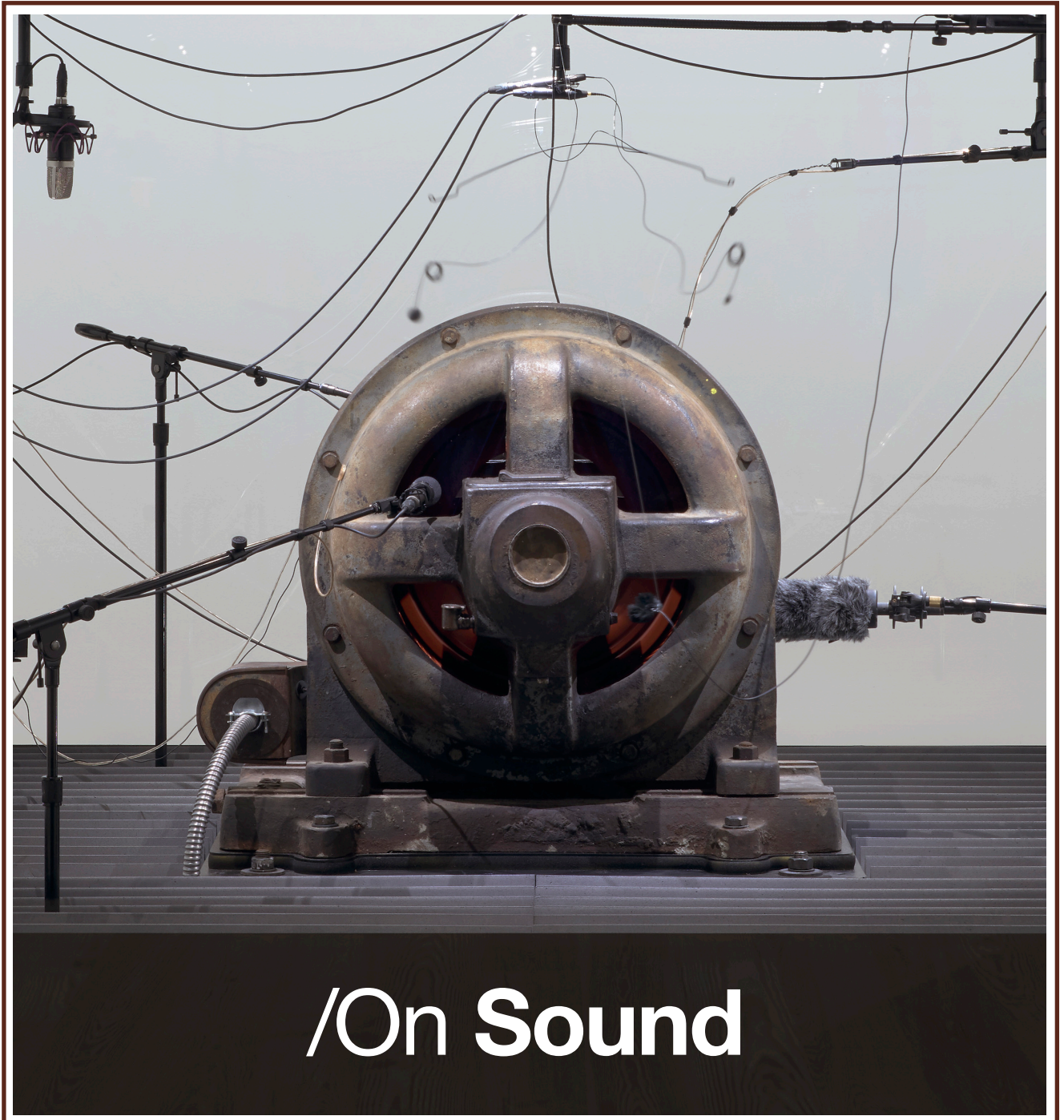


VOLUME THREE / SUMMER 2019

DetroitResearch

post-studio art / choreography / ceramics / music / performance / critical theory



/On Sound



Cover Photo

Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor, 2012-18* (installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018-March 10, 2019). GE induction motor, custom soundproof glass chamber, anechoic foam, steel wire, monofilament, cardioid condenser microphones, contact microphones, microphone stands, microphone cables, and AD/DA interface. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz

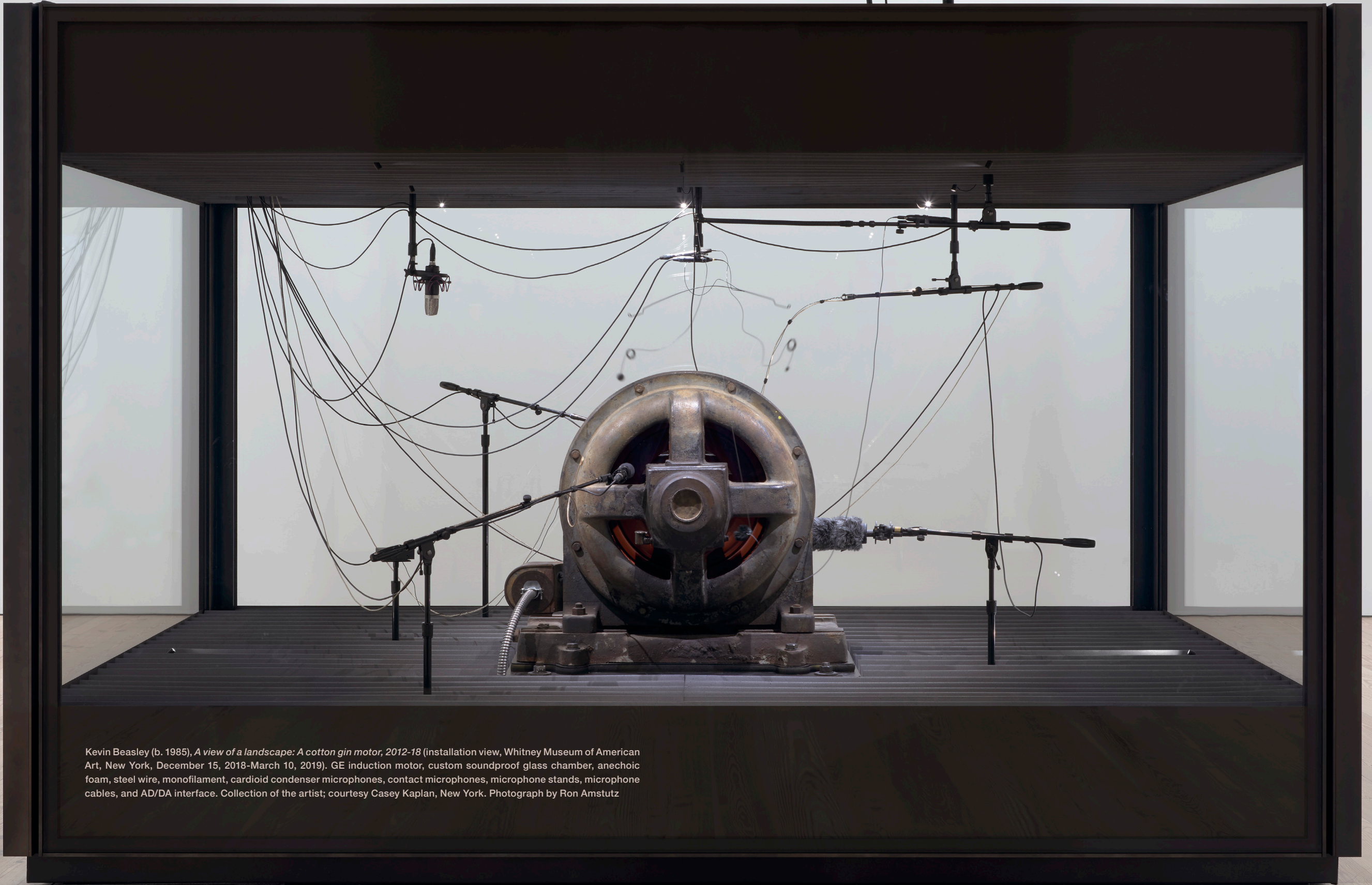
Inside Cover Photo

Video Still from, *I'm Thinking About These Lamps No. 2*, by ADULT.

Detroit Research will publish

- Vito Acconci
- Taylor Aldridge
- Shiva Amahdi
- Mary Elizabeth Anderson
- Toby Barlow
- Kevin Beasley
- Biba Bell
- Francesca Beradi
- Maurice Blanchot
- Jon Brumit
- Joyce Cheng
- Mitch Cope
- Steve and Dorota Coy / Hygienic Dress League
- Kate Daughdrill
- Georges Didi-Huberman
- Pierre Fédida
- Vievee Francis
- Petrova Giberson
- Bill Harris
- Jerry Herron
- Scott Hocking
- Tony Hope
- Amy Kaherl
- Leith Karmo
- Sarah Kofman
- Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe
- Ralph Lemon
- Aaron Levy
- Kate Levy
- Monty Luke
- Jean-Hubert Martin
- Chris Monhollen
- Marsha Music
- Scott Northrup
- Charlie O’Geen
- J.H. Prynne
- Samantha Schefman / Playground Detroit
- Gina Reichert
- Chris Scoates
- Mike Smith
- Mistinguette Smith / the Black Land Project
- Chris Tysh
- Sarah Wagner
- Sarah Wilson

**/ KEVIN
BEASLEY**

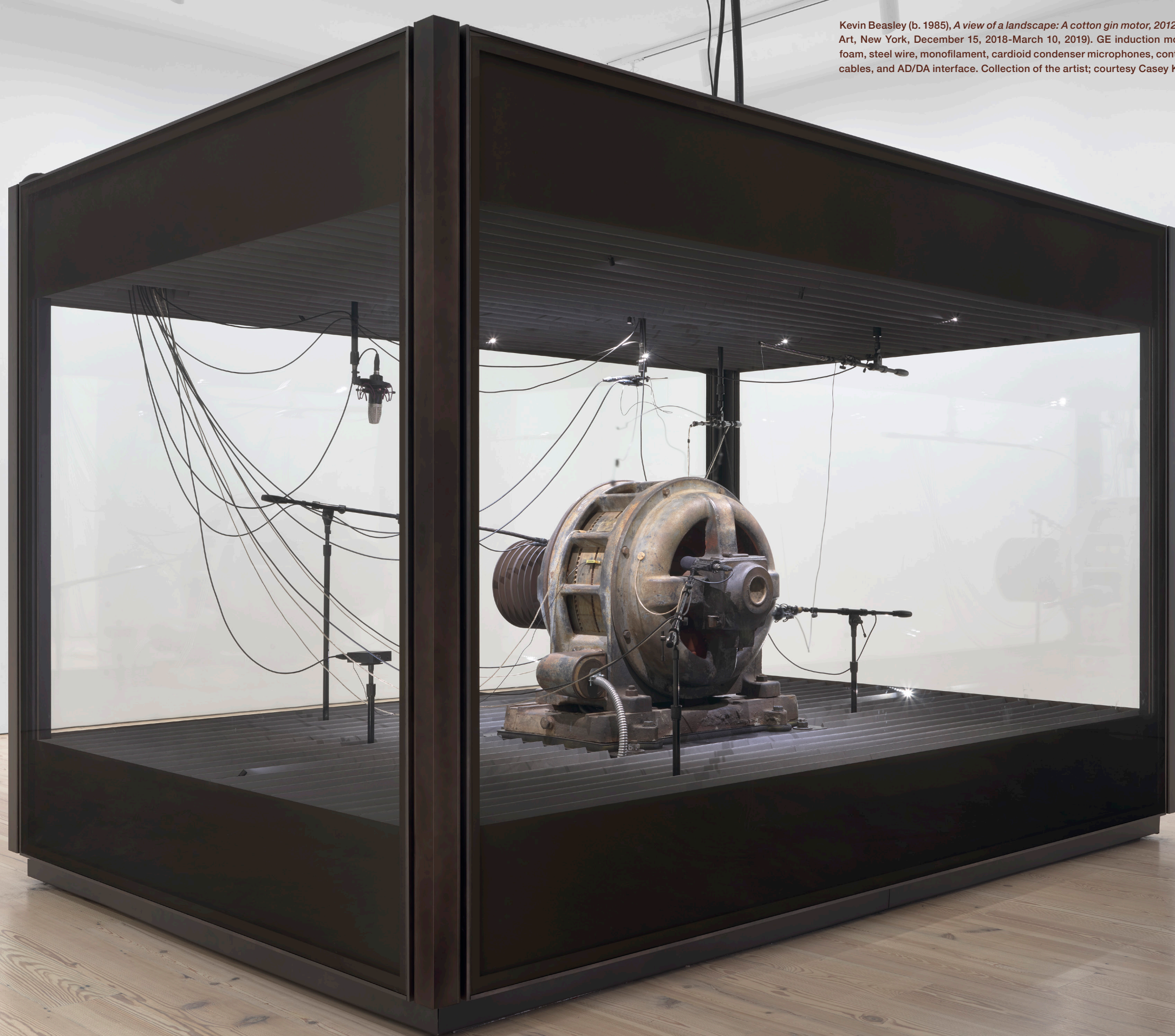


Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor*, 2012-18 (installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018-March 10, 2019). GE induction motor, custom soundproof glass chamber, anechoic foam, steel wire, monofilament, cardioid condenser microphones, contact microphones, microphone stands, microphone cables, and AD/DA interface. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz



Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor, 2012-18* (installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018-March 10, 2019). GE induction motor, custom soundproof glass chamber, anechoic foam, steel wire, monofilament, cardioid condenser microphones, contact microphones, microphone stands, microphone cables, and AD/DA interface. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz

Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor*, 2012-18 (installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018-March 10, 2019). GE induction motor, custom soundproof glass chamber, anechoic foam, steel wire, monofilament, cardioid condenser microphones, contact microphones, microphone stands, microphone cables, and AD/DA interface. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz





Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor, 2012-18* (installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018-March 10, 2019). Custom Speaker system, subwoofers, amplifiers, AD/DA interface, Ethernet switch, mixer, modular synthesizer, equipment racks, and wood table. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.



Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor*, 2012-18 (installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018-March 10, 2019). Custom Speaker system, subwoofers, amplifiers, AD/DA interface, Ethernet switch, mixer, modular synthesizer, equipment racks, and wood table. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.



Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor*, 2012-18 (installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018-March 10, 2019). Custom Speaker system, subwoofers, amplifiers, AD/DA interface, Ethernet switch, mixer, modular synthesizer, equipment racks, and wood table. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz.

