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Multiplicity from the Margins: The Expansive Truth of Intersectional Form

What do you use shoes for?

My mouth clamps shut.

Hands wringing in lap.

Willing-my-legs-to-not-swing.

I sit in the principal's office, a dim but cozy place with soft chairs, and stare at him in silence. He stares back at me with expectation. His black-brown beard with stray grey hairs. His kindly wrinkled eyes. Silence like a third person between us. I am afraid that if I speak, one orphaned answer will spring from my mouth and all by itself that one answer will have to be wrong.

Because there are so many answers.

What do you use shoes for?

for rain

for color

to keep from stubbing my toe

to scrape on the ground to stop my bike with its broken brakes

to keep from getting that worm Mom says gets under your skin in bare feet

to dress up like my mom when she wears

heels

to show I'm a girl

and have my own shoes

(even when I have to wear
my brother's hand-me-down clothes)
to show that I'm a tomboy on days I don't feel like being a girl
to show that we are lucky enough to buy nice shoes
but I'm ashamed of this too, because we live in America
(not like some relatives in the Philippines.)

Surely this would be too much to say
too much space to take up
in such a small dim room, with the once-smiling principal looking at me now in confusion.

Not an Introduction but a Crossroads

Faced with the question “*what do you use shoes for?*” my five-year-old self wrestled with many answers. The struggle was not among the answers themselves, but between them and the external expectation of a single answer. What did the principal *want* me to say? Should I have answered as a girl? A tomboy? A youngest child? A daughter of striver-class immigrants? Or just as someone who didn't want to get her feet wet? What if I said all of my answers, and the principal rejected me as dim-witted and indecisive?

This clash of internal multiplicity and external expectations of a single truth yielded one definitive result: my silence.

For too many writers, conventional expectations—and how they are institutionalized—can cause similar silences in life and on the page. Readers might expect a writer to identify as one thing: a person of color, a woman, a trans person or a domestic worker, for example. Editors might expect a work to be clearly “about” one thing with a disciplined point of view, a clear narrative arc, an opening, exposition, and authoritative conclusion. Publishers might expect an author to write in one distinct genre. These singular

expectations may be useful and comfortable for those interested in maintaining the status quo. But for those of us in the margins of rule-making, singular expectations—and the way they are institutionalized—can perpetuate long histories of silencing and erasure.

I have written like this before: just in the form of conventional nonfiction; just as an Asian person; just as a woman; just as a disembodied objective white-sounding voice. With clarity and a takeaway message. This work of mine has been praised; yet this work has often left me empty; it has left me, to echo Audre Lorde, feeling mute as a bottle and no less afraid. And then I began to study literary nonfiction by authors from long-silenced communities, work by authors like Kazim Ali, Lily Hoang, Lauret Savoy, Robin Kimmerer and Bhanu Kapil. All of these writers resist oppressive forces of silencing and erasure to write what they feel must be told. And what must be told is complicated and uncomfortable and full of fragments, layers and gaps. This multiplicity of what must be told necessitates a distinct type of form; I call it “intersectional form.”

Intersectional form is characterized by writing in which authors write their intersectional identities, experiences and perspectives onto the page. What results is writing that breaks away from the confines of traditional narrative arc and instead moves through fragments and strands and strips, conveying multiple viewpoints to reject homogenous truth in favor of a more complex reality. In doing so, intersectional form necessitates the use of multiple genres such that the lines between nonfiction, fiction and poetry become blurred. Ultimately, by bucking expectations of singular topic, narrative arc, and conclusive truth, intersectional form resists convention not just for the sake of experimentation, but for the sake of conveying and even modeling new ways of being in the world.

