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# It Was Much More Pleasurable To Be A Cephalopod

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IT WAS MUCH MORE PLEASURABLE TO BE A CEPHALOPOD  
*A Play in Verse*

By

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Thesis

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It Was Much More Pleasurable To Be A Cephalopod

Chairperson: Prageeta Sharma

This play-in-verse is based off a true story of the death of Noah Michael Dewitt in 2015 when his body was found in the Eugene, OR waste water treatment center. Rooted in the author's fascination with personal myth, the plot breaks away from narrativity, traditional forms, and causal explanation to seek alternative forms of knowing through the protagonist, Gutterslut, in her journey deeper into the "post-collapse body" of grief. The result is a psycho-drama that interrogates subjectivity, the discourse around murdered and missing persons, responsibility within and outside of romantic love, and the efficacy of language itself. In doing so, the author hopes to queer the underworld, subvert the notion of unity or the cathartic return, and explore other ways of communing with our dead.

## CHARACTER LIST

Name	Age	Gender
EXTERNAL	NA	NA
INTERNAL	NA	NA
FLESH	NA	NA
GUTTERSLUT	20s	F or NB
NARRATOR	20s	F or NB
ENSEMBLE OF STATUES	NA	F or NB
JOANIE	50s	F
TECHNICIAN	NA	M or NB
FISHERMAN	30s-40s	M
SNAKE	NA	F or NB
CHILD	~10	NA
ROSE	NA	F or NB
MERMAID	NA	F or NB
ANONYMOUS	20s-30s	M or NB
REGIS PHILBIN	50s	M
CHRIS	Many-aged	F
AFTERGLOW	Multi-aged	Multi-gendered

NOTE: Casting must not discriminate based on race, gender, sexuality, or ability. The Snake, Rose, and Mermaid may all be played by the same performer. Voiceovers may be used when necessary. The Flesh must not be one solid color, but show a variation of colors and textures. The Flesh must be constructed with materials that allow for passage and capture the Internal projected imagery.

## CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

EXTERNAL,	Two parallel screens. Imagery on each is representative of the external context, however abstract.
INTERNAL,	Projected imagery on the Flesh. Usually pertaining to water, fluidity.
FLESH,	A patchwork, wrinkling, sagging, folding, and gashed open. Slitted. Sometimes perspiring. Sometimes sloughing. Tattooed. Scarred. Picked at, prodded, stretched, renounced, oiled, stroked, enjoyed, detested. Our landscape for the play. Captures the flashing Internal imagery.
GUTTERSLUT,	Intuition, or the feelings themselves. Moves between memories.
NARRATOR,	Logic, or the rational thought. Writes at a desk. Pretends to direct.
ENSEMBLE,	A chorus of statues, broken.
JOANIE,	Noah's mom. She calls the Narrator and Gutterslut.
TECHNICIAN,	Tattoos the Flesh, and anyone else. Dresses in street clothes. Not Antagonistic, per se, but a product of past actions never to be redacted.
FISHERMAN,	Lives in the stench, searching. Casting out a line on the river that formerly-was the Mississippi.
SNAKE,	Knows the movement of the subterranean rivers, as they run, through the body. Narrates the interior.
CHILD,	A product of the river.
ROSE,	A tattoo that performs in place of Noah.
MERMAID,	A tattoo that performs in place of Noah.
ANONYMOUS,	Uninvited audience member from the far back, or nosebleed section.
REGIS PHILBIN,	Game show host.
CHRIS,	Wears a pink hoodie. Sits in a wheelchair with a respirator, whistles.
AFTERGLOW,	At times, a disembodied point of light, a constellation to track. At other times, embodied as the disavowed.

## PROLOGUE

### *Wastewater Treatment Facilities as Socrates Tartarus*

Along the Willamette river in Eugene, Oregon there is a greenway with maps of the solar system to show the distance between planets. Next to Uranus is the waste water treatment facility.

May 30, 2015

*On Friday, I received a call from Rachel... Noah's sister. He had been missing for around three months, since February 13, 2015. They found a body in the Eugene, OR waste water treatment facility and identified it as him... or what was him, and what held him. This is where I want to stop writing.*

A story, a constellation of events. To wait, in grief, for a missing body, pries the mind outside of a linear conception of things. Somehow, those three months between when he went missing were drawn and redrawn, a pattern of intersecting lines. My mind traces and retraces its steps. How do we tell a story, without recreating it's trauma? Without falling back into the fallacy of memory, fact? Without the directness that corners a narrative into a single story.

In Toni Morrison's essay, "The Site of Memory", she talks about rivers flooding.

"'Floods' is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our 'flooding'."

I'm tired of platitudes, straightforward explanations, statistics, justifications. They begin to route or police grief and emotive response. *Just as in a septic tank, at municipal water treatment plants, the solid and liquid wastes are separated first in a process known as primary treatment. Next, as in a septic tank drainfield, bacteria break down contaminants in a process called secondary treatment.* The questions, maybe, need to be considered again. The process, filtration, circulation, maybe, needs to be considered again. As in, instead of, *how do I let this go?* I revert to the question of *how do I connect this beyond my own experience of loss?*

The Milky Way was named in English after the Latin, Via Lactea. In Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian, it's the Way of the Birds. In much of East Asia, the galaxy is referred to as the Silver River. We held a memorial for Noah, and poured the remainder of his ashes into the Mackenzie River. Some of the ashes clung to the stones at the bottom, while others slipped along the current. We poured his ashes in the same swimming hole we used to come sit for hours and observe the converging paths. I love places marked by vastness of water, or its

movement, and wherein there is an acknowledgement of an ulterior time. It is twinned with the secular gesture of looking up during desperate instances.

June 2, 2015

*When I asked myself out loud whether he had suffered, was afraid at his time of death, a family friend told me Noah had found the solace of parting out of mortal existence, and those of us left behind suffer the loss... we are the ones who suffer.*

Those of us left behind suffer the loss, or, grief is the afterlife. The movement of water in a river is mimetic to the movement of grief.

During some our final days together, Noah read to me from *The Last Days of Socrates*. Noah loved Plato's *Phaedo*, in particular, and the belief that learning is remembering. In *Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl, the playwright associates water not only with grieving, but also with forgetfulness. The stage directions call River Lethe, *an abstracted River of Forgetfulness*. Les Waters production of the script included a raining elevator to represent Lethe, which provided passage and acted to undo memory. Ruhl therefore implies that *the grieving individual remembers in order to forget*. I wonder if it is that simple, in regards to the bereaved, or if we just remember contortions of the original instance. What if I don't want to forget? What if I want my grief to allow me to become more permeable, flexible, unsanitary. I want memorials that are messy and remorseful, which recognize complicity, and seek reparations in response, rather than glorify.

This is a story about ontological choreographies. *The scripting of the dance of being is more than a metaphor*; because, *bodies, human and nonhuman, are taken apart and put together* in acts. So it's about taking our differences seriously. It's about seeing where we are enmeshed. Tangled. How we are assembled and re-assembled. It's about a river polluted by regretregret, so we drink the toilet water.

Donna Haraway

In *Phaedo*, Socrates states, *The real earth, viewed from above, is made of twelve pieces of skin, variegated and marked out in different colors*. And beneath, in the hollow places, the land is connected by *unceasing subterranean rivers*. The rivers flow together at Tartarus, and flow outward again. The rivers flow together and flow outward, like a wastewater treatment center.

We never found reason for Noah's leaving, nor his death. An unresolved death always lingers, out of reach, a lack, an ellipses. The death that ensues due to systemic violence rides heavy on the collective while it implicates; and attempts to redact, conceal, but instead drives sharp into us in its movement backwards or away from. *Part of the very problem of contemporary political life is that not everyone counts as a subject.* Judith Butler

Butler

At the waste water treatment center, after the second treatment, *chlorine kills the remaining bacteria*. Or phosphorus or nitrogen. *When the process is complete, the treated waste meets regulatory standards and is released to a nearby water body—that is, if all goes well.*



In Phaedo, Socrates describes *breath in a continuous stream* in Tartarus, which causes *terrible and monstrous winds as it passes in and out; and when in turn it ebbs from there and rushes back this way, it fills our streams again, and when they are filled they flow through their channels and through the earth; and arriving in regions to which their ways have been severally prepared, they make seas and lakes and rivers and springs*. Some rivers, he states, flow in a complete circle, like a snake, they descend to the deepest parts before discharging their waters. The relation to the body is undeniable. So what happens when our rivers are polluted? What happens to our bodies, or our metaphors for grief, for afterlife? What happens to our conception of what comes next?

*He failed to warm this dazed cadaver in whose veins / Flows the green water of Lethe in place of blood.*

Baudelaire

I am not one for Socratic discourse, and I do not believe in the immortality of the soul; but I do believe in emotional memory, subterranean, beneath logic; and translated by the collective into our metaphors and myths. How often is the imagination used to cope with big loss? If it is a flood, than it's fertile. Loss can spawn results, fictive or real possibilities, parallel worlds to contend with the unknowables.

