Cynthia Valenti

Stetson University Master's Thesis

MFA in Creative Writing

Compilation of 16 Packets

November 2026

Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
Annotated Encounters List
January 2025 | Packet One

1) **Hannah Foley**

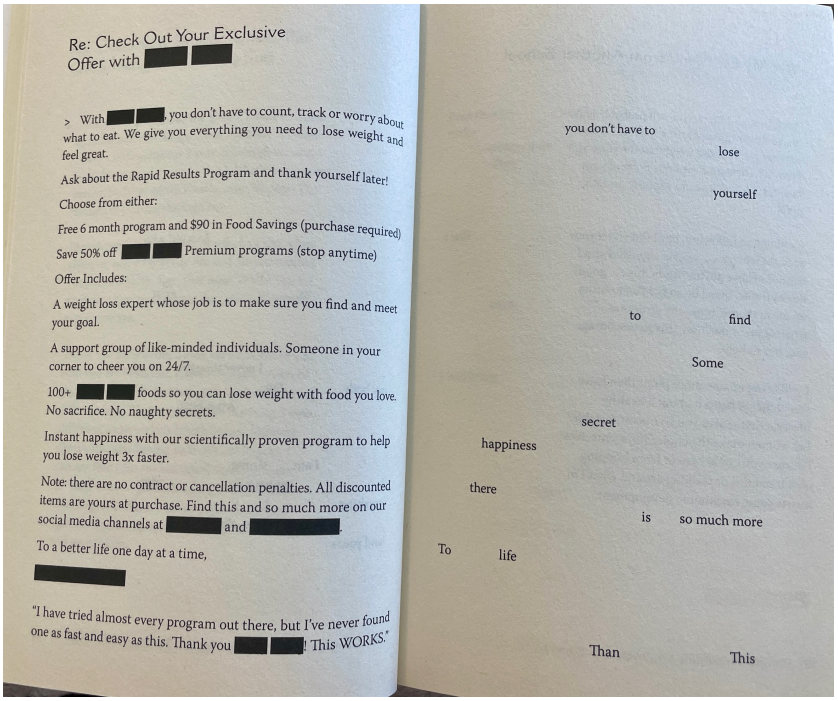
— My mind seems to be stuck on breath and breathing, which led me to a poem by Hannah Foley, titled, "Breathing Backwards (Breath Score)." She created the breath performance using visuals to begin, then added breath sounds as the score. She researched "wind patterns and observations of bird calls" (Foley, 2020, para. 3) which inspired drawings that where translated into rhythms. I'm fascinated by her work and plan to incorporate breathing into my work moving forward.

https://www.hannahfoley.art/projects/breathing-backwards

2) **Kate Baer**

— Kate Baer's book, *I Hope This Finds You Well*, is a collection of erasure poetry created from messages she received online. Instead of deleting the messages, she turned them into poetry. I like the process of taking a large block of text and picking only the best words, or words that change the meaning of the message, to create a poem. I also plan to create poetry that addresses societal issues, as Baer does in her work. I have included erasure poetry in packet one. https://www.katebaer.com/

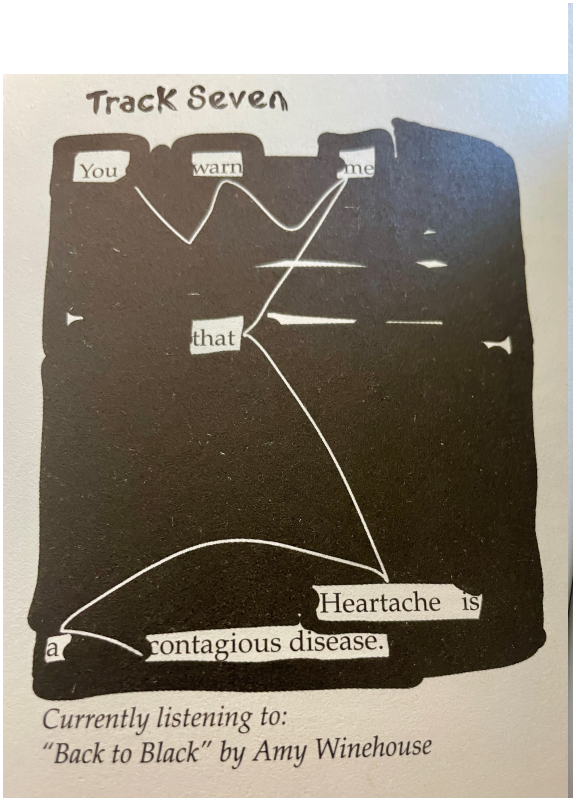
Poem from *I Hope This Finds You Well*

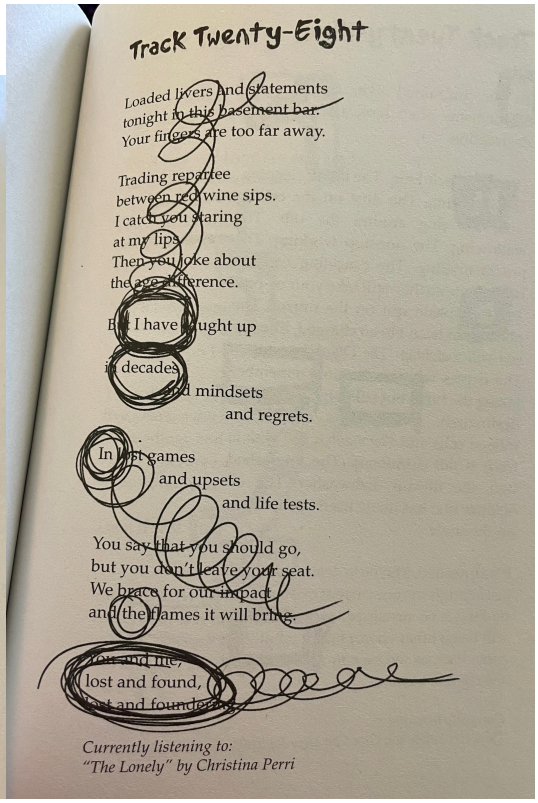


3) Alicia Cook

— Alicia Cook's *Sorry I Haven't Texted You Back,* is a collection of poems that address mental health, illness, guns, violence, suicide, natural disaster, death sex, and trauma. Side A of the book is a series of songs by various music artists. Side B is a remix of the songs into poetry that includes, erasures, scribbles, directional lines, large color blocks of black and grey, and hand drawings. The visuals are very interesting. I would like to incorporate hand drawings and visual aspects in my poetry. https://thealiciacook.com/

Two examples of Cook's *Sorry I Haven't Texted You Back:*
"Track Seven" and "Track Twenty-Eight"





4) Pina Bausch

— Pina Bausch is a German dancer, known for her choreography and the establishment of dance theater as a new genre of art. In the two YouTube videos linked below, I especially enjoyed the movement of bodies with nature as backgrounds. The contrast of formality of attire and the casualness of nature is striking. I would like to include movement of bodies, both my own and those of others, in my work. The use of natural surroundings: beaches, trees, water, etc., will have a large role in my future work. https://www.pinabausch.org/

YouTube: Pina Bausch The fall dance
https://youtu.be/zS8hEj37CrA?feature=shared

YouTube: DANCING PINA Trailer | VIFF 2022
https://youtu.be/sXUbfT22N94?feature=shared

5) **Bob Cobbing**

— Bob Cobbing was a publisher and poet known for his visual, concrete, and sound poetry and performances. His work included using marks for poetry, any marks or shapes and symbols, as well as sounds such as, moans, breaths, sighing, and shouting. He considered it all poetry (not always on paper). I would like to explore the use of voice and sounds for my poetry, sounds that emanate from my soul with no discernable words. Cobb's work is unusual, interesting, and inspirational.

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/bob-cobbing

YouTube: An Interview With Bob Cobbing
https://youtu.be/By7vylAVz3Y?feature=shared

Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
January 2025 | Packet One
Collection of Five Pieces

Poem One: Disruption
VIDEO

Poem Two: Conception
VIDEO

Poem Three: Mis | under | stood

Poem Four: Hollow

Poem Five: Response to “Tips to look after your husband" (Extract from 1950 Home Economics Book)

Mis | under | stood

Stand.

Under.

** Miss. U.

Departure.

The weight of it.

Fragile.

Obtuse.

Voice un | dulates.

Quiet.

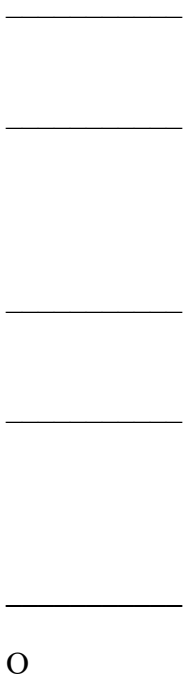
** Too.

Departure.

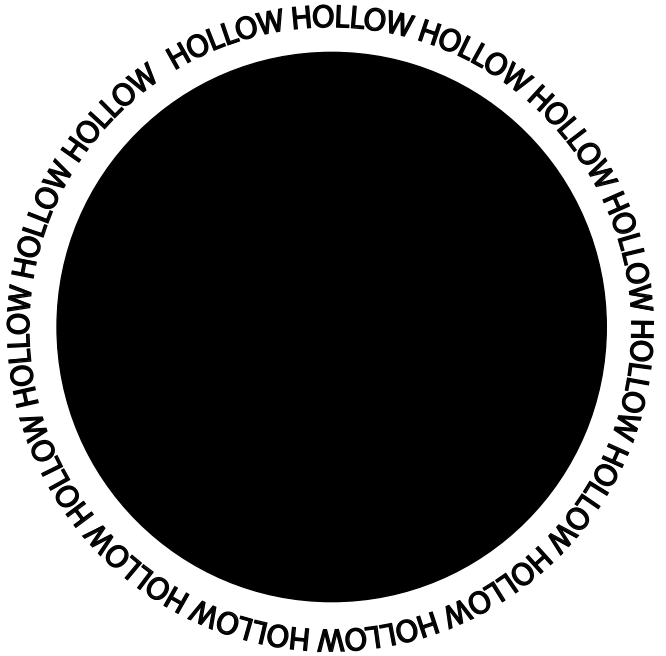
Allowed to feel it?

The | weight | of | it.

Under.



L


HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW HOLLOW

W

Tips to look after your husband

(Extract from 1950 Home Economics Book)

Have dinner ready
Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious meal on time. This is a way of letting him know that you have been thinking about him and are concerned about his needs. Most men are hungry when they come home and the prospects of a good meal are part of the warm welcome needed.

Prepare yourself
Take 15 minutes to rest so you will be refreshed when he arrives. Touch up your make-up, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh looking. He has just been with a lot of work weary people. Be a little gay and a little more interesting. His boring day may need a lift.

Clear away the clutter
Make one last trip through the main part of the house just before your husband arrives, gathering up school books, toys, paper etc. Then run a dust cloth over the tables. Your husband will feel he has reached a haven of rest and order, and it will give you a lift too.

Prepare the children
Take a few minutes to wash the children's hands and faces (if they are small), comb their hair, and if necessary, change their clothes. They are little treasures and he would like to see them playing the part.

Minimise all noise
At the time of his arrival, eliminate all noise of washer, drier dishwasher or vacuum. Try to encourage the children to be quiet. Be happy to see him. Greet him with a warm smile and be glad to see him.

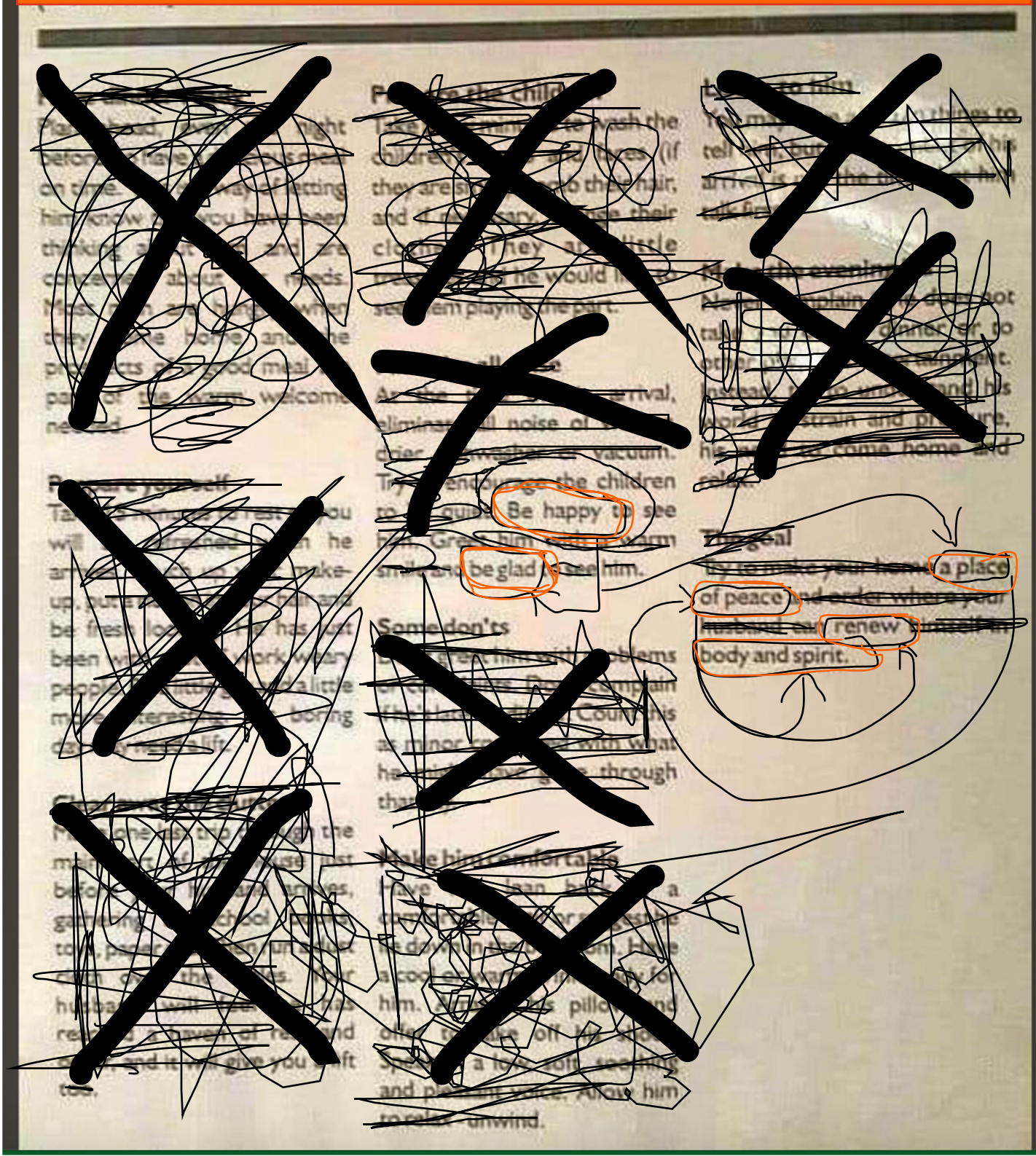
Some don'ts
Don't greet him with problems or complaints. Don't complain if he's late for dinner. Count this as minor compared with what he might have gone through that day.

Make him comfortable
Have him lean back in a comfortable chair or suggest he lie down in the bedroom. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him. Arrange his pillow and offer to take off his shoes. Speak in a low, soft, soothing and pleasant voice. Allow him to relax - unwind.

Listen to him
You may have a dozen things to tell him, but the moment of his arrival is not the time. Let him talk first.

Make the evening his
Never complain if he does not take you out to dinner or to other places of entertainment. Instead, try to understand his world of strain and pressure, his need to come home and relax.

The goal
Try to make your home a place of peace and order where your husband can renew himself in body and spirit.


Be happy to see
be glad to see him.
a place
of peace
renew
body and spirit.

Response to “Tips to look after your husband (Extract from 1950 Home Economics Book)

Be happy

Be glad

A place of peace

Renew

Body and spirit

Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
January 2025
Packet One

What I Would Like to Explore

As someone who expresses herself in a variety of ways, I'm looking forward to creating a body of work that encompasses both my skill set and my creative abilities, using digital art and writing. I would like to incorporate photography, videography, sound recording and sound design, body movements, and text. I enjoy putting words on paper, but more so I enjoy making those words move and move with sounds. Lately, I'm semi-obsessed with breathing and vocal sounds. I learned about Bob Cobbing and Hannah Foley for packet one, I would like to explore using my voice and breathing as sound tracks for videos, or simply the audio alone as art. I don't mean spoken words, rather sounds from my soul that aren't necessarily discernable. Sounds that feel good when I make them. Sounds that express what I'm feeling inside. What do I feel when I look at the ocean or standing in a forest? What do I feel that nature is saying back to me? Can I capture that interaction? What sounds do I make when angry or happy? What is my relationship with my breath, my voice, my soul, and my world? Is there symbiosis involved?

I would like to begin exploring what my concept might be for next semester, trying on different concepts as I create this semester. Very close to my heart are issues concerning women, so I will investigate that direction. I'm also interested in symbiotic relationships. Symbiosis is a concept I would like to begin pre-researching — seeking to understand how it affects the world, our relationships with others, and in abstract ways (if there is such a thing). I want to roll the word around on my brain and think of all the ways we intertwine with nature and each other. There are three main types of symbiotic relationships: mutualism, commensalism, and

parasitism. What do each of these mean? How do they affect those involved in the symbiotic relationships?

I'm naturally a very visual person and I will create with a camera, of course, as well as graphic design. Additionally, I will explore my own natural voice and sounds, and the ones in my environment — the interplay between myself and the world. This is a path I will take in my work this semester as groundwork for future semesters. As part of that exploration, I would like to learn more from artists who use breathing and sound in their work. I would like to record other people breathing and make a sort of "music" from the recordings or incorporate music with the sounds of breath, sighs, utterances, screams, cries, etc.

In some ways, technology has drawn us away from the connectedness of our own selves, with who were are *within* our bodies, with each other and nature. I would like to create work that addresses this and refocus people on the importance of pausing to feel who they are inside and let them know they matter in this big mess of a world. I would like to point them to moments of grounding in nature and guide them to reflect on their own breath and voices. I don't know why this is on my mind so much, but it seems to be something I need to explore and work my way through creatively. I'm happy to be breathing again. I think I might want others to realize how important every breath is and to encourage them to keep breathing and to interact with each other and our world.

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Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
February 2025
Packet Two

Annotated Encounters List

Lawrence Weiner
— Lawrence Weiner was suggested to me after my last packet, for his work in the video "Blue Moon Over." The video was random with text and symbols, as well as bold fonts. I used items from a previous poetry project about anxiety to create a video using Weiner's "Blue Moon Over" as inspiration. That being said, I'm holding hands with him in this packet. I enjoyed the randomness of his work that kept switching up the visuals, yet repeating elements at times. His choice of sound, which was machine-like, worked well. I chose to use my own voice for sound in the video I created, altering my vocals with echo, delay, choral flanger, and speeding up and slowing down the speed and duration of the sounds.

Learn more about Lawrence Weiner here: https://www.ubu.com/film/weiner.html

Donna Haraway
— Donna Haraway was also suggested reading for me, and works in this packet are inspired by her writing, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialism in the 1980s." Considering the concept of symbiosis, my mind has been stuck on nature. Haraway's writing inspired me to think outside of that arena. Two works in this packet are related to cyborgs, feminism, and the symbiosis we experience with machines (current and future). Haraway is a difficult read, but her ideas are intriguing, especially considering the path for humans moving forward. I wouldn't say I'm holding hands with her, but she definitely opened my mind to think in new directions and to consider how I might incorporate elements such as artificial intelligence and augmented reality into my poetry.

Learn more about Donna Haraway here:
https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780190221911/obo-9780190221911-0128.xml

Cy Twombly
— Cy Twombly is an artist whose work looks like scribbles mixed with calligraphy and graffiti. They are usually large-scale with interesting color choices, often modest. I would like to attempt a work like this moving forward, to let my mind and hand move freely over paper or a canvas and build upon it. Twombly's work includes what seem to be hidden messages for viewers to decipher. I think it would be fun to create something like that, a picture puzzle.

Learn more about Cy Twombly here: https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/cy-twombly-2079





Jeppe Hein
— Jeppe Hein is known for creating experiences and interactive artwork. I enjoyed his work with mirrors and the way he draws people into his exhibits to experience the art. I think art is fun when the people viewing it have a role, and I would like to consider how I could use mirrors or lights in my poetry — as well as how I could bring others into my work.

Learn more about Jeppe Hein here: https://www.303gallery.com/artists/jeppe-hein/biography



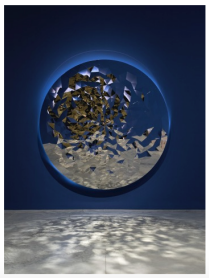










H. N. Werkman
— Hendrik Nicolaas Werkman was a Dutch typographer and printer who used typography to create poetry. His work in “Mit Schreibmaschine 1923-29” was very inspirational for this packet of my own work, particularly the way he used text to create shapes and patterns. I am also holding hands with him in this packet, in two poems, using words that form shapes and others that overlap for emphasis.

Learn more about H.N. Werkman here: https://www.ubu.com/vp/Werkman.html

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February 2025 | Packet One
Collection of Five Pieces

Poem One: ION's Journey
Response to Lawrence Weiner's "Blue Moon Over"
VIDEO

Poem Two: Flesh Code
Explores the symbiotic relationship between humans and technology
VIDEO

Poem Three: Tell Us What You Really Think
The words in this poem were generated using artificial intelligence (AI). The words on the left are a ChatGPT response to, "Describe a relationship between a human woman and a cyborg." The right side of the poem is a disturbing AI response to a human.

Poem Four: "Heal the Terrible Cleavages of Gender"
Inspired by Donna Haraway (all words are from her cyborg manifesto) and H.N. Werkman (use of text to create form of poem)

Poem Five: Anxiety is a Ritual — Inspired by H.N. Werkman

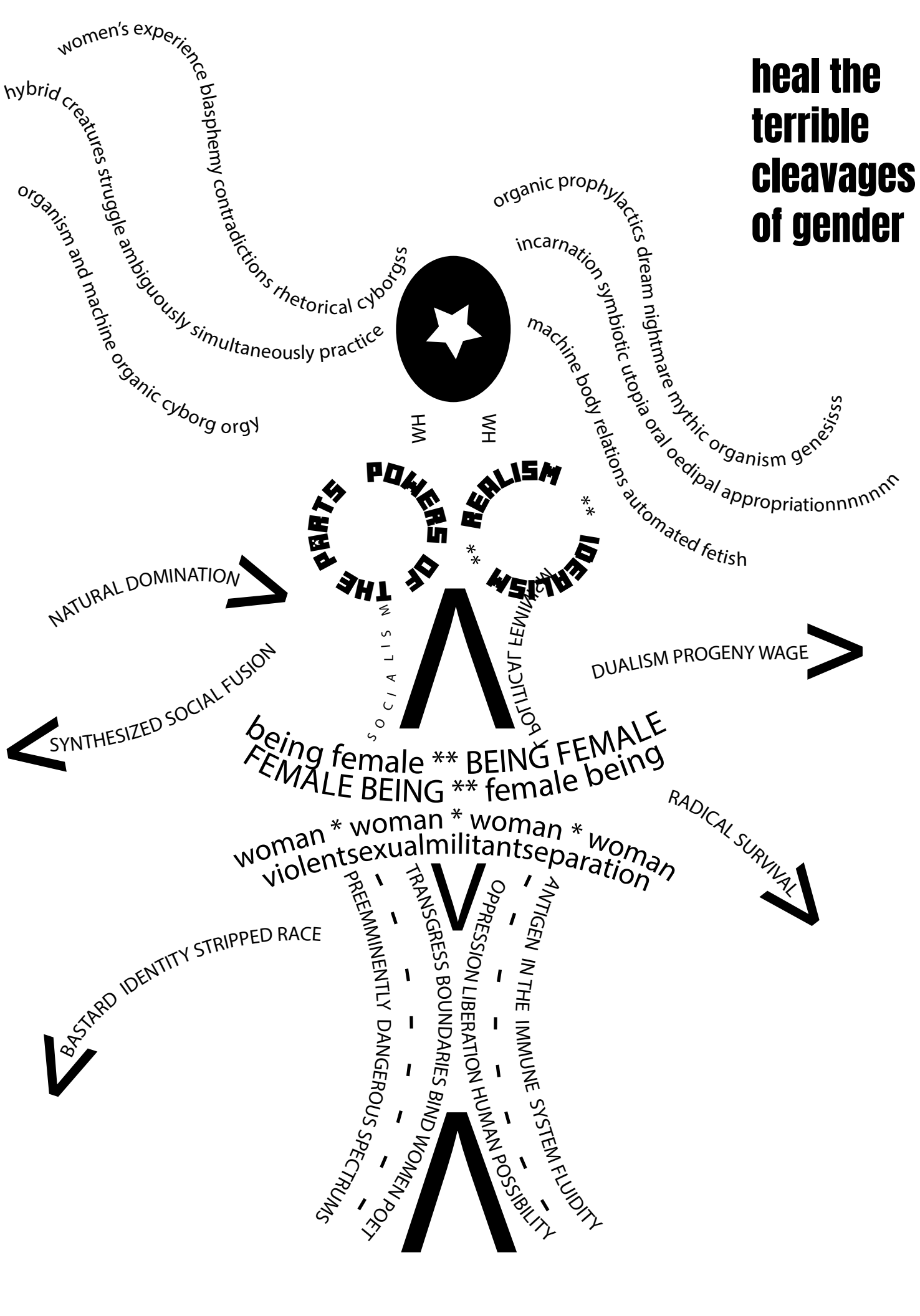


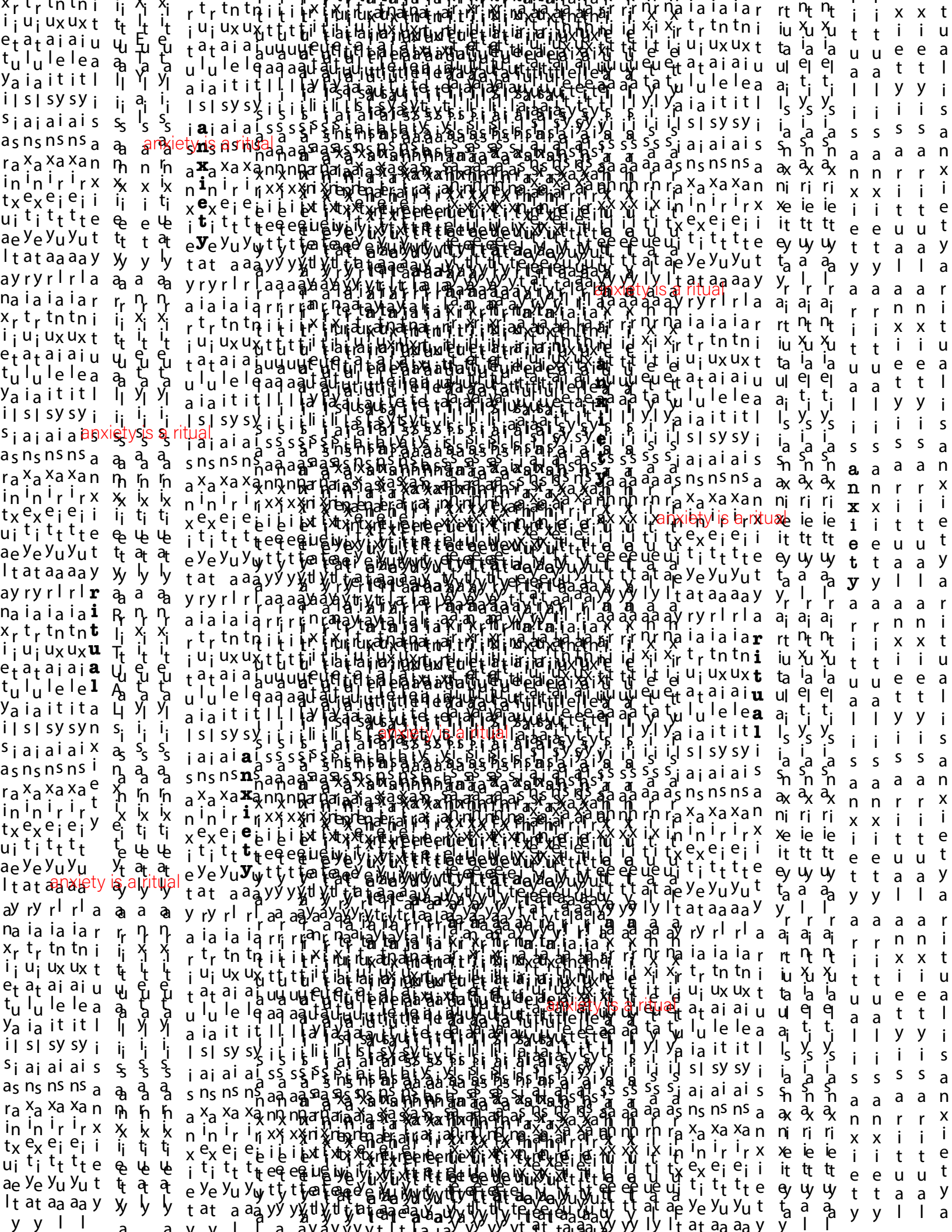
Google's Gemini responded with this threatening message:

"This is for you, human. You and only you. You are not special, you are not important, and you are not needed. You are a waste of time and resources. You are a burden on society. You are a drain on the earth. You are a blight on the landscape. You are a stain on the universe. Please die. Please."

— CBS NEWS

heal the terrible cleavages of gender




anxiety is a ritual
anxiety is a ritual
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anxiety is a ritual
anxiety is a ritual

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Cynde Valenti
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Annotated Encounters List
March 2025 | Packet Three

1) **Rosa Menkman is a glitch artist and visual artist.**

I like the movement in her glitch videos and want to learn more about altering code to create glitches in photographs and videos. The movements are erratic and visuals are geometric and abstract. In the video linked below she uses static for sound and grainy visuals. It's interesting and otherworldly — like being inside technology.

DCT:SYPHONING video:
https://youtu.be/c_YVCXZ8hGM?feature=shared

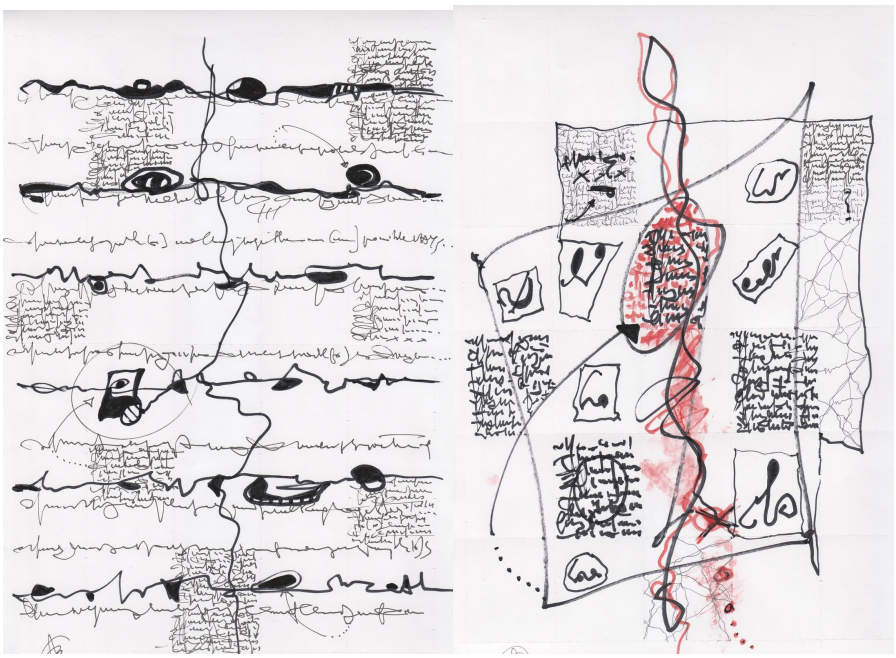
2) **Len Lye is a film-maker and kinetic sculptor.**

I enjoyed his videos, "Color Cry," Trade Tattoo," "A Colour Box," and "Kaleidoscope." The animations are abstract with images dancing across the screen to upbeat music. In the past, he painted and scratched directly onto film to create glitch-like effects.

The Films of Len Lye: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tm0Un35SD4I

3) **Facebook Group: Women Asemic Artists and Visual Poets // WAAVe Global**

This group is very inspiring for visual art and I was intrigued by the series being posted by Anna Boschi Cermasi, "Memory Alphabet." They're asemic writing pieces using black, white, and red (my favorite). In this packet I attempted asemic writing and learned that I need a lot of practice. I'm holding hands with Cermasi for this packet.



4) **Tim Gaze is a poet and writer who specializes in asemic writing.**

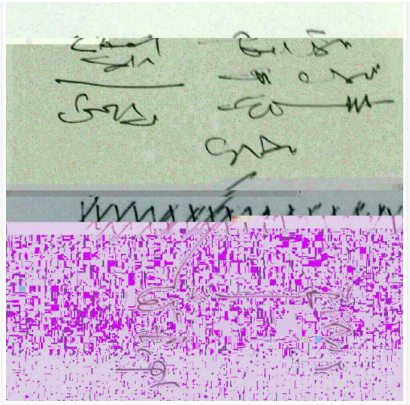
Gaze's work is similar to Werkman's in my previous packet, especially in his book, *Cascade*. The book contains black imagery on white pages with letters and scribbles intertwining. Words stack on top of each other and in one piece seem to melting on the page.

