth forests in what we now call the national parks. You might see Shelton Johnson. You might see a Black female park ranger in the Tetons at the Laurance S. Rockefeller Preserve. Try not to stare. For your sake and theirs, pretend it's normal. You can speculate as to how they got here. You can even take this jumble of images, past and present,



and stitch it to Brianna Noble riding like a modern-day queen on horseback through the streets of Oakland in protest of racial injustice in 2020.

Go North. To the shores of Lake Michigan 101 years ago. Picture the Chicago race riots erupting from the death of a Black boy. See if you can make out the exact line of segregation in these waters. Imagine drifting into the wrong side and drowning from the blow of a thrown rock. Do not believe the lies they tell, that Black people's bones are denser, feet flatter. Do not fear the water. Make yourself swim across this invisible border over and over again for endurance. Do the backstroke, the breaststroke, and most importantly the freestyle.



Go farther North. Into the falling snow and melting glaciers of a dying world. Visualize yourself as a contemporary pioneer. Follow the route Matthew Henson took on that merchant ship. Imagine his many voyages to the Arctic, learning the Inuit language, dog sledding. Imagine you help to discover the North Pole, but nobody really knows. Share these lessons. Make copies of his memoir, "A Negro Explorer at the North Pole." Stuff them into bottles and send them back East, out into the Atlantic Ocean where much has been lost. Think of the North Pole not as a place, but a force, with the power to move its axis, the power to be rewritten.

Go South. Where it all began. Visit the sites of the old turpentine forests — "the 10,000 faces in the piney woods" from Zora Neale Hurston's "Mules and Men." Imagine a time when African-Americans were forced to extract the saps and then cut down these forests. Listen for the ghosts of maroons who escaped. Picture the wilderness as a site of fear, liberation, and redemption. Meditate on the hidden settlements of the Southern swamps. Imagine a



partnership with the other brown people, the Indigenous ones who share their skills and languages with you. Dream of uniting with them and defending your freedom in the Seminole Wars.

You are an individual and a people unbound by these laws. Go forth into these uncharted lands.

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*Conquer yourself. Expand your mind. Extend your limbs to the four corners. Jump until your breath becomes heavy. Then sink your toes into the red soil.*

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## IV

**D**ancing is what you have, but it won't provide you with stability. Your success and your endurance will make you a teaching artist but won't give you enough money to buy a home where you've performed this success. Fashion yourself for academia and philanthropic foundations to get a share of that institutional money harvested from the blood and sweat of slaves. Your money will make you a desirable candidate for a loan, but it won't teach you about your history. It won't replace the stories of runaways being lynched in the forest. It won't rewrite the Jim Crow laws and the redlining and the mass incarceration. It won't suppress the fear that your loan will be taken away once they find out who you are. It won't shake the notion that this land is not your land. And it still won't be worth 40 acres.

Take root in seven acres in the Catskills. It's more than most have, and it's enough to sense the imprint of the people who roamed the land before you. It's enough to sense the seasonal changes and to ask how much an environment changes you. Make sure there is a well and a stream. Rebuild the old home on this land. Make it yours. Make it a sanctuary. Find a way to install a wood stove. If the power goes out, you can heat and feed yourself.

Learn about the trees on this land. Blue spruce, silver birch, black willow, red maple, oak, ash, beech, fir, cedar, linden, poplar, hemlock, walnut, cherry, chestnut, apple. Buy the cider press and the canning supplies. Look out for the white pine's spiral structure, vulnerable to high winds. When propelled, its branch will make a glorious spinning leap into the air, followed by a snap in the knee upon landing. Cut down the dying trees and the trees good for burning. Give thanks. Chop and haul the wood, stack it in rows to prevent rot. A pattern becomes a portal.

Be brave enough to attempt recreation in nature. Before nature's healing powers can settle in, the current will capsize the kayak. Is that why the rivers are called *kills* here? The Dutch have a sinister sense of humor. River roadkill. Black oil spill. Paddles float away. But you are prepared for this. Flip the boat. Take a breath. Then carry on down. Carrion floating between these mountains carved by glaciers. Try to notice the sheer beauty of the landscape. American flags dot the bank. A willow tree reaches from the shore to the center of the stream like a lifeline. A horizontal trunk begging to be adorned with a tire swing. You will wonder if any bodies have ever hanged from that tree.

In the summer, eat food from your own garden and from the nearby farms. In the fall, pick the apples and harvest the grapes. Watch the leaves turn and blanket the ground. In the long, dark winter, wrap yourself in wool. Shovel the snow and build the fire. In the spring, look for the quick-paced choreography

of birds as they flit from branch to branch. Goldfinch, house finch, purple finch, robin, chickadee, oriole, cardinal, mourning dove, red-winged blackbird, dark-eyed junco, tufted titmouse, scarlet tanager, blue jay, nuthatch, woodcock, sparrow, indigo bunting, Northern flicker, rose-breasted grosbeak, hairy woodpecker. The hummingbird will hover in anticipation. The Eastern Phoebe will pump her tail to the beat. The common grackles will usher in a climactic, ensemble finale.

You are home.



## V

**P**ull out the invasive species. Forward bends, low squats, heel pushes, and torso heaves. Go all the way to the roots. It will break you physically and mentally. You cannot excise the trauma of the Middle Passage. You cannot forget the pain and suffering of building this country, making it great. You will always remember the whippings and the burning crosses. But trust that you will endure. This wild unknown thing can be cultivated into a recognizable form. You must remain steadfast. The weeds will always demand their indistinct sprawl, their right to dominate this Earth.

Plant the tomatoes, beans, kale, squash, and radishes. Water and wait. To steward a plant from seed to fruit is to be beholden, is to be held. To do this again and again is to develop a symbiotic relationship. Wilderness is inside of you. You are your own teacher. Black survivalism has the same ambition as Afrofuturism, only it's concerned with realizing that vision in the present. Make that shit happen *now*. Locate your own form of resistance. Go backward



or forward to a harmonious and holistic relationship with nature and place, to a time where natural resources aren't sapped and hoarded, where pollution doesn't harm the poor. Become autonomous from the roving and virtual space of society and embedded in the local geographic experience. One day, when Afrofuturism is Afropastime, you will travel off this planet into the stars as an evolved and hybrid mutation of your environment.

