



Withdrawn

Thom Donovan



“Withdrawn” is a draft of a forthcoming book of poems and other texts. Like my first book, *The Hole* (2012), it responds to conditions of friendship, community, and the relationship between private and public life during a series of ongoing disasters, both global and local, actual and virtual, ecological and geopolitical. In the process of writing *The Hole* I realized that what separates a “book” from a collection of texts has something to do with the book’s potential to model and activate certain forms of gathering. So I suspect that “Withdrawn,” to become a book, will require years still of extension and further thought about what its own gathering could mean. Thanks to the editors of *BOMB*, *The Offending Adam*, *Peacock Online Review*, *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, and *WITH + STAND* where some of these texts have appeared. Thanks also to Aryanil Mukherjee for inviting me to put this draft together in a PDF form for his MUD project.

Withdrawn

for Leslie Scalapino

*Everything will be taken away...*

Or what I mean by this can't matter  
The grave will just be a hole  
My self some sense of self  
Will be a hole when I am done singing

A place where I lost you of course  
Where I stopped world forming  
There would be a politics in this  
If loss could be felt and not seen

It is easy not to sing  
The face withdrawn from smoke  
Different than a soundtrack  
Which never was for us

Expressing this limit that face  
Makes signals in the air  
Only that face understands  
Because it can't stop remembering

The total catastrophe that was the line  
Or the face wishing this  
Wishes invisibly  
In a language of these days

We became crossed-out  
You burned your photographs  
To remember home

~~A kind of body torn apart~~  
~~A kind of body shared~~  
~~A kind of body no one shares~~



Wishing the mind  
To touch anything  
But this combat

Combating, that is,  
To touch you  
And touching

Only dark, a room  
Full of dark  
All voices eyes

All I's be hushed  
Sensed so stricken  
As of in silence blowing

Whereupon the woman  
You are the man  
The skin sheds us

She singles herself out  
Pointing out the lack of  
Form in her self-apprehension

A failure to withdraw from  
Them because every  
Thing is in relation

What it would take  
To name ourselves  
Into unblind threat  
To maintain this threat  
And through it call  
‘Self’ into being

Black light, black light  
Of the light-skinned  
Face cornered  
In the room (any  
Place whatsoever by  
Your camera)

Any name, by the name  
We would assume  
How it would  
Accuse an angle  
And without alibi  
Unworld

If they are not paid  
To eat any fucking  
Thing they want to eat  
Whenever they want to

And not abide  
By their illest purchases  
On wanting to be  
On wanting  
To be in the world

The scar that could be made on their backs  
Will be made on their backs  
Because we can

The scar that is someone's power  
To pay them and never  
A living wage is a striking thing

Living in this discrepancy  
The risk of losing you in me  
Becomes something to sing

Nearly in the sea like "water is in water,"  
Land within land, dreams with dreams

But then there are things we see with our desire  
The deaths we are also with, apart inside us

Swell sometimes, speak to me a barometric  
Of address and the consequences of not speaking

Of withdrawing from what we say, to another  
Wilderness the dark will not pray for us

The dark will be a ground we recover in the night  
Illegitimate, turning to those other bodies

Those others who are the only spirit, the only health  
We will have known, going to them like conditions

To imbibe the harm that also involves us  
Like forms for an approaching wreck.

*The Leak*

Disaster's the national pastime  
Shame's the natural course  
Of hegemony sovereignty equals  
Its weight in force

Disaster knows no limit  
Limited only by the eyes  
That see it not the decibels  
Charged by their screaming

Rubble sees in retrospect  
From the distance of their failed  
Infrastructure from the distance  
Of dispossession a kind of curse

Of progress what dispenses  
With the ego society no force  
Of nature accomplished this  
Because we've gone global

And seeming  
And a semblance  
They flee  
From us

The products leak  
What one has been  
Will be

Like a hole  
In the transmissible  
Air the sea  
Is anarchy

Deregulating  
Birds wings  
Landing  
Whole worlds

In imploding  
Debt  
Who gives  
Their word?