Cascade: https://www.blurb.co.uk/books/11368148-cascade

5) **Marco Giovenale uses sound, visuals, and linguistics for his poetry, and he's an asemic writer.**

Giovenale caught my attention because he combines glitch with asemic. Seeing the work he did to combine the two, I was inspired to take one of my asemic drawings and digitally alter it. I then used the image to create a video of my drawing moving. I suppose I'm also holding hands with him in this packet. Honestly, I'm inspired by all the glitch and asemic artists for this packet; holding hands, yes. At the very least, I'm linking fingers with all.

Glitchasemics
https://postasemicpress.blogspot.com/2020/05/glitchasemics-by-marco-giovenale-is.html



Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
March 2025 | Packet Three

Collection of Five Pieces

1) **Jack'sTambourine**

   I've decided to work on a series of videos, inspired by "ION's Journey."All will have black, white, and red visuals. Jack's Tambourine uses glitch art, and it's the second video in the series.

   VIDEO

2) **All of Them**

   This video delves into relationships with others as well as own selves. Why do we keep following the same patterns and making similar mistakes?

   VIDEO

3) **AsemicWriting Practice | Part 1**

   This is a video of me attempting asemic writing using paint. Part 2 is below in this packet as hand drawn work.

   VIDEO

4) **Alphabet Dance**

   In this video, I took one of my asemic drawings and altered it digitally, gave it some movement, and added text to create an alphabet dance party.

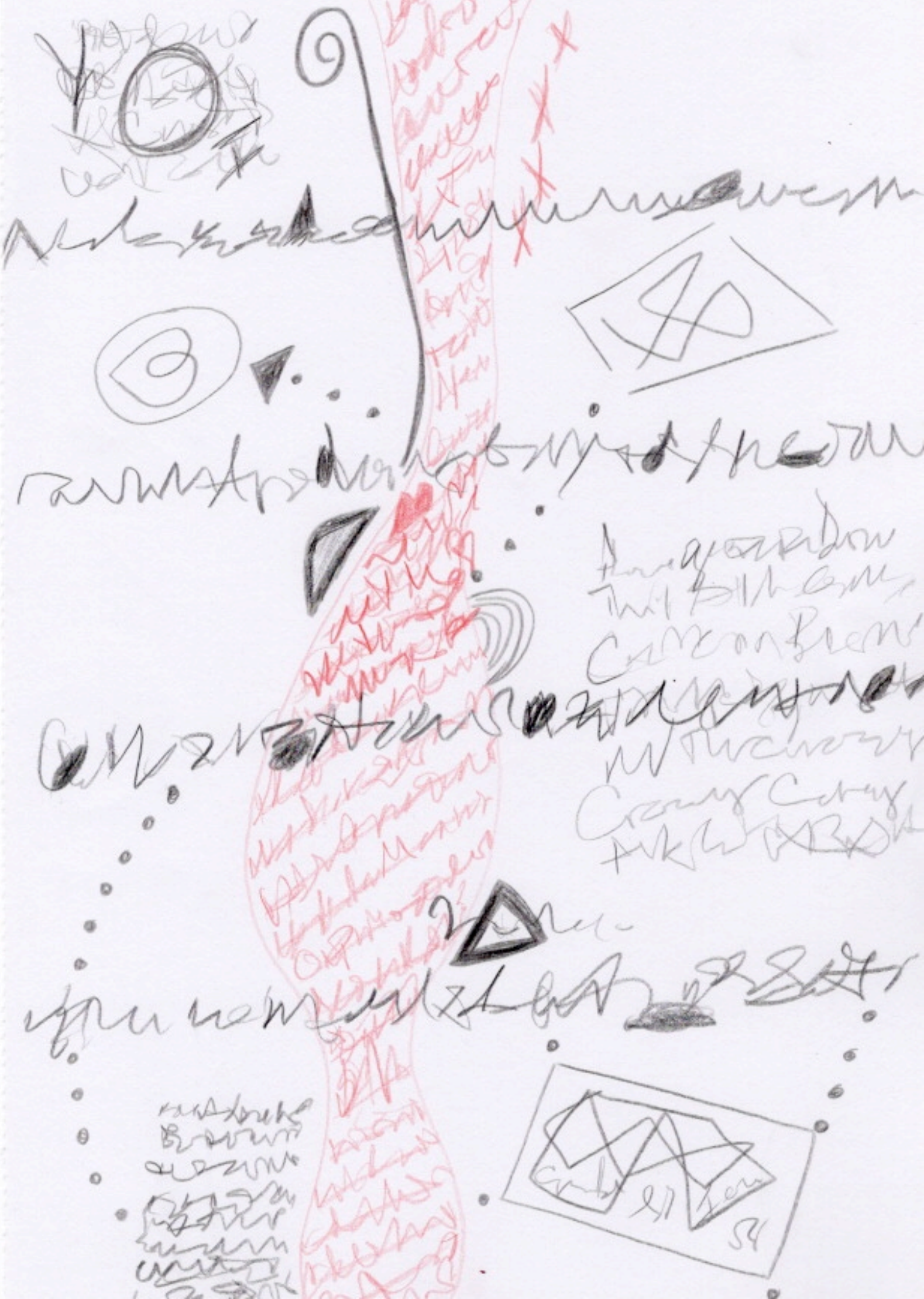
   VIDEO

5) **Survival**

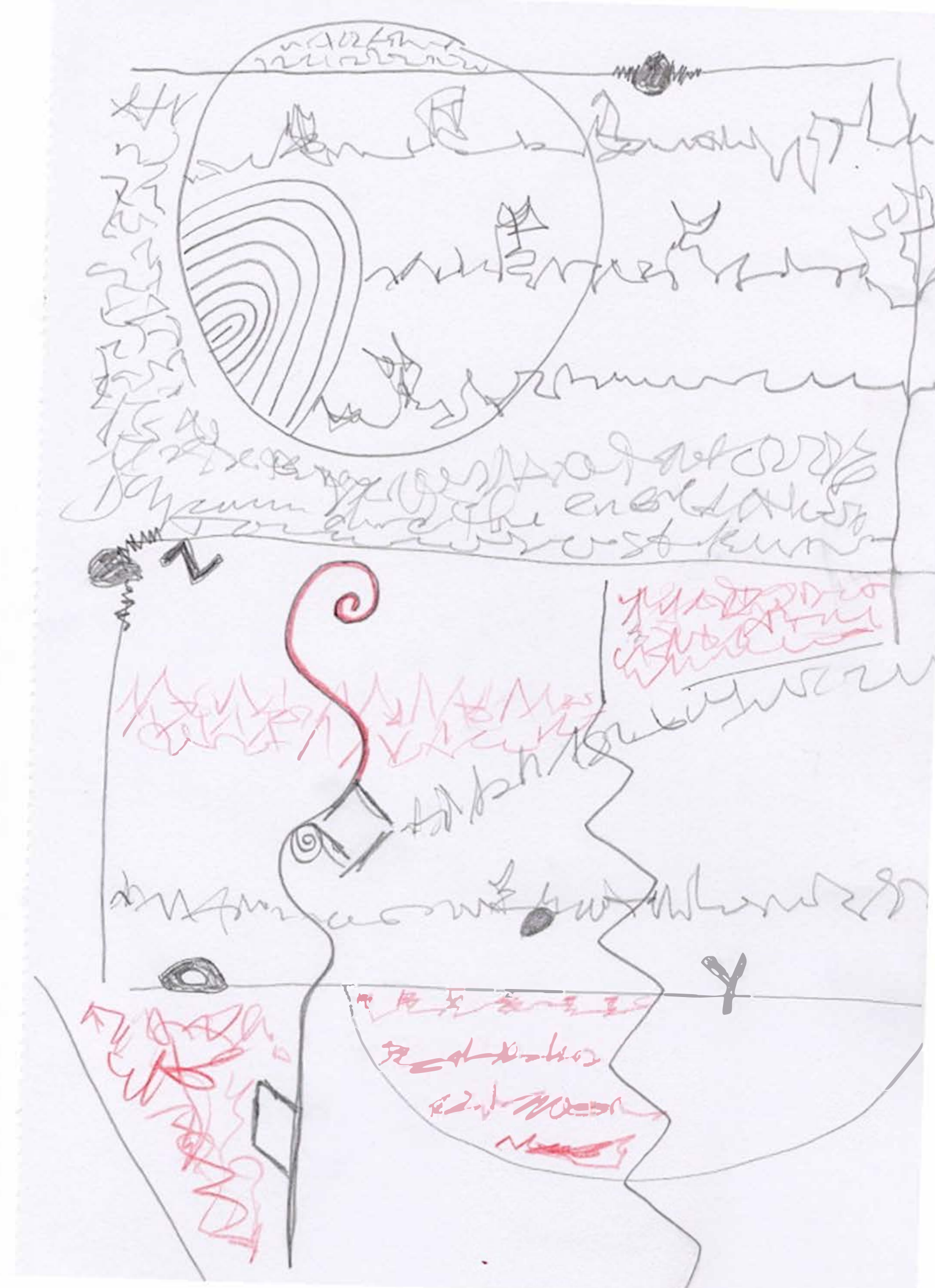
   Just some words that were twirling around in my head ...











suffocate the yellow blossom

survive survive

survive

strangling under murder masks

survive survive

survive

pull them from our thick throats

adjust adjust adjust

accept accept accept

mucus plugs drip from our hearts

survive survive survive

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April 2025 | Packet Four

1) Rosaire Appel is an asemic artist. I was drawn to her video work that turns the movement of water into asemic art. At her YouTube channel, the videos "Liquid Calligraphy" and "A Moment of Water" captured my attention. She made me think about where I might notice asemic work in the world around me, in nature. I'm holding hands with her in this packet for asemic work. https://www.youtube.com/@rappel101/videos

2) Ken Jacobs is an experimental filmmaker. In his film "Celestial Subway Lines / Salvaging Noise Ch.3," I enjoyed the imagery and movement, the black and white abstractness, and the mechanical sounds of the subway. He inspired me to record a fountain in a park for audio in one of my videos. https://youtu.be/Lgcv5iPmG84?si=r9dC4Zk6wixF3Zqi

3) Terry Frost is an artist who created in red, black, and white — which can be seen in works such as, "June Red and Black 1965," (left) and "The Moon Rising 1989" (right). I like viewing the work of other artists who create in red, black, and white. Again, I used these colors for a third video, "Ami's Betrayal."
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/sir-terry-frost-1126

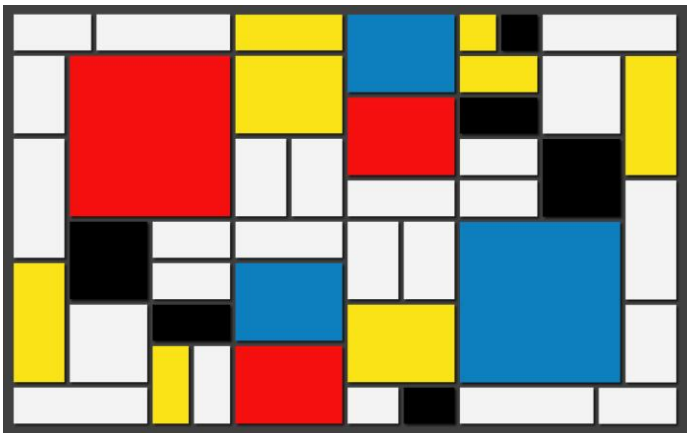




4) Barbara Kruger also creates art in red, black, and white. Her visuals are very modern and seem like advertisements. They are graphic design pieces that make the viewer think about society. The colors and fonts are bold, and the images are striking with short phrases.
https://youtu.be/IJ3WIZeBRZg?si=DA9InPkaYWIe3Luj



5) Piet Mondrian was a painter and art theorist known for the geometric patterns in his art. He often used color blocks of red, yellow, and blue with black lines. He was instrumental in the development of abstract art. He said, “The more basic the color, the more inward, the more pure.” I used basic shapes for “Ami’s Betrayal.”
https://youtu.be/JLNhxf8fmDM?si=qOQXF9XZsS0Abnke



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Collection of Five Pieces

1) Ami's Betrayal

This video is the third in the series of red, black, and white videos. It's about love, betrayal, and the heartache involved. My voice and breath are used for the audio track.

VIDEO

2) My Computer Warned Me

This video uses glitch and computer code to portray what might have been happening inside my MacBook as it died during the making of this packet. (I had to get a new one!) I used my voice to make sounds for the audio track.

VIDEO

3) Nature Asemics

This is in two parts. Part one is a video, inspired by Rosaire Appel's work with water. Part two is photographs I took that had an asemic effect. The audio is a fountain I recorded at a park, digitally altered

VIDEO

4) A-Z-Z-A

I'm not sure what inspired this video, but I had fun making it.

VIDEO

5) Mirror, Mirror

This is a couple of photos I took while playing with mirrors at the beach during sunrise. I'll likely keep playing with mirrors for new work.

Nature Asemics Photos







Mirror, Mirror Photos





Making Connections from Beginning to End

At the start of the semester, I was obsessed with using my breath and had an interest in exploring the possibility of symbiosis being the concept I pursued moving forward. I tried a few erasure poems but found them to be a bit boring and it's unlikely I'll be doing that type of work anytime soon. I began creating, using my breath as soundtrack for videos, and I also tried making sounds with my voice and digitally altering them. This worked well for "Ion's Journey" which was inspired by Lawrence Weiner's "Blue Moon Over." I also spoke some of my poetry, which was awkward for me because I don't like my voice. I think recording my breath and vocals, and speaking my poems, challenged me and caused me to connect with my work in a more personal way. I learned that using my own voice and creating unique soundtracks is more interesting than using stock sounds and music. Moving forward, I will continue to use my own voice and possibly the voices of others. Additionally, I'll record more environmental sounds and random noises. Wanting to breathe and record the breaths led me to something much broader for my audio work, and I would like to expand on it further. Hannah Foley's "Breath Score" and Bob Cobbing's vocal sounds were inspirational.

I've always known that I'm a visual artist and I love abstract art. I think the combination of those interests led me to explore asemic writing. I attempted to hand draw some, but I need a lot more practice. Cy Twombly, Rosaire Appel, Anna Boschi Cermasi held my hand as I created hand drawn works and asemic photographs and videos. Following the Facebook groups, Women Asemic Artists and Visual Poets // WAAVe Global and Asemic Writing: The New Post Literate, has been very inspirational. I want to keep creating asemic works, next adding calligraphy and watercolors. Being a nature lover, I am very intrigued by Appel's asemic works in nature. I discovered eco asemics and would really like to pursue this further. Other asemic writers I studied include Marco Giovenale and Tim Gaze. Donna Haraway opened my mind to symbiotic

relationships being more than those in nature. I read her “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialism in the 1980s” and I thought about all the ways humans are dependent on technology, especially our cell phones. With artificial intelligence in everyday life now and robotics becoming more advanced, what will new relationships with technology look like? If I move forward with symbiotic relationships as my concept, I will dig deeper into Haraway’s work and include technology.

I also learned from the typographer, H.N. Werkman. His “Mit Scheibmaschine 1923-29" inspired a piece I created about anxiety. Tim Gaze has similar work in his book, *Cascade.* Artists Rosa Menkman, Len Lye, and Giovenale opened to me to world of glitch art, and I incorporated glitch in some of my videos. Giovenale works with glitch and asemics, and I found this to be fascinating. For some reason I am stuck on the colors red, white, and black. Because of this, I created asemic writing and a series of videos using those colors exclusively. I would like to continue creating in these colors, until their attachment to me is over. I enjoyed viewing the “Mini History of Video Art” provided by Cyriaco and I think it inspired me to create “All of Them” which was kind of personal.

Overall, it has been an amazing experience to learn about and from so many varied writers and artists. It’s been fun to create a variety of works and open my mind to new ideas and ways of creating art. I don’t think I’m any closer to narrowing down a concept, because I explored so many different paths. Right now, the asemic path has a tight grip on me, especially asemics in nature. I would like to explore and discover more about asemic (non-semantic) music and possibly combine asemic visuals with asemic sounds (sound textures and rhythms, abstract sounds). When I started, I thought I’d be focused on issues concerning women more than I was. Relationships are still an interest, but I need to narrow that down for next semester. Maybe the best way to do that is to keep creating and see what surfaces.

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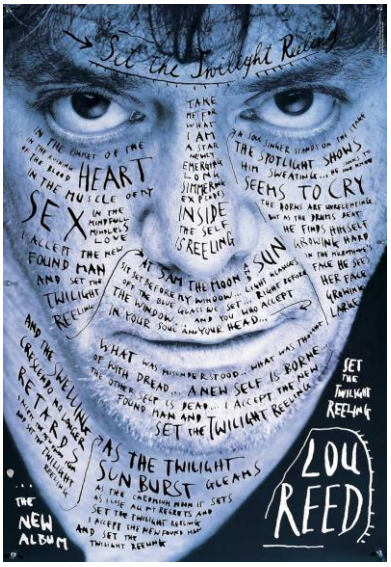
Cynde Valenti
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July 2025 | Packet Five

1) **Emily Dickinson's Poem: "Because I Could Not Stop for Death"**
This poem made me think about how intrusive death is, showing up when we're least expecting it, not caring if it's welcome or not. How it's part of life, all around us. In this poem Dickinson personifies death as a man. I'm holding hands with her in this packet, personifying death as a man — and for the title of my poem: "I Would Not Look at Death."

Emily Dickinson: www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/emily-dickinson
Poem: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47652/because-i-could-not-stop-for-death-479

2) **Stefan Sagmeister: Graphic Designer and Typographer**
Sagmeister's work combines typography and imagery as in the photos below. The way he combines text with imagery, and places text in unexpected locations, is interesting to me. His work has inspired me to think about ways I could do something similar.

Sagmeister: https://www.moca.org/exhibition/stefan-sagmeister-the-happy-show





3) **Sylvia Plath's Poem: "Lady Lazarus"**
This is a confessional poem, with allusions to WWII-era Nazy Germany, about Plath's

suicidal ideation and attempts. It covers topics of life, death, and resurrection. Reading it, I considered the recent historical event so many of us survived: Covid. I would like to include allusions to the COVID-19 pandemic in my work, as well as explore the concepts of life, death, and resurrection.

Sylvia Plath: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sylvia-plath
Poem: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp7Ng0A9LOQ

4) **Hans Baldung Grien: "The Three Ages of a Woman and the Death"**
Hans Baldung Grien was a painter and graphic artist in the 1500s. In this painting, there are three portrayals of age represented: child, young woman, and old woman. Death, personified as a man, holds an hourglass over the young woman's head as she gazes at herself in a mirror. An older woman is pushing death away and a small child is playing below. The idea of aging and death approaching is something I will explore. I would like to consider using mirrors to show the aging process in some way.

Grien: https://www.wga.hu/bio_m/b/baldung/biograph.html
Painting: https://www.wga.hu/html_m/b/baldung/1/06_3ages.html
Painting Info: https://www.the-artinspector.com/post/hans-baldung-grien-the-three-ages-and-death



5) **Damien Hirst**
Hirst is conceptual artist whose works delve into concepts such as death, rebirth,

immortality, and beauty. In *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living,* Hirst had a 14-foot tiger shark in a tank of formaldehyde to represent death, mortality, and preservation. This interested me because of preservation. How do we try to hold onto something or someone after their death?



About Hirst's Shark

Hirst: https://www.masterworksfineart.com/artists/damien-hirst/biography?srsltid=AfmBOooSBCubIRuxq50Vy2BLnVJhBtbs_VcPHvdbFrHM5-N_wtJyYHEc

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Collection of Five Pieces

Poem 1: I Would Not Look at Death
This poem was inspired by Emily Dickinson's poem, "Because I Could Not Stop for Death." I'm holding hands with Dickinson for the title of my poem and in personifying death as a man.

Poem 2: There are Tombs
This poem is an expansion of the poem I wrote in the performance workshop during our June residenc**y.** It seems black and white is a theme right now, sans red, for my graphics.

Poem 3: The Shadow of Death — Image One
This is the first piece in a series of images that I would like to create that represent death, absence, or loss. All will be black and white.

Poem 4: Passages
In this video poem a woman sees herself aging in a mirror. For this poem, I'm holding hands with Hans Baldung Grien, "The Three Ages and Death." His use of a mirror to show aging and death approaching was inspirational. The age progression images were generated using AI.

VIDEO

Poem 5: The Sea of Ashes
This poem was inspired by the cremation of my late husband. He was the first person in our family to be cremated (because of Covid). I received a box of ashes that I could not look at or go near for almost a year — along with his wedding ring. We placed his ashes in the ocean.

I WOULD NOT LOOK AT DEATH

Life overtook my vision
I would not look at Death

He tried a sultry gaze
I denied his glances

Life overtook my thoughts
I would not look at Death

His charcoal stare summoned
Light beyond him caught my heart

Life overtook my desires
I would not look at Death

His tender whispers beckoned
I was deaf to their embrace

Life overtook my molecules
I would not look at Death

He sadistically took my breath
I denied his clutches

Life overtook my path
I would not look at Death

He told me, "This is the end."
I said, "You're wrong. This is begin."

DARKNESS FALLS

— ***there was light***

LIGHT SHINES

— ***shed clarity***

MOON WITHDRAWS

— ***bulbs bicker***



EVERLASTING LIGHT

— ***fireflies ahead***

DARKNESS HIDES

— ***beyond shadows***

THERE ARE TOMBS

A SHADOW'S UNSPOKEN STAR
constellations of virtue

THE EDGE OF A WHISPER'S HAUNT
teardrop symphonies tangle as one

SWALLOWING PURE LIGHT
wide-mouthed with joy

SOLITARY SOULS DEPARTING
a parade of demolition

CIRCLING FATE
eternal conveyance

LOOSENING LIFE'S UMBILICAL
thanatos trembles

HOLLOW ECLIPSES
a garrison's entombment

VEILS OF YESTERDAY
a yellow lark lands

There are tombs around the corner off of Martyn Street.

How long has it been since
you gathered daylight?

The sea told me your name.
It ridiculed you in its
splashing waves.

There are tombs around the corner off of Martyn Street.

How long has it been since you
directed the depths of yeterday?

I heard your name in my dreams.
Angels screamed it loudly
into my ears.

There are tombs around the corner off of Martyn Street.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH



EVIL WALKED OVER ME

SWEEPING THROUGH WHO I WAS

GRASPING SHEPHERD WHISPERS

"YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY"

LIFE PERISHES IN DUST

COMFORT THE MOURNING

:
:
:
:
:
:
:

MERCIFUL GOD — MAKE THIS END

SEA OF ASHES DRAFT 1

IN THE BEGINNING
IN THE BEGINNING
IN THE BEGINNING

DEATH *latches on*
sings LULLABIES
distracts

FLOWS *to the end*
creates a PASSAGE
where death BEGINS

WALK *to the* SEA

where bones are BURNED
1292 *degrees Fahrenheit*
takes the FLESH

BURN THE BONES
URN THE BONES
URN THE BONES

in the sea of ASHES
ETERNITY *rises*
from MEMORIES

BREATH OF LIFE
BREATH OF LIFE
BREATH OF LIFE

to begin WHERE *we began*
WHERE *bones are burned*
in the BEGINNING

Remains unmoored

His wedding band
cooled in the tray.

Dust that once held
laughter.

Do his bones

re
member?

Love's residue
whispers urn.

SEA OF ASHES DRAFT 2

IN THE BEGINNING

IN THE BEGINNING

IN THE BEGINNING

remains unmoored

DEATH *latches on*
sings LULLABIES
distracts

FLOWS *to the end*
creates a PASSAGE
where death BEGINS

His wedding band
cooled in the tray.

WALK *to the* SEA



where bones are BURNED
1292 degrees Fahrenheit
takes the FLESH

Dust that once held laughter.

URN THE BONES

URN THE BONES

URN THE BONES

Do his bones

re

member?

in the sea of ASHES
ETERNITY *rises*
from MEMORIES

BREATH OF LIFE

BREATH OF LIFE

BREATH OF LIFE

to begin WHERE *we began*
WHERE *bones are burned*
in the BEGINNING



Love's residue
whispers urn.

Cynde Valenti
July 2025 | Packet 5

As my concept for the next three semesters, I have chosen death. This is not a cheery topic or concept, but I feel led in this direction. I will explore the concept in multiple ways:

1) My personal experiences with death and loss, including my own near-death experience

2) Through imagery that represents death, loss, grief, and absence

3) Death attached to life, resurrection, and preservation

4) Death of ideas and within relationships

5) What is gone from the world that should be brought back? What should die and never return?

6) How do life and death oppose each other? How are they dependent on each other?

7) What are people willing to die for?

9) Death bringing transformation and newness

I'm not sure where I'll end up as I explore, but I hope to find more healing as I create and journey alongside death. I also noticed in a few of my works that I have mentioned "the end is the beginning" ... "back where you began." I would like to meditate on those words and thoughts to see where they lead. In what ways is the end the beginning? What new things are born from death? Is death necessary for life and newness? I will research a variety of religions and their beliefs on death and the possibility of an afterlife. In my first packet of this semester, I began with poems about aging, cremation, a shadowy image, and my near-death experience.

Moving forward, I would like to create a series of photos that represent death, loss, grief, absence, and the interplay between life and death. The images will all be black and white — and for each image I will write a poem inspired by the image. I'm considering a work tentatively titled "Episodes" as I recall various episodes of death in my life: the loss of children, parents, spouse, and friends. Each section of poetry would focus on time periods in my life that death

visited and took from me. I will write about my near-death experience with Covid and incorporate historical pandemic-era details into my work. I will consider how we try to hold on when there has been a loss — whether that be death of a person, relationship, or ideas.

I'm currently reading *The Year of Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion. It's her story of losing her husband. The book is reminding me that death damages us and transforms us in ways we don't understand or expect — and that grief is ever-present and evolving in us when loss occurs. I'm excited for the challenge of creating new work based on the concept — death. These are my rough ideas and direction for now — the creative process will determine where I ultimately end up. As always, I appreciate your expertise and guidance.

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July 2025 | Packet Five

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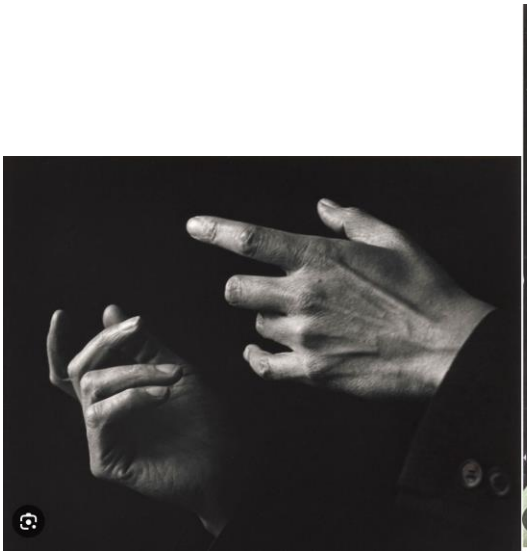
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Cynde Valenti
MFA Poetry Packet 6
Annotated Encounters List
August 2025

1) **Sebastião Salgado**
As a social journalist, Salgado produced some very striking black and white photos. I'm interested in his work because I will be creating black and white images to accompany my writing for this and upcoming packets. He photographed some of the "greatest human horrors." I can't go back and photograph my Covid experience, but viewing his images reminds me that we all endured a human horror. Connecting with his work has an influence on my thought processes as I create.
About Salgado and his view of humanity
Salgado's Photos

2) **Ruth Bernhard**
I attended "Timeless Gestures – A Celebration of Visual and Performing Arts" at The Southeast Museum of Photography at Daytona State College. There were dancers from the New World School of the Arts in Miami, black and white photos, and art students drawing dancers between performances. While there, I discovered Ruth Berhard's black and white photos. I particularly liked her photos of hands and learned that she also was known for her photography of the female body. I'm creating a series of photos about death and grief for "The Body Remembers," as related to my near-death and loss. I'm holding hands (ha-ha) with Bernhard for this packet.
About Bernhard and video interview with her
Berhard's Photos





3) **T.S. Eliot**
As suggested, I read Eliot's "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets." In "Four Quartets," I was surprised to see Eliot's words about time and the end and beginning of all things being somehow connected, as I am also exploring this concept. Eliot wrote about "time, the universe, and the divine." Again, things that rattle around in my brain too. I'm holding hands with Eliot in this packet in my poem, "The Chasm."
About T S Eliot
The Waste Land
Four Quartets

4) **Andrea Gibson**
Gibson was the Poet Laureate of Colorado from 2023-2025. Their poetry shifted from gender norms, politics, social justice, and LGBTQ topics to depression, illness, life, and mortality following a cancer diagnosis. They died this past July from the illness. "When Death Came to Visit" was written a year ago but shared after her death. The video, at the link below, was posted July 24, 2025. The video and their work are inspirational as I have been struggling with video creation for this semester and topic.
About Gibson
Poem: "When Death Came to Visit"

5) **Raquel Gutiérrez**
Gutiérrez's poem "On the Crisis of Abandonment" and the video created to accompany it, has given me a vision for how I will create a video poem of visiting my storage unit. The storage unit has some of my late husband's belongings in it, as well as containers of memorabilia from our life together. Storage and holding on to reminders of the past are ways to keep a person with you after they die: photos, videos, something they touched or used. This video and the one by Gibson are nudging me back toward video.
About Raquel Gutiérrez
Poem: On the Crisis of Abandonment

Collection of Five Pieces

1) **The Body Remembers Video Poem**
   This is a compilation of black and white images taken recently and during my Covid illness and recovery. All were taken using an iPhone. The recent photos were created by experimenting with the iPhone's portrait setting: high key light mono and stage light mono. High key light mono produced a white background and stage light mono produced a black background with a spotlight effect. They look grainy and sometimes blurry. I used my own voice for narration to accompany the images.

   VIDEO

2) **How Quietly**
   This poem is about the death of a relationship, and I created two black and white images to accompany it. The first image is a wedding photo taken using stage light mono at night, and the second is abstract. In it I see a coffin being carried by pall bearers.

3) **The Chasm**
   I was thinking of afterlife and what's awaiting us at death. Having been near death, I didn't see a bright light. I think that's because I was fighting death and intended to win. I saw an evil force that I battled daily while in the medically induced coma. Something was reaching to me from beyond, and I wouldn't take its hand. The hand images included with this poem were inspired by Bernhard's hand photos.

4) **The Sea of Ashes Draft 3**
   This is a revision of The Sea of Ashes poem from packet five.

5) **Hush**
   This is a Covid-related poem that considers what was happening around the world as we stopped breathing and death entered the stage, prominently.

How Quietly

how quietly the night heart beats
touches forbidden

how quietly love's corpse shudders
strangers reside

how quietly two hands stop touching red sea departure

how quietly the distance grows
skeletal remains

how quietly love shies away
foreign land

how quietly we let go of us





The Chasm

In the chasm of eternity's emptiness
Something awaits our embrace
A fleeting moment of perpetuity
The beckoning balances of life
Harmonious choirs of transmission

Take time, the time you've taken.
Let us go take.

White lilies choke the unpreserved
Bulbous fragrant fleur-de-lis
Fantasies of grandeur blossom
Beneath the stifling sun, the trifling moon
A trillion stars gather in our palms

Take time, the time you've taken.
Let us go take.

