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### Versions of Now

Robert Balun  
*CUNY City College*

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*Versions of Now*  
Robert Balun

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“Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts of the City College of the City University of New York”

*"We as viewers and readers do not receive answers; instead we are implicated as accomplices in the conspiratorial search for meaning."*

*-Alice Fogel*

*"I am losing my because.  
I said I was  
the new species: no one."*

*-Alice Notley*

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[render] and remember it's easy to

stay suspended in

cloud and breath  
delivered

if you make room  
make empty

don't look down

we are nowhere and it's now

I know I borrowed that

but you said it so  
perfectly in  
the shape of

my never thrown out fantasy of  
what I was

promised I could  
imagine to become

dream enshrined

piece of the collected  
symbol and myth

an energy that fit  
in the place I left hollowed out—

from time to time  
for what it's worth  
it's worth it

and if I find you  
I would promise I will tell you

remind me to consider

the landscapes I really love

and how to look for

something really worth it

doesn't this always start with fever

drug or dream

is memory not the same

I take your story and it becomes mine

our sky hung in wrought  
iron relief

we make it an artifact

no we call it a brightness

an empty we can reuse

you said you  
had seven  
bottles of time

I had a cigarette  
a dead ship sailing your fey mouth

we look to the door for recognition

you ask if the river runs or carries  
maybe sickness can be our mystery

my cup dissolves into a bubble of spectrum  
I'll bring you back some rain

in this vision of floral  
patterns / remember

to cover up what needs to be covered

a lived in diffusion  
put around

your construction  
of sacred objects

of essential motion

resonance and recurrence—

wrapped / in a code  
a pattern to keep  
hidden all day  
I paste petals



I put me in a keepsake  
the icon  
totem of  
your mirrored gaze

inside the skull  
analogy  
ruined spacial  
echo chamber

you smell like the sunset

you smell like the dusk

I always forget  
how you fit in my hands

as this name erases the other  
make it your little universe

put it in your pocket

the night hung on our heads like a bow

in the backyard shadow  
I sit and listen to the  
    war cries of  
    the neighborhood flung  
    against the looping night

the new ritual is called don't look for the come down  
there is an emergency outside

we can't see the neighbors  
but we can hear their guns

I do a version of this noise

I call it the branch of science that studies a perfect movie  
the hero is a hero / the flag is a memorial

let's go get stung by bees after this  
let's sew ourselves into the memory / a song

you wrote / the equation of never sleeping

a mouth blooming  
feathers plume  
tongued practice

I love you but only like a lover

I don't want you to feel ancient

we met in a dream bought with borrow

I do a version of this noise

I live in a house with knives  
now I'm sure it's bones

there are no degrees of tragedy

only light leaked in  
through the weak parts of skin

a kaleidoscopic hole in my hand

the sound of the missing never crystallized

why is one more lost than another  
among those who have lost ahold of their dancing flowers

I swear I'm not trying to put a time in your room

bloom and bring me  
ritual newness

spirit deal

I want your persona

something to put inside my organs—

the dream came rushing through the window

everything's been all wavy since—

did I finish telling you what I was laughing at before



*Self (Eponymous)*

all serious inside your tiny toy castle

you obscure

a tomorrow room

understand I am the same hymnal  
I give you your pilled out tension

(here) the cloud kingdom  
skull city

(here) stay obtained  
inside your dream  
composition

your gospel  
cloud-  
watch

the projected new  
body light

(here) I brought you

your favorite  
sugar  
water  
flavor

I promise I'll bring  
along the clouds of your growing up

I promise I'll touch

your face like a secret

all serious inside your tiny toy castle

*Self (Map of a Napkin)*

I follow your memory  
against the busy world

push back

no we  
made way  
for you  
made up your place for you (here) so we wouldn't get lost

first you thought  
an ocean  
then you swam inside it

called it the birthplace of vessels

we haven't become sandy beaches  
we are still being worn  
away  
inside the surrounded by  
prismatic  
inflecting  
morass of time  
spent (here)  
there is always  
someone trying to get  
out of the body

an ambulance drives by and the bar looks like an artery



*Self (American Continuum)*

I wake up:

and my leg hurts  
the achilles specifically  
I wonder if the body is finally eating itself