This paper analyzes the intersectional form of three book-length essays or collections of essays by authors from marginalized communities: Lauret Savoy’s *Trace*, Kazim Ali’s *Bright Felon*, and Lily Hoang’s *A Bestiary*. Each of these authors wrestles against silencing to tell what they feel must be told. Lauret Savoy examines the buried histories of her Native American and Black ancestors to trace the ways in which

Indian removal, mining and slavery irrevocably shaped the American landscape. Kazim Ali rejects his right to remain silent and instead tells of moving through a world that brands him a criminal, as a queer brown Muslim man choosing to embrace both faith and love. Lily Hoang shatters the cone of silence imposed by the model minority myth to write about the pain, privileges and imperfections of her Vietnamese refugee family racing for survival and belonging in America. Each of these works dismantles once-dominant truths of Manifest Destiny, model minorities, the American Dream, and the purity of religion and sexuality through the content and craft of intersectional form. In naming and examining intersectional form in literary non-fiction, I draw heavily from the Black feminist scholarship of Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Hill Collins, whose work defined and expanded the concept of intersectionality. I also draw from the literary non-fiction of social theorists from marginalized communities, including W.E.B DuBois, Homi Bhabha and Gloria Anzaldúa and their critical work on double-consciousness, hybridity and *la facultad*.

Because intersectional form seeks to expand what currently “is,” it is not a break with conventional creative nonfiction, but an evolution of genre. If creative nonfiction is about the transformation of raw reality into literary art (Singer and Walker 2) then intersectional form allows for the transformation of multi-faceted realities into literary art. If essays are a simulation of “the mind working its way through a problem” (Monson), then intersectional form allows for a more authentic simulation of the workings of marginalized minds wrestling with power and “gifted” with the multiple perspectives of the margins (DuBois).

This wrestling with power is now more important than ever. It is a time of rising authoritarianism, when political leaders are legislating oppression and coercing dissenters into silence. Writers face a crossroads between compliance and resistance. Intersectional form allows for an especially powerful form of written resistance. It allows for telling that is not just about breaking silence and confronting lies, but about telling truths on one’s own terms and modeling a shift in the balance of power. Intersectional form allows for a strategic engagement with power not by directly locking horns in an arena of authoritative

truth and false binaries (the realm of facts vs. alternative facts), but by writing from a third space where there is room for the intersections of contradictory truths, spectrums of identities, clashing and reinforcing values, and interdependent subjects and genres. This space created by intersectional form is not only reactive to oppression, it is also generative of new worldviews. Therein lies the most powerful aspect of intersectional form's potential for resistance. Instead of positing new singular truths to replace dominant truths, authors writing in intersectional form use the multiple perspectives afforded by marginal identities and vantage points to refract light onto subjects as foundational and varied as race, gender, family, religion, sexual identity and American nationalism. The result is resistance to stereotypes and dominant narratives that have passed as singular truths, and to the policing of boundaries among identities, competing perspectives, and literary genres. Ultimately we see that the generative power of intersectional form can model a de-centering of dominance, and offer more expansive—and therefore more just—visions of who gets to speak, take up space, and shape the visions and values that govern our world.

Multiple “I”s: Intersectional Identities

Intersectional form begins with the explicit (and often lyric) expression of multiple identities of marginalized authors on the page. As has been explored by writers and scholars like W.E.B. Du Bois and Gloria Anzaldúa, people from communities that are marginalized by race, class, gender and/or sexual orientation often live in co-existence with many parts of ourselves, including a consciousness of how those with more decision-making power see us. These multiple identities yield conflicting perspectives of ourselves, but they also yield a sort of gift of “double-consciousness,” or “second-sight” (DuBois 2, 3) and “borderland consciousness” or *facultad* (Anzaldúa 77, 90) that allows for multiple, expansive perspectives on the world. Kimberlé Crenshaw, who is credited with coining the term intersectionality, writes about the intersection of multiple “categories of experience and analysis” (Crenshaw 1242). She

highlights the ways that racism and sexism “readily intersect in the lives of real people” and specifically in the lives of Black women. This intersectionality affirms that race and gender, as well as class and sexuality, are not mutually exclusive but co-existing, and that experience—and as I argue, writing—must be analyzed at the crossroads where these categories overlap. As Crenshaw writes, to “expound identity as woman or person of color as an either/or proposition [is to] relegate the identity of woman of color to a location that resists telling” (1242). Savoy, Ali and Hoang are committed to telling. And so in the face of a dominant society that is largely non-intersectional and silencing, these authors create a new location that allows for such telling. They begin to do so by writing their intersectional identities onto the page.