✱

*Perform a south-facing ritual with no beginning, middle, or end.*

*Draw a circle around yourself.*

*To survive you must conjure the ancestors.*

*Your ritual can be chaotic like the natural order of the universe.*

*The moon can share the sky with the stars.*

*Stand tall. Step to the left, then right.*

*To survive is to be vigilant, alert.*

*Shake your whole body. Let the rhythm grow and subside.*

*Believe in and submit to change of varying scales.*

*Choose a self-propagating, asymmetrical, informal structure that is ever-blooming.*

*This disarray will create diversity.*

*Your day lilies follow your phlox. Your irises precede your peonies.*

*Your wildflowers cannot be tamed.*

*Lie flat on your back. Look up and out.*

*To survive you must reconcile the past, present, and future.*

*Repeat.*

*Survival is accumulation. Survival is devotion. Survival is creation.*



**RASHAUN MITCHELL** is a choreographer, performer, and teacher living and working in New York. He is a 2014 Guggenheim Fellow and recipient of the 2012 NY Dance and Performance Award (Bessies) for Outstanding Emerging Choreographer. His choreography has been commissioned by New York Live Arts, Danspace Project, Baryshnikov Arts Center, REDCAT, ICA Boston/Summer Stages Dance, La Mama Moves Festival, Mount Tremper Arts, Skirball Center at NYU, the Museum of Arts and Design, The Lab, ODC, and at numerous site-specific venues and universities. Other awards include a 2007 Princess Grace Award: Dance Fellowship, a 2013 Foundation for Contemporary Art "Grant to Artist," and a 2011 New York Dance and

Performance (Bessie) Award for "Sustained achievement in the work of Merce Cunningham 2004-2012." Mitchell is a Cunningham Trustee and licensed stager of the repertory. He has taught master classes throughout the country and is currently on faculty at NYU Tisch School of the Arts. His work with ongoing partner, Silas Riener, involves the building of collaborative worlds through improvisational techniques. Together they have received a 2014 City Center Choreographic Fellowship, were selected for LMCC's Extended Life Development Program, Wellesley College Artist in Residence, Headlands Center for the Arts Residency and Center for Ballet and the Arts Fellowship. Their work together has been commissioned by BAM/Next Wave, The Barbican, EMPAC, The Walker Art Center, MCA Chicago, The Wexner, On The Boards, Philadelphia Museum of Art, SFMOMA and MoMA PS1.

