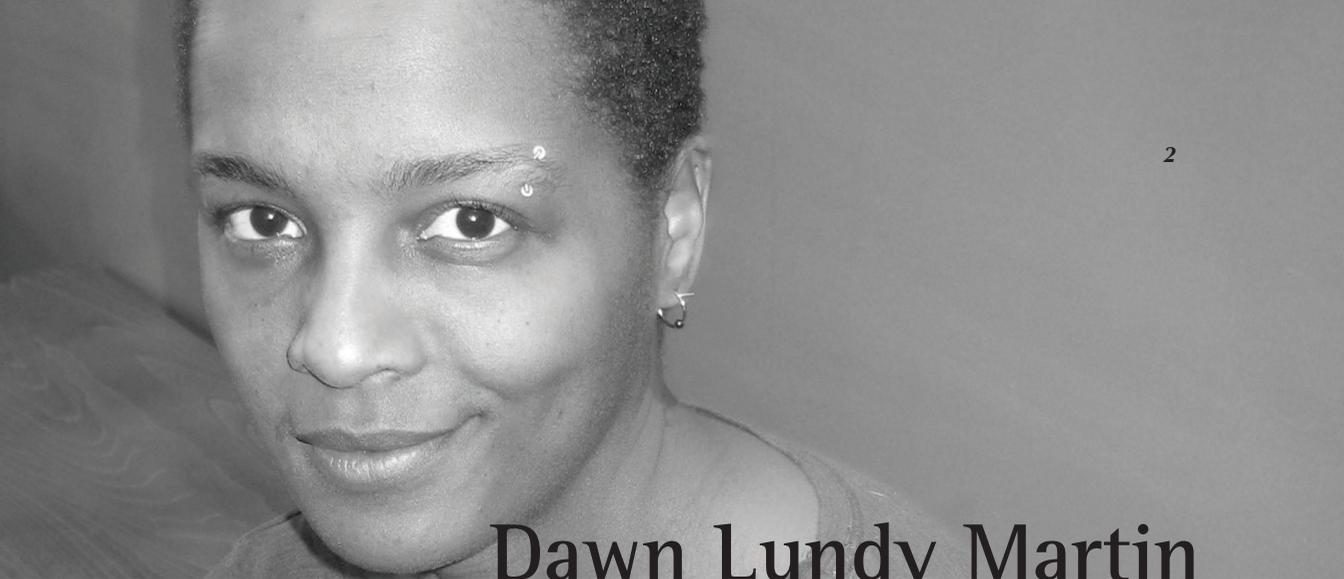


TROUBLING THE LINE

TRANS AND GENDERQUEER POETRY AND POETICS

Edited by TC Tolbert and Tim Trace Peterson

Online Excerpt for Lambda Literary Interview

A black and white close-up portrait of Dawn Lundy Martin. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. She has short, dark hair and is wearing a small hoop earring. The background is a plain, light color.

Dawn Lundy Martin

from Life in a Box is a Pretty Life

Dear one, the sea smells of nostalgia. We're beached and bloated, lie on shell sand, oil rigs nowhere seen. It's Long Island, and the weather is fine. What to disturb in the heart of a man?

A boy is not a body. A boy is a walk.

Shed the machine.

Must be entirely flesh to fight.

Must be strategy instead of filling.

What to disrobe, there, centrifugal logic, as in here is a slice of my finger. Tell me the circumstance of your cock extension. When we slip into imprecision, we lose control, windowless walls close in. Awareness of being in a female body is a tinge of regret. "The human frame to adapt itself to convention though she herself was a woman." To receive, to be entered, to fret around upon entry. It's grand. I'm a system. Plants tall as wheat to hide in.

*

When blanched in suspension.

When turned white from irons.

When hung by one ankle.

Hails knocks down mid-day. It's beige.

A black arm extending out.

Without fodder. A voice plays
background, saying:

A body is a piecemeal accumulation. It's already fraught. We attempt to construct
wholeness. No debris. No breaking off eastward.