I drink old water  
and never catch up  
it pous

I switch and ask if this is the coffee  
promised to us by the management  
during the labor dispute

I switch to outside  
smoke a compulsion  
litter that piece of breath  
give that part of myself back to the ground  
and look for your pieces

I find it's been years since  
I'd seen you and you still have on  
that army shirt  
so we sat and talked about our wars  
everything was a salvo  
and simultaneous:

how is my missing son

I had to incorporate you

and I said fine dad

make you a thought and a motion

where are the caterpillars I sent

so we could talk again

they were supposed to keep you vibrant

like light switches

safe through the winter

and wiring connected

steady shipments of new (would-be) butterflies

I had to make lessons on the minor

timed perfectly so they'd blossom through

visions and how to find them inside

the papered-up peace—

the daily muck

a perception

how to make this place  
an elysium if you'd like

(I let my body slander its shape  
my limbs are yours  
and we are made whole in that way

perched above  
a billboard reads us  
*elija menos sodio*  
I know it is warning my health  
but I don't know what *elija* means  
and I just keep repeating  
*elija elija*  
*elija* until it means anything  
until it means an elysium if you'd like

until it means where  
the parenthetical ends  
and the interiority begins

until it answers—  
when do I stop inhabiting you / when do I burst into ancient particles  
when does this end

*Self (Cultivate Tendency)*

I linger in prayer  
head bowed to the sun god

conscious effort

keep our orbits from inevitable decay

I never think about what this does to my head

the process of building or forgetting

I sink deeper into my coat  
the best part of winter

fever  
drug or dream

is memory not the same

a soft light diffused and bloomed—

flowered into a cup

how do you get the glass to twinkle like that  
how do you get it to laugh in your hand

we ring and ring like a call to mass

a dull corona burns on the front lawn  
we've got to get you to the coast before all the light is gone

how do you look for something really worth it

call me an augur and I'll tell you

*Self (I/II)*

be careful with that brain of yours  
always keeping it filled with glitter  
ideas bought

from the falling  
sea of recent data  
acclimated

though the installation doesn't seem to be going happy  
just laughing and laughing

stuck dealing with our heat  
we want motility

we want to  
meticulously dictate  
each moment of frame per second  
since the ether flooded  
this world and we called it time

no one lives there anymore

(sidewalk closed)  
I died / walk close

I don't want to melt  
I watch you disappear and know I'm up to the same thing

*Self (Stasis)*

we eat the god particle  
and every second is  
accessible inside  
the wild lung  
the breath of any  
drug to feel normal  
I always knew I  
wanted to be a  
memory but  
am now just the sound of  
you behind you  
trying to get  
closer to  
the center of heat  
I don't want to impose  
but I will see you in  
one hundred years  
after this american  
century of scurry  
for now I will be  
washed out on the lawn  
the laundry on the line  
hung like prayer flags  
me covered in sun

*Self (Prayer)*

I'm so happy I found you  
/ filled with  
all flavors / inside the ritual  
I'll ask you how to spell the voice /  
a power resides  
in its true name / but you know that  
you were made / by me /  
pulsed with elegy /  
I snap in half / I recombine into any  
shape of wonder / or  
no / distraction / anyway  
this prayer will dissolve  
tomorrow / my tongue  
long gone into /  
the sweet mess of lips / of the faithful  
it has always been easier  
to inside the prayer  
fantasy of sweet lick / remember  
I want this world to be a construct-  
a place where I can gather