## Poems from the Lockdown

Los Angeles Spring 2020

Drawings from the brook at Mad Brook Farm

Vermont. August 2019

BY SIMONE FORTI



I

Finally, it's good

this plague

Something had to

stop us

We knew it

From the beginning

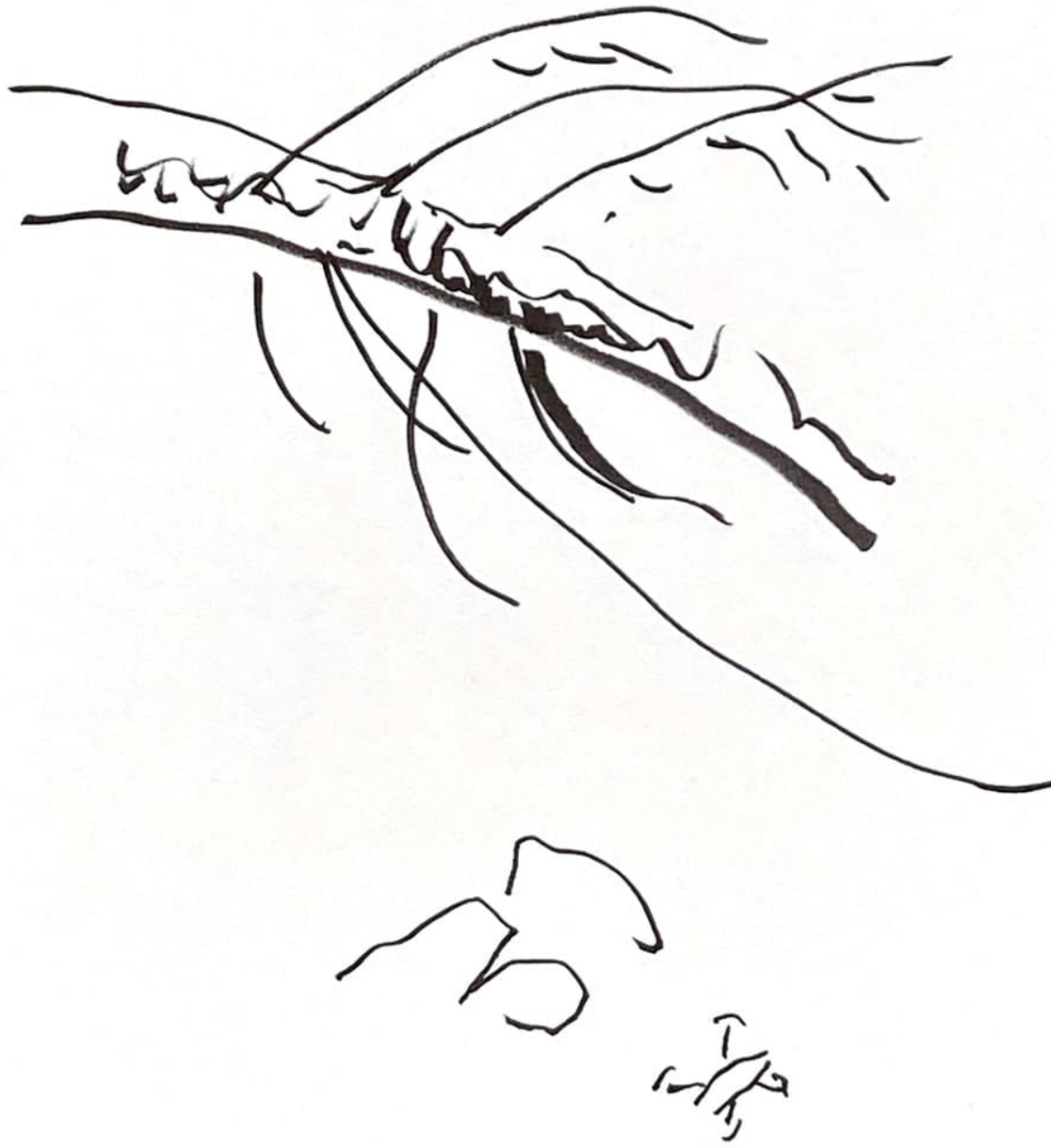
it's a cycle



Hard to be there

when it comes

But it's good



## II

You know the feel

of swinging on a

swing the part

before the drop

time

and training eyes and hands on solid

this or that

no endgame

A spit of lawn between low bushes

a city block where a crow walked with me

Poetry

Shoes like bread

Suspension without

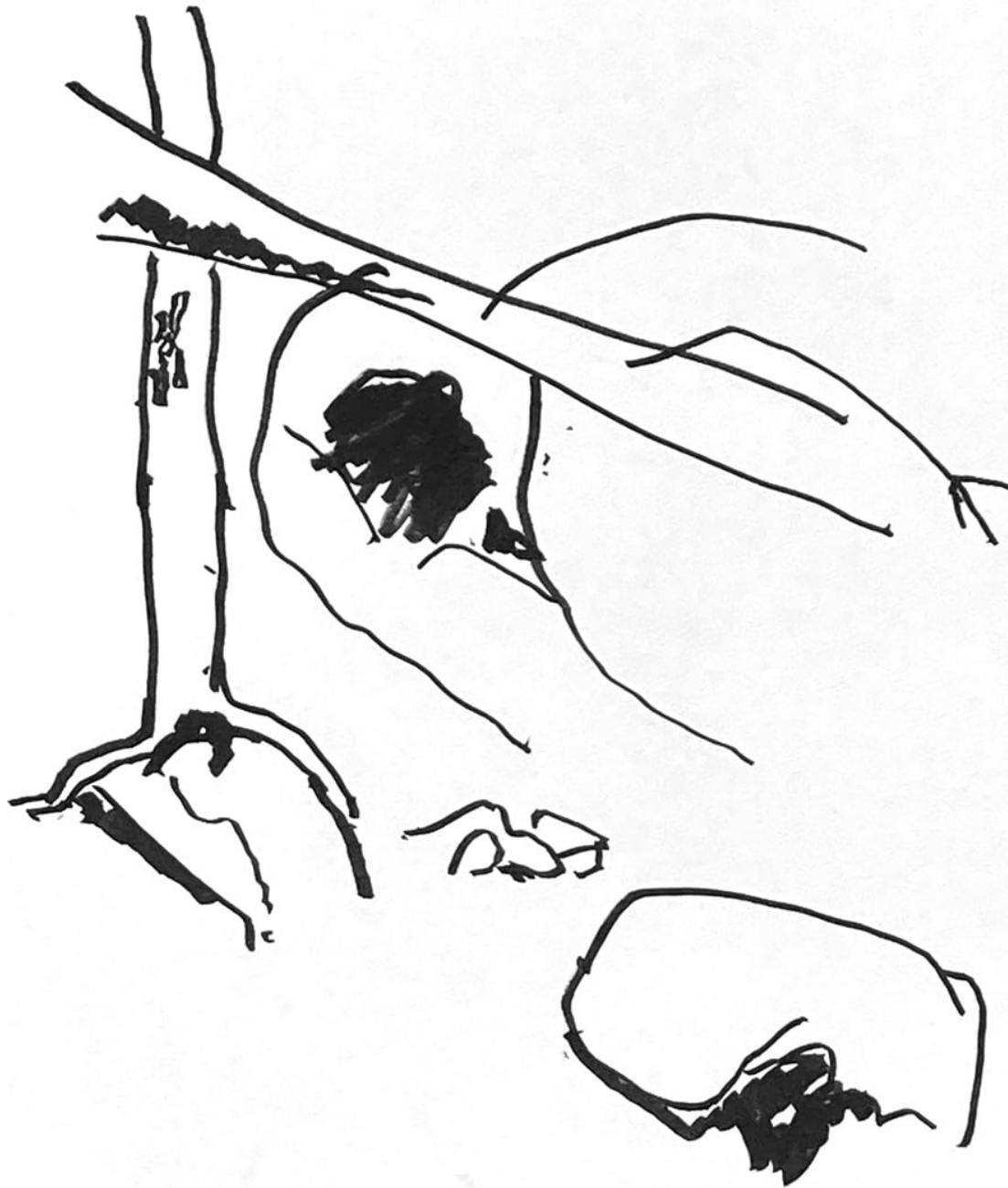
passion

Suddenly it's neutral

The bed has blankets

Death could fall upwards

just as well



### III

These days

bound together

like bananas

bunched

bland

like dizzy spells





## IV

A blessing

shouted into

non duality

Hello

There is so much now

That is unspeakable

Significance

drifts in and out

I wash my hair

That show that's been

suggested

I want it

quick

before the fading

of its meaning

Structure

meet

non duality

Can you

make

the leap

To deconstruct

the hive

in this sea of

entropy



V

His beauty worked against him

The arrogance

of his height

His poise

See the executioner's expression

his face



lost

lost

as he slips his hand

into his pocket

casual

As he rolls his knee

into his victim's neck

And so the virus

runs wild with grief with fury

with Purpose in the streets

On my bookshelves

of long-forgotten treasures

I find James Baldwin

The Fire Next Time

His articulation

I watch police in various guises

jam shields into the crowd

batons, chemicals in orgies of release

I count the viral danger

as Multitudes march

now in distancing formation

now clumped

muscle to muscle

skin to skin

As through a narrow

passageway

to herd immunity



## VI

The heel of my hand

to the tooth

of a word

Hunger coming

Notebook full of

graphite

Days ago

I sheltered here in place

Now it's how I live

Run to poetry

grab with both hands

that loaf of bread



## VII

She picks at her skin

Takes five minutes

to pull off a sock

What else is there to do

She's had her last piss

Indulged in prayer

Good night eagle

she bids her bedside lamp

The bronze responds

Good night Simone

Then darkness

and random dreams





**Simone Forti** is a dancer, artist, and writer based in Los Angeles. Her early “Dance Constructions” were influential in the reinventing of dance that took place in New York in the 1960s and ’70s. Over the years Forti has developed movement vocabularies based on studies of animals’ movements, of the dynamics of circling, and of the synergy between moving and speaking as in her improvisational “News Animations.” Forti has performed internationally at venues including the Louvre Museum in Paris and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which also features some of her work in its permanent collection. Forti’s book *Handbook in Motion* was published in 1974 by the Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. Her book *Oh, Tongue* was edited and published by Fred Dewey for Beyond Baroque Books, in 2003. Forti’s book *The Bear in The Mirror* was published jointly by Koenig Books, London & Vleeshal, Middelburg in 2018. In 2011 Forti received the Yoko Ono Lennon

Courage Award for the Arts. She is represented by The Box LA Gallery.