To button up in a tight grey sweater what has been released.

*

Life in a box is a pretty life, arrangements and things. We all have the same type of
feeling. There's some drifting. *Breathe into my bag.* Flowers. To fight is to lie down
among the dead. [Unstable space.] [Claims historical.] History is littered with severed
cocks. A want to be buried here—these ruins. *Things seen from the corner of the
eye occasionally indicates a wider haunting.* Gapes to fall into. Almost everything
we're ever desired is diminished when enclosed. Attempts timelessness. Attempts
prayer. Can find no god, no oracle, no air. This is concavity. Feel cut of skin darkened
in such emergencies. Who wants a strobe light ring? Who wants a pickle? Small comforts.
Hapless encounter on the subway, or after a show, and we swat down inside ourselves.

*

When the head is shoved it naturally resists. Covers her dark face in a black cloth
(could be a hood).

*

We are infinitely disgraced. Wishes, well-wishes, eel. I am eleven and am and let into
a dim room where my brother and his friends are watching a 32 millimeter film in
which a woman is gangbanged. Upon entering the I distends. To claim is to maneuver.
Punishment referent: belt, whip, glory. *We speak to each other through mountains.
You excrete god likeness. Whose presence entered my world? Who decided upon and
then let go? I present you with a phantasmagoric me. I wear a sheath and jewels. My
tits hang out. I'm unworthy. Mouth unfastened, draw in. I fast. I work. I design. I craft. I
lend. I pour out. I stiffen upon command.*

*

Power is exercised where it can be exercised. Exacting precision. Spectacular momentum. Ninety-nine percent of the time, the ones in power will act like victims, will say, *we're not in power, we're trying to save all of us, it is for the sake of order. The current conditions are unforeseen.* They will say, *It's not our fault, or We didn't notice. How can we notice when the buildings are burning? We're doing everything we can,* they'll say, and, *Our hands are tied.* Bayonet already positioned. Figures in white, shadowy, through smoke. They appear to dance in half time. Jangle-mo. Distracted by concretions.

*

Squeezes legs together rhythmically, hopes no one notices. This is better than love because it is not unlike pleasure. No way to fill, no persuasion in the effort of filling. Relentless hours. The Global Economy is killing me. My mother tells me the story of Sodom and Gomorrah over again on the telephone. Has she imagined sodomy? Has she imagined flesh filled and flesh ripping? The state of things in the state? It's a broad sphere of unsanctioned doings. When I'm at my lowest I feel just fine. No money in my pocket, crouching behind the abandoned broke down carousel. Head-severed horse whinnying for me. *Where are you he calls? I dreamed I'd forgotten your name.*

*

Historically, we extend. We drift into. We are back straight. We bind. We draw. We categorize. We are punitive with regard to fairness only. We are method. We are order. What would you do without us? O, we are so very smitten.

*

This morning, I had a dream and remembered it. In the dream, you are ill and in the hospital. Maybe you're dying, I don't know. I think you are pocked and Leper-like. It doesn't matter. I was so worried about you. I answer my phone. It is not you but a friend who rattles on, who cares about what. The inevitable box makes an appearance. Tonight he's shiny—fetching, one might say. I was inside of the reverberation, beyond exhilaration. How to learn consensual violation? Feels in the mouth like—cannot explain—has an image of—you are probably thinking of some kind of particularly dinosaur-like bird that dives into the ocean and is relentless in its pursuit, opens beak, throat for fish, geeking it all down.



Joy Ladin

The Subject Disappears

It's hard to make small talk
when the subject disappears. Excuse me:

have you seen my I? Have you heard
which way it's pointing, whose heels it's sniffed?

Does it buy you drinks, give you shivers,
did it turn you on last night, stumble out at dawn,

tail between its legs, identifying its repetitive desolations
with the descending scale

of a bird that moaned in the distance?
Was it clever, patient, self-reflexive,

doomed to some dim archetypal quest,
did it crash in on itself like a waterfall, has it lost its sense

of beginnings and ends, does it stretch itself
toward opposite horizons, a tragic rainbow,

whose no can only mean yes?

