

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Bird Float, Tree Song: dis•articulated poems by Los Angeles poets

Terry Wolverton · Wednesday, April 20th, 2016

✖ Most of the time a poet begins with an idea rooted in an experience, a memory, a feeling, or a response to something we've encountered in the world.. Then we set out to search for the right words—the best words, the best form—to capture that elusive, yet pressing idea.

But sometimes for poets, that process can break down. Ideas feel wedged in a familiar rut, language and images start to seem repetitive. We may fear we're not surprising anyone, even ourselves. We grow tired of our minds and search for ways to reactivate, even transform our thought process when we sit down to write.

Enter the dis•articulations process. I've pulled together different processes I use with students—writing from prompts, “fevered writing” and “cut-ups,” then added an additional element, sorting the cut-up words into their parts of speech—nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions, etc. I found the process of “dis•articulating” the words to be fascinating and liberating—a stage of abstraction that helped me to release my pre-conceived notions of how a poem needed to be born.

In 2015, I decided to invite twelve Los Angeles poets, one per month, to collaborate with me on dis•articulations poems. My collaborator and I would each select four prompts (drawn from the media—print, broadcast or social) and exchange them. With each prompt we were given, we would spend 3 minutes doing “fevered writing” (writing without intention). Then we exchanged those four segments of fevered writing. Working with the words provided me by my collaborator, I would assemble a new poem; they would do the same with my words. Every word of the poem, including the title, had to come from words we were given. We were not required to use every word but we could not add words.

Starting without an idea, working with someone else's words, allowing the words themselves to suggest ideas led to poems that surprise and lead us to unexpected places. The poems from this project are now compiled in an anthology (along with the writing prompts and the fevered writing): *Bird Float and Tree Song: dis•articulated poems by Los Angeles poets*. A publication party and reading will take place on Sunday, April 24 at 7 p.m. At Art Share-LA, 801 East 4th Place, Los Angeles, CA 90013. Admission of \$10 includes a copy of the anthology. RSVP: wtrsatwork@aol.com.

Terry Wolverton is the author of ten books of poetry, fiction and creative non-fiction, including *Embers*, a novel in poems, and *Insurgent Muse: life and art at the Woman's Building*, a memoir. She is the founder of Writers At Work, a creative writing studio in Los Angeles, and Affiliate

Faculty in the MFA Writing Program at Antioch University Los Angeles. She has edited fifteen literary compilations, and including *Bird Float, Tree Song*. <http://terrywolverton.com>.



Hover

Years ago I stirred the future
until skyline fell to dirt.
I whispered an outlaw language
that only women heard.
I tasted the orange of the city
on the backs of their necks.
Every day we would bend and lock;
where was the place for wonder?
I became mother to the whales,
visited their seven waters.
I could stay under a long time
and trade funny stories in Spanish.
This was a weapon superior
to history; I could ask them
how they planned to foreclose time,
what the new world would be.
I longed for a chair in the grass
on top of a hill, the canyons
of downtown before me, digestible,
rarified cliffs and new malls.
From this place I could see
the after-years, when all questions
would fall back to the orange dirt,
when I would belong to another life.

Terry Wolverton

Olga García Echeverría: Born and raised in East Los Angeles. Ultra Libra in love with the ocean and the clouds and the birds and the trees and the disappearing bees. Author of *Falling Angels: Cuentos y Poemas* (Calaca Press and Chibcha Press 2008). Teacher of English. Creator and destroyer of language. Splendid Spinster of the New Millennium who plans to joyfully spin words until her fingers turn to dust



Wildfires

I.
Bam! Just like that.
Another woman of color
eradicated by the system.
Why not start a wildfire
with all the newspaper articles?

It makes as much sense
 as anything.
 II.
 She needed
 more hummingbirds
 more salvia
 more seconds on the Universal clock
 She needed
 more nectar to sip
 more time
 to let it all hang out
 to sit serenely, thinking
 to small talk at dinner
 to gossip with friends
 She needed more time
 to write
 to birth
 to live
 to sleep
 inside the safest place, her own navel,
 spinning wheels of energy, yellow
 Chakra vibrating, the mystery
 of the undulating Universe
 dripping from her fingertips
 She needed more softness,
 this purple-colored woman
 bellowing through time,
 wildfires in her eyes...

Olga García Echeverría

Douglas Kearney's collection of writing on poetics and performativity, *Mess and Mess and* (Noemi Press, 2015), was a Small Press Distribution Handpicked Selection. His third poetry collection, *Patter* (Red Hen Press, 2014) examines miscarriage, infertility, and parenthood and was a finalist for the California Book Award in Poetry. Cultural critic Greg Tate remarked that Kearney's second book, National Poetry Series selection, *The Black Automaton* (Fence Books, 2009), "flows from a consideration of urban speech, negro spontaneity and book learning." A collection of opera libretti—*Someone Took They Tongues*—is forthcoming from Subito Press. He was the Guest editor for 2015's *Best American Experimental Writing* (Wesleyan). He has received a Whiting Writer's Award, residencies/fellowships from Cave Canem, The Rauschenberg Foundation, and others. His work has appeared in a number of journals, including *Poetry*, *nocturnes*, *Pleiades*, *Iowa Review*, *Boston Review*, and *Indiana Review*; and anthologies, including *Best American Poetry*, *Best American Experimental Writing*, *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond*, and *What I Say: Innovative Poetry by Black Poets in America*. Raised in Altadena, CA, he lives with his family in California's Santa Clarita Valley. He teaches at CalArts.



The Livestock

we've places in our properties for them,
 lots for growing them into lots more for us.
 in the places, there, we can watch them,
 our faces like hands having want. we, beaten
 by a cooler outside, said they got a coat kind-of-
 a-skin sewn up on their body until—beaten
 by the cooler outside—we slip them out it
 to wear it on us and so we
 are we, for we wear their skin for us.
 by our stove-like imagination,
 in it, they are a wad of living Crisco,
 Crisco shut up in them until we cook it
 out them, them out it, into a pan, a cut of them
 fried in it out a can and into our mouths,
 ground inside our mouths turning us into we-
 who-wear-wads-of-body-in-our-bodies
 and the wad's bodies on our bodies and so we
 are we, for we cook to enjoy this insiding.
 times, we've agreements with us
 to think for them impassive bodies what they think
 our love is like, so we spin answers out slashed mouths,
 snipped tongues, the splatterings beaten out their they
 in our lots for growing us out of them:
 we say they may say we are universes gashing Earth
 or baboons long ago hardened into clothes
 or that by their brown livings we guarantee us
 they want in our mouths, to be our coats,
 to tiptoe their they through our imaginations,
 graceful as, doting as mothers sewn to cries.
 no no no no no—our love is nothing but goodbye.
 and how we only want to love it all and so
 all of them.

Douglas Kearney

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