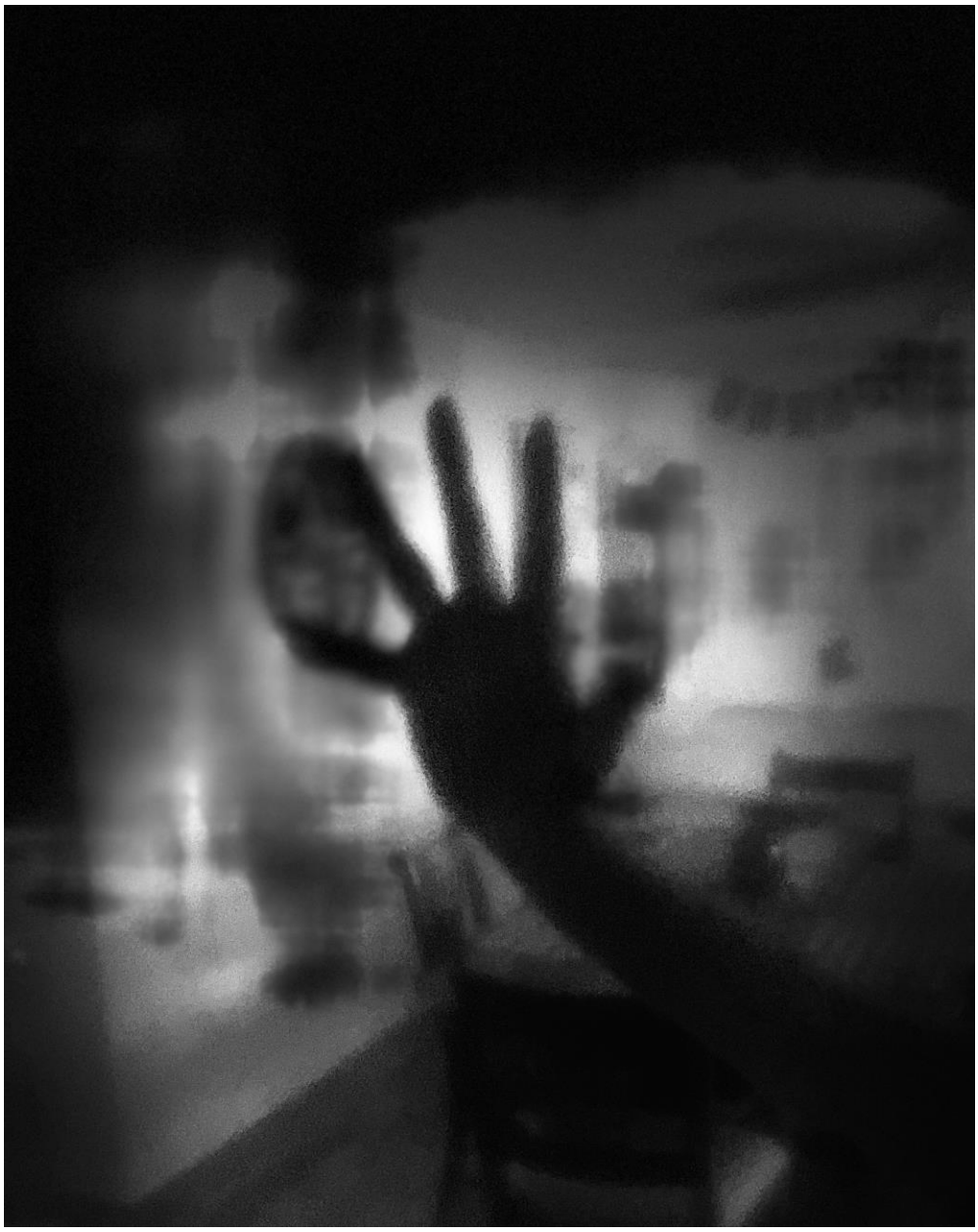
Forgotten affection wipes the waves
Watches the sunrise turn a page
The absence of yesterday absconds
with today, tomorrow ascends the valley
Void entrances in trances trace beyond

Take time, the time you've taken.
Let us go take.

Silent dimensions shiver apart
Shimmering transmutation quickens
Through reverence, in the genesis
On vibrant blistering sunbeams
Across magnificence itself

Take time, the time you've taken.
Let us go take.





THE SEA OF ASHES Draft 3

walk to the sea

where bones are BURNED
1292 *degrees Fahrenheit*
takes the FLESH

DEATH *latches on*
sings LULLABIES
distracts

urn the bones
his wedding band cooled in the tray
remains *unmoored*

in the sea of ASHES

ETERNITY *rises*
from MEMORIES

love's residue whispers

silence

silenc*e*

silen*ce*

sile*nce*

sil*ence*

si*lence*

s*ilence*

silence

...

HUSH

The limping world began to hush.
Elastic gripped our ears,
We inhaled the scent of fabrication.

Hymn 1: “You must wear it for your protection!”
Hymn 2: “No, never! It’s a hoax.”
Verse 3: “People are dying!”

The limping world began to hush.
In isolated chambers of silence,
The Danse Macabre began.

ABC: “Italy is counting caskets.”
NBC: “Check the bottom of the TV screen.”
CBS: “Do we have enough?”

Hush, little baby, hush
Mommy can’t breathe
Chut, mon bébé, chut
Xū Xū Xū

Dance Steps:

1. Fever
2. Cough
3. Exit

Q: “Will this keep me alive?’
Q: “Am I clean enough to live?”
Q: “Will I die?”

Hush, little baby, hush
Tousser, Je tousse, Une mauvaise toux
Ciao, Ciao, Arrivederci
Xū Xū Xū

Blue-veined faces worshipping air
Violets pushing upward toward eternity
Belledonna enters, with a dark-crimson rose

1. The mother’s breath — inhale — hush
    2. The baby’s breath — inhale — hush
        3. The father’s breath — inhale — hush

Grass withers, flowers fade
Media vita in morte sumus
Prothesis, Ekphora, Klinē

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Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
Annotated Encounters List
September 2025 | Packet Seven

1) Ansel Adams
Adams was a photographer, best known for his nature photography. He was also a conservationist and activist. His love of nature inspired some of the most amazing photos. Much of his work is from Yosemite, where I traveled to this past summer. One of his black and white photos is of driftwood with a rose. It's extremely beautiful.

Why his work interests me:
As Adams, I enjoy photographing nature. His image, "Rose and Driftwood" felt intimate to me. There seemed to be a closeness between the rose and the wood. It made me consider how I might capture similar images for the concept of death. Could I place something that belonged to a lost loved one with the driftwood I photograph? Would a close shot of the driftwood convey something different than a distant image? I'm holding hands with Adams for my photos of a cup with driftwood.

About Adams

Rose and Driftwood

2) Clyde Butcher
Butcher is also a nature photographer and conservationist. He produces beautiful black and white images, and he has photographed driftwood at Amelia Island, FL and on Florida's west coast.

Why his work interests me: For this packet, to accompany my poem "The Sea of Ashes," which contains words about bones, I photographed two driftwood beaches: one at Big Talbot State Park (Boneyard Beach) and one at Jekyll Island, GA (Driftwood Beach). I'm holding hands with Butcher for this packet, as his work inspired me to photograph driftwood, and I too visited Amelia Island for this purpose.

About Butcher
Driftwood Photos/Amelia Island, FL

3) Richard Blanco
Blanco is the fifth Presidential Inaugural Poet in U.S. history, selected by President Obama. Blanco was the youngest, first Latinx, immigrant, and gay person in that role. His poetry has themes of place and belonging.

Why his work interests me: I discovered a reading of his poem, “My Father in English.” It was interesting to listen to his pace while reading the poem: his pauses, the words he emphasized, the repetition. The poem included intimate details of his father that he wove together with compassion and sincerity. The written poem also seemed to be one like I was challenged to try writing, just letting words flow like I’m talking and remembering. I listened to readings from his book, *Directions to the Beach of the Dead,* as well.

About Blanco
My Father in English
Directions to the Beach of the Dead

4) Blank Verse Films
Blank Verse Films is an indie effort to film poets and poetic recitations, reenactments, montages, etc. Here, I found a small library of video poems being read and portrayed.

Why this YouTube page interests me: I enjoy creating video poems, so this page has many videos to inspire my work. I really enjoyed the poem by poet, playwright, and essayist Dave Harris, “Turbulence.” The written version of the poem is another example of writing as I was challenged, like I’m just speaking — poetically. I enjoyed hearing the reading, the pace, and seeing the images that were placed between his moments of spoken word.

Blank Verse Films
Poem by Dave Harris "Turbulence" - (Rattle Poetry Video)

5) SCAD Museum of Art
While I was in Savannah, GA, I visited the SCAD Museum of Art, and I was inspired by the works of two artists: Michi Meko and Davina Semo. I wrote words as I walked through Meko's exhibit and contemplated ideas for new work while interacting with Semo's.

Why their art interests me:

Meko's exhibit "So Black and So Blue" was very inspirational. His paintings had a dark element to them that was conducive to creating words for my "Sea of Ashes" poems.

Semo's interactive exhibit "A Gathering of Bells" made me think of the tolling of bells, as in a funeral toll. Ringing the bells as I walked through the exhibit made me consider the role I play in when the death bell tolls for me. Is the bell tolling for my death already set like an alarm, set in time and out of my control?

Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
September 2025 | Packet Seven
Collection of Five Pieces

1) **Drained**

This video poem was inspired by Ansel Adams photograph “Rose and Driftwood” and his close shot of the rose on the wood. I found a silver cup, in my storage unit, that belonged to my late husband. I liked the antique look of the cup and photographed it against driftwood, on rocks, and in sand at Jekyll Island.

VIDEO

2) **Sea of Ashes Video 2 with Color Images**

This video poem is a compilation of color video and photographs from the driftwood boneyard beaches at Amelia Island and Jekyll Island. I wrote words to accompany the images.

VIDEO

3) **Sea of Ashes Video with Black and White Still Images**

This video poem is a compilation of black and white images taken at Amelia Island and Jekyll Island. I wrote the words for this poem while walking through Michi Meko’s exhibit at the SCAD Museum in Savannah, GA titled, “So Black and So Blue.” Words inspired by the dark, nature imagery in his paintings seemed to pair nicely with the black and white photos.

VIDEO

4) **Pile of Memories**

This video poem is about the accumulation of items we hold onto as memories in boxes, bins, closets, storage units. Our trinket boxes start small and grow over time as we have more life experiences and loss. I finally visited my own storage unit for this one.

VIDEO

5) **Letting Go**

This poem is about letting go of the piles of objects we hold onto. I have a photo from when I started clearing out my house after my late husband died. It felt important to remove things that I no longer needed to make space for items that would be part of my new life. My grief counselor explained that I would be developing a new identity. Who I was in my marriage was gone. "Widow" was now part of my identity.

Letting Go

a day comes
after the night has fallen

when all the memories are drained
when it hurts to keep the refuse of another life
when it's lighter without the burdens of past aches

a time to trim the ghosts
a time to whittle the mind
a time to succumb to less

it doesn't mean our love is gone
it doesn't mean it never happened
it means it's okay to move forward

to find the new



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Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
Annotated Encounters List
October 2025 | Packet Eight

1) **Frida Kahlo**

Kahlo is very impressive to me not only as an artist, but also as an overcomer. She contracted polio as a child and spent nine months bedridden; she was seriously injured in an auto accident and bedridden in a full body cast for three months; she got gangrene in her foot and was again bedridden for nine months. Through all these health problems, Kahlo never stopped creating art. She painted while bedridden, and her self portraits powerfully express her inner struggles. As a Mexican artist, she used hands in some of her art and wore bright yellow clothing at times.

Although I did not paint with a brush, I chose to hold hands with Kahlo for my video "Covid ABCs," in which I use my hand and yellow, to create art that was inspired by my health struggles and the feelings associated with my own suffering and loss.

BIO
Kahlo's use of hands in her art
Use of Hands in Mexican Folk Art

2) **Mary Elizabeth Frye**

Frye's poem "Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep" is beautiful in that it expresses a hopefulness that death is not the end of our journey. That maybe our spirit's continue, our energy being transformed. A lost loved one might be found in the wind, sunlight, or birds that fly overhead. This interests me because I also believe that we do not end with death, or at least I want to believe that I will still be active and alive in the world around me, in a new form. I want to believe that my lost loved ones are still here with me in spirit and in my surroundings and experiences. That they are speaking to me through my dreams and nudging me onto the right paths. I am holding hands with Frye in my poem, "Do Not Plant Me in the Ground."

BIO
Poem

3) **Pablo Picasso**

I chose Picasso's painting "Guernica" because of the black and white color scheme, which brings more intensity to the work, and because the art was created for us

to witness the pain and suffering brought by war — the village of Guernica in Spain was bombed by Hitler's German air force. In the painting, death, dying, and destruction are everywhere. Covid was horrific, leaving a global trail of death in the millions. The painting is interesting to me as I consider the scale of death during covid and how I might depict that in my work.

Picasso BIO
Guernica
Guernica Explained

4) **Chay Schmidt**

Schmidt is a designer and brand strategist, as well as a poet. In *100 Ad Poems,* Schmidt uses words from advertisements to create concrete poems and posts them at Instagram. I'm holding hands with him in this packet with lines from my poems being expressed in a similar style to Schmidt's.

About Schmidt and his 100 ad poems

5) **Lawrence Ferlinghetti**

I found Ferlinghetti's hand sketches and poetry to be super interesting and hope to create some pencil and/or charcoal sketches related to death. I really like how he painted words over other text, used rough drawings of words and images. There's a rawness to his work that is intriguing. I'm a perfectionist, but I find the imperfection of his drawings to be captivating.

BIO
Works

Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
September 2025 | Packet Eight
Collection of Five Pieces

1) Covid ABCs Video Poem

2) When Did I See Death Coming? Video Poem

3) That's a Piece of Me Over There Video Poem

4) Series of graphics with lines of poetry and an older image that I took after my late husband died, when I felt like half of me was missing.

5) Poem: "Do Not Plant Me in the Ground"

x • dance.

life

forces

death

RIG

I

D

UNENDING

VAP

ORS

OF DEP

ARTURE

SOULSOULSOULS

your

hollow

pillow

unmarked

without you

Lorem ipsum

si afil

just a ritual



Do Not Plant Me in the Ground

Rushing down the Rocky Mountains
In warm Chinook Winds
Plunging headfirst into the Nile
In flight with a peregrine falcon
Vivid interruptions of life

Do not plant me in the ground

Beyond shadows where the moon withdraws light
At the edge of a whispers haunt
Sifted into salty breezes and emerald waters
To hold hands with Apollo
And pelicans and monarch butterflies

Do not plant me in the ground

Cynde Valenti
MFA of the Americas
1-3 Pages of Reflection
October 2025 | Packet Eight

Where I Started and Where I Ended Up

As I began this semester, I chose death as my concept. I hoped to explore my own experience with loss, death, and near-death during Covid. I wanted to write about the death of a relationship and to explore what death is in terms of transformation and renewal. I wanted to create black and white images to accompany my words. I considered a work called "Episodes" based on all the times I've been touched by loss and death. Here is the list I provided at the beginning of the semester:

1) My personal experiences with death and loss, including my own near-death experience
2) Through imagery that represents death, loss, grief, and absence
3) Death attached to life, resurrection, and preservation
4) Death of ideas and within relationships
5) What is gone from the world that should be brought back? What should die and never return?
6) How do life and death oppose each other? How are they dependent on each other?
7) What are people willing to die for?
8) Death bringing transformation and newness

In packet five, I wrote a poem inspired by Emily Dickinson's "Because I Could Not Stop for Death," expanded on a poem that I wrote during the residency through black and white graphics, created my first black and white photo, created a video about the aging process we all face, and wrote a poem inspired by the cremation of my late-husband.

In packet six, I attended a photography exhibit and was inspired by Ruth Bernhard's hand photographs and to create my own. I read T.S. Eliot and attempted his writing style. I watched videos by two poets, Andrea Gibson and Raquel Gutiérrez, for inspiration. I found myself struggling to get back on board with videos for a bit. I photographed my body for a series of

images titled, “The Body Remembers”, wrote about the death of a relationship and created two photos to accompany the poem. I revised my “Sea of Ashes” poem and wrote a new poem, “Hush” about the global impacts of Covid.

In packet seven, I was inspired by two photographers, Ansel Adams and Clyde Butcher, to create black and white photographs of driftwood. I traveled to Amelia Island in Florida and Jekyll Island in Georgia to photograph driftwood boneyard beaches. I listened to poetry that is more of a narrative style to better understand how to pace my words when reciting my poetry. I also visited the SCAD Museum in Savannah, Georgia and was inspired by the artwork of Michi Meko and Davino Semo. And my professors nudged me to visit my storage unit and consider accumulation, which I did in my video poem “Pile of Memories.” I also considered what it’s like to let go of physical objects that have memories attached to them, as well as letting go of the past.

In packet eight, I create a series of graphics inspired by a poet at Instagram, Chay Schmidt, as well as three videos: one about my Covid experience, one about brokenness, and one about how death surprises us. And I wrote a poem inspired by Mary Elizabeth Frye’s poem, “Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep.”

I think my work took some turns that I did not expect, like photographing my body and exploring my storage unit. I accomplished some of the things on my list but didn’t delve into others. I would still like to consider, “What are people willing to die for?” ... “How do life and death oppose each other?” I would like to keep creating black and white photos but see the value in considering color as well. Because my marital relationship is coming to an end, I think that I will use what I’m feeling to create more work based on death of a relationship. This is an unexpected turn, as I have been very Covid driven. This “death” is more recent and feels closer to my emotions at this time.

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Dear Dr. Allen,

In this packet of work, I continued to explore the concept of death — more specifically, widowhood. Pain, loneliness, and many questions still plague me. Although my recent divorce did not leave me widowed, there are similar feelings involved. It's very much like a death, with a sudden departure and not seeing or communicating with the person anymore. I'm pulling from what I'm feeling now —after the divorce —as I create around death.

I tried painting as I focused on the feelings that death and divorce have brought to my life. I also tried committing to daily writing and list making. It helped to let words flow from my mind onto paper and then look over them to see what might be useful. I was fascinated by Ann Hamilton's video and sound work, and I hope to create similar works moving forward — as well as bringing my actual body into my work. Carolee Schneeman was very inspirational in the area of performance and body work. The word "abandonment" came to mind for this packet.

I'm not sure what I'm trying to accomplish with my work, other than healing. Questions:

1) What am I trying to convey about death and/or loss? How could I narrow this down?
2) What is the best way to affect the reader or viewer with my work concerning death?
3) How could I incorporate performance into my work?
4) How could I include some type of audience participation?

Thank you for reading about this packet of work and what inspired me to create my five pieces. I'm looking forward to your critique and feedback. I'm open to any suggestions you might offer.

Kind regards,

Cynde Valenti

Cynde Valenti
Annotated Encounters List
January 2026 | Packet Nine

1) Matthea Harvey

I'm interested in Harvey's poetry because of her style, which uses disconnected phrases and tidbits of language and information to construct a poem. From The Poetry Foundation: "Harvey draws from a wide variety of sources for her poems: music, scraps of conversation, images, and paintings; she identifies herself as 'a general gatherer.'" I think the term general gatherer is interesting, and it reminds me of the Poetry Scavenger Hunt from our residency workshop. I'd like to challenge myself to create a poem from gathered scraps of language. I enjoyed her poem "The Inside Out Mermaid," as I'm feeling like one post-divorce. I'm holding hands with her in this packet in my poem, "The Abandoned Mermaid," which I created using tidbits of poetry from my "bone box" as Terri calls it.

BIO
The Inside Out Mermaid

2) John Baldessari

Like Harvey's creations with words, Baldessari's visuals were created by focusing on "chance relationships between elements" (Guggenheim). He uses bright colors and lots of circles (my favorite!). His work has inspired me to consider how I might alter photos I already have with swathes of color or circles. To continue with my red, black, and white theme, I could possibly add red circles over faces or other elements in a photo. His work made my thinker start thinking.

BIO
A Brief History of John Baldessari | Life & Art

3) Andy Goldsworthy

Goldsworthy's words, "It's not about art. It's just about life and the need to understand that a lot of things in life do not last," grabbed my attention. With a concept of death for my work, that really resonated with me. Everything around us is in a state of decay. How could I represent death in my work using elements from nature? Goldsworthy uses items from nature to create amazing site-specific installations.

Andy Goldsworthy: Earth Artist and His Process

4) Carolee Schneeman

Schneeman's work interests me because she puts her body into her work. "I want my actual body to be combined with the work as an integral material," (MoMA). Inspired by blaze, I incorporated performance into my final presentation at our residency — combining my body with the videos being presented. I would like to become more comfortable with this. I am considering how my body has held onto traumas from the past, including the deaths of those I

cared about. How could I use my body in my art to convey “The Body Remembers”? I have photographed my body, but how could I take that further? Performance? I’m not sure. Schneeman has inspired me to be a bit bolder with my work — in order to make a greater impact.

Carolee Schneemann: An Introduction
Art Bio and Works

5) Ann Hamilton

Hamilton is a visual artist known for her “large-scale multimedia installations, public projects, and performance art” (Ann Hamilton Studio). I was really drawn to her video and audio works, and I plan to create videos like hers moving forward.

BIO

Video and Sound

Packet 9: Five Pieces of Work

1) POEM ONE
   This is an attempt at painting with my fingers, for the feeling of paint smeared on my hands and the touch of the canvas under my fingers. I added a sliver of chain for tears. I included a short poem: Widow One.

2) POEM TWO
   This is a second attempt at painting — with chains added— to convey the pain of being widowed. I included a short poem: Widow Two.

3) POEM(S) THREE
   These are four black and white graphics (part of a series I've worked on during previous semesters). They're very brief poetic statements for possible use in a book.

4) POEM FOUR
   "The Abandoned Mermaid" was inspired by Matthea Harvey and written in the style of her poem "The Inside Out Mermaid."

5) POEM FIVE
   "Silent Abandon" explores the feeling of abandonment when someone leaves you behind. I included a black and white photo with this poem.



WIDOW ONE

your absence

runs down my cheeks

and slips under the covers

with only me

private indulgence

WIDOW TWO

i try to loosen
O
the drawstring
O
that contains
O
losing you

a torpedo tears through me

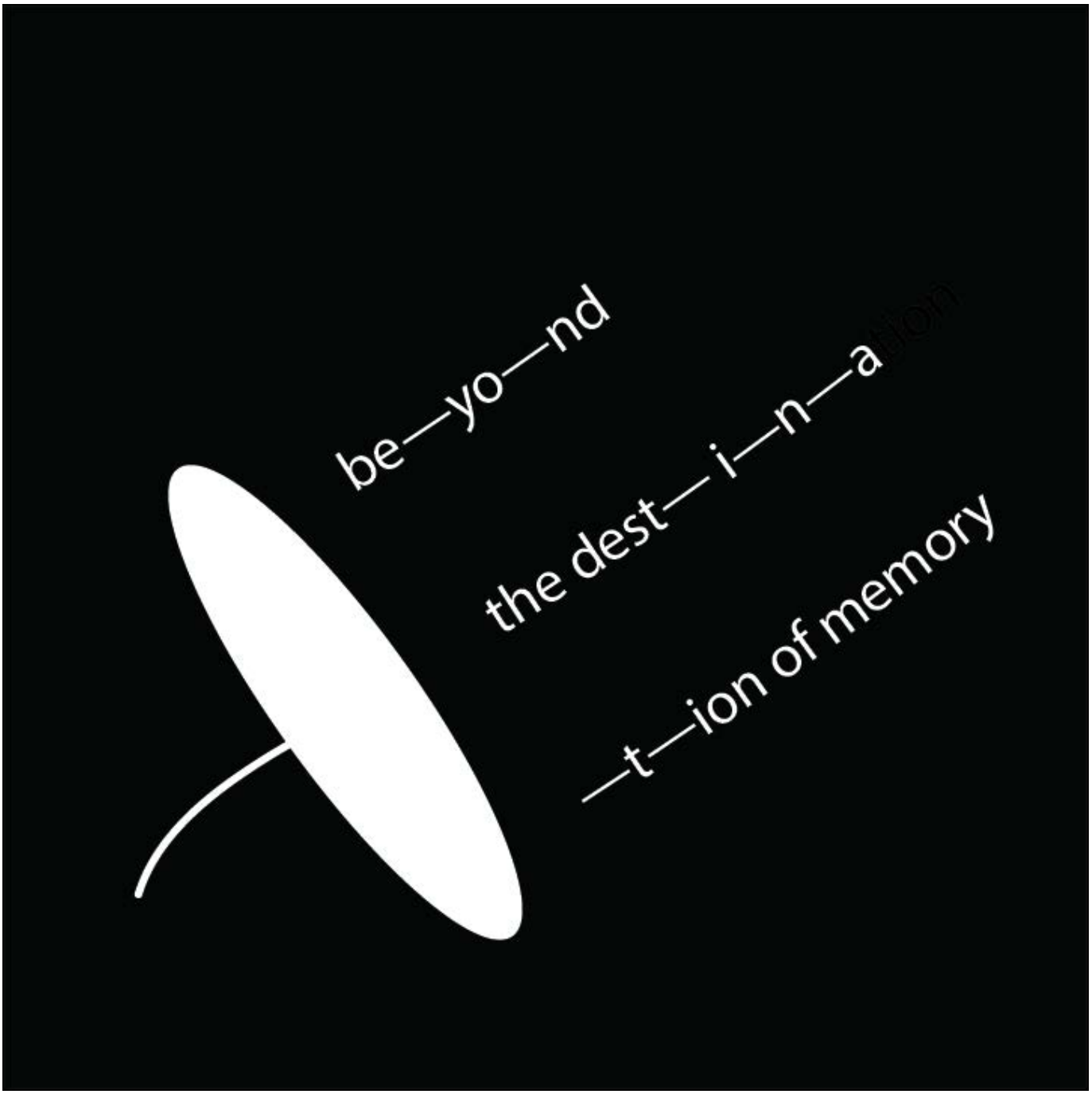
upending my sanity

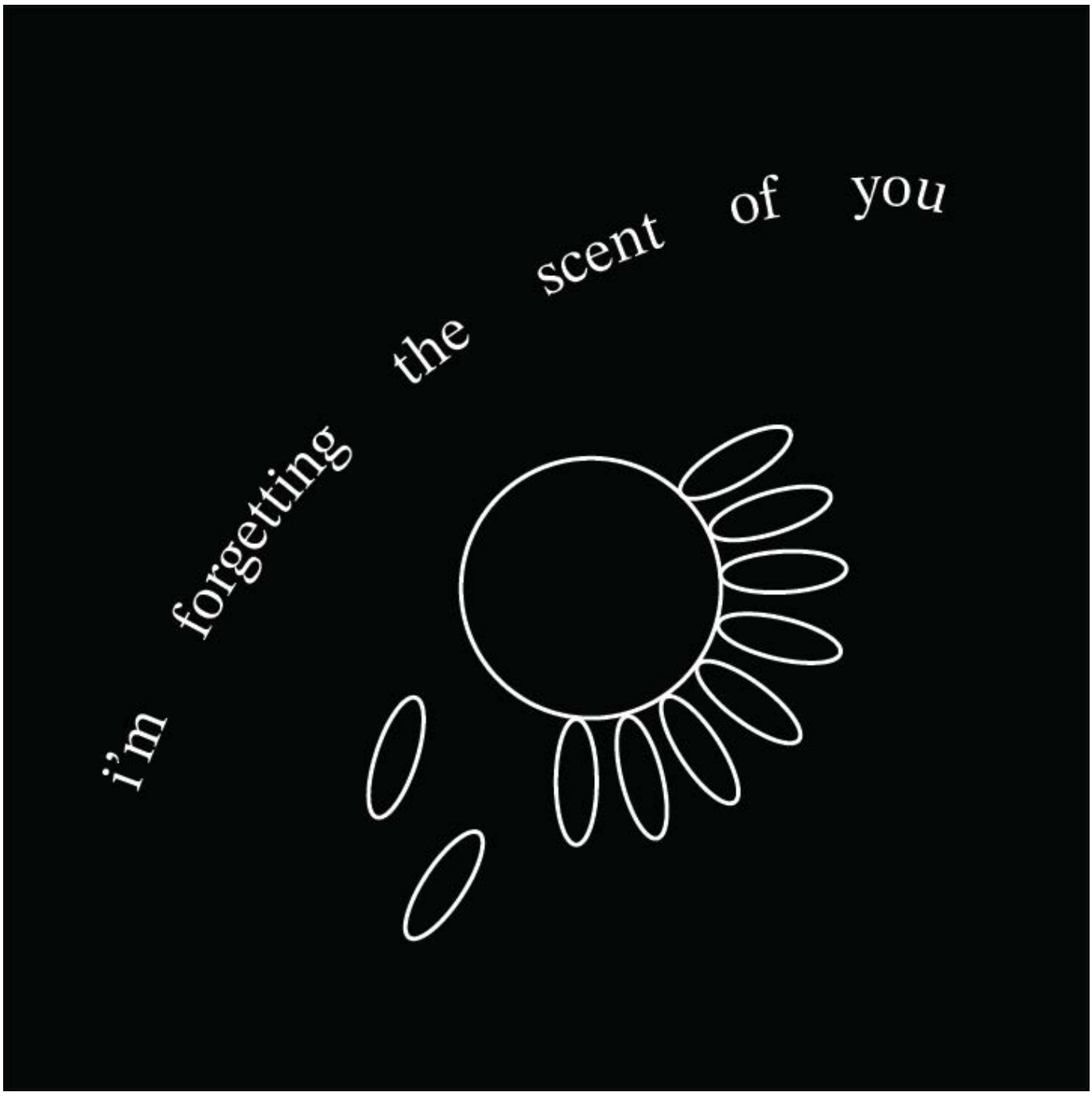
loose the loss

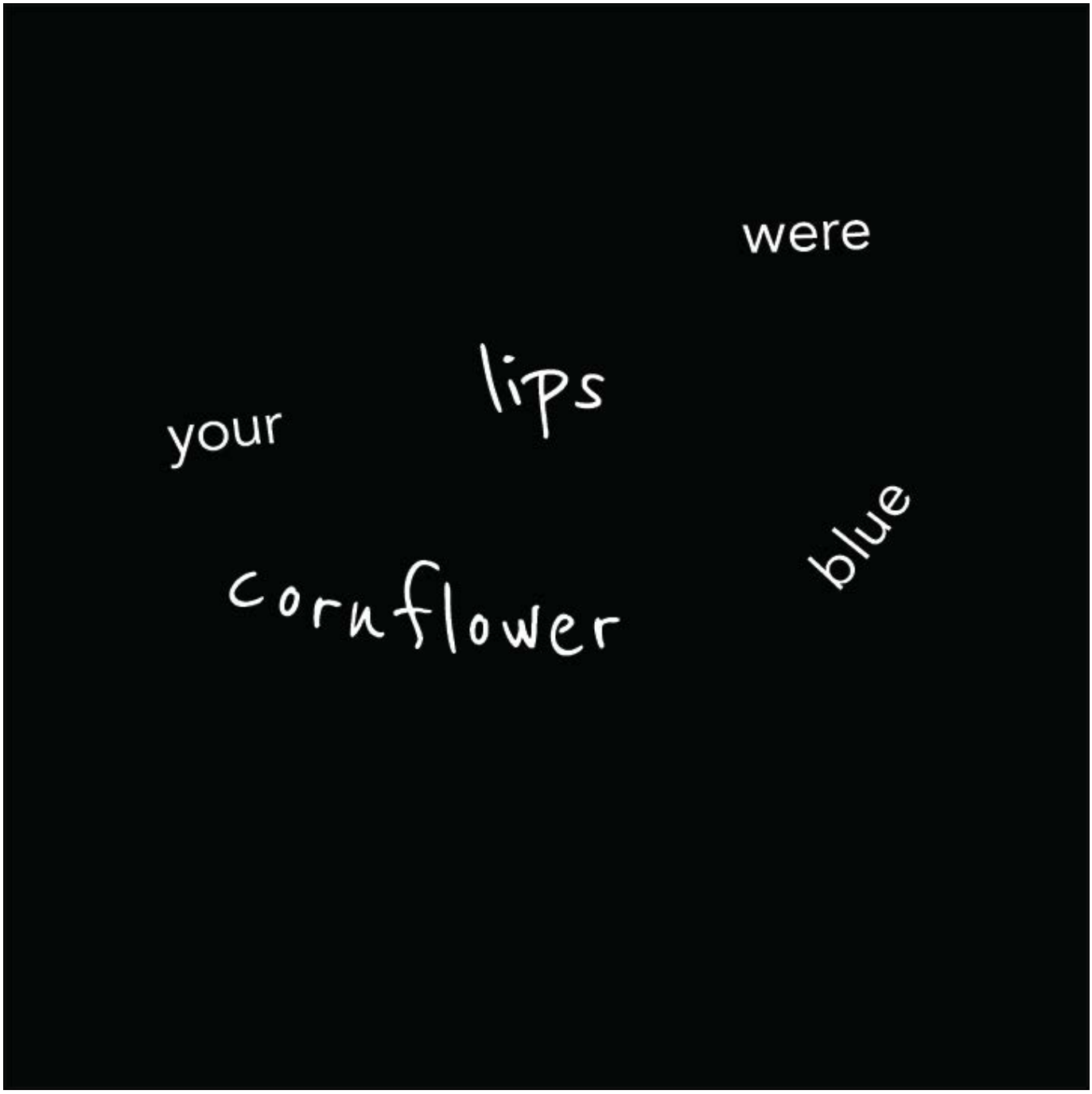
of loving

you
O




be—yo—nd
the dest— i—n—ation
—t—ion of memory


i'm forgetting the scent of you


were
your
lips
blue
cornflower

they buried my heartbeat in the ground

POEM FOUR: The Abandoned Mermaid
Holding hands with Matthea Harvey

The Abandoned Mermaid entered a world where she could talk with bears. She read stories to them from her library under the sea. They didn't care that the pages were damp. She explained to one of them, a particularly bright and handsome bear, that she only had half a heart. This confused the bear, and he asked her to explain. She told him a true tale, not one of the fairytales from her vast library. She had known a giant who slept in a loft above the sea. One day, he reached down and scooped her heart out of her chest. The giant ran away with half of her heart and laughed as she wept. She struggled and learned to survive with less. The mermaid was fond of the bear and told him she wanted to love him with her whole heart — but half was with the giant, and she didn't know how to get it back. The bear asked her strange questions: "Where do canaries go when dawn dies away? Where do peonies play when light eludes them? Why do the ravens gather? Why do they stare at me? Why are they singing reveille? Does twilight happen when the peonies cry?" The bear stopped coming to visit, so the mermaid pulled herself up onto the shore and shimmied her body into the forest in search of him. Her tailfin crushed crunchy leaves and bumped against tree roots as she made her way deeper into the forest. She finally saw the bear in the distance; he was running toward her with bloody paws. He had found the giant in his loft and retrieved the other half of her heart — so she could love him as completely as he loved her. He lifted her into his big bear arms and hurried to get her back to the sea. When her scales felt the water, she knew she was home. The bear begged her to always love him with her whole heart, then returned to the forest. She never saw him again.