Letter to the Feminine

You are a dream of clam shell and olive,
dark places between tails and spines, sheets stained
to reveal the spiritual complications
of your carefully perforated wings,

a calculated performance I rehearse again and again,
style detached, breasts incandescent,
little theaters of impossibility, immature stages
of the women in which you clothe me –

dead women, married women, women stuck between medieval pages,
fluttering in slips, flirting with socialism.
mounted, judged, incarcerated,
rubbed by unknown hands.

I wade through your editions,
lives you've bound, lives you've stitched,
lives you've flushed with dedication,
to unearth the truths you've hidden

in my own time, my own skin,
my own self unfolding
toward you and away,
over your passionate objections, through your suffering.



a narrative of resistance

recently I went to an “I am a _____(fill in the blank) and I am beautiful and sexy and fine and I am ok with who I am no matter what you say” performance. the fill in the blank in this case could be any word that describes any category or any group of nouns that are a category or any adjective that describes a group or category of nouns that are recognizable within the repeatable patterns of situated narratives, whether on a part time or full time basis. this is not a judgment about the “I am this _____(fill in the blank) and I am beautiful and sexy and fine and I am ok no matter what you say,” club, since it is a first step in seeing one’s self other than as a formless form situated in social shame. it is more a question of, if this is the stopping point, does it do anything more than reinforce the “I” as the ultimate achievement; where the end-game is the epiphany of late capitalism; to become an all consuming self-controlling anorexic life-form on automatic here to be the greatest consumer by buying one’s way into endless cycle of unexamined representations of the grand tale; a maybe, a reiteration of the heroic journey, or a story with a moral? I am not interested in morals, morals situate one within the state of label placements and finality. as whatever said in *a day in the life of p*. writing an article for the *psycalene quarterly*: “to the funeral ball - to the bat-n-ball, hand shaken going on at the funeral ball.”

I am not interested in situating myself or seeing anyone situate themselves in a state of subjugation, “or a felonious definition that creates a category.” on the other hand trying to escape from this multi-labeling assembly line at the commodification factory is like a fish trying to open a franchise of mcdonald’s . . . though this is not a probability, it might as well be possible. the probable we live out of has as many options as the impossible we exist in the probable of the planned out, knowing the outcome ahead of time. I want to explore the possibilities hidden away in dark rooms, the unnamed and unseen I want to experiment with new ways to articulate

the inarticulate that do not situate it in “a larger than persephone cast iron cog with teeth of cement blocks,” and at the same time affirm our humanity while calling attention to flagrant lapses of institutionalized thoughtlessness. whether we were dropped off here by someone’s god, or by accident there is too much suffering and destruction going on for it to be always about the “me” theme in personal “I” narratives.

so then what is a narrative of resistance? what is a narrative that informs and resists at the same time? what is this miracle and how did I get here? is there a stable body? can there be more than twenty pronouns?

words become important in the act of resistance or the corruption of words, or what you can do with them, or not. and just for the record, I am a self proclaimed deviant and all that that can mean. it’s just a word right? deviant is like queer, but more so; I deviate as much as possible from moral norms . . . or social norms, right path, or a proper code of conduct, proper spelling, right grammar, right way to be, here to serve someone’s god and country. that does not mean anything goes, it is still and always about reducing suffering.

basically, the way things are going now, the implementation of the social contract is not working, there is too much suffering and destruction going on and I/ we need to deviate from this path of institutional subjugation. in *a day in the life of p.*, p. the main character is “referred to as sometimes, something, whatever - or both.” are we not at all times, a both or whatever sometimes? and a whatever as we glide through our own positional grid, qualitatively changing with each passing event. we can pick and / or choose (as much as one is able) multiple categorie(s) to situate in, if we choose to pick a category at all. there is also the possibility that no matter how positioned we think we are in category or our choosing, an individual can experience a sudden sift in one’s position as one subjugated by another’s gaze into a different category.

