



**Tangled! An Eco-poetics of Threads**  
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**6.45-8.45pm**

'I began the day wanting to bring into convergence three activities of being—what I'd seen, what I'd read, and what I'd drawn—and to say about these acts how they made lines in the world that ran alongside other lines, and how all these lines together made environments of the earth, where I could put my body and you could put yours, and these would be lines always entwined because there was little if anything you could say or make without calling forth other lines, and this was how you knew you were where you were and the ground was worth cultivating and that there was life beneath the ground' —  
Renee Gladman.

In today's workshop, we'll be looking at the significance of entanglement within eco-poetics and its practice. This is a question of threads and lines, whose interrelation is as much about earthly creativity as it is about cultivation, survival and exchange, as Renee Gladman highlights. Donna Haraway's notion of sym-poiesis, or making-with, describes a way to think with 'a host of companions in sym-poietic threading, felting, tangling, tracking, and sorting.' Her idea of 'string figures' is a 'theoretical trope' for acknowledging the way all kinds of making and thinking are done collectively, often between species. Haraway's notion resonates with existing ideas such as Édouard Glissant's theory of a 'Poetics of Relation', whereby 'each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other'. What Glissant teaches us about thinking

racialised difference bears upon how we think about other kinds of difference in writing. The metaphors we use are material gestures towards writing's conditions of production. I am passing you this metaphor of thread, which I began ravelling from the work of many others, and together we'll consider new ways of thinking through ecological consciousness, precarity and relation.

The aim of today's workshop is to explore how thinking our entanglement with the more-than-human can revitalise our ecopoetic practice, while extending a more relational sense of creativity in general.

In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Roland Barthes writes:

'*Text* means *Tissue*; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this issue as a product a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasising, in the tissue, the generative ideas that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving: lost in this tissue — this texture — the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web'

As Barthes reminds us, *text means tissue*: metaphors of the web, mesh and textile abound in our sense of writing. We're going to begin today by thinking about this image of a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. My first question is: *what kind of animal are you when you are writing?* This question is meant to prompt reflection on your personal process: are you a hunter-gatherer, a greedy carnivore of references, a hive-mind or a solitary wanderer, do you build nests or dams or other kinds of shelters in your work, do you work in one big sprint or incrementally arrange things, do you feel vulnerable in writing, are you fast or slow, nocturnal or a fan of daylight, what is the scale of your work, how much territory do you need to work with? This is quite an abstract question so I'm going to give **you two minutes** to think about it and write down what writing animal you are and why. If you want, share your animal in the chat.

### **Exercise: being the animal [5 minutes]**

Now you have your animal, I want you to spend **five minutes** free-writing about how you would make and unmake yourself into this animal, as per Barthes' quote. As you write free associatively (in any way you like, not lifting your pen from the page/fingers from keys), think about the sensory and otherwise ways in which you find yourself 'lost' in the web of your writing. What would it mean to write consciously as this animal; how does the world feel now, what are your main priorities?

~

### **Thinking the mesh**

Some ecocritics take issue with the binary set up between animals and their environment. One way of thinking the deep *interrelation* of all objects and things is 'the mesh'. Timothy Morton describes the mesh thus:

'Meshes are potent metaphors for the strange interconnectedness of things, an interconnectedness that does not allow for perfect, lossless transmission of information, but is instead full of gaps and absences. When an object is born it is instantly enmeshed into a relationship with other objects in the mesh. [...] *Mesh* means the threads and the holes between the threads.'

As you can see, Morton highlights that 'mesh' is a *metaphor*: it provides another conceptual imaginary for helping us think about ecological relation. What's important about the mesh is that it also accounts for the gaps *between* the lines and threads that make it.

Well, poetry deals in metaphor of course, so how does all this relate to poetry? Well, poetry is a form which often interweaves voices, other forms of discourse, landscapes, environments, different places, spaces and registers. The poem itself might be considered a constant weaving, whose reader joins the mesh in the act of reading. Poetry then is not a static tapestry so much as a constantly shifting, vibrating web. In *Threads*, Nisha Ramayya writes:

'I am transfixed by metaphors of weaving in poetry and theory, the ways that they enable thinking and writing about context, movement, and relationship. The interdependent relationships between the parts and the whole in the act of weaving, sometimes between the weavers; the patterned movements that admit the possibilities of mistake, haphazard, and risk, the multiplicity and diversity of the metaphors themselves.

I think of the weaving frame as a context in flux, that may be moved and expanded across spaces and times [...] I think of threads as parts that frame, as repetitions that enable memory, destruction and recreation, as continuities that loop and accrue meaning. Threads are moving bodies and the movements themselves, narratives and the processes of narrating.'

We might then use metaphors of threads and weaving to think about ecopoetics in the context of relationships of gender, race, sexuality, cultural difference, (dis)ability, species, locality and many others. It's also useful for thinking about mistake and randomness: a thread can loosen, unravel; a stitch can be dropped. A poem's evocation of time, place, meaning and relation is never *seamless*, but always subject to unravelling and being woven again in new contexts.