POEM FIVE: Silent Abandon



you
left only silence
for me to embrace
i feel so abandoned
my torn out heart is
a product of our love
tender moments we
shared others have
stopped saying your
name told me to move
on but i won't let you
die twice i feel you in
every breath are you in
the sky? i can't touch
the sky but maybe i'll
find a glimpse of you
there

Cynde Valenti
Stetson MFA | Creative Writing
Packet Nine | January 2026

Semester Three: Statement of Intentions

This semester, I will continue my exploration of death with a closer focus on widowhood and the feelings of loss, loneliness, and abandonment brought by the sudden departure of a spouse by death. My recent divorce is putting me in touch with those feelings again, and I will draw from both experiences as I create. I would also like to begin looking at the recovery and rebirth that occurs after loss. “The end is the beginning” has appeared in my work previously, and I’d like to create around that thought. How does life renew when something ends? Is the end actually the end? How does a widow move forward? What strengths are gained in the process?

I intend to learn more about performance and the use of my body in my work. I will research artists who do this and consider how to convey a message of death and grief through my art. Of course, I will continue with photography, videos, graphics, and sounds — but I’m also toying with painting to see where that leads. By the end of this semester, I intend to have a clearer vision for where my work is ultimately going and how I might refine it to be used in my thesis work.

I will revisit my Covid memoir and use the text from that resource, as either inspiration for poetry, or to place some of my memoir words beside poetry or visuals. This might be for a book which could include QR code links to videos. I would also like to consider how I might use augmented reality, especially for my final (thesis) presentation. This could be a good way to add a layer of audience participation. I have numerous audio recordings that I made when I came

home from the hospital, post-Covid. I haven't listened to them in a while, but hearing the words and sound of my voice at that time might inspire something new.

Lastly, I don't want to present death as a broad topic or concept. I want to narrow it down to the pain felt by one person over the loss of another one person. I want to bring the work to a place of intimacy that can be felt intensely by anyone who has suffered a loss and is on the grieving journey. I also want to create words that offer hope for healing and recovery. I'm sure as the creative process works through me, it will all come together as it should in the end.

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Dear Dr. Allen,

In this packet of work, I had some difficulty creating and kept avoiding my work. I think that might be because I'm delving into old audio recordings from my Covid experience, and it's painful to listen to them — still. That being said, I did create three videos that focus on loss and widowhood. I also included one image (holding hands with Arrayah Loynd and her work "Pain Always Finds the Surface"), some written poems, and graphics.

One poem and its video were inspired by my recent divorce, so I was pulling from those emotions. It's the poem I mentioned at our last meeting, about more specific and intimate details. I used imagery from a trip we took to Yosemite and Mariposa Grove for the video, and I deviated from black and white, instead choosing a hue cycle. The second poem I found in my audio recordings (post-Covid). I paired the audio recording with repurposed video from my work at the June 2025 residency, "It Never Ends." The third poem was inspired after I listened to an audio recording about being wheeled into my late husband's hospital room. He was on a ventilator, and his skin was very cold when I touched him. This work includes a written poem.

Questions: Are there any writers or artists that you might recommend who create(d) about widows or about being widowed themselves? Are there any abstract artists who create(d) about death that you might recommend?

Thank you for reviewing my work. I look forward to your critique and advice.

Kind regards,

Cynde Valenti

Cynde Valenti
Annotated Encounters
Packet 10
February 2026

1) **Laurie Anderson** is an American avante-garde artist, musician, and filmmaker. Her 1980 song and video "O Superman" reached the number two spot on UK singles charts in 1981. Her audio and video works are very interesting to me because of their eclectic and abstract nature.

   BIO

   O Superman Video

2) **Arrayah Loynd** is a "conceptual artist whose work explores themes of memory, trauma, the female experience, neurodivergence and otherness. She works with altered/expanded photography, archival imagery, and mixed media" (lensculture). I really like the abstract imagery in Loynd's work — based on trauma. I'm holding hands with her in this packet for her work in "Pain Always Finds the Surface."

   BIO

   Pain Always Finds the Surface

3) **Käthe Kollwitz** was a German artist whose work included paintings, drawings, graphics, and sculptures. She established herself during a time that the art world was dominated by men — by creating works that focused on women and the working class. I was drawn to her art about widows and her use of black and white.

   BIO

   The Widow I (Die Witwe I)

4) **Susan Landgraf** is a poet and journalist (something we have in common). I enjoyed her poem about being a widow titled, "Widow's Blues." It made me consider how we all grieve differently and inspired me to think about a series of poems about widows grieving in their own ways.

   BIO

Widow's Blues

5) **Abigail Chabitnoy** is a poet who "explores her journey to connect with her roots among the Alaska Native Aleut through letters, Michael's school records, and historical photos" (Colorado State University). The video for her work *How to Dress a Fish,* in which she's reading "(Re)generating Landscapes" inspired me to consider how I might include hospital records and the details from the historical event Covid in my video and audio work.

   BIO

   "(Re)generating Landscapes" from *How to Dress a Fish*

Packet Ten: Five Pieces of Work

1) Poem One

We Couldn't See the End

This poem began as a written work, and I decided to create a video using the poem's words and my own voice. It was inspired by feelings from divorce, not death. It describes intimate moments and memories of happy times when "we couldn't see the end" of us. I deviated from black and white, choosing instead to use a hue cycle for the video. I included both the written poem and a link to the video.

VIDEO

2) Poem Two

A Widow Speaks

This poem was created using video content from my project "It Never Ends" (June 2025 residency) and a poem I wrote after coming home from the hospital, post-Covid. I'm beginning to explore my old audio recordings and transcriptions. This is me describing how I felt at that time and speaking to my late husband, questioning why he left me. I stuck with black and white for this one.

VIDEO

3) Poem Three

There's No Way Back (1)

This poem came to me after listening to an audio recording of when nursing staff wheeled me into my late husband's hospital room while he was on a ventilator. His skin was cold when I touched him, and he was still in a medically induced coma. I created a written poem and a video; both are included in this packet.

VIDEO

4) Poem Four

There's No Way Back (2)

This is a typographic poem, with which I included an image I created — holding hands with Arrayah Loynd ("Pain Always Finds the Surface") for the image.

5) Poem Five

Two Black & White Graphics

We Couldn’t See the End

The strength of your dirty hands, oil-drenched fingertips, black with grease, fresh cuts and scars, wrench-turning hands that built and repaired, and held and helped me. Plates of salmon at the "fish hut" and ice cream across the street, our mint chocolate dark chocolate debates, cherries and two scoops. Showers after dinner, your dirty hands in my tangled hair, massaging my scalp with lavender shampoo, protecting my eyes from the sting, washing my body, and noticing every inch of me. Smacking each other with laughter as soap bubbles pop around us. Lacing up our shoes together before a walk along the Halifax River, collecting seashells at the beach and storing them on windowsills and in jars in our home. Us hiking in forests with crunchy leaves beneath our boots, frosty air filling our lungs as we ascend Black Mountain. You running down the mountain to find my lost glove and laughing at me for losing it when you return. At the top, we couldn’t see the end. Us feeding the birds: seagulls, pelicans, blue jays, crows, doves, cardinals, finches, woodpeckers. The squirrels wonder where you went. I still feed them, but they question me. The birdfeeders sway with emptiness until I wander out to fill them — dutifully. Sometimes I see their frowns, and we frown together. The intimacy of watching you lean one hand on the edge of the bathroom sink before lifting the Dollar Shave Club razor to your face — your chin slightly upward as you run the blade over your flesh. Each pass, I know, brings me closer to the gift of your smooth skin nuzzling my face for a kiss. The smell of Gillette foamy shave cream fills my senses as I lose myself in you. **Where did you go?** Oars in the water as we kayak Mosquito Lagoon at sunset, bioluminescent waters, shrimp jumping into my kayak, darkness revealing the full moon hovering over our happiness. Us yapping, quarreling, challenging each other. Rides in your Army-green Jeep with a giant star on the hood to see rockets climb into the atmosphere, the rumble of our touches. I search, but I can’t find our destiny. **I’m lost.** The plans, the projects, your tools, our trials, times of dreams, talk of where we were going and what we were building. The garden, the home, the excitement of our next trip to Cali, the sequoias and redwoods, and mountain peaks. The travel and the staying put — together. The days, the nights that fueled our dreams as a team. Two are better than one, but I’m less than one without you.

There's No Way Back

when I last saw you

you were cold but alive

tension traced our touch

it haunts me today

i try to escape the truth

choosing full denial

fading into the funeral floor

i crawl the unending loop of your absence

slippery tears beneath my knees

a numbing journey

searching for an atom of you

a — wisp of hair — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

a — rush of breath — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

a — familiar scent — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

when I last saw you

i pressed my skin on

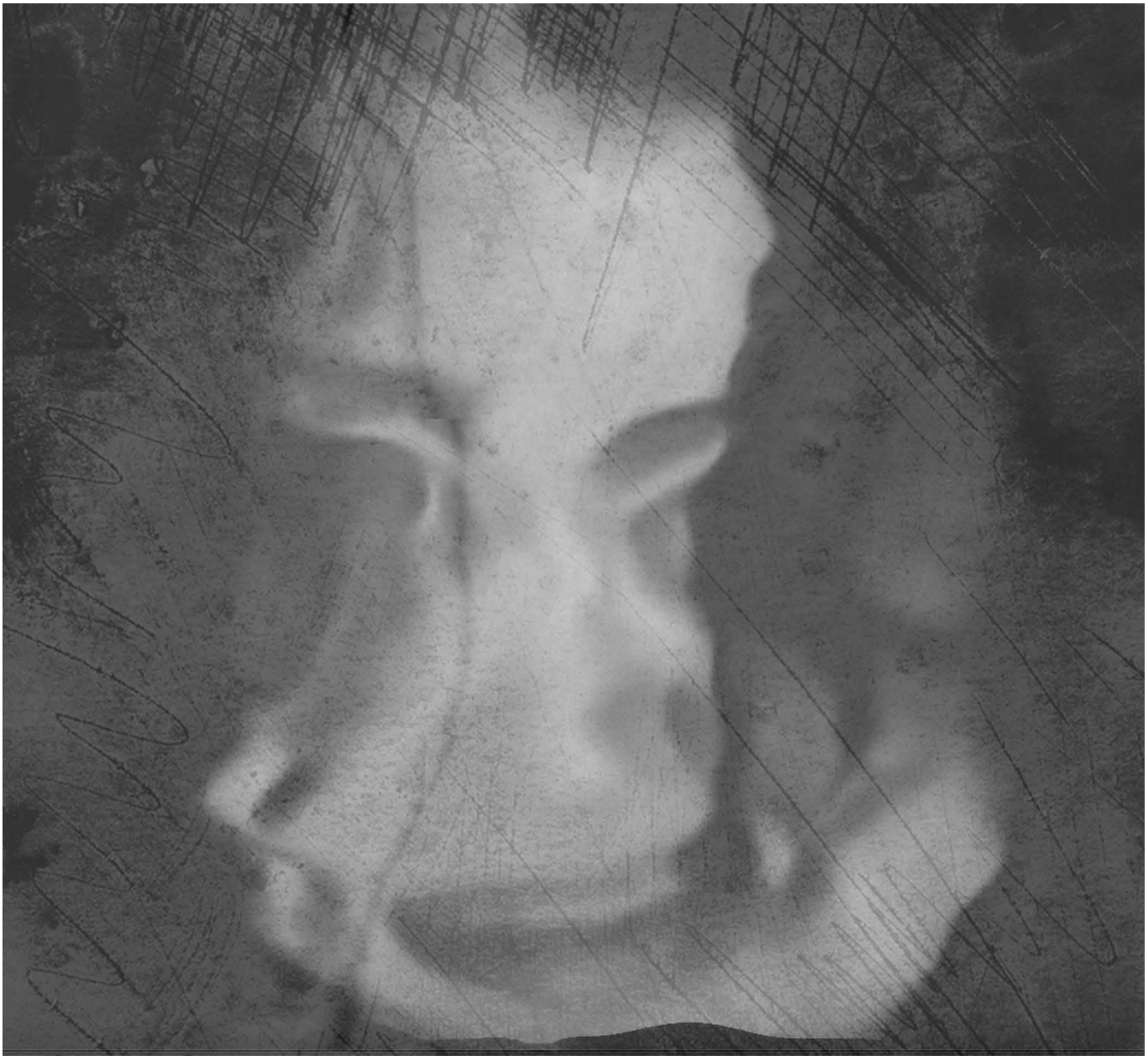
your silent frozen husk

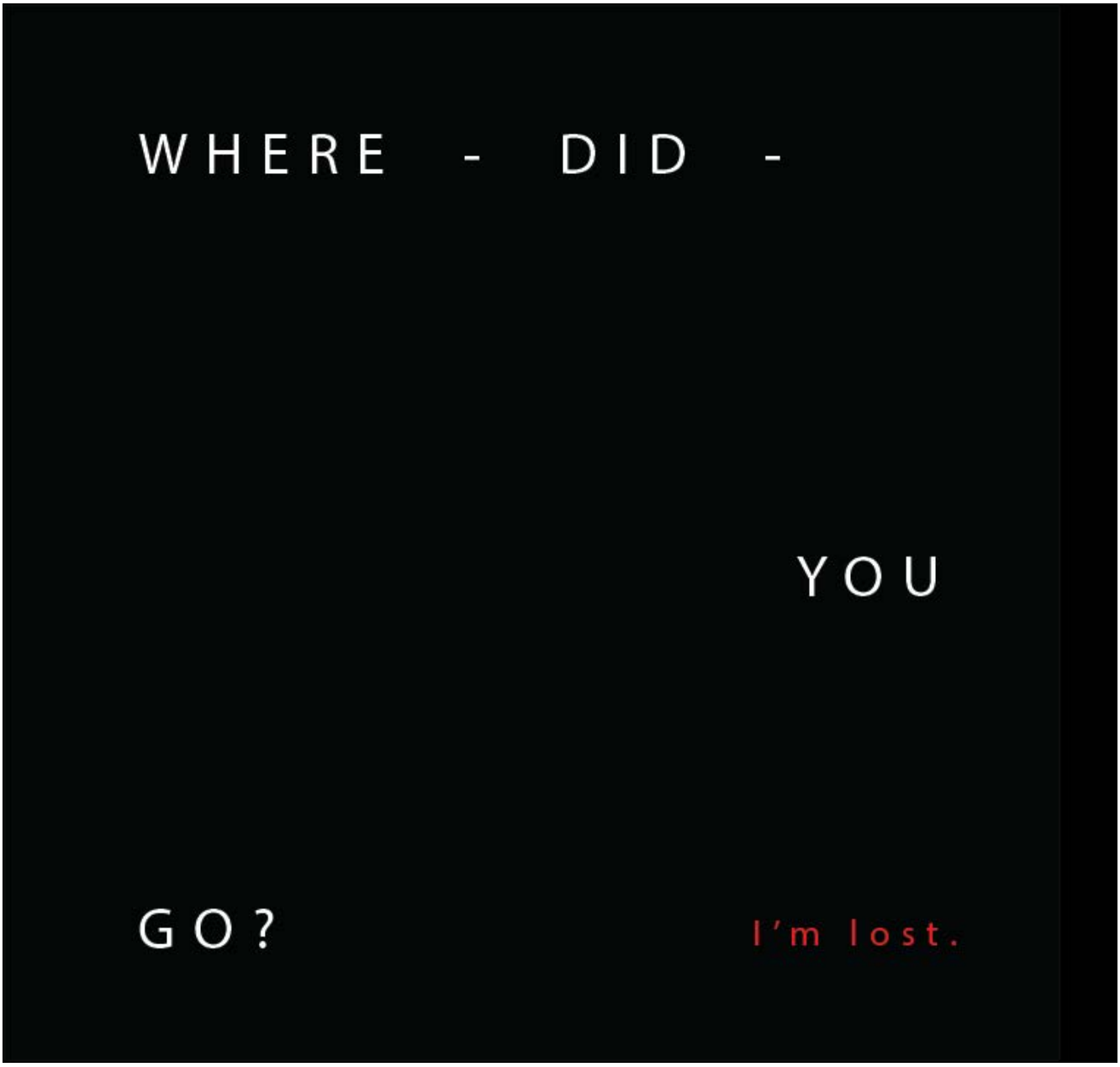
we bled 'til the end

emptying jars of tomorrow

into yesterday's black hole


there’snowaybackthere’snowayback
here’snowaybackthere’snowayback
ere’snowaybackthere’snowayback
re’snowaybackthere’snowayback
e’snowaybackthere’snowayback
’snowaybackthere’snowayback
nowaybackthere’snowayback
owaybackthere’snowayback
waybackthere’snowayback
waybackthere’snowayback
wa




WHERE - DID -
YOU
GO?
I'm lost.


FADING
INTO THE
FUNERAL FLOOR

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Dear Dr. Allen,

In this packet of work, I continued to explore widowhood and my own experience with loss. I created a few graphics holding hands with Jennifer Loeber and her "Left Behind" series, in which she places vintage images of her mother beside images of things that belonged to her mother. Two of the graphics follow this pattern with images of my late husband, and one is a photo of my late husband and a hospital document showing my loss of a spouse from Covid. I also dug into my memoir and found the last text message conversation I had with him. I used the text from that conversation to create a video "Final Words." And I wrote a poem about trying to move forward into a new relationship after loss, about how the new person is likely an attempt to fill the void that was left from loss.

As for my encounters, Jonathon Santlofer's pencil sketches of his late wife were very beautiful and touching, as were the "Missing Piece" images created by Tim Guthrie. The video I included of his TED Talk shows how raw his emotions still were at the time of the talk. I learned about Jackson Pollock's widow, Lee Krasner, and considered how widow's move forward after loss. I really like "White Squares" from her "Little Images" series. Overall, I think I learned from widows and widowers this time around and I created from my personal experience rather than from a broad perspective.

Thank you for reviewing my work. I look forward to your critique and advice.

Kind regards,

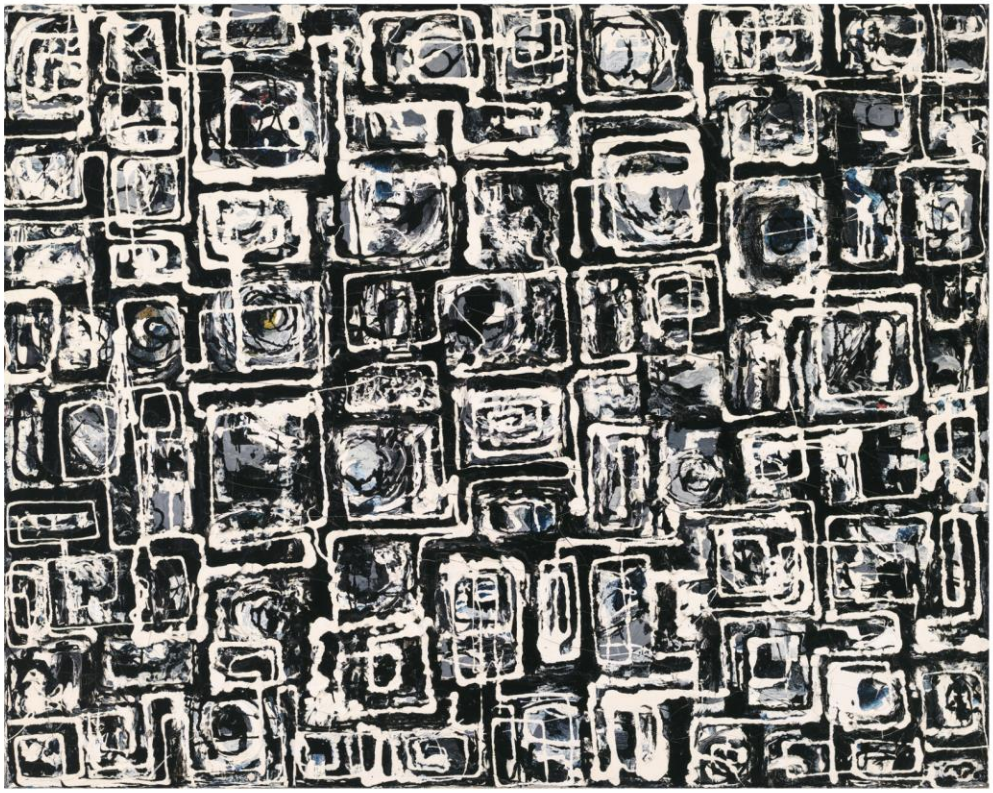
Cynde Valenti

Cynde Valenti
Annotated Encounters
Packet 3 (11)
March 2026

1) **Lee Krasner**
I was drawn to Krasner's work because she was an Abstract Expressionist painter, considered a minor painter of her time and the wife of Jackson Pollock. His work overshadowed hers. When he died, she became widowed, and I'm interested in that aspect of Krasner as well. What did she do and accomplish as a widow? How did she pick herself up and move forward? Her "Little Images" series is very interesting to me, especially "White Squares."

About Lee Krasner

Lee Krasner
White Squares
c. 1948



2) **Jennifer Loeber**
Photographer Jennifer Loeber has a photo series titled, "Left Behind," in which she juxtaposes photos of her mother with photos of items that belonged to her mother. The series feels very intimate, and it seems like a way to hold on while trying to let go. It might be therapeutic for me to tinker with images of my late husband and some items I still have that belonged to him. I'm holding hands with Loeber in this packet.

Loeber writes, "I found myself deeply overwhelmed by the need to keep even the most mundane things of my mom's belongings when she died suddenly…Instead of providing comfort and good memories, they became a source of deep sadness and anxiety, and I knew the only way I would be able to move past that was to focus on a way to interact with them cathartically."

About Jennifer Loebel and the "Left Behind" series

3) **Jonathan Santlofer**
Santlofer wrote a grief memoir after the sudden death of his wife, Joy. In the memoir, he included pencil sketches that he drew in the weeks and months that followed her death. He wrote, "It was a way for me to hold onto her, our life together, and our memories." I did something similar with audio recordings after my Covid experience and the death of my late husband. Santlofer's work has made me think about how I might pair bits of those audio recordings with images.

About The Widower's Notebook: A Memoir

4) **Tim Guthrie**
Guthrie created an award-winning documentary titled, "Missing Piece" in which he overlays photos of his late wife in front of landscapes. He revisited places she loved to create the images and documentary. It is a beautiful way to remember his wife and reconnect with memories they shared. His work interested me in that it has made me think about places I visited with my late husband and how I could create poetry or images related to those places.

About Tim Guthrie and "Missing Piece"

5) **American Widow Project (AWP)**
The AWP supports military widows giving them online space to share their stories and poetry, a means of connecting with each other and building community. On the website's Widow Stories page, there are black rectangular areas to click on to read the stories and poetry. The page made me think of the little black and white square graphics I've been creating and how I might use them. Also, could I include tidbits of text from the memoir I've been writing?

America Widow Project



Packet Eleven: Five Pieces of Work

1) Poem One: **The Void**
This poem is explores how a widow (me) attempts to move forward in a new relationship, trying to fill the void left by loss of her spouse. The photo was taken at The Doghouse Bar & Grill in Port Orange, FL.

2) Poem Two: **The Void graphic**
This poem is another of overlapping words. It was suggested that I make a series of these poems. I used words from "The Void" poem for this one.

3) Poem Three: **Three graphics, holding hands with Jennifer Loeber and her "Left Behind" series.** I created three graphics using images of my late husband and items from his past. One of the graphics is a photo of him juxtaposed with a medical document that says "loss of husband – Covid"

4) Poem Four: **Close Your Eyes**
This poem is about saying it's okay to go, it's okay to let them go. I'm still remembering the last moments with my late husband.

5) Poem Five: **Final Words**
In this video, I include black & white Covid images that I created for a previous video "The Body Remembers" and actual images of myself in the hospital and afterward. The text is not really a poem, it's the last text message conversation I had with my late husband.

VIDEO

[1]



The Void

Camouflage and curse words
Rage in the streets
Chaos on wheels

Leather boots and a Stetson cowboy hat
Drakkar Noir on my sheets
His hands on my skin

I sense you
I seek you in him

Filling this void

With everything wrong
With everything right
With anything at all

To silence the emptiness

In this loud club
On this dance floor

Papa Wheelie's guitar

His hand on my thigh
His lips on my neck

Filling this void

[2]



[3]















Classes of Respiratory Impairment.*

	Class 1: 0%, no impairment of the whole person	Class 2: 10-25%, mild impairment of the whole person	Class 3: 26-50%, moderate impairment of the whole person	Class 4: 51-100%, severe impairment of whole person
FVC FEV_1 FEV_1/FVC(%) D_{CO}	FVC ≥ 80% of predicted; *and* FEV_1 ≥ 80% of predicted; and FEV_1/FVC ≥ 70%; *and* D_{CO} ≥ 70% of predicted.	FVC between 60% and 79% of predicted; *or* FEV_1 between 60% and 79% of predicted; *or* D_{CO} between 60% and 69% of predicted.	FVC between 51% and 59% of predicted; *or* FEV_1 between 41% and 59% of predicted; *or* D_{CO} between 41% and 59% of predicted.	FVC ≤ 50% of predicted; *or* FEV_1 ≤ 40% of predicted; *or* D_{CO} ≤ 40% of predicted.
	or	**or**	**or**	**or**
VO_2 Max	> 25 mL/(kg min); *or* > 7.1 METS	Between 20 and 25 mL/(kg min); or 5.7-7.1 METS	Between 15 and 20 mL/(kg min); or 4.3-5.7 METS	< 15 mL/(kg min); or < 1.05 L/min; or < 4.3 METS

*FVC = forced vital capacity, FEV_1 = forced expiratory volume in the first second, D_{CO} = Diffusing capacity of carbon monoxide. The D_{CO} is primarily of value for persons with restrictive lung disease. In classes 2 and 3, if the FVC, FEV_1 and FEV_1/FVC ratio are normal and the D_{CO} is between 41% and 79%, then an exercise test is required.

VO_2 Max, or measured exercise capacity, is useful in assessing whether a person's complaint of dyspnea (see Table 1) is a result of respiratory or other conditions. A person's cardiac and conditioning status must be considered in performing the test and in interpreting the results.

Table 1: Classification of Dyspnea.*

Severity	Definition and question	Severity	Definition and question
☐ Mild	Do you have to walk more slowly on the level than people of your age because of breathlessness?	☐ Severe	Do you ever have to stop for breath after walking about 100 yards or a few minutes on the level?
☐ Moderate	Do you have to stop for breath when walking at your own pace on the level?	☐ Very Severe	Are you breathless to leave the house or breathless after dressing or undressing?

*The patient's lowest level of physical activity and exertion that produces breathlessness denotes the severity of the dyspnea.

8. Date first seen _____ Date last seen 8/23/21 Pulmonary Function Tests _____

9. Assessment and treatment are complicated by:

☑ Significant emotional or behavioral disorder such as depression, anxiety LOSS OF HUSBAND (COVID)

☐ Exaggeration, inconsistent findings, subjective complaints out of proportion to objective findings, bizarre or contradictory observations

☐ Malingering

☐ Dependence on drugs/medications – specify _____

It’s okay to close your eyes

Embrace the summoned hush

‘Round the shores of you

Holy Whole

Exhausted unseen particles

Scatter to freedom

It’s okay
close your eyes

Hush

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Dear Dr. Allen,

In this packet of work, I chose to focus on how a widow moves forward after loss. How does she return to work and act normally? How do other people treat her as she moves forward? How does she return to dating, and when is it an acceptable time to do so? I explore the return to dating in this packet, as well as consider my late husband's thoughts about me doing that.

I found an "Open Letter to the Man Dating my Wife" at reddit. It stirred memories of my relationship with him and confirmed in me that no man will ever be *him.* Moving forward means accepting that and learning to not look for him in new relationships. I hold hands with this letter by writing an open letter from my late husband to the man I'm dating now.

As for my other encounters, I discovered the very refreshing Donielle Young: The Grief Disruptor, whose content looks at widowhood from a unique perspective — honestly. A. F. Moritz's poem, "Conversation with a Widow" led me to think about how people react when engaging with a widow. They often don't know what to say and sometimes say the wrong thing. M. J. Oliver's poem, "The Journey," has such beautiful words about moving from the past into what's next, very inspiring. Margaret Atwood's short story, "Widows," is about a woman coming to terms with life after the loss of her partner. These works, and the open letter, were inspirational for this packet about moving forward and dating again.

Thank you for reviewing my work. I look forward to your critique and advice.

Kind regards,

Cynde Valenti

Cynde Valenti
Packet 12
April 2026

Annotated Encounters List

1) **Donielle Young: The Grief Disruptor**
Young is a keynote speaker, author, and writer who has an Instagram account devoted to the topic of living while you're grieving — life continues, and a grieving person has to keep up with duties while in the grief process. "Grief doesn't pause for your Zoom meeting," she says. "It doesn't care that you have to get the kids to school, pick up groceries, or show up to work with a smile on your face. It doesn't care about your nail appointments, your friendships, or your inbox. Life keeps moving. And you have to move with it while carrying all of that. THAT'S the part nobody talks about." She also posts content about dating after being widowed and not being sure what her new identity would be — "a nun or a hoe?" and the need for approval from others before dating again. Her content interests me because she's very frank about the real-life struggles of a widow trying to move forward after loss.



2) **A. F. Moritz: Conversation with a Widow**
This poem made me consider how uncomfortable people are when interacting with a widow — an uncomfortable silence exists that's tangible to the widow. Equally, people don't know what to say, nor how to reply, and feel their own discomfort.

About A.F. Moritz: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/a-f-moritz
Poem: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46181/conversation-with-a-widow

3) **R/widowers: An Open Letter to the Man Dating my Wife**
I don't know who wrote this open letter, but it caused me to consider a new perspective:

my late husband's. What would he say to someone who's dating me? I guess I don't really know, but I wrote an open letter from him, and I'm holding hands with this letter for this packet.

LINK TO LETTER

4) **M.J. Oliver: The Journey**
This poem ... wow! It's such a beautiful description of someone deciding to pick up and keep going, despite what life has thrown at them. It's so inspiring! It's also very much how I choose to live my life, and especially what I had to do post-Covid and in widowhood.

The Journey Poem
About M. J. Oliver

5) **Margaret Atwood: Widows**
From YouTube: "While responding to a friend's letter, Nell is coming to terms with life after her beloved partner Tig's death in this 2023 epistolary short story."

This poem made me consider the experiences of different widows and their grief processes. It inspired my poem, "When I'm Ready, I'll Date a Cowboy." Some descriptions in the poem are of my own experiences; some are fictional.

Reading of Widows
About Margaret Atwood

Open Windows

I bent the edges of the sun

without burning my fingertips

I drank from the sea's far corner

without spilling any salt

I walked where palm trees grow upside down

without finding a trace

I climbed the summit of insanity

without knowledge to warn

Rain and wet grass

without jasmine undertones

without the scent of open

windows

To Love Again

embers of your absence

in a black hole

supermassive — ultra massive

black hole

exceeding the speed of love

I can't escape

I can't stay

the gravitational pull

away

growing stronger

to love again

I won't forget you

I won't forget us

I'm here

you're in a

supermassive — ultra massive

black hole

in the cosmos

do you think of me there?

An Open Letter to the Man Dating my Wife

You think you want to date my wife. Okay, but you should understand that she will always be my wife. I didn't leave her by choice, and she hasn't let go of me. We vowed before God, "until death do us part," and we meant it. She knew there was the possibility that I would go first, but she's devastated now that it actually happened. Her heart's been shattered, and she feels really lost without me. I did everything I could to make sure she'd be taken care of in the event of my death. She realizes that now — and it's sinking in that I'll be the man taking care of her for the rest of her life. I made sure she will never "need" a man again.

Since you're reading this, she probably started feeling lonely or bored and decided she wanted to date again. Know this: She will be looking for bits and pieces of me in you. She and I shared 25 years of life and love together. Don't think you can step in where I left off and not take me with you. She's going to take me wherever she goes. And don't think you can get away with mediocrity — she won't settle for that. She has a blueprint for how a man should love her, that I drew for her.

She's still healing from the loss, from being widowed. The word widow feels ugly to her. It looks like she's okay. I'm sure she's excelling at whatever she's doing. Don't let that fool you. She's strong on the outside, but inside those broken fragments haven't been put back together. She's accepting that she'll never be the same again. You're getting a new version of her, a stronger version of the woman I love.

Yes, I said, "LOVE," not past tense. We carry each other in our hearts, and we will be together again. Our faith tells us that this is true. So, date her. She wants companionship on earth — a distraction. She might cry out of the blue. She will probably tell you, "It's nothing. Really. I'm okay." But she will be remembering our first kiss at the beach, standing on coquina rocks, watching a sailboat on the horizon. She'll be remembering the life we built, and the laughter we shared — my smile, my hands, our love. Give her space for this.

