

The Opposite Of Silence: An Introduction

Every loss does not hold a promise of anything like resolution.

--Krista Tippett, on “ambiguous loss,”
a term coined by psychologist Pauline Boss

Things are not getting worse, they are getting uncovered. We must hold each other tight and continue to pull back the veil.

-- Adrienne Maree Brown,
writer and activist

If, instead of exploring my embodied narrative, this paper detailed a scientific study and its findings, the peer review committee would be quick to return the copy smudged with red ink suggestions. Inclusive evidence would be the main offender; *too soon to tell*, they would say and it would be fair criticism. For someone who loves to wrap up everything from projects to emotions to conflict in beautiful paper and neat silk bows, I find it curious that I’ve gravitated to the humanities, a field that has notoriously defied closure, tidy findings and black and white thinking. There is always more nuance to explore. The ambiguity of the humanities has been, in the past, something that I found vaguely irritating, yet ultimately endearing. I felt about the humanities-- writing and art in particular-- like I feel about my little brother. Both are exasperating at times because

they won't ever give you a solid answer, but they are too precious and lovable to ever seriously consider leaving for good. Now, for the first time in my life, I am exhausted by the process of creation because I don't know how to write about myself in any meaningful way when most everything has lost its order; the flimsy internal structures that I've counted on for years are splintering.

In her memoir, *In the Dream House*, Carmen Maria Machado asks, "How do we do right by the wronged people of the past without physical evidence of their suffering? How do we direct our record keeping towards justice?" (5). Up until my 24th year, my body and its story had been buried beneath layers of plaster and dust. By many accounts, the physical evidence of past wrongdoings is gone. There are no scars and there is no paper trail and there is no one else alive who remembers-- many say that the case is closed. Because of this, I have existed in a liminal space for my whole life where the past was not accessible, yet constantly present. Machado writes about "[g]aps where people never see themselves or find information about themselves" (5). I lived for many years in one such gap and considered the resulting silence a blessing. I could be free at last. But for the first time in my life this past summer, a flicker of outrage sparked. I want to record my truth-- and I want it to bend towards justice. The opposite of silence is ballooning inside of me and I don't know what to call it yet except to say that it's there. This body of work is nothing more than the record of myself at this moment in time and space.

I wanted to write triumphantly. I wanted to wish with my hands, to craft clarity where there once was nothing. I wanted to present this piece of writing in its most polished form as proof that I could navigate the rupturing of inner worlds. But I can't do any of

that right now because it's impossible to present the lessons when you haven't finished learning them. *Inconclusive evidence*, you might say. Instead, I am letting my breath and my hope catch on 'skillful will', a term coined by the writer, Selah Saterstrom. In her book, *Ideal Suggestions: Essays in Divinatory Poetics*, Saterstrom defines skillful will as "working with what you've got to create the most poignant result" (x). I don't have a refined narrative or hard-won lessons to offer; I only have fragments and the desire to direct my record keeping towards justice. I am letting skillful will take hold-- I am gathering up the pieces and I am choosing to look and I am hoping that by writing my way around and about and through my inner landscape, I can, at the very least, keep myself company in the dark.¹

¹ This last clause is inspired by Olivia Gatwood's introduction to her book of poems, *Life of the Party*. She concludes the introduction by writing, "I asked earlier what stake poetry has in this conversation. The only answer I have is this: to help us feel less alone in the dark" (xv).