



it is a tight little world  
that we live in  
and i am  
[trapped here]

Andrea Abi-Karam



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*I would like to thank Lara, Drea, and Wendy for their endless support and inspiration.*

Mess Editions  
Oakland, CA  
2014



## AGAINST THE PATRIARCHY

I'm not sure why  
you  
feel entitled to touch me.

I never step towards you  
try to avoid eye contact  
sunglasses help but not when  
I have to work inside.

is it because I look different?

am I the age old 'other'  
that you put in cages up  
high for everyone to see and wonder  
at the color of my skin  
and strange proportions  
and eyes so big they move you from  
across the room

or is it that I'm not supposed to fight back

that you don't expect that resistant crack  
of fists that have been frozen  
in fury for lifetimes

I'm not sure why you feel  
entitled to touch me.

and if you ask first  
you move in with you grabby  
hands before I even have time to answer.

I step back and say no and you're  
shocked  
it's the end of the fucking world  
if someone says no to you

so no, you cannot touch my hair  
no matter how many times  
you ask  
no you cannot touch me so stop trying  
and no you cannot watch me while  
I make your latte because  
you're a fucking creep  
just like the way you were raised to be.

## DESERT DELIRIUM

White lines of waves in the desert  
crashing against mountainsides  
misting up into the  
dry air

sweet 'Frisco in the distance  
I can feel you

heat rising off the pavement  
along lonely '50 forms  
liquid dreams of  
lakes and yellow skyscrapers

jobs with salaries  
endless summer  
contained wildfires  
(no campus shootings)

this old camry climbs  
mountains on the daily

I don't understand when it rains in the desert.

free danger.

chase the heat demon of democracy  
into the mighty mountain

maybe it will be better, there

chase the heat demon of democracy  
down US 50

til the ocean  
til it can't run farther



watch out for the major deer  
and don't get lost in Vegas

there are heat demons everywhere

follow the dusty valley to the end  
when the mountains break down  
and the road the levels out

we can use our depth perception  
once again  
spread out past our  
heat ridden valley vision

into the city  
where that heat demon is hiding

give me water  
give me water  
give me time.

to hang pictures from the ceiling  
with white floss  
framed rocks and mountains  
and valleys  
and lakes

to remember the beauty

before we tear it down

(in the name of that devil,  
democracy).

## THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING AND THE END OF (SOMETHING ELSE)

Kreon says

you do not do you do not do  
pour cool soil over the burning body  
to hide him from the brutal buzzards  
circling round and round and down

events don't happen just once they say  
tragedies don't just live in the headlines  
that we often ignore

how can we learn from them anyways  
when we're too busy fighting each other

seasons are cyclical in most places  
but in the bay they're an endless  
sine wave  
heaving between fighting pigs on the street  
and fighting each other in bedrooms  
during the rainy season  
it's a drought  
the body decays  
and i slip through the night in a purple shawl

they fought each other outside the gates  
and collapsed in each other's embrace  
a cruel exercise in nature v. nurture  
give one an army and one social anxiety

you do not do you do not do  
you do not wall your own people  
in the SHU  
especially with a cable gold and blue  
the signature of family  
not chosen

the sign of leaders gone blind  
from their own finger nails  
drunk on rebuilding marble walls  
and past greatness

it seems the conveyor belt of time  
has reversed and we're falling back  
into infancy  
back into ourselves  
back into the sea

## [I AM TRAPPED HERE]

Here here on this stage on this page in this cage  
Every breath I take I wish to splinter  
the whale bone that surrounds me  
around and around me  
back and forth  
Back  
Forth  
back across  
Over to the chair  
And you know what?  
I can see you there.  
Staring.  
night after night after goddam night  
eyes aglow desperate for for for  
the fall through the wall off the stage  
down to your level  
upper-middle  
middle  
poor  
whore  
for a spectacle a show a performance a perfectly curved body  
look somewhere else  
this is real  
this is real this is real  
is this real  
for more from where from nowhere  
move the pieces across the board  
watch them play watch them play watch me play  
watch me play watch me  
no.  
watch me  
carve the air out above the stage  
swim along each bar in the csar  
laurel halo tangled in my hair  
a tunic hangs loosely

you look at me strangely  
Regard me as queer  
Should I point my toes?  
Float, glide, weightless not effortless  
Delicate strength  
It comes from within.  
Will you recognize me among that robotic army?  
Hair pinned back tight rendering me faceless  
No.  
I am not a pin up doll.  
Hang me up, all that's left is my stripped spine  
Rigid (and still not weightless)

Grounded.