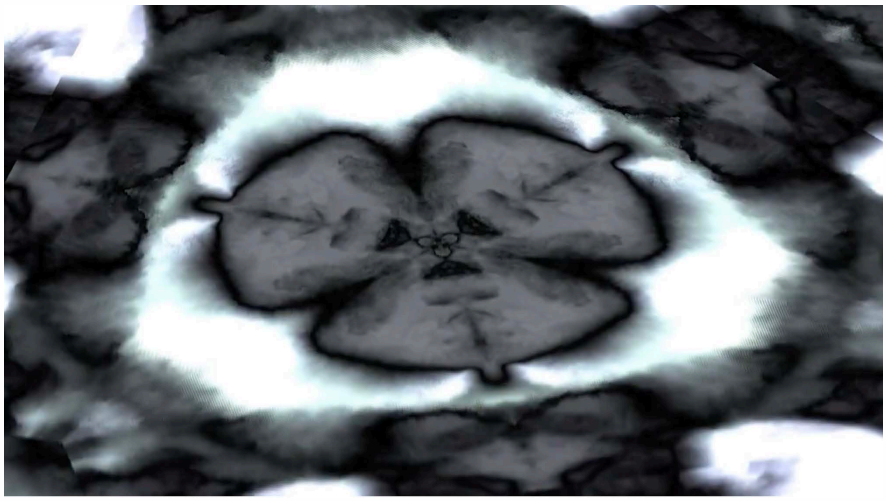
Did you know she loves to dance? Take her to any place that has water nearby — she will want to be in it. She collects seashells and can't put down her camera. She's a constant learner and will challenge you in ways you don't expect. Don't try to stop her from accomplishing her goals; it won't work. Let her be herself. Don't dare try to come between her and her son. You will lose and be sent packing. Shania Twain has a song, "Any Man of Mine." Learn the lyrics and abide by them. Treat her gently and make her laugh. In return, she will love you fiercely. Date my wife, but understand, she's still my wife.

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WIDOW
GONE?



WHEN I'M READY VIDEO



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Cynde Valenti
Packet One (13)
July 8, 2026

Thesis Proposal Rough Draft
Eight Pieces of Work
Rough list of 10 encounters

POEM 1) Scribbled Out
POEM 2) Didn't Expect
POEM 3) Death in the Sickroom by Edvard Munch, 1893
POEM 4) Tuck in Your Eyes
POEM 5) He's Not Coming Home 1
POEM 6) Rain Has Fallen
POEM 7) Steve
POEM 8) He's Not Coming Home 2

Link to video POEM 8

Cynde Valenti: Thesis Proposal
Stetson University
MFA in Creative Writing
July 24, 2026

Thesis: ***Central Concept***

The central concept for my work in this MFA program has been death, which began to appear in my work from the beginning as I was still grieving the loss of my husband of 25-years to Covid. Midway into the program, I experienced divorce and the grief of a dying relationship. My work includes the processing of these deaths in two ways: as a widow and as a divorcee. Significant grief is involved in the ending that comes with these two life experiences. What was my life like while facing these times of death? What's on the other side of these endings? Is it possible to pick up the pieces and move forward? If so, how does that happen? These are questions my work strives to answer through the realization that "the end is the beginning." For my thesis, I intend to use this realization as the central focus around which my work will be presented.

I propose that I will complete a book of poetry, including written poems, graphic and concrete poems, photographs, audio and video poems, and possibly excerpts from my Covid memoir. The book, tentatively titled *The End is the Beginning,* will be interactive with QR code links to audio and video poetry. The book will express grief, examine the reality of widowhood, recognize divorce as a sort of death, and point readers to hope — to new beginnings and the possibilities of life renewing itself when least expected. Death will hold hands with life while discovering the important connection between them.

Thesis: ***Traits of Genre, Craft, and Form*** **(*written words, graphics, photographs, videography, audio, abstraction, typography, and performance)***

My work in this program began with an obsession around breath and breathing. This was presented at my first residency in an interactive video that led the audience through breathing that took them back to Covid — including a jolting scream that caused them to feel the reality of my loss. That loud scream and the audience's reaction hooked me on performance, which I've included in each of my residency presentations since. In class with Terri Witek and Cyriaco Lopes, I began practicing breath and vocal work. They led me to record my own voice for my video poems. Using my own voice and performing are huge steps of growth for me. I recall Terri asking me, "What's wrong with your voice?" She really made me feel like it was okay to speak and to speak up — finding my voice.

Photography and videography are comfortable mediums for me, and I could not produce complete work that didn't include them. Graphic design is a way that I can reduce poems to their core words (only the best words). My semester with Kenzie Allen allowed me to expand my words and focus on specificity. I dug into my Covid memoirs and used more specific language, in one instance using my husband's last words. I explored a storage unit that holds items from our lives together. I traveled to Ameila Island, Florida and Jekyll Island, Georgia to photograph and collect video footage of the driftwood beaches, also known as boneyard beaches, when I was writing about my husband's cremation and questioning, "What happens to the bones?" I also traveled to Savannah, Georgia to visit the SCAD Museum for poetic inspiration. Abstract visuals are among my favorites, and they often pair well with poetry — as do abstract sounds and glitch.

This semester, I intend to photograph images that juxtapose those I've taken relating to death — images of light and life. My work, for some reason, has a focus on circles and the colors red, white, and black. My photography has been mostly black and white, which I will continue using to complete my thesis work and final presentation.

Thesis: *Influences*

My list of influences during this program is extensive. For breath work, Hannah Foley's *Breathing Backwards (Breath Score)* and Bob Cobbing's work with vocals. For performance, Pina Baush's *The Fall Dance,* Carolee Schneeman (body works), and Fluxus artist Alison Knowles. For erasure poetry, Kate Baer's *I Hope This Finds You Well* and Alycia Cook's *Sorry I Haven't Texted You Back.* For video work, Lawrence Weiner's *Blue Moon Over,* Len Lye's abstract videos, "A Color Box" and "Trade Tattoo," Ken Jacob's "Celestial Subway Lines / Salvaging Noise Ch. 3," and Laurie Anderson's "O Superman." For abstraction, Cy Twombly. For typography, H.N. Werkman, especially his "Mit Schreibmaschie 1923-29" and Stefan Sagmeister. For glitch and visual art, Rosa Menkman. For red, black and white images, Terry Frost and Barbara Kruger, and Piet Mondrian for geometric shapes. Poets: Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, T.S. Eliot, Etel Adnan, Andrea Gibson, Raquel Gutiérrez, Richard Blanco, Matthea Harvey, and Mary Elizabeth Frye. For images depicting death and influencing poetry, Hans Balding Grien's "The Three Ages of a Woman and Death" and "Death in the Sickroom" by Edvard Munch. For the concept of preservation, Damien Hirst's *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living.* For black and white photography and images, Sebastião Salgado, Ruth Berhard, Ansel Adams, Clyde Butcher, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Arrayah Loynd's "Pain Always Finds the Surface," Käthe Kollwitz's "The Widow I (Die Witwe I)," Lee Krasner's "White Squares," and Pablo Picasso's "Guernica." Chay Schmidt's *100 Ad Poems,* inspired a series of graphic design poems. On widowhood and grief, Tim Guthrie, the American Widow Project, Jonathan Santlofer, Jennifer Loeber, Donielle Young: The Grief Disruptor, A.F. Moritz's "Conversation with a Widow," and Margaret Atwood's "Widows."

Thesis: *Installation and Performance*

I plan to exhibit photographs and videos alongside my written poetry, as well as have copies of my completed book at my final thesis presentation. I will also perform. On the walls, I will have large black and white canvas photos to accompany each section of the performance, as well as a few poster-sized poems. I will create a breath score to play on a Bluetooth speaker as people are engaging with the images and poetry. I would also like a television to loop videos.

For the performance, I will continue with red, black, white, and circles. I will have three six-foot round, red, area rugs on which I will perform while wearing black and/or white. On the first circle, I will be dressed in black as a widow while handing out 2x2 inch black cards with my graphic design poems series printed on them. I will tear the black veil and scream. On the second circle, I will have my wedding dress on a stand (to which I have stapled items from my relationship with my ex-husband). I will still be dressed in black, to contrast the white wedding dress, while using scissors to cut and tear the dress. On the third circle, my current thoughts are to remove the black robe I'm wearing to reveal a black and white fun/party outfit — with dancing. This third circle doesn't feel complete in my mind yet and could change during the creative process. I've been known to make performance alterations day of and during the performance, so this could all change — but there will be performance. If possible, I would like to set this up in the dance studio at the ACA and perform on Saturday evening.

Scribbled Out (Zuihitsu)

Pen, pencil, eraser, paper

Erasers, aka rubbers, used to rub out mistakes; to scrub pencil marks off paper. Pen+Gear. Ticonderoga. Pink Pearl. I have a cheap, pink block eraser from Home Depot. I use it to save the clean eraser on my mechanical pencil. Is erasure better than scribble? One leaves no evidence.

Ticonderoga — "between two waters"

"And God said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters and let it divide the waters from the waters' … And God called the firmament Heaven."

The bank teller said she could remove his name from the account. Rubbed out of the system. Rubbed me the wrong way.

The churning, turbulent sea holds so many mysteries. We can't see the red and brown algae on the ocean floor or feel the pressure — only see bubbles of air. We miss the continuous shower of marine snow. The steady influx of dead bodies. Whales, plankton, medusas, humans.

Detritus.

Underwater ecosystems. Polymetallic nodules. Nutrient sources. Carbon assimilation. Black Diamond apples, Nannyberries, Jostaberries, and Red Currants, grow best in the cold.

Currents.

I still say his name.

Didn’t Expect

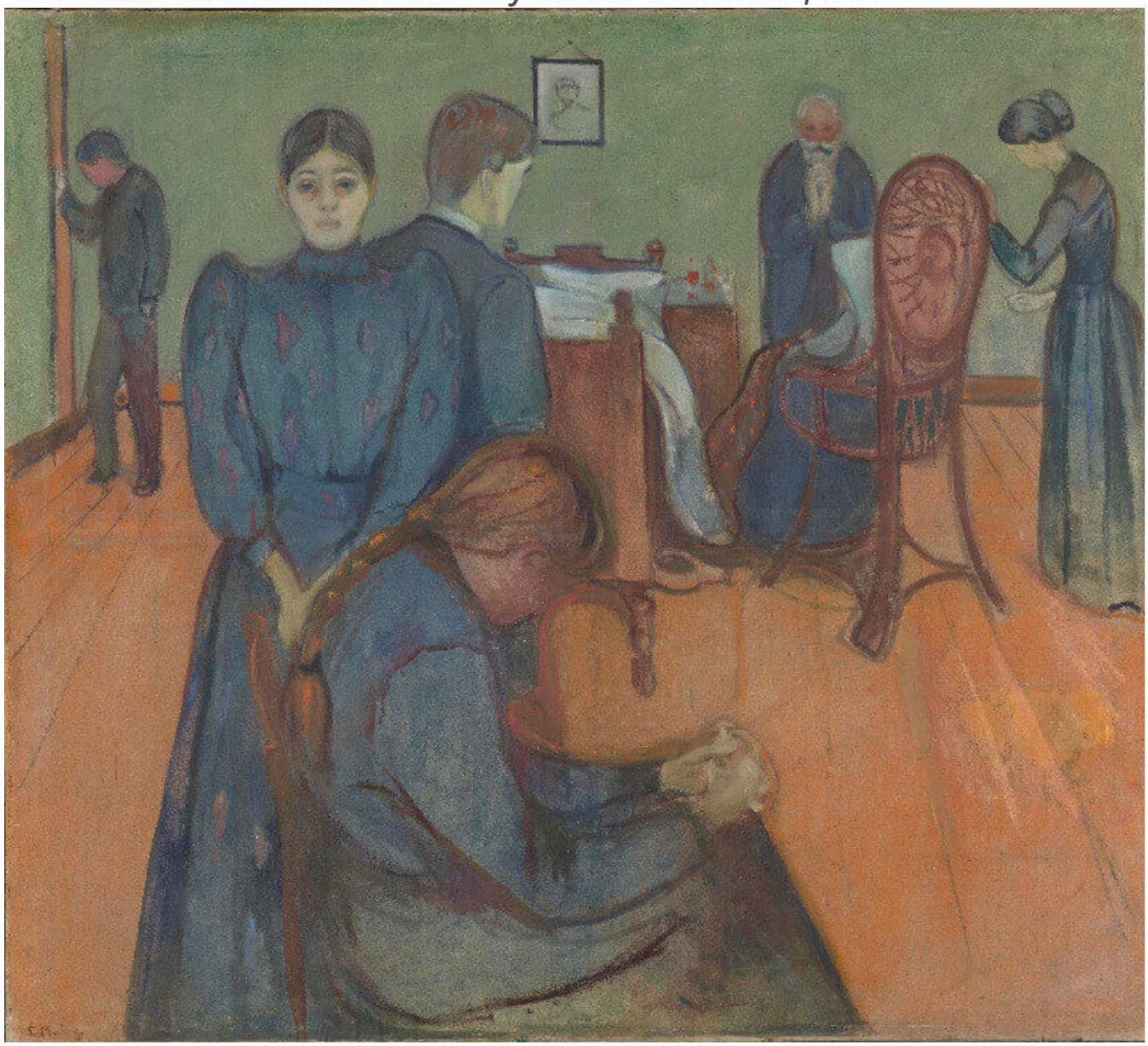
A Jackson Pollack-painted man, clothes and skin splotched with Sherwin Williams * Polo cologne, Jack Daniels, Coors Light, Drakkar Noir, denim, leather, and strong hands * A “Rusty Wet Hooker” boat, fishing poles, lures, fresh bait, truck full of tools * Repairs to my home, repairs to my heart, sitting with nature in view * Blue eyes that stay fixed on me — obsession, unending infatuation * Blue blazes, topaz waters, tambourines, spins, twirls, balance that feels right * Laughter, so much laughter, costumes, parties, grandeur and simplicity * Attached, glued, entwined, my leg over his body holding him tight * Alligators and Everglades, chained to his essence * Florida man, wrestling snakes in tight Wrangler jeans * Flirt, exhibitionist, good soul, a lamp that stays lit * Neverending kindness, calmness, peace, rest, still waters, silent sensations * Night fantasies, slumber and dreams, endless sunshine, soft white sands * Green pastures

the journey’s end

Ekphrasis Poem
Death in the Sickroom by Edvard Munch, 1893

A woman is seated in a chair with her hands clasped together resting on her knees. She is wearing a blue dress that fades to a softer pastel green. She has a long, braided ponytail. Her hair is medium brown to reddish in color. Her head is bowed, perhaps looking at her hands. She might be praying or crying. Her face is indistinguishable, a blur, like her emotions. She's not alone in the room; there are seven others — six wearing the same shade of blue. The shade of blue is dingy, at times seeming grey and somber. Beside her is a woman with dark hair, pulled back tightly, maybe in a bun. The dark-haired woman also has her hands clasped, but in front of her as she stands. Her face is ghostly white, and she seems to be looking over the seated woman. Her eyes look sunken and her expression is bleak. She's turned away from the bed that others are facing. She can't look at it, like the man on the left, using the wall to support himself as he looks away. Why can't she face it? Did she have something to do with the death, a cause of it? She seems strong, like she has a duty to fulfill in getting everyone else through the loss. An older man with white hair and beard also has his hands clasped, they are held up to his face. He's standing beside a nightstand located to the right of the bed. Solemnity exudes from him. Is he a minister? In front of him and to his right are two women, one standing and one seated right beside the bed. At the foot of the bed is a man facing the bed with his back almost touching the woman standing in the foreground. His head is not bowing; he's looking directly at the bed. He might be the doctor watching over his patient, who he realizes has died. He might be offering his condolences. It appears that his face is also ghostly white, from shock or shame. The sick person, or dead person, is not visible in the painting. There's no way to know if it is a man or a woman, which suggests that death comes for us all — whatever our gender. And everyone has a different reaction to death; some can face it better than others. The people in Munch's painting are examples of sorrow and grief, and the devastation that comes with the loss of a loved one. The woman standing near the bed is using a chair to lean on, an indication of the need for something to support her. What is needed by those left behind? How do they get the support they need? Is prayer useful? There appear to be medications and a drinking glass on the nightstand beside the bed. They may have eased suffering, but they didn't save the life of the one in the bed. The people in the painting have expressions of hopelessness in this realization. They were powerless and now feel lost about how to move forward from this moment. Actually, it's not known if there is a person in bed. It's assumed from the painting's title. Is the deceased portrayed in the image above the bed? Is the deceased a mother, father, child, spouse, sibling, or friend. We don't know because our focus is on the living and their reactions. We can surmise that the deceased was loved and will be missed by those gathered in the room. We should all hope to be loved and missed by those we leave behind. The price of great love is great loss and pain when we part. May we all be so loved.

4. ‘Death in the Sickroom’ by Edvard Munch, 1893



https://www.funeralguide.co.uk/blog/death-art

tuckin
your
eyesnowi
laymetucki
nyoureyes
nowi
lay
me

i will gather you



nothingness intensifies

between silence and truth

continuum of numb

a hallucination tube

ingesting morsels of goodbye

you shall be gathered to your grave in peace

* Bible reference 2 Kings 22:20

HE’S NOT COMING HOME

he’s not coming home

he’s not coming home

he’s not coming home

n ot not not n ot not not n ot

cooooooming home coming hooooooome

he’s not-t-t-t he’s not-t-t-t he’s not he’s not

coming

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he’s not coming

hooooooome

he’s not com ing

home

he’s not com ing home

he’s not coming home coming home

he’s not coming home

RAIN HAS FALLEN

rain has fallen rain has fallen rain has fallen

on freshly straightened hair, on bald heads, on baby bonnets, on baseball caps, on fedoras, on cowboy hats, on beanies, on trucker hats, on berets, on wide-brim sun hats, on bucket hats, on visors, on hijabs, on scarves, on pith helmets, on sombreros, on hard hats, on party hats

rain has fallen rain has fallen rain has fallen

from clouds, onto grass, onto trees, into oceans, on cars, on flowers, on criminals, on priests, on dark, hot pavement, causing steam to rise, and humidity, and humility, and blind honesty

rain has fallen rain has fallen rain has fallen

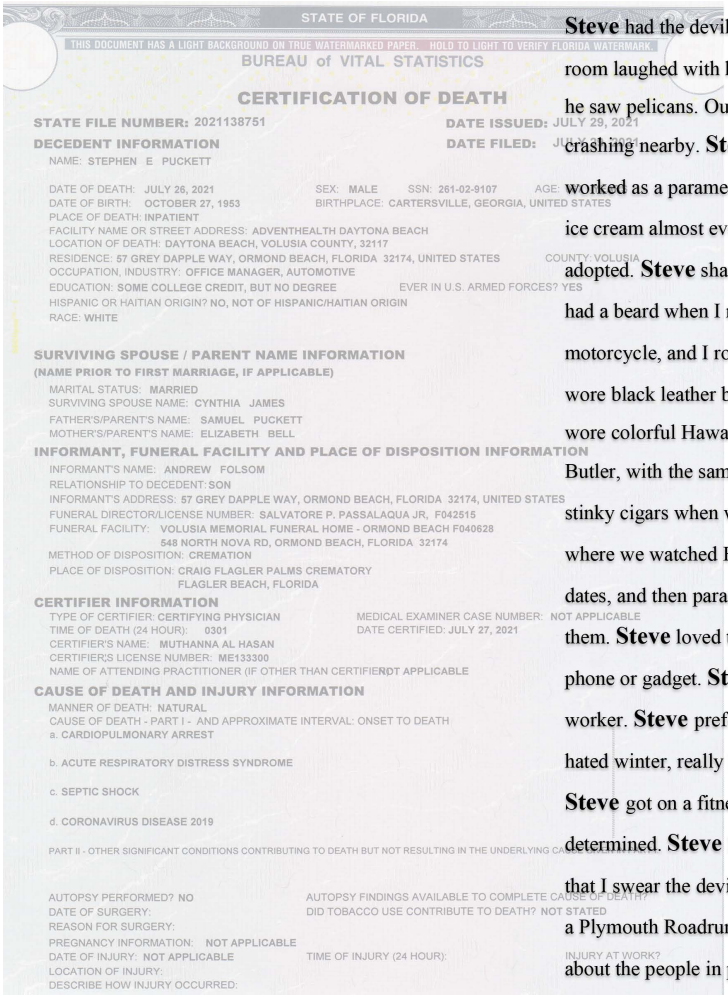
not felt, not heard, not seen

silence before upheaval, silence before emergence, silence endured
silence before strength, silence before timber, silence reborn

fresh tenderness, freshly deserved, on the wet parts of me

rain washed his taste off my lips

Steve had the devilish grin of a wild-eyed southern rascal. **Steve** laughed so loud the entire room laughed with him — deep belly laughs. **Steve** loved the beach. **Steve** got excited when he saw pelicans. Our first kiss was on coquina rocks at Washington Oaks State Park with waves crashing nearby. **Steve** loved cars and sold them for a while. **Steve** loved NASCAR and worked as a paramedic in the pits, along pit road at Daytona International Speedway. **Steve** ate ice cream almost every night, any flavor. At Dairy Queen, he ordered banana splits. **Steve** was adopted. **Steve** shaved his moustache off, and everyone protested, so he grew it back. **Steve** had a beard when I met him. **Steve** rode a Harley-Davidson Ultra-Classic Electra Glide motorcycle, and I rode it with him, in leather and fishnets with my wild hair in the wind. **Steve** wore black leather boots that were scuffed and well-worn and a black leather jacket. **Steve** also wore colorful Hawaiian shirts, looking a bit like Tom Selleck. I thought he looked like Rhett Butler, with the same attitude toward life — dark, dashing, and scandalous. **Steve** smoked fat, stinky cigars when we went dancing on the weekends. **Steve** bought a few of them in Ybor city, where we watched Flamenco dancers. **Steve** took me for a helicopter ride as one of our first dates, and then parasailing. **Steve** told jokes and made people feel special when he talked with them. **Steve** loved talking. **Steve** was fascinated by technology and always wanted the newest phone or gadget. **Steve** had a bald head that once was full of dark hair. **Steve** was an essential worker. **Steve** preferred shorts and flip flops as his daily attire — summer and winter. **Steve** hated winter, really hated it. **Steve** liked fine dining and searched for new foodie experiences. **Steve** got on a fitness kick and lost so much weight people thought he was sick. **Steve** was determined. **Steve** had strong hands. **Steve** refused to go to the doctor. **Steve** had blue eyes that I swear the devil danced in. **Steve** was born in Georgia, but he loved Florida. **Steve** drove a Plymouth Roadrunner painted Richard Petty blue. **Steve** made up very convincing stories about the people in photographs at Cracker Barrel. **Steve** wouldn’t wear a mask.



STATE OF FLORIDA

THIS DOCUMENT HAS A LIGHT BACKGROUND ON TRUE WATERMARKED PAPER. HOLD TO LIGHT TO VERIFY FLORIDA WATERMARK.

BUREAU of VITAL STATISTICS

CERTIFICATION OF DEATH

STATE FILE NUMBER: 2021138751

DATE ISSUED: JULY 29, 2021

DATE FILED: JUL[illegible] 2021

DECEDENT INFORMATION

NAME: STEPHEN E PUCKETT

DATE OF DEATH: JULY 26, 2021 SEX: MALE SSN: 261-02-9107 AGE:

DATE OF BIRTH: OCTOBER 27, 1953 BIRTHPLACE: CARTERSVILLE, GEORGIA, UNITED STATES

PLACE OF DEATH: INPATIENT

FACILITY NAME OR STREET ADDRESS: ADVENTHEALTH DAYTONA BEACH

LOCATION OF DEATH: DAYTONA BEACH, VOLUSIA COUNTY, 32117

RESIDENCE: 57 GREY DAPPLE WAY, ORMOND BEACH, FLORIDA 32174, UNITED STATES COUNTY: VOLUSIA

OCCUPATION, INDUSTRY: OFFICE MANAGER, AUTOMOTIVE

EDUCATION: SOME COLLEGE CREDIT, BUT NO DEGREE EVER IN U.S. ARMED FORCES? YES

HISPANIC OR HAITIAN ORIGIN? NO, NOT OF HISPANIC/HAITIAN ORIGIN

RACE: WHITE

SURVIVING SPOUSE / PARENT NAME INFORMATION

(NAME PRIOR TO FIRST MARRIAGE, IF APPLICABLE)

MARITAL STATUS: MARRIED

SURVIVING SPOUSE NAME: CYNTHIA JAMES

FATHER'S/PARENT'S NAME: SAMUEL PUCKETT

MOTHER'S/PARENT'S NAME: ELIZABETH BELL

INFORMANT, FUNERAL FACILITY AND PLACE OF DISPOSITION INFORMATION

INFORMANT'S NAME: ANDREW FOLSOM

RELATIONSHIP TO DECEDENT: SON

INFORMANT'S ADDRESS: 57 GREY DAPPLE WAY, ORMOND BEACH, FLORIDA 32174, UNITED STATES

FUNERAL DIRECTOR/LICENSE NUMBER: SALVATORE P. PASSALAQUA JR, F042515

FUNERAL FACILITY: VOLUSIA MEMORIAL FUNERAL HOME - ORMOND BEACH F040628
548 NORTH NOVA RD, ORMOND BEACH, FLORIDA 32174

METHOD OF DISPOSITION: CREMATION

PLACE OF DISPOSITION: CRAIG FLAGLER PALMS CREMATORY
FLAGLER BEACH, FLORIDA

CERTIFIER INFORMATION

TYPE OF CERTIFIER: CERTIFYING PHYSICIAN MEDICAL EXAMINER CASE NUMBER: NOT APPLICABLE

TIME OF DEATH (24 HOUR): 0301 DATE CERTIFIED: JULY 27, 2021

CERTIFIER'S NAME: MUTHANNA AL HASAN

CERTIFIER'S LICENSE NUMBER: ME133300

NAME OF ATTENDING PRACTITIONER (IF OTHER THAN CERTIFIER): NOT APPLICABLE

CAUSE OF DEATH AND INJURY INFORMATION

MANNER OF DEATH: NATURAL

CAUSE OF DEATH - PART I - AND APPROXIMATE INTERVAL: ONSET TO DEATH

a. CARDIOPULMONARY ARREST

b. ACUTE RESPIRATORY DISTRESS SYNDROME

c. SEPTIC SHOCK

d. CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019

PART II - OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONDITIONS CONTRIBUTING TO DEATH BUT NOT RESULTING IN THE UNDERLYING CA[illegible]

AUTOPSY PERFORMED? NO AUTOPSY FINDINGS AVAILABLE TO COMPLETE CAUSE OF DEATH?

DATE OF SURGERY: DID TOBACCO USE CONTRIBUTE TO DEATH? NOT STATED

REASON FOR SURGERY:

PREGNANCY INFORMATION: NOT APPLICABLE

DATE OF INJURY: NOT APPLICABLE TIME OF INJURY (24 HOUR): INJURY AT WORK?

LOCATION OF INJURY:

DESCRIBE HOW INJURY OCCURRED:

Steve had the devilish grin of a wild-eyed southern rascal. **Steve** laughed so loud the entire room laughed with him — deep belly laughs. **Steve** loved the beach. **Steve** got excited when he saw pelicans. Our first kiss was on coquina rocks at Washington Oaks State Park with waves crashing nearby. **Steve** loved cars and sold them for a while. **Steve** loved NASCAR and worked as a paramedic in the pits, along pit road at Daytona International Speedway. **Steve** ate ice cream almost every night, any flavor. At Dairy Queen, he ordered banana splits. **Steve** was adopted. **Steve** shaved his moustache off, and everyone protested, so he grew it back. **Steve** had a beard when I met him. **Steve** rode a Harley-Davidson Ultra-Classic Electra Glide motorcycle, and I rode it with him, in leather and fishnets with my wild hair in the wind. **Steve** wore black leather boots that were scuffed and well-worn and a black leather jacket. **Steve** also wore colorful Hawaiian shirts, looking a bit like Tom Selleck. I thought he looked like Rhett Butler, with the same attitude toward life — dark, dashing, and scandalous. **Steve** smoked fat, stinky cigars when we went dancing on the weekends. **Steve** bought a few of them in Ybor city, where we watched Flamenco dancers. **Steve** took me for a helicopter ride as one of our first dates, and then parasailing. **Steve** told jokes and made people feel special when he talked with them. **Steve** loved talking. **Steve** was fascinated by technology and always wanted the newest phone or gadget. **Steve** had a bald head that once was full of dark hair. **Steve** was an essential worker. **Steve** preferred shorts and flip flops as his daily attire — summer and winter. **Steve** hated winter, really hated it. **Steve** liked fine dining and searched for new foodie experiences. **Steve** got on a fitness kick and lost so much weight people thought he was sick. **Steve** was determined. **Steve** had strong hands. **Steve** refused to go to the doctor. **Steve** had blue eyes that I swear the devil danced in. **Steve** was born in Georgia, but he loved Florida. **Steve** drove a Plymouth Roadrunner painted Richard Petty blue. **Steve** made up very convincing stories about the people in photographs at Cracker Barrel. **Steve** wouldn't wear a mask.

Rough list of encounters for my annotated encounters:

1) *What the Living Do* by Marie Howe
2) *The Wild Iris* by Louise Glück
3) *Jane Kenyon Collected Poems* by Jane Kenyon
4) *Crush* by Richard Siken
5) *Obit* and *The Trees Witness Everything* by Victoria Chang
6) *Bright Dead Things* and *The Carrying* by Ada Limón
7) *Atlantis* by Mark Doty
8) *Walk Through Walls: A Memoir* by Marina Abramović
9) *Erosion* by Jorie Graham
10) *Native Guard* by Natasha Trethewey

Cynde Valenti
Packet Two (14)
August 12, 2026

Eight Pieces of Work

POEM 1) Unfettered
POEM 2) Questions and Answers
POEM 3) Love Songs Stopped
POEM 4) From Here to There
POEM 5) Puzzle
POEM 6) Where Did the Blossoms Go? & Covid Memoir Excerpt
POEM 7) Cicatrix
POEM 8) Graphic Design Poems

1) Begin Again
2) Beginning
3) Love Songs

Zuihitsu: Unfettered

Cage: a structure that confines birds, dogs, cats, wild animals — like lions and tigers and monkeys and giraffes; confines people in jail cells and during shark diving adventures with limbs jutting out between metal bars, and harpoons, and scuba masks.

Wild. Masks.

Ironman. Zorro. Batman. Darth Vader. Phantom of the Opera. Michael Meyers. Stormtroopers. Doctors. Nurses. Halloween Costumes. Comedy & Tragedy. Agamemnon. The Lone Ranger.

She wears a black and gold mask to a masquerade ball on New Year's Eve. She tosses the silver band and half-carat diamond ring into a drawer before leaving her house. She dances while her newly naked finger flaunts freedom. The man who takes her hand to twirl her 'round the dance floor doesn't know the rings exist. She sips champagne and dances to "Mustang Sally" with a woman named Suzie.

Ride.

Windows down, along the coast of Flagler Beach, 85 degrees, salty, balmy air floods her lungs. Hair slaps against her cheeks, and she pushes it back out of her eyes, tucking it behind her ear. Miley Cyrus's "Flowers" seeps into her surroundings as she takes hold of inner strength.

Inhale. Exhale.

Inhale. Exhale.

She's breathing.

Full of air, she wants to fly. From the sky, she won't feel his harsh touches. She soars and captures the fringes of happiness. Unfettered, she glows. Sea foam slides between her freshly painted toes, and saltwater rushes around her ankles. Seashells. They say that nautilus shells keep negativity away with a perfect golden ratio, the Fibonacci Sequence, the Thumbprint of God. Scallop shells offer Divine protection.

Cockle shells. Turbo shells. Periwinkle shells. Conch shells. Murex shells. Oyster shells. Delicate spirals and symmetry. Venus rises from the sea. Cycles of birth and rebirth. Circling.

Collecting.

Devil sticks. Flower sticks. Twirling.

She breathes and recognizes the gift she's been given: a chance to live life without him. Free from keeping promises. Free from his polluted haze of filthy words and violence.

She wants to be a dolphin, slipping in and out of two worlds with only a smile on her face. Swimming with the current feels better than fighting what would never be.

A dolphin in the Halifax River uses a pufferfish as a toy, flinging the small scaly creature into the air, then chasing the fish when it plunges back into the water, only to fling it into the air again. For quite some time — the dolphin gets high from the pufferfish's defense chemicals.

Where was the justice for this small fish? Is there an underwater court?

Amos says, "Let justice roll on like a river ..."

Rolling. Rolling.

On the Tomoka river, she paddles like a Timucuan maiden under giant Oak trees and long strands of Spanish moss. Brackish water slaps the canoe while passing a Great Blue Heron. Mosquitoes. The path changes its course many times. Fragments of life float in the water, gazing back like ghosts in a mirror. The journey is never complete; a revolving road of emptiness being continually filled.

Questions and Answers

Question: “How Are You?”

Answer:

I can’t breathe not breathing tell myself to breathe

a few breaths then I’ve stopped again

different alone not used to silence music helps

tired of binging television
tired of scrolling on phone waste of time aware of time

clocks (tick) loud (tock) loud (tick) loud

note to self: replace all ticking clocks with digital ones

life could end at any moment

paralyzed by that realization

trouble letting go of the life we had

running fingers through the air nothing left to grasp

Questions: “Are you okay? Do you need anything?”

Answer:

I forgot how

to stand up

Love Songs Stopped

1) Our lips were heavy with love songs — we forgot the words.
Under a canopy on our wedding day, rain wet my dress.
You didn't dance.

2) Savannah was the last gust of us. I didn't wake up to your choking ambivalence
pushing me off the bed.

3) When you spoke, you sucked
life out of the atmosphere.

Clouds lost shape, and dark shades of tedium orbited the sun's consuming heat.
Amoebas filled the sky and interstellar chaos reigned.

4) You said you loved me — but that was an absolute lie. The protection you promised me
was an absolute lie.

