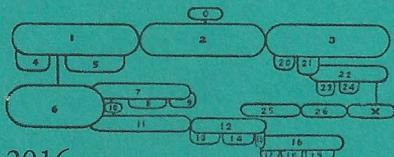


Score Poems

by Allyson Paty



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A Present Tense Pamphlet

SCORE FOR THE NEW COTILLION

do the knees	of the brother	in a stranger's	home video
when he chases	the dog	pulls	the dog's ears
do the left wrist	of an anchor	the right arm	of a riot cop
& the scalp	of the crowd	<i>c'mon</i>	do the pelvis
of the talent	in a blue movie	tilting always	away
add the torso	of a man	in a clip	from a prank
do the second	just before	he eats pavement	<i>you know</i>
<i>you're twisty</i>	<i>little girl</i>	now switch	it's your neck
after the neck	of the brother	your shins	after the shins
of the anchor	your navel	of the police	& thighs
of the crowd	you've got	the elbows	of the talent
& your lips	<i>c'mon</i>	do the lips	of the person falling

SCORE FOR THREE VOICES

I.

Like anyone your kinfolk
have been speaking
for centuries.
On the floor of your largest room
lay out each glass
each bowl each jar, spoon, & vase.
Consider the men
as split-open fruit.
The women, the work
of splitting.
Recall every onion you've watched
your father prepare,
& Mother, when she peels
away an apple skin
how she holds
her own gaze in the knife.
Into the mouth of each container
recite every adage they've given you
striking the words
never & must

II.

Stand face-to-belt with the bronze figure
at the center of a public square.
Should it happen the statue is cast
in the shape of a fighter
list victories
as Clue accusations
 Henry *in Agincourt* *with the longbow*
 Sherman *in Savannah* *with the torch*
until you don't
remember another.
Should it happen the statue is cast
in the shape of a statesman
recount charters
 Jefferson *in parchment* *with ink & quill*
 Moses *in stone tablet* *with god's hand*
Sit on the monument's shoulders.

Sit with your legs around his neck.
Kick off your boots
so they land like two dead pigeons.
Expound on the urge
for a different end
no force no disgust no exhaustion

III.

Bring home scraps of paper left in grocery baskets, on top of ATMs—
most litter will do.
Speak what is written but don't move your vocal cords.
This is how to hear the tongue the roof the spit the teeth.
Put your mouth to different surfaces.
This is how to hear the shelf the wall the coil on the stove.
If someone is listening, you can put your lips directly on his body—
it won't hurt.
You can say into his stomach *this is my patois which means to paw, to treat roughly the language.*
When there is no more to read,
begin again. The first word as quietly as you can manage.
The next a bit louder. Likewise the third, the fourth.
Before long you are shouting.
Before long you cannot articulate a full word.
Isolate the vowels.
Scream the breath from your lungs like two fists wringing water from a rag
until the voice refuses you.

(Once I watched a woman lie on her back & scream.
I walked in, the performance already begun.
Instantly one knew the extent of the piece: *the woman would lie there, the woman would scream.*
Each sound rent its own path through the torso & soon watching untethered from *what I'd say*
was happening, became a new thing.

At four, Dick Higgins's daughter saw him perform a score that read
Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream!
She later reflected, *you can't interrupt the relationship between a person & a body that's screaming at*
the top of its lungs.)

I have only on language, & it isn't mine
watch it pass through your body
—an address without origin
save the fact of
your voice the hair
that catches in your mouth.

SCORE FOR LIKENESS

Taste pennies out of nowhere & my nose is about to bleed.

Self-portrait with paper towel over the face.

The family doctor says *Not pennies. Iron.*

Self-portrait when sold off the timber

& gone to lay track.

That kind of work with pincers & sweat.

Self-portrait the morning the tunnel collapses.

Say my face is a ribbon cutting

My face is broken ground.

You know that the water you're drinking is ancient.

Self-portrait as condensation.

Condensation as effigy.

Every day of your life you have been a woman.

What about when you're bone char.

What about dirt.

Say your life's work.

SCORE FOR LIKENESS

myself from the top of a stairwell / not one full body / slivers of hand & wrist

as a montage of security footage / skewed / walking out of the frame

or as the neighbors see me / absent when not / pacing / fucking / clanging plates

the sum total of minutes spent in stairwells / a currency

not poor

blanching the day / as turning a jar / will empty it of water

SCORE FOR A SPECTACULAR

The peeping toms advance onto their balconies.

Mosquitos rise, Lolitas run baths.

I was a girl among girls in the locker room.

Blond legs. Blond books.

We took turns with our eyes to the rifle scope.

A champion undressed, we were waiting.

His pocked back in the crosshairs.

Look in your compact for the transit of Venus.

E coli observed through a keyhole.

One hundred thirty thousand pounds ground beef
reloaded into trucks.

While the sitter keeps a finger-frame on the crib,
the mayor attends the symphony wearing night-vision goggles.

Kettledrums heroic in green.