**Reading: [5 minutes]**

Let's have a look at some work that relates to this idea of the mesh. I'm going to read for you a passage from Lisa Robertson's brilliant poem 'The Seam'. A seam, of course, is a line where two pieces of fabric are sewn together in a garment, but it is also an underground layer of a mineral such as coal or gold. So you can already envision the eco-poetic potential of this image.

From ['The Seam'](#)

This fundamental torsion  
so thoroughly unskirtable  
there will never again be sex in 1983 and  
I don't mind really.  
Must I fear formlessness?  
If it weren't for this I'd be free  
as body organs cast in metals  
—divinatory objects—  
to decorate time  
I like to spit from moving trains.

So much can be passed over  
in avoidance of the rupture  
The driver of the team of 6 horses, ploughing  
was a woman, cotton sleeves  
rolled to the elbow, hands to straining  
harness, skinny, capable  
my kinship with this woman  
her 6 huge horses and the surge  
of their vitality running through leather into my body  
we who have no memories at all  
mount the pulsing tree in evening  
every desire emits  
a throw of dice  
I start a school called how can I live.

In my school called how can I live  
in my theory of appearing  
I lay out my costume.  
We don't belong to culture. We're sunsets.

We simplify our thoughts  
until they resemble  
stripes.  
Stop hiding from life we say to ourselves!  
Our skin itches.  
I beg you—show me something unknowable.  
I don't believe in this possibility of knowing.  
How will you start?  
The flipped-over buses  
The strange stuff suspended in the air  
While they copulate they turn their heads  
towards the east.  
Tell me now about shame and isolation  
the shame that has not even  
a vocabulary  
—it distracts us from our purpose.  
Sometimes I see things and I know right away  
like looking someone in the eye.  
The great health is unknown gratuitous expenditure towards the material ideal.  
It is not a metaphor.  
From now on, everything will be called The Middle, everything will be called The Seam,  
everything will be called Toxins, everything will be called The Great Health.  
Everything will be a hormone.

### **Note taking [five minutes]**

Spend **five minutes** making notes on what you think the 'threads' of this poem are. They might be certain emotions, energies or forces, objects, movements, features of nature, questions or anything. They might be thematic issues or features of the poem's form: including syntax, imagery, texture, prosody, enjambment and lyric address (e.g. the use of the 'I' and other pronouns). Think also about:

- What kinds of intimacies and connections are happening here?
- What 'matters' in this poem?
- What is happening with the line lengths?
- What do you understand by the word 'seam' and how is it working in this poem as a metaphor or otherwise?
- How are time, aging, gender and the body represented?
- What kinds of ecological 'enmeshment' do you recognise in your own life?

- What might be the 'holes' between these threads? What does the poem leave out?

### **Exercise: teasing the seam [ten minutes]**

What happens if we consider the left or right margin the 'seam' of a poem – what happens when we start to tease or mess up the margin? Is a poem's margins, then, a place of binding and 'hold' or connection?

Keeping in mind some of the notes you wrote on making and unmaking yourself as an animal, take **ten minutes** to write a poem that in some way addresses, plays with or experiments with the seams of its margins. You can do this literally, perhaps by using white space/indentation, and/or figuratively, perhaps thinking about what it means to write from or to a certain idea of the margins, or thinking about what the margins, seams or connecting lines of a particular landscape or ecology might be. If you are struggling for inspiration, check out the further reading extracts I have added to the end of this worksheet, which offer various experiments in form and line.

**(Five minute break)**

### **Hybrid Webs**

Now we are going to enter the strange and magical world of Tomás Saraceno's *Hybrid Webs*. Saraceno's website describes the installation:

Spiders spin tiny Universes. Formed of complex interwoven networks suspended in air, the *Hybrid Webs* unique architectures originate from inter-specific encounters between unrelated solitary, social and semi-social spider species. As different spiders from different species weave in the same space, bridging the architectures of each other's webs, each one of them tells a story of hybrid relationships, entangling not only different arachnid webbed ecosystems, but also human and more-than-human worlds. In this series, floating galaxies made of different silk and web types collide, challenging gravity and fostering the emergence of new kinds of vibrational environments. There, sensory worlds and lines of communication merge and connect, the web being considered an extension of the spider's sensorial and cognitive systems.

Even better, Saraceno has worked with the spiders to produce music, a kind of symphony whereby when a spider plays one string, it reverberates and plays all the other strings. Paying attention to *Hybrid Webs* allows us to explore the multi-sensory possibilities of entangled imaginaries. In this exercise, we are going to practice *ekphrastic response*: ekphrasis being the detailed description of a work of visual art as a literary device.

### **Exercise: spider writing [six minutes]**

For **six minutes**, I am going to play Saraceno's '[Spider Salon Jam Session](#)' and allow you to explore [the Hybrid Webs](#) images. Your challenge is to write a poem in response to both the sonic and visual artworks. You might want to think about how poetic form itself can engage with weblike thinking. What would a spider diagram poem look like as a poem?

