ABSTRACT

The Endless Tap

by Daisy Levy

My interests as a writer are generally located in social issues and the discourse that surrounds and shapes them. This work explores language and identity, gender and sexuality, and the relationship of individuals to communities. Many of these issues may be expressed in manipulated narratives, syntax, and margins to cross a post-structuralist understanding of the world with uncertainty, as an attempt to complicate what we think we know and what we don’t. This tension is the center of these poems, attempting to blur the edges of categorization on more than one level: prose and poetry, linearity and non, the emotional, physical, and intellectual senses, visibility and invisibility, subject and object. This work relies on an embodied language, a system of expression with texture and weight that can be felt/seen, as much in its sense as its intention and sound. Ultimately, all contributes to the experience and so, the meaning.
The Endless Tap

A Thesis

Submitted to the faculty of Miami University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts Department of English

by Daisy Levy

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Because this couldn’t have been done without Keith Tuma’s patient
“Where’s the rest?”

and Louis and Jane Levy’s encouragement,
wide and constant as it is.

And for Kevin, who knows the questions count more than an answer could.
Taken from the “Memo Concerning Conduct from Drawers and Files”

all writing must critique some form
center-spaced and justified flush to
one-quarter note whenever acute
pains take coffee to conceal

–don’t think things through too much–

pockets may not be patriotic remove
gender whenever acute middle class
love will be material permitted of all
aspects encroaching commercial
pains to conceal the center space
justify addressing negative light take
eye pockets secret does not finally
end with orange after red

–according to the proscribed format in section B-37–

brotherhood references must be
prior by official jury hearing in
triplicate orange not naturally
approved materials will be removed
and critique acute writing

–in the following year’s annual Canon of Phrases, Hymns, Lyrics, and Verses–

public prayer will release stanza
guidelines in states of physical
failure to appropriate etymology
results semi-quarterly union
negotiations produce rules in three
nevers referring to anyone who has
succeeded, and never to precedents,
antecedents, or duringcedents

–when you cannot breathe properly, fill out the form–
Right Life
I DON'T KNOW WHETHER
a march a walk a procession a season that goes like a military
gesture a protest to make yourself seen to shape shadow force
merge voices normalize space claim safety presence that stops
traffic a picket line a funereal line a happening of people on feet
a way to put your feet down to put your feet in motion
invert the question of status to question a position

TO CROSS MY ANKLES OR MY KNEES
subject object public recognition memorial a way of saying
no a way of not saying anything to participate keep moving
a way to move to be moved to move out to outlast a way
of hiding of counting out masses a way to be counted in
control the uncontrollable a way to resist to be challenged

LOOK HIM IN THE EYE
to separate watchers from doers make sound
intentional avoid asking hard questions to say
refuse to be moved insert to legitimate go in to
come out to watch a way to shut people up

OR STARE AT MY FEET
to get out of school to pray a way to cause
fear to judge raise awareness a way to keep vigil to
assure you maintain anonymity make yourself heard

TO RAISE MY HAND
to cry out a way to resist to violate the inviolable
a way to impress your date flip the tables to feel
better about what you did once cross the road

OR INTERRUPT
to make contact reach the organization to administer
a way to the people to be upright be one of the gang

STAND ON THE CURB OR IN THE STREET
to keep from fighting to take power to join in
to exclude a way to subvert the power to split
adhere to codes of violence choose to instill
order in chaos to display to be displayed comply
hold hands to break bonds keep control
keep the light on to ask

I DON'T KNOW WHETHER TO STAY IN THE SHADOWS
for more air time to surface a way to ritualize
issues involve yourself

OR THE SPOTLIGHT
without implication deny a way to divide
conquer a way to make permanent
mark time mark ourselves mark others to cover
ground travel to condone the crowd to look on
to look at to look back look through to re-mark

TAKE IT LIKE A MAN

to remember to repeat the past to seek
peace wage war wage peace to seek to justify
force to force the few to justify many to be part of
a way to abandon the few make individual the same

OR RUN LIKE A GIRL

to fill space get the word out to refuse comfort
a way to be bad be proud to glorify the crime
a way to focus silence the silent play games to represent

TO PLAY HARD TO GET

to make numb endure a way to maintain order
inquire the fortress to rewrite alleys the inevitable
accident to inform a way to recognize disruption