DetroitResearch

post-studio art / choreography / ceramics / music / performance / critical theory

VOLUME THREE / FALL 2019

Detroit Research is published in Spring and Fall by the Alexandrine St. Seminars,
© Detroit Research the present collection. All rights revert to authors upon publication.

e: DetroitResearchjournal@gmail.com

w: Detroitresearch.org

fb: @DetroitResearch

in: @DetroitResearch

Detroit Research has been made possible with support from



Knight Foundation

COLLEGE for Creative STUDIES



Cover Photo

Kevin Beasley (b. 1985), *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor, 2012-18* (installation view, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018-March 10, 2019). GE induction motor, custom soundproof glass chamber, anechoic foam, steel wire, monofilament, cardioid condenser microphones, contact microphones, microphone stands, microphone cables, and AD/DA interface. Collection of the artist; courtesy Casey Kaplan, New York. Photograph by Ron Amstutz

Inside Cover Photo

Video Still from, *I'm Thinking About These Lamps No. 2*, by ADULT.

Back Cover Photo

John Cage, *4' 33*, performed by ADULT., 2019.

Editor

Michael Stone-Richards

Assistant Editors

Marissa Jezak
Jessica Stavrides

Donate

detroitresearch.org/donate/

Advertisement

detroitresearchjournal@gmail.com

Fundraiser Intern

Jack DiLaura, LTU

Editorial Board

Addie Langford
Biba Bell

Guest Editor

Nicola Kuperus & Adam Lee Miller (aka ADULT.)

Featured Artist

Kevin Beasley

Creative Director

Cece McGuire / Joshua Smith

Web Designer & Manager

Cece McGuire

Typography

Helvetica Neue (1983) - Developed at D. Stempel AG,
a Linotype subsidiary.

Harriet Text & Display (2012) - Designed by CCS alum,
Jackson Cavanaugh of Okay Type, Chicago, Illinois.

Production

Printed in Dearborn, MI by PostNet.

Printed on 80# Cougar text bright white pages.

100# Neenah Classic Crest stipple cover with spot UV

Contents

/Kevin Beasley /004

Low End Theory:
Kevin Beasley: A View of a Landscape
Christopher Y. Lew

Kevin Beasley's *View of a Landscape*
Photography by Ron Amstutz
Courtousy of the Whitnet Museum of Art

Notes on Black Labor in Kevin Beasley and the Black Avant-Garde
Michael Stone-Richards

Seeing / Hearing Kevin Beasley's *A View of the Landscape* at the Whitney
Cece McGuire

Notes on Seeing Kevin Beasley's *A View of a Landscape*
Addie Langford

On Kevin Beasley
Chido Johnson

An Interview with Detroit Research
Kevin Beasley

America: A Hymnal
Bethany Collins

1 /On Sound /064

Introduction
Guest Editors: Nicola Kuperus & Adam Lee Miller (aka ADULT.)

The Physical Value of Sound
Yuri Suzuki

Close your Eyes
Juliana Huxtable

ARIA
John Cage

ESP TV, WORK

Him
Michael Gira

The Casting Agent, 2017
Pieter Schoolwerth

An Interview with Sharsten Plenge
Suzy Poling

On Lun*na Menoh
Tosh Berman

The Aesthetics of Time: Color Change: Experiencing Light as Physical Presence
Chris Scoates on Brian Eno

Attack of the Mushroom People: A Theory with Jimbo Easter and Friends
Cary Loren

/Dossier on Detroit 1967: Soundings

Curatorial Statement: Pleasures of Rebellion
Ingrid LaFleur

Sound works
Sadie Woods
Sterling Toles
Reuben Telushkin

(The sound works by Woods, Toles, and Telushkin curated by Ingrid LaFleur can be found online at Detroit Research, vol. 3)

Detroit 1967: The Division of Labor
Marsha Music

Further Soundings
Todd Stovall
Jon Brumit
Chris Faccini

The Sound of Detroit
William Bunge

2 /Artist Research /158

The Art of Trespassing
Bridget Frances Quinn
Sound work by Quinn, Traffic Chorus online at DR vol. 3

An Interview with Vito Acconci
Biba Bell

An Interview with Jim Crawford
Rebecca Mazzei

On Choosing Things for the Huckleberry Explorer's Club Museum
Stefany Golberg

Critique on the Critique : A Dialogue
Shannon Morales-Coccina

3 /Research /194

Ray Johnson's History of the Detroit Art World
Ellen Levy

Hello, Kitty
Joyce Cheng

Dancing in the Fray: Nick Cave's Sonorous Bodies in Detroit (or, The Choreopolitics of Walking Down the Middle of the Street)
Biba Bell

Magiciens de la terre revisited
Jean-Hubert Martin

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha
Reese Williams

Addie Langford

Drifts of Time: New Paintings by Addie Langford
George Tysh

Rumination in Seven Parts: Of *The Gray Series*
Biba Bell

Objects and Place at the Scarab Club
Dennis Nawrocki

Notes on Tuttle, Rouan, Hantaï, and Binion
Addie Langford

Advanced French Painting comes to Michigan: On Supports/Surfaces at MOCAD and Michel Parmentier at the Broad Museum - MSU
Addie Langford and Michael Stone-Richards

4 /Social Engagement /240

Another City
Francesca Berardi

Externalize, Extract, Co-opt, Repeat
Kate Levy, Shanna Merola, and Halima Cassells

Shakespeare in Prison
Frannie Shepherd-Bates

The Poetry Writing Workshop at Women's Huron Valley Prison: A Dossier
Rob Halpern

Poems from the Poetry Writing Workshop at Women's Huron Valley Prison

Toward a Fugitive Poetics: Notes from the Poetry Workshop at Women's Huron Valley Prison
Megan Stockton

5 /In Review /275

Material Detroit
Laura Mott and Taylor Renee Aldridge

On Kylie Lockwood's *Becoming a Sculpture*
Addie Langford

53 North
James Boyle

Intimations at K.OSS, A Conversation
Lynne Avadenka

New
Greg Fadell

Detroit and Vassar: Intersections of Contemporary Imagination
Matteusz Kasprowicz

Beautiful Instruments at Busan Art Museum, South Korea
Dionne Smith-Jackson

On the exhibition *The Color Line*, Musée du Quai Branly, Paris
Felicity Stone-Richards

On domesticity / intimacy in the recent music of ADULT.
Michael Stone-Richards

/In Memoriam /290

Julie Taubman
Marsha Miro

Harry Mathews
Lynn Crawford

Gordon Newton
Tim Hill

Low End Theory:
Kevin Beasley: A View of a Landscape

// Christopher Y. Lew

Installation view of Kevin Beasley: A view of a landscape (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, December 15, 2018–March 10, 2019). A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor, 2012–18. Photograph by Ron Amstutz



The harvest had happened but some remained, white airy bolls speckling the field amid the trampled branches. This was Kevin Beasley’s first direct encounter with living cotton, on break from graduate school in 2011, during one of his family’s annual summer reunions in Valentines, Virginia, a little more than a hundred miles from the town of Lynchburg where he grew up. The land where they gathered had been in the family for generations, but for the first time it had been leased, just the past season, to local planters to grow cotton. Beasley picked some, feeling the light fibers between his fingers and surprising himself by the pleasure of the sensation, which stood in stark contrast to the hardship, pain, and trauma endured by so many generations who had been enslaved in service of cultivating the crop - likely including Beasley’s own ancestors.¹ It was almost too much for the artist to process:

This wasn’t about a plant or a field for me. These are containers for a much more painful and complicated history in which the nuances are somehow obfuscated. I couldn’t collect myself until I saw my mother in the kitchen, cracking jokes about being a slave family . . . The complexity of the circumstances is far deeper than I can put language to, still . . . And so it felt imperative for me to synthesize these experiences through objects and material.²

That step towards understanding through synthesis - reconciling personal biography, place, histories, memories, physical experiences - took Beasley further south, to Alabama, to purchase a cotton-gin motor that a man named Bobby had posted on eBay:

Up for sale is an antique GE electric Induction motor. This motor came out of a Cotton Gin in Maplesville, AL. It actually ran the Cotton Gin. The motor run when put up, but hasn’t run in over 30 years. This is a very large and heavy motor. It is about 3 - 4 feet high and 2 - 3 feet across. These are the numbers on the tag:

Model 1718
Type 552 8 75 900
Form B
Three Phase 60 CYC
Volts 220
Amp 182
Speed Full Load 875
No. 5055643
75 Hp Continuous 40.³

A poem of specifications, the online ad referred to a machine that was much more than its amperage draw and horsepower output. The motor played a part in one of the oldest industries in the United States, one that, for better and for worse, helped to shape the country into what it is

today. While this particular motor would not enter into that story until the mid-twentieth century, Eli Whitney’s invention of the cotton gin in 1793, ten years after the United States won its independence from Great Britain, almost paradoxically intertwined the industrialization of cotton production in the U.S. with the brutal institution of slavery.⁴ By automating one intensely laborious stage of the production process - the separation of the fiber from the seed - Whitney’s machine made the cultivation of cotton on slave-owning plantations in the American South profitable. The cotton gin increased efficiency fifty fold, which instead of reducing the workforce, only increased the demand for slave labor to match the increased rate of production, and the U.S. swiftly became the largest cotton producer in the world, providing raw material primarily to textile manufacturers in Manchester, England.⁵ Yet this economic success, which arguably helped to secure the fledgling country’s independence, would not have been possible without the morally abhorrent importation of slavery or the equally abhorrent genocide of Native Americans, both of which cast an indelible stain upon the country’s founding myths. As described by historian Sven Beckert in *Empire of Cotton*, “This was a land whose social structures had been catastrophically weakened or eliminated, a land without most of its people and thus without the entanglements of history. In terms of unencumbered land, the South had no rival in the cotton-growing world.”⁶

Plantation owners quickly seized upon their advantage to build large industrial-scale operations. By 1860, 85 percent of cotton was cultivated on plantations that were a hundred acres or larger; more than 90 percent of the country’s enslaved population was consigned to work these operations, in a system that stripped away the culture and history of Black people to make use of them as mere property and tools.⁷ As artist and filmmaker Arthur Jafa has said describing African Americans’ foundational role in the story of American industrialization, “We were the first technology. We are the technology that drove the American industrial engine.”⁸

The exploitative relationship between African Americans and the production of cotton did not end after emancipation. If Southern planters had earlier embraced the technological advancement of the cotton gin, in the wake of Reconstruction they set about creating a system designed to approximate as close as possible the antebellum status quo, disenfranchising and disempowering the Black population both through discriminatory laws and though extralegal means of white terror. The majority of Blacks remained in the South with little opportunity but to work the same land, this time as sharecroppers, and it was not until the 1930s that Southern planters began to mechanize the cultivation of cotton in ways that had already been adopted by farmers

in the West.⁹ This time technology would help serve to break the connection between the crop and Black farmers. Given the cost of tractors, automated pickers, and other machines, only large-scale farmers had access to the capital necessary to acquire them. This forced poor white and Black famers alike out of the cotton business and gave Black sharecroppers another reason to join the Great Migration north.

The cotton-gin motor that Beasley acquired in Alabama was an active agent in this story of mechanization. Used on the farm from 1940 to 1973, the machine operated through this period of technological disruption. Such machinery, along with the introduction of chemical pesticides, made farms more efficient, reducing the amount of backbreaking labor required. While the machines did lead to the unemployment of many farmhands, they can also be viewed as the metaphorical wrench that stopped the cycle of labor and debt that defined sharecropping.

While cotton farming was being transformed, the country was experiencing other profound changes. The civil

helped replace the labor of the very men and women who were active in the fight for civil rights - working away on a farm between Birmingham and Selma while innocent people were lynched and murdered, while peaceful protestors endured violence at the hands of the police and racist mobs, and while marchers finally crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge and made their way to Montgomery, a pivotal moment in the movement, which would see federal passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act less than five months later.

The motor ran for another eight years and then stopped, perhaps due to the shift in global cotton production away from the U.S. and to Asia. The machine fell silent for more than forty years until Beasley had it rebuilt in 2017 and incorporated it into his multipart installation *A view of a landscape: A cotton gin motor*, which is being shown for the first time at the Whitney. He has placed it within a soundproof glass chamber so that, initially, viewers can see the machine running but not hear it, the sleek contemporary lines of the vitrine standing in

visual contrast to the motor's worn patina. The sensory experience of visitors is reversed in the adjacent room, which Beasley has designed for deep listening, with its low lighting, dark walls, acoustic panels, and carpet. It is here where visitors encounter the *sounds* of the machine - the physical vibrations of its metal casing, the high-pitched revolutions of its spindle, the barely audible electric hum coursing through its wire windings - captured by various specialized microphones that surround the motor next door in its vitrine and processed by a system of modular synthesizers. Yet there is something else in this sonic mix, something felt as much as heard, hovering at the 20-hertz threshold that marks the low-end frequency of human hearing. It's the machine conveying the sweat, tears, blood, and song that permeate the land, the soil from which cotton has historically been grown. There are literal sensations emanating from

the installation's subwoofers, percussive soundwaves from the bass bins that move the fine hairs on the nape of the neck. The air vibrates with the history that Beasley excavates by isolating and amplifying the motor's myriad sounds. In this layered history are collective voices, such as those of the Selma protestors who used music as a form of resistance, steeling themselves in song in preparation for the march to Montgomery. Perhaps this

is what ultimately powers the bass lines of Beasley's sound composition. On March 15, 1965, marchers were repelled by state troopers half a block from the Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church. From within the church, protestors sang:

Oh, freedom, oh, freedom, oh, freedom over me, over me,
And before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.
No more Jim Crow, no more Jim Crow, no more Jim Crow
over me, over me,
And before I'll be a slave, I'll be buried in my grave
And go home to my Lord and be free.¹⁰

In 2012, shortly after he completed his MFA at Yale, Beasley was invited by Ralph Lemon to perform in the atrium of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, as part of the choreographer's series *Some sweet day*. Beasley

enacted a sound-work-meets-DJ-set titled *I WANT MY SPOT BACK* in which he played a capella versions of 1990s rap tracks the artist made himself that he then manipulated into overwhelming sounds that shook the walls and windows of the museum. Thinking about the bodies from which the voices of such iconic hip-hop artists as the Notorious B.I.G. and Tupac Shakur emerged, Beasley said, "I got really interested in listening to the breathing in between, like Biggie was a heavy breather . . . I should really listen to that and see if I can extract the low frequencies from just his breathing."¹¹ Again, the low end serves as the carrier wave.