I am alone before all of you.

Breathe in.

I capture your gaze  
Hold.

Exhale.

Let my rapture go  
Center outward expansion  
Until the pins reach my fingertips  
Grow out of them like nails  
Inhale, recruit them back center forward  
Look first, stage left  
Land with a an echo

Breathe out.

It comes from within.  
Open the blinds, raise the curtains  
Crack the window unlock the door  
Let the stark light in  
There are no walls left anymore  
You, you don't know what you want

And yet, I envy you.  
I seduce you without meaning to  
In this moment, but how can you not stare?  
I am up here you are down there  
I am before you you always just behind me

Run skip land hop drop pad  
I had to step across knee floor  
Reach out to you  
Unfold from within  
Mold melt down  
stage  
Earth  
Page  
air

My hair is unruly.

That won't stop me  
You cannot stop me

Watch out.

watch out for your eyes  
watch your eyes out  
watch

I chained her wrapped the links around her ribs and pull and wrenched  
them tight crack smack rack I killed them seared them cold as many  
as could find for for fear of being queer I fucked her tore her open and  
mangled the blade before I twisted turn the key trapped in a cage on  
the page up on a shelf only when I need you I need you to stop please  
stop stop staring at me

This is not a world in which I wish to live.

Silver glass on the floor  
Peering back at me  
Eyes eyes eyes  
Glowing twirling  
Step over them carefully  
Be careful not to  
Press  
depress  
impress

Do you know my name?

Do you think it's possible to die before being born?

Do you think it's possible to feel cold while standing in the sunlight?

Do you think it's possible to be wrong?

Do you think it's possible to drown in a sea of logic?

Do you think it's possible that sanity will not save me cannot save me  
won't save me

to overcome oppression

opposition

restriction

constriction

to be innocent, again

to have a conversation and be remembered

to fall asleep

to be free from expectation

to count forwards



let the stark light in.

to my drawing room  
underwater coffin  
bisected solar plexus  
reflective mind

illuminate my desire  
finger my father's pistol  
move with me

it is myself who has never lived in this tight little world.

seeking a language a movement a bullet a line to express our troubled  
condition with no omissions.

[stare back]

## PIPE DREAM

when the fog rolls in  
city councilors make drug deals  
in the washed out streets  
of San Francisco

when the fog rolls in  
a waitress shucks oysters  
in a smoky kitchen

officials draw maps on  
diner napkins  
of routes that don't  
exist

the fog shrouds the sky

when the fog rolls in  
studio masturbators  
steal their neighbors'  
internet  
for some lonely kicks

when the fog rolls in  
veterans rock to sleep  
under US overpasses  
headlights flash  
under their eyelids

a hospitalized trucker whose  
driver's seat pushed  
his back out of line  
so bad he can't walk

when the morphine kicks in

he dreams of that open road  
sneaking in extra night hours  
passed the legal limit  
just to feel that mainland (midnight)  
momentum

driver's seats force spinal step offs  
once a week in his sleep his right  
foot pushes down hitting the gas  
of white dreams

## TRAPPED DREAMS

*for jami*

2 days before the election  
i dreamt i was hiking past polling stations  
and got jumped from behind  
cuffed up  
stripped down  
and put away.

inside  
    outside  
        same side

repeat until the walls disappear.

i dreamt i was released.  
i dreamt i was alone, taken  
and gone for three days.  
when they let me out, we drank  
champagne on the steps of the courthouse.  
when i bailed out there was no champagne.  
just bright sun to beat into my pounding four day headache  
right before I got my fix

an airy cappuccino will not erase this.

inside  
    outside  
        same side

repeat until meaningless.

i dreamt there was grass in downtown Oakland.  
that i was singled out in a group, questioned, and arrested  
method of restraint: ankle cuffs.  
i dreamt that while they looked the other way, i slipped  
my left foot free and ran into the sun  
a single ankle cuff dragging on  
the pavement.

inside

outside

same side

repeat until free.