Who are called upon to leak  
All barriers of the same  
And what we are and when  
We are not reconciled

The way the ground rose up  
Spills our guts makes us, um,  
Come clean; spreads the  
Shittiness around at least

Endless streams of stars  
Crossed by song unweaved  
Recall what won't be sung  
Because no one is dreaming

It seems I can almost touch  
The plume they cannot plug  
Me up with currency and currents  
Touch everything we'll never be

Copulas of cant  
Evacuate what's left of place  
Signify while real eyes watch  
A wreck of belief



Not even time to mourn it seems  
The loss of me as you  
The event and the time this event  
Takes place within without name

Because you were moving with it  
Interrupted by the social  
Interrupted by how language  
Mediates the social

There is still a horizon here  
A rose rim for the real.

*Mic Checks*

"the ear is the only orifice that doesn't close"  
--from Sharon Hayes' *Parole*

Your silence blows the  
Ears off my head

So that what I'm hearing  
And what isn't seen  
Structures the rupture

What's left-over  
From speaking privately  
In a public place

Some ways to imagine  
Not being them,  
Being crossed out  
Or simply tongue-tied

If the tongue  
Had eyes and they  
Were here

If they  
Looped like history,  
Like the history of  
A scream

Or steam from that  
Whistle not yet blowing

The voices absent in this present  
In their presence coheres a statelessness  
Without subject

Sentiment is the tenuous  
We screaming again,  
Words one lip-synchs for their life

Discourse schools a public void  
In private just because  
You put a mic

On me doesn't mean my voice  
Will carry

Or anyone is out there listening

We are archivable, which means  
We can easily be forgotten

We are public, which means  
We are double/multiple/substitutional

Through no lack of repression  
Do the words finally appear

However private we are, however  
Rich our interior life

[politics which pressures the inside out]  
[politics will smoke us out]

[politics will drive us into the world]  
[politics will drive us into the open]

Where any one may listen

To this resonance pattern  
To these distances wherever you go  
Voice a form of intimacy without control  
Emotions before they formed and hardened  
Into a public speech

Which summons us all these voices verbs  
Recorded but not heard  
Stricken from the record it would seem  
Before sound could appear  
Thinner than the thing-in-itself  
The magnetism of all lost futures

In the breaks silence sticks  
Wakes the dead from trace

The living from paradise  
Semblance sleeps in our ears

Across eras cross-phasing  
Hatch private spaces in public

Tongue in my mouth in  
Your mouth mic checks.

*The New Us*



--after ACT-UP

When bodies become the case  
Will they still be a poem  
Or form of art or prose because  
Grief is a form of action

When bodies become the case  
Of all we cannot be  
No art can prove or disapprove  
Movement made a maze

Of skin when bodies became  
The case an image they still needed  
That would extend space that might  
Buy some time, save some face

For the dying whose bodies became  
The case and were a law  
Living inside the heart like  
The law was always made

Blood becomes a site  
No glove will heal or hold  
Steeped in what was left to fill  
Until hell evokes a reason

They put their hands on us  
No glove will hold or touch  
The law their bodies were  
When there was no justice

So all the lenses of your  
Camera almost crack  
But don't outliving the fact  
Of their blood's gaze, its resolve

That all our laws lacked  
The question of this subject  
What the body can do  
Determines a line of police.

--for Jerome Bel

The body is an archive  
The breath a convolute  
A collection sung for no one  
But to remember it has danced

Compendiums when you point  
With your eyes to what it did  
And cannot do, this also being useful  
The body fails but it survives

The body as an archivist  
Kissing all relation, tells us what  
We did, the failure of this doing  
Called career, called smallest hope.

--for the Kootenay School of Writing

The mountains around the city  
Sounds they make blue  
On the retina in the ear  
Resound a commons what will have been  
The time of year not weather  
Not the names of these  
Places no longer there  
The people we took never given back  
To a useless and unused air

There are plenitudes in what we do not  
Possess, in which sound dispossesses  
Our future property took like the real  
Announcing exactly where we are  
In relation to who or what externalities  
Banalities like belief

So hack spirit, come hack this  
Spirit enclosure up, talk to the man  
Like he won't come back from empire  
Like power can't do anything about this

So hack spirit, hack me up  
Take my name or don't take it  
Multiplicity see if I care  
Division matters because we are born  
That strived-for-never-in-fact-  
Existing-ever-imminent-commons  
In our swagger in fact matters.