My grief is actualized in the moment I hear it slant. My guilt of survival, the remorse running in place. While writing this play in verse, I watched *Fruitvale Station*, a film that retells the murder of Oscar Grant. Oscar's mother, when she sees her son's body on the operating table, post mortem, cries and laments how she told him to take public transportation. How is it always so easy to blame ourselves? Or, for how long do the numbers accumulate before retribution through policy, or reconciliation through public memorial? And what services exist that protect my life at the cost of so many others?

*How can responsibility be thought on the basis of this socially ecstatic structure of the body? As something that, by definition, yields to social crafting and force, the body is vulnerable.* Judith Butler

The body on an operating table. The body in bed beside the mattress dent, an imprint of absence. The river drains back into its channel, and leaves its mark of rise in the floodplain; something was lost in a reconsolidation of memory, the edges curl, burned. Or the wound, the scar, the body stitched back up. The floodplain reconstructed. The chemical tailings. The memory flows around new contours, carved out. The ashes mix with sediment. *One of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds.*

Aldo Leopold

May 30, 2015

*I remember a picture Noah painted with watercolor for me that said, “you are my home.” When I feel the guilt for what I could have done to help him, to reach out, but didn’t, I try to remember what our community of friends continued to reiterate, which was that, “it was more complicated.”*

But is that an escape from liability? His body was vulnerable. We were his home. Robert Pogue Harrison writes about our relationship with the deceased in *The Dominion of the Dead*. Ancient Roman houses may have been constructed on the tombs of their ancestors, the corpse then is the hearth. *We inherit their obsessions, he writes, assume their burdens; carry on their causes; promote their mentalities, ideologies, and very often their superstitions; and often we die trying to vindicate their humiliations.*

Concealment of bodies alludes to sanitation. The outcry of the conservative public during the AIDS epidemic posited that queer bodies were unsanitary, and therefore disposable. The erasure of victims and liability instigated a wake of testimony, ways of processing out loud, public in defense and revolt; like Amy Hoffman’s memoir, *Hospital Time*. Douglas Crimp’s essay, “Mourning and Militancy,” prompted Hoffman to respond, saying, *For a minute... can’t it just be us? Not hundreds of thousands of AIDS cases worldwide, but just this one person, here in this bed, quietly dying?*

There is a balance then to remaining permeable and responsive to instances that are not our own, and treating them as our own. Just as in a septic tank, the systematic cataloguing and subsequent separation of subjects is known as primary treatment. Next, as in a septic tank drainfield, the breakdown of components through the media reports— so we may *remember to forget*— is secondary treatment.

In an undated passage sometime in July, I wrote, *The effects of the drought are very clear— a lot of plants along the cliffside appear brittle and blackened with thirst*. Or, is it true that if someone is ignored long enough they can believe they don’t exist?

*Water, water everywhere, / and not a drop to drink.*  
Samuel Coleridge

## HOW TO READ THE PLAY

- 1) This is a play in verse. The reader must allow the subtle workings of figurative language and associative thinking to take precedent over a clearly delineated narrative.
- 2) This play, like all plays, operates according to the logic of it's own world. *IT WAS MUCH MORE PLEASURABLE* occurs on the landscape of a body. As poetic thinking pays attention to subtleties, so do the senses, especially the haptic or somatic. (In fact, it may be that the story is occurring on *your* body, so please pay close attention to your sensations, and abstain from excessive libations.)
- 3) This play is intended to be performed. However, it can also take place as a performance of the mind, i.e. read alone or aloud in a group. The reader's eye may move across the page as if reading a graphic novel, but their imagination is the illustrator.
- 4) That being said, the text that overlaps or is shown side-by-side is read simultaneously. As my fellow creative Kate Morris said of her own work, cacophony is to be expected.
- 5) Regardless, please keep in mind that the "Flesh" is a conceptual, sculptural prop. It is variegated in color and texture, and contains tattoos and projections, sleeves and slits, folds, bags, gashes, and wrinkles. It is not clean. Halfway through the play, when the Snake narrates (signaled by a syntactical markers in the stage directions) the Flesh inverts so we are inside of the body itself.
- 6) The stage directions will be read aloud for the majority of the performance by the Narrator at her desk (later by the Snake, i.e. {{ ~ ~ ... ~ ~ }}). Her reading aloud will be prompted by the {{curly braces}}. If necessary, or chosen by the director, they may be performed as well as spoken. The stage directions *without* {{curly braces}} are simply queues for actions.
- 7) Since the landscape of this play is a body itself, the performativity of [dis]embodiment is crucial. This is shown through movement, gesture, and dance. The sprawl of dialogue across the page is reflective of the bodies present. The numbered prompts scattered throughout are for phrasings for dancers. In the AUTOPOIESIS, dancers must have complete agency in designing their response through improvisatory movement.
- 8) The stage is marked by two screens, which signify the *External* context, while the projected images signify the *Internal* (or emotive) context. The audience at the start of the performance are hereby encouraged to explore *their* full range of movements while engaging with the script or its enactment. (So, lean back in your chair, squat, close your eyes and stretch your mouth into several contortions, stick out your tongue, grab your genitals and yell, open your chest and take a deep breath in, or stand on your head. Whatever you do, allow your movements to extend whatever feelings that arise to the surface of your body, as a cephalopod, communicate yourself through shifts in skin patterns, color, and texture ...  
[                      Insert movements here.                      ]                      Begin.)

IT WAS MUCH MORE PLEASURABLE TO BE A CEPHALOPOD

*A Play in Verse*

THE FISHERMAN

*{{Lights on dim. Gutterslut and the Fisherman are beside a river in the post collapse world of grief. Grief smells like fishrot. Grief rivers run heavy with sludge. Sometimes the water speeds up after a rain, the sludge dilutes, just as, sometimes all the emotions that follow a loss are realized; and awash on the surface with the residue, sticky plastic bags, old tires, an empty sealed wine bottle full of doodled dicks on shriveled bits of off-white paper.*

*The Fisherman wears suspenders. He's a shriveled bit of paper, a half-realized love note tossed in a drawer. He crushes cans, belches, notices the little things: the infinitesimal ripples from a distant cargo boat before the freight finally passes, or the sound a glint of light might conjure if it could. A high note. The muttering from a melancholic willow tree rooted in the shore. The prophecies imagined by the dead manta ray. The young couple in the grass. Their naivete, a comfort. The sound of his weight plunking below the surface of the water. The line dropping and like a nerve, traveling up, until he feels a stirring in his chest.}}*

FISHERMAN

*Casts his line off of the stage.*

GUTTERSLUT

*Paces the shore.*

EXTERNAL

*A river. Clothes shed around ankles (to swim).*

EXTERNAL

*A river.*

INTERNAL

*A mercurial river. Chain link fence over rocks.*

GUTTERSLUT

*Anything?*

FISHERMAN

*Turns. Grunts.*

*Nothin' to eat.*

GUTTERSLUT

*Long pause.*

I was planning on swimming  
in the river.

FISHERMAN

*Laughs. Spits.*

*Gutterslut and Fisherman look to current.*

GUTTERSLUT

*Picks up a stone and squats with her arm at  
an angle to skip the stone. She flicks  
her wrist and lets the stone spin, flying.*

INTERNAL

*The stone skips in the mercurial river.*

*Lights dim.*

GUTTERSLUT

I'm here because of a phone call.

*{{Instantaneously, the river drains around a corner,  
not to leave, but to wait.}}*



JOANIE

*As audio.*

Hello,

*Static.*

I hope you've been well.

*Static.*

I'm calling about Noah.

GUTTERSLUT

My fault. My fault.

What has been done that—

NARRATOR

Noah was my partner.

Noah was

Noah is my

No—

*Movement of backspace.*

Joanie is on the other line—

his mother.

JOANIE

Apparently he—

*Static.*

at night. He hasn't shown up—

GUTTERSLUT

Can't be amended.

NARRATOR

*To audience.*

At the point she called he had only been missing for a few days. We— No—

*Movement of backspace.*

Noah— No. He's—

JOANIE

—and no one has heard from him for a few days now...

*Static.*

NARRATOR

*To Joanie.*

I heard from Noah a few days prior.

I called him every day until—

He responded, *alright... getting by...*

I knew he wasn't. For a long time, I—

GUTTERSLUT

I turned away.

I called him, but—

I knew he wasn't. I knew he wasn't alright.



For a long time I—  
I should have told you.

—someone.  
I should have told someone.  
It's my fault. I should have—

NARRATOR

*To Joanie.*  
I'll try calling others. Let me know  
if you hear of anything.

GUTTERSLOT

Do you see the afterglow?

*Gutterslut hangs up the phone. The afterglow leans in  
close...*

*Lights off. Joanie exits. The room is empty. Gutterslut  
enacts a numbness, a settling, while the Narrator is stuck  
in a backspace.*



TECHNICIAN  
*Tattoos the Flesh.*

I tattoo, I do you.

STATUE 6 & 7  
We belong to Gutterslut, and her Narrator.

GUTTERSLUT  
And I am mourning.

NARRATOR  
No, you are the avatar of my grief.

GUTTERSLUT  
Do I have no agency of my own?

NARRATOR  
I can't find him without you. I'm lost in words,  
Blindness, fragments of explanations.

STATUE 1  
Think of yourselves as the two sides—  
reason and feeling. Word and expression.