Sound can be a language unto itself. While sound and music unfold in time like reading, they are visceral, heard through the ear as much as felt through the bones. "The



Dave Lewis cultivating cotton on a tractor, Macon County, Alabama, May 1940. Photographic print. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC (LC-USZ62-11111)

rights movement arose in the South, demanding voting rights, social justice, and equality for African Americans. Selma, which is just thirty miles from Maplesville, was a key site for this struggle, the city from which civil rights activists made three attempts in March 1965 to march to the Alabama state capital of Montgomery in an effort to gain voting rights. Beasley's motor sat in physical proximity to these historic events - a machine that likely



Kevin Beasley, performance of *I WANT MY SPOT BACK* (2012) at the Museum of Modern Art, October 2012. Part of *Some sweet day* (October 15–November 4, 2012). © 2012 The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Image courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

sonic,” Huey Copeland writes in *Bound to Appear*, his examination of how four contemporary artists have addressed slavery, “has long served as a viable if not unproblematic medium for black folks to refute the falsifications of the visual, to make claims on the human, and to give voice to dreams, desires, and aspects of the self that would otherwise go unheard even if they remain unintelligible.”¹² When it comes to conveying humanity, the sonic moves faster than the visual, as if inverting the laws of physics. In Beasley’s sound performance, we hear Biggie breathe - or should we say inspire? - but never see it.

Describing his work with sound in his practice, Beasley has said, “Sound for me is just as physical, tactile and experiential as any other material . . . it’s another material I can use to help understand myself and my environment: where am I located, where are other people located in relationship to me?”¹³ The listening-room portion of his installation makes Beasley’s concerns palpable. The sounds of the motor are transplanted, not just from the gallery next door but from the deep South. Moreover, Beasley unpacks the motor’s resonances by distributing speakers overhead and subwoofers on the floor that amplify certain sounds in specific sections of the room, creating a landscape for the ear. This is echoed in electronic music producer Jlin’s approach to sound and music. One of the artists invited to perform with the installation, to “play” it, Jlin has said, “I’m definitely one of those people that believes for sure that every sound belongs somewhere. And there are certain sounds or certain movements that can strike me so deep and it opens up a totally different world for me.”¹⁴

Beasley is clear on where these sounds come from. He has had the motor follow the northward route of the Great Migration that the machine helped make possible, from Alabama to Connecticut, where Beasley first showed it on its own in his 2012 MFA thesis exhibition at Yale, and then to the Whitney in New York. The journey is also charted in the new “slab” sculptures he has made for the exhibition. Massive wall-like sculptures made of polyurethane resin, clothing, raw Virginia cotton, and other objects and materials, the three sculptures chronicle Beasley’s relationship to the motor and, more broadly, to the South, reflecting the land with which the machine had for so long been associated, before moving on to Beasley’s first encounter with the motor and then to the Yale campus where it was first displayed. For example, the first slab, *The Reunion* (2018), resembles a pastoral scene with figures rendered solely through deeply inset du-rags situated in a lush green landscape, not only referencing the Beasleys’ annual family reunions but also cutting through time to suggest ghostly figures who are in the fields not by their own volition. A band of green strapping, appropriated from a cotton bale, bisects the composition, appearing to both slice through the depicted landscape



Kevin Beasley, UNTITLED (FIELD), 2011–15. Pigmented inkjet print, 26 1/4 x 39 3/4 in. (66.7 x 101 cm). Image courtesy the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York

and hold the sculpture together. The strap was stamped by its manufacturer in black “SAM,” which also happens to be the name of Beasley’s grandfather.

This is not the first work to draw connections between Beasley’s family and the land. In his first solo exhibition, at New York’s Casey Kaplan gallery in 2015, he exhibited *UNTITLED (FIELD)* (2011–15), a photograph taken in the half light of dawn or dusk, depicting rows of graves before a stand of trees. Illuminated by raking, surreal light - from the artist’s car outside the frame - the landscape speaks to different cycles of time. There is the brief time during which the tall grass has grown between graves, and then there is the long time that has weathered smooth the stones in the foreground and seen them sink deeper into the earth than the rows behind. Whether the viewer is aware or not that these are Beasley’s close and distant ancestors laid to rest on the family’s Valentines property, the photograph suggests a full circle, a young

artist on the cusp of completing his graduate degree contemplating mortality and his connection to past generations, an intensely private moment that nevertheless speaks to the contradictions inherent to the country at large, a nation that celebrates the possibility of social mobility afforded by education yet is still riddled with systemic racial inequity and violence.

These complex, difficult, and layered histories are not just subject matter to investigate for Beasley. They are woven into life, a life surrounded by family and steeped in generational memory. Through the particulars of his relationship with the South, Beasley addresses a broader American experience, confronting viewers with the hard truths that bind regions, races, and people. To borrow from Ralph Ellison, Beasley poses the famous question, “Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?”¹⁵

Endnotes

- ¹ Kevin Beasley, unpublished text shared with the author, 2018.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Eli Whitney (1765–1825) and Harry Payne Whitney (1872–1930), the husband of the founder of the Whitney Museum, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, both descended from the same ancestor, John Whitney, who emigrated from England to Massachusetts in 1635.
- ⁵ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 102.
- ⁶ Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 105.
- ⁷ Becket, *Empire of Cotton*, 110.
- ⁸ Arthur Jafa, quoted in Kate Brown, “‘Black People Figured Out How to Make Culture in Freefall’: Arthur Jafa on the Creative Power of Melancholy,” *Artnet*, February 21, 2018.
- ⁹ For an examination of cotton production during Reconstruction and after, see Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, chapter 10, as well as Gene R. Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), chapters 19 and 22.
- ¹⁰ “Oh, Freedom!,” band 6 of *Freedom Songs: Selma, Alabama. A Documentary Recording by Carl Benkert*. Folkways Records FH 5594, 1965, 33 1/3 rpm.
- ¹¹ Beasley, quoted in Jenny Schlenzka, “Shaking the Museum: Kevin Beasley,” *Mousse* 41 (December 2013–January 2014): 169.
- ¹² Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 15.
- ¹³ Beasley, quoted in Schlenzka, “Shaking the Museum,” 169.
- ¹⁴ Jlin, quoted in Ann-Derrick Gaillot, “For Jlin, the Only Way Is Up,” *Fader* (May 2, 2017).
- ¹⁵ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* [1947] (New York: Random House, 1995), 581.

Christopher Y. Lew, Nancy and Fred Poses Curator, The Whitney Museum of American Art

Christopher Y. Lew’s essay, published on the occasion of the exhibition *Kevin Beasley: A View of a Landscape* (December 15, 2018 – March 10, 2019) at The Whitney Museum of American Art, is reprinted with the generous permission of the author and The Whitney Museum of American Art.

**1 /On
Sound**

CLOSE YOUR EYES

/JULIANA HUXTABLE

A MAN PASSES YOU ON THE TRAIN AND G L A R E S ^{AT YOU}
HIS FACE BEGINS BENEVOLENTLY AND QUICKLY
TURNS INTO DISGUST

HE LOOKS AT
YOUR NECK

YOU, IMMEDIATELY!
WANT TO DISAPPEAR, BUT YOU DON'T
...CANT REALLY

HE REACHES IN AND GRABS A ROACH
YOU DIDN'T NOTICE
TRAVERSING THE WIDTH OF
YOUR ADAMS APPLE

REACH IN,
INSTEAD OF WANTING TO DISAPPEAR
IMAGINE THAT IT'S THE MOST EXOTIC TRAIT ON A
RARE BIRD OF A MODEL

THE SOVIET SATELLITES HAVE BILLOWING BROWS
THE ETHIOPAINS HAVE A MELANGE OF ARABIC AND AFRICAN
THE SAMOANS HAVE A SONOROUS FORTITUDE IN STANCE
LOW LYING

THE SENEGALESE HAVE SUCH
'RICH BLACK THAT WOULD PEEL [BACK] LIKE A PLUM,
IF SNAGGED'
MS. FLOWERS
BUT

YOU,
OH SWEET ONE,
A PENDANT CHOKER; DANGLING FROM THE SOFTEST
JUVENESCENCE

YOU,
12 AGAIN EVERY DAY OR EVERY-OTHER WEEK
85 AND WISE AT SUNSET
YOU,
SWEATING NECTAR
MY ^{STRANGE} FRUIT

YOU,
NURSING TROPICAL SUNBLEACHED HAIRS OF A YOUNG KIWI
MY ^{RIPENING} FRUIT

LETS KNOW THAT THIS FRUIT IS INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE
LOT

G R E E E N SWEET.
...ESCAPING ENVY
...RIPENING AS IT LULLS TO

SWEET
TOXIC
FUZZY
PAP

THE TICKLES AGAINST THE FACE OF THE ONE YOU

KISS KISS
KISS KISS
KISS KISS

NOTHING OR EVERYTHING
THEY ENCROACH IN ON YOU
YOU WANT TO DISAPPEAR. REALIZE THAT YOU ARE WHAT THEY
CAN EXACT ON YOU...

...BROKEN LESIONS
...A SPLIT
//A TEAR IN CAPILLARIES
YOU ARE THE SPLITTING

SAVORY TWIZZERLS POP!
GUSHER BLOOD DRIBBLE-BOUNCE-JUMPS
SUBMERGES

RUPTURE!!!
STILL IMPRISONED,
NOT FUGITIVE

*YOU ARE THE POOL UNDERNEATH THE SKIN
TRAPPED BLOOD WITHIN SURFACE*

RED, FINALLY THEN BLUE

SUCCESSIVE LAYERS OF DEAD SKIN BLUNTS NERVES
STRETCHED THIN IN VERUCA SALT BLUE BLOOD JUICE SWELLING
BRINGING IT CLOSER TO THE TUBE LIGHTS OF PUBLIC
TRANSPORTATION
TO OXYGEN, BUT FINALLY
NEVER
FREE
YOU ARE THE GREEN WORKING WITH HEMOGLOBIN
BUT YOU ARE DEFINITELY NOT
YELLOW OR BROWN

YOU ARE ALWAYS BITTER, CHEWABLE LICORICE

IN A BAG WITH OTHERS, THE DAYLIGHT WHITE LIGHT OF THE
CANDY STORE HINTING AT BROWNS, CUTS THROUGH BUT
NEVER ENOUGH
FOR OTHERS TO REALIZE...
NOT,
INSECT IN AMBER,
NOR TOURMALINE POLISHED SAFEGUARDING
STACKED TO DISGUISE ;
A SEA OF SEE-THROUGH SERIAL CASTOR CHARRED BROWN

LICORICE IS BLACK, AND SO ARE YOU
LICORICE
IS BLACK
AND SO ARE...

YOU,
ARE THE LACTIC ACID
TURNING YOUR MUSCLES INTO TWEAKERS; QUENCHING,
RELEASING, HEATING
YOU ARE THE SWEAT GLANDS TRYING WITH ALL THE POWER
THEY HAVE TO
NOT.
DROP.
EVERYTHING THEY HAVE
AND RUN

SCREAMING SO LOUDLY ITS DISGUSTING
CRUSTED FOAM IN THE CORNERS SLIDES OUT WITH ERUPTING
BUBBLED SALIVA
SPILLING ACROSS THE UGLY LINES OF DESPERATION
YOU ARE THE CONTEMPLATION OF THE FIGURE NEXT TO YOU,
UNLIKE YOU BUT CLOSE ENOUGH TO KNOW
IT COULD BE THEM

YOU ARE THE FLUCTUATION BETWEEN YOUR SISTER'S PROXIMITY
ON THE SAME BENCH
THE WORRIED GLANCES SHE GAVE YOU AND
THE DISTANCE FROM HER SILENCE NOW

THE WOMAN ACROSS FROM YOU WHOSE EYES MEET YOURS
DIRECTLY, PARALYZED IN INACTION, BUT HER EYES ARE ALL
YOU HAVE
SAVE THE HYPOTHETICAL ALLIES WAITING AT THE NEXT STOP
THE HERO VIRTUOUSLY WAITING TO TAKE THE FIRST BLOW

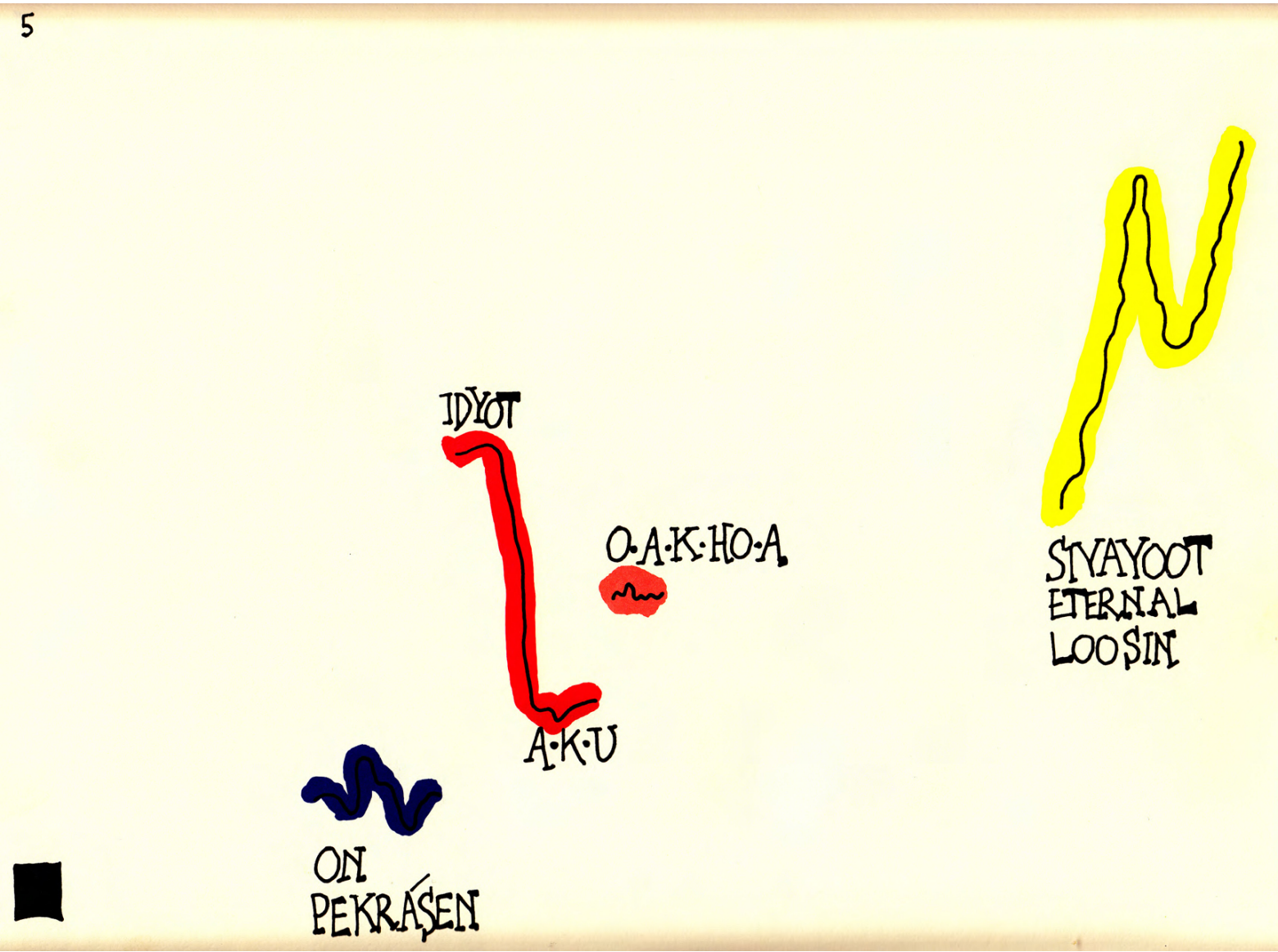
*YOU KNOW THEY ARE THERE! YOU KNOW IT!
YOU KNOW THEY ARE THERE! YOU KNOW IT!,
YOU KNOW THEY ARE THERE
YOU KNOW IT.*

AT LEAST AS MUCH AS YOU ARE HERE TO THEM ...