## To Return: a difficult transcendence

BY JEANINE DURNING



### Everyday Practice/s –

Do one, or more, if you can. Notice when two, or more, necessarily overlap:

- + **Write:** doesn't matter what or when or how, but use language that is commensurate to the questions and the *Body* you are living through. Don't search for answers.
- + **Move:** doesn't matter if you're dancing, but you can call anything that you're doing dancing, if that helps, or not, if it doesn't.
- + **Notice:** take some moments to notice where you are, what you are in relation to, how you feel.
- + **Wander:** preferably in the woods but could be in and around your home. Listen to your surroundings and to yourself. Record your thoughts. Listen to your voice while you speak. You can edit later if that helps.
- + **Reflect:** you can centralize yourself, but don't stay there. This can be in the form of walking, or dancing, sitting, or writing.
- + **Locate:** the *Poet* at the center of yourself — but don't search for poetics.
- + **Read:** something that is not the news.



+ **Meditate:** this can be in the form of walking, or dancing, or reflecting, or jumping on the bed, as well as sitting.

+ **Accept:** practice will, by necessity, look and feel different than it did before.

## INSIDE



## day /

i wander from room to room. this wandering doesn't feel aimless although there is no discernible aim. there is no where, or there, to get to. sometimes i don't realize i've been wandering until some minutes later. it feels like dust after speeding down an empty dirt road. things get revealed as the particles settle.

i walk in the woods. there are trails, so there is some direction. i usually notice when it is up or when it is down and less when it is meandering. i stare at trees. i notice the bend of plants toward or away from the crack of sun. i notice *Nature* and the nature of my thoughts. i try to recognize my body there, in the formation of a leaf, in roots or rocks. what kind of light or darkness have i leaned into, to become the form i am?

## day //

my body feels different. maybe my parasympathetic nervous system is finally doing its thing. i've been in a fugue state for years now, running from place to place, from here to there, never staying more than a month or two, if even that. that's what we are told, what we learn to be true: a "successful" "working artist" is always moving, always touring, always transporting and transitioning. the necessity to work becomes the nature of the work, mobilizing.

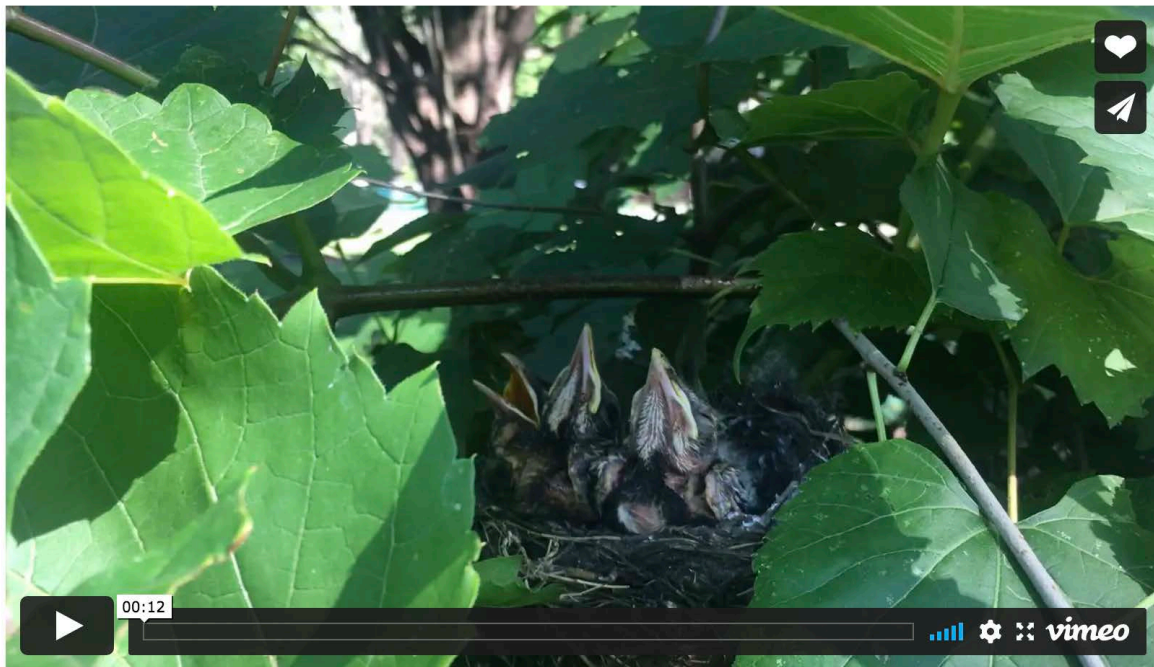
*nonstopping*. that became the name for my practice. maybe i've gotten that all wrong. maybe when the nervous system is in balance, the truer nature of the imagination has room to move, with more agility and ease. i think in many ways pushing myself into constant "doing," constant fight or flight, has been an artistic survival strategy. (although i read recently that prosody, the act of speaking rhythmically and melodically, helps to stimulate the vagus nerve, which helps to calm the sympathetic nervous system, almost like self-soothing. this sounds a lot like my solo *inging*.)

home, food, sleep, the truth of my dog, my body that is healthy but hurts, the smell of cut grass, the bloom of peonies, the feel of dirt. more and more, words become fragments, used like sounds, like soft shields. fluency is a mirage. philosophy is suspect if it doesn't include the *Body*. poetry usually helps, but the books on the shelf are not speaking in the

ways they used to. whitman and dickinson have expired, products of their time, the quaker companionable on the one side, the calvinist recluse on the other. two parts of me, too, more or less, that i can't seem to reconcile. *are you talking to me? i don't see anyone else here.*

## day ///

i've been thinking a lot about that image of a heart supported by a tree with deep roots. it strikes me as a clue into my own heart-feeling, so unmoored and unrooted these past couple of years. today, i took a long walk with mrs. roosevelt in the woods and spent a good amount of time looking at the trees again. i found myself gravitating toward the broken ones, some torn in half, probably met by storms. but because the roots are so strong and deep, only the highest part of the tree collapsed; the bottom half remains firmly connected to the earth, still living. and i thought: where the break is, is where the heart is. i think i've heard that somewhere.