GUTTERSLUT  
Body.

NARRATOR  
Mind.

STATUE 2  
And in this liminal space—

STATUE 3  
*Limn*, meaning to highlight, to suffuse or portray, illustrate.

STATUE 4  
Is there is a relation between an illustration  
and the gray area of post-collapse, a life waiting to be  
excavated and re-imagined? *Limn* and liminal.

STATUE 5  
Only that here, as a painting, there is no fixed time.  
As we said, our liminal world is marked by passions.

ENSEMBLE OF STATUES  
*Together.*  
Do you see the afterglow?

NARRATOR

Memories return, shuffled, out of order.  
The missing poster. His face monochrome,  
repeated. The last picture he sent me  
on his computer, his expression bent from  
sadness—

EXTERNAL

*A printer releasing copies of a black  
and white "Missing" flyer...*

EXTERNAL

*A printer releasing copies of a black  
and white "Missing" flyer...*

His picture, monochrome, the gray area,  
the liminal. Can I suffuse a light— a hue—

EXTERNAL

*Static.*

EXTERNAL

*Gutterslut on a fisheye lens.*

GUTTERSLOT

Noah?

*{{Lights dim. Gutterslut continues to call (Noah?) in the  
dark. The afterglow lingers above her head. }}*

RAPIDLY BLOOMING OVERNIGHT, PT2

*The Narrator claps, and shouts—*

NARRATOR

Repeat the scene, recollect, begin!

*{{The Technician takes off his sweater, and puts it back on. A clambering redaction like a movement of a backspace. Meanwhile, the Ensemble of Statues shuffle across the stage, to (nearly) align with their original placement in the scene preceding, and so suggest the inaccuracy of a mental image, re-consolidating, doubling back on itself, a transposition...*

*... like the one you love running towards you (in reverse) on the shoreline.}}*

STATUE 1

Maybe it won't make sense.

STATUE 2

Until you've been shuffled, rearranged,

STATUE 3

the way in which every memory slips out of focus,

STATUE 4

Like a lens on a camera, the picture,

STATUE 5

sunwashed until inaudible.

STATUE 6

When the one you are closest to vanishes.

STATUE 6 & 7

I am who I love. I am how I love.

NARRATOR

Louder!

STATUE 6 & 7

I am who I love. I am how I love.

STATUE 8

No, you are a tattoo. We are all tattoos.

*The Technician stands and laughs.*

GUTTERSLUT

And I am mourning.

NARRATOR

No! You are the avatar of cut flowers.

GUTTERSLUT

How many times can we rehearse  
it will never resemble—

NARRATOR

I can't find him without you. I'm lost in the  
multitudes, and magnanimity of grief.  
The questions— Do you see the afterglow?

STATUE 1

Think of yourselves as the two sides—  
Muck and leak.

GUTTERSLUT

Silt, or a supple response under skin.

NARRATOR

Frack, or excavate tirelessly with logic.

STATUE 2

And in this liminal space—

STATUE 3

*Limb*, meaning offshoots from the body. Arms. Legs.

STATUE 4

Is there is a relation between what is inside  
and outside? Rivers of grief, rivers of sewage.

STATUE 5

Only that I break and reconfigure my body and limbs so  
the contamination held inside is visible from the outside.  
This, mutilation, a sacrifice of composure to be heard.

ENSEMBLE OF STATUES

*Together.*

Are you displaced? Do you afterglow?

NARRATOR

Memories return, shuffled, out of order.

Or, maybe, the world meets me halfway  
shuffled, out of order, when I cease to  
live in the shadow of a version of its logic.

*Statue 2 and 3 cut the flyers into paper dolls,  
and hold them up to the light.*

GUTTERSLUT

Where is the child?  
Our tragic foresight?

SNAKE

Deeper still.

*Statue 2 and 3 continue their ritual, while lights stay dim.*

*{{In precarity, every simple act or conversation is seen with a new color, a (painful) vibrancy of contrast; but in quiet moments time slows until— under the pressure of silence—, a minute can drop like ink below a mouth, while the landscape tilts until a pause rushes, dendritic, towards the same possibilities spread across four corners (a deck of cards on a table); or, conversely, the imagination short circuits, and fails. It persists anyways— filling in gaps, launching through the mind's attempts into other realities— and then stumbling back on itself.*

*The imagination usually stumbles back. Always undercut by the impossible— to will or wish someone back. The realization settles, momentarily.}}*

THE MEMORY OF NOAH FAINTLY APPEARS

EXTERNAL  
*Tattooed skin.*

EXTERNAL  
*Tattooed skin.*

INTERNAL  
*Close-up of many eyes, blinking.*

*Gutterslut rushes towards the blinking eyes. {{But moments (rare) exist when the reality of a situation can be acknowledged, felt. These moments are bracketed as if by parentheses. Pools. One has to take them when they can, sink into the quiet enclosure that acknowledgement permits.*

*To let seep in. To be inundated with. To hold the worst— the insecurity of the present, the dread of waiting— and allow it to expand wider than the attempts to escape, solve, talk through, draw circles, all speculating. }}*

*All lights off in a breath.*

INTERNAL  
*An imprint filling with water.*

*{{Gutterslut becomes the water, and then a stream of tears that cry her into the next scene. }}*



## THE NATION'S SLEEVES

*{{Wait, have we not constructed the Flesh? This needs to happen. The Flesh, our landscape, as we, Gutterslut and lonely, lowly grief, and their crowding of constituents continue to travel and traverse in search for the lost part of themselves.*

*Keep in mind, Flesh is not clean. It's desirous, and self-shaming. Flesh is picked at, prodded, stretched, sloughed off. Flesh is the border between the body and the vastness of all beyond it. To inhabit one's flesh is the equivalent of towing a steep ledge. The Flesh, a skin suit, can be embodied or disembodied. Cast off. Burned down. Shunned. Discarded and sewn up. Dissoluted and strewn into a dream of itself. Entangled or enmeshed with another's. It's not one tone, but variegated, like "the many colors of the earth."*

*... An actual human body... can you believe it? Will you believe it? Each tattoo, an island, consolidating and re-consolidating meaning. It does both at once. It comes as a surprise when something so fixed appears to shape shift. Just as, when we look in the mirror, we never see our same selves. Always misconstrued, distorted somehow. The eye is a moving magnifying lens, and the mind becomes a pair of tweezers.}}*

### STATUE 1

Here, we begin and live in grief  
We begin and live on the body.  
Spotlight on a lump of flesh,

*{{A mass of gauze tapestry around two bodies who animate the Flesh in the corner of the stage, slowly move across. Their movements, writhing, suggest a maggot.}}*

### STATUE 2

Time is not linear, but marked by passions.

### STATUE 3

In the body of grief, passions or memories  
will be represented as tattoos. All that is left.

STATUE 4

All that is left, these faded  
conjurings, habits held in the flesh.

TECHNICIAN

All that is left, the memorials I etch, memories  
held in the flesh, ba-ba-baby do you regret  
that ink? What's it mean to ya, huh? I, somatic,  
I see I eye you and yeah I see what you feel.  
I flesh, I body, I mark and make you.

STATUE 5

The flesh, two bodies wrapped in a large swatch  
of gauze-like tapestry.

STATUE 6

The nascent forms of love and loss move amorous,  
amorphous, sticky, and unravel, writhing.

STATUE 7 & 8

A landscape of flesh.

TECHNICIAN

And what is flesh and love,  
but baggage and likenesses?

{{ *Eventually, the Flesh is hung upright,  
staggered and draping towards the audience.* }}

*Sound of a tattoo gun.*

STATUE 4

The gun, humming. Ink bleeds.

STATUE 5

The Technician leans down to wipe,  
or lick, the blood.

EXTERNAL

*Tattooed skin.*

EXTERNAL

*Tattooed skin.*

INTERNAL

*A large cursor.*

*Sound of a double click. Out of the Flesh emerges a bed,*

*resembling a wound. She folds herself into the scar tissue, and it absorbs her. {{ Noah left at night, and his bed was made in the morning to appear as though he was still sleeping inside of it. The Technician ceases tattooing and climbs inside the scar to lay with Gutterslut. When do we want the source of the pain close, as though just holding the absence and the regretregret that follows is better than the nearlynearly (i.e. states of denial, debilitation in the face action, the lack, the unanswerable lingering, the slow trudging trajectory to nowhere nearer.) The pain of responsibility is sometimes the closest to the beloved actualized, in Flesh, stitched back up, unharmed, "same as he always was always has been!" the fallacy of that, the fallacy of memory; no, only the pain itself can come back to bed. Please, come back to bed, Noah. Gutterslut lays with the Technician.*

*Lights off.*

*Lights on. Gutterslut lays alone.*

*Lights dim.*

*{{The sound of rain catches Gutterslut, carries her into the next scene. She floats along the surface of the river of Flesh, and sees The Fisherman's hook, and passes it's fang, gleaming. A whirlpool sweeps her ashore. }}*

AN INVESTIGATION OF A TATTOO [BELOW COLLARBONE]

EXTERNAL

*A hand picking petals off a bouquet of roses.*

EXTERNAL

*A hand picking petals off a bouquet of roses.*

INTERNAL

*The reflection of a collarbone in still water.*

*The Technician, crouched, tattoos a Rose on the Flesh. He wipes his brow on his sleeve. Dabs blood.*

*{{ Sound of the tattoo gun, humming. An image of a rose tattoo beside a heart with an arrow. A Mom in script. A bloody heart smears it's scar (fresh) across the Flesh, the skin on a collarbone above a chest. The Rose is one of many memories, inked in memoriam. Most notably, however, the Rose is a stand-in for Noah. An instance of him temporarily conjured.*

*Washed up on a square of lawn in early Spring, Gutterslut, dizzy with smudged instances, sits beside Rose and its ornaments... }*

ROSE

*Gestures.*

1. Divinates through arranging and rearranging bouquets.
2. Clips stems of future possibilities.
3. The possibilities each require a sacrificial petal.