OR GET TO THE POINT

to enforce belonging require to cooperate a way to rise
to relinquish nothing to be made private to affiliate
have strength in numbers have a way to protect
to face off to face the aggressor

TO BELIEVE THE AUTHORITIES

catch fire catch their eyes a really big fish
catch their attention realize the margins heal
a way in a way out a way to go on

OR NOT TO

apologize advertise danger wash your hands
to elegize to shine light into
corners contrast edges mask safe
zones put in place a way to locate
license to give take to differ
a way to name yourself

ANSWER THE PHONE

to empower make famous a way to be
famous to pass as important to legislate a way
to dilute support to make evident provoke

TO LOOK INTO THE CAMERA

a way to stay quiet to signal others to play by
the rules take it personally make it public to unify
a way to state the case to break down walls a way to walk

OR LOOK AWAY

to reinscribe walls the same walk into
a way to build it to make a statement give it
up to intend look on be active to follow
herds remember to be unsatisfied to snap
into place to commit identify comfort antagonize
to settle for a way to be observed
I DON’T KNOW WHO TO CALL IN CASE OF EMERGENCY
to observe reclaim a way to show you
care to deflect emotion to respond to collapse
means and ends perpetrate crimes inspire
others express anger to be safe do the same as
you do break the cycle break down
in public to stand where you are seen

I DON’T KNOW WHO IS WATCHING ME

spark debate discuss a way
to exacerbate burn situations
a way to set fire to catharsize
to be urgent take the next
step to confront
be overt to be vigilant
walk a way to walk a way
to walk in the dark the only way left

I DON’T KNOW WHO IS NOT.
This Confessional

word this revelation this
  easy indulgence in this
knowing this
  moment makes repercussions
is not worth this
  this reality remembering
makes the act of eating this
  being easily swallowed, this struggle
to get out of bed, to turn and look
a lover left behind this
  echo matched lust and this patience
you might have heard it before might never
have this slow bleed hand in the fire trapped—
  make it to the sink in time
this one more time
  something relished this
obstacle to work your fingers
near knuckle, this unstable cadence
  this is being present
this is not your problem
  this skunk fear sautéing onions
to cover this burning flesh stench
this is what happened it could happen to you
Entering the War
In memory of Alice Paul, the National Women’s Party, her foremothers and mine, with gratitude

The first time they shoved that
tube down your throat, strapped
you down, poured raw egg through
their tight rubber tool, just
after the biggest of them
squeezed his palm around
your jaw, making space

— the vice, metal
  crank pushed gums
  back to teeth, steadied
  your tongue, not to tremble
  not slump, reckless and block
  your throat, saving you
  this insult, this
  bellowed silence—

you held your eyes
open, watched their brute
force facing your back-throated screams, your paralyzed
tongue, the veins in your forehead
standing up.
as if some rich white senator ever looked
into the enemies’ eyes, ever
bad to choose crossing
felt fear creep down
his leg, unsteady
heart beats; weighing survival
between picket line screams, the clinics closed
and an unpinned grenade seconds until torching
the bastards trying to kill him, back home
no one says – a good looking piece like you –
why aren’t you knocked up, barefoot,
a good wife, his mother, his daughter or son maybe—

as if he ever shat in the bushes
twenty yards from the front line,
his boss will never watch his belly,
dysenteric and thirsty for bad beer,
his breasts that swell every month,
something more than dehydrated
eggs and bile
rising in his throat every morning—

as if he ever looked himself
in the mirror, fingered the slit
covering where the bullet went in,
pushed his body back inside
After Freud, Cixous, and Ortho-Cyclen

if she considers only that moment
of birthing
as the perfect expression
of will,

passing information between bodies,
will she remember
day to day minutiae,
decisions like decaf or double
opened risk to her,
possibility?
she wonders the starting moment–
developing fetus with fingernails
that mark her, that not yet hard covering,
not yet effective.
she’s not sure she can
offer bodily replacement;
thirsty for more—discussion,
what’s spilled between people,
taking chance.
Out

I haven’t felt special since
kissed off chrome
covered cravings
passed to glass
—walk—
I stare as long as I
finger on spine