In her essay collection *Trace*, Lauret Savoy writes of herself as a descendant of “free and enslaved Africans” as well as “people indigenous to this land” (Savoy 29). But she also writes of her privileged identities, sharing that she is the descendant of “colonists from Europe” and a professional geologist implicated in histories of oppression (64). By laying out these multiple “I”s Savoy also acknowledges that her identities operate on different planes. Intersectional form creates the space to acknowledge differentials in power in privilege, what Patricia Hill Collins describes as the “conceptual space needed for each individual to see that she or he is *both* a member of multiple dominant groups *and* a member of multiple subordinate groups” (Collins 234). As an academic geologist, Savoy has the privilege to apply her skills to understanding the storying of place, and to the storying of herself (68). As the descendant of slaves and Native Americans, she also writes from the marginalized place of trying to see what others with more power have buried: “Many of my own ancestors, my mother’s people, lie in forgotten plantation graves; their lives forgotten, too” (94). Savoy also writes that as a geologist, she is implicated in the mining interests that led to the displacement of her own Native ancestors. In this instance Savoy accepts the hybrid identity of both the oppressor and oppressed, as viewed through eyes trained to view the world in geologic time.

Savoy does not seek to resolve these tensions among her identities, and instead likens them to the many layers of intersecting history that lie beneath the surface of the American landscape. Kazim Ali similarly explores multiple identities in *Bright Felon*, through the metaphor of layered cities. Ali writes that he is a “Muslim” and “an only son,” who is also a poet, a wanderer and a lover of men (Ali 96). Ali not only writes these identities into his work, he unflinchingly explores the tensions among them. And like Savoy, he ultimately refuses to choose between them, even when they are in direct conflict with each other:

You are the only son of your father.

...

Who knows what Hell is.

...

The conflagration in the heart of a son who disappoints his parents.

Scripture or rupture you will never know. (19)

Instead of choosing, Ali resists binaries and embraces the volatility and agency of a hybridity of “I”s: “Neither Isaac nor Ismail, I am the third son, the wolf-tongued son. / So sure of G-D he is willing to walk through the door to the fire” (85). As hybridity theorist Homi Bhabha writes, this third space allows for “liminal and ambivalent positions and *in-between* forms of identification that may be asymmetrical, disjunctive, and contradictory” (Bhabha 5). By affirming his multiple though dissonant identities, Ali subverts stereotypes of Muslims as patriarchal and heteronormative, and also subverts assumptions about queer men as secular or at least not especially religious. It could also be said that he resists expectations of only sons of immigrant parents by embracing his identities as wanderer and poet. This multiplicity of identities goes far beyond creating a complex personae on the page (Olding). Rather, by taking up space with its multiplicity, this intersectional personae undermines stereotypes that have served as “universal truths” that restrain marginalized communities both on the page and in society at large.

Lily Hoang creates this third space of intersectionality to resist the model minority myth and embrace the many parts of herself that are characterized by imperfection. Hoang writes as a Vietnamese-American immigrant and a refugee, who on the one hand is subjugated to white supremacy, but who on the other hand is privileged compared to the refugees who did not survive, and to other people of color and immigrants in America. She writes as a flawed daughter, failed lover and struggling aunt facing oppressive conditions, and also as a privileged and successful writer and professor. In doing so, she models Patricia Hill Collin's expansion of intersectionality not just as a personal experience of multiple oppressions, but also a societal positioning of relative power and privileges:

Placing African-American women and other excluded groups in the center of analysis opens up possibilities for a both/and conceptual stance, one in which all groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privilege in one historically created system. In this system, for example, white women are penalized by their gender but privileged by their race. Depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed. (Collins 222)

By embracing her multiple identities of relative power and privilege, Hoang complicates the model minority myth and allows herself to become whole through fragments on the page. She shows her own double-consciousness by imagining other identities that would be more acceptable to her refugee parents: "Other Lily doesn't fail at marriage, and her husband is Vietnamese. He respects her, too" (32) and by embracing the power and privilege she does enjoy despite her minority identities: "In the classroom, I project confidence and strength. People tell me I intimidate them. This is my favorite Lily to wear" (106). Hoang tells all of these identities to give a larger sense of her layered and imperfect self, which resists the myth of the model minority and dominant expectations of Asian assimilation and Asian women's perfection.

