

## Poetry without Poets

My first<sup>1</sup> job landing back in the states in fall 2008 was with the Poetry Center of Chicago. Though, “job” is not the correct word. “Poet in Residence” was a fancy title for “poet who is acknowledged as a poet but not legally as an employee.” My position with the Poetry Center was as an independent contractor—though this is not how I saw the position at the time. I was overjoyed by the possibility of an income via a labor that I might enjoy. My contract stipulated that I would teach twenty poetry classes at 3 different elementary schools: sixty separate classes total in the span of a school year. I would read and post their poems on the Center’s blog. There was no curriculum or syllabi so the classes were mine for the making—I was a “free” poetry agent.

I thought that my previous education trained me for this position. I knew the modernist poets well and I could assign them. When I started this position, I believed in the importance of technique and legible form and choose poems according to this methodology. Good poems and good sounds for the best technique. No complications in between.

This position changed poetry and education for me for two reasons: the economic meltdown of 2008 and my students’ poetic praxis.

I quickly learned that technique and form were not foreign for my students. They were the easiest elements to digest and enforce. Language was not a medium; it was a standard, a measure for further standardization. I did not need to lecture on the ambiguous relationships upholding the fallacies between inspiration and poetry, the capital and colonial “I” and the impossibilities of language — their daily test preparations and yearly exams had already convinced them that language was not theirs — language was not to be pleased by them and the tests instructed that language was not meant to be controlled by them.

Our current standardization of education is a policy that supports the firm division between *writing* and *the self* and lauds the importance of western formal values. It is a political position that filters access to language—it marks language as inherently “uncreative.” This was a thesis that many of my students knew too well. This is not an original thesis: it is the thesis of enforced standardization.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Héctor Ramírez for looking at an early draft of this essay and for providing much needed feedback. The poets that contributed to Amy King’s “Literary Activism” post prompted this essay; I am thankful to her and to all the contributors of the post for giving me much to think about over the summer. I thank all of the students I have been able to work with over the years: I am devotedly. Lastly, I am sincerely grateful for my mentors: Fatima El-Tayeb, Page duBois, and Grace Hong—I hope to remain your poetry loving student forever.

US standardization<sup>2</sup> is the enactment of a structuralist fantasy. When I speak of structuralism—I do mean old-fashioned, Saussurean, European structuralism. I mean the kind of philosophy that was deemed ‘innovative’ for a few decades before it was deemed too restrictive. I mean the kind of relationship that structuralism wished existed—the kinds of relationships and patterns that are quantifiable, repeatable, and consistent. Many of us in the fields of humanities have moved on from the militant capital S structuralism in our practicing theories and application but I am positing that in the praxis of secondary and even some post-secondary education, the relationship that Structuralism theorized is being enforced, and the consequences of failure to abide by this relationship remains dire. This form of institutional desire has been well documented and criticized. It is essential to move away from this strict binary structure of institutional expectation and desire—towards ones that have critical, creative and emancipatory thinking in mind.

When I was beginning to understand this formation, the connection between our theoretical impulses versus their praxis, ‘our’ economy collapsed.

Halfway into my contract I received a call from the head of the board of directors—someone whom I’ve never spoken with or knew of—who informed me that while my services had been deeply appreciated, the corporate donors of the Poetry Center have been affected by this collapse and will not be fulfilling the amount promised to the Center. I was told that as of this moment, they could not honor my contract and that I was not to return to the schools under the assumptions that I would be compensated. I was explicitly advised not to return to my schools.

The existence of poetry in schools cannot be dependent on corporate whims. In “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex,” Dylan Rodriguez writes that there is, “...a dependent relation (albeit uneasy and at times conflicted) with the neoliberal state and philanthropic foundations” (33). While the intended goals of an organization, such as The Poetry Center, might be implicitly or explicitly against neoliberalism, the financial dependency on neoliberal philanthropic foundations, and neoliberal corporations renders non-profit organizations such as The Poetry Center politically and financially vulnerable. Rodriguez expands that, “This is not to suggest that a “pure” autonomy from state authority and discipline is attainable, but rather to argue that resistance and counter-hegemonic organizations dismantle the possibility of radical

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that while the US has started increasing standardization as ‘other’ countries, countries devoted to standardized forms of education (ex. Singapore and South Korea) are decreasing and looking to other methods as measures for education—or at least recognizing that a structural enforced system of learning has not produced the ‘results’ that a growth based economy would like to produce.

antagonism as they move into closer proximity to — and dependence on — the centers of state power and (philanthropic) capital” (33). Though pure autonomy may not currently be possible, I would posit that a space for poetry in Chicago Public Schools’ highly standardized<sup>3</sup> terrain — is antagonistic. I would also posit here that while philanthropic capital drives nonprofit organizations, they do not always drive the work being done. More often than not, employees and independent contractors of various not-for-profit, arts and community based organizations run on uncompensated labor. NPOs often depend on this unpaid labor, and this labor moves beyond the NPOs.

