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Erika Hodges:
A New Insurgent Writing

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“She must write herself, because this is an invention of *a new insurgent writing* which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history”.

— Helene Cixous, *The Laugh of the Medusa*

The contemporary rhetoric of the United States, where I was born and raised, is obsessed with returning. Make it Great, make it white, make it male, make it *again*. This returning (even if it is a relapse to an imaginary past) is an effort to hold on to known form. To grasp onto old architecture with the thought that if it is already built then it is the only structure that will save us. Cixous fights against this in her essay *The Laugh of the Medusa*. It is upon her anti-scaffolding of absence and darkness that I have built my theory.

My friends were upset after the election. I was upset too. This returning was antithetical to my vision of what the future could be: new, uncontained, free. I spent hours in between classes and work shifts reading and imagining, but mostly searching for language that substantiated this desire within me. I had turned to poetry and theory to make sense of the apocalyptic crumbling I was witnessing all around me. I did not want to be alone anymore. I wanted a concrete action to combat the separatism that was oozing out of my phone screen.

I was sent Five Years’ call for submissions to the Being Together Is Not Enough festival in the midst of this frantic research by a friend. It seemed so unlikely that such a call could exist. Such potent language for this new unprecedented utopian ideal that I had felt bubbling inside my own internal caverns.

I did not know anything about Five Years or its members. I did not know anything about the festival but it said free and open and I believed it. I did some fundraising but also a lot of extra shifts so that I could fly across an ocean to speak to an unknown amount of people in a place I had never heard of in London where I knew no one. On the flight I kept thinking about my hypothetical response if a friend had said to me right then, “But being together is not enough”. “You are right. We must also show up. Show up with not just our bodies but our intent and commitment and dedication and fervor and grief and love and rage and joy, with all of it at once. We must do it over and over again and when we can’t anymore we must trust our friends to care for us and show up for us until we can show up with them and for them again as well.” A year later I still believe that and it was the basis for the presentation I brought with me blindly across an ocean. We must feel it all at once. We must embrace the grey space. In that nebulous formation of decentered thought and more importantly feeling and expression, they cannot get to us; only then is there room to make something new.

The original proposal was written in collaboration with another poet I thought would perform with me so the ideas and language contain a bit of his spirit and assertions which did not show up in the final iteration but I am happy to have them side by side if only to show the diversity of tactics possible and necessary for an experimental future. The following is an excerpt from the notes I brought with me to London. A lot of what was actually said was dependent on the people in the room. I did say some of these things but mostly it was a conversation which was the very best I could hope for.

A New Insurgent Writing

...we have pink hat protests and facebook hashtags that are labeled “resistance” or rupturing to the system but because it is in response to this problematic system, it is really still a part of it, feeding it from a different angle. If you have ever been to Times Square, or really any shopping mall, you will know what I mean when I say that if capitalism has a reference point for what you are doing/saying/acting like, it will consume you, just as you are directed to consume it. Advertising is insidious in this way; “accepting” of all body types/genders/races under the guise on “inclusivity” but really this tactic that is marketed as liberal openness is just there to assimilate you and ensure you are compliant, sedated. So, any direct response to it as an act of resistance is a lie.

I believe it is important to not gloss over my own participation; personal responsibility is a way of showing up for one another. I allow this lie to proliferate inside of myself. I buy things, sell my labor and participate in capitalism. I do actively work though, to find ways to escape with my most honest expression, to make art that is not only labeled revolutionary but is actually revolting to capitalism. To this end, I have introduced the idea of Illegibility as a part of the central vocabulary for my thinking here around insurgent, anti-capitalist artmaking. To be illegible in this context means to be irrelevant from capitalism. If your work does not operate in the same modes as patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, racism etc. then it becomes impossible to consume and difficult to squash. Capitalism is not a clever system. It adapts, yes, but only within certain parameters and through the same predictable methods. It can not exist in a world without clear definition. It does not do well with nuance, or capricious human emotion. It’s modus operandi is to simply either abolish or absorb all that does not agree with it by any means necessary. Our society dictates that for communication or expression of any kind to be valid, it needs to be legible, to be easily understood. This expels a whole range of human emotion that does not propel the forward moving, linear energy of consumption. These sort of complicated expressions move in all sorts of directions and without warning. This sort of energy is authentic and present in the moment and therefore unpredictable.