NARRATOR

*Pacing while writing.*

In the rose garden he denied the fact.  
It was our first date.

GUTTERSLOT

*To the Rose, laid beside her.  
Your shirt is ripped. I thought you said  
you wanted to go out to dinner.*

Spring is

sunlight and collarbone.  
Unvocalized feelings undermined to save  
face. Claire arranging and rearranging

bouquets (and what if that  
were a kind of divination.)

Why did I always

Defer.

I don't know if you've noticed this yet,  
but I constantly—

I'm unsure.

Intuition strewn across the body.

I think of how much I couldn't know then,

I don't always trust myself, or what I feel,

but I want to spend time with you.

If only it were as easy as divinating  
with bouquets than I could tell us  
where to go to dinner, or—

and the insecurities absolved  
by mounting expectations and flattery.

I think of blossoming  
and unfamiliar warmth.

name this warmth  
out loud.

Warmth speeding up  
towards an end point.

Aren't you cold  
with all those holes  
in your shirt?

ROSE

Gutterwet.

*{{The bud bleeds into its surroundings, coupled with a  
tangled ball of yarn, a horse saddle, i.e. objects out of  
place that would rather not explain their presence, but  
somehow made it here, too. They share the space of an  
apology, soaked, standing in the doorway (the apology  
asks if it can come inside). As a palindrome, the apology  
finishes where it began... here, time works like that,  
endlessly reinstating the moments deemed significant,  
but never seen in the same light.}}*

JOANIE CALLS THE NARRATOR, 2

*Statue 1 carries out a phone and sets it again in the center of a set of a room. Wood floors? A counter and cutting board? The phone rings. Slicing apples or folding socks? Morning asanas or crying in the shower, loofah in hand? ... Gutterslut lets it ring a little longer than last.*

*Joanie passes in and out of the Flesh as a silhouette on the other line.*

EXTERNAL

*The shower still running.*

EXTERNAL

*A telephone in hand.*

INTERNAL

*Flowers floating in a bowl of water. Flowers sink to the bottom of the bowl when weighted with stones.*

GUTTERSLUT

*It's Noah's mom calling again.  
How much time has passed?*

*Sound of static persists for a long time. All anxiously pace. The pacing itself becomes a dance of waiting. Of in and out. Of rotating, tracing, and retracing; of hope and it's clockwork. Of the afterglow and it's perpetual accumulation. The river branches, but is shallower each time it forks. As the finitude of options under pressure. Or, as meaning, or ways of perceiving, once fleetingly captured, incessantly scatter and divide.*

JOANIE

Hello, I'm doing

*Static.*

Thanks for asking.

I need to know— did you and Noah

*Static.*

a place you went together?

Somewhere he might return to?

*Static.*

We need more leads...

NARRATOR

*To the audience.*

I imagined him walking to the coast.  
I imagined him in the forest. The river  
formerly known—

GUTTERSLUT

Along the river formerly the  
Willamette is a map of the solar  
System.

EXTERNAL

*Map of a river, and a finger tracing the contours.*

EXTERNAL

*Off.*

NARRATOR

We were nervous and convinced we  
were approaching an inevitable end point.

You know, what is inside reflected outside.  
We used to talk about leaving the planet.

GUTTERSLUT

Environmental and interpersonal.  
End. Done. Over. Goodnight.  
What is inside reflected outside.

He called it *blasting off.*

As an avoidance strategy  
for this catastrophe.

*Blast off...*

JOANIE

We visited his old house and asked  
the tenants if they knew where he went.

GUTTERSLUT

The distances on the river path  
reflect the distances between  
planets in the solar system.

The last day he was seen  
he went to work  
and they said—

*Static.*

and he—

*static.*

along the railroad tracks.

NARRATOR

Where could he have gone at night without  
shoes and—

*Static.*

We found his shirt  
in the gutter.

Others are following up  
with the reported sightings.

NARRATOR  
Have you tried the forest? Near the Mckenzie?

A group has been walking—  
*Static.*  
the forest for days.

GUTTERSLUT  
*Blast off.* I could feel him  
start to slip downstream  
before he ultimately disappeared.

NARRATOR  
I'll let you know what I hear,  
or if any other possible locations come to mind.

GUTTERSLUT  
A voice releasing its mind.

*Gutterslut hangs up the phone. Sound of shower water.*

INTERNAL  
*Bare feet in a dry river bed.*



AN INVESTIGATION OF A TATTOO [UPPER THIGH]

*{{The running water turns into the sound of a shoreline. Blue light. The Technician, crouched, tattoos a Mermaid on the Flesh. He wipes his brow on his sleeve. Dabs blood. Fishrot. Ripple glints. A melodic, high pitch.*

*Gutterslut lays, and the Mermaid chain smokes cigarettes while they recline, poised on the edge of the frame, or slung around the rounded side of a thigh. The Mermaid is another instance conjured, inked in memoriam; and, again, a stand-in for Noah.}}*

*The Narrator paces, dictating aloud while writing.*

NARRATOR

We would say it in a long drawl,  
like bourgeois snobs sprawled on a rock  
below an abandoned factory,  
and we'd take drags—

Noah was the first person I met who'd swim  
unabashedly in the river.

He'd throw all his clothes off at once like  
a three-year-old. Never sexual.

Just free... at first glance.

I don't want  
this constant

voice of judgement  
I carry.

As if my insecurity fractured me  
from a kind of knowing. Always  
three steps to the left of myself.

*Movement of a backspace.*

GUTTERS LUT

*Speaks to Mermaid.*

Urban mermaid.

*Both share the cigarette.*

I'd rather not. Yeah, who knows  
who is leering in the brush...

I don't want some...

*bush-perv*  
checking me out.  
*Smiles.*

Yeah, you're right  
I'd crush their skull  
with my thighs  
if I caught 'em.

*Drags cigarette.*

You have it easy.

Even when you are naked  
you evade all connotations  
of what it means to be exposed.

GUTTERSLUT, NARRATOR, and MERMAID

*Simultaneously acknowledge.*

Scales.

*{{Gutterslut and the Mermaid look up to the sky. The  
sewage pipe leaks and pools waste around their ankles.  
The afterglow stirs in the water. Gutterslut attempts  
to lift the glow above the sludge with two cupped palms.  
Meanwhile, the Fisherman's hook hovers. The Mermaid  
blows smoke at its bait.}}*

A CROWD BECOMES A COMMUNITY, LIKE A FOREST [ AS INTERCONNECTED]

*{{A Statue passes, sweeping sewage and cigarette butts off stage with a broom. We are somewhere in between limbs, in the liminal, a crease, a shadow, a question mark, directionlessness...}}*

NARRATOR

When he went missing we elaborated a system of thinking underground, collectively.

*Gutterslut pushes through the underbrush. Car lights flash through branches. She pulls herself up.*

*The rising sound of phone conversations, overlapping, disparate voices all speculate whereabouts, growing louder until inaudible.*

ENSEMBLE OF STATUES

*A mass. Pantomimes, in situ.*

1. Elaborates a system of collectively thinking underground.
2. Is a forest silenced by the surveillance of clouds.
3. A storm passes, and communication fissures into dead circuits.
4. Trees speculate in small groups, side glance across distance.

*The Ensemble of Statues are felled with a swing of lights, and walk through the aisles of the audience to pass out "Missing" flyers, but instead of Noah's face is an erasure of face... a smear, an absence of self. Each Statue asks audience, inquiring through the rows.*

Have you seen him?

Have you have you seen—?

A voice releasing

it's mind?

Are you

grieving

are you searching, too?

Do you

have room for

one more

lost,

one more

loss?

## GUTTERSLUT IS ABSORBED INTO THE FRACTURE

*{{The crease, the shadow in the liminal space widens until we are on one body pressed against a second. Have you ever noticed how quickly intimacy turns into sudden lack? The unknown falls stark against the known. Hold me tight. Cut to.*

*A violation. Interruption and retort. A wordless reveal, a flash of disdain. Disgust.*

*Or, imagine, your beloved running towards you in the shoreline. The shoreline retreats. The beloved reverses. Vanishes. That is, we trick ourselves so easily into believing we know another. This fantasy is groomed, palatable. Easy on the eye.*

*How many questions crowd into that gap between two bodies? How much doubt? And when it comes, in what forms?     }}*

EXTERNAL

*Two bodies pressed.*

EXTERNAL

*Two bodies pressed.*

INTERNAL

*A tattooed figure swimming in a square of sterile turquoise.*

*The Technician tattoos the Flesh. Wipes brow. Dabs blood.*

GUTTERSLUT

*I knew something was wrong.  
Repeats x10.*

TECHNICIAN

*Stands.  
It was your fault.  
Repeats x10.*

NARRATOR

*I'll name it Gutterslut.  
Movement of a backspace.  
Gutterslut, Gutterslut, Gutterslut—*

STATUES

*Singing in a row.  
Gutterslut.  
Gutterslut.  
Gutterslut.  
Gutterslut.  
Repeat.*

GUTTERSLUT

I'm simultaneously summoned and erased,

an imprint; a chain of paper cut outs.