## BUREACRACY WITH REPERCUSSIONS

*for the ACAC19*

these yellow halls  
that force your skin  
so sallow  
the lights just so  
to see the strained expressions  
on every face  
you can't hide here  
no, not in this place  
of so called justice  
please, don't kid yourselves  
that empty stare  
beneath this oppressive glare  
they make you wait, for a reason  
they make you wait until it sinks in  
that slow draining gravity of reality  
to make your head spin and  
your neck hairs stand on end  
when will this end  
when will this end  
those 9am days  
where nothing happens  
except another pencil mark in the court calendar  
of stolen time and scheduled anxiety  
and to think we made it  
through an entire year  
without nineteen hearts falling apart  
beneath authoritative madness

email disagreements  
sunday night park meetings  
where the sun falls  
before we have a chance to get warm  
the night stretched thin around us  
the yellow halls  
pressed close against us  
the lawyers yelling time  
time  
filing in to creaky seats  
the room of waiting  
the room between  
closed door secret dealings  
and deliberation alleyway  
is it over yet  
is it over

## FLASHPOINTS

it's a friday  
i slept 'til noon i am tired of this life  
they pick me up driving through truck routes  
and port ornaments on the  
bay  
it's half past and i haven't had coffee  
and through the dusty window i try  
not to consider how this is all useless anyways  
i roll down the window and we're there  
a dive diner in the bottoms of Oakland  
and our growling bodies  
we sit bar style on creaky stools that  
scream if you try to move and order  
greasy breakfast as though it  
is our last meal before the end of  
the city's sanity  
simulacra of ourselves  
and surreal as fuck  
we talk strategy  
as though the three of us in some diner  
can find the fittest flashpoint to  
spark  
something bigger than just us  
and our friends who spent the whole  
winter fighting each other  
we receive large plates with eggs and toast and hashbrowns  
i worry about the consequences  
we're all broke and lawyers are expensive  
and jail fucks you up  
we can't waste our energy on something small  
that will be forgotten once it stops  
trending  
i sip on bottomless coffee  
this is not what we want to hear but we have  
to say it anyways



we might not be scared of their tear gas  
pepper spray cans and flash bombs and  
looming black sticks  
the short term is something we can understand  
but we are scared of their cages  
What's A Little Eye Irritation And Dulled Hearing If We Get To Start  
The Fire  
Let's Just Be Careful Ok That They Don't Put It Out By Putting Us All  
Away  
Beneath Bad Press And Bad Charges And Bad Ideas  
if we only has more hot sauce, i think  
We'll Never Get Anything Done If We're  
Too Nervous To Try That's The Whole Point  
Of What They Try To Do  
I See What You're Saying We Have To Be Selective Don't Stop Just  
Don't Start At The Wrong Time  
our plates empty  
someone gets a parking ticket  
a construction worker picks up a to go order  
i sip on the end of my coffee and when  
the course black liquid leaves the bottom  
of the mug white i longed for the answer  
to be as simple as that  
Would You Be Down, If This Meeting Gets Together To Start Some-  
thing  
I'm Going To Yell For The Hunger Strikers Tomorrow In The Hot  
Sticky Valley But I'm Down To Start Something When I Come Back  
But Only If It's Creative  
something they haven't seen before  
something to stir them up and arouse  
a coordinated chaos across cities  
something that stops daily life for awhile  
i dream of taking the bay bridge at rush hour  
they drive me home  
silent on the way back  
our bodies heavy and our minds dark  
foresight too thick to break down in thirty minutes.

## A CITY IS A CITY IS A CITY

we sit and wonder what makes a place worth living in.