this dance with a narrative of resistance started for me when I “discovered I was writing this secret diary, totally unaware of the fact that I was keeping this secret diary . . . (but) there was always this feeling I was doing something I didn’t know I was doing.” I began reading books that allowed me to say, “oh, there are others like me, and they all did similar x, y, and z things.” finding these connections with others are important, if not critical to resistance. having a language to speak ones truth is a critical tool for resistance, but it does not creates an environment of resistance if one stays in an identifiable category; just the opposite happens, one becomes, “I am this, I will always be this,” “this is my story,” and “I am going to tell my story.” then there is a city full of stories, and television shows with everyone’s story on it, all day all the time. after reading numerous “x, y, and z things books,” what I started to notice was, all these “x, y, and z thing” books were more of the same thing, then there were more books that said the same thing from a different perspective, and all these books

ended up on a bookshelf in the back of 'barrens and nobles,' or those bookstores with rainbow flags out front... another way of looking at this is, this is a country of, "I am an island theme songs," "my story counts as possible docudramas points," "I am an island in a special ocean" we can no longer afford to be islands . . . or support the island effect. artificial boundaries are foolish and create the is the first step to nationalism and creation of the 'other.' we are a nation that thrives on islandism . . . psychotherapy induces islandism. there is a blue jean company that produces 45 different types of blue jeans, so we can become one of 45 special islands . . . how many types of blue jeans do we need? it becomes nothing but a celebration of "the national assembly line production quotas for the year. look at me I am the newest of the new in my 1 of 45"

what ends up happening with all these "x, y and z" books, is they lead to forms of ghettoization, and marginalization. traditional chronological narratives create recognizable forms. time situates form within a past relative to the present, form has a category . . . recognizable forms are those events that take place in progress. recognizable is something repeatable enough to be seen as a noun and can be situated in a category. the problem is once one zeros in on a site, or a group, zeros in and calls something home, one becomes a target for new markets. or is placed on one of those bookshelves in the back of the store, or becomes a group locked into the DSM IVR. so shifting and causing interference, not knowing where the "I" is going, creating the probable out of the impossible and reinforcing resistance with information jolts to the system from stagnation. you could say practice "being a campaign of personal espionage," "as was done with those who went over niagara falls in a log cabin, or when someone landed in a distant field in the wrong direction." what becomes important is new systems, "all split atoms should have their own zip code." new approaches to open new areas in life one does not even know they do not know, "write one thing that relates to each of the past 14 million years, in large print."

we need to explore the hidden possible, out of dark edges or lost words that take place in the path of personal narrative, "like truffles on parade," not the known past which situate the already situated into further subjugation. shift, transform, find multi-connections and use many ways of distortion to swerve out of the way of the oncoming train. there are new connections where there may not have been connections. seeking out multiple connections creates new systems that takes us into communities where we would not normally go, and the more we can get outside ourselves the more we can connect with others. "truth=maybe."

all this brings back the question of how does one write a narrative of resistance of the inarticulate, in a language that situates? lean towards deviation, migration, position shifting, slipping in and out of focus, shifting, (that kind you

do when your bored and sitting on your seat to long). try to find alliances that go in the same direction by a different track, corollaries that get lost in their own direction, which challenge the "find myself" narrative. so why do this? this is a tool for disruption, activism, acts of personal and public empowerment. give back to the community, with glorious havoc and come up with new possibilities. as "p." stated, "remember - all prescribed incidents are nothing more than obligatory super rantings . . . with a sigh of relief from nowhere."

all quotes taken from:

edwards, kari. *Iduna*. Berkeley, CA: O Books, 2003

edwards, kari. *a day in the life of p*. New York, NY: Subpress, 2002

edwards, kari. *diary of lies*, Brooklyn, NY: Belladonna chapbooks, 2002 & EOAGH Books, 2013.