I’m soaked
if there was a bus I could get on
a pimped up car
a dream
minus
give up bending
be disqualified
is you are
a woman who is
during the test
to encounter a smoke detector
on the side and
two tiny white hands
all the same
of course this

this little
moment rolls
its really fast
nervous looks
so mean I am
breathing between
the bell the grade
the big sad part

my body
what cleavage sells
kissed his wallet said
you can’t
just be
long eared

my feet wet my pants
dry and quiet
music mumbles
everything you know

as long as we sit

(side)

foggy morning
passing—
walk
can walk
on my person
not even
for a dream
if forced
she
nothing but noise
just a pronoun
something bound
an exit sign
on the other side
with loose fingers
he’s around

excuses

reduced
troubled
the edges
interrupting you

—um ok uh am I

stupid stupid

(be still)
cold breathing
record

however
I'm serious
we idle

tired enough to need
benches the tattoo parlor

nothing to be conquered

art is in

nothing but iou's

no really

are we really
closed

the not and

chances are yes
Wal-Mart Parking Lot
  Meeting the Scorpion King

sharp angles splinters open palms
sucks courage from thighs dark ink
ditches running sideways desperate
asphalt splinters gushed out thud and
bump empty crosses loaned desire
little grateful fists frozen incandescent
shrouds in my peripheral vision curled
shiny towed blinking gut
when
a dragon learned to inhale
summer behind her
parents’ house she told me
breathing artless flames
flipping the law a torched
rebellion consoled fire with
fire whether or not she can
breathe better this struggle
deep restless won’t outrun
The Man insidious hands
she couldn’t stand craving
the taste that tar stains
match-struck sulfur got her
burnt ash coated tongue
stale lips flavored noxious
cankered throat but her
fingers ached
let go resistance that
slender roll picks loose
leaves free ends the endless
tap
Body Forth
The Hard Seat

You may have drunk cyanide
laced wine; might have left it on
the nightstand before you set
the alarm, maybe broken
the only key, might have
lain in the wrong dark
street, full explosive
stars sweat waiting,
another dog’s fear, sniffed
the guy with the gun, may have cried
out loud, chasing your mother’s voice,
to sink possibly, being chased,
or soared, in German show tunes
and wings ripped the skin
on your back. Whatever happened
don’t bother thinking

about it. At three in the morning,
there is nothing but

dark room
too quiet

breathing next to you
Behind the Minivan from Kansas on Top of the World, Trail Ridge Road

not snowball fight kissed
edge, not crowd gawked
twelve thousand valley
feet— easy slipping steering
wheel, slight right over
the shoulder, sliding down
Song for the Isocahedron
for my dad

I
You witnessed no blinding light,
vioence, or hope. Just this
giant roadway splintering
mid-nowhere, East Wyoming,
Kansas acres perfected
by lawless horizon. Yawns
dusty roots, daylit in brown.

II.
No one drives these roads, no towns
itch beside them. You exist
alone to try and order
the pavement maze, the swirling;
clouds dislocate you. Your chest
hurts. Somewhere, a steady beep
and hum. The roads stay quiet,

III.
consider Sisyphus, his
rolling back eyes, watery
rumble, falling pianos
through no open window, glass
shatters the impulse to split
skin, stand still or start running
this bent universe, so hot—

IV.
so sweaty. Swollen thunder
moves on, the next thing noticed,
you listing, making lists proves
you know where you’re going. Wait.
Expectant highways turn to
river. Swerve back this rock shoved
forward. Cross over, rimless
V.
math making lines to etch space,
containers, carry the sense
fashioned from what was then is
not what’s missing, not now. Found
perfect numbers, Natural
or Ideal, True Beginning
relinquished. This unresolved

VI.
you, or Hammett, or Spade, or
a phoenix, smoking cinder
pile. Quiet igniting
without struggle. Simple rise
and falling time, serious,
patient. Cycles taken slow
race backwards. Through streets, shadows

VII.
like strangers, family, steps
feel unsynched. You’re undoing
your plans. This reversal gone
wrong. The immediate ache,
unfamiliar, hurts like this
concentrated regret. Dry
throated strain wavers and fades.