STATUES

*Frame Gutterslut on either side  
hold hands, and expand outward.  
All become a chain of paper cut outs  
strung across a window and left hanging  
across four seasons...*

TECHNICIAN

Love is just b-b-b-bad.  
B-ba-bagg-  
age and  
likenesses. Let me  
love you, we are both  
carrying  
such a heavy  
load. You see  
the afterglow.

*The Technician pretends to tattoo mid-air, humming.  
The wall of Flesh slowly stains with blood from behind.*

GUTTERSLUT

No. I feel baggage, but no... not likeness.  
Not with you.

TECHNICIAN

Baggage. Gutterslut. Shit. Where'd you get  
your name? That's rhetorical. Cheap street whore.  
*Snickers.*

GUTTERSLUT

*Retorts.*

Gravity runs down,  
slime the pipes, slide,  
kick the can and chug.

NARRATOR

The pipes adopt dual significance as both location,  
and representative of the subconscious mind, the psyche.

TECHNICIAN

I'll like your baggage, I'll run you down  
and slurp you up-p-p-p...

*Bites lip. Squints. Yells.*

*The Ensemble of Statues enter.*

*The shadow of the Technician, a fictitious escalator  
to heaven, mocks his presumed hierarchy.*

GUTTERSLUT

*Turns to Technician.*

STOP. You know what you are? You are a—

TECHNICIAN

Hey, hey, hey—  
look, you're doing  
exactly  
what you condemn  
*I can tell.*

GUTTERSLUT

Let me past your ink.

TECHNICIAN

No. You are labeling *me*.  
*Jabs finger into chest.*  
Yeah, I fix things into place,  
yadda YADDA!  
Doesn't mean I'm a *bad*—

GUTTERSLUT

I don't care what you are,  
only what you've done.

There is so much noise I can't hear

I can't access

quiet,

the haptic;

but you know what's worse?

Now that he has fled,  
others are compelled,  
legitimized almost,

to voice their doubts  
in him,  
or whether

*he will be found*

he will  
at all.

No, instead they evaluate his logic of leaving

—or lack of— and-and-

interrogate or speculate his motives.

And the most intimate,  
personal details—  
our jokes, outrageous  
ideas, secret  
conspiracies—

suddenly, those are up for grabs, too.

Penned  
warped renditions. So,

no. It's *your* fault, it's your—

#### TECHNICIAN

I'm not a bad  
yadda yadda!

*Bites lip.*

*Crouches down.*

*Stands up.*

Hey! Look!

*Points. Loud moan.*

*Flaps sleeves of sweater.*

Bad. Bad.

Bad. Love.

I'm not a bleh.

*Cocks head. Squints.*

— I can tell!

#### GUTTERSLUT

Well,  
maybe  
you  
can  
tell  
me  
where  
he went,

too.

*The Technician, obstinate, walks up a staircase.*

*Considering...*

*Gutterslut, resigned, sits on the bottom step, and whistles to queue Ensemble of Statues.*

#### STATUE 1

Can we enact a leaving? Rehearse the possibilities?

#### ENSEMBLE OF STATUES

1. The ensemble of statues dance in pairs.
2. Lead collapses, deceased.
3. Follow crouches and shakes lead.
4. Switch partners. Repeat step 3.
5. Lead rises.
6. Repeat steps 1-5. Replace follow shaking the shoulders of the lead with—
  - I. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
  - II. A head in a lap.
  - III. One pair of hands on both faces.

*Sound of a heart monitor. Siren lights.*

*No sound of a siren.*

#### ENSEMBLE OF STATUES

*Yell all together. Stomp feet.*

No!

1. Hold flashlights, search for the body around flesh and through audience, under chairs.
2. Rejoin on stage. Hold light under faces. Silent scream. All collapse to floor.
3. Yell, “No!” with varying intonations, and turn flashlights off.

#### INTERNAL

*An imprint of a body flooded with water.*

*Lights dim.*



INTERLUDE WITH A TATTOO OF A SNAKE [WRAPPED AROUND THE DOMINANT ARM]

*{{The imprint of water floods across pavement. I don't want to give the impression that we must avoid or resist memory, memorial. Nor do I believe we can or need to hold it all in. Every One is the run off of someone else—*

*It is a question of how. This story is partly about systems of catchment... let seep, inundate, divert to spread, slow.}}*

EXTERNAL

*A bloody knee.  
A finger tracing a map of a river.  
and a small altar by the shore with flowers,  
stones, and candles.*

EXTERNAL

*An embodied member (masked)  
Afterglow sits on the other side of a  
river, and washing clothes in the  
water.*

*Water pours over the sidewalk where Gutterslut sits  
with the Snake cleans Gutterslut's knee with alcohol.*

NARRATOR

*Speaks while writing.*  
A river ran red from sediment.  
A storm was coming.  
  
Noah said when storms come,  
when rain falls, it gives him new  
  
ideas. We were both excited  
by water that doesn't travel straight,  
  
and instead flows in a figure eight  
pattern. Nick told us that's how  
  
it works. He said it plainly,  
and our minds were blown.  
  
Which is funny, in hindsight,  
we talked about it for months.  
  
We drew pictures of blue  
eights. The way memory  
  
rolls back on itself, and so briefly  
we backflow with

GUTTERS LUT

*To Snake.*  
It's our ritual.  
to bring glass jars to the river.  
and every month,  
  
We pour out what we collect  
and fill the jars back up  
to keep on our windowsills.  
  
Noah, will you hold mine  
for a minute? I love  
the repetition of simple  
acts repeated, rituals.  
  
— I told you,  
I fell, scraped my knee, and  
sat on a bench next to  
  
a group of women, water-  
healers, that's what they called  
themselves.

ourselves, and it's a good thing,  
no, it's not something to resist

or— it's only messy,  
and to remember the instance

supplies a false impression that we  
are completing it;

As if only what is filtered through  
our senses comprises the totality of—

think about, for example,  
how much rain falls on pavement.

They told me that I kept  
falling, because I was moving too  
fast, doing too much, and I  
should try to

slow down.  
Whether or not it heals,  
I think the act is soothing, slowing.

Otherwise we might not  
come sit by the river so often—  
at least in Winter and Fall.

AN ATTEMPT AT CONTACT

*{{Light undulates, reflects off the river in late evening. The Fisherman casts out and sits on a bucket. Spit tobacco. Swig beer. Freeway grey noise mixes with the tide. Passing freight. He watches the young couple make out in his periphery; and pulls out the sealed bottle floating in his subconscious, breaks it open, and skims its shriveled notes. Ballpoint pen, faded. His mind wanders back to her. This time the face of his ex blends with the young woman who sells fruit popsicles in the parking lot on weekends. He kicks the broken glass aside, and begs the willow to offer him one more fish before dark, before the sky turns red. He'll go to the market in the morning. He'll sling fish for cash to the tourists, and tell them it's farmed. He'd never eat the meat himself, no way in hell. Have you ever seen the rivers in post collapse?*

*Before he can reel in and cast out again, Gutterslut slips over, like oil pools up under a car at night, and makes a little rainbow in the drainage ditch.}}*

EXTERNAL  
Static.

EXTERNAL  
Gutterslut through a fish-eyed lens of a computer monitor.

INTERNAL  
A mercurial river and chain link.

EXTERNAL  
The fisherman casting out into the river.

EXTERNAL  
Static. The eye of the fisherman, up close and swiveling.

*Sound of a heart monitor. Gutterslut walks out and the Fisherman is baiting his line.*

*He looks over his shoulder to talk to Gutterslut.*

FISHERMAN  
Turns. Grunts.  
Who are you trying to lure?

GUTTERSLOT  
Catch anything?

*Pause, an evaluation.*

GUTTERSLUT

Noah.  
He's lost,  
missing.

FISHERMAN

Oh yeah?  
*Spits.*  
I'm looking for someone too.

GUTTERSLUT

Are you? Who?

FISHERMAN

Not sure yet.  
I'll know when I meet them.

GUTTERSLUT

How will you know  
if you were to find them?

FISHERMAN

I'll feel 'em coming.

*Pause. Considering.*

GUTTERSLUT

Like a fish?

FISHERMAN

Like a fish. There's a tug felt before the breach.

NARRATOR

*To herself.*

How can I express the loss  
while prioritizing not the mutability  
of his thoughts, verbalized, out of context,  
but his movements themselves?  
The space he occupied, and now ceases to occupy  
in a room. This is what I miss.