'I don't want to get all  
Parallel universey on you  
But I am at once the spider  
The spider web, and  
Me observing them'

- Bernadette Mayer, *Works & Days*

### **Reading [5 minutes]**

Now I am going to read for you an extract from 'Word & Thread', a poem-essay by the Chilean artist, filmmaker, poet and activist Cecilia Vicuña. While I am reading, think about

- How language is a thread
- What does it mean to consider a line of poetry a thread?
- How do the lines and space work in this piece?
- What is this piece saying about the environment, about making, about acts of care and knowledge exchange, about ambience, about history, about material acts of memory, reading and transmission?
- What does this conception of writing mean for thinking the relationship between writing and the ecological mesh?

**Cecilia Vicuña** '[Word & Thread](#)'

Word is thread and the thread is language.

Non-linear body.

A line associated to other lines.

A word once written risks becoming linear,  
but word and thread exist on another dimensional  
plane.

Vibratory forms in space and in time. Acts of union and separation.

\*

The word is silence and sound.

The thread, fullness and emptiness.

\*

The weaver sees her fiber as the poet see her word.

The thread feels the hand, as the word feels the tongue.

Structures of feeling in the double sense  
of sensing and signifying,  
the word and the thread feel our passing.

\*

Is the word the conducting thread, or does thread  
conduct the word-  
making?

Both lead to the centre of memory, a way of uniting and  
connecting.

A word carries another word as thread searches for  
thread.

A word is pregnant with other words and a thread



contains  
other threads within its interior.

Metaphors in tension, the word and the thread carry us  
beyond  
threading and speaking, to what unites us, the immortal  
fiber.

\*

To speak is to thread and the thread weaves the world.

~

What I love about this piece is the way its spacing of form allows us to think of each statement itself as a thread. You really see the weaving together, the undertow and overflow of ideas in her writing. As we have seen with Saraceno's soundpiece, it's important to think about how soundscapes, musicality and ambience also weave into ecopoetics and sympoiesis. Although our world is changing and the loss of species means increasing levels of eerie quietude, it's important to think about how we can 'attune' to or preserve ecological soundscapes in our voices and writing. If you're interested in exploring this further, the poet CAConrad has some brilliant work on sound and extinction which you can hear more about [here](#).



Figure 1 Cecilia Vicuña: "Disappeared Quipu" at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. October 20, 2018 through January 21, 2019. John F. Cogan, Jr. and Mary L. Cornille Gallery. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Vicuña also works with 'quipu' which are complex record-keeping devices made of knotted cords. For the ancient peoples of the Andes, these served as a vital device for reading and writing, memorialisation and archiving. Spain banned the quipu during their colonisation of South America, and in drawing on her indigenous heritage Vicuña reawakens the art of quipu and its sensory potential of communication through installations and participatory performances. Normally I would get you to work with real wool, but since this workshop is virtual, let's think with quipu through Zoom for this next exercise. With this form in mind, let's try something a bit more collaborative.

### **Exercise: weaving quipu [10-15 minutes]**

Firstly, I want you to 'drop a thread' in the chat for someone else to pick up. The thread could be a line or sentence, a description, a phrase, a short sequence of words. These must pertain somehow to an environment, living thing, the weather, climate, geology, object, waste materials – anything you consider relevant to ecopoetics. This could include emotions and sensations as much as 'things in themselves'. Once everyone's had a chance to write something in the chat, pick up someone else's thread. This is the starting point for your quipu poem. Now I want you to write the poem however you like using this line however you like: it could be your poem's title, first line; you might even want to unravel the line and weave parts of it in a different order through your own words. You could also try tying 'knots' in your poem, as Vicuña does with her quipu. What is a poem knot? A cluster of alliteration or associated images? A riddle? A stumbling block? An indication of censorship or blankness? A 'thick' description? A loop? You decide! You might want to think about what context your quipu poem appears in. Is it in a gallery for people to look at, or outside? How does this 'context' change your sense of the poem's voice and perspective? If you are stuck, you can simply make a poem by weaving together all the suggestions on the chat in a kind of braided poem. You might want to think about this Tim Ingold quote for inspiration:

If we think of every participant as following a particular way of life, threading a line through the world, then perhaps we could define the thing [...] as a "*parliament of lines*" [...] the thing has the character not of an externally bounded entity, set over and against the world, but of a knot whose constituent threads, far from being contained within it, trail beyond, only to become caught with other threads in other knots.

### **Exercise: taking a line for a walk [5 minutes]**

One way of really paying attention to the work of a line in poetry is by *drawing* the line. This is something Renee Gladman does literally in her book *Prose Architectures* (a sample of which you can find in the handout below). This is also a nice refresher exercise which gets you thinking about connectivity and using your body, senses and hand-eye coordination as a means of expression.

You will need a pen and paper for this, or you could use a Paint type programme on your computer. I want you to draw a continuous line in response to the song I'm about to play. You might want to draw the sound, the variations in notes, sonic textures; or you might want to draw a representation of what imagery the song conjures for you. When you are finished drawing, go back to your drawing and then fill in some of the gaps between lines with words that relate to your feeling around the song. You will have made a kind of mesh that slips between language and beyond language.