Savoy, Ali, and Hoang allow their multiple identities to co-exist like strands, layers, and fragments on the page, going beyond what Patricia Collins has described as “the either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought” (222). The result is that marginalized writers can render themselves more fully human than normally allowed by dominant culture (think of the alternative of Margaret Cho’s character in the 1980s sitcom “All American Girl,” which was about a Korean American family but had no Korean American writers). In the process, they undermine stereotypes meant to box-in marginalized groups and lay the foundation for a third space with room for hybridity, multiple perspectives and expansive truths.

Multiple Eyes: Prismatic Perspectives

While Savoy, Ali and Hoang express multiple identities in their work, the subjects of their essays go far beyond narrow explorations of identity and self-discovery. In fact, identity appears less as a subject in their books and more as a prism through which to look at many different subjects in one work. In this way, intersectional form supports a kaleidoscope of topics as seen from the manifold perspectives of marginalized experiences.

In their craft essay “Ill-Fit the World,” T Clutch Fleischmann writes that a critical departure from conventional essays involves resistance against one “sovereign” and “authoritative” truth as offered through the lens of a singular “I” (Fleischmann 44). Fleischmann offers up Montaigne as an example of a traditional essayist and quotes Samuel Delaney’s description of Montaigne’s essays as “meditations in which the sovereign self is the authoritative ground for analytical inquiry” (44). Savoy, Ali and Hoang’s essays, in contrast, fit with Fleischmann’s description of non-conventional essayists whose work exhibits “formal qualities” that “challenge any sense of authoritarianism on the writer’s part” to challenge how authoritative truth has been used to silence, exclude, and oppress communities in the margins (45). Authoritative truth is not challenged by replacing one dominant truth for another, nor by diving into

postmodern inquiry about the nature of truth, but by expanding our notion of authority from a single individual truth to multiple collective truths: “by using the shifting, hidden, exposed, and expansive truths of the margin as collective tools to help us better understand the world” (Fleischmann 45). This is the type of understanding that most concerns writers of intersectional form. Their work does not stay in the confines of the existing margins, nor does it try to play in the narrowed lanes of expectations imposed from the center. Rather, their work examines where their identities bump up against the restraints of dominant society in such a way that it forges new space from the margins. This new space on the page can correlate to new space in society, as their multiple ways of being and seeing project multifaceted ways of understanding the world.

In *Trace*, Savoy explores geology together with buried personal and social histories of African and Native American communities. In doing so she explicitly names the multiple perspectives one can take when undertaking this exploration:

What lies beneath the surface of maps and names? The answers, and their layers of meaning, of course depend on one’s point of view. Whether what came before 1492 is considered prelude to an American story beginning to unfold. Whether participants from places other than Europe are seen as supporting cast or props. Whether ‘we’ and ‘our culture’ embrace a much larger changing whole. (87)

It is this much larger changing whole that Savoy ultimately sheds light on through her investigations of geology, geography and history. She does this by uncovering layer by layer, place by place. For example, in her essay “Placing Washington D.C., After the Inauguration,” Savoy writes: “The [American] capital and its architecture of urban slavery inscribed the geography of race from day one” (180). She first orients the reader to the landscape around DC: “Here the Piedmont’s crystalline bedrock, cut by the Foundry Branch, by Rock Creek, and by the river itself at Great Falls and Mather Gorge, descends beneath the blanketing coastal plain” (161). And then she digs below the surface: “some of the most notorious [slave] markets

and pens stood along the Mall where so many would come for Barack Obama's inaugurations" (172). Savoy not only exposes the slave markets buried beneath the Mall, she positions them as critical to Washington DC's status as capitol city of the United States. She writes, "Put simply, the first president wanted the capital embedded in the South, not too distant from his Virginia plantation...The permanent home for the federal government, in George Washington's mind, had to be located where slavery would remain unmolested" (164). As a result, Savoy's prismatic perspectives illustrate what dominant narratives seek to erase: that our country as we know it was founded on slavery and grew from slavery, and that slaves were not merely supporting actors or props, but were actors central to the creation of an America whose ascendance depended directly on their forced labor and dehumanization.

