

PROLOGUE (I never read prologues)

The point of this essay is not to prove anything -because like anything, nothing can be proven- but rather to illustrate the metaphysical digestion of my thoughts on Poetry and Performance. Why you might ask, *are you writing an essay and not just a long or short poem?* To which I might reply if you might ask by first saying that this IS a long and short poem and by second saying that I already tried that and I needed a different form to try to understand it different. This brings up questions of form that I will not answer. This essay is an answer to a question of form. Since you ask, I have also been bumping into the question (in the dark as well as the day) of *why work?* And more specifically *why work for school?* The half answers are “because what else?” and “because someone will read it.”

This essay includes conversations:

why are you writing more anyway?  
because i haven't proven it yet.  
proven what?  
proven that it is real yet.  
but it is real you are writing about it.  
i know that's why i am writing about it.

why are you writing more anyways?  
because school is a limited area of opportunity.  
by which you mean...  
by which I mean after school I can't be sure if anyone will read it.  
so you're capitalizing on it.  
no, or I didn't intend to, or yes, and sorry to whoever is reading this, if I am making you do  
extra work, I am just trying to-

THE CRITICAL ESSAY



The term critical comes from the late Latin "criticus" and the English "critic."

Its etymology refers to "the crisis of disease."

Quoting the oxford dictionary:

4. (MATHEMATICS·PHYSICS) relating to or denoting a point of transition from one state to another.

5. (of a nuclear reactor or fuel) maintaining a self-sustaining chain reaction.

"the reactor is due to go critical in October"

## THESIS

In a continuing struggle with the concept of Critical Essay, these definitions become helpful. Not via the first three (elided) definitions of the term critical, but by the last two which I here deem to be just as applicable. By the logic of these definitions, to write a critical essay is to write an essay which is in a state of crisis between one thing and another. In this case, this essay serves as(is) the point of crisis between the enacted performance and the theoretical one.

## CRISIS 1:

Dance does not have an effect.

Effects of dance: can produce body heat, can change emotion, can make me feel as though I am practicing my most virtuosic self, can make me feel, can make me feel alive, when I do it and when I watch it, seems to exist outside of commodity, satisfies the viewer, satisfies me, can serve to undo capitalist ideals of production,

## CRISIS 2:

Dance does have an effect.

Dance does not: produce anything tangible, do anything noticeably important, save the world turtles or the bees, always make people happy, always make me happy, de-commodify art, always satisfy the viewer, always satisfy me, always do it,

## POETRY IS DANGEROUS:

The reason that I know this is an intimate reason, but because this is poetry, and therefore intimate,

I will unfold it.

small history, for context:

I started really liking poetry (and by really I mean knowing) in 2017, Puerto Rico. I was working on an island studying monkeys. The people who were supposed to house me asked me kindly if I could

live somewhere else so I had moved in with some of the researchers and was trying to find my niche. In those months there was a pool(hole) of characters that would surround me but here I will talk about J, as he is the one that seems to be the source of it all. Anyways, he was quiet but opinionated and very smart (I will here say was because I no longer feel as though I know him in present). One day in the lunch cage amid a surface level conversation he said that he memorized poetry for fun and recited it while working to keep the boredom away. Since he had blue eyes and was very beautiful that night I memorized a poem too. It was a bit by Auden that I had saved to my phone notes.

It began

*“Defenseless under the night  
our world in stupor lies...”*

~~Ironically~~ Poetically, I repeated the line so many times that it manifested. Next day I recited it too to him in the lunch cage. He said it was beautiful and who was it by. I said that I didn't know and had simply copied it into my phone notes. He returned to that state of disappointment that seemed the neutral. This appeared to be the beginning. Although I did not know then that poetry was dangerous. And that is why poetry was dangerous. He lent me the book of poems from his mother that he had taken to Uganda and cherished. I lent him Walt Whitman which I loved and he hated. We talked always between noon and two. He talked in knots and I attempted to undo.

Eventually there were two knots for two nights.

What is dangerous about poetry is also what is dangerous about going out to sea.

I was as overridden as the island was overridden with lizards and rats. The reason that poetry is useful is the reason that ropes are useful. The reason that poetry is dangerous is the reason that ropes are dangerous. The jury is still out about whether or not romanticism is dangerous. Poetry is dangerous because romanticism is dangerous.

What I am trying to prove by saying that Poetry is Dangerous, is that it is having an effect.

I know that Performance has an effect because I can feel its effect and because people said that my performance made them anxious so I can assume that it had an effect on them.

If performance is poetry, and poetry is dangerous, then is performance dangerous?

At least I know that they are both having an effect.

It is because he said that philosophy is **faff** that I will not write to him again. **Where** are your morals?

*“the gift of panic is clarity—repeat the known qualities:*

Today is Wednesday.” -Pico

## POETIC LOGIC

Dear Claudia, why poetry?

*“I believed the linguist*

*On the radio who said words are most interesting*

*When they indicate something not there,*

*Something not inherently in or of themselves.*

*Freud thought of writing as the voice of an absent person.*

*I miss my father, and though I see signs,” (Claudia Keelan, We Step Into the Sea)*

Like a third, like a *not there*, poetic artifacts (poems, performances) become an intermediary through which a space is created where we can meet each other. If through poetry we can create a reality of our choosing which has an effect on our physical reality than it must be worth it. *worth the energy*. If we agree that poetry exists otherwise (“not there”), then that means that we can exist otherwise through this alternate medium. If we are existing otherwise, through an alternate medium, then alternate laws can apply and we can make them up. Poetry and performance can then become ways to communicate, outside of the confines of known and habituated time and space in this alternate area that can give rise to new beauty only possible through these forms which we had so much power in curating. Words, once thought, once read, once just written out, could achieve an actualization in this alterplace, and thereby shift our conceptualization of things in this physical place. For example “A

plane.." you know a plane right? "a plane is like a bird" is a logic that described a fairly commonplace assertion; that planes are like birds because they both fly. However in poetic logic we could say that a *plane is a bird*, and then it would be.