*but really we should ask ourselves what makes us worth living here at all.*

the rough city air  
proximity to water

*what's summer without late night swim sessions*

they ask me why i moved here  
as if  
so disturbed i could let go where I'm from  
and follow the beats  
and the punks  
across the groaning continent to the edge

as if a city can be broken down into positive traits with collapsing syllables

'public transportation'  
'cultural capital'  
'good weather'

it doesn't matter who lived here before us except that now they live  
under freeways and we live in their houses

*but we've got that guilt so it's ok*

number of empty jobs to fill with warm bodies  
work is work is work ok  
another reason to stay somewhere  
green streams hold you close  
to the ground  
the steaming concrete

the sweat falling of our bodies  
endlessly  
for the paper thin future  
rolled up tight between rubber bands

*i just have to pay rent you know if i didn't have rent then i wouldn't work  
so much and be so tired drunk depressed all the time did you know you can  
get a pint of whiskey for five dollars here that's pretty good so i think i'll just  
stay awhile and give in to the liquid pyrite awhile try to warm up the night  
a little.*

## BECOMING-TIME

when the lights turn out  
any character can fit the part  
it's just a simple stage show.  
the art of assembling a mirage  
before you, for you  
the art of assembling weapons in order to win wars

do you love your country more than you love me?

don't their colors green, the body rich with power envy  
blue, they see right through you, deviance subsumed, to red and red  
before putting a price on your own head, they already have, try not to  
give them  
anything  
they can sell back to us, when we're dead

the war inside my head when it rains and on the eleventh hour you sit  
on my floor and ask if i gave your name. no. and thanks for the beer.

but now, it's now is just different forms of absence mixed together when  
i wake up and it's already dark the house is empty the parking lot is  
empty and it's now and the time is out of joint and the joint is out of  
place and the place is out of time to heal

we lack the measure to measure, this

we lack the hands to tell the difference

a politics of the imminent, open end  
or as i want to say, a politics of the open road

i am open to disruption.

i might be on probation but i still want to climb a fence with you. keep  
your eye out for shadows.

an event based measure of how to remember how a crisis feels forever  
closely stacked frames, black and white grain

how our familiarity with fear is not a coincidence but more a collective  
consciousness  
of being seen as traitors to the nation.

## ARM THE NIGHT

Let's showcase our sins on  
television.  
watch the streets from museum  
mountain tops (it's safe up here)

wash your hands after the show  
wash your hands for at least  
sixty seconds  
to feel clean from indifference  
(that's what the bottle says)

pour five ounces into a glass  
add ice  
and drink deep  
to feel free from loneliness  
(that's what the bottle says)

tired fingers reach through cracks  
in communication  
for a soft touch  
(quick, before they hear us)

black boots trod through the night  
(quick, before they find us)

in the march towards freedom  
they will stop at nothing to  
untie our shoelaces

in the march through repression  
we will stop at nothing to sing  
discordances.

## WE CANNOT SELL THIS

*For the Chilean Poets*

we are obsessed  
with this so called  
cost-effective analysis

books collect dust on shelves.  
and blue mold in dark basements

how can we sell this?  
how can we sell ourselves?

Pinochet blasted Neruda's  
house to the ground  
for his ink that bled into  
paper and his words  
that found peoples' voices  
on the streets

we are obsessed with the dead  
who lie passively underground

'how can I imitate his turn of phrase?'  
books collect dust on shelves  
and blue mold in dark basements

we are obsessed with picture frames  
and student blood running free inside them

we cannot sell this  
we cannot sell ourselves

## WHO TOLD YOU THIS WAS NEWS?

the bike you used all this time was used  
by someone who worked at the  
local liquor store  
for years and years  
on his way to work everyday  
(he worked 7 of 7 fateful days)  
he'd stop at the market  
and pick the reddest strawberries  
just to make his day inside  
just slightly sweet

what happens when you find your  
dreams are not so new at all?

reimaginings of every other  
overconfident mind  
of a house with a fence  
and a backyard with an organic garden  
air too close to the freeway to breathe  
the people that lived there before  
had kids  
everyone knows you shouldn't raise kids  
in dirty air anyways  
(what were they thinking)  
the landlord pushed them out

5 bedrooms are desirable these days  
so now you write him a crumpled rent check  
and hope it doesn't bounce  
because you don't want to be pushed out



(this is not my story to tell)

the family moved under the freeway  
i hear it never rains in California anyways

how can we carve out a space for ourselves in  
this world so full of itself already?  
the streets are not wide enough for us  
four lanes deep  
with faded yellow traffic lines  
running parallel along  
the course of our lives  
trying hard to intersect with something  
new  
the concrete edge the metal lines  
the painted sidewalks and blurry signs  
that we see  
are used.