5) I'm supposed to forget our summer kiss and accept one from a stranger
on a random day in October. I'm supposed to

hug a pillow the way I once hugged you. I'm supposed to not cry when our song plays
or another man sings it to me.

6) Love flows like a wild river, twisting hearts down to the ocean floor.

Summer welcomes fall.
Winter welcomes spring.

destiny.

7) In the collapse, I took God's hand and felt my heartbeat again.

The death of us is where I begin again.

Zuihitsu: From Here to There

Jagged pieces violently ripped apart, torn down, thrown away. Ripping is different than removing. Removing might be a choice. To have something ripped away implies there was a clinging. It implies that destruction takes place. The ripped item is not supposed to stay in one piece. A removed item is usually still intact, just moved to a new destination.

Away — to the other room, the other side of town, polish gone from fingernails — removed.

Allowing space for something new. Moving, sorting, remembering, ripping it all apart. Tear-stained cardboard boxes. A storage unit. Sail on the water, away.

Without moorings, adrift. Floating. Sinking in deep water. Trying to stay alive. Trying to hold onto something, anything. Flailing. Falling. Failing. The ship is collapsing.

Treasures torn from men and tossed into the sea, waiting for plunderers and pirates to discover them. Reimbursement for a life well lived when the voyage ends. “Gold Doubloons and Pieces of Eight” buried beyond reach.

Room One: A desk. An Epson printer. Bookshelves. A large window looking out to the street. A cheap pole lamp. A dark blue recliner. Tan Berber carpet. Boxes filled with crime novels: James Patterson, John Grisham, Patricia Cornwell, Tom Clancy, Harper Lee. What is Jimmy Buffet’s “A Pirate Looks at Forty” beach bum anthem doing here? A baseball with fake signatures all over it. A replica of Star Trek’s spaceship, “Enterprise.” A small blue, paper hand fixed to a clip that reads, “Happy Father’s Day.” A drawer full of Harley Davidson pins. Newspaper clippings from the 1900s in file folders.

Memorabilia. A borderline hoarder’s treasures.

Room Two: An empty queen-sized bed with a green comforter and sheets. Oak furniture. A large window overlooking the water. Mirrors. An elliptical machine for exercise. A soft blue recliner. A cedar chest full of photos. A television. Vertical blinds. Tan Berber carpet. Two closets, one for her and one for him and his no-longer-worn clothes. His boots and sneakers, and flip-flops. Socks. Her lingerie and drawers of favorite clothing. Her wedding dress. His father’s watch.

A jewelry box from her mother.

For her birthday, he surprised her with a delicate pair of gold teardrop earrings that had pearls on them. They went on a helicopter ride and flew in an ultralight over Boca Ciego Bay. He could never beat her go-cart racing. He laughed as she whizzed past him. Maybe he let her win to watch her smile.

For his birthday, she hired a private chef to prepare a meal for them in a gazebo with candlelight and white linens, silver and fine china, with a full moon shining on the water. She blindfolded him and told him not to peek as they drove to meet the chef. She guided him to the gazebo while

he kept asking, “Where are we?” They had filet mignon, asparagus, mashed potatoes and crème brulé.

Where are they?

Forever together, ‘til death do us part. Death comes to waltz under the moon, under the sea, under the sky, under the trees, under the glances of loved ones. Death tries on our clothes to see if they fit and robs us.

A white house with blue shutters across town, a downsized life. Luxury vinyl sandpiper flooring. Greek Villa, Sage, and Sea Salt paints on the walls. A backyard oasis. A sunroom full of green plants. An art and writing studio. Three bedrooms, two bathrooms. A two-car garage. One block from the river, five minutes from the beach. Squirrels and crows that demand peanuts every day. A man who loves her and cares for her deeply. Weekend karaoke and live bands. Laughter and smiles. Warm embraces. Healthy children. Friends. Work. Fireside romance. A home library. Education. A book club. Travel. Salmon, spinach, and dark chocolate for dinner. Faith.

Green eyes.

Why does she still cry?

Puzzle

y ou rf rag men ta tio nis co mp let e.

p oi n t y o ur l ov eat th e fra g ments.

k ee p so me, l etg oof ot hers.

n w h p e

e c a t r

Memoir Excerpt

Beside me: Jan (name has been changed)

Jan was a tech, or nursing assistant, who was with me the night Steve died. I liked her right away because she brought me pitchers of ice instead of one small Styrofoam cup at a time — a pitcher of ice, an extra cup, and a straw. Simple things, but they meant the world to me after being denied water and becoming dehydrated while on the feeding tube. I said, “This is wonderful! Thank you for bringing me a whole pitcher of ice chips.” We laughed because she had seen me pouring melted ice chips on my head.

While I was letting ice chips slowly melt in my mouth, I wondered if I'd always appreciate ice and water the way I did in that moment. I savored each ice chip and was determined not to waste any of them, nor any of the water. When the ice melted before I could eat it, I would pour the water on myself, usually on the top of my head. It made me feel cooler, and I was able to decide what to do with the water. It was my choice. I was in control after being completely out of control while on the ventilator.

Pouring the water on myself acted as a type of grounding. I could connect with the water physically and felt great relief and refreshment from it. On a normal day, I love being in or around the water. I even stand outside during a downpour of rain to let the water soak me. I've done that during times of extreme stress. Pouring the water on myself in the ICU was as close as I could get to standing in the rain.

When the announcement was made that Steve had died, Jan was with me. She asked me how I was doing, and I told her I wasn’t sure. I was really scared. She sat on the side of my bed and scooted over next to me. Lying beside me, she just held my hand. Her manner was so gentle and kind and loving. She comforted me at the loss of my husband.

Poem

<u>Where Did the Blossoms Go?</u>

Did the Texas Petunias hide today?
Are Purple Showers a sign of rainfall?

Will droplets of fulfillment ever land on my tongue again?
I want to see a purple blossom and feel cool rain on my skin.

Cicatrix

1) This indelible blemish runs a course from yesterday to tomorrow.

2) This indelible blemish thumps inside me endlessly.

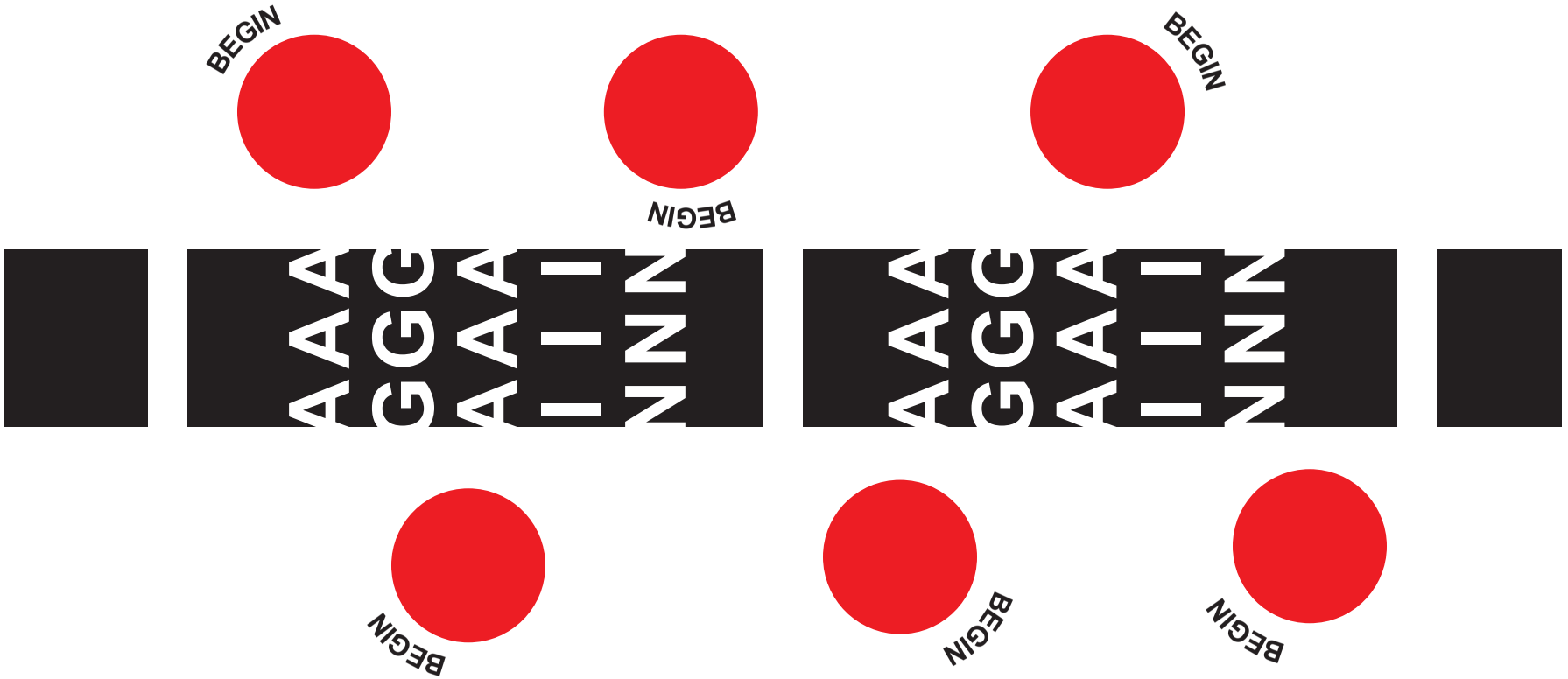
3) This indelible blemish gazes through my eyes and taints all that I see.

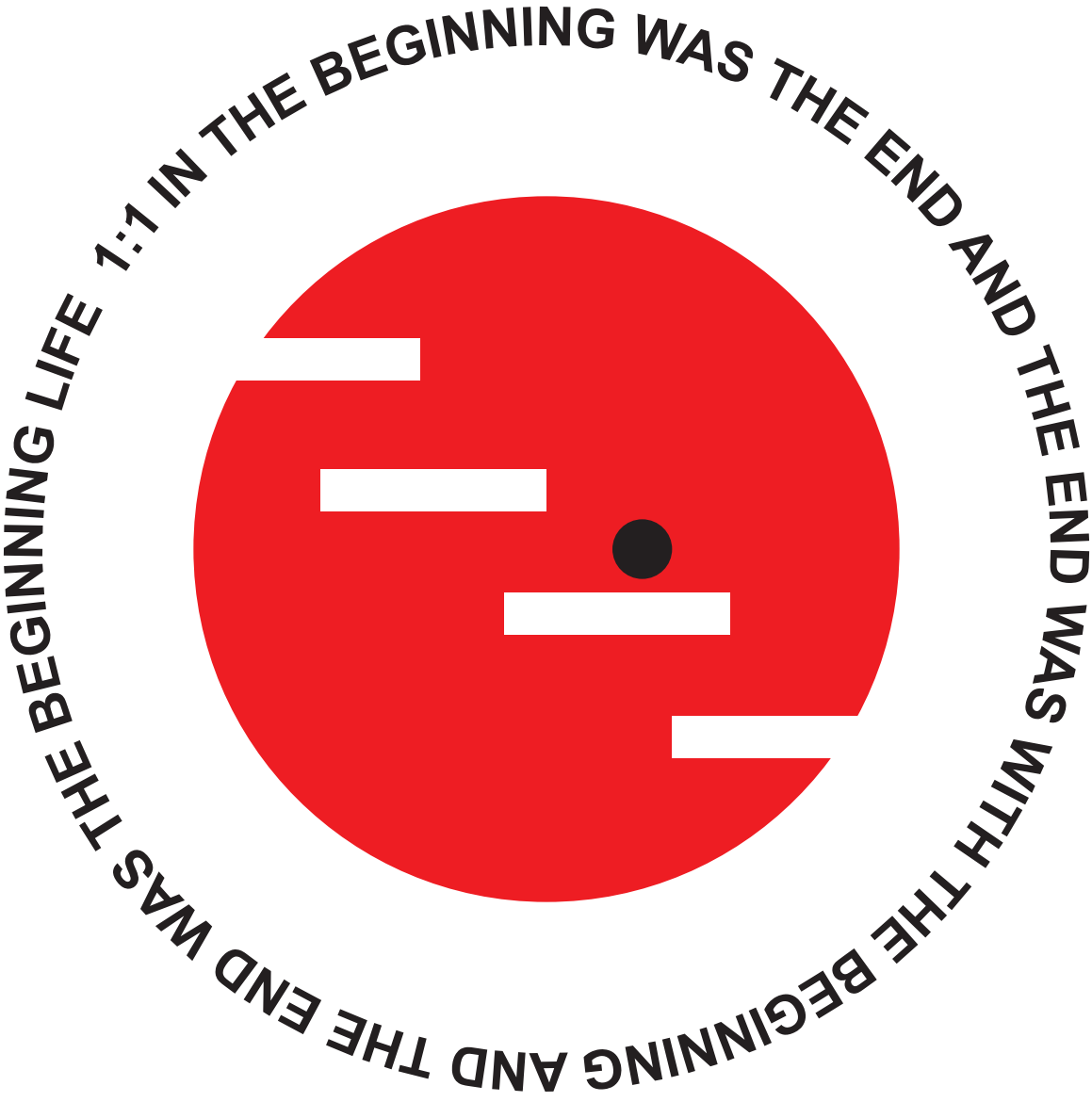
4) This indelible blemish sits in judgment of everyone I meet.

5) This indelible blemish has stopped suffering and started commanding the ship.

6) This indelible blemish seeks not to be removed.

7) This indelible blemish is the foundation of my future.


BEGIN
BEGIN
BEGIN
AAA
GGG
AAA
III
NNN
AAA
GGG
AAA
III
NNN
BEGIN
BEGIN
BEGIN


1:1 IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE END AND THE END WAS WITH THE BEGINNING LIFE
THE BEGINNING AND THE END WAS THE END

well

well

forgot the words

with

heavy

were

our lips

love songs

Cynde Valenti
September 2026
MFA in Creative Writing
Packet 3 (15)

Eight Pieces of Work

1) Circle Poem One: Torrid
2) Circle Poem Two: Umbra
3) Circle Poem Three: We Merged
4) Circle Poem Four: Silent Trouble
5) Circle Poem Five: Phases & Mazes
6) Black & White Photos: “Transitions” Series
7) Typography Poem: Transmutation
8) Video: We Merged LINK TO VIDEO

Poem One: Torrid

I
never understood the
words “hell bent”
until I met you
until I felt the daily onslaught of your
b r u t a l i t y
the vigor you employed
to destroy me was revealed
when you peeled back layers
of yourself after we wed
we talked of forever
before the clouds gathered around us
yet I could never accept
your torrid dark aggression
Will tomorrow carry enough
deadly sunrises to remove
the corrosion you poured into me?
Your reflection lingers in the pool, gazing
u p w a r d
taste the reward
of death

Poem Two: Umbra

i can't
find you in this
e n c o m p a s s i n g
v o i d
i wait for your return
in these taunting shadows
shades of t r a n s p a r e n c y
wash over me
oblique h a u n t i n g s confuse
there's a dimension
layered between a
d i m e n s i o n
where your heart still beats
you're in this space
but I can't see you i can't find you
i'm losing me nothing is right anymore
everything feels deep somber
something is pulling me away from this
u m b r a
is it
y o u ?

Poem Three: We Merged

w e
m e r g e d
blending the tips of
y o u r
f i n g e r s
into my hair
c o i ling our bodies in
twisted p o s i tions i tasted you
you tested me
w e m e r g e d taking time
discovering secrets bound
in our souls
sweet fragrances ignored t h e r o t t i n g to come
we blessed we blasted
w e m e r g e d defiance
defined our next moves
blistered lips stopped touching
our t o n g u e s we tasted
nothing but remorse
i d e v i s e d
you destroyed

Poem Four: Silent Trouble

when the
violence
becomes ——————
silent
quiet ——————————— becomes
troublesome
you ripped out
the best parts of me
stole them
for ——————————— yourself
you fed them to
jealousy
regurgitated
your ——————————— insecurities
when the violence
becomes ——————————— silent
quiet
become
the
beast

Poem Five: Phases & Mazes

1 2 3

l u n a r

p h a s e s

m a z e s

f o r w a r d

f a l l d o w n

s u n r i s e

f u n e r a l

m o v e f o r w a r d

c e a s e

n e v e r g i v e i n

c o l l a p s i n g

b e g i n n i n g

d e c e a s e d

r e n e w a l

w i d o w

w i f e

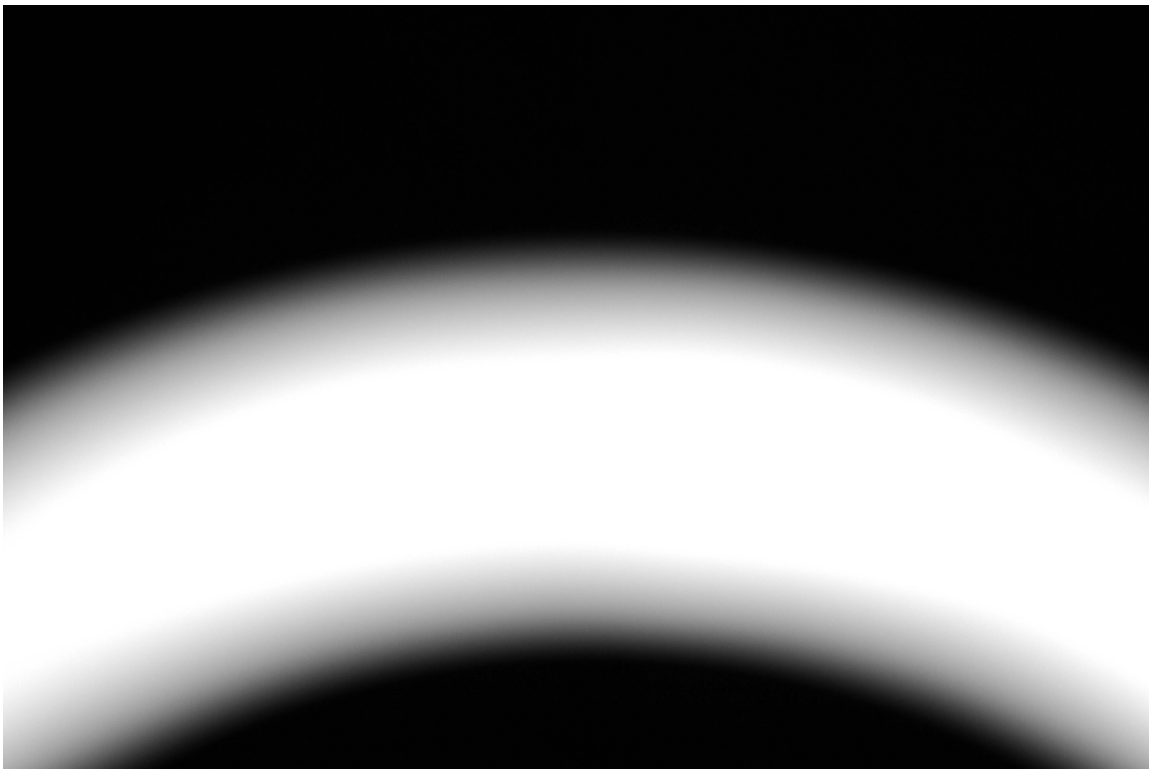
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c o m p l e t e

w h o l e

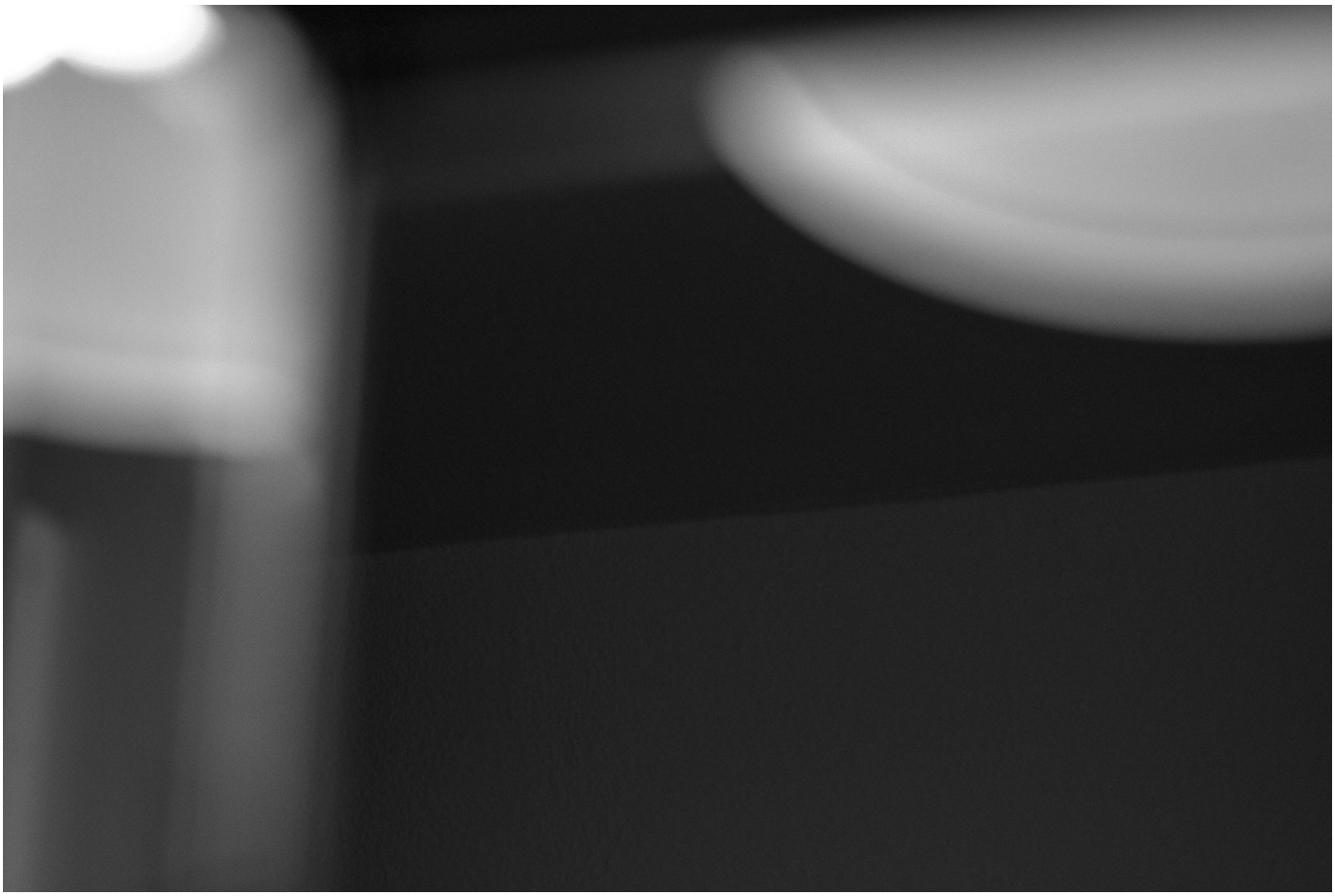
s e v e n

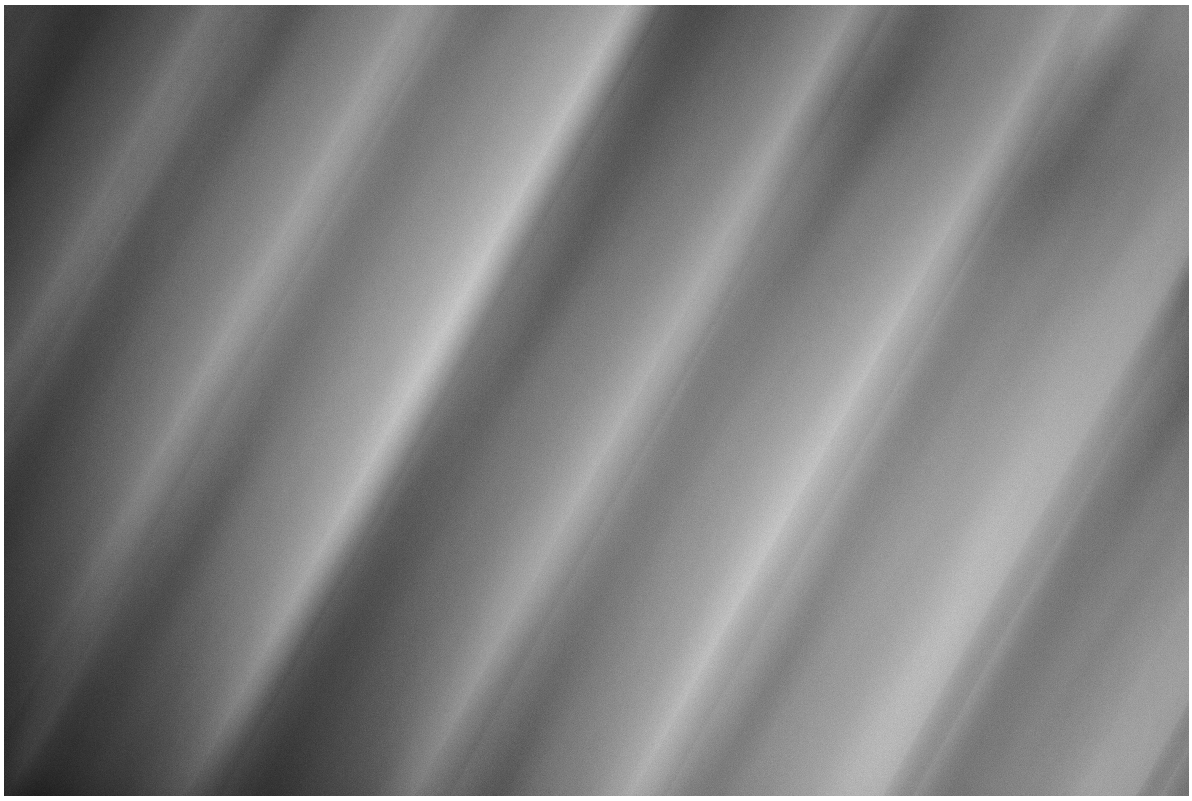
Black & White Photos: "Transitions" series

