

Matters of Feminist Practice, an Invitation

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“Does this begin anywhere? / How does this begin?”

“I thought it began with the question, why are we alive?”

“What is a woman? Who gets to be one? And who is thrown sharply, uncomfortably, into womanhood by a word or gesture?”

“My mother asked: ‘Are you crying?’”

“And is that a memory?”

“If that’s all you can say, what good is it?”

“Who could airlift her to a better life in the night?”

Matters of Feminist Practice: This project came together because of questions, the way such matters usually do. Questions of our own led to gathering contributors who raised questions of their own, questions we now weave through this editorial note. Vocalized by the writers of this volume, this collage of questions, like this very book, is just one curation of many curations; because these voices and identities coexist, outside of hierarchy, with no definite beginning or ending. The narrative told, the poem heard, the line of thought pulled through all depend on where we enter, where we exit the conversation.

“The question is, If I’m writing to get free, and I am, how must I deal with language?”

“How do the spaces of relation produced between what is and what is rendered, un-rendered, and unrenderable shift according to the situation of tense?”

“In what way might the body present a site for feminist practice, and not just the ground for feminist identity?”

“Is the garden a feminist project?”

“What does a flower have to do with rage, besides everything?”

“How, or rather why, then might one claim ‘woman’ as an identity that is still central and centrally useful to a feminist practice conceived as radical politics?”

“How would I manage the crossing?”

“Why write about it if I’m not sure words will help?”

Matters of Feminist Practice: These questions, our gesture of weaving them into introduction, celebrate the multivocality at the center of this project. Scholars, writers, poets, and artists of different identities and backgrounds have gathered in this space to confer on the urgent topic of “feminist practice” through seven topics: the body, the quotidian, hybridity, language, documentation, environment, and conflict. We do not consider these topics to be conclusive or comprehensive, but rather they are starting points that generate discussions of a wider range, considering individuals and systems, the personal and the collective, through as many lenses as possible.

“How are language and language structures gendered? How are reading practices, publication histories, our *entire* understanding of what a ‘poem’ is or could be, gendered?”

“What is in a name, in your name, dear imperfect crescent of the moon?”

“If our poetic work is to engage these critical conditions and stories as well, how do we do so with respect, how do we pay tribute without speaking for others, without fetishizing lived experience?”

“What epistemological tensions in documentation can we embrace, in highlighting silences, thorns, knots?”

“What about those who died? Did the soils and tall grasses that drank their blood, at least, provide cushion and comfort for their lifeless bodies?”

“What is an ordinary day? Who buys bread in the absence of the deceased?”

“What are we to do with these sorrowful remains? The brittle bones of biography in a flooding world?”

Matters of Feminist Practice: In the twenty-five scholarly and creative-critical pieces included in this volume, each contributor brings unique visions, insights, approaches, voices, and forms. They also share suggested texts, inviting in a lineage of thinkers with whom they’ve been in conversation, expanding this community, and guiding us toward further future explorations. In the spirit of the individuality of these pieces, we have refrained

from applying a house style to formatting footnotes, endnotes, citations, italics, indentation of quotations, etc. Another way of phrasing this is that polyvocality is the style of this house that we together make.

“Are ideas quotidian?”

“Can we stand limp in the gaping mouth of time or must we manufacture it symbolic?”

“What does it mean ‘to want’ in such a circumstance?”

“What I wish I would have / had when? / (And what would I have / done?)”

“Is the only logical consequence for women born into tyranny to overthrow the tyrant, to overthrow herself? To seek out the outcast witch and believe in her spell?”

“But why does tyranny in women have a fast fate? Is it the way disaster swells in a woman’s body? Or the way she can’t help but exorcise herself, then bless the men who will behead her? Is it the absolute lack of foresight for her own calamity?”

“So the Revelation, as a portmanteau, holds that which cannot be seen?”

“How does one carve out a space of sanity? Of an alternative? How does one maintain stability under constant attack?”

Matters of Feminist Practice: This volume brings together a group of writers with unique subject positions, but the textual bodies also create a collective presence, gradually morphing into one body, one text.

May the borders of our separations gradually become porous, and we offer a circular fluidity that feels simultaneously solid and grounding.

“But who has not felt at some shifting angle from each of her relations at one time or another? Who has not experienced a parallax self?”

“But what if we learn to embrace our disagreements and parse our contradictory ideas of who is within and who is without, of who among us is oppressor, who victim, and who both?”

“Would carrying long-delayed messages through glances be an indictable offense?”

“Who taught me that?”

“Who doesn’t want to make up with a friend or lover after a fight?”

“But if the personal story does not support the shared cause...how is it of use?”

“Is there any other way to be in this world?”

Matters of Feminist Practice: Our hope is for this space to be generative of feminist engagement that has the power to help us to expand our imaginations and practices, both present and future. We wish that the exchanges here continue beyond the pages of this volume and we envision futures where this project catalyzes print and online journals, performances, textual and intertextual collaborations, conversations, and pedagogies—devotions to the communities we strive every day to reimagine and

rebuild beyond the toxic structures that have forever been perpetuated in our lives.

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“What I said when I saw the umbrella jellyfish: ‘How can something so transparent be alive?’”

“What is the purpose of genre distinctions, after all?”

“(What, anyway, would be the ‘core’ of ‘feminism,’ as if it were not always feminisms?)”

“What happens when this light, or the attachment to the sun as a source of vanquish, exhausts itself?”

“What to do with one’s body?”

“What is gender?”

“How do I make my hybridity legible?”

“*Who speaks? Who benefits?*”

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Matters of Feminist Practice: Without the writers of these essays, without you the readers, without the support that funded this book, this project would not exist. It owes its life to the efforts of Rachael Guynn Wilson, Kiran Puri, Diana Cage, Caroline Crumpacker, Asiya Wadud, and James Loop, who joined us midway into the process as our editorial advisory board and contributed an enormous powerhouse of labor. They are a thousand suns of wisdom and generosity. We are also blessed to have this book come to life as part of the Belladonna* Collaborative, a fierce force behind women’s voices that has for

twenty years held space for a community of daring feminist literary practices.

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“What is this? Is this an essay?”

“What could one even call this book?”

“What word can hold all this?”

“Who are you/am I to indulge in despair?”

“What will you sacrifice, my girl? What will you overthrow? How will you be overthrown?”