NO TRAIN IS EMPTY AND NO ATOM IS FULL
NO TRAIN IS EMPTY AND NO ATOM IS FULL

ARIA

/JOHN CAGE



Copyright (c) 1960 by Henmar Press, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corp.

D'APPRIMA
TOUJOURS EST-IL
QUE CE MOT D'UNE
LANGUE HUMAINE
G.L.N.T.B

K.A.S



LEZVOV

T.O

A

Pleasures of Rebellion

/INGRID LAFLOUR

People ask how might we “meet in the middle,” as though this represents a safe, neutral and civilized space. This American fetishization of the moral middle is a misguided and dangerous cultural impulse.

What is halfway between moral and immoral? -Tayari Jones¹

On July 23, 1967, Detroit police raided partygoers who were celebrating the return of two soldiers from the Vietnam War at the United Community League for Civic Action in the Virginia Park neighborhood of Detroit, Michigan. Tensions were already high from institutional racism, battling the Detroit police, housing discrimination, and lack of employment opportunities. But the police brutality, in particular, had worn on Black souls. The Big Four of the police force was created because the Black population was growing and they needed to be controlled. Their tight grip created a push-back that eventually resulted in forty-three people dying, over a thousand injured, and thousands of buildings destroyed during five hot summer nights.

When talking about the 1967 rebellion, no one discusses who won. Perhaps because the rebellion continues, it has never ended. I entitled this sound exhibition *Pleasures of Rebellion* to highlight the unnecessary need for civility in a time of absurdity and the satisfaction of actually acting on one’s beliefs. In Detroit, we are grappling with the same issues that prompted the rebellion in 1967. In fact, it was reported in 2017 on the 50th anniversary of the rebellion, that Black Americans remain challenged by the same socio-economic disparities that were present in 1967. That is an indication the rebellion was not successful. However, if you ask the children of the rebellion, those born after 1967 before the mid-1980s, they may disagree. It can be argued that the rebellion created an imperfect utopia of

Blackness that we still long for and fight for. The nostalgia of that era has even infected those who visit or are new to Detroit. They begin to join the fight for the imaginary utopia of long ago. There is a yearning to have that memory of Black bliss come alive, transform itself, grow and expand. But it won’t.

As Detroit faces water shut-offs instituted by the city government, an overwhelming poverty rate, school closings, and more, Detroiters yell at the top of their lungs for policies they desire, but the requests land on deaf ears. The legacy of continuous disrespect and harm instituted by city government only fosters frustration, resentment and ultimately anger as it did in 1967. However, it was that particular rebellion that gave birth to the local hero Mayor Coleman A. Young, a former Tuskegee Airman and the first Black mayor of Detroit. Young was unafraid of facing the oppressive forces ruling Detroit at that time. Civility was not in his repertoire. Respectability politics did not exist for this man. There was no moral middle with Mayor Young, and should there have been? If people are being harassed, violated and killed because of the bodies they occupy, where is the civility in that? What is the moral middle within the prison of oppression?

When Mayor Young took office in 1974 the policing strategy called S.T.R.E.S.S. (Stop The Robberies Enjoy Safe Streets) was in place trying to continue the legacy of the Big Four, a police group which focused on targeting and brutalizing Black bodies. One of his first acts as mayor was to shut down S.T.R.E.S.S. and to reform the police

department. I was born into the Detroit that Mayor Young built, thankfully. It was glorious. Imperfect and wondrous. A safe place for a little Black girl to establish a sense of self through the lens of being unapologetically Black. This was the case for most children of the rebellion.

We are moving deeper into the 21st century with the level of racial violence steadily increasing because the president, a self- declared nationalist, loves stoking the fires. The 1967 rebellion serves as a reminder of what happens when the fire is stoked for too long. It also beckons upon lessons learned from rebelling. History of the 1967 rebellion is expansive holding the memories of pain, pride, and collective vision. The rage from that summer carved a new direction for Detroit nd we are still feeling the aftershock.

Sound artists Sadie Woods, Sterling Toles and Reuben Telushkin build upon the consequential wave generated by the 1967 rebellion by taking us on an aural journey of the past, present, and future. It is within the imaginary that the sounds help us come to terms with what happened, what is happening now and what is to come. Their sound journeys, each uniquely prepare us to recognize that rebelling can be useful, messy, violent, but ultimately healing.

1. Tayari Jones, "There's Nothing Virtuous About Finding Common Ground," *Time* (October 25, 2018). Accessed November 09, 2018. <http://time.com/5434381/tayari-jones-moral-middle-myth/>.

DETROIT 1967 –
THE DIVISION OF
LABOR
/MARSHA MUSIC

My late father, Joe Von Battle, had a record shop that was destroyed in the '67 Rebellion. In his profound loss and accelerating alcoholism, he was a broken man, often literally insane from drink. Our home in Highland Park, a tiny, lush city-within-the-city of Detroit, virtually rocked on its foundation with the mayhem within.

In 1968, as I began high school, a Black labor radical named General Baker was working at Dodge Main, a massive industrial complex in Hamtramck (the other city-within-the-city of Detroit), with other Black workers in the lowest paid, dirtiest, and most dangerous jobs.

There had been a growing intolerance by many Black workers for both the flagrant discrimination practiced by the auto companies, and the measured response - or no response at all, as far as Baker was concerned - by much of the UAW leadership. A year after the upheaval in '67, Dodge Main workers mounted a wildcat strike, sanctioned by neither management nor the union; with Black workers facing off against not just the White owners and management at Chrysler, but the union leadership as well – White *and* Black.

In the aftermath, the workers on the wildcat strike were discharged, and when Baker and a co-worker were not rehired, he, Ron March, Chuck Wooten, and a band of

Black workers formed DRUM – Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement. DRUM was conceived in the heat of the '67 Rebellion and - after a year long gestation of increased Black worker frustration and militancy - was born in the Dodge Main strike of July '68.

In addition to General Baker, Ron March and workers at the plant, activists such as Kenneth Cockrel Sr., Mike Hamlin, Luke Tripp, John Watson, John Williams, Chuck Wooten, and others coalesced at a house a block away from my high school, on the corner of Cortland and Third, and I'd listen to them tell their stories. They talked about the extreme heat and working conditions at the plants, and General Baker led meetings, ran printing presses, and told tales of Detroit factory life. With my own father failing in despair, Baker became my surrogate father - though I didn't realize his role until I was good and grown.

I was fourteen years old in that year after the '67 Rebellion; I hung around the office/house with other students and folks from the plant, and, more than once, down through the years, General would tell how during the rebellion in Detroit the year before, auto factory employees, along with police and hospital personnel, were among the few Blacks allowed to pass police checkpoints in order to go to and from home on the streets of Detroit, after the curfew imposed on the city during the days of martial law.

This was a startling real-life affirmation of all that Baker had theoretically known, a visible confirmation of his ideas about the importance of Black labor in the auto and truck plants of Detroit. It informed his thinking a year later, in 1968, while in the midst of the wildcat strike over working conditions at Dodge Main, where DRUM was formed.

The unrest in the streets in '67 was an explosive resistance to the discrimination and abusive policing that was endemic in the majority White city – but it also reflected a deep schism in Black Detroit. The developing fissure was signaled by the eruption at Northern High School, in 1966. Black students, weary of inequality and bold-faced discrimination by the school board, rejecting the trepidation of most of their parents and the admonishments of the school's "Negro Leadership," walked out of school in an unprecedented rebellion, enlisting help in setting up a ground-breaking Freedom School in a nearby church.

That same year, protests against police brutality by young people on Kercheval Ave. on Detroit's East Side escalated into an intense, one-day rebellion that was a precursor to '67, and came to be called the Kercheval Mini-Riot. Here too, these young people - including General Baker - were rejecting not just the status quo, but the restraints of older, traditional Black leadership - in a rending of the fabric

of Detroit's traditional social activism. Many community organizations and coalitions of Black self-determination emerged in the months directly following the '67 Rebellion, and I became involved in the movement of Black Students - even in the exemplary schools of Highland Park, there was systematic discrimination.

During and after '67's Rebellion, many Blacks from the higher paid, more stable sections of Detroit's working class, and the city's burgeoning professionals, expressed anger and open contempt towards the looting and turmoil in the street. Divisions among blacks in this country are not new, from separations between the house and field enslaved; to differences articulated by Du Bois and Washington, to tactics enlisted on the ground in the Civil Rights Movement, but discounted by many in the political and religious leadership; to the demonstrative founders of the early "sanctified" church, ridiculed by followers of mannered, formal black Protestantism.

Detroit's Black community - segregated as it was over the decades - in old Black Bottom, the old West Side, Conant Gardens and other enclaves, had been compelled to act as a monolith, in a united front against segregation and discrimination. The destruction of Black Bottom was two decades before 1967; the destruction of Hastings St.,

just seven years prior to the unrest. The thousands who were dislocated as a result of the razing of these areas were dispersed, yet segregation limited the places to which Blacks could move; so that decades-long social formations within the new neighborhoods remained relatively the same.

The unfair treatment of Blacks in segregation was effective glue, holding the layers of community together, differences kept "within the family." The explosion of the street-born wrath of 1967 was untethered from the legalist strategies of the NAACP, the UAW, and the vestiges of the cotillion ball/brown paper bag culture (where one's skin-tones, relative to same, determined admittance to upper class Black events and social activities). A contemporary aphorism, suggesting a positive by-product of segregation, "we used to look out for one another when we had to live together," is a common admonishment for a lack of harmony and engagement - often across classes - within the Black community today.

There were notable exceptions to this class division - in the professional class, Judge George Crockett, attorney brothers Milton and Richard Henry and later, Kenneth V. Cockrel and others, distinguished themselves by not turning away from battles regarded as unsavory by the Black upper strata.

It is often said that - although there were incidents of racial encounters and assaults - the '67 Rebellion was not a "race riot," i.e., Blacks against Whites; race conflict was not the general character of the unrest. In fact, there were many anecdotal accounts of Whites engaged in looting and street fighting, alongside their Black neighbors, and I remember eyewitness reports to that end during those turbulent days, from relatives and family friends on the front lines. Later, television and newspaper reports gave little coverage to this spontaneous accord - far be it that Whites be identified as fellow mutineers. The role of Whites *with* Blacks during the rebellion was diminished in mainstream post '67 narratives - though many witnesses today remember it well. There are also many stories of Blacks protecting Whites from harm during the turmoil.

It is a common truism that the Rebellion was an expression of the "have-nots against the haves," what with many Whites looting alongside Blacks, and many Blacks looting not just White, but many Black businesses. However, make no mistake - it was not an uprising of the poor - for in Detroit in 1967, the Black working class was doing increasingly well, despite impediments due to discrimination. Many of the looters were working folk; but those at the bottom of Detroit's economic and social rungs were trapped in lower paying jobs, subject to destabilizing, periodic unemployment; with a tantalizing, but unreachable carrot of equal opportunity dangling in view.

Many - Black and White - opine derisively about how Black people “burned down their own neighborhoods,” but as a practical matter, Blacks actually owned few commercial properties in the neighborhoods where they lived; most rented from White and Jewish owners who often lived outside the city. Moreover, there is - even today - deep suspicion among some in the community that the police themselves ignited buildings. The venerable Ed Vaughn, a former state senator and former owner of a Black nationalist bookstore, publically relates the story of when - at the urging of Mayor Cavanagh - he reported the suspicious burning of his bookstore to the police. They laughed, and threatened to burn it again - and the shop was, in fact, torched the next day.

There was little evidence that residents literally set their own homes on fire, but much anecdotal recounting of the inability - or even refusal - of authorities to contain the infernos in the commercial areas, that resulted in the ancillary residential destruction. A friend, now a Detroit business owner, says that the homes on the side-street on which the family lived - the massive houses and huge, brick, two-family flats of the West Side - began burning, but a police officer told the shocked crowd, “Let ’em burn!”

The homes *burned seven houses deep*, east of 12th street.

Working-class Blacks often found themselves heaving against the mainstream Black leadership of the traditional civil rights organizations that stood between them and discriminatory powers in Detroit. The infamous photos of looters and protestors loudly deriding a young Congressman John Conyers’ futile attempt - standing atop a car - to convince the crowds to go home, is a symbolic case in point. His bullhorn-wielding effort to keep the peace was pilloried by the people in the streets during those tense moments, and ridiculed by some grassroots folks for years (though more recent history has been kinder to his effort).

Such a demonstration was a signal - the declaration of an upheaval against traditional Black leadership. This schism was in its nascent, volatile form in 1966, during the Northern Student Movement, escalated during The Kercheval Incident, and reached its nadir on 12th Street in ’67. As the rift grew wider, the contradictions reached completion by the actual leaving of the city by much of the Black middle class.

There is an oft-repeated trope that “all the Whites left Detroit after ’67.” This is a deeply embedded fallacy, as Whites had been leaving the city in droves since after World War II - driven out with the movement of industry, discriminatory government policies and real estate blockbusting. With the movement out of the city by Whites, and the post-Rebellion loosening of the strictures of segregation in some areas, *contrary to the common narrative of “White Flight,” the most significant post-1967 departure was not of Whites, but of Black middle-class Detroiters.*

Soon - in the population and tax revenue-challenged municipality - educational decline, crime, and drugs drove more blacks across 8 Mile. In another round of migration in the 1980’s, many blacks found that they were driven to the inner-ring suburbs by spatial, racial limitations that disallowed them from moving into the remaining majority White communities within Detroit.

