

Michelle Naka Pierce

excerpt from *Autobiological Rupture*

In everything we do, lies the figure. The verticality of existence. Death reaches out horizontally: the collapse among us.

We are forest green, moving toward the edges. We sink into black and white. We become a river. A pocket of water. A lake. We understand nothing, not even the gentleness of a hand on the shoulder. We spot yellow particles in succession of light. The varnish pulling us down. We are visually disfiguring, the perception a split thread. We are both structurally unstable and visually distracting. We ask ourselves: How far do we retreat? The possible solutions unfamiliar. Unidentified. We are blue—and this is not a metaphor for sadness. Not the unexpected. We slim down into an orange sky, the perpendicular heat.

We are birds in flight. Migrating toward our beige surroundings. We are bruised factions, ashen flocks, impartial masses, provisional clumps. We gather in motion as if one, as if wings were reaching into fingers to touch. Our writing utensils are confiscated. We are feared—what we can do with our ink. Spill. Stain. Scar our skin. Fault line.

We are these non/native plantings. We are the boundary of deck and garden. The seedlings. The fast growth. The rock. The dead leaf. We create the signage: please keep off. We are terrace, the bridge, the grates above. We grow and sprawl over the facade. We know no bounds. We ignore the surface. We are black cats or just the shadows. Our vision engulfed. We are marked by jagged, locked-in profiles. We punctuate our bare stillness. The void. Our hues confuse us. We sparkle, drip, grey into the world. We inhabit the fertile periods. Pulsate. Encrusted mouths. Our burgeoning cultural leaders at war. We shield ourselves in the field. Density. Quality.

We are not busy, but we move. We are swathed in the fallow. Let us repeat. We are swathed in the fallow, washed out, pale, wan symptoms of our survival. We are guarded by those who walk in agitation, circling round to make us nervous, to make us question our stance. That is, we are watched as we are watching. And our orientation diagonals into blood. Our image is an optical illusion. We see white against the sullen white from various angles. We act as the tint enhances us, taking away our contrast.

We are the spider drop. The ceiling above repositioning as webs form. The sounds of machinery following our every move. We are allowed sunlight only a short fraction of time. We are protected. Or confined. We don't understand the distinction in this concrete structure. We work in seclusion until our ruin. We dedicate ourselves to our skills—an economy of imagery. We express emptiness until the vivid forms set invisible forces—what the color red teaches us on a Saturday afternoon near five. Violent underpinnings in the corner of our gaze. Sweet mesh clouds: skews our vision. Outside we see freedom. Below: cars racing by. A bicyclist crossing the street. Manicured lawns with arrows—this direction is the street, is the way to autonomy or demise. The fleet.

We lose our tags pinned to our bodies. Tracking mechanisms. Arch. Branch. Stick. We draw diagrams of the island. Our home. The access points. While the map is not the territory, we continue in this vein. In this obstacle apparition. We establish radical verticality. Invade. Rise. This is our life, now truncated in our palms. We emerge into forms dominating the sphere.

We drift, travel. We leave a family or language. We look homeward inward forward behind. We face the sun and pray. We feel separation independence guilt. We find comfort in community, in song. The space between us revealing itself as interlocking sentences.

Michelle Naka Pierce is the author of eight titles, including *Continuous Frieze* *Bordering Red* (Fordham, 2012), awarded the Poets Out Loud Editor's Prize, and *She, A Blueprint* (BlazeVOX, 2011), with art by Sue Hammond West. She is the co-editor of *Something on Paper*, the online poetics/multimedia journal. Pierce is professor and dean of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University. Born in Japan, she currently lives in Colorado with the poet Chris Pusateri.