
Water Memory

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ARTIST STATEMENT

Silvia Federici writes,

Starting from an analysis of "body-politics," feminists have not only revolutionized the contemporary philosophical and political discourse, but they have also begun to revalorize the body. This has been a necessary step both to counter the negativity attached to the identification of femininity with corporeality, and to create a more holistic vision of what it means to be a human being. (15)

I wonder, what does it mean for my body to live on different land than my parents'? How do I reckon with the gen-

der binary, and with having a body and a gender that exist outside of normative narratives? What does it mean to dig into sexuality in a world of gender-based violence, of body negativity, of sex negativity, of moralism? What does it mean to fully grieve in a culture that obliges the body to be quiet and pretty? It is strenuous to seek embodiment in a world where the body is a site of so much violence and pain. Nonetheless, I am curious, and I am committed to the revalorization of the body as a site of liberation and wholeness.

"Water Memory" is the story of the traumas that continue to live in my body—ancestral and current. It is writ-

ten as an invocation of intimacy partnered with grief. It encourages relationships (with the self and with others) that not only allow, but revel in, the fullest embodiment of the body's experience.

I write from a place of queerness, of transness, as a first-generation Greek/Turk/Uke Canadian with chronic pain and a mood disorder. Yet, I insist, my body is not the enemy.

Work Cited

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia, 2004.

It just happened again, last week. It happens often, but never wholly—I have yet to be turned all the way inside out. I keep coming back to it because I want it, but I don't believe that anyone else could want it too.

“Sex while crying—water signs only.”

I warned her before it was happening: “I cry a lot.” She consented, seemingly agreeing it was a good idea. Together, we moved. Isn't it funny how movements are slower and simpler, but also more arduous, underwater? Breathe; you won't drown here.

Together, we coaxed out the flood with fingertips and teeth, gouging into bones and the depths between muscles, crying out to show it was working. Everything around us was wearing darkness. It was the quality of black you might encounter at the ocean shore, unable to see where your feet stand on a ground that becomes water, that becomes horizon and sky, that becomes the back of your eye sockets before you even realize you're back again. Black: the colour of every colour in chorus.

It must have started when I discovered my diaphragm. I learned to laugh and shook out everything. Especially the things I didn't remember forgetting. It was like going outside and pounding the dust out of a shaggy rug after a long winter indoors. Muscle memory draws deep, deeper than the mind.

These days, I mostly reflect on my grandmother. She would lie to her family back in Greece after emigrating to Canada. There, she had been a midwife, crusted in salt from the Ionian Sea and the lifedeathlife fluids of all the babes in her mountain town. Here, she worked at a laundromat. She didn't tell them that, not over the long phone lines nor when she went back to visit. I have walked with her through the slanted streets of that old place, Kyriaki, Greece, nestled in the mountains of the Peloponnese. In Kyriaki, my grandmother saunters while my prairie calves work hard to hold my body upright. Women twice my age wave to us, women who have been caught and washed of their amniotic fluid by her hands. She left during the junta, journeying the Atlantic Ocean to work at a laundromat in Northern Canada, where her nylons froze to her legs.

The ER doctors cut them off, tiny crystals tearing her skin. Did she lie about this, too? I've learned that immigration is a story told through what is forgone, left behind.

I could feel myself bruising immediately, especially along my collar and neck. I asked her to go deep into me and she did, pulling the wetness out. The land was thirsty, eager. I could hear the ground cover cheering us on.

She was strong, biceps pulsing, teeth firm, oh she was strong. I am crustacean-born—wetness knows no bounds. It seeps in and out as I slosh around, fumbling. With her, it flows out my sex and then up through my throat, and I heave and retch. Everything wants out but it is not solid; it is a diluted mass of memories, ideas of grief and trauma that hold no form. I churn and shudder and make noise, and eventually salt water also flows from my eyes as these mysterious remembrances leave my body; flying, floating, up, up, and out, and I slump in relief.

Sometimes the water is gentle, buoyant, and then I laugh again, with ease. Other times, it crashes hard, struggling, swelling, and slamming into towers of rocks that stubbornly throw it back at itself.

I never know how deep the well is or if I'll be able to climb out afterwards. Inhale, there is always more, and I hesitate, breathe, choke.

He wouldn't let me cry. I avoid his name, but I half-hiss-half-spew out the pronoun with a carnal "h" pitched from the back of my diasporic throat. The second it began he moved to plug up all the holes, quickly, like a pickpocket speeding away from a now-empty pouch. Like my grandmother, I left. We are a story of movement.

This is everyone and everything's burden and I am not willing to hold it alone. Won't someone cup their hands and catch my breath, gather the matter fallen from my chest, and dig a hole with me in which to bury it? Let us have a ritual, let it flow and put it to rest. All things need a burial, need earth on the belly to stay grounded, weight on the eyelids to help them close. Water has force. I need help.

Sometimes they would wait, stroking my hair, wiping away each tear as it ran towards the floor, stopping it before it could find its own place to rest. This is interference; it wouldn't be this way in the ocean, where all waters commune, illustrious, kissing and sliding, each drop one of the same and making more always. Yes, we are fluid bonded to each other, but I want to be fluid bonded to myself, my cum and tears mixing on skin, eros and thanatos together, a whole life force. Do not choke me halfway, I need all of my mouth to breathe.

I think of my grandmother, and also my mom's dad's brother, who drowned in the river behind the farm the day after returning from the war. His name has drifted, it is not passed down, but I still know it happened. Water memory: water's ability to retain a memory of substances previously dissolved in it, even after a number of serial dilutions. That was over 30 years ago, and that river still feeds the farm that feeds us. I was still born in his wake, silently watching my mother choke and sputter around me.

Who can cross the river of Lethe without drinking?

All of this water lives in me and is suspended, ready to cascade. I hold its hand, waiting with it, wait for it. We are friends and will not abandon one another. Find me, please. I salivate to think of it.