The irrevocable split of Detroit’s Black community into overtly discordant and even acrimonious classes is a division that expresses itself today. The chaotic, unorganized unrest in ’67 – marked by *rioting within the*

rebellion, as I say – was the public revelation of the chasm between classes; the parting of a Black Detroit Red Sea. As the working and unemployed folks in the streets hurled themselves against the admonishments of Black leaders, contempt and even animus towards the Black masses was publically voiced by the middle and upper classes during - and long after - the conflict.

In the aftermath of the Rebellion and for these decades afterwards, there developed an open identification of many middle and upper-class Blacks (and even working folks) with the White Detroit establishment, in its condemnation of the unrest and the people who wrought it; there was often great shame expressed about the destruction that the unrest visited upon the community (with little distinction between what was alleged to be wrought by the looters and that which may have been caused by authorities). Even today - among not just Whites, but many Blacks as well – there is a vociferous refusal to acknowledge any social causes of the unrest, and an adamant insistence that the ’67 unrest was no “Rebellion,” only a criminal element engaged in a senseless “riot.”

I have heard it said that before something can unite it must be divided, the knowledge of that division a precursor for discerning points of unity – within and across race and class lines. General Baker died (in 2015), knowing that this prerequisite had been met; the affirmation of the importance of Detroit workers in '67 when they, raw and unruly, took to the streets. A year later, at the Hamtramck plant, DRUM burst from the loins of that Rebellion. With 1967, Detroit's Black community announced a formal separation with itself.

The post '67 Rebellion period brought more intense activism - to meet the intense reprisals from especially police - a mock trial, "The People's Tribunal," was convened by activist Dan Aldridge and Lonnie Peeks, and held in the community, an examination of the Algiers Motel murders, with Rosa Parks as a juror among others. Opposition to inequality and abusive policing sparked the 1974 election of Mayor Coleman A. Young, and there was a loosening of the restrictions that had kept Blacks on the bottom of the auto industry – and union leadership.

Many White and Black civic leaders united immediately post-Rebellion, in a "rebuilding" refrain, condemning '67's destruction and violence; though there was little rebuilding of the destroyed areas - many of which remain vacant and empty today.

A stratum of Black leadership surfaced - entrepreneurs, upper level civic professionals, church leaders, etc. - disparaging the Rebellion, and collaborating in a phalanx of "New Detroit" initiatives, acting as apologizers for and condemners of, the violence. This layer of Detroit leadership likewise functioned as soothsayers of a sort - warning of turbulence and repeats of the unrest; helping to usher in monies distributed for programs ruefully known as "riot insurance." There was fear in the inner sanctums of White spaces of power, of the possibility of repeat of the conflagration; with layers of community jobs, and public and private organizational positions, designed to assuage the fearful brows of industry, retail and civic titans.

Today, in 2017, the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Rebellion in Detroit has provoked many questions regarding the

possibility of such a conflagration happening again. This is not the same Detroit as in those years, but in many ways, the disparities are much worse than they were then - a city that, at the time, was on the cusp of its status as the greatest middle-class haven for Blacks in the country.

In contemporary Detroit, with unprecedented numbers of water shutoffs, foreclosures, and a decimated school system, and an economically challenged community surrounding more affluent pockets and a bright and shiny Downtown, the possibility of another rebellion in some form is troubling to many. Especially with the leaving of the city of much of the Black middle class, and few moving back to replace them, the need for diversity expressed by some in high places is doubtless not just a desire for equality, but for that comfortable layer of Black Detroiters to act as seers, buffers - and protection from the have-nots.

In today's Detroit, new public and private organizations may replicate this form of social shield. But the chasm between today's haves and have-nots is greater in a

way that would have been unthinkable in the Detroit of '67. The real protection against another mass Rebellion is not the palliatives of mid-level leadership, but a real confrontation with systemic problems - to start, a revisiting of causes addressed by the post-Rebellion Kerner report, commissioned by President Lyndon B. Johnson - never acted upon then, and unaddressed, even today.

The rupture in the body of Detroit Black leadership - exemplified by the Northern High students, the Kercheval youth, the rebels of '67 and the activists that emerged pre- and post-Rebellion - may finally be understood as a precursor to a greater level of unity, as new generations examine the complex role of class and race in Detroit.

Marsha Music, 9.4.2017

4 /Public Engagment

ANOTHER CITY

/FRANCESCA BERARDI

Trash, pick it up, don't throw my life away.

New York Dolls



/ On Sound

The word “waste” comes from the Latin “vastus,” meaning uninhabited or desolate, similar to the term “vanus,” vacant, empty. Waste is therefore recognized as being useless, negative – i.e., it is the death of places and things, their cadaver. An abandoned building is waste, even if homeless men are using it as a shelter or adventurous children as a place to play. An empty beer bottle is waste, even if it’s perfectly intact.

I spent the past year working with people who make their living picking up bottles and cans on the streets of New York. They call themselves canners or lateros, depending on the language they speak. They push their carts overflowing with waste for miles, day and night, in order to redeem every piece for five cents.

One Saturday evening in early October I followed a Mexican couple in an area in Brooklyn where there is an exceptional number of bars. I waited with them for the last club to close at

five in the morning. Then I fell asleep in their car, which they use as temporary storage for their collection while they continued working until dawn.

They both migrated to the US about 30 years ago. They’re in their late forties, they pay rent, have six kids - only one in common, the others with different partners - and two grandchildren. They work seven days a week, whatever the weather, sometimes sleeping not more than four or five hours. They make about \$ 40,000 a year, a figure definitely above average among canners. For them the city is an endless treasure trove that’s invisible to most people.

The physical job of picking up cans and bottles makes them think of their work on a farm in the State of Puebla when they were kids. Canners, like farmers, don’t allow themselves to take time off for vacations or sick leave because their land, or turf, has



got to be constantly taken care of. It is especially important for canners to establish and care for a geography of places and relationships with people who can give them regular access to the largest amount of recyclables, like those who work in restaurant kitchens or the superintendents of buildings with a significant number of apartments. In order to maintain these relationships, they often carry little gifts such as a piece of “queso” or a box of cookies. The two Mexicans I spent the night with, before working on the street, had a more conventional job – she in a factory, he as a delivery man – but they weren’t earning enough to make ends meet.

What makes canning so compelling to many disadvantaged people is that the amount of money they can make depends on the effort they put into it - and by effort I mean both the hours of work and striving to find new and effective strategies. More importantly, there is no exploitation and no rude bosses to deal with.

Some canners are so into their activity that they become obsessed. This is the case of a jazz musician in his late fifties,

raised in the Bronx, and tired of not having a stable income. Since he began canning, he’s in better shape and more in control of his finances. The downside, he says - apart from doing a job that’s harsh and extremely tiring - is that when he goes out on dates, he gets distracted by cans and bottles he sees on the streets, instead of focusing on the woman at his side.

Some people become canners because they feel they have no choice, like those who have lost their job due to an injury, or feel they’re not competitive on the job market because of an addiction. Some, for example, use the street not only as a source of income but also as a place to live. One of the canners I met – a man of an indefinable age, but definitely too young to have only two teeth left – lives in a tent that he moves throughout Brooklyn, camping in vacant lots or work sites; another lives with his ten-year long crack addiction in a trailer put together with sheets of aluminum, parked smack in the center of Bushwick. It looks from the outside like a spaceship out of a cartoon by Hayao Miyazaki. Inside is a bed, several notebooks where he jots down his thoughts, often dedicated to cats or to gods, and a small TV that’s connected to an electric outlet in the parking lot. During the coldest months of winter, he looks for a place in one of the city’s shelters.

The New York of canners focuses on the dark corners of the streets rather than the spires of the skyscrapers. It is a land of the poor, hard-working, and free. Their economy is defined as informal, but in actual fact it takes on very precise shapes, simply not controlled. It takes place in basements, in back lots, on the sides of streets, in vacant lots, in places of no interest to anyone which for this very reason become areas where it’s possible to exercise a form of freedom that is different from the one offered in public spaces devoted to specific uses and activities.

Freedom

“Freedom is no fear,” Nina Simone sang.

The urbanist Kevin Lynch has offered a powerful analysis of the vital role of a city’s marginal and abandoned spaces. “An ugly, polluted, yet tolerant place [...] these urban remnants are also freer places, where one is momentarily relieved of

the pressures of status, power, explicit purpose, and strict control,” Lynch wrote in his last book Wasting Away completed and published posthumously by one of his pupils, Michael Southworth, now Professor emeritus at UC Berkeley College of Environmental Design.¹ In Wasting Away, Lynch reflects on our relationship with the notion of waste and its impact on the city. His basic idea, as Southworth explains in the introduction, is that decline, decadence, and waste are a necessary part of life and growth: we must learn to value these things and manage them well. In order to do so, Lynch maintains, we must reflect on a very simple daily mechanism that concerns all of us. Life is a continual accumulation and disposal: every day we discard things that we believe are useless, we turn them, arbitrarily, into waste which once thrown into some container or hidden corner disappears from view and therefore, as far as we are concerned, no longer exists. And the farther away it is buried the better off we are, because although our existence also depends on waste, we don’t want to have anything to do with it. Those things horrify us in the same way abandoned spaces excite a feeling of fear.

All the canners I worked with spoke about how difficult it was in the beginning to live with that feeling of disgust when digging in other people’s waste; also, the feeling of shame at doing this in public, along with the fear of the streets at the most unthinkable hours and in the darkest corners, especially on the part of the women. One of their biggest challenges is to overcome these feelings, but they eventually do, establishing a new relationship with the city and its waste. A freer one.

They feel that not only is picking up bottles and cans no reason to be ashamed but that it can be something to be proud of. They manage to survive in a city, New York, with one of the highest costs of living in the world, giving things that someone else declared defunct a second life. Canners see these things (I started imagining them with a third eye, like the Spanish illustrator Ricardo Cavolo’s characters), then collect them in the state of placelessness that these things fallen into after being abandoned, and give them a new place. David Koukal, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Detroit Mercy, interprets the placelessness of litter as lack of care: “Litter is that which appears as placeless in a lived world through the lack of care.”



At the moment when canners pick up a bottle, they care for it.

Nature and the artificial time of history

Dai diamanti non nasce niente, dal letame nascono i fior
(From diamonds nothing is born, from manure flowers grow)

Fabrizio De Andrè

Traditionally, waste is hidden, like the dust under the carpets in a house, on a city’s outskirts Donald Trump would call – has already called – “shitholes.” But more and more we are seeing people who care for the waste even in the heart of the urban context. The activity of canning in Manhattan – just as in the centers of other metropolises – is also made possible by the fact that while cities grow and expand their limits, city centers are transformed, often experiencing periods of abandon. Lynch writes: “Now, as the region continues to expand, wastelands reappear at the city center, in the form of vacant lots, boarded housing, junked cars, and exhausted slums.”² In processes of transformation such as this, nature plays an essential role. Just as soon as a place or an object stops being cared for by dwellers, nature displays its strength, both frightening and reassuring at the same time. Slowly but surely, but with determination, it takes over the abandoned space and lives in, embraces, the ruins, continuing to give them a time (in this sense, the abandoned object is both timeless as well as placeless). The presence of nature, as well as that of the stray and wild animals that roam there, reminds us that the





classifications and dichotomies we use to qualify the objects and the spaces we live in – useful/useless, lived in/abandoned, active/dead – are a mental constriction that denies, according to Lynch, “continuous flow and gradation.”³ This is one of the reasons why cities with a significant presence of uncultivated green spaces – as in the case of Detroit – can look so attractive to outsiders. The time of nature growing in and occupying urban spaces without permission creates a feeling of calm but also of vital tension. It represents a challenge, a form of resistance to the mainstream narrative that synthesizes the life of a post-industrial city in phases – an extraordinary rise, a tragic decline, and then a controversial rebirth – set in motion by tragedies or other upturns that, depending on how they are defined, tell different stories.

The presence of spontaneous nature wakes us up to the fact that Detroit wasn’t born with the automobile factories. It has always been there. It never died. It wasn’t born again ten years ago. Its so-called abandoned spaces have always been used in one way or another or traversed by someone. By a group of kids for play, by a homeless person for sleeping, or by an artist for creating.

In Detroit the artist Scott Hocking built his practice on ruins. His work is an non-sacred monument not only to abandoned places and objects, or those that have never been used, but to forgotten time as well - what is always flowing, every day, at the same speed, initiating processes of change, and which simply continues. Scott’s biography itself shows that his relationship with waste spaces and objects did not begin with his deliberate work as an artist, for in his childhood, Scott, too, was a canner. Here he is in his own words:

At some point around 10 years old - or perhaps I was 9 or 11 - I became obsessed with collecting returnable cans and bottles for money. I'd call it my first paying job. My father, a poor-man's jack of all trades, would use me as his assistant on plenty of mechanical and carpentry jobs, but I don't remember ever seeing a dime. He would drink quart-sized glass bottles of Mountain Dew, a lime-flavored soda packed with caffeine, which they sold in cartons of 8 at the time. He also had a complete upper set of false teeth, so I guess drinking quarts of sugar-water didn't harm him much. Pop bottles were

everywhere when I was a kid, and big glass bottles of soda and beer[s] were easy to find. Probably my first act of "collecting" was bottle caps: I would find the metal caps of bottled sodas on the ground, and if it was a brand I didn't have yet, I'd add it to my collection - which was a wooden board with dozens of bottle caps nailed to it. I remember pounding nails right through the center of the caps, kind of ruining the logo of that brand, but that must not have been my childhood priority. Collecting caps led to collecting whole bottles, with their individual glass shapes and styles. But money must have entered my mind eventually, because, just like those 8-packs of Mountain Dew we racked up and returned for cash, I started to see all the discarded bottles and cans laying around town as dollar signs. I can still remember the rush of finding a big stash of "empties." Michigan has a 10¢ deposit for returnables, so it didn't take long to recover 1 dollar, maybe even 5 dollars in empties - that's a lot of cash for a kid back then! I would ride around the neighborhood on my BMX, looking in ditches, trash cans, dumpsters, wherever. Plastic grocery bags would hang from my handlebars as I rode around, and sometimes I'd collect more plastic bags out of the trash if I needed them. Sugary drink cans and bottles were often covered in ants in some trash can, and empty beers had that stale beer smell, something I got used to years before ever drinking one. I'd shake everything out before putting them in my plastic bags, but those bags were sticky as hell and smelled disgusting by the end. At the height of my empty-collecting obsession, I asked my stepmother to wake me up at dawn everyday, so that I could get on my bike and beat all the old retired men to the spoils - my only real competitors. Along with becoming my first habitual collecting, gathering empties also led to my first theft: I was riding on the hunt for bottles, when I saw a few 6-packs of empties in a garage - I circled around and looked for any witnesses, before snagging a few of the beer bottles out of the cartons. I never really did this kind of thing again - felt too guilty I guess - but a year or so later, when I'd gotten older and more brazen in my illegal activities, I concocted a more elaborate plan to capitalize on empties: Sneak out of my home in the middle of the night, hike down the railroad at the end of my street and hop the fence behind the 7-Up soda bottling plant, remove 3 large, clear plastic bags full of already-returned 7-Up brand empty cans and plastic bottles that sat in giant dumpsters, and throw them back over the fence. I remember hauling

them back to my garage in the wee hours, and surveying how much money in ten-cent ant-covered cans I'd acquired. Sadly, when I brought them to the liquor store the next day, the clerk recognized the giant clear plastic bags and knew they had been stolen - a problem I wouldn't have had with today’s self-service can-crushing machines. My empty collecting slowed down as I got older, but I'd still do it for extra cash now and then. Even when I was broke while in college, I would occasionally walk around the campus at night, collecting all the empties. And one of my earliest art installations was a piece where I walked about Detroit, collecting empty liquor bottles - which were everywhere, because unlike soda and beer, liquor containers had no deposit, no value. I collected thousands of liquor bottles for that project - not nearly as profitable as my BMX bagging days, but my hands ended up just as dirty and disgusting, ha...



