

In attempting an introduction for Anne Waldman, a poet and force whose voice has so shaped the ways I see intersections of poetry, performance, activism, feminism and community, I decide to begin with a quote by Robert Duncan, from his essay “Rites of Participation.” He writes:

“The very form of man has no longer the isolation of a superior paradigm but is involved in its morphology in the cooperative design of all living things, in the life of everything, everywhere.... We hunt for the key to language itself in the dance of the bees or in the chemical code of the chromosomes.

Parts and operations of the human body, but also parts and operations of the cosmos, are related in a new ground, a story or picture or play, in which feeling and idea of a larger whole may emerge. The flow of sound from the throat and the flow of urine from the bladder, the flow of energy from the dancing feet, the flow of forms in the landscape, the flow of water and of air felt, translated in a rhythmic identity disclose to the would-be initiate what man is but also what the world is – both other and more than he is himself, than the world itself is.

The power of the poet is to translate experience from daily time where the world and ourselves pass away as we go on into the future, from the journalistic record, into a melodic coherence in which words – sounds, meanings, images, voices – do not pass away or exist by themselves but are kept by rime to exist everywhere in the consciousness of the poem. The art of the poem, like the mechanism of the dream or the intent of the tribal myth and dromena, is a cathexis: to keep present and immediate a variety of times and places, persons and events. In the melody we make, the possibility of eternal life is hidden, and experience we thought lost returns to us.”

Though this essay concerns itself with the poetry of H.D., I was struck by how Duncan’s statement so exemplifies Waldman’s work and serves as a point of entry into her cosmology.

I isolate three terms: *body*, *archive*, *cathexis*.

**BODY:** Waldman often writes of a “body politics” or “body poetics,” and though one might take this to mean a literal embodiment of poetry, or *prosody*, the integration of words with their performance and sound, I will argue that “body poetics” is more of a political statement about work and value – a lateral, non-hierarchical view of poetry in relation to its auras of performance,

community and social/global import. I had a dance teacher who once described her ideal dancing modality as “socialist dancing.” In other words, not one body part is valued above another in the dancing whole. Similarly, Waldman’s *Work* (work with a capital W – book/poem/product/text) is equal to but also merged with and inseparable from her *work* as an ambassador of poetry, her teaching and organizing, her voice as she performs the texts, the music she creates with her son, Ambrose Bye, the suffering ecosystems she cites. She describes this in her most recent book, *Gossamurmur*, as “language not separate adaptation but an internal aspect of/ something much wider” (39). It is this occupation of multiple and equally important positions, this ordering of experience without hierarchy, that poet Akilah Oliver describes as Waldman’s “queer sensibility.” A quilt-like poetics.

**ARCHIVE:** In *Gossamurmur*, Waldman presents the material gossamer as a kind of cosmic, linguistic and energetic connective tissue, carrying sound and history in an empathic substance of communication. She writes: “A way pliancy can supplant stiffness/ the way tensile strength prevents fractures (30). “ We could also see this substance as a cerebrospinal fluid or muscular fascia, connecting self with the *exo* until there is no boundary or container with which to delineate self from nature, self from environment, self from other, self from poetry. The gossamer is infused with vibratory murmur (speech, sound, whisper, collective breath), which also connotes the communal bird formations we might witness in the sky – *murmuration* – an image of relation among beings that surpasses language. It is a book of connections, interweavings, recordings.

Throughout the book, the speaker describes encounters with an identity thief, a ghostly double self, another Anne Waldman (wouldn’t we be so lucky!) at the credit union. The hinge of these shadow selves is the bank, the commerce this book disrupts. As this new Anne Waldman steals original Anne Waldman’s money (and vice versa) they become each other. The reader is reminded of the ways we become facsimiles of ourselves, the selves owned by banks, mined by social media, data-doubles unconcerned with others who effortlessly recede into global amnesia.

In Waldman’s work, I register the desire to create an ever-expanding and visceral recuperative archive (à la Derrida’s critique of the archive that forgets its own origins) through moving and adaptive language, a beautiful attempt at a catalogue of “ the fragile cassette and song files of the fleeting, transitory poetics...”(5). This troubles the all-knowing and vivisectionist archive of ownership and data hoarding in favor of a more inchoate memory-log. The archive is also intimately linked with the act of mourning: the endangered species catalogued and listed, the poets no longer with us (never dead)

remembered and annotated and invoked. In her “Mourning Song for Akilah Oliver,” Waldman vocalizes, “poets teach us how to lament.” Waldman’s poetry has a way of “calling forth” through repetition and deep attention. This is also how an archive gathers. She writes in *Gossamurmur*:

“Memory of an animal is also yours/ Archive all opposable thumbs we have record of/ and many wisdom identities/ Archive’s murmur circulates around the room/ Archive lets originals breathe/ you can’t tamper with Archive/ it’s a strange cosmology/ Archive is the antithesis to a war on memory and stealing poet fire/ Archive listens into the margins.”

The notes at the back of *Gossamurmur*, more than an annotated bibliography but a kind of echoing map, rest against the book like a field guide. In it we find references to such diverse subtexts as Rosalind Franklin, a female scientist whose research was used without her permission by award-winning male scientists, the myth of the Spider Woman, caddis flies, the Norwegian seed vault (it exists!) all laced with personal and anecdotal process-based annotations.

**CATHEXIS:** Her investment in and engagement with community. Waldman’s influence and nurturing energy is omnipresent. I feel her presence in my own sphere: the phonemic/eco-political and amelioratory dance performances of The Commons Choir, directed by Daria Faïn and Robert Kocik, the somatic poetry exercises of CA Conrad, the performances of my friends LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs and Ivy Johnson. Her work for many years in this very space and at Naropa. I’ll return to Duncan, but this time to Waldman’s words *about* him. In the *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, vol. 17, she writes: “And Robert Duncan’s arms waved and danced in the air as he read.... This was a body poetics. And these poets had put their whole beings on the line. Was I being too romantic? And I made a vow too to the larger community that sustained this poet and would sustain others, a vow that I would spend my life developing and maintaining such a community.”

*Gossamurmur* is a poem (also essay, myth, pleading dialectic) that struggles against the corporate and capitalist and war mongering and ever-present invisible realm of *Deciders*, those who wish to create a “life of unrelenting State without poetry” and who ask, “What’s a poetry portal?” Waldman’s answer: “A window onto the whole world...listening back at you,” and if there’s an artist who has spent her life opening this window to the world for poetry and poets, it’s Anne Waldman. Please help me to welcome her.