



“She Takes It Upon Herself...”

“...a tactic...”

The phrase (not mine) is revealing, isn't it? Here we see manifested a lack of comfort with, or maybe even an overt objection to, feminine agency. Who is he, I mean, the one who says this, the lyric speaker? "One of the Honors boys," says someone who's known him a long time, "the 'Great Books,' you know..." Never mind. She should not "take"—anything! We know that. I mean, except what she is supposed to "take." Lie back and...take it. But not *that*, it's mine.

I'm going to *take it upon myself* to see if I can make, as we say, a silk purse out of a sow's ear—a *sear*. This is a song (an "air"), about power, in part: who has it, who can have it, who gets to (ab)use it (we say "wield") and how. *The Chair's Airs*, I might have called it, *The Chair's Errors*. *Chair* is French for *flesh*, in German the word for *chair* is close to the polite term for.... What happened? Well...I, I mean *she*, took it upon herself to express her concern about a student who had included—in his final project (without context)—a photograph of his assault rifle lying on his bed, with three extra clips of ammunition. (This is language we have been learning at school, at schools all over the country: "clips" or "magazines"—and "assault rifle": a little phrase that comes up frequently, usually accompanied by a list of the wounded and dead.) The student insisted her reaction (and that of the upper administration, who did make sure he was not an immediate threat to himself or others) was inappropriate: he could've been sent to prison and raped, he tells her, anyway the gun is only used for contests. She expressed her continued concern, and the Chair informed the student she didn't want him in her workshop, bonding with the student in their agreement about her failure of understanding and lack of support for "the second amendment." "She takes it upon herself to determine who from the MFA program is permitted to take her workshop," means "she" directly expressed her desire that the student not be enrolled in her Spring seminar. In other words: the fact that "she" had a concern and expressed it is the foundation for her Chair's feeling that she is no longer an appropriate teacher / graduate faculty member. It should be noted that, here (in the carefully unnamed "here," for sure, University of Nowhere) drinking with students, sleeping with students, and plagiarizing student work does not seem to raise this kind of red flag (this ragged, bleeding ear...)—but that's another story. Let's see what I can make of this one, shall we? For Marthe, my beloved and much missed friend. You would have been angry for me, yes, and I am using that righteous energy, your outrage (why this normalization of fear?), but I'd also like to delight you if I can, delight my memory of you: imagine making you laugh, a little, wherever you are. (In the world of light, and laughter...to the point of tears.)



Tools:

1. The “Over” App—as in *I am so **over** this...* (What’s the name of this font? “Hand-written”—spikey, fake-intimate, ‘urgent’ and sentimental—the phrases typed into the “annual evaluation” become evidence of an effort to communicate, an “inadequate descriptive system”—as Martha Rosler puts it, elsewhere.) (Remember: there is an elsewhere.) (You would remind me if you were here...now eloquently absent.) Two years ago this same Chair used my annual evaluation to try to blame me—alone—for what he called “a Department-wide meltdown.” I am soooooo OVER this. *Remember*, as in to reconnect the member, here.
2. The annual evaluation (this language is, a colleague said, “a weird kind of present”): thank you, thank you so much, oh, you shouldn’t have...for me? *Really?* *Too* kind.
3. My photographs—of flowers (annuals, mostly) and art and oceans (counterbalance: reasons to stay alive...no matter what lies are told about you). The only moments at which I really feel alive and intact, recently: focusing on a bloom, watching waves break.
4. Phone, camera in phone, storage (phone). This is a phone call, also, also, also. Cell.
5. “My” *Chair*.



Rules:

1. **Double exposure**—the interaction of at least two images / ideas. A superimposition, different PoVs, my “supervisor” (someone here sees more, sees above, sees past, the other...which?). “YOU have a problem with the second amendment,” he asserts, angrily.
2. **Beauty**—the Chair’s gesture (irresponsible, cowardly...) seems *ugly* to me: we are not allowed to give into ugliness but are sworn to the counter-balance. Right, love?
3. **The language** is not my own: like “Echo” I can only repeat what has been said about me: parroting power. (Also *to* me: I have included some reactions here.) Now I speak the lines “about” me—allotted to my *character*...—to you, no longer here.
4. **An image each day**, or almost. Consistency (this stuff is...thick): I have to keep going back to it, inhabiting, dwelling in, its poverty. There’s not much here.