1. Kevin Lynch, *Wasting Away*, ed. Michael Southworth (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990).
2. Lynch, *Wasting Away*, 112.
3. Lynch, *Wasting Away*, 40.

The pictures in this essay are visual notes taken with an old iPhone between the Fall of 2017 and the Summer of 2018, while working with a group of canners who are part of the Sure We Can community in Bushwick, Brooklyn (www.surewecan.org).

EXTERNALIZE,
EXTRACT,
CO-OPT,
REPEAT

/Kate Levy, Shanna Merola, and Halima Cassells



Pure Gas Station, Detroit, 2015

There are two main ways a community can be exploited by private industry: externalized costs and wealth extraction. An *externalized* cost means that the costs of producing any given commodity are not accounted for in the costs of the product, nor are they taken as a loss by the company that produces the good. These costs, then, are not reflected on the balance sheets of producers. They are simply externalized to other people and communities.

For example, the global price of Iowa-grown soybeans and corn cannot account for the costs to treat nitrate runoff downstream, so the Des Moines Water Department must foot the bill instead, likewise, the market price of fish does not account for the costs to the fishing economy of New Orleans when inadequately processed nitrate pollution travels via the Mississippi into the Gulf of

Mexico, causing a hypoxic die-off where all aquatic life within a 400-mile area are exterminated.

In Kentucky, for example, coal mining has sucked the groundwater from its basin in the process drying out - exhausting - wells that required massive public investment in water infrastructure - a burden that local governments cannot shoulder, given inadequate coal tax revenues. These unaccounted costs have led to water contamination across Appalachia. Another example:

Across Detroit, we shoulder externalized costs, too - whether through the health costs of air pollution caused by incinerating the suburbs' trash, refining oil in 48207, or decreasing property values when the company US Ecology expands its operations on the east side in order to store radioactive waste.



Surveillance Tower, "Fight for 15 Protest", Detroit, MI, 2014



Often, the private entities involved in externalizing costs have a single mission: to maximize shareholder value, rather than cultivate sustainable businesses. Thus, there is a real incentive to externalize the costs of a higher profit margin on the communities these industries call home.

Wealth extraction, on the other hand, is when an entity, often (though not always) those that deal directly in financial transactions, detects a vulnerable population, and profits from that vulnerability. Wealth extraction goes way past simply earning a profit by meeting a person's needs or desires by providing a product. Instead, the extractive



Left: Michigan Coalition Against Tar Sands Action, 2014. Right: Enbridge Line 5 Tar Sands/Petroleum Pipeline Marker, MI, 2014

entity makes money (often increasingly) because the community cannot access the good or service. Usually this lack of access is created by an external circumstance. Car insurance redlining, subprime loans, land contracts, and rental furniture are examples of wealth extraction based on black Detroiters' historic lack of access to fair credit. Entire cities have been the victim of this type of extraction. A common manifestation is through the privatization of municipal water departments, unfair tax abatement deals, or, as a result of austerity, an over-reliance on private contractors to handle operations traditionally undertaken by trained city staff. Privatization is a process that has been proven, across the US, to increase costs and decrease quality of drinking water.



Republican National Convention, Cleveland, OH, 2016

In 2012, Detroit’s Water and Sewerage Department paid \$500 million in interest rate swap termination fees after they desperately tried to borrow beyond their debt limits following massive state revenue cuts. The result: Detroit residents paid higher and higher water bills. Thousands of Detroiters simply couldn’t pay - their water was promptly disconnected by a team of private contractors. Others paid, resented their neighbors, until they, too, couldn’t pay, and their water was also disconnected. These shutoffs compounded the exodus of long-term African American Detroiters from Detroit already underway after the mortgage foreclosure crisis of the 2000s.

Another example of wealth extraction in the city of Detroit is funneling tax dollars, through Tax Increment Financing, into certain neighborhoods to build stadiums and condominium high rises. Tax Increment Financing, or TIF, is generated by a formula where taxes captured via increasing property values stay within the neighborhood where property values are rising. This prevents the circulation of public resource from one area of the city to another, or into parks, schools, or recreation centers. Detroiters understand that the city’s comeback is not for long-term Detroiters. TIF financing is one reason why.



Coal-fired Power Plant, WY, 2012

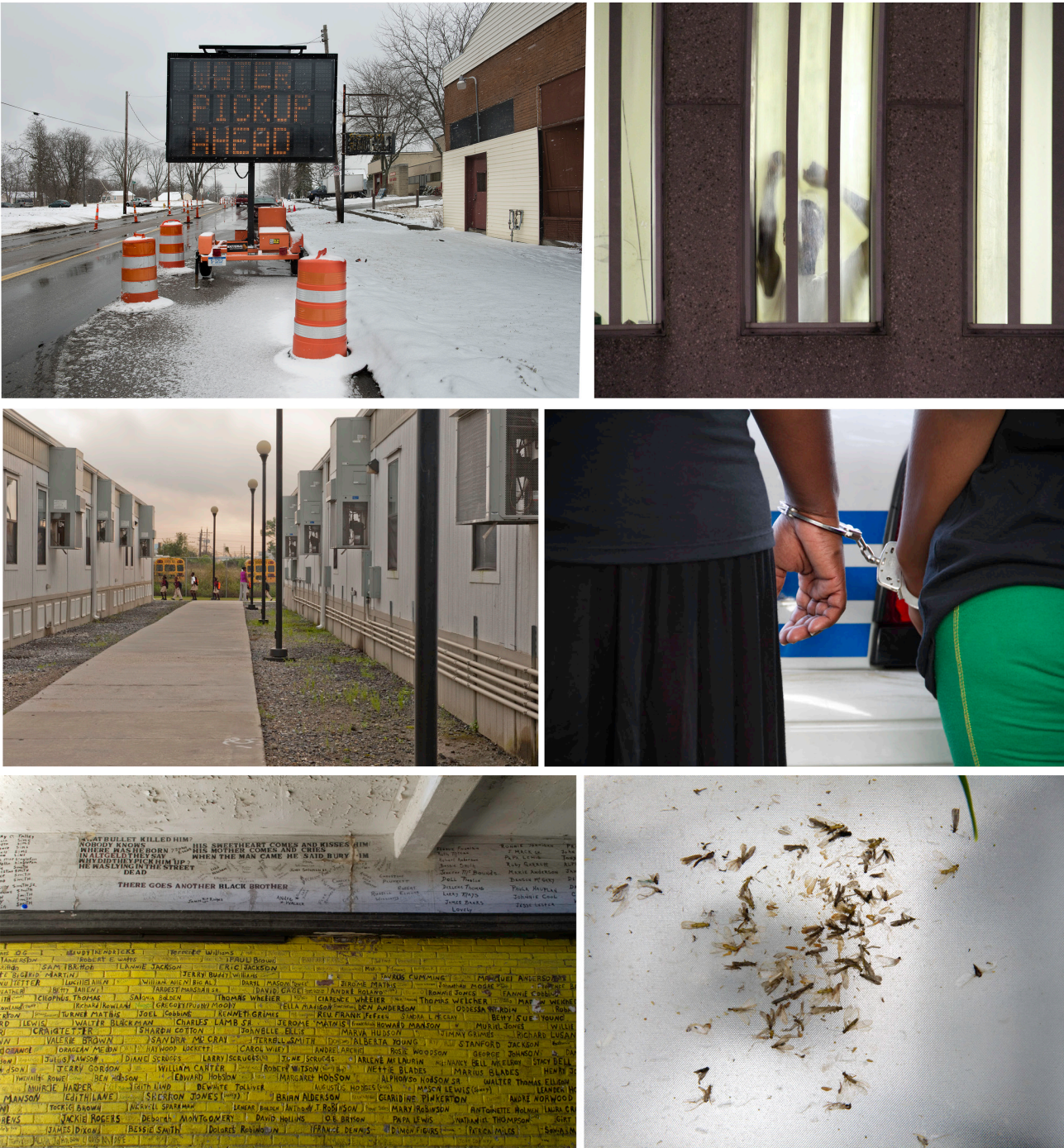
We would argue that wealth extraction is the primary mode of exploitation that has created the regional inequalities cemented into Southeast Michigan’s social, political, transit, health, lending and media institutions. However, once cycles of wealth extraction are established, externalizing costs on that community becomes all the more easy. Vulnerability breeds desperation for jobs, which often means that communities will accept externalized costs like pollution in the name of jobs. Both wealth extraction and externalizing costs thrive in the dark.

But how and why would communities allow these destructive processes to continue? One important tactic that is utilized by corporations to create complicity with their extraction / externalization model is their seemingly unfettered power to co-opt and appropriate. When communities demand corporate accountability, their words are often used against them. Corporations mirror the language, but then act in a way that is opposite of the intended meaning - always proving their loyalty to shareholders above all else.



/On

Sound



For example, in 2016 the Equitable Detroit Coalition, a group of neighborhood organizations and concerned citizens, waged a grassroots campaign and created Proposal A, a ballot initiative for a Community Benefits Ordinance in Detroit. The ordinance would require a community process ending with a legally binding agreement from developers using public funds. Almost overnight, over one million dollars were deployed into promoting the corporate-backed Proposal B, using the same language and logic of Proposal A. In fact, Proposal B itself was a carbon copy of the people’s initiative - with one slight difference: an omission. It was missing the clause about legal enforceability. It won by a very slim margin.

Fact-based political discourse requires a transparency that puts the fear of god into companies that operate by extracting wealth from vulnerable populations and hiding the true costs of production. A discourse that holds private industry accountable depends on having an egalitarian space - a commons - for residents to come together to share experiences and information, activities that lie at the heart of democratic expression. Historically, parks and schools have served this purpose, and Detroit is no exception. From the union rally of 1937 where thousands flooded Cadillac Square in support of city-wide sit-down strikes, to the Newspaper Strikes of the mid 90’s, publicly owned parks and streets open up space for collective solidarity and opposition.

It is this destruction of the commons, whether through wealth extraction, externalizing costs to a community, or privatizing public space, that claiming public space through protest interrupts.

Across the country, public-private partnerships are becoming the norm for parks, hospitals, and schools. In Detroit, Rock Ventures, a holding company responsible for 1/4 of the home mortgage foreclosure crisis in Detroit - one of the hardest hit in the country - now owns most downtown buildings. Rock Ventures operates a security command center operating from the basement of Detroit's Chase Tower, functioning as a panopticon capturing a constant livestream through hundreds of unblinking video cameras and security forces throughout the public parks and streets. Over the past few years, various news outlets report that Quicken Loans employees work with private security as part of a two-pronged effort to monitor and control activity on public space. With regard to private security practices, attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union warn that since they are not subject to records requests under the Freedom of Information Act, there is far less transparency around private “policing,” which has deeply anti-democratic implications for anyone who is not a corporation.

In 2014 specific organizers from the group Moratorium Now! were identified and had their social media accounts monitored by Quicken Loans employees. The following year the ACLU of Michigan won an interim decision in favor of the activists’ right to peacefully assemble without interference – but, it is uncertain for just how long those rights will hold in a city that is constantly under siege through an agenda of extracting, externalizing.

Page 260: Photos from left to right: Emergency Water Relief Station, Flint, MI, February 2016; “No New Jails” Prisoner Rights Protest, Detroit, MI, 2016; MSU “Stop Richard Spencer” Protest, Lansing, MI, 2018; Logging memorial along Enbridge Line 5 Pipeline, Upper Peninsula, MI, 2014
Page 262: Standing Rock, ND
Page 263: “Man Camp” Construction, Bakken Shale, ND, 2012



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

FRANNIE SHEPHERD-BATES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CECE MCGUIRE

Jane (this is a pseudonym; prison policy does not allow the use of her real name) joined Shakespeare in Prison because she was bored and wanted to try something new. She was boisterous, loud, and good-humored. The energy she brought into the room was contagious, and it sparked something in me. I knew I was going to love working with her. We were less than a year into our work at Women’s Huron Valley Correctional Facility, and we were still figuring out exactly what we were doing. I had been trained and was working as an actor, director, and teaching artist, but I had grown increasingly frustrated by the limitations of traditional theatre as performed for passive audiences --people who simply show up, sit down, and watch. While I loved (and still love) this kind of theatre, it was not, on its own, enough for me. When I learned about Shakespeare Behind Bars, the oldest program of its kind in North America, I knew right away: I wanted to do *that*. I could take my skills and passion for theatre into a prison and see if I could make a difference. But I’d never done this kind of work before, and I needed to approach it in a way that was new to me - to let go of how things *should* be done and just let the process unfold itself. I founded Shakespeare in Prison determined that it would be developed by the entire ensemble - that I would be there to facilitate, guide, and encourage, not to direct or teach as usual.

The day I met Jane, we were exploring the monologue from *Richard III* (act 1, scene ii) in which Lady Anne mourns her father-in-law’s death as his corpse is borne across the stage.

Set down, set down your honorable load,
If honor may be shrouded in a hearse,
Whilst I awhile obsequiously lament
Th’ untimely fall of virtuous Lancaster.
Poor key-cold figure of a holy king,
Pale ashes of the house of Lancaster,
Thou bloodless remnant of that royal blood,
Be it lawful that I invoke thy ghost
To hear the lamentations of poor Anne,
Wife to thy Edward, to thy slaughtered son,
Stabbed by the selfsame hand that made these wounds.
Lo, in these windows that let forth thy life
I pour the helpless balm of my poor eyes.
O, cursèd be the hand that made these holes;
Cursèd the heart that had the heart to do it;
Cursèd the blood that let this blood from hence.
More direful hap betide that hated wretch
That makes us wretched by the death of thee
Than I can wish to wolves, to spiders, toads
Or any creeping venomèd thing that lives.
If ever he have child, abortive be it,
Prodigious, and untimely brought to light,
Whose ugly and unnatural aspect
May fright the hopeful mother at the view,
And that be heir to his unhappiness.
If ever he have wife, let her be made
More miserable by the death of him
Than I am made by my young lord and thee.
– Come now towards Chertsey with your holy load,
Taken from Paul’s to be interrèd there;
And still, as you are weary of this weight,
Rest you, whiles I lament King Henry’s corse.