*Movement of a backspace.*

FISHERMAN

Look, I don't have much to offer.

*Long pause.*

But you could do like me—  
Keep baiting. Keep waiting...

yeah, that's one way.

*Pause.*

Or you could go  
down,  
and through...

GUTTERSLUT

Are you saying—

*Snake emerges from a slit in the Flesh.*

SNAKE

To travel in subterranean  
water  
rife with contaminants,  
in the leaky  
conveyance of slump skins,  
the slow,  
sepulchral creep  
oiled slick, and on fire,  
while half-asleep.

INTERNAL

*Crude oil and water.*

*Lights remain off.*

*The Child walks through a partition in the Flesh,  
and stands before them.*

CHILD

Gutterslut picks up a stone and squats with her arm angled  
to skip the stone. She flicks her wrist and lets the stone spin.

*Lights off.*

*{{The afterglow skips upstream, while the Fisherman stays  
in place, we follow it.}}*

## THE SELF CONSCIOUS NARRATOR DIGRESSES

*{{The afterglow hellos the whole way through. Screw this murk, it thinks, it's so hard to see where I'll land. Yes, the afterglow is sentient. It is not of one mind, but holds multiples. If anyone understands the afterglow, it's the Child. The glint plunks underwater.}}*

SNAKE

That's when I  
make my entrance...  
I mean I've already  
entered, but now  
I make an entrance...  
*Smiles.*

Here I am,  
and with me I carry  
the orphic or edenic  
archetype.

*An Anonymous Audience Member stands up  
from their seat. Their nose is bleeding profusely,  
and bleeds the duration of the play.*

ANONYMOUS

*Turns to Technician.*

Hold up. I came here with my wife.  
We don't usually do this  
kind of stuff. She keeps whispering  
questions  
and I'm like, baby...  
you're acting like Regis Philbin.  
*Canned laughter.*

EXTERNAL

*Clip from Who Wants to be a Millionaire.*

EXTERNAL

*Clip from Who Wants to be a Millionaire.*

*Blood spills down shirt.*

I mean my point is, I can get  
behind this fluid, pulsating *world of flesh...*  
Okay, but at least tell me,  
who the hell is this Technician.  
And why is it Gutter Slut's fault?

REGIS PHILBIN

*Walks across stage in a suit.*

For 500,000 dollars, who or what bodies are deemed disposable with little to no reconciliation, or public memorialization? You search for the one you love, but what about the rest?

NARRATOR

The Technician dwells here, in Grief,  
in Postcollapse.

He creates the tattoos...

*Movement of backspace.*

which, like a coloring book,  
allot some room to fill in,  
but nothing more.

He carves the world up.

Marks its parts.

*Movement of backspace.*

ANONYMOUS

Can you mark me  
a better seat? Or wife?

*Laughs.*

C'mon. Kidding.

I'm kidding.

But if that's the case...

you know, carving

the world up...

designating the flesh...

deciding whose who,

gets what, how

so-and-so

is seen or

remembered or

etc...

imagine the idolatry

if they were penned—

SNAKE

*Gestures quotations.*

Just right. With me in mind. Always me. Mine.

TECHNICIAN

No, no, no... my character, the Technician... line?

NARRATOR

The Technician is...

TECHNICIAN

*Nods, smiling, remembering.*

The Technician is a product of past actions  
never to be redacted. The abuse of grief,  
unwelcome. Shut the door the apology is waiting  
outside. The product of regretregret. Hold  
and holy, only some holy. Only who and only  
a few remembered. I mark the parts, I say  
what memories are aired. Tune in. Keep your  
dial locked. Keep your pen poised. Keep your mind  
stuck on the slumpshit and assumptions. Keep your  
self weighted down in the shallows. Slug and pump.  
Knots of inaction clutch your throat. I stay at the  
crossroads and die- rect where the waste goes.  
I say whose sinned. Who is who who is cleaned.  
I say you can't see the whole. There is no afterglow.  
No, no, no!

ANONYMOUS

*To Gutterslut.*

Why does he have such a hold on you?

GUTTERSLUT

*To Anonymous.*

Have you ever looked at someone you loved  
as if you didn't know them? Because  
their insecurity scared the shit out of you?  
Because, by suddenly acknowledging their pain  
you believe you are responsible, or must alleviate it;  
but the truth is, you became responsible—  
I mean, I became responsible— the moment I saw him.  
The moment I felt his distance growing wider.

NARRATOR

*Talks to self while writing.*

And the tattoos are inaccurate.  
So is the recorded narrative.

*Movement of backspace.*

I try to fix

GUTTERSLUT

*Gestures to self while speaking.*

How is a tattoo akin to a memory,  
akin to a memorial,

akin to

a mark,



what I know

in place. It's always  
skewed, faded, warped,

a caricature  
of my own subjective

lens,  
superimposed

by the present  
each time it is conjured

again.  
In drawing

from memory  
I exaggerate

a new  
deficiency—

the eye,  
placement

of a hand, tone  
of what was spoken...

Gutterslut is my avatar, I mean,  
an extension

of my past  
flaws and actions.

An emblem  
of my psyche, the feeling

body, maybe,  
built to follow

Noah the night  
he left.

an othering,

A division,  
a difference?  
It's like if the Signifier took his or her Signified  
out on the town...  
to meet his boss,  
or mother...

Each context for introduction  
creates a new result.  
Hello, I'd like you  
to meet my Signified.

*Imitates a greeting.*

Hello! How do you do?  
Like memory,  
a definition changes shape.  
The meaning  
renews

is reintroduced,  
expands,  
contracts,  
changes form,  
double backs,  
contradicts. Like me,

I am the Narrators avatar, but  
I don't always extend  
her logic. Sometimes, I—

project the alternative.

I am the feeling that may  
undermine logic.

Maybe,

I regret less. Maybe, I wouldn't have followed...  
Noah the night  
he left, in hindsight.

*Turns to Gutterslut.*  
No. You would never. How could you?  
  
If you don't want to find him  
Then we never will.  
You need to want this as much as—

how is *to allow* different than *to turn away*?  
  
You're right. No.  
I said that out of fear, the unknown,  
you know, I would have—  
  
I need to know where he went,  
maybe we can still—  
*Quiets...*  
Blast off.

INTERNAL

*A potted plant, overflowing with water, mud spills.*

SNAKE

You gotta fuck it out.  
Go down on it.  
We're all sluts for being fucked.  
*Pause.*

Look,  
there are ways  
to move  
through the rivers-  
that-formerly-were,  
down sewers, and  
beneath the surface  
of the skin,  
deeper...

*Laughs.*  
through the hollow center  
of the body.  
Where it all drains...  
is kept,  
our internal  
knowing, outside  
time, experience,  
it rests,  
sequestered.  
You gotta fuck it out.

*All stand, perplexed.*

ANONYMOUS

What do you mean? Like cosmic screwing?

SNAKE

Like... shed. Lose this baggage.

*Gestures to the Narrator...*

*who is stuck again in a backspace...*

GUTTERSLUT

Fuck out the answer? That's too bleak.

*Pause.*

But, I am named Gutterslut after all.

So, run me down, more ragged, more willing, wet—

SNAKE

*Turns to audience.*

What's better than to enjoy this world of ours,  
and the great internal adventure it offers?

TECHNICIAN

He's a distraction. Gutterslut

it's your fa-fa-fault! Your fault!

You're a b-b-b-b! You're a b-b-bleh!

STATUES

*Singing, soft, out of sync.*

Gutterslut.

Gutterslut.

Gutterslut.

Gutterslut.

Gutterslut.

*Repeat and trail off.*

SNAKE

Snake in the grass. Sss...

How do I get under

that flesh? Shhh...

*Lights dim with a spotlight on Snake as she coaxes  
grief and its constituents to the surface of the stage.*

*A melancholic congo-line forms.*

*Light flickers behind the flesh.*

## THE NARRATOR REALIZES A HARD FACT

*{{The Ensemble of Statues enter while the rest exit.*

*The Snake dances descent, the narrative always unraveling behind her sharp turns.*

*The Narrator backspaces around a board where she draws and redraws diagrams. The Ensemble of Statues huddle around her, concerned. She beats against the Flesh. She claws at the tapestry until the surface bursts open and plumes gauzy tool. The Narrator, heavy in the fabric, heavy with baggage, slumps over, sloughed. she lifts, sheds...}}*

### STATUE 1

As she listened to Gutterslut and the rest speak,  
the Narrator realizes...

### STATUE 2

How the logical mind can confine the intuition...

### STATUE 3

Yet, she questions this dichotomy. She wonders...

### NARRATOR

Is it as simple as body and mind? What about speech?  
To speak, is itself, a bodily act; but to speak up or out shatters  
the distinction, although—

### STATUE 1

Repeat. Explain.

### NARRATOR

Is it as simple as body and mind? What about speech?  
Meaning, speech draws it's lines over the body. To name  
will accidentally redact or override a physical act.

### STATUE 4

Is the body the blind spot of speech?