## LOVE POEM, BERLIN

The layer of sweat that sticks  
To your skin  
When you sleep on a couch that's  
Too short for you  
When you should have slept in the  
Bed instead  
With your friend that wrote you a  
Crush poem last winter

You should have gone home  
With the city that night  
Except you're in the city  
That never sleeps  
And doesn't even need  
The speed  
Like NYC

Berlin! I will sweat on your couches  
All summer long  
Instead, I slept on your futon for a week  
And smitten,  
I dug my claws in  
To the cobalt blue fabric  
I climbed into after  
The pale sunrise  
Every night

I say, maybe they'll let me stay  
Sink in to the heaving  
City streets  
That push you through  
Graffiti heaven  
In every alleyway  
(the situationists would love this place)  
And on to rooftops

That keep you awake  
For days just to gaze  
At the city that never  
Seems to work but always  
Play

Berlin, you drive me  
Whiskey wise  
And wild eyed  
The city that pushed my  
body against a dark, rock wall  
For a sultry moment  
Outside a smoky jazz club

And Berlin, freedom  
So direct  
The kind of approach I want to have  
Where an Italian punk  
On the night bus  
(that's always on time, by the way)  
say they love it here  
they feel free, finally

Berlin, the city that pulls you in.



**[nightmares]**

### **nightmare 1**

we just wanted to go swimming.  
but they sky turned dark  
against us  
i did not want to jump.

### **nightmare 2**

we just wanted to make some money  
our boss drove us into a tree

### **nightmare 3**

it was too dark to run.

### **nightmare 4**

i was Ulysses in the final battle

### **nightmare 5**

it was winter.

### **nightmare 6**

we were silent.

### **nightmare 7**

i was Antigone  
walled up and red  
i was Antigone  
walled up and blue  
i was Antigone without a veil.

## **nightmare 8**

you were kidnapped

## **nightmare 9**

can i come in. no. i need to come in. no. let me in. no. i need to come in.  
i don't know you. go away.

## **nightmare 10**

your face was made of glass  
backlit with blue

## **nightmare 11**

we were together. we were alone. we were together. we were alone. they  
all jumped off the porch and it was just the two of us. and them. break-  
ing up a party with firepower a bullet that went through your neck an  
aggressive hickey that spiraled into a nonconsensual surface piercing  
you fell to the boards of the porch i kneeled and i reeled and pushed  
the bullet out before your body swept it up. i lay your head down. you  
didn't bleed that much i thought you should bleed more.

## **nightmare 12**

we didn't fight back

## **nightmare 13**

we fought back

## **nightmare 14**

i murdered the two cops who shot you. there wasn't much left. i hid  
them under the floorboards.

## Underground Part 1

the walls are round  
in the underground  
my head scrapes the ceiling  
metal bristles  
understand compression  
the air thick  
with rush  
electric eccentricity

a system  
that doesn't know where  
it's going.

## Underground Part 2

people read the paper  
on the underground  
instead of that empty blue  
stare into  
virtual no future

the doors open  
we press out  
caged bees  
must remember  
how to fly

they run into each other often.



## **Bart Nightmare 1**

bart screamed underwater  
i pretend we are suspended instead  
watching the sunrise over the  
mythical city of foggy  
san francisco

the tunnel must be rock solid

i've never seen bay water drops  
on the windows  
but i'm not always looking  
bart bucks

we all look up

for a second  
it seems we might ram the tunnel  
wall  
and let our metal snake out  
for a morning swim.

## **Bart Nightmare 2 (Bart Strike 2013)**

the trains stop  
the buses rest  
the bridge is maxed  
the cars are full  
and the city still works  
and all the chaos  
almost goes  
unnoticed.

### **Bart Nightmare 3 (Bart Non-strike 2013)**

my time is not my own  
shackled between transit schedules  
and narrow tracks  
and they still have to run the trains  
even if  
a strike goes down  
to keep rust from eating through  
the tracks  
that san francisco salty air  
gets deep into everything  
the sweet feeling  
of waking up near the ocean  
and not going to work.