Similarly, in *Bright Felon*, Ali applies his focus to religion, sexuality, language and the geography of cities to undermine dominant narratives about Islam and homosexuality. In particular, he complicates Islam as both a religion under attack (18) and a religion that can be oppressively practiced (90), while spending the most time on the page writing of Islam as a religion in a third space of familiarity and change: "This is where people had gathered and my presence was accepted without question...Is that me at the edge of the blanket asking to be allowed inside. / Asking that 800 *hadith* be canceled, all history re-ordered" (83, 87). Ali refracts light onto the complications of feeling at once hopeful about and persecuted by his religion, positioning long histories of Islamic scripture alongside lengthy trials of homosexual men: "A labyrinth of time ties you back to the streets of Cairo, months after 52 men were arrested on a floating nightclub, taken to jail for crimes against society. Their trial will stretch out. / For years" (29). He notes that the layers of these complications exist on all levels, within his identities, his own body, the bodies of queer people, the rules of society, the landscapes of cities: "Under any city other cities still exist. Under any body other bodies" (63).

It is this vision of the coexistence of layers that is the expanded truth created by Ali's prismatic perspective. He holds the binary myths of religion vs. sexuality, and rule-followers vs. felons up to a critical

light, and what we see through his eyes goes beyond the surface of a targeted religion and his own targeted body to uncover a third way of being that is alive with “amniotic grit”—the vibrance that comes with embracing contradiction without the need for resolution.

Hoang uses her prismatic to examine how myth can both hide existing truths and be vehicles for aspirational truths. Hoang at first props up myths as fun house mirrors that reflect distorted realities of acceptance and rejection: “I strolled in and played a colorful tune and the rats followed me through the village and across the meadow and into the woods and through the pure white sand and far into the ocean. Later, the villagers called me a witch and threw me back into the ocean” (147). She then applies her prism to adapt these myths, both to lift up their utility and to poke holes to deflate their influence. As the work progresses, her adaptations shift from reflecting distorted realities to projecting possible futures: “It is not a wolf but a prince and his name is Charming. They are not pigs but little girls with delicate snouts and curly pigtails ... It is not three houses but one ... and one little girl huffs and another one puffs and the last one pushes Charming right out the door” (149). The interweaving of myth with anecdotes of a more shattered reality is how Hoang creates an expanded realm of aspirational truth. Faced with the realities of abusive relationships, a dead sister, and a heroine-addicted nephew, Hoang “unstitch[es] the real and out tumbles magic” (55). In this magical third space, a society of familial pain, oppressive misogyny, and racial hierarchy can be transformed into a realm of acceptance, imperfection, and belonging. In this way Hoang’s prismatic perspective creates a new mosaic by shining refracted light on familiar subjects of family and belonging.

Writing intersectional identities in this way sheds light on what *is*, but the form then refracts light onto what *has been assumed to be*, in ways that help readers see these subjects anew. It is this re-assemblage of subjects as seen from the perspectives of the margins that constitutes expansive truth, or that at least contributes to an ever-growing space that can hold more expansive truths. In this context, writing toward expansive truths bypasses the offering of new knowledge from dominant to subordinate groups. Instead,

writing expansive truths may be one important way to “reveal new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality” (Collins 238). More than this, by focusing their prisms on topics as varied as plants and rocks, sexuality and religion, zodiac animals and violence, these authors model how dominant truth is best confronted not by other relativist truths on the same plane, but by collective truths shared from the margins. Through their prismatic perspectives captured on the page, these authors model how intersectional form allows writers to go beyond a subversive oppositional consciousness of their own reality to achieve a generative consciousness that presents *all* of us with ways to “see the world anew” (Singer and Walker 5).

Multiple Genres: Embodied Narratives

Writing prismatic perspectives requires the refraction of conventional literary lines, particularly those that police boundaries between genre and those that fabricate traditional narrative arc. This third aspect of intersectional form is about *how* intersectional identities and perspectives are freed (rather than captured) on the page. The endeavor of telling a multiplicity of truths about a multiplicity of experiences and subjects, within the context of interlocking systems of power and privilege, is not well served by writing strictly in one genre. Writing expansive truths requires a blending genres and bending of conventional techniques to convey the complexities of marginalized minds contending with power.