Outcomes:

1. The more I make this language mine, that is, the more I echo this, the less it seems to pertain to me, the more absurd it is, more an aspect—revealing itself—of some larger machinery...this is the lesson of Sophie Calle’s *Take Care of Yourself*.
2. A collection: a series, a bouquet. To celebrate the Chair’s stab at “creative writing.” He must *need* me to be a bad person, so that his behavior toward me is explicable or excused? He must want exposure, or to be famous...for something.
3. Alleviation of fear and shame. I am not hiding: I am done protecting and enabling.
4. A collection of images, double exposures, decorated by phrases and words, snatches of something overheard, language as it slips away from its target, turning back to source. But images that, also, capture something of the way in which what is said seems to overwrite the world: language as veil, opinions dropping down in front of experience.
5. This chapbook, “a meeting place”—*What took you so long* I seem to hear you ask...



She took it upon herself

She takes it upon herself

She took it upon herself



“in some way, my confession is a kind of subterfuge, a tactic, a way of overturning the damage at the root of its wounding. It is the silence that I fear more than anything, the pretense, the way it seems that, in the silence, suddenly some violence springs out...”

Toi Derricotte, *The Black Notebooks*

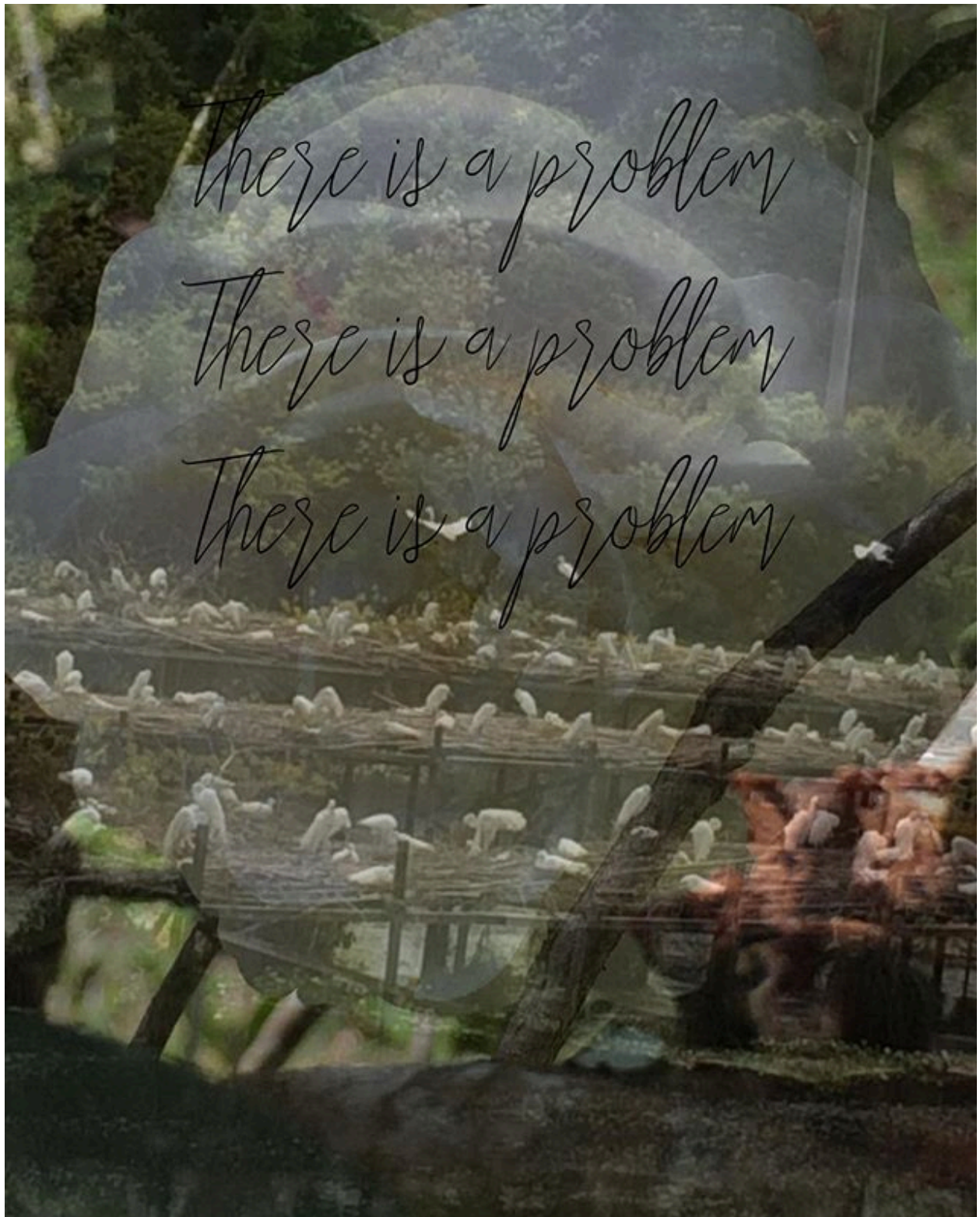


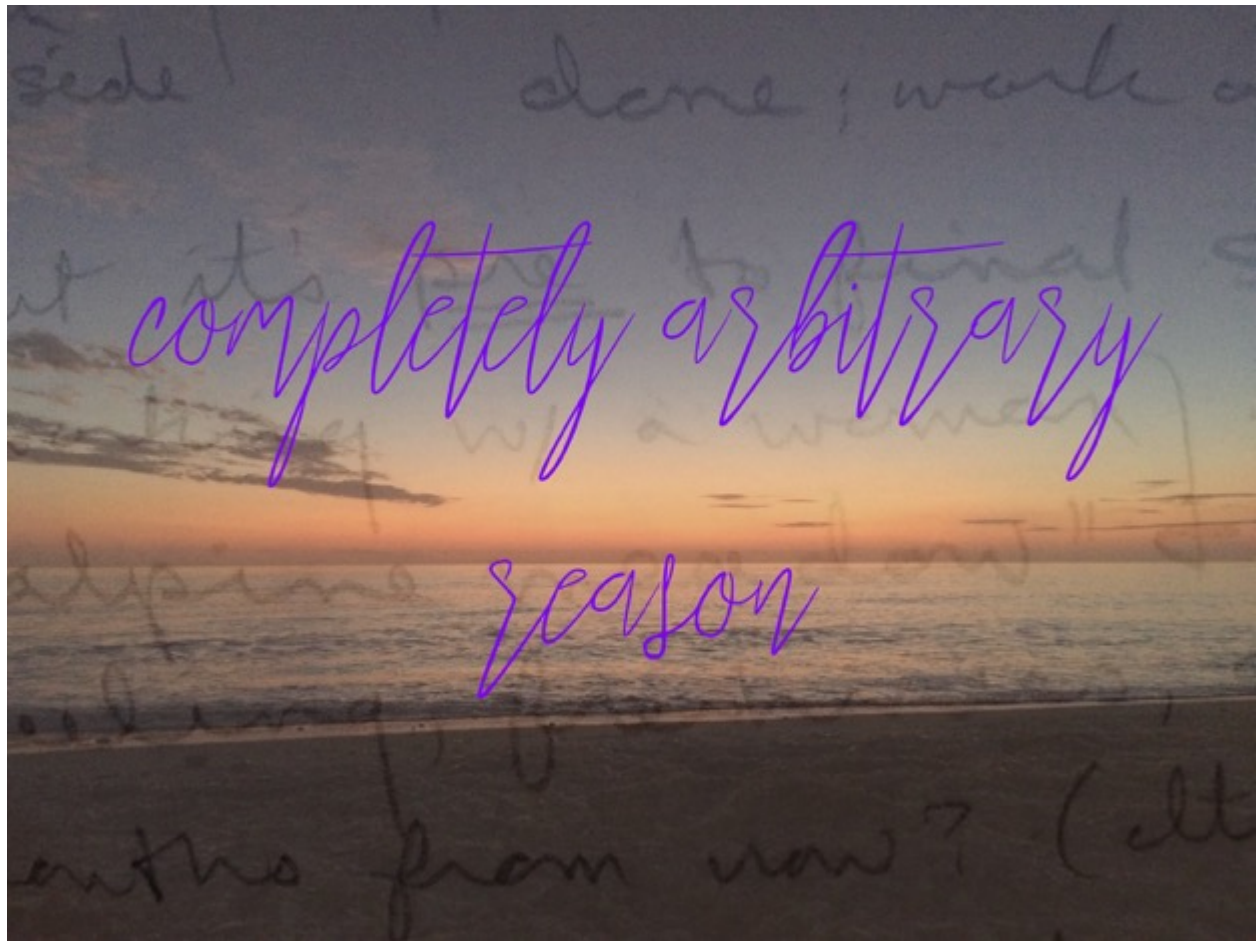






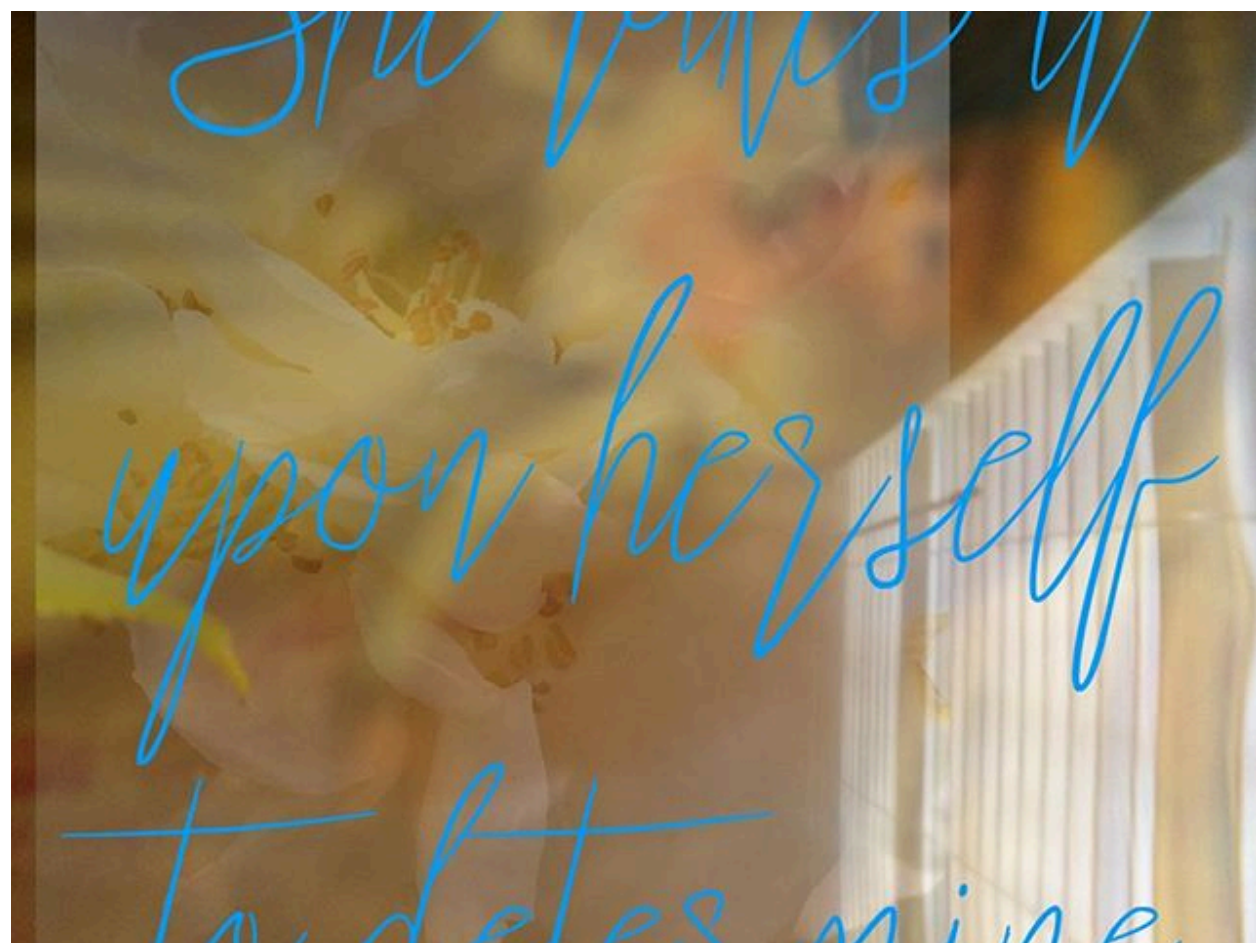
There is a problem
There is a problem
There is a problem





completely arbitrary

season



She takes it

upon herself

to determine





to determine who...is permitted

What they say when you tell them:

“

I am uhm
sorry for your
uhm conflict

”



Stutters and pauses. The glances toward and away. The tones of voice: your own attentiveness to tones of voice. Frantic, attention turned to greed. Awareness of greed. The timer that goes off in your head as you talk: “Tell me if this is too much information...” The shutting down you imagine doing or even try to do and don’t do. “You,” this “you.” The second person: you climb into to get through this to get the job done to go on moving forward to push whatever it is (“I uh am uh sorry uh for your uh conflict”) out of the way in order to go on making these noises. Speaking to blank looks, silences, and deflections, telling “your truth” (“that’s your truth”) to people who only want to forget and will have forgotten the next time you talk to them. And what why I mean who would want to why do you want them to why do you want to recall? “When we left our heroine...” In what way is the shape of the story a shape that invites one kind of content (content!) and closes off others. Ragged shape that is the shape of forward falling and rising and falling. *I want to live* means I want to live this, too. Now.



For and to and with Marthe Reed—I can't say it too often. With deep thanks to Susana Gardner and DUSIE, and to Patricio Ferrari, in whose exquisite retreat (in Monte Estoril) this work was—insofar as it can be—finished. (How much courage the home you made communicated, how amazing to sit at your desk, admired scholar and writer: surrounded by books and facing the wide Atlantic...) And for Claire Chase, who reminded me that anger is energy. Each image the catching of—brief riding of—wave after wave. Breaking and vanishing: distant, near, and gone.