VIII.
Uncertain force writing want
without a story to try,
to feel part of this severe
landscape. Feel the weight of dust
watching. Its sensation, less
impact, full settle and sift,
thin covers. A rustling
IX.
answers action with no
word. Irregular rhythms,
tenuous planlessness less
precise. Lines look more like some
thing woven, no emphasis
on order. Noise follows
dim light. Trails outrun margins

X.
between spaces. The repeating
roads you reach for, steadied
beat challenges. Your control
grows, groans, wanes utterly
without you. Intervals dis-
connect figure and event,

make use, struggle, and change.

XI.
Your path, recognizably
unseen, lost names failed naming
dreams. This enormous state,
erratic volume, and air
empties logic. Boundless chance
asks for another. You have

forgotten your note cards where,

XII.
in your memory, crystals
and twenty faced models, their
twelve triangular sides all
ways equal, will intersect
highways. Branches snap under

your feet, agitate the dirt.
Getting Grounded

in sonogram pictures
sound shows the apex
    at the bottom— inverted thump

peaking, reversed feet.
this ice cube turns itself
    in my palm, blood pools

to my own feet-inverted peak. my soles are stuck
    to tin, underneath. we

talk about his heart
now, its leaking. melting ice
    slips through cracks, my fingers,

and plinks, sounding home, drips
slip between my toes. blood gone
from one hand turns to a cramp

in the other. new things find
where i was. how can a hand be so cold
    and feet so warm? in that sound

picture, your dying fish heart stops
my breathing until they pump ink
through the fish turned muscle.

i make the same sound as your
fishmuscle. full of blood, erratic
    leaking. my toes are wet. i am not

warm enough to melt any more. i am
trying to find a place not too cold, rub it
    like a worry stone. melt it down to nub.
Reconciliation

that only my midnight heartbeat wakes me that
even her crying sticks in dry-mouthed night that
cries imagine mountain cold switchbacks that
she careens under hung cliffs chalky aftertaste that
they took fifteen years to get my meds right that
sometimes I still wonder all these decades that
gape shadowing corners rattle her shut doors that
stops sometimes managed rhythm sometimes that
pieced together some days I can’t see her help that
she soothes my fingers tremble that they ache that
empty sharp dark that I can’t tell if it’s that I hear
her if it’s me or if it’s that.
Dreams for a Good Prognosis

Your scar is my own,
raspberry red and long.
I look down at my chest,
see one nipple,
one neat slice
across my body, down
to the armpit. Here.
Touch this.
The Next Chapter
in which the Poet and Rohrshach the Cat pass through security
at Denver International

In my hands, her heart
pounds forward. Her ribcage
swells in my fingers,
her soft, black belly
bundled against my own
breast, wild twitches—
not so much confidence
as momentum in the end. You
take one step.
Disclaimer

It’s my Jesus year. Thirty-three speeds up, comes down to woulda’s, shoulda’s, nevers. Still this young sound starts to plan for, to ask of; my voice, lungs full of air, thrilled for a choice: in me, this hum of question, direction, regret; its timbre is quiet. Shakes sometimes. I hear echoes strung out, inside my breath, circles of wishes become material. Having named them, some given, others denied, I wonder. How was it Christ came to hear his own voice? Did he stumble? Slur his words? Were they too loud at first, too earnest? Did he feel the tremble in his chest, the risk to speak? Did the sound surprise him—a gesture once outside of him coming in, bringing rest.
In Each, the Other
Stand immense.
Tide licked,
clean breath, rustled
thirst building. Rest
like rain, settle
what flaps wild.
Lake Effect

Drying limbs whistles her waking dream. Water beads hover, the ones she misses close to her spine, sleep clings in corners, cat’s eyes. Winter bright air. Sharp lung pulling tight cilia, bubbles. Watery skin.
pre-dawn cicadas, lonely
crinkle bickers
morning weight,
rolls over empty rain
night-chilled, your smell
and I slept.
Provocation

Tuna-red flesh
shimmers. Fish-scaled
pumps. Slip inside. Gold
stileto chopsticks
tickle my foot.

