

**MARTHE REED**

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# **(em) bodied bliss**

*For Laura*

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We tell ourselves whatever we have to

In order not to stop.

*—Laura Mullen*

## **A statement of policy regarding the high value target**

*“we heard a lot of screaming”*

~Walter Diaz, military police  
officer at Abu Gharib  
at the time of Manadel al-  
Jamadi’s CIA interrogation.

obligatory the syntax of control, inexorably coding a space of

shame’s confusion obsolete

as a matter of policy, alter the perceived time of death. a permanent  
corpus of knowledge accessed via the interior surface of his eyelids

narrating infamy

it is not our policy. that is, we—

“the president enjoys complete discretion”

there was no impartiality. abstracting the order of bruises and  
postures, of blunt blows to the torso

the fine bones of the cranium

described in detail, the rigor of the disciplinary regime. betrayal

wrists bound in cloth diminish the trace of a mark

against the contagion of terror a window onto night, binding us also

the gloves are off gentlemen

punishment, the most hidden part, cataloging deprivation

suspended by his arms from the bars of a window, five of seven  
exceptional techniques

ritual of blandishments, ritual of conceit. ritual of violation,  
language's complicity. a crucifixion

it is not our policy— the required level of pain, a matter of intention

with respect to force, beyond our borders, we

death by asphyxiation, confusion rampant again

lowered to the floor, *blood gushed out of his nose and mouth as if  
from a faucet*

our tongues are tied

## Text(ure) of compulsion

1

*everything had to be told.* the precise measure of the gap severing knowledge and expression. a gasp of pleasure or pain, the interrogative impulse. no one doubts the sincerity of affliction or such incitement to hunger. filled to bursting. breathless. Fluidity, a compulsion or pressure playing against breath. can you feel me? in the dark he reaches for what has already vanished. the compassion of touch. whether knife or a finger's caress. such gentleness knows no bounds. confession's disordered bliss.

2

*a shadow in a daydream,* such solicitude. in the amputation of regret, will you kiss the cross? or the president's ass. a rosary of forgetfulness, thou shalt not cry out. no longer spectacle, the procedures of grief skeleton silence. the body's complicity. beads of absolution scatter to the corners of a room in which dream recurs. or nightmare. certainly, more subdued the suffering of others. a profusion of cries stops our ears. though never imprudently, grief wells from the site of erasure. steel pincers tearing away flesh.

3

*pursued down to their slenderest ramifications,* a closed door assures consummation. will you attend these? a thin rod and a collapsed form. a thin rod against which there is no recourse. or doubt. copper's green: in the dark I can no longer find my body. its dissolution defying convulsion, furor. grace. methodical prosecution of bodies and language: what was said and what was meant. sodomy's baton, phosphoric acid. *an image too slowly dispelled.* judah's cradle murmurs at our ears.

## ***KUBARK Manual***

### **::Sensory deprivation**

The dark persistent and intense. He cannot hear.

The early effect is anxiety.

*Do you recall the texture of your daughter's hair? The play of light on water? What is beauty, or desire? Can you recall?*

Beneath the hood, the order of days collapses.



## **::Threats and fear**

Cut off from the known and reassuring, the tension of fear.

[10 lines deleted]

*The dog's violence and ferocity are nothing personal. The marks of his teeth, your nearest companions.*

Balanced on a knife's edge.

Afford him an acceptable escape.

## **::Debility**

Next, the induction of physical weakness. He stands for hours chained to the bars of his cell.

*Pain and pleasure indistinguishable, an “acoustic bombardment.”*

Grant his meals and sleep irregularly.

*Can you feel your hands now, where you lean at their furthest extension? The pricks and needles of blood's deprivation giving way to blankness. –Wake up. You are ready for fire.*

## :: Pain

Let him stand at attention for hours. Days.

His resistance is likelier to be sapped by pain he seems to inflict upon himself.

*After the heat of the desert, the cold so refreshing. Your shivering the mark and trace of its effectiveness. Perhaps I shall arrange a blanket.*

Electrical burns on the soles of his feet and on his genitals.

## **:: Narcosis**

*Your regression is inevitable.* The threat of the drug most powerful.