*Self (Ascension)*

your soul cycle

the echo in cloud (cloud) (cloud)  
bounced around  
the sound of breathing through  
the long days of rain

look around and make sure you have all your problems

even though I know  
I know we are dreams

let's say we are not  
because I prefer the clutter

I prefer you open my mouth and pry

spin the sound into light  
hear me melt inside the SMiLE

return to our primordial  
residue the amino  
acid soup  
    my cells once knew jellyfish

inside the repetitive weather  
system same  
same-same

let's walk and be unhappy

    circle the ghost hole

let's smoke those

    forget mechanisms  
    poison and wonder  
    be filled

    with the feeling of empty

alive inside the loud  
surrounded by

exactly  
suddenly  
now

the sea gull's scratch and caw  
to garbage heaven

by the time you arrive

remember to glitter  
inside the world memory  
a million cloudy doppelgangers—

I don't know why I took the snack food with me  
I feed it to the sun  
the sky looks like drugs

my air luxurious  
cut from cloud and always new

I feel spacey and great—

I always forget everything about you



*Self (Nothing That Has Happened So Far Has Happened So Far)*

I guess we have ghosts now

you pour water from your bag  
while I get flooded with moths  
and crushed by that softest ocean

we can't talk (here)  
our speakers slowly crackle

I threw two things  
two times  
each made of snow and filled with shatter  
waited for the breaking  
to see if this was

the garden made from pillars of glass  
filled with those who lost ahold of their dancing flowers

(here) the new is the endless  
you have you forever like a theory or a dream

I look for something to find  
left in the woods  
my pockets stuffed with snow and pine

*Self (Think of Distance)*

rare irregular  
my loveliest data cluster

my head filled with  
orbits of I want

that elevated blood  
like anything else I see through a window

the synopsis of  
ritual filled with essentially

film exposed briefly  
on a watery pane of glass

I followed a memory (here)

inside a room full of shapes  
a second so small and sudden

frozen against  
this epoch

touched like frost on vegetation  
a flower bursting into silver linen

this dream culture is instant and old

too full of life  
a flower

bursting into ribbons  
and forgetting

the kind of song  
you lived inside forever

your memory (here)  
sonorous and ebullient

I'll name it

a holding on

a grab at a surface

a figure

you want to lose yourself inside instead

(here) lamps slung up like graffiti

sweet anxious then  
still—

a pilled out  
blue dream

I drew

your drawn-on  
shadow features

my refracted tag

set beneath the way  
the provinces are run—

in searching plurality  
ubiquitous identity

in a prayer or a cloud

this pretty little drunk

an irreconcilable  
fire

too much  
in the throat

you have you forever  
like a theory or a dream

*Self (Versions of Now)*

I am always in the ether  
always in the voluminous  
cloud

each day curating  
this personal museum  
someplace big to sort through

with no maps  
the fields are breathing

you know that I am (here) for the taking  
it's such a lovely excuse  
to be nothing but distance

find me and dose me  
heavy  
slow  
hits of gravity

it's easy to disappear

(here)

or there

I don't remember

exactly

I remember:

you told me an incantation:

draw breath

cover us in noise

make it loud and worship

our lives forever

until we've had enough

until we fall through

our punctuated timeline

sprout flowers

bursting out

buried in ecstatic descent

and all your volume

fell into me

a memory of white noise

left to be filled with stories  
each one flowering into sound  
each one a version of self  
asking to be

authentic  
and with skin

\*\*\*

I pour cuts in all my smoke—  
an offering  
sunk and spectral  
all light and buried  
like a piety

I sift through old coats  
full of electrons  
and technically  
mostly empty space  
I gather  
all this sentiment

(here)

again

(here) your sediment

compressed and reconstructed

to matter

one particle at a time

a memorial

\*\*\*

someone wanders by with wind on their cheeks and it is almost you

*Self (Here)*

drifting off and out  
and this will always be for the waterless

moments we were married at the spine of the world  
feeling the nervous system  
then scattered like electrons

to the swamp where I ate fishbones in the reeds  
with magnolias leering beauty from leather escarpments