## day ////

while i'm just waking, the birds are particularly active — equal parts disney and hitchcock style chirping. i've read that because of the widespread lockdowns and cleaner air, migrations are different now. i have images of their lives, flying around, collecting things — nests, the sky, birdhouse or branch — but mainly i'm consumed by their sounds, moving from a collective body to individual calls and melodies. at times it's raucous and dense, as if they will take over the world again. and then the creaking open and tinny slam of the neighbors' back door and then the bellows-like menacing bark of their 1-year-old unneutered male mastiff. the birds go silent.

i don't know how to talk about bodies anymore, especially my own. even the language that's held me together is falling away.

## day ###

it's so long since i've felt that sense of impeccable timing in my body. is it sunday or monday? i don't know. it is morning and then it is night. i decipher *Time* by the way the light moves in through the blinds. on gray days, it's harder to tell. mrs. roosevelt tells me.

maybe i used to experience *Time* like this when i was a kid. slipping by and glacial, together. the difference now is that i am hyper aware of how precious *Time* is.

the news cuts into the luxury of reverie.

dense grief and intense gratitude. everything feels urgent. hard to focus on any one thing for any length of time. so much hope, so much terror for what more could happen — the



things unseen. my own not-seeing. these things i've practiced for so long — not-knowing and precarity — are not so theoretical now. maybe this is what i've been practicing for all along, the ability to hold this paradox in my body. time to use this training and put practice toward purpose.



## day ### I

learning to surrender to circumstance only comes when that surrender is matched by a certain guarantee of givens — money, health, food, home, *Love*?

how easy it was for me to surrender, giving up a daily artistic practice as i had understood it. it's important to question the relevance of your voice and mourn without pity.

what emerges in isolation, what grounds in the midst of radical uncertainty?

the luxury of even contemplating that question.

## day ### II

every once in a while i get a glimpse that i'm supposed to be exactly where i am. and of course, i "know" this, but sometimes i actually KNOW it in my bones, in my gut body. sometimes i don't know what i want, but my body does. i need to listen more closely.

listen there

where the ocean meets the body's edge.

it's handing you what you've been looking for:

*Time*

and the disappearance of a shape you've known before.

## day ### III

i notice embedded cadences and rhythms. usually in language but also in my walk or what information i choose to listen to.

the bird is inside you still

the animal is alive



## day ## ///

i dug a hole in the backyard today. it was time to bury the acorn that d and i found the day we decided we would get married, at that park in brooklyn. i was going to bury the rings too but couldn't find them. they're here somewhere. maybe i intentionally lost them. i bought a lilac bush at the nursery to remind myself that the future can smell sweet. i've recently read that it can take up to six years for a lilac bush to flower. i guess *Time takes Time*. i've always loved lilacs.

to dig a ditch  
and watch things grow  
to worry if the lilac you planted  
will bloom in that perhaps-too-shady spot  
next to the peony by the garage  
and the italian vine on the chain-link fence  
rage is just another form of grief  
everybody knows that.  
so maybe this hole i've dug is endless,  
echoing back to me my own terror, my own truth.  
don't be afraid of death or even the life you've been given.  
the bird is inside you still.  
the animal is alive.

## day ### ###

i gave myself a black eye from rubbing it so hard.  
boo-hoo.

## day ### ### /

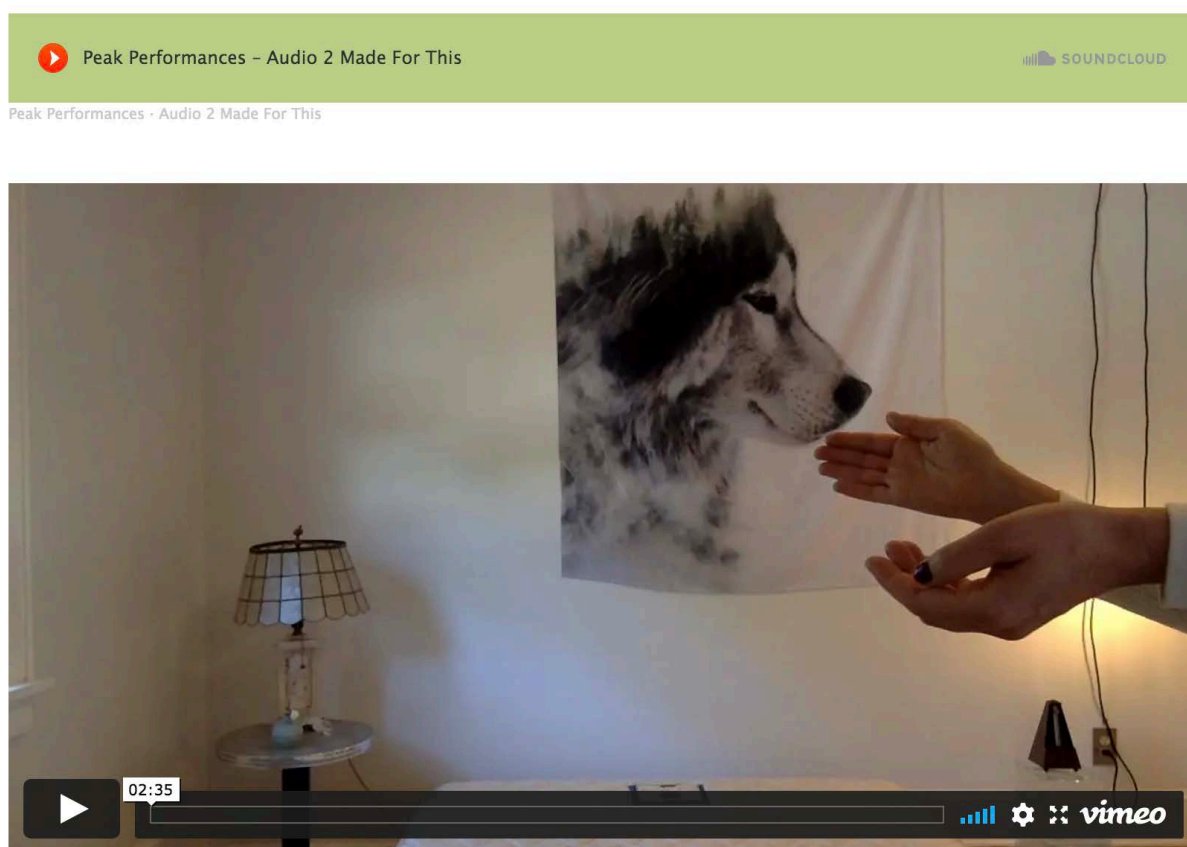
*Body.Place.Mind.Time* manage to align. i find myself standing in the middle of the kitchen, somewhere between intention and the not quite opposite of intention, the body still in motion to find its purpose. my body is still now, having realized i have spent some many seconds or maybe minutes pacing from room to room with a generalized attention that something needs to be done. what that *something* is, i don't know. this is thematic



these days. standing next to the stove, body still, my mind paces, speeding through the many things undone, not done, or waiting to be done. destroyed, incomplete, imminent.