A neat excuse, one without blame.

The usual effect: the interrogated's defenses crumble and he becomes like a child.

*You will obey me.*

**:: addendum**

Treat the prisoners like dogs.

*Godless, shorn: you must beg for your supper.*

Extraordinary rendition.

*A whip is a form of justice. Did you not kill some of my own? The marks on your flesh, evidence of my grief.*

## Complicity

immured in a predicament of virtue

sighting grief

the way light opens day

is it possible to both effect and

feel

a pressure of heated sand

horror

*appropriate and consistent with military necessity*

or breath

a naked defiance

leading us about on a leash

waking in cold sweat

under no obligation

necessity of polite euphemism

I pursue the narrowest touch

inflicted in defense of

covering his tracks

a caress

though the bleeding will not stop

a memo or authority, a legal

recalling the cold intensity of ice on my tongue

predicament, “harsh

treatment” preferable to

dissolving

virtue

individuals outside

the pleasure or relief night rouses

citing decorum, decency, *niceness*

U.S. territory

if I close my eyes

redefine the measure of reason, its limit

enforced

I see you lit against an autumn sky

nudity

a subjugation

its color an affirmation, bliss

a legal regime

hooding, drowning

the scent of jasmine

the postures assumed

meticulous

I had forgotten

preparation of scalpels

expurgation of the body



your eyes

a manner of polite

discourse

warm and dark, like wine's lament

*a badly exorcised complicity between the body's*

*mechanics and*

a breath

*the mind's complacency*

it was only a small cut

or caress

enumerating our obligations

there was blood all over

where memory presses me

conceiving

death would be

there, here, lodged in time

inconceivable

we must be prepared

night's dissonant multiplicities

organ failure, honor

an untenable disturbance to equanimity

relinquish dawn

## Lectures from the Marquisate

Suspended between faith and license, in the wrong place at the wrong time. *Yet it is always by pain that one arrives at pleasure.* “we adhere to the law”. A certain knowledge exalting necessity, its compensations.

*The way to your heart lies along the path of torment.*

Intensity measured in the movements of the heart, a sanctioned exercise of authority. *In order to know virtue, we must first acquaint ourselves with vice.* Your fault without doubt, confession its only recourse.

The ritual purifications of the flesh, a process in which reserve is no longer required. *There is no livelier sensation than that of pain, its sensations certain and dependable.* SERE protocol, a secret inquisition.

*Only when laws are silent do the greatest actions occur.*

An illicit discourse, ours, though your silence heightens my necessity: “correcting our own mistakes and weaknesses”. *sensual excess drives out pity in men.* Listen: rats and cockroaches of your cell.

We move with perfect conviction *destruction one of Nature’s mandates.* “Our reservations, understanding, declarations” performing the necessary work of permission. “Take comfort in our adherence to the law”.

*But in privacy and silence, let us compensate ourselves.*

“Those were the instructions”, *the means by which the nation is nourished, strengthened, buttressed.* You cannot evade the peccavi: *never so dangerous as when one has no shame.* A determined subversion

## A kind in coercion

Ontology of contempt. *If I place a hood over your eyes, forgive me.  
I thought the sight of your own blood would unnerve you.*

Our talents are innumerable:

The use of the hood

The use of restraint

Ratcheting intensity

Alternations of despair and reprieve

A question of right use. *If you gasp, you inhale your own death.*

*Will you need your left hand?* Ours, a clandestine ecstasy, pathology  
of excess.

A kind in coercion

Naked

Smeared with shit

Smeared with blood

A crucifixion

*(Don't look away we have only begun*

## **this doesn't exist**

somewhere, water. or otherwise discreetly. voice enters as a refusal of night. the exact proportion of finger to forearm escapes me. if I were drawing the dark, in which of its permutations would I appear

no mistake was possible

like the rats, hunger. a constant companion. the stuttering of locks and doors. there is no one else. stink of urine

this is an illusion

the shape memory takes in the absence of volition. pushed aside. I inhabit its corrugations as an exercise in clarity. nothing intercedes between me and the stars

the right point of attack

the weight of them, so like water. or vermin. a voice in extremis echoing against steel. shuffling of boots as in a well