### INTERNAL

*"Is the body the blind spot of speech."*

*Gutterslut is caught in the web of the words  
projected like wisteria, a clinging of vowels. The phrase*

*lingers, certain letters widen or shrink at random,  
responsive to Gutterslut's resistance.*

STATUE 5

So speech and the body are inseparable,  
but incongruous. And that, by naming  
herself the Narrator,

STATUE 6

She inadvertently prioritizes her stance,  
her logic, over Gutterslut, the intuition...

STATUE 7

Feeling. The grief itself, unbound from any moral  
or otherwise logically defined complications...

STATUE 8

That, as words distort the quiet multiplicity  
of meaning inherent in a painting,

STATUE 1

her causality and orchestration from above  
distorts the inner workings of this world...

STATUE 2

the afterlife.

NARRATOR

Maybe my fixation on the past is what  
binds Gutterslut to guilt. I project my experience  
onto her; and so, silence her.

EXTERNAL

*Gutterslut's mouth, on a fisheye lens.*

EXTERNAL

*Gutterslut's mouth, on a fisheye lens.*

INTERNAL

*Water pouring into a mouth.*

*How can silencing be shown other than a physical*

*struggle? Sound of hollow beat each time Gutterslut opens her mouth, or...*

Maybe it's best if the search goes on without me.

*The Statues push a ladder out in the slits of Flesh, the Narrator exits through the clouds, writing while compulsively enacting a backspace.*

*Statues dance in response to the numbered prompts, while they simultaneously read out loud.*

#### ENSEMBLE OF STATUES

1. A gaze turns downward by a hook of a smile.
2. The corner of a lip is linked to a grinning, heavy chain.
3. The body pressed up against chain link, rattling.
4. Strength in the discomposure of climbing over a high fence.
5. Or, to swing three steps to the right of the body. Or,

#### STATUE 1

Have you ever seen an object shift in light until— ?

*Light shifts like a glance across stage.*

VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

INTERNAL

*“You gotta fuck it out. Go down on it.”*

GUTTERSLOT

Snake in the grass. *Shhh*. Do you want to know how I got my name? It has to do with the direction I moved to find him.

Snake

in the grass. Gravity run down, run me down, run ragged, more willing, wet. *Shhh*. Imagine the stench. He used to bite my lip. Don't bite.

Bodies in the sewage.

SNAKE

Gutterslut. Gutterslut.  
Gutterslut.  
So much flesh.

So much flesh,

flesh on the body.

*Since the Narrator has left, the Snake hijacks the desk. The Snake smooths her dress, sits, smiles.*

*Her pen is poised. Gutterslut is tangled in words, projected.*

*The Snake talks aloud as she writes, occasionally looking up to Gutterslut to assess her progress...*

*{{ ~ ~ Gutterslut proceeds to “fuck” the flesh. She arouses the slit until it further unfurls, widening, glowing, and drawing open like a curtain...*

*Blue lights. Silhouettes pass behind the Flesh, and suggest a reordering as Gutterslut has dropped to the other side, slipped into the body, and now sees Grief from it's most cavernous depths. Amongst its roots. Wet.*

*Here, everything responds with touch. Here, is run by the haptic, sensorial. Responds and is responsive. Moves easily. Is intertwined.*

*Sound of water dripping in a hollow space. The walls move, blue, the Flesh undulates. Veins emerge, and blood flows.*

*The afterglow glints. It is a lit clot in the blood. ~ ~ }}*

## MUCKMUCK AND LEAK HELLOS

### GUTTERSLOT

Noah? Hello?

*Touches the glowing clot,  
and it scatters into pointellations of light.  
When the light scatters, bodies tumble  
out of the Flesh. The afterglow,  
embodied, wears masks.*

*{{ ~ ~ The Afterglow oscillates between it's lit,  
autonomous form, and it's embodied, disparate parts.*

*This is the Million Dollar Question... ~ ~ }}*

### AFTERGLOW

1. The ensemble of the afterglow dance in pairs.
2. Lead collapses, deceased.
3. Follow crouches and shakes lead.
4. Switch partners. Repeat step 3.
5. Lead rises.
6. Repeat steps 1-5. Replace follow shaking the shoulders of the lead with—
  - I. Mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
  - II. A head in a lap.
  - III. One pair of hands on both faces.
  - IV. Create a human checkout stand, and pass through one-by-one.

*Sound of a heart monitor. Siren lights.*

*No sound of a siren.*

### AFTERGLOW

*Yell all together. Stomp feet.*

Yes!

1. Hold flashlights, search for the body around flesh and through audience, under chairs.
2. Rejoin on stage. Hold light under faces. Silent scream. All crumble to the floor.
3. Yell, "Yes!" with varying intonations, and turn flashlights off.

### INTERNAL

*An imprint of a body flooded with water.*

*All stream off stage when the Internal floods, pours over.*



## THE CHILD AS PRESCIENT, POLLUTED

*{{ ~ ~ A river on stage. A river through the body of Grief.  
A Grief river contaminated is... like any other river. It pulls*

*in the external pollutants until it becomes uninhabitable,  
undrinkable. Guilt amplified by shame. Regret. Chemical.  
We don't know how to grieve when we feel the weight, the  
baggage and likenesses. Unrelenting. When we still love,  
we hold. We don't release. Release. Please,  
release. A grief river polluted from the manufacturing (of  
death) along the shore. This murk is thick. How do we  
shed this? So viscous, viciously cycling. It starts inside,  
and what is inside is reflected outside, it leeches.*

*The Child, our prescience, tosses cut flowers. ~ ~ }}*

### CHILD

*Tossing cut flowers.*

I, swimming. Submerged. I, river.

My body chiseled flat, stoic;

pickpick, thumb, let spin.

Prescience. I, not-all-at-once,

but in successions, soul amasses  
like unworn dress around the ankles

and body is sloughed asunder  
cotton or buried under

the muddy shore. Soulless. No  
breathing. Taptap. Shush.

*Buryit. Buryit. Buryit.*

They say, sullen.

I, cellular, absorb  
arsenic, pesticides, solvents. I,

pointellations composing  
and submerged.

Where (glowing) is our guide?

I, downstreaming cadmium, mercury,  
zinc, copper, lead, and I,  
cyanide. I, (no public apology  
now) septic and seep of storage  
tanks, waste, and fertilizers. I,  
landfill, easy-does-petrol. Hello?  
Here we are!  
I, the family evacuated.  
I, the product of the family  
evacuated. I,  
afterthought. I, hindsight.  
I, so-called, composite, infectious  
amalgamation of the "I"  
themselves, sticky, plastic, plural.  
(Who believes in a we, a plural now anyhow?)  
Smelters, concentrators, processors  
along the crick. Industrial  
carrier, the river. The I. The ruckus  
that hardly ensues, suchandsuch a shame.  
Waterfunk. Watersludge.  
Muckmuck and leak. This, I.

#### ENSEMBLE OF STATUES

Tossed cut lilies. Darker varieties of roses. Babies Breath.  
Hands hover above what pools, what water? Is it any longer?

#### CHILD

Meanwhile, Gutterslut follows the stones,  
spinning... into the gradual  
loss of a center, water draining, this, the, I.  
*Plunk.* Here, in the hollow places.

JOANIE SAYS HELLO FROM UNDERWATER

*{{ ~ ~ Static or is it censorship of information? Do you see the afterglow? Static, or discretion, breaks up Joanie's*

*voice on the other line. In the body of Grief, she swims.*

*A telephone unlike any telephones before it, appears.  
On a table. Or is it floating mid air? Is it buried? And if so,  
does Gutterslut put her ear to the ground to hear it ring?  
In doing so, what else does she hear? A pulse? A thump?  
A high note? A glint on a ripple? The quavering in  
Joanie's voice? Or is it the onset of release. Some  
baggage falls softly, like mist, from the sky. ~ ~ }}*

*The Memory of Joanie gathers flowers tossed across  
the stage, bundles the mass in cloth.*

JOANIE

I— I thought I'd call

*Static.*

we still haven't found him, or his body.

It's almost as if he—

*Static.*

EXTERNAL

*Off.*

EXTERNAL

*A house built out of tarps,  
corrugated metal, and scraps.  
A masked figure (Afterglow) sits  
inside, wrapped in a blanket.*

JOANIE

*Static.*

I always could imagine  
the two of you—  
staying together,  
finding land, and maybe,  
who knows, kids—

*Static.*

Who knows,  
maybe he'll turn—

*Static.*

I'm swimming.

I bought a snorkel and—

*Static.*

To look under—

*Static*

Who knows, I thought...

ANONYMOUS MAN

*Walks across stage, reading Phaedo.*

By not knowing where the body is, we think of it more as undying.

*Looks out.*

The outcomes multiply...

## MOURNING MORE THAN A SINGULAR LOSS

### ANONYMOUS MAN

*Walks back across stage, reading Phaedo.*

By not knowing where the body is, we think of it more as undying.

*Looks out.*

The outcomes multiply...