Max Wolf Valerio

Fetish Eyes

*hide the
symptom*

cold fear
tangled

bent to

perfect tension

runaway kids on Polk Street with fish in their hair motion
to the crawling
furnace of oil and syringes

yoga asylum

object-oriented
hybrids
circle

with squatting
feelers &
brush-level
tongues

collectors
pickpockets



Samuel Ace

I met a man

I met a man who was a woman who was a man who was a woman who was a man who met a woman who met her genes who tic'd the toe who was a man who x'd the x and xx'd the y I met a friend who preferred to pi than to 3 or 3.2 the infinite slide through the river of identitude a boat he did not want to sink who met a god who was a tiny space who was a shot who was a god who was a son who was a girl who was a tree I met a god who was a sign who was a mold who fermented a new species on the pier beneath the ropes of coral

I met a man who was a fume who was a man who was a ramp who was a peril who met a woman who carried the x and x'd the y the yy who xx'd the simple torch

I rest (the man who) a woman who tells the cold who preferred a wind a chime who was a silo who met a corner a fuel an aurora a hero a final sweep

I sleep the planet I call my face scorched

It's been 10 years without a name an ordinary life

Tell me what you know

Begin message:

From: L

Subject: Tell me what you know the future will traffic my security for your security and the inflatable bus that takes me to the springs the boy boy parts the stains of coo the prance and the farm hidden and encrypted and failed I've tried to get in through the west fence the pressure scolded for pain it was the wrong direction it was the serial surveillance that finished him off it was the backend of sodden tradition a hotel for gardens

Date: April 9 9:57:11 PM EST

To: S

The future
will traffic
my security
for yours
the inflatable
bus that
takes me
to the springs
the boy
boy parts
the stains
of coo
for pain
the wrong
direction
the serial
surveillance
finished
him off

the prance
the farm
hidden
encrypted
and failed
I've tried
to get in
through
the west
fence
the pressure
scolded
the backend
of sodden
tradition
a hotel
for gardens



Trish Salah

Poetics Statement

Page 1

In the annals of a voice, a vocal exercise
machine, in the wake of a surgical gawk,
Not unlike the university defaced.

I used to work on my breath cuts
swimming under water was harder
I think the reason I couldn't cannonball.

You look up and you follow the words.
And numbers align, blood, the light fades,
You stumble, internally, recover.

An out of body experience, spongy
Green fields below, an I soaring
Breathless, choke of a sleeper still.

Breathy, her froth and tremul, as if?
A question, clipped and round "o"
Pursed, smiling, uptalk, for, like, always?

Enter the clichés, so as to be entered
Into the real. Reach over the body, ok?
Recognize practice makes unconscious.

Its lessons or lesions, and the associated
Press, risk silk or granary, rasp seductive
Like smoke, a body of smoke, Trace, thanks told you,

In Sotto Voce, what's a girl to do, do a woman
Like you, due do to pause, and fleshly accident
Accidental, pitch bitch of being born, as if!

A soul dwells there, a harbour of light
Haunts pleasantries with desire's husk
Bodies present themselves, appealing.

Poetics Statement

Page 2

Page 1 was a poem. I need coffee. Funny about the manifesto being something that for me was always immanent. "always" dates from encountering Fiction/Theory in Tessera, so 1991. For always or until 1991 (happens again), which will be a while.

The writing, like Jack Spicer, doesn't come from this body. I don't know about beams. It comes from what I don't know about. In this body, or that other, or that Other. The writing is singular, and eclipses particular modalities of thinking about. It could be accused of romanticism, then, or vent. There is a two body problem, that cannot quite get hold of or contain the more than two bodies that enter into the text. I guess the problem is between any two bodies of the possible field or duration in which two of those bodies are in view, one typing, one being typed, or not typed, but being a locus from which what is typed is oriented.

At least that is what I think when I am not thinking. (This writing is on a double track.) The traction of the body on the vent or romanticism is that I've not yet had a body my coffee this morning, insomnia sucks, I am lonely in a new town, my apartment is drafty, and....