I feel that this logic could also legitimize performance logic. Counteracting this feeling I've been having that performance doesn't do anything. What if. Performance doesn't do something it *is* something.

Recently I performed a dance that was a Eulogy. How can a dance be a Eulogy you might ask, well a dance can be a Eulogy if I say it is and mean it. < The point of that sentence being that, like poetry, performance gives an opportunity to create a space of alterity. This becomes important to me when I am looking for a work outlet for my urgency. When there doesn't seem to be a right place to put my urgework I have to build a new place and put it there. Well, I don't have too, I could do something else, but this is what I did do, seem to be doing. And when I think about whether I should spend my urgework picking up every piece of trash that I see, or feeding every hungry person, the fact remains that there will still be someone writing the screenplay for McDonalds commercials. There will still be people sitting in offices. And I love dancing, and I love writing. This love logic is trumping the guilt logic. Well, trumping but not excluding.

*"And so, in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By "enstranging" objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and "laborious." The perceptual process in art has a purpose all its own and ought to be extended to the fullest. Art is a means of experiencing the process of creativity. The artifact itself is quite unimportant."*

— Shklovsky, Viktor, *Theory of Prose*. Translated by Benjamin Sher, (Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), p. 6.

n said that watching my performance required work. Understanding through Shklovsky, I have made the process of communication "laborious" through the means of ambiguous gesture, specific to me, but up for interpretation from the viewer. Like I think Z said on the last day of class, *it was not the gestures that were meant to be understood, but the substance passing through them*. When I realize

that I can't write everything down, I can't explain everything, the window (time) and vehicle (art) become hyper important. The Question becomes *how can I get you to know, and by what?* Not to know what I know, for this is impossible, but to know what you can about what I do, so that maybe we can know something together.

"WHY?"

"BECAUSE LANGUAGE."

because language(poetry) is a way we can communicate our feelings.

although language as we know is always inherently inadequate, or at least *other*.

especially when describing pain.

when insufficient to say "it hurt" we must use images.

*"my head feels the way that a rare steak looks as though it must be feeling."*

*"when J emails me it feels the way that carbonated water looks, but in my whole body and sharp."*

*"how do you feel? good today, by which i mean, not sour anymore"*

And language is inadequate because we all have our own definitions, understandings.

In a conversation with Fabian from Sweden, after a comment by me about how I sometimes wished that I was born in Germany, so that I could read Celan's poetry with all the understanding of the German language that the people who have lived there have. (Although, in a way I'm wishing that I was Paul Celan, so that I could know the most of what he means. However, maybe it's better this way Paul, I am glad to be myself and not you.)

Fabian replied by talking about color. Approximate quote: "Yes, I imagine understandings of colors vary country to country. Like because of living in America, and the products and environment that you have here, maybe *when you think of blue it is a different blue than I think of in Sweden.*"

Poetry, I think, is a lot like translation. Maybe, I think, Poetry is really just translation, or, someone trying to get someone else to understand these acute and exquisite feelings.

*"To place a work in translation (and one could argue that every piece of writing is a work in translation) is to place it in transition and to leave it there"- The Language of Inquiry, Lyn Hejinian.*

However, I wonder that if once language leaves us, or even while it is still not yet heard, it is still Existing Otherwise, or in "transition" as one's aspect or understanding of just a chunk of something that we are sharing. So: Is language mine?

I think that I can say at least that language is something, outside of theories of whose domain.

*"Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss." -Celan, Collected Prose, translated by Rosmarie Waldrop*

As though, language is stable. Or, if not stable, at least something to hold on to.

Does it come down to comforting and not?

good or bad effect does this exist?

**SOMETHING COMFORTING:**

there are still moments of goodness  
and moments are everything.  
since we can know that time doesn't exist  
like this  
we can choose to acknowledge that  
everything is alive somewhere in time.  
that everything is ending  
and nothing ends.

short novel:

all i can say is that it is so jarring when  
my father clears the  
table because it is shaking and  
he is shaking and the  
crumbs are falling onto the floor now.

WELL,(hole),:

on finitude:

i'm wondering why i keep feeling like it's the end when i don't have to. and i think it's because i think urgency is valuable(?), just like poetry is dangerous. and if anxiety is an energy.. are there good bullets? is there bad empathy? this becomes relevant when i ask myself if my performance has done

anything good. if it was of energy and anxiety and produced energy and anxiety, then i hope that this can be considered a resource. I hope that this was generous and not aggressive.

I think that performance and poetry can be generous.

for me, someone who , it is gift to have something to look at or read. to P, thank you, for allowing me to be engrossed. and if art is everywhere then is it all magic everyday i wake up and it is beautiful and to write about it would be beautiful and it is all beautiful how i could become devoted to the production and beholding of all this beauty. maybe that is what i can hold, maybe that is what i can hold for you.

*"and understand it without knowing" -Unknown*