--after F.E.A.S.T.

Summons that we feeling  
Certain things made  
Gathering as a kind of making  
An active question that storms our thinking  
Called world, how we do  
How we no longer called this 'us'  
When a name was true  
We lost our names  
When loss was useful

Except capital  
Except a certain  
Knowhow the birds know  
Their sense turning to sense  
Their uneven development  
Movements disaggregate  
Subtracted from action  
The air we make and the air  
Which makes us  
The *we stamp* and *we are stamped*  
So complicity becomes the subject  
So history isn't just a motor of mistakes

The new us starts from a dish  
Not socialism, continues to grow  
Sans system, an attention  
To this consumption system, a local  
Kissing of totality what will be value  
And what's the use, in poking  
Our heads out, food sovereignties  
Produce this singularity

The new us, the new good life  
Well being as muse and health  
As wealth all we are saying's  
The all new thing, new expression  
Being shares this sense, of turning  
Around a land, or land fills  
Me up with emergence, political  
Like a dish, we cannot help  
Gathering around, or con/tem/plating.

--after a phrase by J. Morgan Puett

*Let art lay fallow here*  
And artfulness since resistance

Fuels "the system," scratch that  
Since resistance is part

Of an organum of control  
A matrix of complicities

Stop the world simply let  
It be useless, let be the silence

Of a different effort  
Sing that it is elsewhere unframed

That conscience and com-  
punction are a kind of form

Caring withdraws eclipsing  
Art's acknowledged value,

The efficacies of its being for us,  
Not an unspeaking thing.

I am testing a series of propositions about friendship and community which may or may not last in time or produce the results I would have wanted or intended

I am testing them against the tried ephemera of political action and reflection on this action called theory even while it may be occurring

No dream encompasses this contradiction between what we dream and how we wake up and an effective mode of action within a particular set of forces or relations

Thus the feeling one is doing nothing while one is in fact doing everything

One must act very specifically while maintaining the possibility of everything.

*All Black*

--after Fred Moten's *In the Break*



“It’s all black, I love us.”

(Jay Z)

I.

Death will come  
For us it will call

Itself "scarcity"  
The wind in the

Trees and meadows  
Recall ruins re-

verse a process a  
Social process if

We will be on time  
And dust collects

What dust collects  
On the things we

Built unsustainable  
Like eros unifies

The ego it is a lan-  
guage but I don't know

What it says shit  
Builds like sound

Concrete in my head  
No longer dreamt

Nor will waking  
Discover me a memory

Trace, a set of planes  
Traversing blue

Ghosts of a geometry  
Your horns blow.

II.

What worlds end  
So we can create

Sustain caesura  
A break of each

And each recall  
The sea a rhythm

Of this place pul-  
sing under what

We dream emer-  
gent in the ones

We name sing-  
ularities what we

Cannot possess  
What genealogies of

Men won't colla-  
borate with history

Since history wo  
n't corroborate

The sense of ru  
ins revealing you

Dreaming us up  
Not the other way

Around the sun  
Clicks off and on

Soundlessly ab-  
andoning to events

What we would  
Call presence.

III.

--for Adam Pendleton

These shiny  
Stone-like cubes  
Obsidian of what

They speak an  
Alphabet cannot  
Be said it is

Too much just  
To feel them  
To have to

Form words  
Before pictures  
Is a problem

Of history but  
You know this  
The glissando

In our politics  
Of attention gliding  
Cannot know

Us or call  
Us back to  
Kill whitey

So easily as  
Antagonism art  
Thrown into

History and  
Not wanting  
To be

Thrown into  
An archive  
Becomes responsible

For opacity  
Assume this  
Power not

Quite one  
Making nothing  
In particularity

It waits the thing  
Itself to know  
Ourselves.

IV.