In our case, all the teaching artists received the same call and all of the poets who worked for the Center fulfilled their contract. All of us returned to our schools — because we ended the session before with a preview of the following week’s poem, because we didn’t say goodbye, because the students believed they would write twenty poems, because we wanted to finish our syllabi — all of us returned and continued to work with the students. With or without the board’s approval or pay, because the work is never about the people who have board meetings whose faces you’ve never seen.

Much could be said about our collective decision to “work without compensation” — a position I would never demand from another laboring body and certainly a position that I would most often advocate against, but during the collapse, all “options” seemed untenable. People expect those in the arts to work for free, because it is “enjoyable” “creative” work; this is already the expectation placed on us. Working without pay sets the precedent that future teaching artists do not need to receive compensation. Working without pay will further devalue the contracted, “non-employee” work that we performed. But never returning to the school because of a phone call from a person we had never met meant that we worked for them. Never returning to the school because of a phone call from a person we had never met meant that they controlled our time. Never returning to the schools based on their instruction meant too much, gave them too much power. Abiding by their instructions/not abiding by their instructions: both “options” left us in a position we did not wish to be in. We were never their employees; therefore we could not be fired. This was idealistic, but our responsibility spanned beyond their reach. So with our limited options, we returned to the schools, unmanaged, unevaluated, unpaid.

I want this essay to be many things. I want it to be a meditation on: 1. the neoliberalization of everything, particularly on arts education and its reliance on corporate funding aka *corporate*

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<sup>3</sup> Teachers must account for every minute of their day, including bathroom breaks.

*excess* 2. forms and testing 3. the prevalence of certain western forms and standardization 4. form & content, forever, and 5. poetry without poets. I also wish to credit my students with my education, but as carefully as possible. I am crediting them as full teachers of my poetic education; but they are not accidental geniuses, or exceptional “child” scholars. I want to argue that as Jacques Ranciere argues in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, that, “...there is no hierarchy of *intellectual capacity*. Emancipation is becoming conscious of this equality of *nature*” (27). Students come into a learning space as full instigators of their own learning, and contemporary theories of poetic ingenuity—as defined by Kenneth Goldsmith and Marjorie Perloff—or direction—as defined recently by the editors of Commune Editions—are not liberatory acts for students in secondary public school education—they are in line with standardization, formal confinement and Empire’s understanding of English.

I will use my two-year teaching contract with the Poetry Center of Chicago to interrogate how the standardization of education, academic theories on language and poetry, academic poetry and funding practices have shaped the possibilities of poetry in our current, standardized landscape. In doing so, I will pull from academic conceptions of “New Poetry” or “better versions” of cultural formations as akin to pre-existing techno-progressivist, standardized, secondary US public education. I will compare three texts, “It’s Not Plagiarism. In the Digital Age, It’s ‘Repurposing’” by Kenneth Goldsmith, which is a treatise on “Uncreative Writing” formatted and published by the Chronicle of Higher Ed, next to a contemporary “Response” posted on *Lana Turner*, and the congressional rhetoric behind passing the legislation for “No Child Left Behind” to situate their similarities. In addition, I will contrast the similarities of these three texts with Audre Lorde’s framing of poetry, my own experiences, and poetry that the poets I worked with from 2008-2010 wrote — to think about the poetry and its impossible forms.

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In 2011 *The Chronicle of Higher Education* published a repurposed article by Kenneth Goldsmith. At this point, many scholars in the various poetry communities may have been familiar with Marjorie Perloff’s thesis in *Unoriginal Genius*, published in 2010. In the book, Perloff argues that the future progression of the avant-garde can be found in the work of figures like Kenneth

Goldsmith. Goldsmith and those like him, Perloff argues, reject all notions of “original” “inspiration” “lyric” and “writing” and instead, contend with the possibilities of “uncreative” writing — which is appropriation, found, non-writing that remains authored. In their formal acceptance of uncreativity, they become the progenitors of the resurrecting avant-garde and therefore infection becomes *their* genius. In the text, Perloff builds off of her thesis on modernism and the avant-garde, which remains strictly an uncritically white, European camp. There are many things to discuss concerning the politics of “uncreative” and “genius” and the markings of the “new” by Perloff, but here I would like to focus on Goldsmith’s re-articulation of Perloff’s thesis.