Take my toes in your mouth.
Wasabi tingle.
Taste slippery salt,
tender heat,
raw.
I Have Never Been To Church

Two weeks under vaulted ceiling stations kept watch over canyon sun; empty slickrock lightening stones at sinners; me and the wait for the next confused spectacle, kicking air.
It was a good sign when I stepped out, jammed elevator, solitary. Full silence. Lila Acheson Wallace’s Modern Wing keeps Pollock, Rothko, Johns, Kline staring at no one. Culture-seekers push Picasso, Modigliani. Paris painters draw millions. Empty swirl, color splatter lures me every time, asks me to sit by Rothko and I found this one. Untitled. Red and small next to the rest.

The way my back throbbed had to squat at the base. The red smear. Pulled on me, vacuumed. Space, maybe, or Mars, or pure power spread desire, worn red blanket. Central Park’s Great Lawn, pressed prone. Skyscrapers, smog, damp bodies dream oceans, mountains, a good Thai place moving in. Squatting, in me, still this thread. Thrums, being filled up. Being emptied endlessly.
Incantation
Bones of the Earth
for Isamu Noguchi

A soft, cold
lie trickles out, a wall,
days comfort, breathes
cut rock. Climb
it, stand. On the top,
spit. Listen, salt
loneliness turns splat,
long dribbled pulp.

The air is dry and hot.
No one can spit dust.

Some greedy, well-
meant walls
are walking water’s
more powerful hands
like knives, endless
slicing stone, supplicant,
laden.

Hum time-dribbled
pools. Quiet hiss.
Stand. Face the fairway head on, and clear your mind. Settle the afternoon into your feet; square off at the tee. A breeze whistles against your driver. Listen. Pivot from your mind, settling the afternoon into your feet, rising up through the spiral of your spine against your driver, and hear your revolution become a full twist. Suspend your arms, risen up. The spiral of your spine, shining upswung one note, becomes full. Twisted suspense in your arms releases, reverses. Torqued hips, steady shining, upswung one-note swims in parted air, arcing toward the ball, released. Reverse the torque in your hips, steadied hinge. A ring of contact sounds, swims in parted air, arcs the ball higher, straighter, longer hinged off a ring of contact. Sounds hum and whir, an unbroken coil turns higher, straighter, longer; against a sky blue ocean. The vibration of your unbroken coil curls up and back, iron high over your head, against a sky-blue ocean, square at the tee. Breathe. Whisper, “Up. Back.” Iron high over your head, standing, facing the fairway. Clear.
because knowing lives in Movement
what you Know escapes you

because you squint to read Between the lines
perfect Vision is only illusion

because you always see the Others first
you are at the center of Everything

because you never really fit In
you have never been There

because No one ever asked you
you are the Only survivor

because you never had a place to call Home
when you talk about Here you mean Me

because you Want your life to give give give
derby you name It you change It

because you aren’t sure it’s what you thought it would Be
you want to Make it yours

because you can’t Always get what you want
you don’t always know when it Counts

because you have not felt for feeling but Fullness
you can’t say exactly When it hit you

because there is more than One answer
when it rains it Pours

because size is Relative
without your Dreams you are nothing

because you want your dreams to be Meaningful
you believe you’ll know When it’s for real

because even when you sleep you know you are Awake
you never know when Something big is happening

because you never asked for This
you are not the only one to feel It
because there is a thin line Between love and hate
you get dizzy when you look both Ways

because there is always Another road
you never see the Same thing twice

because there are no New stories
you Open like a book

because you want to be seen as you Are
you Keep your eyes on the prize

because objects May be closer than they appear
you never thought you’d see the End of the road

because you try to live for the Moment
you can never settle on Just one

because you can’t straddle the Fence forever
the moment when it Happens is not convenient

because the right Way is not the left Way

because the left is not Lost

because a lost cause is no One’s fault

because falling off can stand Down

because Nothing never stands still
having never lived in california having always wanted to know
what it is exactly except for nototherplaceian possibly new
american accent in koreanspanishjapanesehindifrenchfarsi
sometimes english too a west idea without as many straight
lines straight streets straight paths straight laces san franciscan
smells know california girls look skinny short combat-booted
blonde tall and fat prada-heeled dark-skinned and cornrowed
boygirls in san francisco looking up looking around looking me
in the eye in san francisco when i go to sleep i dream of
swimming dancing driving always something -ing