"It's holy work and it's dangerous not to know that 'cause you could die like an animal  
down here."  
--Abbey Lincoln

Like the heart was a line  
Was a frame to break  
A kind of intervention before  
The score was made

Or everything could be written down  
Totally administered worlds  
Poetry becomes a score  
It becomes a music that heard justly  
Is never just heard

Performed but not played  
To blow that supplementary horn  
What we sing remains  
Of that communication that is not their dreaming  
Which is all a scream was worth.

*The Archivist*

--for Dave Nolan

Because you wanted the world to hear  
What you heard  
Ears are all we are sometimes  
A moment of music on them

The details not the mirage of *hearing*  
That's what the archivist sees  
Like we were sometimes just eyes  
No longer I when we see  
Stein said that  
Because the world is mindful

Of identity you were taping it  
All the time even the noise even the blanks  
Before they organized our memories  
What was even searchable  
As memory

How any of it could impress us  
This is where music comes in  
Structuring the thing otherwise  
All that time with the tape on  
Just in case there was music.

--for Robert

My friend when you go away  
Into a medical emergency  
An emergency of how living  
Is practiced I miss you

I feel I am missing out  
On my own life the consequences  
Of which a building never  
Materializing would make it true

Because the building is never  
Built it remains a proposal  
Or plan about how prosody  
Lifts the body outside itself

How *ekstasis* cures  
Your books remain to be written  
Because the possible  
Doesn't end with words.

--for Kathy & Jen

I want to make a park with you  
Make a campfire in the park  
Like Mylar crinkles like light  
Is durable the light we make

I want to make a fort where  
Melody was and our voices were  
Where our voices became a  
Collective cry in the lost air  
And yet uplifted and somehow  
Spoken

Not in heaven, not into its hands  
Not enclosed the voices we do  
The fences we defend,  
Bodies full of pain unmake  
The world because they are not just  
A language, never were they full  
Of grace the toxins structuring us.



--for Charles & Rit

Like names falling through  
Old levels sounds like  
In the open of the public  
Eye we are vulnerable  
Scrutinized not just for the poems  
Sounds they make on the inside

How they still how they don't  
Make us whole but the whole  
World flickers the time  
They take to get outside  
And sense not just this sense  
Of the mind's survival.

--for Steve

Spilled in the language's veins  
A militant regard  
When will words be  
A tool for something other

Than exchange watching us fuck  
Them up in the dance with  
Forces again  
The city shine with it

Little estates make a little  
Shit out of me  
You are everything  
To me dear abstractions fleeting

View of the thing from the thing  
In itself trees move with us  
Our disappearance  
We disappear the world therefore

Appears flashes with  
Thoughts difference spreading  
In these leaves  
Bifurcating futures

Like elements *huckleberrying*,  
Like language sometimes  
Squats in us.

--for Rob

Criss-cross this chorus  
Not marshaling us  
The state of the soul or  
The soul of the state  
Is a formal feeling

An emotional thing  
Swerving into the doing  
Standing reserves and  
Potential across personnel

Body of living labor  
Gives me a sign  
We are not done with you yet  
This is the place we were born  
And this the place we became

Slaves in an air other  
Than our own  
The indentured sing  
Of power in a new form

But are not themselves we  
Are not ourselves  
Beholden to a brand  
Locking the flavor in like value

If an emotion possesses us  
If a theory of value signs  
Off into the void let us rule  
For another decade

Let our nets cast us larger  
Than our appetites appear  
For control or the armies  
That we lead

With their hands blown-off  
No longer forced to rule  
Who will resurrect  
What we could not feel  
The first time?

--for Michael

The violence of this voice  
Smoothed into place  
Shared like reason becomes  
Afraid and believes

From this cloud this hand  
Of the police reaching down  
Teaches us things suddenly  
Like the animals once

Taught us to be headless  
The mind utterly mindless  
Made of flesh and blood  
And covering the streets

Sites certain dissensus  
It only knows seeing red  
The mind bludgeoned  
By a force without grace

Around the null set  
Possibilities of planks  
Intone our total abandon  
Power ripples from

Pure means like white  
Eschatology without end  
Pierces the simple  
Shapes of our art

Differences they make  
Like machines on the skin  
Harrows become operative  
And run our mouths

A course of law could stand  
No earth nor other  
Orders of being  
Crowned by its waste.