### EXTERNAL

*View of the highway from passenger seat.*

### EXTERNAL

*Afterglow (masked) on the side of the road.*

### ENSEMBLE OF STATUES

*Each one, another set of outcomes.*

*Another interpretation of loss, undefined.*

*Each embodies her result.*

1. My loss, an ecdysiast, a contortionist circling sod to dirt in the front yard.
2. My loss, the Signified in a cold sweat free from its Signifier for an afternoon, buying a six pack.
3. Feigns self-containment, but is definition number three.) To be ruled by the planet, characterized by rapid and unpredictable changeableness of mood.
4. A cache ultradeep, I frack, speculate finitude, regretregret, and my nearlynearly drains from my whole. Where does it go when it goes?
5. Coffee grinds at the bottom of the mug. A language built of resemblances, smiles familiar and weak, a palm-to-palm. I gently squeeze a hand attached to another body to appear more animate to myself. A cloud with ellipses hangs loose above our heads.
6. My loss appears as a pocket-sized reportage of Falcon 9, a sudden and distinct realization of—
7. There I was, gesturing again to the gold-green heap, when I see my loss, flashing above the water, a wave waving over the waves. Do I wave back?
8. I puncture a hole in my loss and breath myself upright.

*Repeat x2; and— differently timed— the Statues will  
read the manifestation of their loss once in lieu of movement.*

### GUTTERSLUT

*Stands Stage C. with spotlight.*

It's been how long, and no trace. No sign.  
We've printed posters. So many have called,  
And believed they've seen him. But it's just  
uncanny resemblance. To be lost,  
or in a state of loss, is revealed pervasive  
in their passing expressions. We've spent how

long calling his name along the river.  
We called his name along the river.

STATUE 1

We called his name along the river.

His face on the flyers resembled the others...

We received phone calls.  
Yes, I saw him, they'd say.

STATUE 2

Walking down the highway.

Or, Yes. I saw him.

STATUE 3

He is in the granary.

I gave him a ride. Or,

STATUE 4

Yes, I saw her, years ago...  
she told me she was lost, and  
I closed my door.

Or,

STATUE 4

Yes, I saw him when I was a child.  
She used to walk in the field  
behind our house.

Or, yes I think I saw—

STATUE 5

He was crowded with himself, or  
with many selves. He was fleeing.  
I saw him.

I built a wall. I saw him—

STATUE 6

sleeping under the bridge. I saw —

him.

I saw all of him. I didn't stop. I didn't  
offer help. I saw him, and I drove by.  
As a kid I saw him and I was told  
*don't look him in the eye.*

STATUE 7

I was told *keep walking, honey*. As a kid I saw him in the subway.

I saw all of him leave—

STATUE 8 & 1

En masse. I saw him and her.  
I saw they. I saw them.

STATUE 2

En masse. I saw him and her.  
I saw they. I saw them.

En masse. I saw him and her.  
I saw they. I saw them

I saw them multiply in fog,  
while walking at night,  
along a fence.

STATUE 3

I saw them in exodus. I heard about him,  
and the rest,

STATUE 4

in the papers.  
Without papers.

in the papers.

Without papers.

STATUE 5

I heard they were turned away.

STATUE 6

I heard he mentioned an attack

GUTTERSLUT

*Don't shoot*, he wrote on a slip of paper  
the day before he went missing. I heard

STATUE 7

they were attacked.

He fled.

They fled.

STATUE 8

They've been fleeing. I heard about it in the news.

STATUE 1

I saw them pass on the bus.

STATUE 2

I saw them through the window,  
looking out.

STATUE 3

I saw my reflection. Look—

GUTTERSLUT

*Angry.*  
I turned away.

STATUE 4

I have always turned away. I heard—

STATUE 5

them! In the park  
asking for—

STATUE 6 & 7

—a chorus of them, and I crossed the street.

INTERNAL

*Silhouettes, distant, in a row along the horizon line. A pixelated sea.*

*{{ ~ ~ Hands reach through the flesh, interweave.  
Is to interweave a product of grief? ~ ~ }}*

CHILD

The family, once interwoven.

I, the product of the family

evacuated. I,

afterthought. I, hindsight.

I, so-called, composite, infectious

amalgamation of the “I”

themselves, sticky, plastic, plural.

STATUES

(Who believes in a we, a plural, now anyhow?)

CHILD

Smelters, concentrators, processors

along the crick. Industrial

carrier, the river. The I. The ruckus

that hardly ensues, suchandsuch a shame.

Waterfunk. Watersludge. Water what do we do,

but acknowledge the lack and act

by giving in substitution for those we’ve lost.

Memorial, Muckmuck and leak. This, I.

The culmination of ...

GUTTERSLUT

*Audio.*  
*I turned away.*



*I turned away.*  
*I turned away.*

## AUTOPOIESIS

*Gutterslut approaches two glints of afterglow, embodied, masked on stage. The afterglow stand at the bus stop and wait, while shaking glints (little flecks, like static) from their jackets, out pockets, kicking the glints from*

*boots, swat them midair. All the glints, escaping their clothes, their skin, their backpacks when opened.*

*When Gutterslut enters, few glints of afterglow hover around her.*

*A Statue enters. The statue choreographs a dance between all three. It is a dance of trade-off, moving through, and into one another's experience. Each time the light shifts, one becomes the other, is absorbed and absorbs. Leaves as part of, and without. The static glints move with the masks. High notes. The fisherman's hook.*

1. [Shifts in the light until... we slough our marks and gather up the lines of another ]
2. [Shifts in the light until... we incise the ripe center and spill open every unthought idea, held inside to ferment]
3. [Shifts in the light until... we graft limbs (or a limn in the center of) our partner]
4. [Shifts in the light until... we, more permeable now, coax out our warm throats, and every phrase said and would unsay, or wish away]
5. [Shifts in the light until... we, so porous now, hear our mothers speaking through our skin, and what do they repeat when they speak?]
6. [Shifts in the light until... we grow taller until our vascular system can't pump water and nutrients any higher; and sag our tired mechanisms]
7. [Shifts in the light until... and by the time we reach old age, the whole crown is wide with no identifiable leader.]
8. [Shifts in the light until... we trade, and interweave as product of grief.]

BOTTOM DWELLING

EXTERNAL

*A figure walks down the highway.  
The figure turns, wearing a mask,  
Of an autonomous Afterglow.*

EXTERNAL

*A house built of tarps, spare parts.  
The figure turns, wearing a mask,*

*Of an autonomous Afterglow.*

*A soft singing.*

CHRIS

*A product of the Afterglow.  
Sings in a wheelchair in the dark,  
masked. An empty chair is beside her.  
When Gutterslut addresses her  
she pulls off her sweater hood,  
and lifts up her mask.*

GUTTERSLUT

I could hear your song from across the river.

CHRIS

It's a folk ballad.

*Chris has respirator tubes connecting to her nose  
down to an oxygen tank. It sounds a light tempo.*

GUTTERSLUT

Have you seen anyone come by here,  
someone alone, who appears lost?

*Chris hands Gutterslut her mask. Gutterslut puts it on,  
and sits down in the vacant chair. Chris speaks slowly...*

CHRIS

I don't see much of anyone. And I haven't.

*Pause.*

I was diagnosed with tuberculosis fifty years ago,  
and there was no cure at the time. I was told  
to stay away from others so as to not infect them.

*Pause.*

So I sing.

GUTTERSLUT

Do you imagine singing to someone?

CHRIS

The woman I love

I haven't seen—

*Both look out, quiet.*

GUTTERSLUT

I read out loud.

CHRIS

*Looks over.*

GUTTERSLUT

When I want to feel him.

*Looks down.*

I thought I could feel him.

*A disparate, disembodied fragment of the afterglow  
pauses on the Flesh. A vein glimmers a gurgle of blood.*

I deluded myself. I thought I could be  
the one who—

CHRIS

You continue to put yourself  
in the center.

GUTTERSLUT

I'm not sure I—

CHRIS

"It's *my* fault, *my* fault, I turned away..."

GUTTERSLUT

Regardless, he could be here,  
we are in the afterlife, after all—

CHRIS

The afterlife is another way to say unaccepted  
outcomes. Postcollapse. Grief.

Maybe your solution is not to try to find, hold, but  
create a system to divert one loss into many.  
To slow, spread this singular loss. You see  
the afterglow, after all.

*Long pause.*

*Both close their eyes.*

INTERNAL

*Light refracting off a pool and onto a wall.*

CHRIS

So, you're supposed to represent  
The Narrator's intuition?

GUTTERSLUT

That's what they told me.

CHRIS

Only the so-called  
*intuition*  
of somebody  
writing a play  
could remain so  
controlling—  
Look, you already  
want to name  
your outcomes,  
dictate closure...

*Pause.*

I do appreciate  
that you are giving me  
the final word.

*Both lean back, tired.*

GUTTERSLUT

A voice releasing...

*The Flesh undulates. Hands reach through the tapestry,  
and interweave.*

CHRIS

If you're quiet enough, you can hear it.

*Gutterslut pulls the mask over her face, and leans back.*

*Song begins to swell... the humming of the child? A fishing line  
tugging to signal a distant encounter? A high note, ringing? Or the  
light tempo of the respirator, a breath, the persistent, measured  
evidence of living despite the constant effort of it all.*

*Or is it a reminder to breath? Or is it a mother somewhere, when  
she hears her husband's respirator stop. The sudden quiet. She*

*knows he is gone, and holds him until morning to give her kids one last night of rest.*

*Gutterslut lifts the mask and takes a sudden, sharp inhalation.*

*Lights off.*