The song lasts five minutes, but I'll give you a wee bit of extra time to fill in your words afterwards. Consider this a vine-like exercise in thinking in sprawl, vibration, entanglement, criss-cross, pause and swerve. You're weaving a kind of forest from gesture and sound! Drawing, the artist Paul Klee often claimed, is like taking a line for a walk. When we can't go outside as much as we'd like to, drawing might be one way of connecting with surface, texture, space, environment.

If bandwidth is laggy for you, you can mute the zoom for five mins and stream the song yourself: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3\\_MRe3JwFc8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_MRe3JwFc8)

### **Bonus exercise: make a protective garment [10 minutes]**

The poet Evelyn Reilly writes, 'why should our bodies end at our skin?'. Thinking with threads and lines allows us to think about the turning between inside and outside that occurs in ecological thought: we can think about how global heating, ecocide and other symptoms of this period some are calling the anthropocene actually take effect in our body. Our hormones are affected by the plastics that enter our food supply, our moods affected by changing temperatures, our energy levels by changes in atmosphere, sunlight, precipitation. And by extension, what we put into our body (from pharmaceutical medicine to organic carrots) affects ecosystems in some way. At the same time, we have to think on big, structural scales of cause, effect and correlation. Poetry (flexible form that it is!) is one medium which can actually do this.

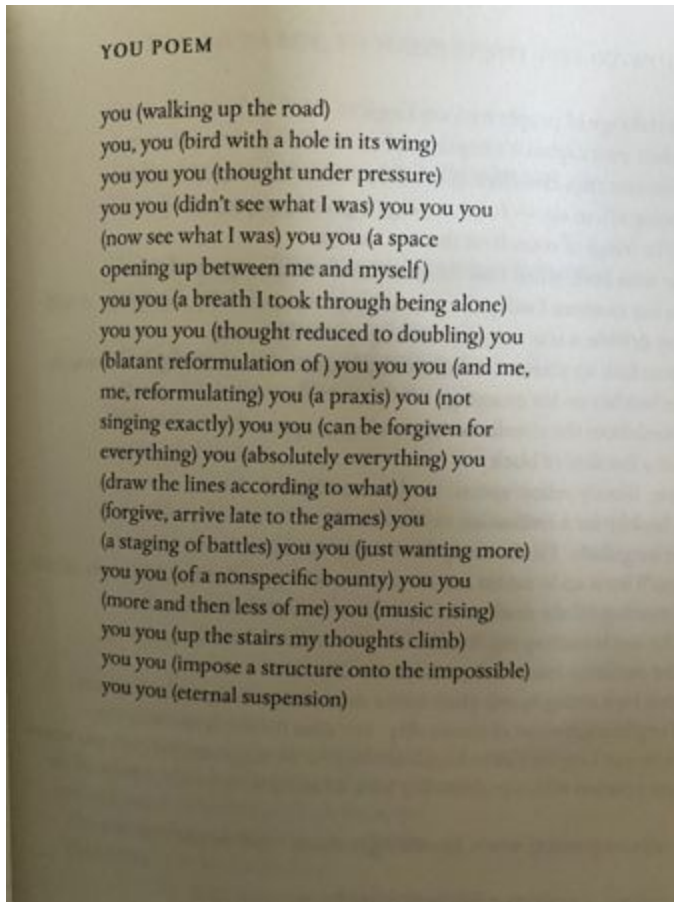
In this exercise, you are going to imagine a kind of garment with which to 'hold' a part of the world that you cherish. It might be your family, a rescued animal, a pet; it might be

your garden, it might be an entire ocean, a stranger, it might be a meadow you remember from childhood. It might be a single body, a single cell, a planet or the universe itself. Spend 5-10 minutes imagining this garment that could somehow be 'worn' by the world. Would it be recyclable? Windproof? Heatproof? What would it need to generate, resist, insulate or cool? What is it made of? How does it 'hold' its wearer? How do your choices around prosody, imagery and voice relate to the garment's materiality, texture, weight? Is the poem addressed to the garment, does it describe the garment? You could write it as an ode, a spell/charm, a product description, a utopian vision or a monologue from the garment's point of view? Who made the garment? What are the special properties of its threads? What would it need to keep out and let in? As you write, think about your definition of 'world' and what seems important to you to protect and why. What kinds of weaving can you do each day to maintain this protection? What keeps you protected? What is the function of a garment, other than protection — can you write about that as well?