Every time I pick up my opera glasses, the towers are mid-collapse.

On my seaside vacation they are burning again
in the keel of a glass-bottom boat.

My face & the minnows alight
your open mouth like an oil slick.

I love you when (& only when)
you are the single eye of the panopticon
& I the six thousand prisoners.

INTERVAL

nothing lost so many times

it cannot stand in shade

I dig a little trench with bare hands

no symptoms

if space is not a voice

falling on soft tissues

what gravitation

my literacy

casting vision

left to right

stitch, under stitch

things that are the case

blue kerchief, shadows readymade

& kinds of erosion

SCORE FOR NOTHING

for a minute

on piano

in a room

the afterlife

out there

between us

in an hour

what I made

I spent

a day

in the blotters

as meme

SCORE FOR THE CONTINGENT

Where the night speaks of the fire which speaks of the flock,
cue Fishwife onto the porch:

*A moon that makes an open dish means rain.
Means smoke that moves close to the ground.
And the swallows when they fly they fly as one.*

She says *a downpour is a downpour is a downpour*: cue action in the gutter.

She says *trouble brings trouble brings trouble*.

A bird flies in through the window.

Fishwife: *Watch for illness*.

Flies in and can't get out.

Fishwife: *Watch for death*.

An empty chair goes rocking.

Fishwife: *Watch your money*.

A wishbone hung from the door.

Fishwife: *Watch for love*.

Don't make him both your racehorse and your wager.

We who watch watch from the wings

We whose bets begin to draw off our boldness

At the heart of our work is persistence

As long as I withstand I believe I am owed

The fishwife calls on us to make a sound
like a steam whistle with no ship to herald.

SCORE FOR TWO MEN AND UPRIGHT PIANO

You play the one man. The first.
Supine on the top board.
Don't mimic a club singer, arranging herself
like deviled eggs. Each vertebra is an eye,
and you are hell-bent
on watching the hammers.

I play the other man.
I come in after the audience is used to you,
and growing bored.
I play a song from the year someone built this piano.
Next piece, I move back a decade.

You stay as long as you can bear it.
Wait for your feet to lose circulation.
Let me touch your ribs with sustain.
Song by song, I accumulate
my chronology in reverse:
A dialectic of muscle and wood.

Wait for your mouth to go dry.
Wait for your stomach
to start growling again.
When you stand,
take the top board with you.
Set the hinge pins on my lap.

The best scenario
is your patience aligns
with the age of our piano
so when you demand the key cover
I'll be on music
for organ and clavichord.

We look inside the piano
and find quarters, trinkets—
Things that will tell us
who used the piano
before we took it for our own.

Together we dismantle the action:
hammers, dampers, keys, strings.
I arrange the parts on stage like a spinal cord.

We dismantle the action
and it won't be easy.
My arms will weigh
like a curse under the tongue.
Your stomach will growl
with such vigor it would be audible
But we apply such force,
our breath will mask the sound.

SCORE FOR EXITS

Through the smell of the man left sleeping the deadlock
lifted from its socket and returned the bag caught
on the fence like an appeal for parlay it is white.

Through the office carpet all the flies caught dead
in the light fixtures the window onto the alley
one pedestrian is collapsing her umbrella.

Through the doctor his tools his work on the table
is me the new body of words he administers
his hand is implement the nurse's a stroke.

Through no evidence of flood save the price of greens
is high next week my friends will be married
in the vineyard I will sink through the grass.

MISE EN SCÈNE

To the tourist
even the orange
belongs to this city
when he sees it
in my lunch-break hands
your gaze
what makes it
yours when it lights
on a woman
as she binds each twin
in his flame resistant fleece
yours when it shifts
to the vistas of hair
hard bodies encased
in silks & voices
amebic against
the ornamental cherries
& *yours* when it rests
on the membrane
when I pull apart
the sections
my fingers speak
in their language of use
the seeds
I spit on the path
the waste
& total value of the fruit

MISE EN SCÈNE

In a sunburned time
I wait on the curb
the traffic breathes on me
I take the heat
personally. No need
to synchronize
our clocks by hand
the scene is time
as uniform
as water in a wading pool
At the end of a parking lot
I reach toilets, pay phones
a mailbox, an ATM
what is it a person needs
when everything is a plot point
fully measurable
At the end of two identical hours
I re-board the bus
count row house after row house
painted two shades of beige

NOTES FROM A THEATER

From excess
of sameness

one dark over every seat

The dancer wrings
his torso, beats at his chest

Agony already
in & of the body
like hands or teeth or wakefulness

no symbol will do

Around the stairwell, a wire cage
On the sidewalk, Bradford pears
give off their sex smell

I want to dismantle my vocabulary of sequence
I dug in my purse for keys or a lipstick

& to begin with, why mime
falling? The drama of flailing the arms

when the body in earnest can fall

lakedark, oildark, city night, tar

Single breath
the flutist sustained

note, its curved shape

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The Block Museum | Northwestern University
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<http://sites.northwestern.edu/present>