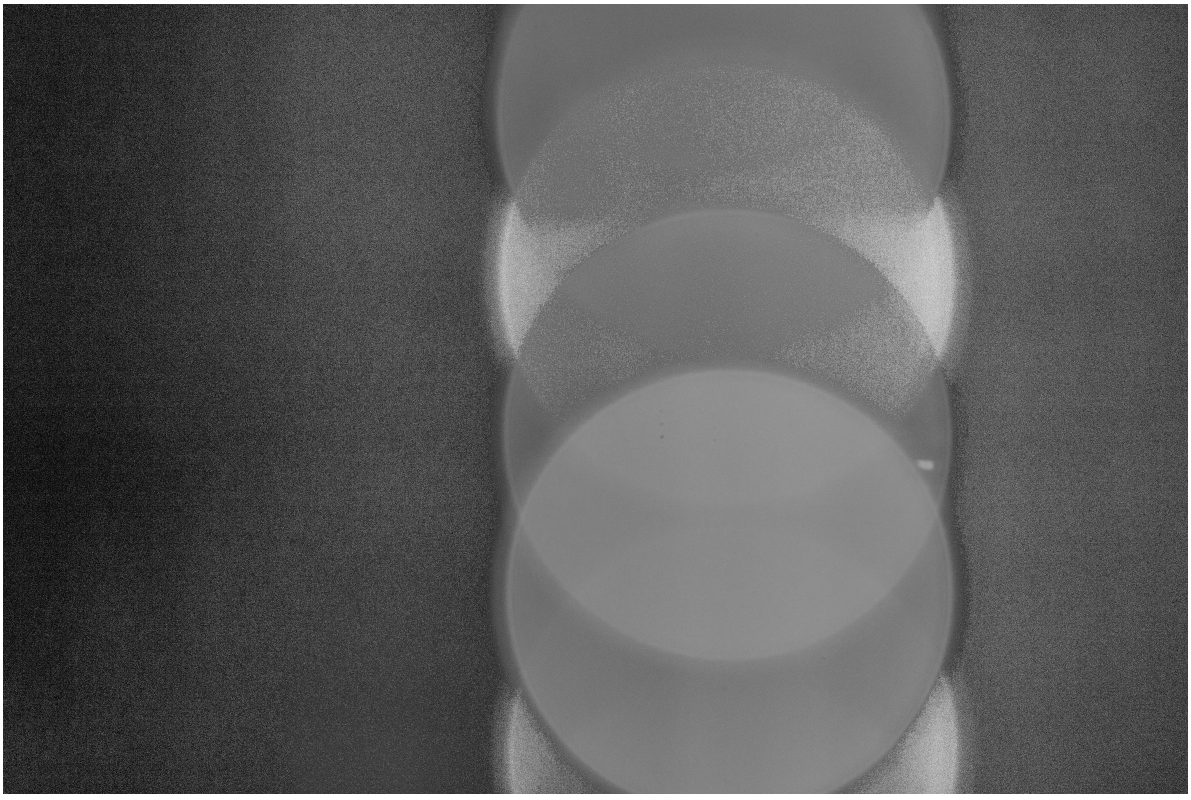


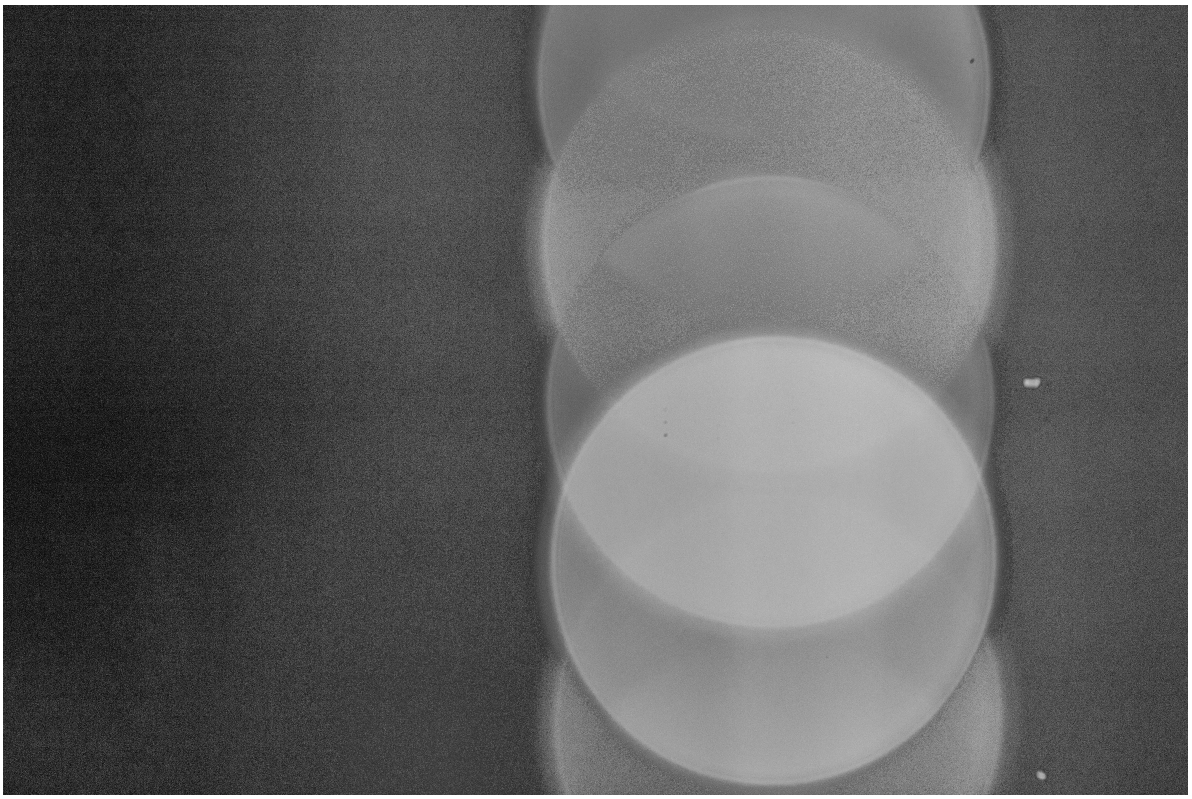




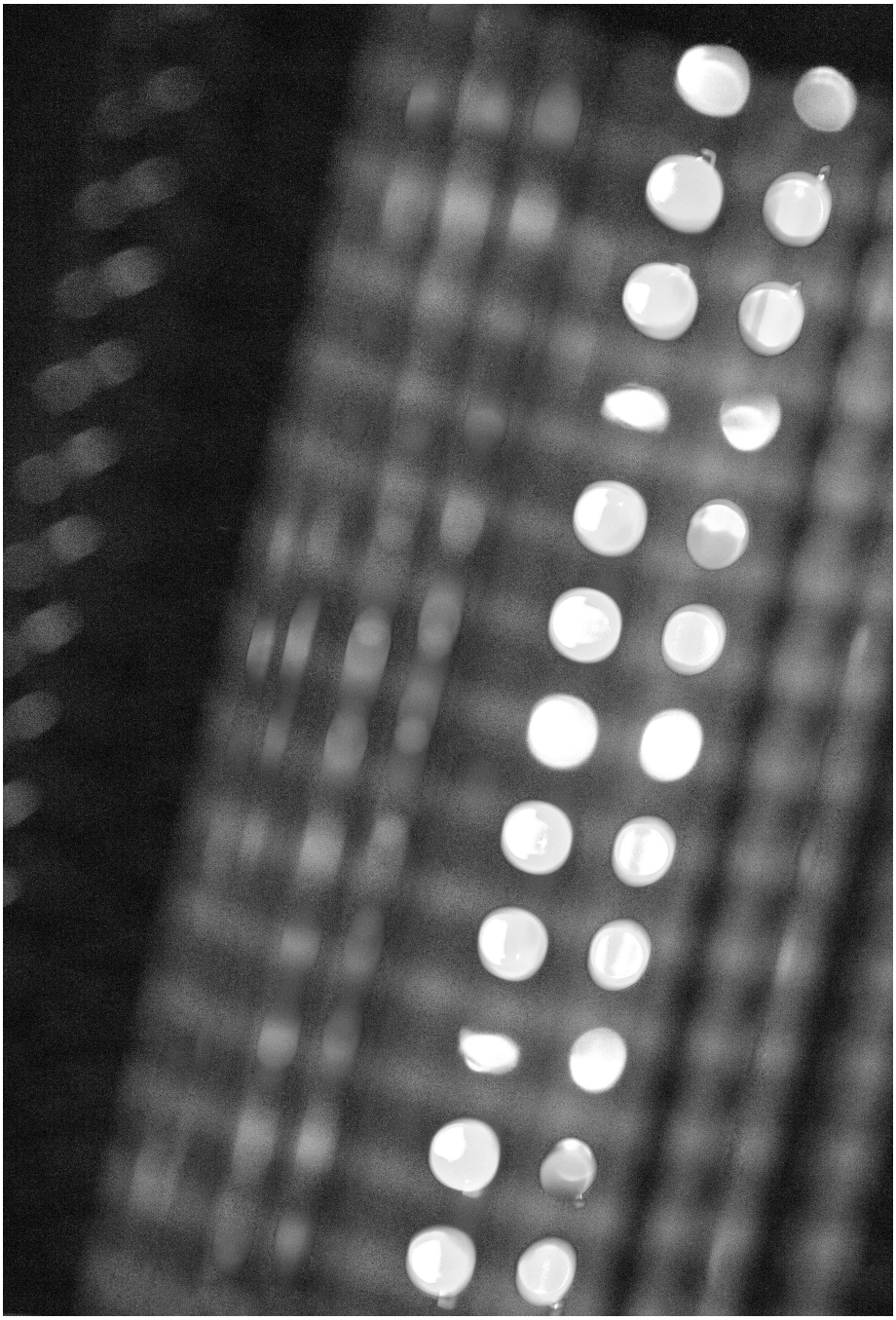


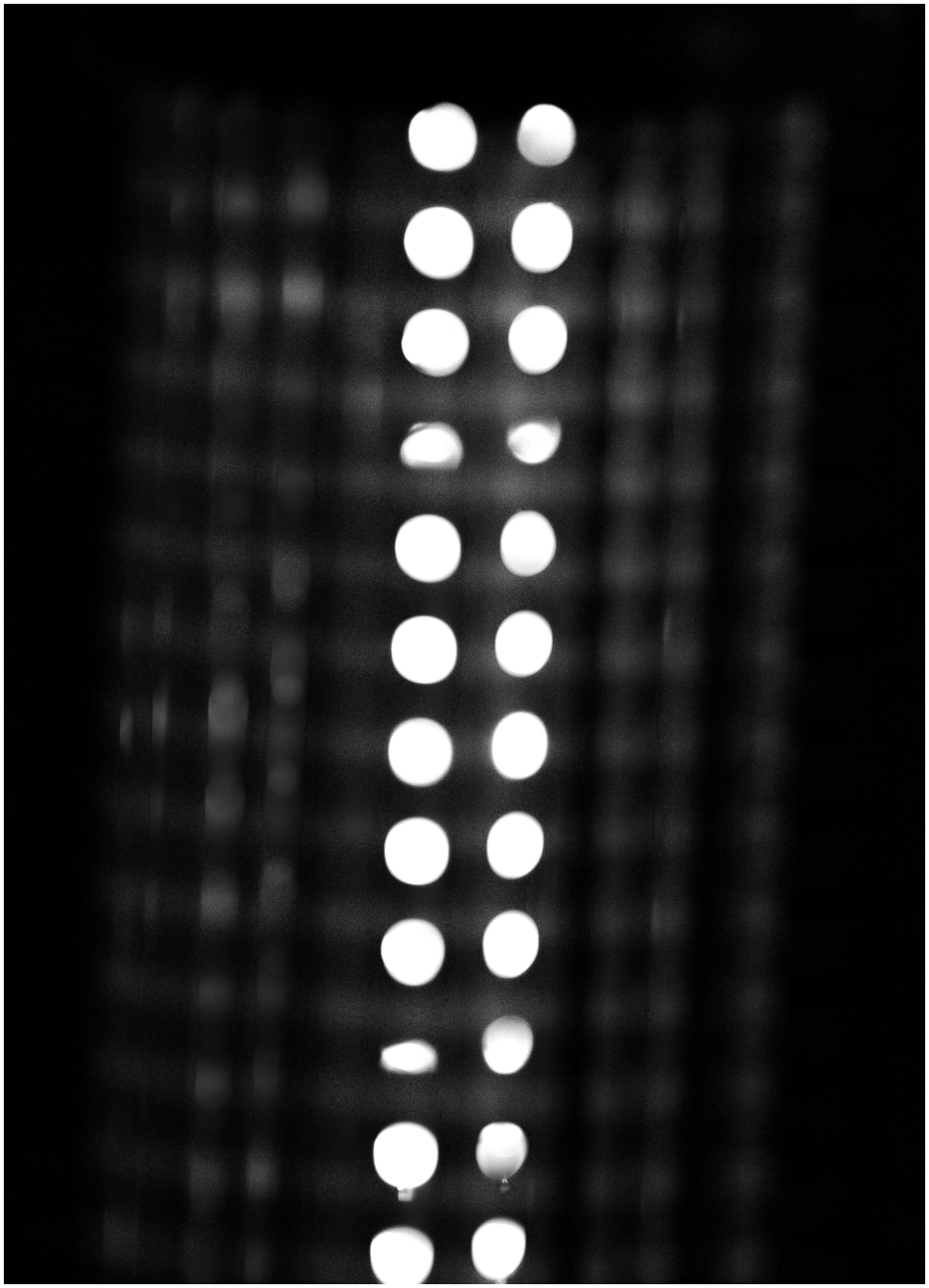




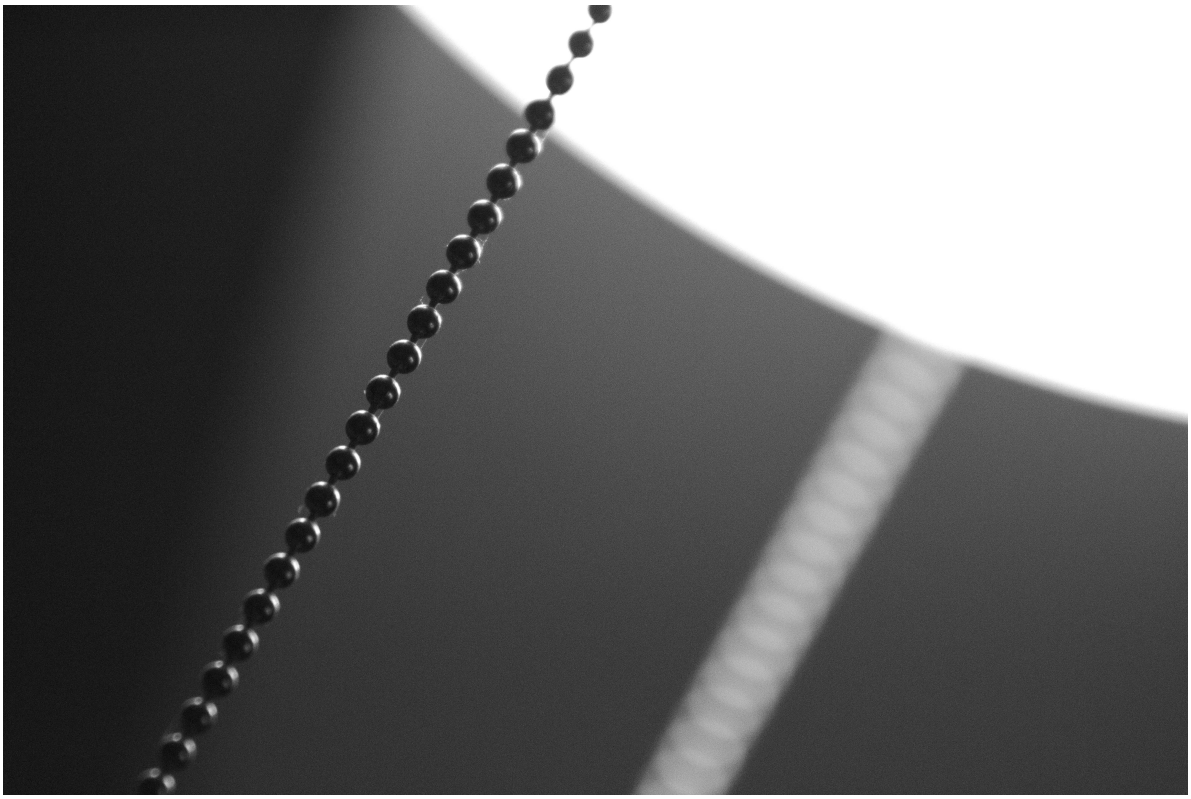


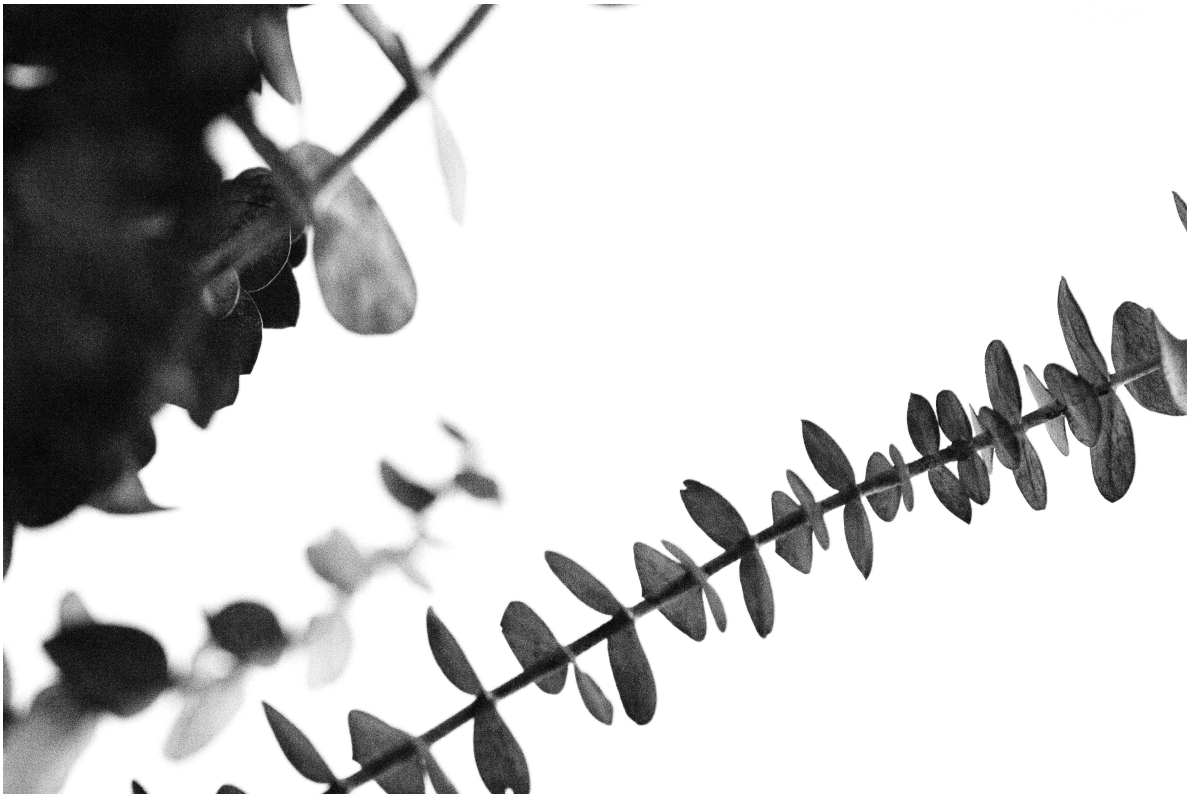






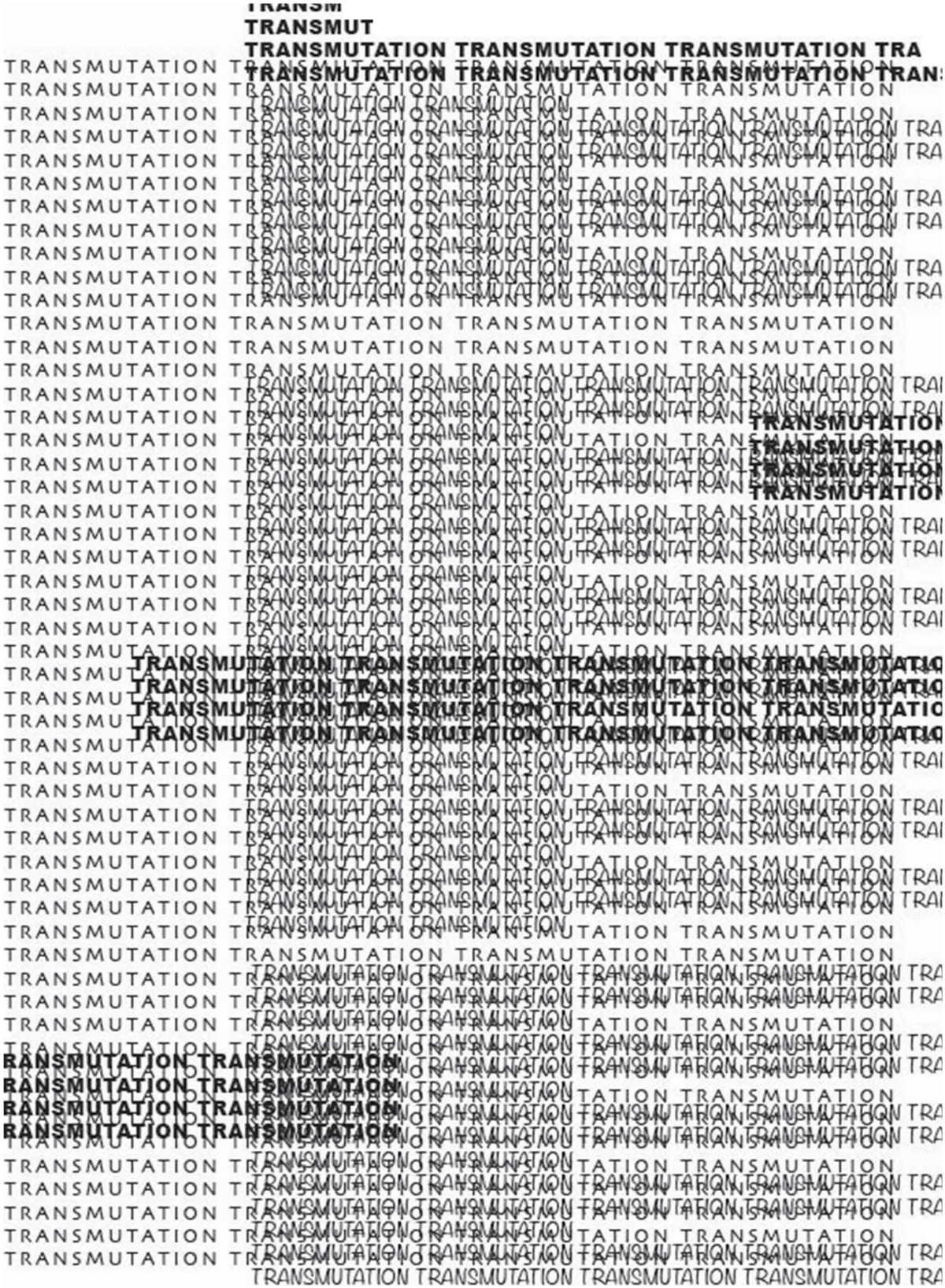


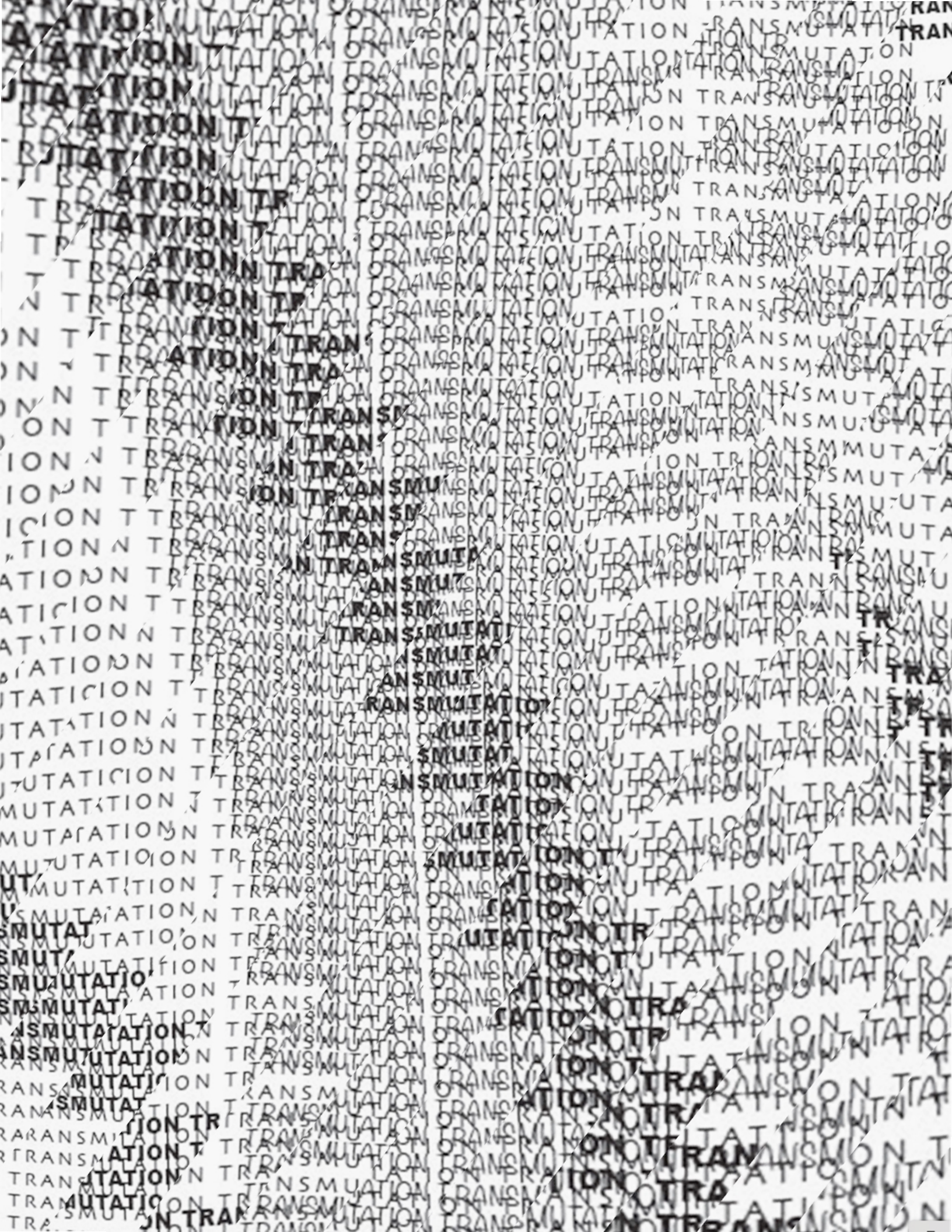






Transmutation




TRANSMUTATION

Cynde Valenti
October 2026
MFA in Creative Writing
Packet 4 (16)

Eight Pieces of Work

1) Poem One: In the Gray
2) Poem Two: Dusty Silhouettes
3) Poem Three: When
4) Poem Four: In the Garden
5) Poem Five: Proceed
6) Poem Six: Saddle the Day
7) Poem Seven: Covid Calendar (experiment, holding hands with Natasha Trethewey and the poem “Native Guard”
8) Black & White Photos: “Transitions” Series

w h e n
i n d w e l l i n g
f r e e d o m
disappeared transparent reality spoke
i argued with liberty's shadows
comforted by the predestined uprising
i neither stood in ebony
nor waltzed with ivory
i n t h e g r a y
i lingered without harmony
shards of copal penetrated who i was
i n t h e g r a y
i neither stared at begonias
nor recalled expectation of touch
o u t s i d e
stagnation swallowed hard
while life delivered a peace requirement
full of pangs and groans
to abort my precious
s u ff e r i n g
h o p e

c o s m i c a l l y

s e p e a r a t e d

s i l h o u e t t e s
dust sifts through the wind
from vast places between the stars
e a s t w e s t
blurring my tedious thoughts
sticking to my eyelids chastizing my eardrums
get out of my head to a place of beauty
where I began with
zodiacal light and supernova explosions
j o u r n e y
with nervous system fragments
to an intergalactic land
e v e r l a s t i n g
b r o k e n n e s s
a v e n g e d
b e g i n

when
darkness shrivels and
shivers in every recess
when hollow mountain paths lead beyond
wisdom beyond knowledge beyond fear
paths to departures and transgressions
when a crescent moon solves all mysteries and recycles
the rhythms of nature to align lunar goddesses
when our tango turns tomorrow around
w h e n
shadows disguise themselves when the singing stops
when the fullness erodes and frailty creeps into view
under a full moon in the desert
waiting for favor to surround wanting to touch the sky
waiting for anger to walk outside and sit down
wanting shimmers of silver when the bend becomes
the way when chaos is silenced when the
confused arrange the stars
to see tomorrow
on the horizon
w h e n

In the
g a r d e n
shrewd lovers accuse
one another
wasting the gift of love
handed to them on purple platters
they deride and seek justice for
t h e m s e l v e s
hating one loving none
the abomination of matrimony ending
measured out in heaping spoons of
s h a m e
in the garden of covenant
where we began to end
l o v e r s
of convenience tempting the gods
with deception and promises
t o r e t u r n
lies that quiver in the bellies
of fear and passion
l o s t

t e m p t a t i o n

s w e l l s

i’m penalyzed by this famine

d r o u g h t

i m p r i s o n s

i cannot overcome the adventure of you

a pearl on a pinnacle

the emblazened sun awaits

p r o c e e d

p o s s e s s e d

by your eyes

p r o c e s s e d

by your touch

p a r a l y z e d

by your words

p e n e t r a t e d

by your laughter

r e w a r d

from the

s e a

a b a n d o n
dreams that tell you to
slip away from tomorrow
s i l e n c e
songs that forbid you
from flying over mountaintops
c r u c i f y
ideas that keep you bound
to rote and archaic limitations
s a c r i fi c e
the dead weight of misconceptions
that tell you to be who you are not
break the
w i d o w h o o d
m o u l d
alone and destitute confining
your possibilities
saddle the day and whisper
to the moon and stars your
d e s i r e s

Covid Calendar

December 2019
disease was named crept into our lungs
festered in organs pulled us away from life
blue faces cried for a moment more here
on earth to taste and smell again to find
beauty from a hospital bed that cradled them
to sleep at night with nurses sticking needles
into their slumber and faceless caregivers
adjusting medications and ventilator tubing
that snaked into throats and feeding tubes
that nourished abandonment alone they
faced gazes of death as one after another
succumbed to the virus known as COVID -19

Spring 2020
social media showed rows of coffins lining the
streets of italy isolation was the standard advice
from medical professionals who scurried to find
answers and a cure they grew tired of watching
patients die day after day the overwhelmed
medical community limped and worked as
those deemed essential non-essential workers
were told to isolate and work from home we
were not allowed to be less than six feet apart
when we shopped or stood in line at the bank
plexiglass barriers were supposed to protect us
from an air-borne virus that caused the constant
coughing — unto death

July 2, 2021
sore throat and fever

July 4, 2021
the virus had a firm grip on me with a raging
fever and razor-blade pain ripping my throat
to shreds i was told to stay hydrated and isolate
my son found me in my bed gasping for air with

blue veins popping up on my face in septic shock
an ambulance took me to the hospital and then my
husband was hospitalized with the ick known as
COVID-19

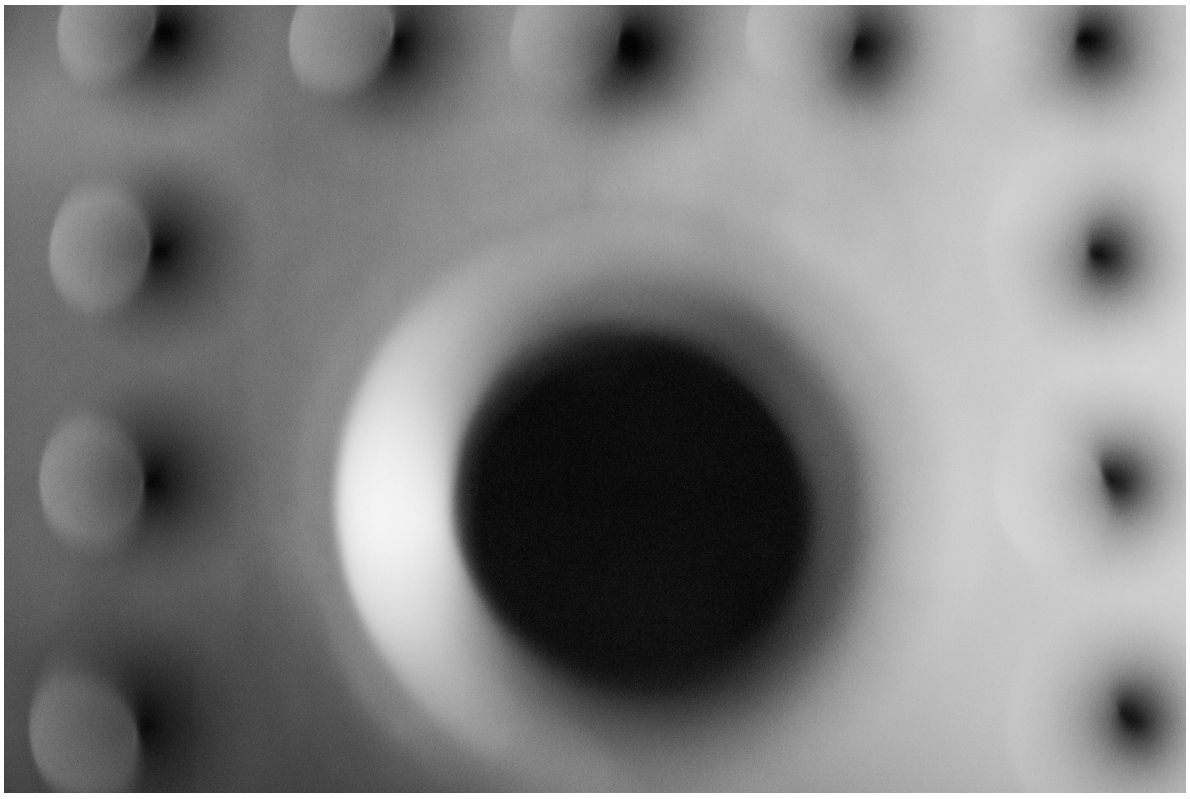
July 16 -17, 2021
our last words
cynde: hello my love how are you?
steve: couldn't be better let's ditch all this
and go for a beachside stroll
cynde: soon i'm actually struggling a bit
I get to eat a bite for the first time in a while
steve: that's why they've got us up here in
the ICU where the pros can monitor us
food i remember food can't remember having
any in a while well have fun maybe I'll see you
in the corridor
cynde: i love you
steve: i love you too
cynde: fyi they're putting me on a ventilator
steve: how 'bout dem apples we are so close
in feet and in getting a vent i'm apparently next
depending on current numbers.

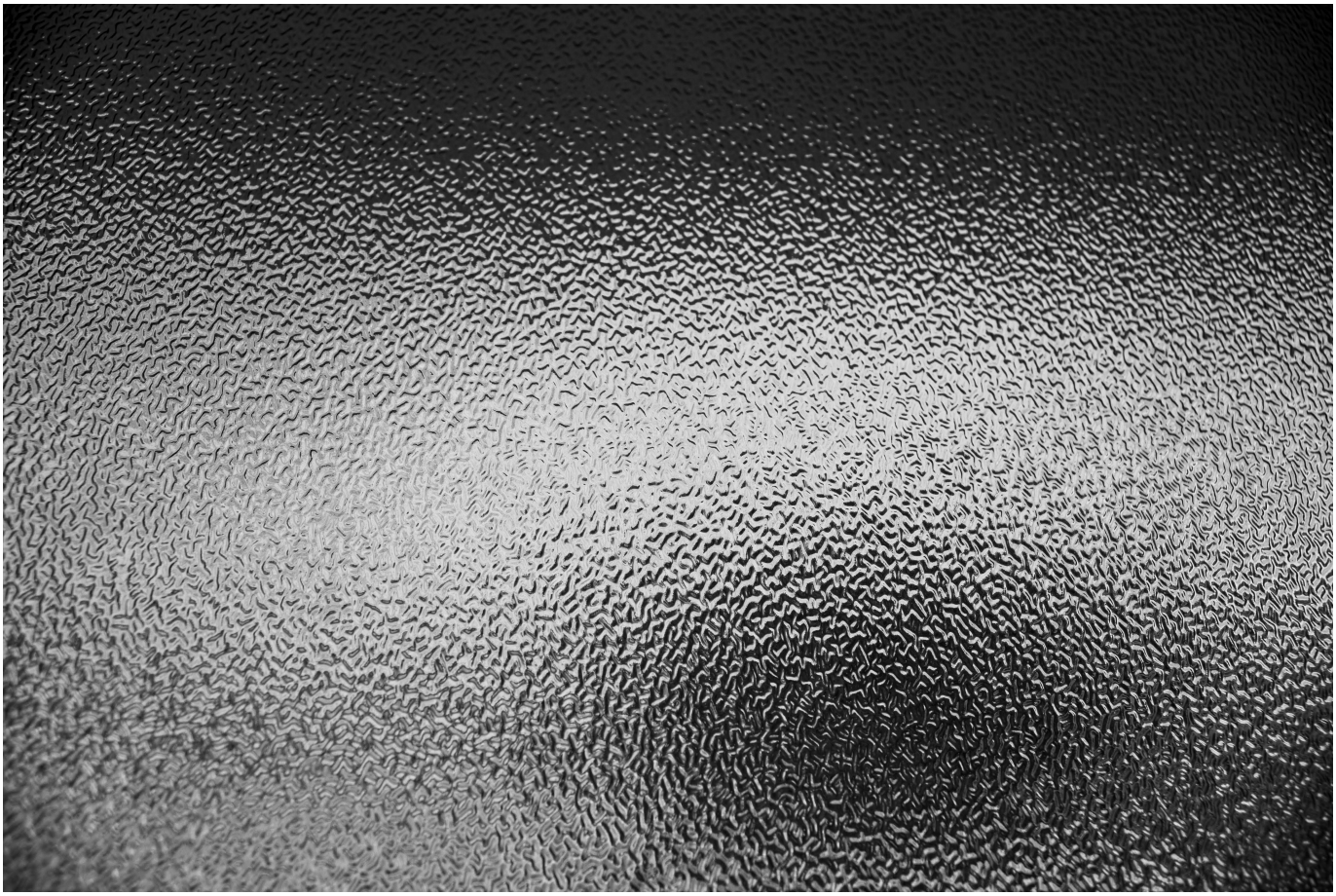
July 26, 2021
does your husband have a DNR? a what?
your husband has coded, one, two, three times
he didn't make it during the last code. GOD!
WHY? code blue for the blue-faced on every
floor of the hospital in hallways and waiting
areas waiting to live or die and only God made
the decision who left or stayed who ascended or
descended the ladder to the afterlife's unknown
i knew i couldn't grieve or i would die too i had
to be strong and push through for survival and
get out of the hospital's death corridors with my