It is not an accident that Goldsmith’s “It’s Not Plagiarism. In the Digital Age, It’s ‘Repurposing,’” appeared in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, is a platform that is a, “[S]ource of news, information, and jobs for college and university faculty members and administrators.” Additionally their masthead reports that their circulatory reach is extensive, “The newspaper is subscribed to by more than 64,000 academics and has a total readership of more than 315,000.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* is a news source for educators and a platform for teaching. I would argue that Goldsmith’s publication of this article in this platform was to paraphrase and advocate for Perloff’s reading of his work as “uncreative” and “genius” to educators across the United States.

In his article Goldsmith makes this position clear. He paraphrases, “Perloff’s notion of unoriginal genius should not be seen merely as a theoretical conceit but rather as a realized writing practice, one that dates back to the early part of the 20th century, embodying an ethos in which the construction or conception of a text is as important as what the text says or does.” Goldsmith explicitly argues that “Uncreativity,” the tradition in which he’s most closely aligned, is the tradition that should be replicated and taught in schools as a premiere ‘writing’ method.

In the article, Goldsmith discusses what he believes to be a new thesis to the contemporary conditions of writing. He writes that in our current moment,

It seems an appropriate response to a new condition in writing: With an unprecedented amount of available text, *our problem is not needing to write more of it; instead, we must learn to negotiate the vast quantity that exists*. How I make my way through this thicket of information—how I *manage* it, *parse* it, *organize* and *distribute* it—is what distinguishes my writing from yours. [Emphasis Mine]

Goldsmith believes that what he is suggesting is an innovative solution to the technology of writing. Writing as technology has proliferated, duplicated and manufactured beyond “our” immediate conception and control. The best way to adjust to the proliferation of writing — the technology — is to become its manager and consumer. The underlying logic suggests that perhaps when “we” better negotiate with the quantity of available writing and organize creatively, “we” may eventually become its producer? But certainly not before contending with the “vast quantity” of writing that exists and must be managed.

Goldsmith’s laudation of management is in line with neoliberalism and the elevation of ‘corporate values.’ In *The Darker Side of Modernity*<sup>4</sup>, Walter Mignolo writes, “The technological revolution together with the corporate values that were prioritized in Western Europe and the United States...made management itself the prime center of social life and knowledge” (15). While Goldsmith might believe he is being “unoriginal” yet “interesting” in his articulation for the “management” of pre-existing texts, what he is doing is simply channeling the rhetoric of corporations and neoliberal capitalism. Goldsmith via Perloff performs these statements as though they are the new, critical, theoretical interventions into the study of literature, when in fact, prioritizing management, organization, and distribution of pre-existing texts/narratives are not original, radical, ruptures into literature, but the accepted logic of corporate values and standardization:

The logic of standardization notes that there is one correct answer.

The logic of standardization verifies whether the student understands how to choose the correct path

The logic of standardization punishes<sup>5</sup> students who cannot or do not

The logic of standardization situates one master, one student

The logic of standardization rewards obedience

The logic of standardization rewards the management of information

The logic of standardization produces managers

The logic of standardization focuses on pre-existing texts

The logic of standardization cannot imagine *new* texts

The logic of standardization rewards regurgitation, replication

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<sup>4</sup> I want to thank poet and scholar Lucas de Lima for pointing me to this passage.

<sup>5</sup> In California, prisons are built according to the test results of third grade students. Failure to properly manage the “vast quantity” of pre-existing texts, and failure to display and distribute the knowledge of such pre-existing texts marks one’s future by the California state government, as incarcerated.

The logic of standardization rewards recapitulation and punishes memory

Goldsmith situates those before him that desired to move away from memory and he champions their approach,

“In the early part of the 20th century, both Duchamp and the composer Erik Satie professed the desire to *live without memory*. For them it was a way of being present to the wonders of the everyday. Yet, it seems, every book on creative writing insists that "memory<sup>6</sup> is often the primary source of imaginative experience.”

It is fortunate that Duchamp and Satie both published during the “vast quantity” category that existed before Goldsmith, so that he might appropriate/cite/organize their ideas into the future. Is the good manager the figure without memories? What does it mean to call for the management of text without memories? I want to know: what’s so damning about their contexts and memories, what does it preclude? Furthermore, what does it mean to call for the distribution of text without memories? No labor history, no circulation narrative, no criticality: Literature is best a commodity — this is his main argument? How does one author work without memory? If an author worked without memories: why bother holding onto his name? Toss his name.

Though their memories can be denied, their names cannot be erased. Goldsmith, Duchamp, and Satie perhaps do not feel as though they need memory because the “vast quantity” of pre-existing text contain the memories, narratives and politics of western civilization, subject formation, and colonial *freedom as expansion*<sup>7</sup> and other European male fantasies. The same cannot be said for those of us who came after or could not be captured by its “vast quantity.”