## day ### ### //

imperatives? what are those? what is *Touch* to you anymore? you're impervious. transparent, untranslatable, unnameable, invisible. the touch of sound, the touch of light, the sound of sound, the sound of light. you don't remember the touch of skin or the skin of skin or the sound of breath. experience yourself as just a little beside the point. steer yourself, otherly. everything will be fine, she says, distancing herself from herself, not daring to use: *I*. there is a voice inside the *Heart* that can hold itself, again. lay yourself down, facing the sky. there's memory up there, floating northerly. dig it up. find the bones you've buried. the ground of you is opening up and you are falling in. stay there. you don't have to move. it is moving you. pull it out. hold it in your hands. this little *Body* you've become out of the centuries. the *Earth* is red and with your tears you make mud. you mold it into a home and you rest there. spread the rest over your eye. you spin inside. the spinning is so quick, it feels like stillness.



## day ### ### ### //

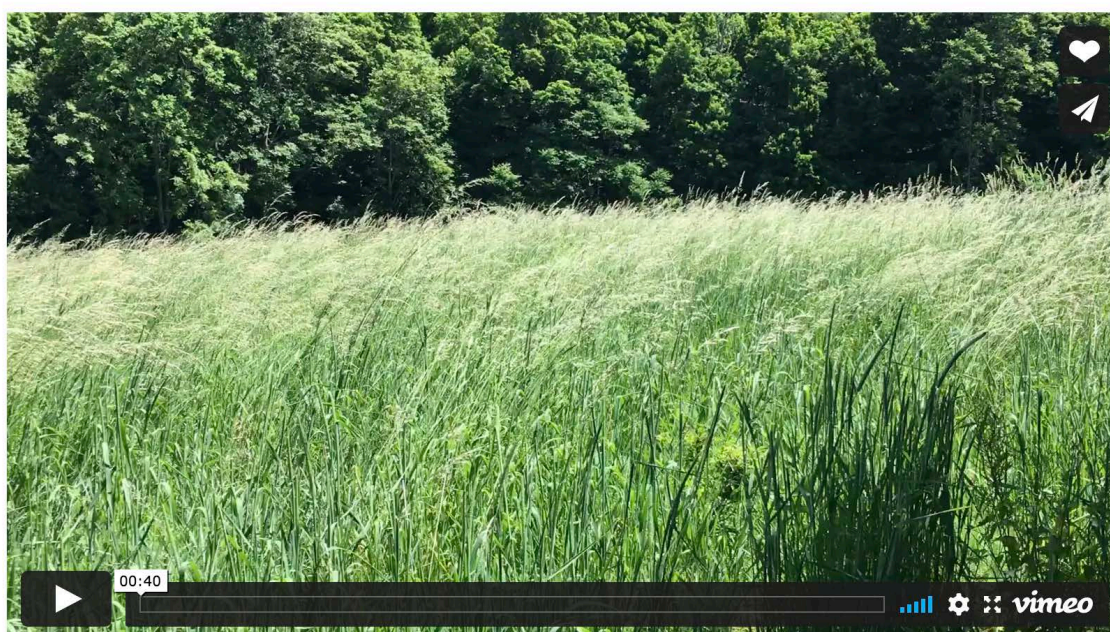
john scott in dublin invited me to make a performance for his micro festival, dancer from the dance. i've said no to almost everything. i said yes to this because i love john and because i've been thinking about my irish roots and because he said it could be anything not lasting more than seven minutes. i started by choosing where in my house i would do it. *where am i? where am i not?* location seems important now. i decided on my bedroom because of the bed and the wolf on the wall. i decided that i would accumulate materials based on the imagery and the physical limitations of the room, as well as real, imagined, and remembered associations to that space. i started by jumping on my bed. this is the text that came up from that daily practice over seven days. i called the dance: MADE FOR THIS.

made for this  
this phantom kiss  
the missy miss  
the this can't last  
like this, like that  
the hugs, the sweat  
the limbic mix  
missing you missing me missing you

the loops like that  
made for this  
the beast inside  
the dog by your side  
the ruff ruff ruff  
this loneliness  
this kiss kiss kiss  
you miss miss miss  
the myth you hold  
that its life was there for you you you  
to have have have  
to hold hold hold  
to take take take  
to break break break  
to white white white  
to kill kill kill  
to ta ta ta  
to ba ba ba  
to ha ha ha  
blue-eyed terrified  
epigenetically repetitized  
jane eyed  
dog eared  
prided and prejudiced  
like this, like this  
manifestly destin`ed  
supremely fiction`ed  
made for this  
made for this  
you made this  
you made this  
you made this

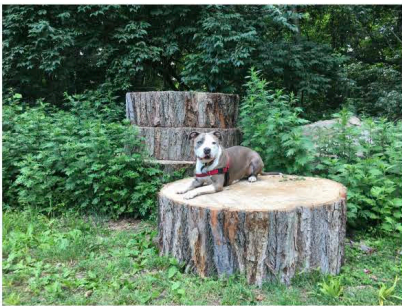


Peak Performances - Utopia3





# OUTSIDE



# day 0


*storm king state park*

micro intensities  
shafts of light  
the sounds of birds  
the heaviness of my boots  
you'd like to condense *Time*  
and miraculously know the names of trees  
it's possible for a worm to live  
even if you cut it in half  
you learned that as a child  
the sound of wind before you feel it on your skin  
the pace of your steps interrupted by a rock  
you romanticize your aloneness, here in the woods  
and then you come across an enormous pile of animal shit  
the sound of a train in the distance  
reminding of the so many places you used to go  
i'm getting closer now to traveling to my own skin