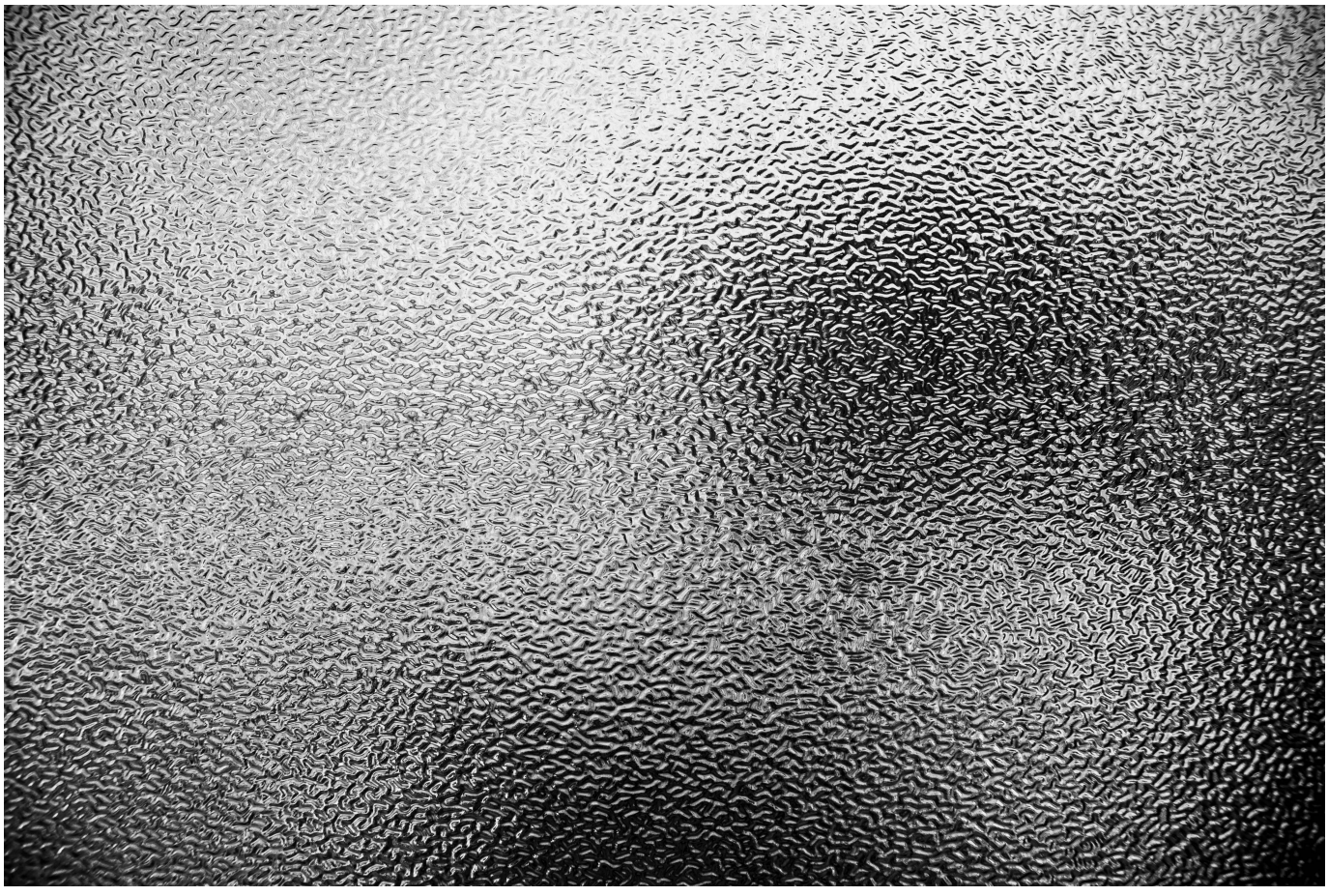
new identity as a widow lurking at me around every
corner promising me that i wasn’t enough on my
own without him without my husband of 25 years

November 13, 2024
776,754,317 confirmed cases of COVID-19
7,073,466 deaths



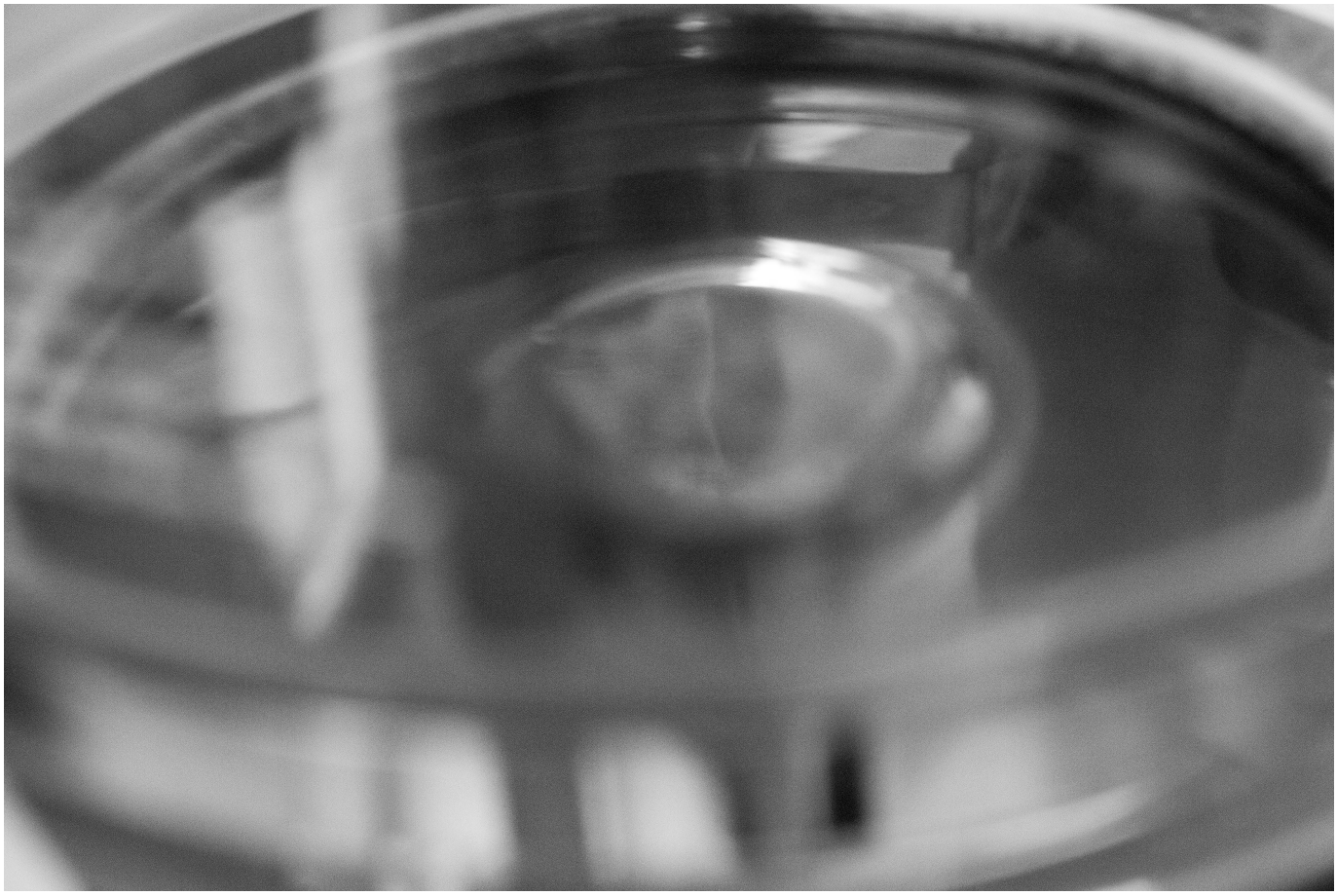










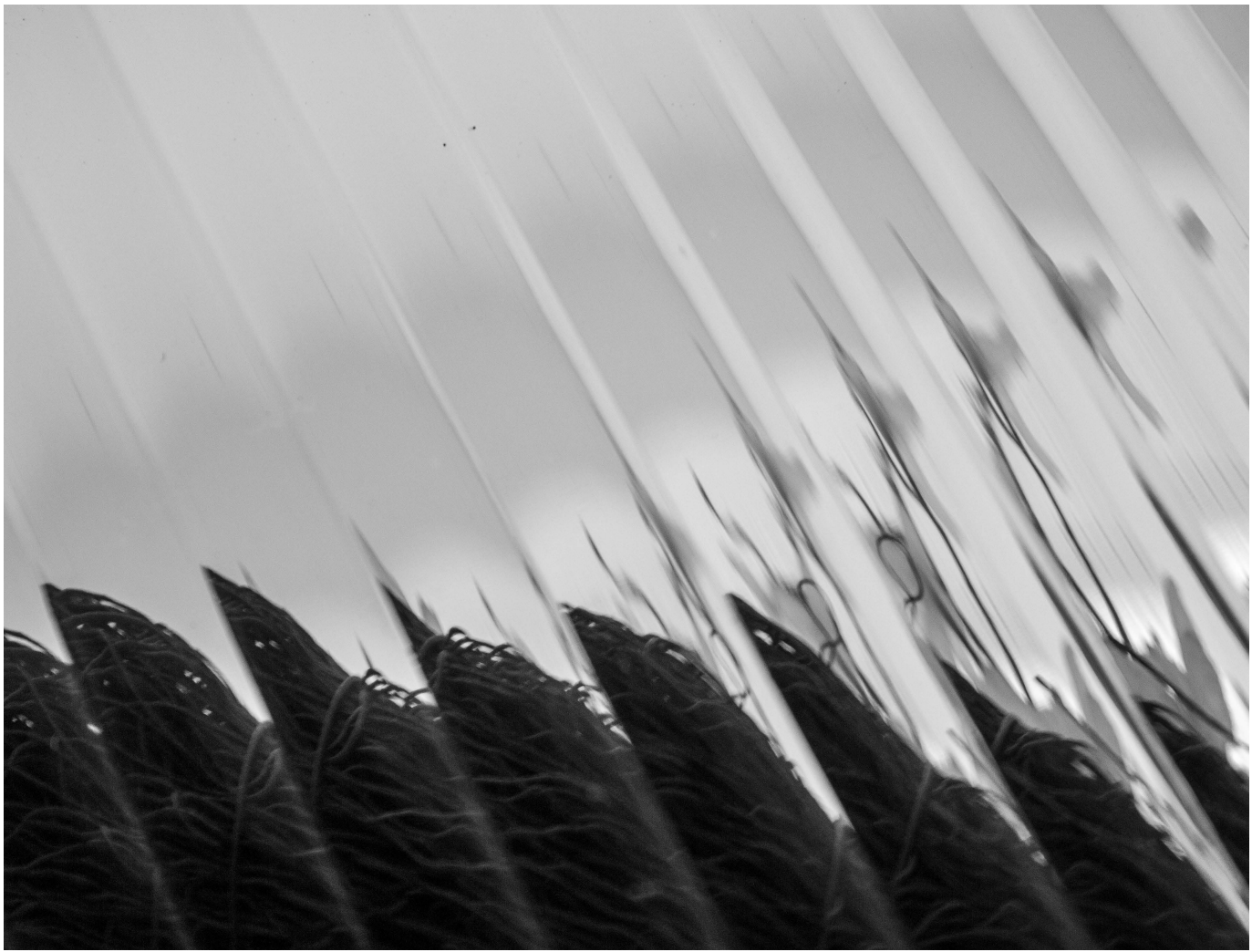




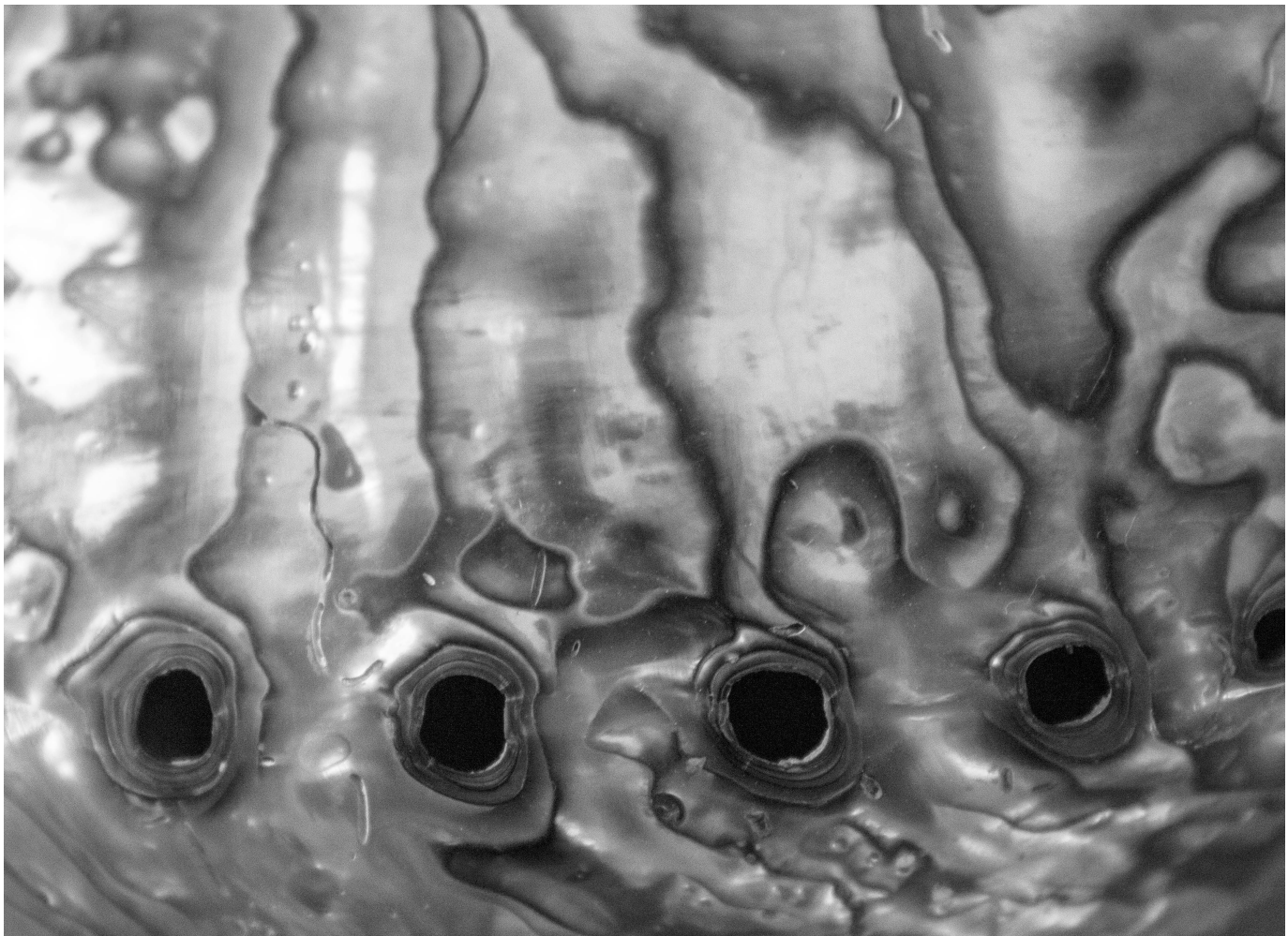


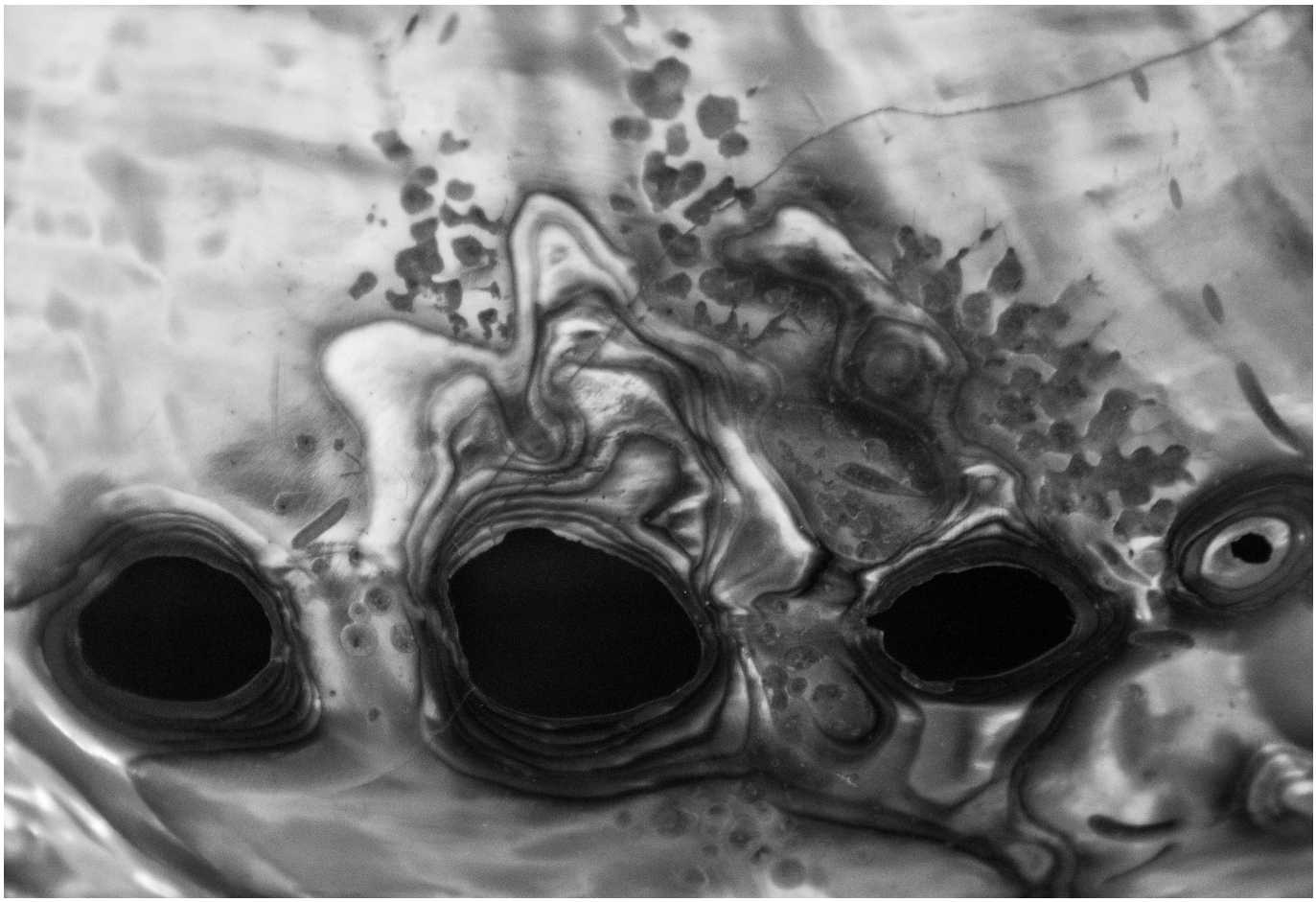












Ten (12) Annotated Encounters for Packet 16

Abramović, M. (2016). *Walk Through Walls*. Random House.

Walk Through Walls is a memoir by a performance artist Marina Abramović that explores her childhood in communist Yugoslavia (Belgrade) and reveals the very strict upbringing she endured under parents who were communist war heroes. She discusses the physicality of her performance art and her 12-year collaboration and personal relationship with German artist Ulay.

I was interested to read this book about Abramović after learning of her performance titled, *Rhythm 0* (1974), in which she allowed people in Naples to do anything they wanted to her while being given the option to use 72 random items on display at her performance. I was so impressed by her dedication to her art, by how she remained still and continued with the performance even when violence and cruelty arrived. This book revealed much about her as a person and her art. I found learning about her useful to my work because I also utilize performance in my work.

Chang, V. (2020). *Obit: Poems*. Copper Canyon Press.

In *OBIT,* Victoria Chang searches for hope following the death of her mother. A portion of this book is written in the style of poetic obituaries, long and vertical visually. Chang expresses that when someone dies, so many other things die as well, and she explores what it's like to be a parent while losing her own parent. In the poem "I'm a Miner. The Light Burns Blue," Chang deviates from the obituary structure to scatter her words all over the page in fragments. Elsewhere, she sprinkles tidbits of smaller poems.

I found this book of poetry to be very inspiring as a way to express the expansiveness of loss that occurs when one person dies. The loss comes with micro-losses that show up in places and ways not expected. I appreciated the different structures represented in this book, especially the words that are scattered on the page. Chang's writing invited me to consider death in various generations as her father suffered a stroke and had declining health. Her young children were also portrayed as being on their way to death, simply because they were alive. The beginning brings an end, and the end causes new beginnings.

Chang, V. (2022). *The Trees Witness Everything*. Copper Canyon Press.

The Trees Witness Everything by Victoria Chang is a collection of poetry that explores grief, loss, aging, and nature through use of a Japanese poetic form known as waka. Each of the poems is designed with pattern and count in mind: specifically, a 5-7-5-7-7 syllable structure. She borrows titles from the poet W.S. Merwin and works around the themes of trees being witnesses to everything that happens on Earth, for all of history. She writes about losing her mother and how we struggle as humans to let go after loss.

The book was useful to me and my work as I considered form for my poetry. This also happened when I read *Obit.* I was inspired to create poems in the shape of circles, and I took excerpts from my Covid memoirs and placed them in circles of text, as well. It was also useful as I continue to struggle personally with letting go of things from my past brought about by death and divorce.

Doty, M. (1995). *Atlantis: Poems*. HarperPerennial.

Atlantis: Poems by Mark Doty was written around the time of the 1990 AIDS epidemic, when his partner was taken by the disease. Words are raw on the page, with hurt and grief, with societal upheaval as loved ones are succumbing to HIV/AIDS. It explores pride and anger. The book also visits the need to accept what has happened and healing through connections with those left behind.

This poetry touched me deeply as I have experienced a similar loss during the Covid epidemic. The fear that consumes a person during an epidemic of these types is paralyzing, and then having the one you love ripped away by the illness is an unbearable journey. His poetry has so many questions in it, and honestly there are no acceptable answers for the losses we've suffered. I enjoyed the tender details he included, and I'm once again inspired to open up with details of my own experience.

Glück, L. (2014). *The Wild Iris*. ecco, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers.

The Wild Iris is a Pulitzer-Prize winning poetry collection in which the words are inspired by a garden in Vermont and focuses on the topics of life, death, and faith. Through plants, a gardener, and God, the poetry reflects on the end of suffering and the possibility of something new happening in place of it. Like in a garden, seeds of life remain. After death, there is life renewed — in different ways. The path to new life is indeed death. When something ends, it opens doors to renewal, as expressed by Glück in the beginning of her book, "At the end of my suffering, there was a door."

I found this poetry to be extremely beautiful and recognized the underlying concept to be very much like my own, "the end is the beginning, and the

beginning is the end." I really enjoyed the use of a garden to express this and the use of seasons, such as winter to represent grief and depression and summer bringing an end. The book caused me to think of nature and seasons in my own work.

Graham, J. (1983). *Erosion*. Princeton University Press.

Erosion by Jorie Graham is a 1983 collection of poetry that explores the connection between the body and soul, and how they are affected over time. She examines how the two can feel separated, not being able to physically detect consciousness and vice versa. As the title illudes, the poetry longs for a slowing of time and grasps for ways to connect the body and soul. "Erosion" implies a slow and gradual fading away of both the body and the soul. What happens when one separates from the other in death?

Graham's poetry caused me to consider what's under the surface — and how the surface and what it touches interplay, such as in her poem "I Watched a Snake." It made me think in terms of juxtaposition and what happens when two very different things seek to find connections. Her writing also caused me to revisit my poems about cremation and the "sea of ashes" — to broaden the text with more sprawling details, such as beach erosion in the context of death.

Howe, M. (1997). *What the Living Do*. Norton.

What the Living Do by Marie Howe is a collection of poetry that expresses deep sorrow and mourning following the loss of her brother from complications from AIDS. In her writing, she explores how the living continue trudging through life under the weight of extreme grief. She lists ordinary things life brings, seemingly

relentlessly, that must be dealt with while grieving. She also uses seasons and writes of wanting winter to pass, for spring to arrive. Her words convey the trudge-like feelings of moving through life though not wanting to. Ultimately, she notices life and begins to move forward.

This poetry affected me like Mark Doty's *Atlantis: Poems* because the lost loved one was taken during an epidemic, as mine was during Covid. I recalled how I was still hospitalized when my husband died, and how I had to focus on living while so many people were dying around me. There does come a time in the grief, and pushing through each day, that life begins to feel a little lighter. Transitioning from the dark and oppressive grief to a place of light feels like a reality when it didn't at the start. This work (especially the cover photo) inspired my photography series, "Transitions" in which light and dark mingle — moving from one shade to the next.

Kenyon, J. (2007). *Collected poems*. Graywolf Press.

Jane Kenyon's *Collected Poems* is a vast source of poetry that delves into a variety of topics, including depression, grief, mortality, the mundaneness of daily life, nature, grace, and her Christian faith. In her poem, "Let Evening Come" she expresses through descriptions of nature and daily life the concept of God's grace. "God does not leave us comfortless, so let evening come." In this book, her works are presented in chronological order which allows the reader to follow how her writing and subject matter changes as she ages and faces new challenges in life, as well as her own mortality.

I found this book of poetry to be interesting and useful for my work, especially with how she expresses her faith, and her reliance on God and His grace even when overtaken by depression and grief. Both can feel like unbearable burdens when thrust upon us. Her poetry makes me think I've been overly cautious to bring up my faith in my work. God really is the one who has gracefully sustained and transitioned me through so many unbearable moments. Her work makes me want to acknowledge Him more in my poetry.

Limón, Ada. (2015). *Bright dead things*. Milkweed Editions.

Bright Dead Things is a 2015 collection of poetry by Ada Limón (twenty-fourth Poet Laureate of the United States) divided into four sections that each follows a unique path. In poems such as "How to Triumph Like a Girl," Limón explores the concept of identity and self-discovery and then describes her inner self as "part female, part male, part terrible dragon" in Accident Report in the Tall, Tall Weeds." Other concepts in her poetry include place (city to countryside), loss, grief, life and love. She writes about the excitement of life and her experiences brought by the forward motion of life. She accepts that life brings good and bad and comes to terms with that reality — finding peace on the journey.

From this book, that is beautifully written, I really grasped the poems and lines about identity. Identity has been integral to my work as my identity seems to be continually morphing to someone or something new: married, widowed, divorced, single. However, what is "my" identity when not attached to a title that involves a man or partner of some sort? Who am I? Limón's poetry caused me to reflect on that question a little deeper.

Limón, Ada. (2018). *The carrying*. Author's Republic.

In *The Carrying,* Ada Limón (twenty-fourth Poet Laureate of the United States) writes about topics such as grief, life, death, birth and rebirth, and the body. The first poem in the collection, "The Name," speaks of Eve naming animals. This poem is indicative of her struggle with birth and infertility, of not having children to name. The concepts of infertility and an aging body are throughout the book, for example, in the title, "Almost Forty." Amid pain and struggles, she still expresses happiness. As with placing us immediately in the Garden of Eden with Eve, she works nature and gardens into her writing, reminding us of the endless loop of life and death — decay and rebirth. There is so much for us to carry through life, and Limón's words help us understand how to carry them without letting them break us.

I enjoyed Limón's poetry in this book for the concepts of birth, death, decay, rebirth and the ultimate need for acceptance of all the things life hands us to carry. For my work, those are death of a spouse (loss), widowhood (a new identity to carry and accept), remarriage (rebirth), death of a relationship through divorce (death and decay and acceptance that it ended). As Limón struggled with infertility, I have struggled in my relationships with men finding "single" or "widow" terms I don't enjoy accepting. Limón's poetry also seemed to be written in the moment, very present and detailed. This is an area I am constantly working to improve as I lean toward abstraction.

Siken, R., Levin, F. by L. G., Introduction by Dana, & Abbitt, R. S., Foreword and Introduction by Erica Stevens. (2025). *Crush 20th Anniversary Edition*. Yale University Press.

Crush by Richard Siken explores intimacy, loss, grief, and obsessive love. It was written following the 1990 loss of Siken's boyfriend to AIDS. The book is the 2004 winner of the Yale Series of Young Poets, selected by Louise Glück (Nobel laureate). Siken moves the reader through moments of tenderness and love that are suddenly intermingled with brutality and violence. Grief arrives and letting go feels impossible. Some poems have a structure utilizing numbers for each section. For example, in "You Are Jeff," Siken uses the numeric structure to move readers through short paragraphs of prose poetry.

In this book, I particularly enjoyed the prose structure and the gripping emotions expressed, laid bare. I was impressed by Siken's courage and ability to write so boldly about a personal topic that so many others have also experienced: loss of a loved one. His style of writing was influential to my work, encouraging me to open the coffers of my heart and deep hurt and let them bleed out onto the page. He has encouraged me to forget what others might think and to put my naked emotions on display in my poetry.

Trethewey, N. (2025). *Native Guard Poems*. HarperCollins.

In *Native Guard* Natasha Tretheway explores the history of her family's roots in the Deep South of the United States. She weaves memories of her childhood, her mother and her mother's murder, with history including racial tensions and the first black regiment of the Louisiana Native Guard being called into action during the Civil War. With words like, "I was asleep while you were dying" and poetry that takes us back to memories from the 1800s, the text is somber and mournful — very much shaped by the loss of her mother.

I relate to Tretheway's writing in *Native Guard* from a historical perspective and from personal loss. As her poetry has been steeped in historical events, so has mine. Covid was a major historical and global event that caused pain, suffering, and loss for people all over the world. Tretheway's poem, "Native Guard" that is sectioned by historical dates inspired me to write a poem that sections off historical dates for Covid in general, and to weave in dates from my personal Covid story and memoir into the poetry's form.

Semester Four: Final Reflection

In this final reflection, I will reveal the books I read, discuss how the readings affected and inspired my writing, how I grew in my writing and art, and what developed as a result of these. During this final semester, I was very inspired by the residency and workshops with Derrick Austin, especially learning about and being challenged to write poetry such as prose poems, ekphrasis and Zuihitsu. I also read more books of poetry than I have in previous semesters; the deviation took my focus away from videos and art and placed it more on written poetry. I spent time considering my thesis and the central concept of my work, which has been death and grief. However, as I developed my thesis, I discovered a deeper layer. Certainly, death is the source, but what happens as a result of the occurrence? How does one pick and move forward? Where does the next step lead? Grief is a journey. Widowhood is different from one person to another. There are different types of death all through life — for example divorce, in nature, etc. When something ends, something new emerges — and that new thing will ultimately end as well. We are constantly in transition from one ending or beginning.

Readings

This semester, I read twelve books: *Walk Through Walls,* by Marina Abramović; *Obit: Poems* and *The Trees Witness Everything* by Victoria Chang; *Atlantis: Poems* by Mark Doty; *The Wild Iris* by Louise Glück; *Erosion* by Jorie Graham; *What the Living Do* by Marie Howe; Jane Kenyon's *Collected Poems; Bright Dead Things* and *The Carrying* by Ada Limón; Richard Siken's *Crush;* and *Native Guard Poems* by Natasha Trethewey. Each of these writers influenced my work and my thoughts.

How the Readings Affected and Inspired My Writing

Abramović's performance art is so amazing and to read about her upbringing allowed me

to peek into the heart of her work. Victoria Chang was very inspirational to me, especially when considering form. Her book *Obit* is written in the form of obituaries. This really made me think about what shape my poems might take visually. Also, reading about the loss she experienced and the multiple mini deaths that occur with one loss, with aging, etc., was very thought-provoking. Doty, Siken, and Howe wrote about grief after the loss of loved ones during the historic HIV/AIDS crisis. Their work touched my heart because they too experienced an overwhelming historical illness that took lives day after day, as I did with COVID-19. Siken's raw words and emotions were beautifully expressed on the page. Howe caused me to consider all the minute and mundane things the grieving carry around and attempt to do each day — while bogged down with grief. Louise Glück's connection to God and her faith caused me to consider if I should express my own Christian faith in my work more. I enjoyed her use of gardens and seasons to point readers to the hope of spring's arrival. Kenyon's poetry affected me this way, as well — through her expressions of God's sustaining grace. I appreciated the depth of thought in Graham's *Erosion,* the juxtaposition of ideas and physical elements while considering connections between the body and soul. Trethewey's *Native Guard* took me into the Deep South with the Louisianna Native Guard, her childhood, her mother's murder, and racial tensions. The poem "Native Guard" inspired me to write a similar poem with a timeline for Covid events.

How I Grew in My Writing and Art

During this semester, I grew in my writing and art by expanding my concept's boundaries, which allowed me to think and write about death in a broader sense than Covid specifically. I wrote my first ekphrastic poem based on Edvard Munch's painting, "Death in a Sickroom." I found that the more I studied the painting, the more details and questions emerged. The painting certainly reminded me of my time in a "sickroom" and the day my late husband

died with a room full of people surrounding his hospital bed. For me, this was a new way of writing. I also enjoyed writing Zuihitsu poems. The sprawling of words was surprisingly meditative while allowing mind-hopping or the "follow the brush" method to create the poem. I also think I've grown in the area of performance, which will be included in my thesis presentation. The performance will be more expansive than those at previous residencies. I've become more comfortable being in front of an audience and expressing my art this way.

What Developed

After reading *Obit,* I got the idea to create circle-shaped poems. This was another first for me that I believe fits nicely with my overall work and my curious obsession with circles. I created a series of them this semester, and I'm thinking about creating a book of just circle-shaped poems. They really forced me to think about the placement of words in the constraints of the circular form. I only created two videos this semester and focused much more on the arrangement of words on the page. I began a new photo series titled, "Transitions" — black and white abstract images that show the merging of black and white as they slip into gray. Grief really is much like this, being in the gray after being in the dark and looking for the light each day. It was fun to create the photo series because I love abstract photography. The really fun part was discovering how to utilize the images alongside my words and concept. At the end of this semester, I recognized that developing a thesis proposal caused me to consider all my work in this program. I'm quite astonished by the amount of work accomplished and ideas that were created in the process. There was considerable growth from my first packets of work to the latter ones: moving from technology to an obsession with red, black, and white and circles. Then focusing on Covid, death, and grief, and reaching inside myself to pull out how all of those feel to me — widowhood. Then I expressed what it's like to move forward and date again, and

remarry, and divorce — experiencing a new type of grief. My message morphed into “everything begins and ends.” The ability to adjust as life moves you through one transition to another arrived in my work. As this program is coming to an end for me, I’m excited about the new beginning it will bring to my life and to my work.