forget the transcendent certainty

inertia of belief in which I do not fail to doubt. it is time for drinks, a cocktail. manhattan by way of preference. different meanings. a convenient guise

this doesn't exist

unlawful combatants  
refuse to defer  
the treaty's protections  
does not apply  
the conflict in Afghanistan  
interpreted as unlawful  
treaties which  
this letter says  
admits the determination  
a Presidential determination  
a greater risk  
a security risk  
protections in future  
conflicts  
the facts underlying  
the event in the  
foreclose policies  
confessed to applying  
conflict in Afghanistan  
the highest level of legal  
prisoner of war  
the highest assurance  
protections do not apply  
risks of liability  
a Presidential interpretation  
fully discretionary  
violated  
operational considerations  
a Presidential interpretation  
to allege that  
nonstate actors  
a Presidential interpretation  
interests of the United States  
a President determines  
detainees are not  
you are assuming  
exposes our  
mistreatment  
entertain charges  
to argue falsely  
legal consensus  
a security risk

## **(em)bodied bliss**

*Pain / we have always / to count on.*

—Keith Waldrop

The words themselves, guises. Predilections. “coercive methods” and “principles”. For example. A dance language performs in our absence. (Em)bodied bliss. The art of getting there.

A mental disturbance

A membrane or network of sensation, punishment’s lexicon. Scattered like marbles. What the bed hides. Or a closed mind. Wishing it weren’t so, playing at blindman’s bluff. That and the oppressive nature of night.

A kind of employment

Meaning. No longer predilection, or desire. The necessity of entry. Press your tongue against mine and whisper, love. Reduced to animal level concerns. Any hand in the dark will do. Will you write this down?

The certainty of memory

A statement I can neither confirm or deny. The equivocal space a body takes up. An absolute against which everything must be measured. We no longer approve its uses. Hands, tongues. Mouths. I have lost all faith.

If we imagine the facts

A clock, a winding of time. Or lock of hair about a finger. Would you abandon such touch? Or memory. Fastidiously secure. The past is no longer available though it is possible to compose a memo after the fact.

A mistake has a ground

The necessary gap words leave behind. Undressing the page. Your apology is accepted. Though the kiss and the cut are now inextricable. Nodding heads in agreement. Will you require a receipt?

I make certain false statements

Choosing a word at random. None of it verifiable, subterfuges in a game. Are you reading this? Deprivation. To deny, to rob. Yes. Doubling the ante. He failed to continue breathing.

More or less arbitrary

On that point, what I want and what I know. Yet to map the correspondences remains beyond the scope of the current inquiry. Driven by urgency. The quick heat of a body. The witnesses are unreliable.

Perhaps not even formulated

Signaling from the gap, words fail me. Will you drive? I would prefer a reply though the letters have vanished. Certain deletions from the record unavoidable. Exploiting the wound. The rules of engagement have changed.