While the blurring of genre and refraction of narrative are not new and may be true of all lyric and hybrid nonfiction, they take on a different necessity and importance for intersectional form. People from marginalized communities carry collective traumas of silencing, violence and erasure in our bodies. Often, our nonfiction writing reflects these realities in both content and in form. For example, Ali, Hoang and Savoy all write in fragments and vignettes punctuated with questions and white space that symbolize experiences of brokenness, silence and erasure. In her book *Schizophrene*, Bhanu Kapil re-creates flashes of traumatic memory through vivid and fantastical scraps of recurring scenes. All of these fragments and

scraps flow seamlessly between poetry and prose, nonfiction and fiction to free (instead of capture) the multivalent realities of survival and becoming in the face of oppression. None move through narrative arc. Instead, they move through association, rhythm and sensation. In these ways, intersectional form can be seen as a type of authentic and embodied hybrid form characterized by, as Bhanu Kapil writes, “not hybridity that comes from the activity of theft, collage or polyphony — but from the capacity of the body to form and extend a new gesture” (qtd. in Luczajko).

These new gestures appear throughout the works of Ali, Savoy and Hoang. Ali employs poetic form and meter to enliven his prose in an act that subverts the prosaic normalcy of heteronormativity on the page (Ali 27). He writes, “Walking down the street and seeing a young man with dreadlocks and blue long johns on underneath his cargo shorts./ Sometimes a poem is enough to seduce you or blue long johns worn underneath shorts” (39). Hoang employs mythical fiction to breathe new feminist possibilities into imperfect realities of patriarchy and racism. Similar to Ali, her act of blending genre is a symbol of resistance in and of itself. She alters myth to both deflate the power of myth, and to use the power of myth to project a future of expansive possibility for women and girls. Savoy does this as well, by bringing the poetic meter of rumination to her otherwise scholarly prose: “Neither man could understand Earth itself as a trickster creation. Instead they wrote false obituaries. And as a child I honored their elegies rather than the continuing presence of vital, fluid cultures” (58). Savoy meditates on her own role in uplifting the stories of the settlers who appropriated, erased, and retold Native American history. Rather than directly refute authoritative history, her poetic inquiry quietly erodes the dominant narratives upon which this country was founded.

These are examples of how genre-blending in intersectional form serves the function of conveying expanded truths. Intersectional form also serves this function by employing non-conventional narrative techniques that not only *tell* of expansive truth, but *create experiences* of expansive truth. In these works, the reader is not pulled along by a cognitive plot with a beginning, middle and end. Instead, these works invite

the reader to immerse themselves in both marginalized experience and expanded possibility by appealing to the somatic experiences of metaphor, meter and sensation. It is work that moves through, as Barrie Jean Borich writes, “the image and sense base...of body-centered narrative.” Savoy, Ali and Hoang’s works all move through non-linear journeys that ebb and flow through poetic meter, metaphorical recursion, and webs of sensation and reflection. In these ways these works are not anti-narrative per se, but are characterized by what Ali describes as “not an explosion of narrative but a new way of narration” (Ali, “Genre-Queer” 35).

This mode of narration, not surprisingly, allows for a multiplicity of narratives that break, stutter and recur. This allowing is not simply for the sake of experimentation, but becomes a necessity when telling the collective and expanded truths of the margins (Browne, “A Conversation with Bhanu Kapil”). For Kazim Ali, in the face of violent recrimination for his “sins” as a lover of men, he tells fragmented and recurring stories of isolation as “the wolf-tongued son” (85), the “drift less star” (93), but also gives glimpses of power and redemption: “It’s always the broken that holds the universe in place./ That’s what I would say about poetry and prayer” (9). Together this isolation, persecution and redemption through the broken pieces create a layered landscape of Ali’s version of expanded truth. For Lily Hoang, fragmented stories of failure and a longing for acceptance recur almost cyclically throughout her work, “A pack of dogs. A swarm of insects. A mischief of rats. You desire the human equivalent” (95), juxtaposed with fortune-cookie-like strips of wisdom about the power of coming in last: the end of the race is sisterhood, a sisterhood of “not pigs but little girls with delicate snouts and curly pigtails” (149), who refuse to run the rat race and who push the big bad wolf and Prince Charming out the door. Together, these multiple narratives of false starts and failures, along with fragments of feminist myth, form Hoang’s Zodiac wheel of expanded truth.