*She's Lost Control Again*

--after Mika Rottenberg's *Squeeze*

It's not clear whether  
She's lost control again

Or if these ties the ropes  
And pulleys are binding

One cherry leads to another  
That's all we can know

Scented fetishes in the  
Global village of the elect

Affect has made them abject  
It has made a fool

Out of processes  
A montage of the orifices

Coursing through power  
Saying it dumb in the

Wind like a name  
We all can't share

Fisting what's without  
Fingering the constellation

Baser games of telephone  
Tell the nails to grow

A tale of power  
Told by the soul at work

If above or below  
These powers the boxes  
Kept moving  
If this was a game  
We were making the rules  
Up as we went along  
As though within our  
Own bodies without control  
She's lost control again  
We're just beginning  
To manage her limbs  
Like assemblage we shit  
We perspire autonomy  
When they tell us to  
Only there is no me  
And there is no you  
There is no beginning  
In other words to this  
Process this continuous  
Product producing our  
Exception



Like in a harrows we sweat  
Like in a vacuum of political  
Control called representation  
Called media saturated

We wake to this machine  
The women already wake spinning  
Their hair as if from gold  
A myth of morning

The animals who make them awake  
And who assist with production  
Form an assembly line  
Within an otherwise post-Fordist refrain

One lays in the grass  
Like a patient or an object  
How these women they are husbandry  
And husband and husbanded

I want to call this rhizome  
The endless exploitation extending without roots  
From a thousand holes where power leaks  
Conspires and condescends on bare asses  
The ass without a face, the dehumanized ass  
The face upon which one couldn't reproduce  
When all we could do was produce  
The hours expand, click into place.

*This Is Not a Performance*

--for Adrian Piper

Gives me the back  
The backside this dance  
Does the butt but does it  
Suffice to be an object

In this dance motherfucker  
Reduced to steps, reduced  
To hips, a kind of scream-  
like script I am hinting at

Like shade light passes through  
Light, like there was no  
Beyond but what is social  
What is a social material

Leaving me what's left-  
over from the armor  
Love makes up the difference  
Motherfucker my only friend

Nice up this substance  
Come shadow come on  
Open up a window  
Pull this ladder up into skin

Songs the object and songs  
The subject refused to sing  
Ring thought balloons  
Make the black still truer

No equal signs, no commons  
In this index of who you is  
In the present  
The archive betrayed us

Blindfolds around entire bodies  
Like a pair of eyes all over  
Your body, a dance that was both  
A fusion and a wreck

The eyes remain the windows  
Of the soul, but who looks in and  
Who looks out's a question  
Your body posed.

*Blood Moon*

--after Etel Adnan

Sometimes I feel  
Like a fatherless daughter  
A motherless father-  
land under this sky  
Overlooking blood

Tribe adrift with a  
Flood of it, the  
Inconsolable, unexplainable  
Wreck of moral  
Ressentiment, which

Like eyes replaced,  
Like the heart re-  
placed for politics,  
For history, places  
Blood came from

What you wouldn't  
Bless then bless now  
Isis, repair the  
Labyrinth of those  
Calls to be violent

Call forth women  
To conquer their  
Sons-filial-cells  
To wreck identity  
Replace it with

A new Indian-  
Angel-step-moving-  
me-up-to-the-sun,  
Something older than  
Blood—like a blood moon.

*Back Figure*

--after Rigo 23

Ruckenfigur in reverse  
Her hearse reviews  
Give me the back  
Spoken like a true muse  
In starving time  
Speaks to power  
What names our name  
Withdrew

Through embroidery  
An effort to send  
These names renewed  
Into time say my name  
Motherfucker be mine  
Lapse from relic to  
Wanting you  
Earth is our studio

So you want to be said  
Into history so you want  
That gaze to be for you  
All turned around  
Capsized from the cross  
All revolving things which  
Devolve to an act of anthem  
Like seeing you wasn't  
Simply enough  
Like hearing you blew  
My ears off

I, you, and we,  
We have become dis-  
enfranchised equals this  
Desire to see your actual-  
statuary-backside  
Of the face you are naming

Power with  
Speaking truth to sunset  
By seeking out shadows  
Folds of your robe  
If with a backward look  
Took'd from that flatbed.