# day 00

*storm king state park*


the decaying of a tree is more visible in the sun's shadow  
green is greener when the sky is gray  
the narrowness of a path depends on your balance  
is that the sound of moss and lichen  
or is that just my mind crackling  
dates are clues  
but they don't tell you that much  
neither the names of days nor of the weeks going by  
the names of landmarks like street corners or schools  
the name of my knee or the tip of my nose  
the name of this island inside me that i'm currently living on

 Peak Performances - Storm King State Park 8

 SOUNDCLLOUD

Peak Performances · Storm King State Park 8

i'm there now, feeling that  
sometimes my bones will crack  
if i take the wrong step

 Peak Performances - Storm King State Park 12

 SOUNDCLLOUD

Peak Performances · Storm King State Park 12



# day 0000

## *mountain road*

sometimes mrs. roosevelt and i see a lot of deer on our walks  
sometimes i see them before she does  
sometimes she sees them first  
i wish she wouldn't bark  
but of course she's just living out her destiny  
watching the creature dart away at her command  
we both heard the mad rush of movement  
i think mrs. roosevelt heard it first  
it seemed to not come from any particular direction  
which can be dangerous in the woods  
then we saw it, running  
the fawn dashing through the brush  
as if for its *Life*  
it probably felt the *Truth* of danger  
with all these humans around  
on a covid wednesday afternoon  
i'd never seen a fawn up that close  
in all its fragility, in all its power  
it seems there's more roadkill now that people are relaxing their lockdowns sometimes i see  
dead deer on the side of the road  
i imagine some pickup truck rammed into it  
and just left it there, like that, to die  
or maybe it was that mini cooper  
with the trump2020 sticker on its bumper  
the one you keep passing on your way to the trail  
it's best not to discriminate over which car can kill a deer  
every time i pass that car,  
parked in front of its colonial house with the white picket fence  
i want to get out and drive my key across the blue paint on driver's side like i did that day to  
the SUV on the UWS



Peak Performances - Reservoir Rd 3

# day 0000



## *storm king state park*

i think about how singular mrs. roosevelt's focus is  
her whole *Being* is about attention minus intention



and maybe that's the clue  
to remove the intention  
because oftentimes we intend to do the right thing  
but how we intend toward the attention fucks things up  
attention + intention = mindful action  
that's what i learned in catholic school  
and in dance school  
i'm struggling with the structure of my intention  
or at least how i've known structure  
i've lived as a runaway, or maybe a runatoward  
and when that came to a stunning halt  
with no one or no thing in particular to attend to other than myself  
i realized i didn't really know what was grounding me  
what was holding me  
sleep, food, the needs of my dog

**day 0000 0000**



*reservoir road*

i want to talk about the condensed energy of  
rocks, boulders, glaciers, stone walls, stonehenge,  
earth in its vibrational shifts  
the unforgiving labor of *man*, the mythology of the gods  
but i don't know how



instead my attention goes to fallen trees,  
to the slits in their trunks that look like vaginas,  
home to some small animal



## day 0000 0000 0

*kowawese unique area*

direct your listening toward the *Nothing* you were meant to hear all along. bring the distance closer to you — the melody of birds, the movement of the water, the panting of mrs. roosevelt, the chipmunk in the brush, the woodpecker in the distance, the wind through the trees, the sound of your mind. this seeming *Nothing* was in you all along, in the movement of your body and the choices you've made. listen closely to the things you were told not to hear. listen to the name given to the path you trample on, underneath you the bones of bald eagle, black bear, bobcat, and mink. *kowawese* means small pine. and way before cole or church or durand manifestly destined their way to the hudson river school with their soft watercolors and violently vibrant oils, way before hendrick hudson was paid his dutch guilders to try to find entry to china, this river was named *mahicannituck* — the river that flows two ways — by the *Muh-He-Con-Ne-Ok*, or the mohicans, as the english called them — the people of the waters that are never still. the river is to the right of you, or to the left, depending on which direction you're going. (41°27' 30.9348" N/74° 0' 59.13" W) sometimes it feels as if you too are flowing in two directions, inside yourself. my father used to jump off the cliffs in highland falls, which used to be called buttermilk falls, or so i was told. he and his brothers would race one another to see who was the strongest swimmer. you'd have to be really strong or really stupid to swim the hudson. all the kayakers know that. they know to stay close to the edge of the shore because the current can draw you down if you go out too far. on summer days, families go down to *kowawese* (also called plum point) and spend the day fishing or swimming in the river, even though it's recommended not to because of the high levels of contaminants dumped by GE in the '60s and '70s. hardly anyone is wearing a mask down there now, anyway, so ... it's hard to imagine that, at one point, the river was teeming with herring and trout instead of the poisonous crab you see washed up on the beach now. mrs. roosevelt always sniffs them but knows enough not to eat them. walking along this path that leads to the river, i sometimes come across deer, peacefully eating the berries that are just ripening. there is a mini standoff as they become aware of mrs. roosevelt and my presence there, and then they run off into the bush. lately i've been wondering how long these berry bushes have been here. how many centuries? were they planted or just there all along? how many hands have picked from them, how many animals have eaten from them? i remember rushing into a field of nettles one afternoon after school trying to get to a raspberry bush, or maybe it was blackberries. within minutes, i was covered with welts and rashes, burning and itching, in and around my catholic school uniform. the green and gray plaid polyester jumper skirt was no protection at all. at least i was wearing knee highs.



**day ~~0000-0000~~ 00**

*kowawese unique area*

a creature needs to move through its environment in order to perceive it, in order to survive it. if it stays still for too long, it risks becoming prey to predator.