The examples of Ali’s and Hoang’s multiple narratives told through blended genre embody the author’s many identities and perspectives on the page. What’s more, in intersectional form the overall

structure of the works themselves constitute another layer of embodiment that could be considered the collective body that holds the multiple narratives together. For Ali it is the metaphorical structure of tiered cities where the coexistence of past and present and emerging future defy the false binaries that separate criminal from saint; for Hoang it is the wheel that contains the twelve animals who ran the Great Race and who all are part of the Zodiac, regardless of who came in first or last; for Savoy it is the geological palimpsest made up of layers upon layers of dominant and dominated stories of humans in relationship to the land. These metaphorical frameworks serve the technical function of containing the vast content of intersectional form, while also serving the deeper function of embodying the expansive truths the authors seek to convey.

The practice of intersectional form as an experience of expansive truth lies not just on the page, but in the action of writing and the interaction of reading and interpretation. By employing narration that both reflects and invites lived experiences at the intersections of poetry and prose, fantasy and reality, brokenness and remembrance, intersectional form encourages us to come back to our guts and our minds. “My body begins and ends with writing,” said Bhanu Kapil (Luczajko). This in itself is a radically rebellious and generative statement. Writing like Kapil’s, Ali’s, Hoang’s and Savoy’s invites re-embodiment in the face of the disembodiment that results from violence and trauma. It is an act of positioning marginalized bodies to project a new and imperfect wholeness made not from easy unity but from the painstaking re-assemblage of fragments.

Not a Conclusion but an Expansion

A: *What are shoes for?*

B: Silence.

A: *Wrong. The answer is, to protect your feet.*

B: Or...they're mostly for style and they actually hurt your feet with their needlenose toes and jackhammer heels. Or they're a status symbol. Or a signification of gender identity. Or for throwing at American Presidents. Actually, I was gonna say that shoes are for giving jobs to children in the global south. Like, to my cousins in the Philippines. To make money for WalMart or Ivanka or Jimmy Choo.

A: Ooob, I see. Getting sassy non, are we?

While we don't need permission to write multiplicity, we do need the space. It often feels like there's no space for expansive truth in our day-to-day lives. The era of 2-minute reads, crossfire debates, digital clapbacks and tweet-driven federal policy can fuel the narrow myths that serve to uphold systemic oppression. Because of this, literary nonfiction can play a unique role in resistance. Literary nonfiction deals with the molding of the actual, and like a sculptor molds the actuality of clay (Pape) it has always carried the potential to help us see reality in new ways. Literary nonfiction written in intersectional form can go a step further by allowing marginalized writers the space disproportionately denied to us in quotidian life—the space to re-assemble our minds and bodies, to expand on ourselves and on how we see the world. On the page we can write voices into silence, multiplicity into singular truth, embodiment into erasure.

When you write from the margins and have so long seen your communities being written for, silenced or violently erased, this practice of intersectional form can become no less than a significant step toward collective liberation. If the success of oppression depends on the narrowing of minds, then the success of liberation depends on the expansion of minds. Beyond strict memoir, literary nonfiction in intersectional form can become a way for authors from marginalized communities to write the collective truths that live both within our bodies and in the collective bodies of our communities. This allows marginalized authors to become agents of the expansion of minds, and therefore agents working toward liberation for all.

Intersectional form is not so much a subgenre of literary nonfiction as it is an approach, a practice, an evolving third space, a journey of possibility. The journey begins with confronting power and privilege through writing multiplicity onto the page. The acts of refusing to choose among identities, refracting new light on familiar subjects, and bending the rules of telling, together constitute a writing practice with the potential to reassemble what has been broken within and among us and around us, and the potential to evolve the notion of what it means to truly live with humanity.

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