

Marginalia: an experiment in critical fabulation

(response to Setting A Tone: Pamila Matharu, Makeda Silvera, Andrea Fatona)

Respondent: Faith Paré

Response to a conversation that took place as a live broadcast online video event on 26 March 2021 as part of the speaker series *Desire Lines: Mapping the Metadata of Toronto Arts Publishing*, hosted by the AGYU in coordination with Artexte and the SpokenWeb.

“[Sister Vision] has already created a past, a certain history.”

— Makeda Silvera

“The story is told from inside the circle.”

— Saidiya Hartman

24:33

*When I saw that women could actually publish and hold a press¹ of their own,²
that really got me going.³*

¹ stanza means “room” but writing isn’t somewhere easy
to put your feet up in a room someone needs to do the dusting
in a room time to dwell is afforded to few
in a room someone can be locked away you lived with text
differently

² breathing pages fresh from the printer walked those words
by trekking bookstore to bookstore stuffing flyers in mailboxes
boxes of uncracked paperbacks surrounding your bed
dreaming a press could belong to all of us

³ but the store clerks & grant officers & sales representatives dared
to tell you women of colour do not read no we don’t
at least not like them no passive absorption no voyeurism
we encounter the lack & write anew

20:07; 24:44

*My first part-time job was with Contrast,⁴ of course, as a typesetter and proofreader.
This wasn’t good at all because I got a lot of cussing because I couldn’t really proofread...*

*What I learned was the long hours and the dedication,⁵ even though it was a male-dominance environment⁶ and
there were no rules and— There were no rules.⁷*

And sometimes it was uncomfortable as a woman.⁹

⁴ were your first companions like mine? *Share & Pride & Caribbean Camera*
between pig feet & tamarind in shopping bags from the Chinese market
excess ink clinging to your fingertips was the craft choosing you
⁵ for the hours I pored over articles you must have spent twice as many
at the age I am now absorbing the pace of print I imagine
the office's trilling phones & chain-smoked cigarettes ashed onto story drafts
you were small nearly disappeared (except when a cussword
was pelted at you with whatever was on the editor's desk
for crossing i's & dotting t's on final proofs)
you learned in snatches that smallness made the job easier
⁶ till you had to walk by men their lurking pupils like full-stops
⁷ who never bided by flinches or sneers their hands
circulated wide & freely as their words
⁸ I recognize this silence too intimately even 40 years later the memory
of what they can do a rage that swells blank from the gullet
but you would not be small enough to chew
⁹ not small enough to catch typos or measure the right spoonful
of sugar for men's coffees you had another kind of vision

27:27; 28:38; 30:55

*Nobody would touch the manuscript.¹⁰ I first took it to feminist presses, they wouldn't touch it.¹¹ I took it to
alternative presses, they wouldn't touch it...¹² They were talking patois... They were mostly talking in their own
language¹³ and that's how I began the whole history of oral English. Nobody really wanted to print a book about
sexual harassment of domestic workers, the long hours¹⁴ they had to serve, their kids calling them the N-word...
exposing having to work over-time in a little hovel in the basement.¹⁵*

¹⁰ you knew the manuscript was hot but they treated it as radioactive
¹¹ the white girls who cried sisterhood claimed no relation
¹² the bohemians lounging in the fringes drew a line in the sand
¹³ between their waxing poetic & our broken island language
what was broken about it? maids & laundresses unlatched
their most silent parts & you understood perfectly
¹⁴ we understand a care that is akin those thankless hours
fingers achingly curled from clanging on keys trying to lift
voice into letter the furnace in your gut after the editor ignores

your weekly calls delivering interviewees foil-wrapped dinners
rousing for a shift in yesterday's clothes trading sleep for transcribing
doing the work because no one else wanted to
¹⁵ making room for testimony & you didn't even have a room
of your own but beneath a house on Dewson you would learn to do more
than make do

30:31

I had to beg¹⁶ and ask others to beg for her to publish it.

¹⁶ why is so much of our history a Black woman begging?

47:08; 48:40; 49:31; 51:06

*So, it was this old house.¹⁷ Lovely old house near the Ontario Art Gallery... We housed Fireweed
for a while and then [Sister Vision] moved into the house in the basement of where we lived.
What can I say? Back then, Dewson House was crazy... So, there were children.
There were five children¹⁸ in there. There were their mothers living life,¹⁹ there were loves,²⁰ there was sex—lots of
sex!²¹ There was mentorship.²² And then there were writers,
then there were people dropping into the place.²³ You'd walk in and you don't know what to expect. You'd wake up
in the morning, I'm telling you, and you'd meet somebody in the kitchen that you don't know. It was crazy, but it was
also exciting... There was always food on the stove. There was music, there was always debates that was going on,
and there were fights, and there were movie nights²⁴ where we showed political films and we also showed porn!*

¹⁷ a place like this in a city like ours is impossible now
perhaps it was the impossible then & yet
¹⁸ sneakers dashed up & down the staircase the rumbling heartbeat
¹⁹ of a house re-made each morning by women re-made as often
²⁰ how could you not fall for someone new across the kitchen table?
visitors who bring fresh produce or can plan a protest while doing their eyeliner
²¹ wanting to live in the gentleness of hands again
& again & again (& again, & some more)
²² the work as much daydreaming as it was writing it was gossiping
while doing the dishes the work was fucking arguments grocery lists
& the work never stopped a Xerox's whir lullabying into the night
²³ over the snores & shifting bodies sprawled on whatever couch is free
²⁴ soulmates & strangers huddled together on quilt-covered hardwood
popcorn-tossing whispers & shushes breaking into whoops
over on-screen raunchiness cackle as much as you want

cuss as much as you want cry belt holler
as much as you want here

01:08:21; 01:08:36

*Often, we are just replicating and replicating generation after generation²⁵... wait a second,
do you not know Sister Vision Press? Do you not know Fuse? Do you not know Press Gang?²⁶
Do you not know²⁷ that these things have existed?²⁸*

²⁵ I must have inherited something more than silence.
I'm suspicious of invention this nation's thirst
to be first & only first the flagpole piercing
instead of braids of genealogy
²⁶ the decades you & comrades mentees colleagues
lovers allies friends Black lesbian feminist
gave making the margins a place worthy to lay our heads
²⁷ can a poem be a citation? a time capsule? your overdue
bouquet? an award for the alternatives who tread the highwire
above the belly of forgetting? how can I honour you
in this nation that covers us over in white?
when you did everything right? documented as you lived
gathered women to invent histories they said we'd never have
²⁸ & still they levelled your broken ground will any block
of this city remember us when we are gone?
how can I forget history when I'm just starting to remember?

52:17

It was totally exciting. At points, maddening, but at least you had your room to go to.¹

¹ a Black woman writing on these lands is writing in the house
you built & I need not ask to be invited
in

acknowledgements (citations and thinking alongside)—

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