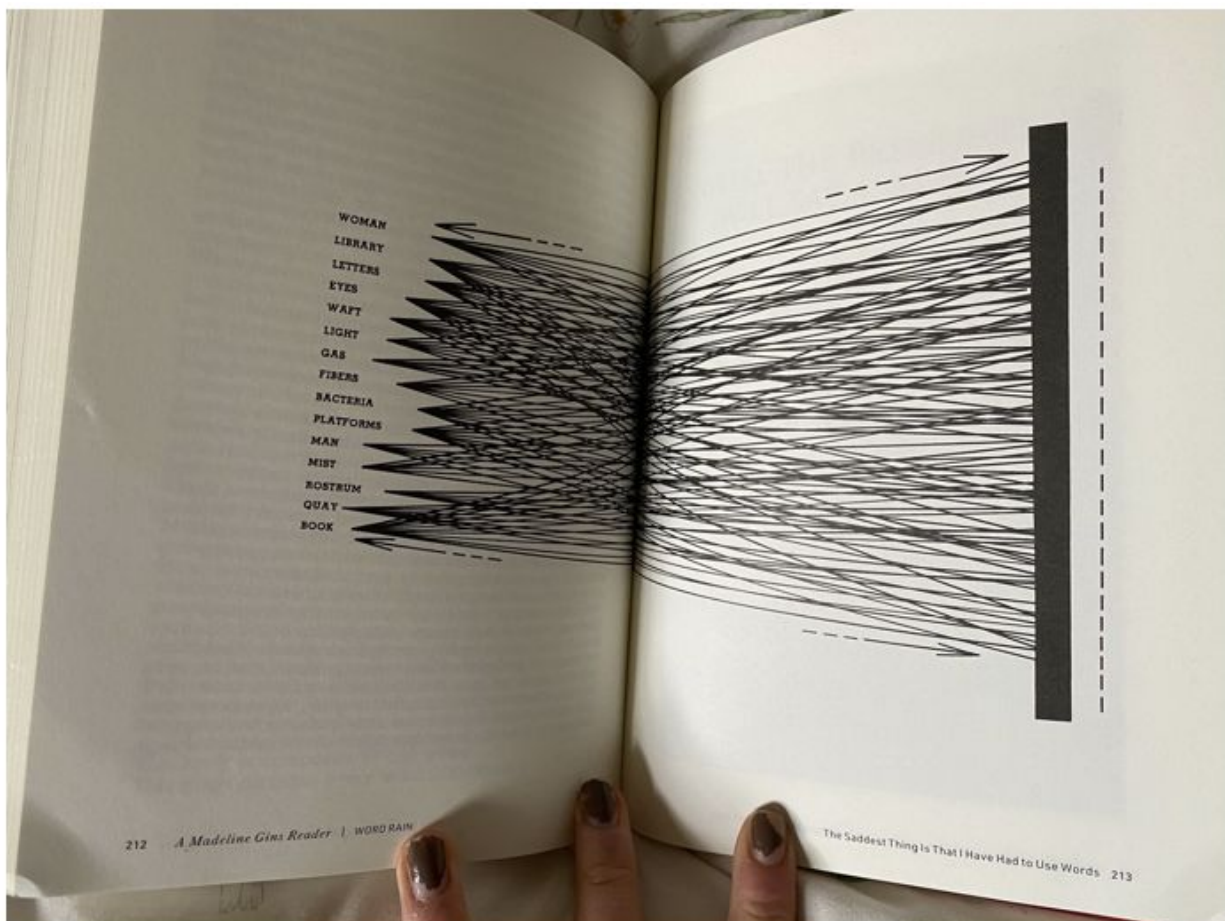
### **Workshop feedback and discussion [30 minutes]**

The final part of the workshop is an **optional feedback session**. I would love to hear some of the poems you've written today so we can hear them out as a class and share comments and thoughts. This is not meant to be a formal or technical 'workshop' setting so much as a chance to hear each other's ideas and poetic responses resonate in the open. I see it as another form of weaving together our perspectives: it can be open and there's no pressure to share if you don't want to. If you'd like to share a poem raise your hand or post in the chat. After you've read the poem, everyone is welcome to share their response in the chat or raise their hand if they'd like to unmute themselves. Please be fair and constructive in your comments: we are more interested in thinking about the poems formally, thematically and conceptually today, *as drafts*, within the messy entanglements of this workshop, than we are about 'fixing' the poem up to something polished and finished.

