

Poetics

2015 was the year when two mining companies killed the Rio Doce, ancestral home of the Krenak, by flooding it with toxic mud.

It was the year when militarized police killed hundreds of Black people in the urban and suburban ecologies of the US and Brazil.

It was the year when the racist underpinnings of the US avant-garde were disclosed and sentences such as the following, published in an academic journal, became impossible to take seriously:

“One of the compelling new developments in writing that [name of white poet] has been advancing ‘after Language poetry’ is eco-poetics.”

Capitalism and its colonial histories of resource extraction and human enslavement, dispossession, and exploitation set off the ongoing devastation of our planet. The Enlightenment is the epistemological seed of this destructiveness. All the critique in the world does almost nothing to wake us up to disaster when the colonial paradigm holds sway, valorizing human-centered mastery where the epistemologies of other societies—the “rest” to the West—do not.

Thought itself is racialized. By this I mean that a poetics which labels itself “eco” but only reproduces the European legacy of critical thought is part of the problem that got us here in the first place.

Process

I write from a cult of death in which life is the aborted flight of a chicken.

To locate my body in the industrial farm:

this is an act of ritual.

The ritual undoes itself and requires a constant unraveling of skin.

As a chicken priestess, I don't fuck with you.

I don't claim to be a shaman but a squawking hallucination on the other side of the fuming, shrinking Amazonian perimeter.

Close enough to hear the Guarani song about an Earth Without Evil.

The jaw-click of Mother Jaguar,

the bulletproof drums of Black Mother Aparecida.

The screams of my Native mothers raped by my Iberian fathers.

I don't claim to translate but to transfigure my embodiment of those screams.

I am born inside those screams.

I am born inside exploding veins.

Under the sky of empire white as my feathers.

Perceptual Challenge

Pick up a text of mythical narrative from any tradition. Copy the phrases that stick out as you read. Then write a poem by dipping the phrases into a vat of your bloodlines. You are ingesting and incarnating someone else's language. It is the lips of your ancestors you wear on your wrists. Let the phrases transmute through the filters of their voices and other intermediary figures in natural and human-made form. Your words will become unrecognizable next to the source text.

Remember what Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote: "Mythical thinking does not know whole trajectories. There is always something else to accomplish. Like rituals, myths are interminable."

Remember the declaration of Estamira Gomes de Sousa, a landfill dweller in Rio de Janeiro: "I am the edge of the world. I am everywhere."

Even if it takes performative violence—even if this violence is something the poem must inflict upon its speaker—dream of a world in which you see everything bleeding.

Even if it means betraying your people, shape the dream into a confrontation with the ones responsible for the bloodshed.