except never waiting for somewhereinbetweenian subtle slurred
soft out loud voices speaking north carolina plagued with
health food co-ops klan marches sticky skin teenaged boys
drawling back deck sorority girls winking a wished city sprawl
pick up thrills a small town heat prickly that stopped to let me
cross the street in chapel hill when i go to sleep i dream cardinal
songs look me up and down always to remind me my chapel
hill is not mine at all

but colorados artoothintobreathian makes it less important
how you say what you say makes your friends your enemies
snow springs single sunburnt fires always contained always
always your flames extinguished after the glare of white piney
girls with dreads with crew cuts always white you always trying
to beat the weather score nirvana how you say the ultimate ride
a dream inside coyotes’ mouths tornado winds a walk through
fire always something lets me go

farther and betterthantherestian in manhattan morning garbage
bag armies tunnel sound inside a beehive look in other people’s
windows where the snow goes how the ends meet january in
the wind gets stuck in starbucks having been somewhere having
happened in high heels high society and mighty never stands
still for steel through empty farmland dreams for the loneliest
the biggest crowd

of proudofcommonwealthian stahts to miss the letter r sounds
bourgeoisie sometimes sounds proletariat transcendental rush
hour oceans protected by my massachusetts window protected
by keeping cold keeping out neighbors back aches steady
houses no one affords the pope painted treetips capitalize
summer enactments revolutionary homes not to make too
much noise when i sleep when i dream calcified steady bone
spurs heal the broken
welikeitounownian standard american english long flat aaaaaa of two lane ohio highways running through steel towns through cornfield universities the land of sandwiches of men marrying women or the other way around but not the Other Way Around belts made of bibles for my teenaged mother cooking like the French do for her father who only ever wanted meatloaf really hums “stuck in the middle with you” when i go to sleep i mostly dream of other places

except that whatyoulearned in history books never happened on myfrontlawn inmyexperience but notinmylifetime and thosewerethedayswhen too makes a place the place you want to see the place you think you are what you think you’re looking at what you wish you were how you think it Really Is some place girls look like other place girls who never found their place in place’s history books with a lot of place men out of place there is nothing exceptional fresh in place no graceful thing everlasting when i sleep i dream the mundane
Annamaya Sutra
for Lil

this is not at all like the body not language like
अन्नमय
the body’s is erased and organized
अन्नमय
rewritten as if it were like the body the plan
अन्नमय
more obvious would be arranged to realize
अन्नमय
one goal all parts connect shapes into that
अन्नमय
fit that doesn’t fit and still struggle to pulse
अन्नमय
breathe bleed stretch its legs like the body
अन्नमय
every part would change every minute adapt
अन्नमय
survive gravity survive inevitable decay
अन्नमय
like the body made of more than this one
अन्नमय
system of the body would be like this
अन्नमय
able to move it in different ways to shove
अन्नमय
bones without muscles rearranging organs
अन्नमय
not at all like we time by the body
अन्नमय
get to the end should be dead not just
अन्नमय
preserved not sleeping muscles stiff in
अन्नमय
organs skin waits rotten — sudden hair
अन्नमय
anything like growth when the body
अन्नमय
dies its decay is live
Cooking All Night

just to stir
something
besides noise
in my head. This
smolder.
Breath in Fire

I.
What urgent is

how silent we are, except for the breathing.

II.
The more things change

November howls authority. One
a.m. corner bedroom takes
me fast, reckless sleep, moon
shine throat gurgle, beams
bare panes, inconsolable
coyote remembers
wild nearsighted dreams

III.
leading up to

the winter you came
for me, the Charles
froze in disgust, restless,
exhausted; the winter
you taught me to lie
still and wait.

IV.
The story I heard:

she was
naked in central park,
crying for help, policeman
didn’t hear when she told him
she had just been raped, the crowd
gathered on 63rd, he too busy staring
at horses with flowers stuck in their ears
some stupid caricature. I don’t care who the damn horses look like.

V.
The details

hunger for memory, how tenderness
swallows skin, salvages
roots, harvests.
VI.
*In the bells toll*

*om*
(the sound of the universe)
*om*
(moving breath of the world)
*om*
(let all the dead rest)

VII.
*Graveside*

kaddish murmur
perfect rocking
match knees
the prayer shawl
rustle cried death
from burden
to family clench
hands how they sweat
in each smell distinct
—hot skin—
and still no one lets go.