(triply) my work should be of use, as well as of pleasure, of productive interference to someone being someone other than me. And specifically, we are so deeply, unmoveably fucked by the violent ordering of the world, the destruction of it, the destruction of us in it. So, Israel invades Lebanon, Palestinians are stateless and dying in public view, for sixty years, feminists debate whether or not to support prostitutes, indigenous people struggle to articulate viable realities, livable lives in/

against/through the murderous and abjecting “options” offered up/imposed down upon them by settler colonialism. And they succeed, sometimes, as do prostitutes and transsexuals and arabs, even Palestinians, succeed in making some life, some joy, something smart, warm or pretty and possible. Sometimes, some do for a little while, or even for a good long, hard won, lifetime, even in spite and through some difficult choices, violent oppression and self-serving rescue committees.

So you want to honor joy, and glory and farts (pardon me, Mirha-Soleil Ross) and (making messy, stop counting) channeling (beaming) the people who make a difference, who make your own life possible, between one body and the next, because that isn't to be taken for ground granted.

I haven't had my coffee yet. It is troubling, where language makes a bridge, but there's no firm. And when you become in a particular direction, the exhaustion of other avenues doesn't mean you are done with them. Writing is sometimes an exercise in the inexhaustible of other avenues. If my hand were to slip under my shirt, under skin. I slipped and cut myself when I first got here, and had no idea where to take myself when the wound wouldn't close. If I were to call you up on the telephone and say it was a mistake. Writing recovery, writing graven, writing manifesting the body and its impossibility, which is a persisting limit if you listen to it. It only sounds like lament to me today. Tomorrow it will screech cheerfully into route and fucking. Friday it will have people over for poems and sangria, or maybe take a nap.

If my body were written from the body would the body it was written from be transsexual? Would it be childhood's projection forward into whatever the forward of Oxford Street in Halifax or Lawson Street in Dartmouth might ever have been? There were imago girls all over my childhood. Which I fastened onto like stars. The neighbors and school chums and a cousin. And it is that (transsexual) lesbian Freudian cliché. Wanting and wanting to be. (There is a kernel of Freud in every Judith Butler Butch/Femme.) Oh, and Gilligan's Island, I Dream of Genie, Battlestar Galactica, the Uncanny X-Men. If we play superheroes can I be Marvel Girl, Phoenix, The Black Queen, Dark Phoenix, Willow, Evil Vampire Willow, Dark Willow, Dark Willow's Girlfriend Dark Phoenix? On Battlestar Galactica, Cassopeia was a companion, i.e. a ho, on a Battlestar, heroic. I loved that. Becoming towards. Sex workers, subtextual (Ginger/MaryAnne) Lesbians, Witches, Dominatrixes, the Girl next door in her Apocalyptic Invert form—superheroes, and reasons to write a body. (Writing this I realize again that Joss Whedon and I are about the same age, and probably watched the same tv growing up. Anya is Genie if Genie were a person and post-feminism.)

Oh dear, and just when you thought you weren't going to embarrass yourself at parties. Anymore. At least you're not passed out in the punch. Say something smart about Al-Andalus. No thanks, not today. I might have been a “dirty leb” but I totally

didn't understand Fairuz growing up. Lebanon was a photo of my dad on skies in the mountains above Beirut, sitting next to a photo of him walking along the beach later that day. (I made that up, the same day of it, just cause it is what they always say). But she pulled at me, like Lou Reed, only entirely differently. Beautiful boys in skirts, another way to fall. Hanging out with my Lebanese cousins listening to New Wave.

Poetics start narrative stops, allow the beach breach, leak out of life into objects, and abject there for a little while. This week in class I'm teaching the makeover as genre and trope. You wanted to be, interrupted. You want through thought to have a room. Kiss up, fuck up, have a party, pay a debt, undo a certain rational, undo a certain violence, all certain rationales, move home, be next to, and welcome, dwell