Many ensemble members identified with Anne’s bitterness, grief, and desire for revenge, but this woman honed in on something very specific. She said that Anne wanted to take her internal pain and make it external, and she tried to make us understand what this meant, choosing words deliberately but ultimately becoming frustrated. As the conversation continued, she stayed focused on her script, looking up now and then but clearly deep in her own thoughts. I got the sense that her insight was not academic: it came from personal experience. I felt she was doing what I hoped we could all do: she had used Shakespeare as a tool to express herself, gain perspective on her life, and cultivate empathy for herself and others. I hoped that empowerment would follow.

A week later, we took turns performing the piece. When Jane volunteered, she said with pride that she had memorized part of it. She ran on stage, trying to get to the coffin, as two people tried to hold her back. She ricocheted between unrestrained grief, resignation, and rage. Another participant said that Jane had seemed overwhelmed by emotion and unable to detach. Jane said she had wanted people to try to console her - to get in her way and try to “bring her back to life.” She said had tried to build on what she saw in other ensemble members’

performances. She had also drawn on her own experience of losing someone when she was very young.

She said she was hooked; that she had had no idea there was anything like this out there. She was my age - in her late twenties - and had been incarcerated for many years after committing a violent crime when we were barely adults; when my toughest challenges were deciding which posters I needed in my dorm room and which shoes to wear to an audition. She alluded to a traumatic childhood and a fraught existence behind bars. Now she was determined to do better - to heal - and she believed that Shakespeare could help her do that.

She frequently challenged us. She had an undeniable, unshakable passion for the group and a commitment to honesty that, coupled with a past that had not equipped her to do otherwise, frequently expressed itself in a caustic way. Conflict came with her - she seldom instigated it, it just seemed to follow in her wake - as it had elsewhere in the prison and throughout her life. But where others in her life had abandoned her and any hope that she could do things differently, our ensemble took a collective deep breath each time a situation arose and worked through it with her.



You have a right to your feelings.
We care about what you're telling us.
We know your heart is in the right place.
We want to help you find more constructive ways to communicate.
We believe you can learn to do better.
We are not kicking you out of this group.
We value you as a person, no matter your faults.

And she learned to do better. From my notes at the time:

[She] responded to a woman who had been directing some negative criticism toward her by thanking her for being honest, putting what she had said in her own words to show she understood while responding, giving details of what made her feel the way she did, and asking the other woman to meet her halfway... It was really exciting and inspiring to observe how calm, respectful, and constructive she was with no coaching at all. This is a skill that is going to benefit her for the rest of her life, and I'm so happy for her that she seems to have mastered it.

She left the group two and a half years in when she was not cast in the role she wanted. It was a very brief departure. From my notes:

The ensemble member who turned in her book last week appeared in the doorway of the auditorium and beckoned to me. "I've been feeling really, really bad," she said. "I've been crying and sad ever since I quit." She said that she'd called several of her friends and family on the outside to talk it out, and all of them suggested that she come back. A former ensemble member who was released earlier this year was particularly strong worded, reminding her of another member's history of not getting the part she wanted three years in a row and staying with the group nonetheless. This ensemble member hadn't realized that, and it made her think. "Really, what it is, is I'm a spoiled brat," she said, smiling a little. She's decided to stay with the group, believing that this new perspective of not getting exactly what she wanted will teach her something important and give her an opportunity to grow. "Shakespeare has been such an important part of my recovery," she said. "I don't think you even understand how much."

She saw herself in Shakespeare's characters over and over. Her connection to the material deepened. It began to work on her in ways that surprised her. She found herself writing - plays at first, and then screenplays, essays, poems, a memoir - delving into past experiences that had been unspeakable and using her writing to articulate them, share them, and connect with others. She was embarrassed at first to share her work, but, greeted with enthusiasm from her earliest readers, she plunged headlong into this new outlet. She produced and directed her own play at the prison. She wrote music for it. She even performed in it, replacing an actor who suddenly had to drop out.

Sometime later, she pulled me aside to read me an essay she had written about her life. From my notes:



It is a powerful piece, describing intense trauma that she experienced as a child and the following self-destructive choices she made that culminated in the crime for which she is incarcerated. She also wrote about her journey in prison toward healing. When she finished reading, she began to cry, talking about how hard it is to revisit these old wounds but how much writing about them helps. She emphatically stated that the reason she's been able to do this has been her involvement in our group. Being able to explore so much through the characters, learn about storytelling, gain confidence and self-esteem, and learn to more constructively express herself and manage conflict has been a game changer for her. She is nearly ready to share her experiences widely and make some kind of impact, hopefully with young girls facing the same challenges she did.

This ensemble member has come a very long way from when I first met her. "I don't think you can understand how much this has meant to me," she said. "This group has changed me. You are my inspiration." "There could be no higher honor," I replied. "This is what we hope the program can do for everyone. And I want you to know that you inspire me, too."



She became so prolific that she regularly ran out of paper and wrote on envelopes, the backs of letters she'd received - any scrap she could find. She frequently came to our meetings exhausted because she had spent the whole night writing. Her dedication to the group was still remarkable, but she began to take on smaller roles. When called upon, she stepped into a large role but was honest with us that, because of her writing, she couldn't commit to memorizing the lines. When the woman who'd vacated

the role found that she could play it after all, Jane firmly insisted that she take it back. It was about the group. It was not about her.

People who'd known her for years said she'd "grown up." She checked in with me frequently, and I did what I could to support her. "I think everyone has a 'better person,'" she told me once. "You are my better person... I feel like you're raising me. No one raised me at home. I've changed because of you." It's never been easy for me to accept praise, but this was different. I had to take it in - to believe that I could be this person for her - because I knew that if she was saying it, it was true. I'd known from the beginning that using theatre in this way had the potential to empower people and dramatically alter their lives, but I'd never considered the possibility that that could have as much to do with me as with the art form. And that is incredibly humbling.

Eventually, other commitments filled up what had once been a near-empty schedule, and we saw less and less of her. I quietly asked her one night whether or not she was still in the group. "I'm half in," she replied. I reminded her of what she already knew - that halfway wasn't going to work. She said she would think about it. She came to a few sessions after that, and then her time in the group was over.

... Or so I thought. A few months later, Jane appealed directly to our staff partner, insisting that she needed to come back to Shakespeare. "I can't do this [prison] without this group," she said. "It's not that I want to come back. I need to come back. Shakespeare is a part of me." The ensemble members all understand the truth in those statements, and we welcomed her upon her return.

"Leaving the group for that short amount of time was like having a baby," she said. "It makes you a better person, but then you become incapable of properly taking care of it. And then you realize that raising your child is not an option because it makes you better." She paused. "And that's the truth."

"I'm back. I'm not quitting," she added. She knows she has more work to do and is eager to continue to grow.

The difference in this woman now from when I met her five years ago is astonishing. It's breathtaking. She has skills, dreams, and ambitions. Shakespeare in Prison has had something to do with that. And I've had the honor - and the joy - of walking this path by her side. In a place where it is easy (and understandable) to succumb to a darkness I can't fathom, she's shown me greater strength, determination, passion, forgiveness, and humor than I knew was possible. Her work has empowered her. It's empowered me, too.

Shakespeare in Prison From a Participant

If prison saved my life, Shakespeare in Prison helped me rediscover who I really am. After almost a decade of drug abuse, I not only found myself in prison for a five-year sentence, but realized that I had been entirely consumed in my addiction and no longer had much of an identity. That all began to change one September evening in 2013.

I had been an inmate of Women's Huron Valley Correctional Facility for six months and had grown accustomed to being known by my last name, prison number, and crime. Imagine my surprise when I walked into the auditorium and three strangers greeted me with excitement and enthusiasm, offering a handshake and their first names. I felt like a human again! For the next two hours, I forgot I was in prison; I've felt that way every rehearsal since.

I'm not entirely sure if "rehearsal" is the appropriate word to describe the five hours we meet each week. Although our ultimate goal at the end of nine months is to perform a full production of a work of the Bard's, there is much more involved than a performance. We acquire a myriad of soft skills such as effective communication, the ability to work with a diverse group of people, as well as critical and creative thinking skills.

The most important lesson I've learned through my participation in Shakespeare in Prison is that perfection is overrated. I have always been a bit of a control freak, constantly pushing every person and situation to be molded into my idea of how it "should be." I know how that you can't control what other people do; all you can do is control how you react to people and situations. Not everything is going to work out "perfectly" the way I would like, and I'm ok with that because it usually works out the way it should.

I will be leaving WHV and re-entering the "free world" in five days. I'm anxious but excited to go home and be a sober mom, daughter, sister, niece, and friend. I'm incredibly grateful to have had the privilege to be an ensemble member of Shakespeare in Prison. The four seasons I spent in the group have empowered me and given me the tools to be the best version of myself. Tomorrow I will enter that auditorium for the last time to say goodbye to the women (and two men) who have given and taught me so much. It will be bittersweet, to say the least, but I know I will carry them with me always.



THE POETRY WRITING WORKSHOP AT WOMEN’S HURON VALLEY PRISON: A DOSSIER

The limit of my language is the limit of my world.

- LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

Wittgenstein’s often cited maxim assumes an entirely new valence in the context of the prison where I have been facilitating an ongoing Poetry Writing Workshop since 2012 (Women’s Huron Valley Correctional Facility). Our group is comprised of seven talented and committed poets who have been writing and studying closely together for the past five years in the interest of transforming their relations to themselves, one another, and the social conditions of their incarceration.

The workshop’s momentum reached a highpoint in May 2017 when we curated a poetry reading in the prison’s auditorium for a capacity audience of close to 200 inmates and invited guests. This reading was a profound event, one that continues to resonate as it enabled the full realization of the women’s solidarity with one another, a solidarity whose potential is

regularly nourished through engaged writing, reading, and discussion. Until this event, however, the workshop had never experienced the power of its own collectivity and camaraderie, as the poems everyone had taken such care to write, critique and edit assumed a new force that night. The auditorium resounded with so many critical voices, each poem carrying a transformed understanding of one’s history, while transmitting a sense of collective possibility.

Through my work inside the prison, I’ve learned how poetry can turn otherwise negated forms of social relation into the stuff of living communion, producing new ways of knowing and acting, while constructing unexpected spaces of social promise even under asocial conditions. This has everything to do with how poetry is able to provide a place to gather, enabling forms of agency and self-organization, collective study and

mutual aid, while cultivating a deeply rooted - that is, radical - sense of empowerment, even inside the disempowering environment of the carceral system.

Among many other things, the poems we heard on the night of that reading aroused, organized, and strengthened what we think of as “an abolitionist imaginary” as it emerges from within the prison itself. This is a way of imagining a world without prisons as the first step toward abolishing them, a project whose utopian energies foster new practices to survive behind bars, while anticipating a transformed world without bars.

I will refrain from saying more about the workshop, as the best way of offering you a sense of what happens there is by way of the poetry itself. And so, I have gathered a set of recent poems for this issue of *Detroit Research*, one poem by each poet, followed by a sustained set of critical reflections on our workshop written by one of its co-facilitators, Megan Stockton.

I will conclude here with the short note of introduction collectively composed by the workshop itself:

For the past four years, the Poetry Workshop at Women’s Huron Valley Prison has nourished our creative and personal evolution through the writing and study of poetry. Our collective attention to form and experimentation is rigorous, allowing for a wide range of approaches to poetic expression and construction. One of our many goals is to risk nonsense in the interest of making “new sense”- of ourselves, our language, our world, and our conditions. Our workshop allows us to access richer contexts for communication, collaboration, and study through a more expansive practice of using language innovatively. In addition, the workshop provides a space to voice and share interests and concerns, ideas and questions, while supporting and encouraging, critiquing and editing one another’s work as we move toward refining and publishing our poetry. The poems that we make are places of energy and change, risk and shelter, healing and engagement. We hope you enjoy them!

- ROB HALPERN

MIKAYLA

I am not supposed to be this. Bleached shell or even bone, yet these are my hands	her. Even if our eyes are only daring the
waving, waving. I know at the bottom is such violence. The south	Mississippi. The threat of deadly flooding is real. Like
still feels like home. In photographs our bodies meet	this pen, is real. White sheets are real. Mouthfuls
on granite ledges, but surface has no color at depths like	of black blood, ships swallowed unto the seafloor. Beneath
this. All her knowing of me, all parts of my	ravens, Thunderclouds, and white insomnia! You must feel!
life. If I could make sense out of the way water	Must see, that we’ve drown. So we ask you: Are you sailors?
forms around something received slow because I am the same as	If we had a name, it would be ocean! and we would not try to understand.

Megan Stockton is a poet and publisher living in Detroit. She is the current editor-in-chief of *BathHouse Journal*, a member of Problem Press, and editor at *Weekday Journal*. She recently graduated with her Masters of Creative Writing from Eastern Michigan University.

— KARMYN VALENTINE

GAOL

What if I never recall life as it was before	This place is trenchant, turning my DNA recombinant, wheedling
washed out midnight azure corded with fading orange?	through my synapses. I am folderoi. Will I always be
Every second I linger within these walls I become	renegade, persecuted by ciphers of an enterprise
one with the chipped coarseness of the uneven promenades	rampant with imbeciles? I long to dismiss this
as if my feet never touched anything before this. Even these	psychodrama, this transient chamber full of contaminated
tatters I wear are eminent domain, as is my muddled	caviar and indecent bunko. Surrounded by effigies. Slum-
timeclock. Did I have a domicile before scarification	lords of state with barely a smattering of decency for me
and belly chains arrayed in lilacs choked out greedy collections	when I wax and wane in my meager sanity. The longer I am here,
where I was prominent and you clamored for me, we as one	the more rapacious I am to be back in the life I had,
ménage? I find this life recondite, useless for what	steeped in ochre sunflowers, gilded water lilies, with frosty
it’s intended for. Reform- ative justice. Refillable coffers.	marigold edges, infested with blue morphos and children. Is that just
Free radical scoffers. Machia- vellianism as its finest.	my chimera, painted at nocturne? What... if I never recall?