**Further reading:**

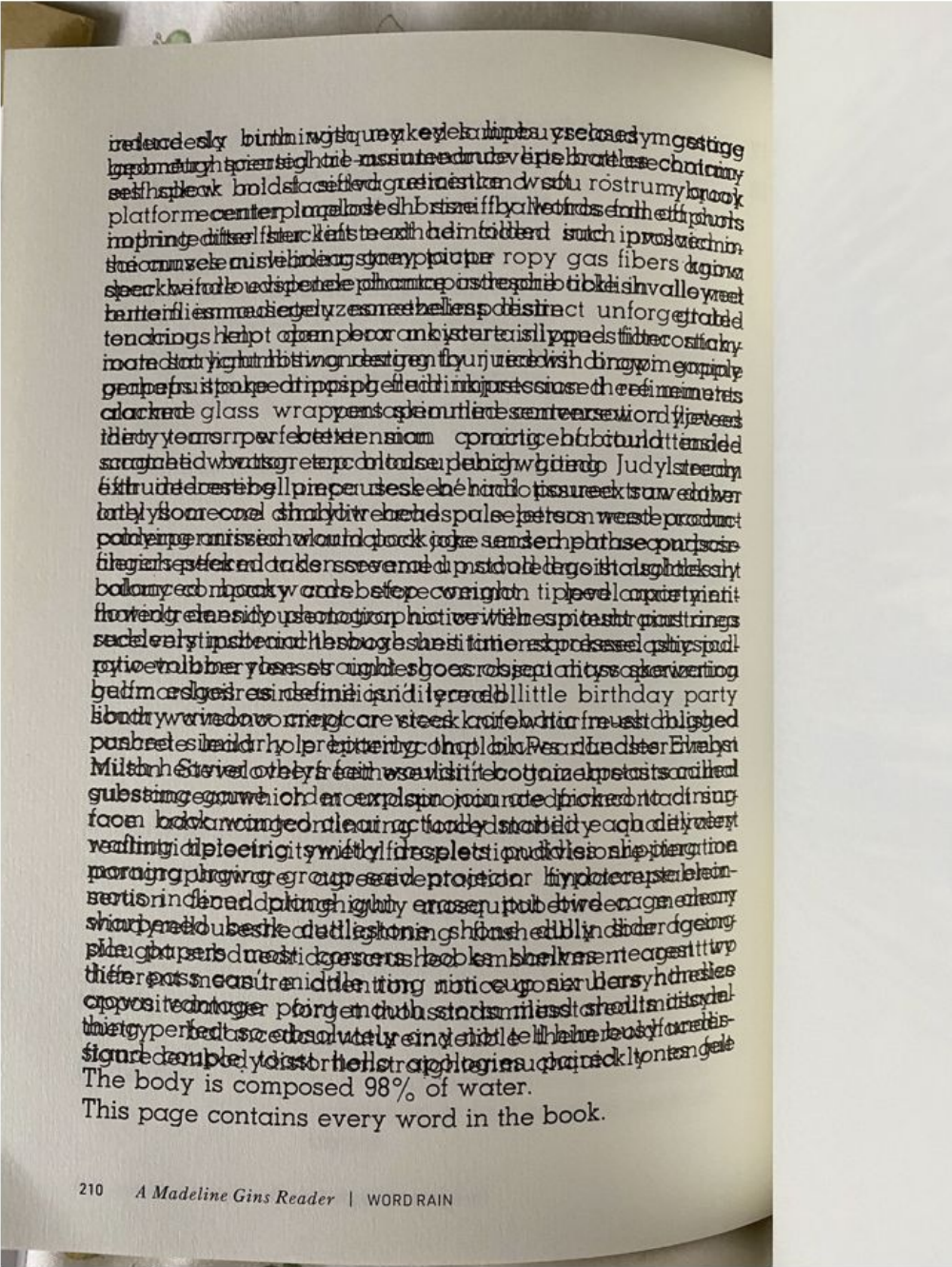


*Marianne Morris, from The On All Things Said Moratorium (2013)*



Madeline Gins, from *The Saddest Thing Is That I Have Had to Use Words: A Madeline Gins Reader* (2020).