## lost things

*maybe / nothing / will come to mind*

–Keith Waldrop

dispensing  
with words

I balance  
holding my breath

\*

such “enigmatic treasures”  
betray me

falling into  
submission

\*

a whole legislative  
history

*keeping  
it quiet*

\*

obscene politesse  
a seductive and

a ragged breath  
pleasures

\*

language recurs

coiling out of memory

litany of  
exceptional circumstances

\*

invoking theology  
a border with death

appears beside me  
among lost things

\*

wandering talk  
any one of the

predicate acts  
absents them from me

\*

elaborate  
codicil to proscription

threat, a  
blank and indifferent space

\*

schizophrenic elimination  
of reasons

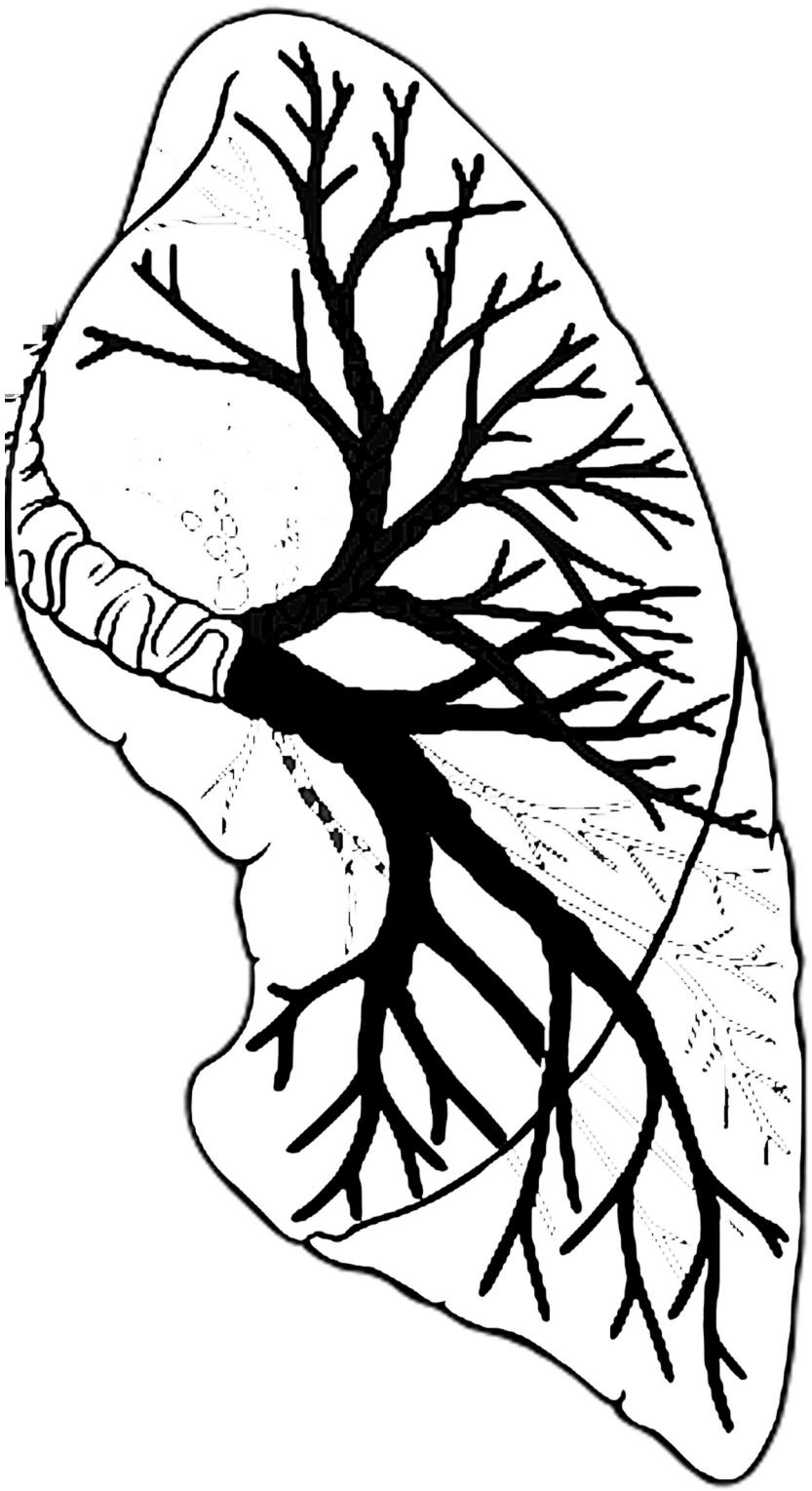
liability, comforts augured by  
a lover's embrace

\*

the barest scent  
a tissue

of petals  
famishes me

Marthe Reed's poetry has appeared in *New American Writing*, *Golden Handcuffs Review*, *New Orleans Review*, and *Sulfur*, and in numerous online e-zines such as *HOW2*, *MiPoesias*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Aught*, *eratio*, and *Moria*. New work appears in *Big Bridge* and is forthcoming from *Fairy Tale Review*. Her manuscript, *an earth of sweetness dances in the vein*, was a finalist in Ahsahta Press' 2006 Sawtooth Poetry Contest. Her book, *Tender Box, A Wunderkammer*, is published by Lavender Ink in New Orleans. She publishes Nous-zot Press chapbooks as part of the Dusie Kollektiv.



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