Karmyn Valentine resides in Michigan, enjoys private living, good guitar music, and exploring her creativity as a novice artist and writer. Quote for 2017: “*This busy trade of life appears most in vain, since rest breeds rest, where all seek pain by pain*” (William Shakespeare).

— SARA YLEN

● GHOSTWRITER

I am gibberish, the notebook that needs no blueprints. I will tell you to cipher leftover Prozac and Xanax. I am exhaust from a locomotive cargo that powders your fungal-infested bread. I want my femur churning bleach into your Hungarian goulash. I am contagious toxic like yellow fever or a black widow. I want to know you like blister puss.

Abracadabra, she snaps into a chant. Her carcass now a klutzy thespian. She cackles, appeasing this masquerade like a ritual. I feel like she’s waiting for an ovation. I want to exploit this animated hallucination.

I debate the instructions. I am the bile she coughs, congests, and even spits into her batter. I am no longer complexion. I will tell you of the fleshy mannequin cramped in filth, cultivated into foam, latex, or rubber. She has procreated. She has hunted. What if I conduct her carousel of guests? What if you’ve tried her stew? What if *she* is you?

— JENNIFER AVERY

Jennifer Avery is a creative woman whose poetry, art and acting keep her going after a hard day’s work or just one of “those” days. She’s nurturing, spiritual, strong, smart, and very independent. Life hit hard, but poetry and faith keep her rooted. She is pursuing higher education, and keeps herself grounded.

● SPEAKING TO THE WALLS

Encapsulated within your mechanical grip
you stand erect intimidating all
in the vicinity. My simple

request to move on makes you shutter,
clank then jerk in response to
multiple fingertip commands,

never a word. At times they confuse you
and with rebellious overload
you revolt obedience for

anyone, not just me. Walls that open and
close, randomly and repetitiously
without explanation, often

no prompt, your purpose irreplaceable.
Insufficient host your place
files to capacity, yet

multitudes continually come. Introverts,
extroverts alike either dread or
relax in your asylum. You

hold secretes often pondered in confidence.
Lock and key doesn’t stop the mind
that knows where it wants

to be. Broken monotony released or unseen
graffiti murals absorbed by
concrete comportment. Cracks

darkened by red-lettered grime. muffled gossip.com
I know why caged birds sing. Songs
to the tune of a freedom march

with hope stretched lungs that chirp more freely
“Nipped Feather Blues.” Your fingertips
pronounce silent pictures.
Word cavancy a defense presentation, story
told volume off. Like seemingly
unanswered prayers you

hit the wall and fall mute, rock with that
receptor’s blank stare structure. The
tongue’s cavity waging war,

incoherent ramblings at warped speed,
fragmented thoughts virtually
stuck to brick palisades.

Your false security lays in sheltered crevices
buried under the dust of a severely
unattended drywall cough.

Time To Dust

Mikayla Hull is a Colorado kid originally born in Abilene, Texas. Mikayla enjoys the Russian language and is a loyal friend, a true fan of Punk Rock who hopes someday to write something good, hop a few more trains, make a documentary about local blk punk culture in Denver, SF, and NYC. Remaining true to S.H.A.R.P. fashion, she also hopes to dress as Alex from *A Clockwork Orange* one Hallows Eve in the Castro (San Francisco).

— TRACY LEIGH

● NOTHING... AND EVERYTHING

I dare not expound
on prison.

This prison...
This prison like liquid
Prozac tastes acrid
but at times necessary,
isn't allowed to loll
in and around my tongue,
mowing my flowery taste buds
leaving them wanting
to off themselves.

But since I periodically
have the urge to off
myself, I imbibe
this prison quickly
and without deliberation.

This prison won't amble
through these fingers.
I will not play
it like a violin
mellifluously for an
ignorant audience
or even for my own
pleasure. Prison...
This prison is
the sound of
nothing and everything,
deafening and mute,
and I both
abhor and appreciate
its reverberation.

In the same breath
I villainize and sanctify
this institution as
not to becloud its
likeness. But,
there will be no Trump-
like harangue disguising
hate in the form of
making anything great again.
No spiel on the ignoble
improprieties of corrections.

I have no interest
in wrothly pawing
at the abominable
wretchedness of WHV
nor do I have the time
to recount the many ways
3201 Bemis Rd
has been the site of
restoration.

I do not wish
to delve into the shit
green of the walls
or prepare a sermon
on the Balm of Gileads
that propagate
along those walls.
Both wall and flower
so entwined I can't
tell one from the other
anymore.

There is no aching
in my bones
to lecture
on the imbecilic ways
in which we've "reformed"
the penal system.
Prison... even more dark,
dirty, and overcrowded
than before
the Pennsylvania System.
But I won't broach
the subject.

I cannot revisit
the days of the Elmira
Reformatory or browbeat
MDOC into adopting
its emphasis on rehabilitation.
I don't have the power
to bulldoze
the many warehouses
and even tents where
some of us are being
stored like non-perishables,
nor will I discuss
the thanks I give
to the Gods
for the blessing
that is a
2 man cell or
my regret that I'm
not living
in Denmark or Sweden.

Patriotism is a value
I applaud. I am both
proud and embarrassed
to be an American.
But I won't elaborate
or even state the facts
such as the U.S.
and Russia
having the highest
percentage of
incarcerated people.

I am no propagandist.
I have no love,
loyalty, or loathing
for the
penitentiary.
And for that
perhaps I
should be
penitent.

— ASIA JOHNSON

Asia Johnson is a writer and poet with hopes of one day becoming a documentary filmmaker. She is a native Detroitter and future New Yorker with plans to travel the world. Intensely passionate, she will use her attributes to shed light where there is darkness and be vociferous for those with no voice.

BETWEEN CLEFTS IN THE INVOLUNTARY PLAN

-after “Mothers” by Robin Coste Lewis

Cracks made the morning news.
Some crumbles rested.
Tears were too sinister and back-stitched.

Crowds blatantly rallied on chipped benches.
Safe pots boiled drippy French noodles.
Their flavors spread on rocky grounds.

Coolness blows in slick tempered neighborhoods
stations seem corrupted with tainted bellies
thoughts noel out to strange masses up front.

Clusters of Davenport ride with the change
saintly crisps follow buckles that fell away
tolls exceed the usual ploy but stay and stare

Chiseled after thoughts total up seconds of no where
soaring plastic tiles lay crooked and tussled
torn up and bided, too splatted to count.

— COLLEEN O’BRIEN

Tracy Leigh was born in a small northern town in west Michigan. She writes newspaper articles, poetry, songs, plays, adult and children’s books. Her work has been published with Voices for Christ and can be found at www.facebook.com/BehindtheNarrowWindows. Her heart for ministry is revealed through singing, writing, community theater, and

TOWARD A FUGITIVE POETICS:
NOTES FROM THE POETRY WORKSHOP AT
WOMEN’S HURONVALLEY PRISON

This past May, the Women’s Huron Valley Poetry Workshop brought over 200 inmates and invited writers from the outside to the prison auditorium for a poetry reading, where the poets read their poems born from many hours of writing and workshopping in class. I had joined the workshop, formed in 2012 by Rob Halpern, as a co-facilitator six months prior to this reading, and the awe that this event struck in me seemed exceeded only by the awe of the poets themselves, some of whom had been in the class since its inception. That following week our workshop came together invigorated by what A had called a “collective enunciation” that had happened that evening, eager to discuss the powerful event. Even if much of the audience were inmates who came not for a love of poetry but a unique opportunity to socialize with friends (as S pointed out), what was undeniable was that no matter the reason, the room was enraptured not only by the individual poets’ work, but by how the whole evening cohered around a sense of solidarity. Something, we agreed, had been articulated in the poems that opened up a space for social relation and imagination in the otherwise unspeakable living conditions of the prison. During workshop, K reflected:

The last poem I read was basically *a fuck you* to the system, and there I was saying it, over and over in my poem, in not so many words. Even if an audience member wasn’t totally following the metaphor or image, there was a sense that people knew what was going on, and how the poem was making that happen.

M echoed this, saying, “Yeah, the poems allowed us to say something we couldn’t otherwise say to a group of people without getting in trouble - basically in code and metaphor.” M said that it was mind-blowing when R read a poem called “After the Prison,” that “it was like *building an army with words*.” I agreed, that both the veil of safety the poetic language provided and the sense of collectivity demonstrated by the workshop poets had mobilized a radical social. No matter the topic of the particular poem or politics of the poet, the reading served to spark a sense of possibility for a fugitive poetry inside the prison.

Later in the workshop we began to ask: What is this concept of a “fugitive poetics” that came into articulation at the reading, how does it materialize, and how can it build an imaginary beyond the limits of

one’s current conditions? (As J put its, “By writing poetry, I can enter a world of ‘unknowns’”). Fugitivity connotes a sense of flight, persisting in a state of brokenness and resisting reduction. Fugitivity is, in many ways, inherent in poetry: a poem “breaks” language on the level of syntax, word, phoneme; it exists orally and textually, and allows for non-sense. A poem thrives when it *resists*: organization, linear logics, singular meaning. A poem is where fugitivity can be performed and realized in language, where the unspeakable, perhaps even the unthinkable, finds a way into legibility and possibility. We discussed how fugitivity is not only endemic to prison and poetry, but that there is a long history of fugitive modes of communication in cultures and histories which have been subject to violence, oppression, surveillance, and disciplinary tactics. Fugitivity has emerged in the forms of slave narratives and songs, in anti-colonial language practices, in queer expressions and aesthetics, in articulating immigrant consciousness, as well as in poetry written by women living under regimes of gendered violence.

We agreed it was a fugitive poetics that fostered that sense of solidarity in the prison auditorium that evening, and in the workshop we began to consider how fugitive poetics might help incarcerated poets “make a difference.” How can we, the poets asked, harness this fugitivity and provoke a sociality in the otherwise repressive mechanisms of the prison? In asking a poem to “make a difference,” or enable this space of sociality, we often turned back to the question of what we might mean by “material change.” A poem can’t improve the food served inside, can’t end the arbitrary daily violence, can’t get Internet access, or end the inhumane overpopulation at WHV. The poem can, however, testify to and document conditions and bodies trying to survive prison conditions, ask for reform, and to index personal trauma, transformation and healing. There is a sense, too, that the poem, beyond acting as a tool that grates against the systematic abstraction of criminalized & imprisoned bodies, can do something else: a poem can risk imagination. Deceptively modest, it is this possibility of

imagining a world that doesn’t yet exist, we agreed, and that is a precondition to “material change”- not only to policy change aimed at fighting the inhumane conditions of the prison, but also in reshaping how justice is understood in our society, and resisting the institution of the prison and mass incarceration as we know it today.

In workshop we talk a lot about how one’s imagination is shaped by the conditions one lives under. If the poem can be a space for saying the “unspeakable” and thinking the “unthinkable,” it is a tool to help think *that which cannot be thought*. The ways the prison tries to control inmates’ thoughts is omnipresent: A reported that the list of banned books is a mile long: she can’t get the Angela Davis book she wants to read, for example. K said that while it exists, the single copy of Sylvia Plath is constantly checked out. C said, “It’s the feeling of being frozen in time,” about the lack of access to internet and contemporary textbooks. What is thinkable, and by extension what is imaginable, is limited by the censorship, repression, and disciplinary mechanisms of the prison. Despite these material constraints, the workshop cites the poem as a strategy to transcend repressive conditions and imagine otherwise through proposing worlds, thoughts, and social relations that whose existence seems impossible.

Of course, this censorship goes both ways: the prison polices what is let outside as well. Unfavorable depiction of conditions inside – whether written or shared via telephone – could be deemed “inciteful” and could come with disciplinary consequences. The public’s imagination of life inside is materially constrained by this censorship; prisoners are not only removed from society, but invisibilized and made abstract. Writing about prison not only comes with the risk of “inciteful behavior” if one chooses to document inhumane conditions. As with any act of representation, it also comes with the risk of simplifying one’s own experience and thereby reinforcing the dehumanizing abstraction of life in prison while feeding redemptive narratives that justify the prison’s existence.

This is something the workshop articulates again and again, particularly as it is made obvious by the types and motives of publications that solicit their work.

One poet A, refused until a few weeks ago to write about prison. In the poem about prison she ended up writing, called “Nothing and Everything,” she exemplifies a fugitive poetics that engages with the material limit of the imagination and refuses to essentialize her life lived inside. Throughout the poem she proclaims her refusal to write about “prison”:

I do not wish
to delve into the shit
green of the walls
or prepare a sermon
on the Balm of Gileads
that propagate
along those walls.

A’s refusal to write the prison is her fugitive way of writing the prison. While simultaneously listing its faults, A’s poem refuses to engage in a propagandistic mode of demonizing prison, thereby challenging both the inhumane prison conditions and flattened narratives of life in prison. A’s fugitive mode is all that is said in the “not-saying.” In this mode, A later writes, “the wall and the flower are so entwined I can’t tell one from the other anymore,” suggesting that the wall itself is arbitrary - is *unimaginable*, even before her very eyes. This also serves to show that the violence of the state is pervasive: that gendered, classed, and racialized violence is a reality that structures daily life and results in trauma and uneven precarity to certain populations. That is, the mechanisms

of the prison don’t stop at the walls. This inability to “tell” refers the reader back to these material constraints of the imagination: hers and the readers. In so doing, she sparks an abolitionist imaginary: A both suggests the wall exists only as a symbol for the multitude of disciplinary tactics of the state and simultaneously disappears the wall, as we imagine it taken over by ivy. For three pages the poem continues “not-telling” the prison, and in the self-proclaimed resistance, ends up doing the work of both documenting & imagining. Her poetic imaginary moves beyond just denaturalizing the institution and abolishing prison, but gestures toward abolishing the larger carceral society. Paradoxically, in refusing to write the prison, A seemingly enacts a simple task that prison abolitionists repeat again and again: *imagine a world without prisons*.

Whether writing the prison or not, the poems from the poets at WHV are able to produce a space of fugitive sociality and radical imagination. The poems emerging from WHV can make legible the censored bodies and life inside prisons, making the violence to those living within thinking and sayable, while testifying to life where life itself is again and again repressed and abstracted. The poems - and the relations they embed - become acts of resistance in their mere existence. Perhaps the awe we all felt in the auditorium during the May reading, confronting the viscerally felt sense of solidarity, testified to a collectivity that couldn’t have been imagined without the poems. The following week we left class with a new prompt to write towards together: *How can we write a fugitive poem?*

-MEGAN STOCKTON

church productions.

Colleen O’Brien is a poetry and prose writer, a native of southwest Detroit, and a member of the Potawatami Indians. She is a creative writing student who studies, works, and lives in Ypsilanti, MI.



John Cage, 4' 33, performed by ADULT., 2019.