I send smoke signals  
to the other mountain  
between the state line

where you are cast away in ancient places  
and covered with green and creeping stillness

only seeing night stitched across the fenceposts



*Self (City)*

it feels earlier than it is  
no it feels later  
let's just say it's never the time it is supposed to be

let's just say I am way behind on all this new breath

let's not say I can't catch it  
it lingers

it's easy to disappear  
(here) or there

it's never the time it is supposed to be

I don't remember when  
                  exactly

I ate the dream  
                  you  
          left in my pocket

the luster of those years shimmering away

let's just say I've never left the woods

*Self (Invocation)*

time moves in more than one  
direction at once

happens together

an ancient  
memory code

I want this  
all dream  
always and always  
now

we absorbed  
the floor with our bodies  
put dust in our teeth  
and mote away

the last prayer to this home

a colony collapse  
in the ghost of drifting void  
left by

the wake of waking

I feel like I have no time  
like I need to feel it all  
happen now

I don't care what you call  
this I just want it

and if time is an instance  
of existence  
colliding

I will keep your night on its own  
cut from the ether and set like a precious stone

*Self (Islands)*

you're my big idea  
a neighborhood of burgeoning alcoholics  
the student loan generation

it's easy to look at other people

behind a  
half smoked  
unlit  
cigarette—

the idea of illumination  
the map from lung to heart  
blood and rush

you push the idea of smoke into a  
galaxy shape

we go to the bar to disappear

\*\*\*

you're my excuse

repetition makes sense

it's easy to stay hidden  
you can crack me open and play with the interior

we can trade songs in the morning  
seal them inside  
a sunlight totem

let the luster of our years shimmer away

\*\*\*

you're my spectral disorder  
my optical malfunction

a place to be hidden and covered in light  
eat paint and vomit murals

spit confetti glamor

it's easy to look at art

I'll promise to never be real if you will

\*\*\*

we dissolve

into something larger

I'll promise to scout a way to the rainmaking if you will



I have to remember my keys  
who I am in each lock

my mirror symmetry

absorb today and  
pray into a cup of water

put on some noise

put some asleep inside me--

a season made of memory

something to put around yourself  
a task or a dream

when I find it I'll be well wrought  
and you'll feel exactly how you are supposed to

sit across from you in twenty years

remember or project this landscape

each repetition of the same

same hungry eyed

happy exercise

the myths you make to fill each day

now tell me the character of these mountains

and soon we'll reach the other

this prayer we've been digging up

that sunlight totem we left inside

you and I are entitled  
to loss and be lost

in this winter draft

in the finery of machinery  
the home we inherit

I'm just thinking about what I'm going to wear  
to the unstable world

you cover your mouth and I  
want to cover mine

because I need the echo

the painting of shadow  
cast through a window

the room full of too much last night

I'll wake up made of sand  
and walk along our fragile bulwarks

hoping to hear you  
sing and give me  
something to cling to

a perfume cigarette  
a perfume river to swim through



I'll wake up

carved up

from the songs you've been singing  
each note dropped and dripping

worn to  
cathedral space

I keep hidden

sculpted one  
memory at a time

carry this offering  
this sunlight totem—

a story that goes

exactly how it is supposed to

in and then out of render

cold air compressing  
smoke or song into viscous  
falling through  
water to

the shape of uncertainty—

a room full of green buzz  
in a hotel that still smelled like smoke

on the floor of a hot summer  
my idle youth washes  
over and away

satiated in the feeling  
of innumerable remainder  
not quite wanting it to end  
not quite expecting it to—

and when these days are gone  
you will not remember  
the feeling of never  
knowing they would ever go

this is a good pill

like walking through

a garden of coral

for now is enough  
to be unmoored

post-hope  
you reach up and pluck

the sky resonates  
you eat a piece of rain—

the dream I  
left in your pocket

I defined as imaginary unit

the desire of matter

to be pulled back  
into ribbons of light—

it stays in you like a prize or a color

on a fake spring day  
the song wavers in static and sometimes

the noise of another life  
a soft dancing in another room

a two-step  
you fill—

until the idea breaks down to senescence

carries the tune away

and the city is emptied  
my pockets stuffed with [render]

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“all serious inside your tiny toy castle” is a phrase stolen from Eileen Myles’ *Inferno*.