Another way of looking at this is a decentering away from a production oriented pleasure and towards a non-economy of excess. We have seen this historically on the factory floor, moving the power away from the manager to the workers, which are varied and changing. We also see this dynamic everyday in our interpersonal relationships. In feminist theory, it is often referred to the phallic vs non-phallic. For example, phallic sex being product oriented; “what will I get out of this experience?” “will it feel good?” “will I come and when?” and so on. While decentralized intimacy, which is often associated with the feminine, has no goal. It is not a means to an end. Actually, it is not a means to anything. Instead it is a possibility, an opportunity for connection and complication. It is a fluid moment and what comes from it is often excessive. An upheaval of emotion, shifting body mass and fluids, a glimpse into what community could be at its deepest and most vulnerable level, beyond language.

“Beyond language” is not something that can be quantitatively measured or really qualitatively for that matter. And so if it can’t be measured, it can’t be consumed, it can’t be sold. It is unsustainable breaths. It is moment based. It occurs and then it is gone, much like water and dust, the basic elements we are made of. We see this in the political uprising as well, which when performed effectively is not for *anyone* except the group and not for *anything* at all. A movement for the people, no longer against the police. The police have been made irrelevant or at least only a variable to contend with but no longer the main attraction. The focus dissipates and the energy becomes focused on the breathing space between one another.

There is a surge in moments of intense community such as this that seems to stop time. A shared euphoria that does not take any substantial shape but instead blends lines between bodies and creates an imaginary future in the real moment. These moments are not consistent, nor do they sustain in a measurable way but they are accessible through surrender and so are like portals to something different and unforeseen.

This idea is terrifying but also so exciting because it lends itself to innovation that cannot be marketed or even deciphered; our work lends itself to the possibility of communicating and being together and making together in a way that breaks the State. I don’t know if it will work but I am invested in

my curiosity. What will they do if instead of fighting back with their tools and language we create our own? In addition to saying no we ignore the command completely and do something else. That something being existing in the grey space, the unknown, the definitionless, the darkness, the too much and overwhelming, breathing into it and saying yes. I would be interested in seeing their next move. It would have to move off the board or map that they created and into unknown territory. I am ready for something new.

I showed the work of my friends (Nathan Wheeler, No Land & Jeffrey Pethybridge). I then performed myself in hopes of fleshing out my sentences with vulnerable expression, a more true form of speaking.

What happened in the days following that performance was what filled up my empty stores and allowed me to continue to create work in a dark winter that followed. It was the conversations and shared meals I had with new friends in pubs and restaurants and parks and homes that I was most grateful to bring back with me to Brooklyn. I had tapped into a kind of magic I was not sure was real (despite having just professed its' merits).

Now I am realizing that I end almost every piece of writing like a love letter. I become sentimental. It is almost over. There is so much deep feeling (that I have been taught is embarrassing) that wells up when I am about to reach the end. I speak of this place "beyond language" but everytime I still try to say it all. I think sentimentality is appropriate this time though, and maybe every time. Thank you Five Years. Thank you Eddy. Thank you to everyone in that room on that spring almost summer afternoon. I'm quite relieved to discover that I am a person that would behave so wildly in order to say a few words and cry a few poems in a new room with new friends. And I'm so grateful to have been received with such generosity and kindness.

Take care. Keep in touch. Warmly & Forever, E.

"Don't fret about the 'right' word. There is none... Everything is worth exchanging, without privileges or refusals. Exchange? Everything can be exchanged when nothing is bought. Between us, there are no owners or purchasers, no determinable objects and no prices. Our bodies are enriched by our mutual pleasure. Our abundance is inexhaustible: it knows neither want nor plenty. When we give ourselves 'all' without holding back or hoarding, our exchanges have no terms. How to say this? The language we know is so limited."

— Luce Irigaray, *When Our Lips Speak Together*



Sniffing Tears

TRUDGE



TRUDGE

TRUDGE