*Area*

--after Renee Gladman



That little limit  
Of the distance  
Between ourselves

And the world,  
Ourselves and event  
Witnessing the haptic

Sense of the hand  
Touching you,  
The nipple tugged

And toggled  
Beside one's self

That's what living's called  
Unworked by everyday dreaming

Busses loop this place  
We would be, this city

That might identify the body  
If it were here

Or the crowd would not disperse

If we were anywhere  
In this present and  
Not dying from death

Which is different than  
Actually having lived,  
But not so different from  
Writing –

A form of living with  
Death inside a present  
The words one writes  
Withdraw us from.

Like a camera  
Swoops in it  
Swoons and we  
Are not unlike  
It gliding in  
A sense of one's  
Own appearance  
Among others

Where we meet  
Where the body  
Touches other  
Bodies,

Like a world was  
Ending

Come to your senses  
Come up from air, for air  
From all this mumbo jumbo

The distribution of the senses  
We are living in a grammar  
Of commons, the most beautiful

Myth while actually not being  
In common most of the time  
The body breaks-up space

Does not grasp it, reassembles  
The surround called sunshine  
Already lapsed to an idea

Of me or you heat involves  
The light from this incident  
The forethought of our lives

In this event, not on the inside  
Are you beautiful to me  
For all time, but being

Inside-out and twisted  
Like a territory we experience  
In real time while observing

What we are when we are  
Not writing, social substance like  
A tracking shot makes 'me' area

And moment and movement  
--a type of twice dying one  
Experiences before their death.

*Pod People*

--for Leslie Scalapino

Thinking, Leslie, of your favorite movie—*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. I have often revisited this film, Philip Kaufman's remake of Don Siegel's original, wondering why it was your favorite movie. The film begins with these gauzy, cotton objects drifting in outer space (the pods!). They are making their way to planet Earth—San Francisco to be specific. There they will undertake their 'invasion' by releasing a substance into the atmosphere. A substance humans/citizens will take into their lungs while they sleep, mind-altering like a psychotropic drug redolent with late-60s utopian longing. This film, released in '78, looks forward and backwards. Backwards at the socio-political struggles of the 70s, of which I consider you a part—and the environmental movement in particular (in the film the would-be protagonists, Donald Sutherland and Brook Adams, work for the EPA). Forwards to a particularly dystopian decade, the decade in which I grew-up replete with Reaganomics, late-Cold War imperialism, culture war, and the replacement of erstwhile public servants and citizens with 'pod people'—people seemingly soulless; an exaggerated version of the people our public institutions and policies would often seem to want us to be. The backdrop to all of this, like in the Dirty Harry movies also set in San Francisco, are these residues of social progress and struggle, forces represented by the counter-cultural non-conformism of Jeff Goldblum's character; the flakey pop-psychology of Leonard Nimoy; and the subtle, yet inevitable, romance of Sutherland and Adams. Like the pods of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* something threatens our humanity essentially. Only this force, represented in the film, is not from outer space, or even really from outside us. And it is this fact to which your own work bears witness, phenomenologizing it through a syntax which gives form to the primal rupture between 'inside' and 'outside'—where 'person' begins and socius ends; where interiority becomes radicalized by an external pressure of events, if not an empathy which overwhelms any account of individuality without exteriority (the need for friends, compatriots, lovers, neighbors, countrymen; the encounter with those inexplicably and mundanely 'other'). What I am saying—something I would like to say, rather—is that conspiracy infuses your work, rendering it potent. A conspiracy, on the one hand, which threatens the social frameworks and communities through which 'we' have no choice but to exist. And a conspiracy, on the other, of knowledge that any interior is

hopelessly dependent on the irrevocable connection of all beings, a fact underlying your particular brand of Buddhism, and your commitment to Gertrude Stein's experimentalism, and a landscape exceeding in its reality any visual or aural description one can make of it. The pods, and the pod people, and the network—the original 'social network' called city—partaking of 'us'! Dear Leslie, who invented an uncompromising grammar—a daring language practice—to embody our ceaseless correlation and conflict.