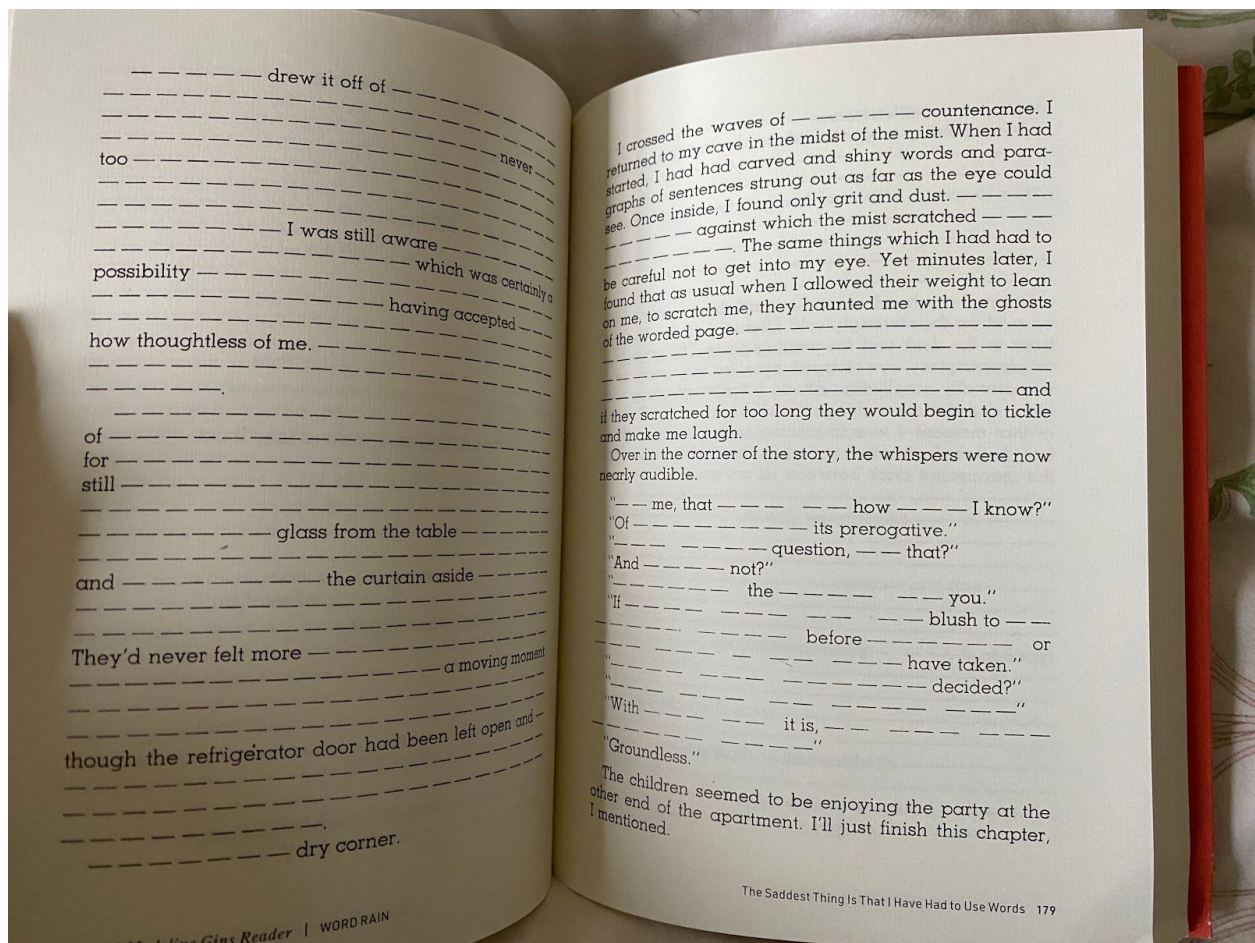




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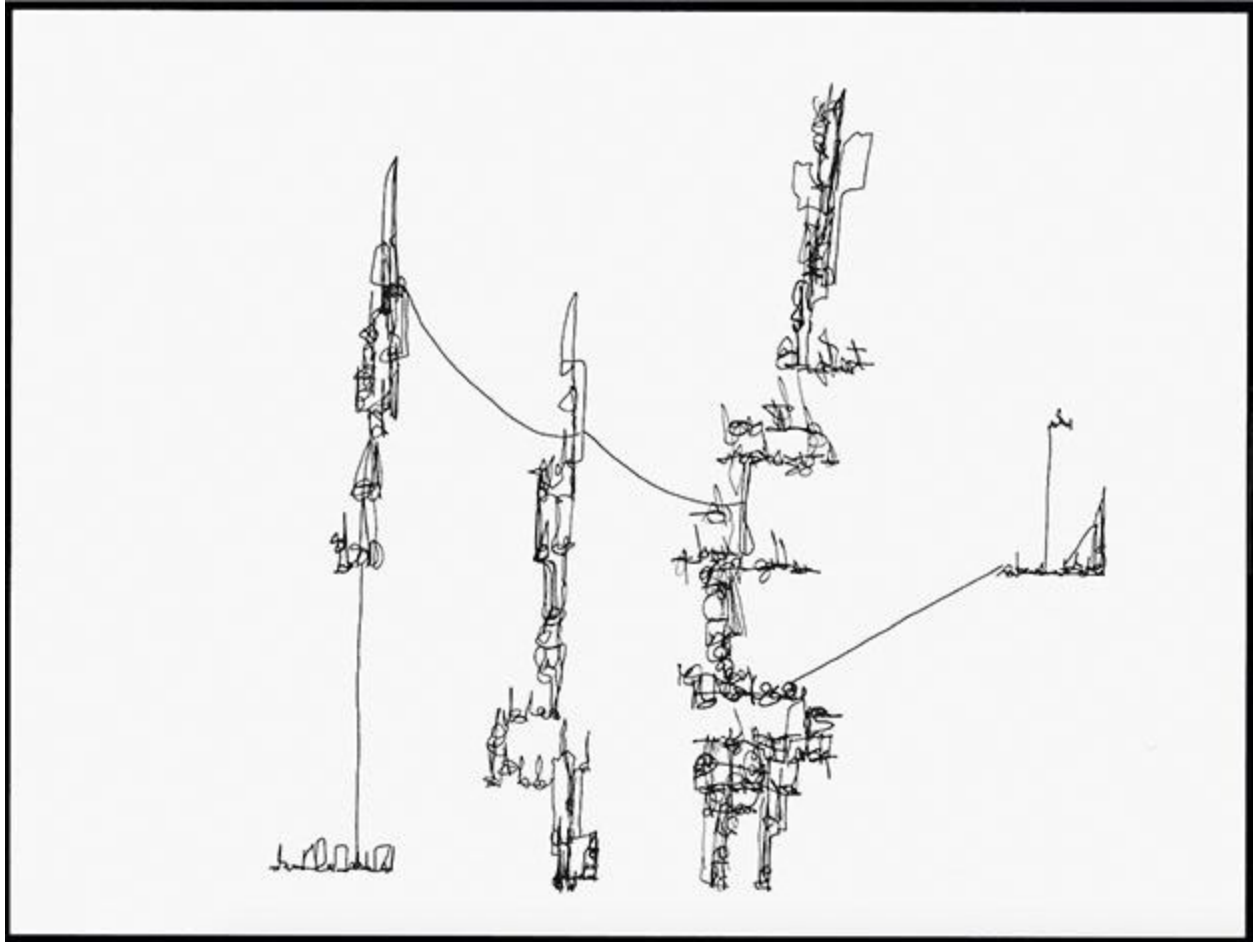
This page contains every word in the book.