### **WAITING FOR DISASTER**

Seatbelt  
Click click  
Riding fast through the mountains  
Click click click  
The hills the suburbs the madness  
The trolley lined city streets shake  
When you run them over

Click  
One pull of the trigger and  
You'll fly through  
The windshield  
Click click

It was icy  
Click click  
Spin  
It was humid

A subway ride is \$2.25  
Click click click  
A turnstile has three bars  
Click click click  
Gas is \$4.49  
The body  
Born of the earth  
Interrupted by metal boxes  
That take us home from the night

It's all compostable when it's carbon

Click click  
We're all just carbon anyways  
Click click  
The time table of our lives is  
Counted in carbon ions  
That fly on hidden maps

There is only speed  
No place no destination  
No goal no reason  
Click

What were you doing that night?  
Skate all day til the sweat pools  
Below your eyes  
After a day of concrete solitude  
You need social stimulation  
And eventually a ride home

In this suburban hell  
No Neon lights cut the dark sky  
Trapped gas can last a long time  
Waiting for the moment when atoms  
Collide faster  
Than us

They make light and  
we make cries in the night  
click click  
waiting for disaster  
click.

## THEY COME IN THREES

It's a Monday.  
and a Monday doesn't mean much  
but it's understood that Monday means  
Working.

and the beginning of a stretch of working  
it's a sobering day with  
diversions far in the distance, well relatively  
considering the internally countless  
but authoritatively quantified hours of the  
dreaded trope of 'early 20's starving what the fuck ever service job'

it comes in threes

for the next three days i'll work nine hour shifts til nine pm each night  
and bite my tongue at what customers say every three seconds  
(i should not complain)

it's Monday  
and twenty minutes in to the routine my short female coworkers  
who doesn't get taken seriously  
said she was enojada  
and i said porque  
and she said i don't know the word in English but I think it's rapid and  
now my niece is pregnant  
entiendes? Entiendes?  
Do you understand do you understand  
Entiendo  
I understand  
How old is she  
14

then she said something about coffee.  
I said are people going after him  
she said she didn't understand  
I wanted to say that I knew people in  
that tiny town in Mexico and that he would  
never do that again and  
that they would hurt him  
but i didn't know anyone and she  
didn't understand what i was saying  
and so i said something about coffee

she said she didn't understand why  
and I said neither did I

it was just another Monday.

## IT WAS THE END OF DAYS

the sun crested at the edge of the earth  
sunk deep beyond the sea  
leaving the world in darkness  
an eternal sleep  
filled with dreams in black and white  
the memories of this land  
on replay  
while the nighttime watch dog  
prowls on  
through silhouettes of life  
the outline of a bare tree reaching  
up in winter  
of the cliffs at the end of the land  
the cliffs decide where we fall  
and where we travel behind  
the walls of the world

it was the end of days and the beginning of nights.

where the rays bled into the sky and stretched  
their crooked fingernails to the curved  
surface of the sky waiting for night  
to descend and obscure their deformities  
with the dark blanket  
scribbled on over and over til the  
ink ran thick and filled the whole sky

'i hoped the darkness meant something'

it was the end of days and the beginning of nights

where the walls break down  
at twilight  
shine catches your camera

so quick it becomes the perfect moment  
repetition routine and regularity  
fall away  
break down

fade back into the morning  
or wait on the next one

the Pacific splits the sky at twilight  
the witching hour of wonder  
the routine falls away  
and the lone wolf unleashed upon  
the world, eyes ablaze  
searching for freedom

oh, the things that are possible when we forget  
life is not just a frame of dates and times  
and places to be on time

it was the end of days and the beginning of nights

the lone wolf stalks the night

darkness subsumes the lines  
between our bodies and the land  
we roam between our feet and the ground  
fills the spaces until we become trees

it was the end of days and the beginning of nights.

they're coming for us  
rolling in hard and swallowing the  
jagged rocks between the edge of  
the earth

fill in the craters at the surface  
make them full  
make them swallow the earth whole  
make them swallow me whole within it  
then rush right past them

coming closer  
always coming closer  
changing colors  
abysmal black to midnight blue to  
turquoise bright and ready to burst  
white

the sea line planets betrayed the land  
when they just crumbled right  
off and fell into the sea

where they were sucked up  
and drowned  
and disappeared into a new world  
another world.



MESS  
EDITIONS