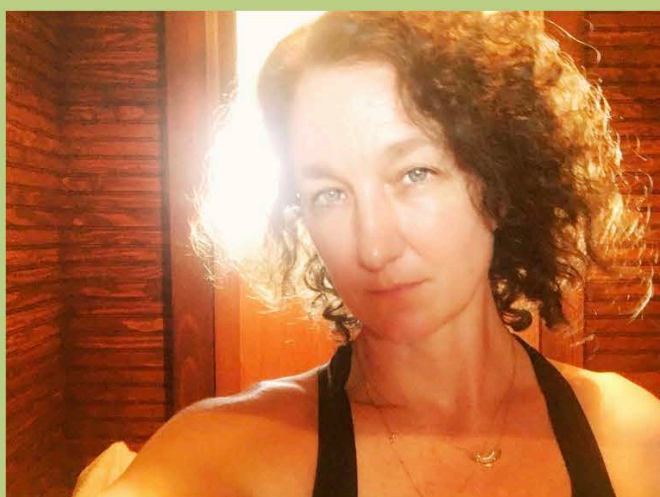
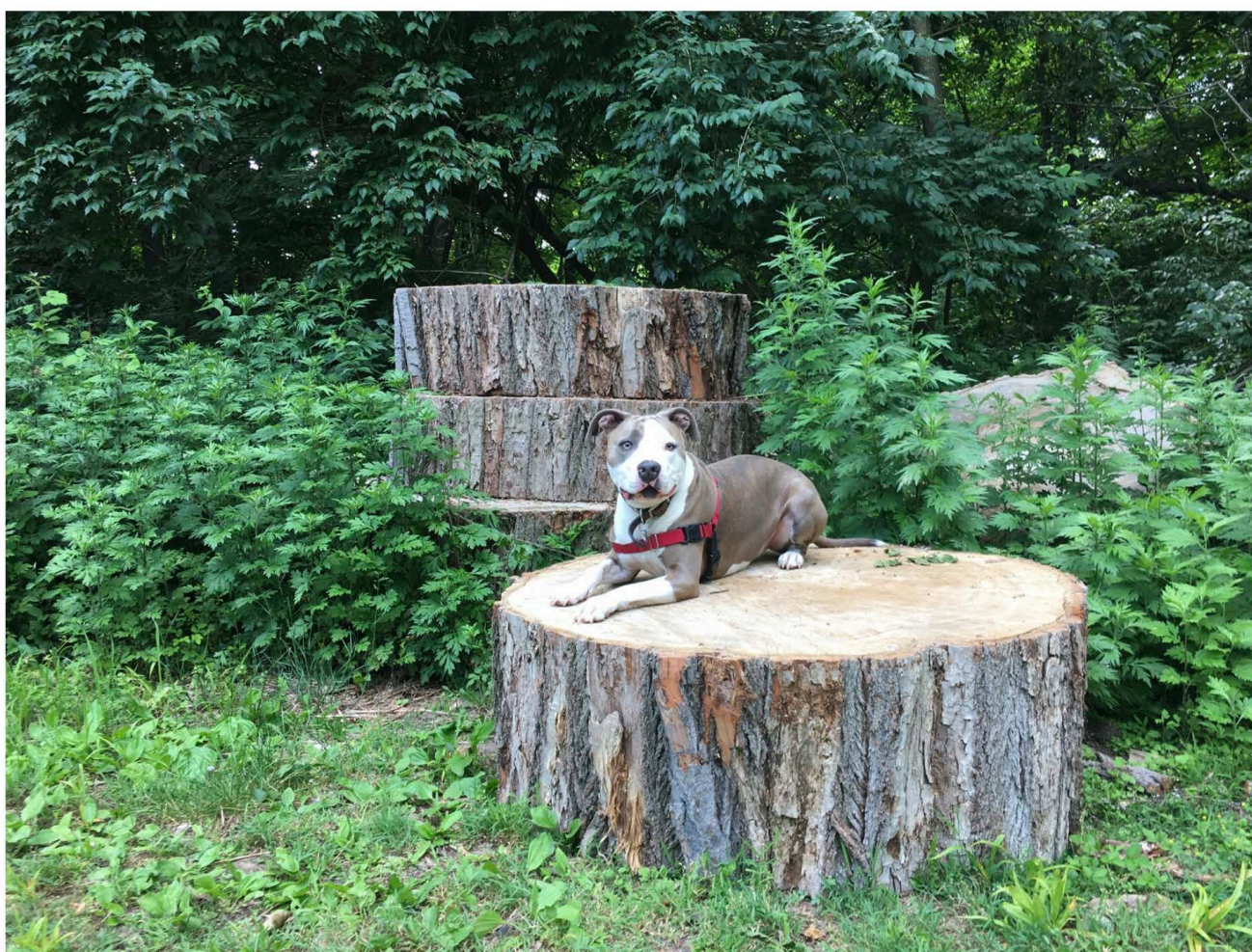
**day 0000 0000 000**

*kowawese unique area*

i went bunny rabbit hunting with mrs. roosevelt today. whenever i say the word *bunnies*, she goes wild. bunnies can be any small, low-to-the-ground creature like a chipmunk or a squirrel. somehow she knows the flight of a bird is not a bunny. she never bothers with them. but yesterday, i found her scavenging in the backyard around the deadheaded peony



bush underneath the dollar store bird feeder i bought a few weeks ago and hung from the garage. i called to her and she sneakily came, ears back but tail high. i went over there thinking she was scrounging some of the fallen seed, but it was a dead bird. it had been there for a couple of days, i think. its body was flat and its eyes were glazed blue white. i prayed for it and thanked it for coming to my bird feeder. i carefully picked it up with mrs. roosevelt's pooper scooper and put it in a bag and then put it in the garbage bin, not before thinking about the sanitation worker who will throw that bag into the back of the truck on trash day, wondering if it will stink too much. i asked mrs. roosevelt if she found the bird like that or if she killed it. she listened to me but wouldn't answer.



**Jeanine Durning** is an Alpert Award-winning choreographer and performer, from New York, whose work has been described by *The New Yorker* as having both “the potential for philosophical revelation and theatrical disaster.” Her research concerns the interrogation of the body as a mobilizing force for change, and choreography as a mode of thought which has the potential to shift perception of self, other, and the spaces we (collectively) inhabit. Her signature solo *inging* has been invited across the U.S., Europe, and in Canada. In support of her new project *Dark Matter*, Durning has received residencies at Seoul Dance Center, the Rauschenberg Foundation, MANCC, and at DNK in Sofia, Bulgaria. Jeanine has had the privilege of collaborating with many choreographers over her many years of performing including with

Deborah Hay since 2005. Jeanine has taught and shared some accumulated practices all over the world through many different institutions for contemporary dance and performance, and is often invited to act as “outside eye” to many choreographers’ processes. She has created original works commissioned by independent performers and companies, including an upcoming commission for Candoco Dance in London. Jeanine has recently been invited to join Cullberg in Stockholm for the coming year as a new rehearsal director. [www.janinedurning.com](http://www.janinedurning.com)