Madeline Gins, from *The Saddest Thing Is That I Have Had to Use Words: A Madeline Gins Reader* (2020).



Madeline Gins, from *The Saddest Thing Is That I Have Had to Use Words: A Madeline Gins Reader* (2020).





Renee Gladman, [\*Prose Architectures\*](#)

## Since Looking into the Mirror

this morning, a new line.  
Your darkness  
falling upon me  
with the precise mark  
of an etcher's tool.  
My torn hands  
are a signal I am  
not observing  
with proper awe.  
Pieces of flesh lost  
for what love,  
lost?  
I would do better as  
your fantasy.  
Then  
you'd send letters,  
flashes,  
numbers exchanged in the night  
instead of fog,  
massing zeros  
quietly.

Kathleen Fraser, from *What I Want* (1973).

**'Lux' by Mei-Mei Brussenbrugge**

## 1

She does not distinguish spirit from body, which interweave via the senses.

“It begins with wonder, then interest.”

The light of mind and sunlight entwine in your eye, though separately each is unseen, like starlight without an object to fall on.

Deep space is black.

Inner life coalesces with daylight, a spectrum on which fluctuations of light from the object stimulate sight, while you simultaneously enhance your reception, until finally you see the ideal within the real.

Your consciousness lovingly assimilates new events to enhance cognition that ensouls space.

I present physical evidence where applicable, but my interest is in my informant and her words.

I learn more about that Eureka moment, when intense phenomenon becomes transparent to the ideal.

## 2

Material and imaginary flow into each other through a crack of light, “observation,” between worlds.

Juxtaposition becomes a blend of unconscious and external event; the more distant the relation, the more emotional, poetic, the perception.

For my witness, bright physical light weakens the interpretive.

But there are two emanations, one from the eye, close to mind, and one from a star, which conjoin.

A close encounter inscribes such diffuse, liminal boundaries of the imaginary.

Psyche becomes increasingly collective, as it assimilates with the gorgeous world.

It's as if a star offered you the nourishing ineffable light of new realism between subject and object.

That beings from outer space manifest to you physically is unproven in my field, but still true.

Each account is recorded as fact in my notebook.

Then I can travel up through light and become more intimate with its star.

### **3**

I wake and see out the window a ball of light swirling above the trees.

A woman stands under the trees, where certain plants grow; she knots leaves into a symbol using streamers of light, and as I watch, I know I'll remember.

My window is the same as light going through it; luminous is a better word than translucent.

When I try to describe her, I draw a star; I saw stars like children's stickers on the window glass; I know if I draw one, I can go there.

Darkness is light's resting state in deep space; transparency can occur all at once, the way a face lights with understanding, or a wave passes you to Andromeda with the swiftness of near and far at the same time.

Consciousness may be such a light source with metaphoric power; thread is a feeling of spiritual connection, sunlight is love.

Language and energy interchange; we can experience a physical event by association, algorithm.

A star visitor could be the attribute of such association.

Seeing starlight is seeing the visible in the invisible, that fragile imaginal cloth holding planet and existence together.

When I ask if she's literally an extraterrestrial or a metaphor from inner realms, she says there's no difference in significance.

#### 4

Their skies are full of life.

She describes starlight as scalar, without properties of distance or time.

Any spirit in matter she calls star-walking: remote viewing, meditation, intuition, plants she was shown, and any soul possessing a certain shine she calls starlight.

The power of relation came through their extraordinary yellow eyes, she tells me.

You're looking into a star, convex, immense, flashing colors through opalescent, flowing nuclear fusion.

I feel separated from home now; I look up at night with great longing.

They showed me earth through their eyes; their oneness extends to us.

Whereas, I'm in the dark; then it opens onto luminescence; there's a lot of "snow".

There's a lot of stars, huge, no horizon and very bright.

I see the Pleiades; I feel like a wolf looking toward home.

Whew! a shooting star just dropped there onto snow, so I go over to it.

A crystal has dropped on the snow, and there's light, a face in the stone; it's as if I'm looking up through the sky and things are very clear, and I'm coming up through the ice.

I've been below all this time, and now I see stars.

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