Of his personal pedagogical practice in his course titled “Uncreative Writing” at the University of Pennsylvania, Goldsmith writes, “We retype documents and transcribe audio clips.” He insists, that while these moments are not acts of “modernist” writing, they are still “expressive choices” — here, testing methodologies, neoliberal notions of subjecthood and consumer activism are aestheticized. Unironically, such a *product* produces a poet-based “poetry,” where the

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<sup>6</sup> Deploying “patchworking” Goldsmith does not cite "memory is often the primary source of imaginative experience." But I am not a patchworker. This line comes from, *The Routledge Creative Writing Handbook*, page 14, Chapter 1, by Paul Mills.

<sup>7</sup>I am using deriving this idea from Hannah Arendt’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951.

distinctive marker is the “subject” who makes certain selections. The selections must be aligned to the subject because Goldsmith believes consumer selection is fundamentally “creative” work. He clarifies,

The secret: the suppression of self-expression is impossible. Even when we do something as seemingly "uncreative" as retyping a few pages, we express ourselves in a variety of ways. The act of *choosing* and *reframing* tells us as much about ourselves as our story about *our mother's cancer operation*. It's just that we've never been taught to *value such choices*. [Emphasis Mine]

This is a strange hypothesis. Goldsmith above, situated that “uncreative writing” needed no memories as the very dead political figures that anchor this movement for Goldsmith, believed memories hindered their everyday *experience*. However, “uncreative writing” — though against memory — is about self-expression. What we decide to copy and paste, manage, appropriate, is ultimately about our trauma, pain and the abjection of those we care about? When I select the ruby shaded phone case rather than the lapis next to it, it is because I loved someone once with cancer? But it’s more than that — I do not need to *write* about my love for this woman, how I still long for her (who wants to read such a story?) — I merely need to value that my selection of ruby red reflects this narrative. It is that we need to learn how to *value* the *uncreative choices* that we make as consumers, and how consumer choices can and should replace the radical imagination, investigations into memory, and our contention with interiority. Why critically look at colonization, white supremacy, hegemony, our interaction with cultural filters and dream of their destructions — when we can all learn how to value the art of our consumer lives? Why shouldn’t we let our commodity fetishism joyfully span across all disciplines?

Goldsmith argues that it is ultimately our interaction with the “vast quantity” and its management that will allow us to express ourselves. Management, selection and subject specific replication are about self-expression. While Perloff and Goldsmith believe they are advocating for an “uncreative” yet “innovative” and “expressive” continuation of the avant-garde, what they are advocating for is techprogressivism, consumer activism and the aestheticization of the neoliberal subject position (which should be argued is the extension of Modernism). After all, the main theoretical claim from “It’s Not Plagiarism. In the Digital Age, It’s ‘Repurposing,’” is: self expression is found in the efficient management of pre-existing texts: literature will be maintained by imitating and ‘catching up’ to technology, not in the act of *writing* and *memories*.



The price for entry into this camp is: the rejection that narrative comes out of impossibility, that writing is survival, that poetics can be defined beyond their reach. Ironically, their campaign to situate “creative writing” as quaint and passe marks *writing* as both passe *and* simultaneously dangerous.

I want to quickly turn to a group of writers who have routinely opposed Goldsmith and Perloff’s thesis. Wendy Trevino, Juliana Spahr, Tim Kreiner, Joshua Clover, Chris Chen, and Jasper Bernes, these six writers wrote two articles responding to and critiquing an article on “Literary Activism<sup>8</sup>.” In their response they cite that, “Our position is simple: *we don’t think you transform the world by transforming literature, we think you transform the world and literature comes with it.*” This statement is uttered as if relenting the “instigative” possibilities of literature is a radical and politically militant sacrifice. While their overall political position might oppose that of Goldsmith and Perloff, their simplistic, procedural statement regarding literature is more in alignment with Goldsmith and Perloff: it situates *writing* (and by extension I will always argue, memories) as secondary to the category the managers wish to promote. Both positions proclaim this as though they understand what could come from emerging narratives and emergent literature — and are more excited to cancel their projects than to listen to them.

I always wonder what it means for gatekeepers, professors and others in positions of power to assert that poetry/culture/art is dead or irrelevant—who are they speaking to? Who do these camps believe they are speaking to? Who are the hordes of students, writers, and educators who are wildly asking students to destroy canons and write from fourth worlds? Who are the vast educators and writers proclaiming that literature is a dangerous field, for the taking? Where do they exist?

Because I work in academia, I understand the attraction to the “literature is secondary” statement. There’s so much racist, misogynistic, colonial poetry and art that we have been taught to revere, that exists and continues to be circulated with the clear goal of affirming state and structural violence that it seems better to move away from cultural production entirely. As revolutionary as this sentiment feels to the intellectually important academic (and I in no way am dismissing intellectual or academic labor, or am suggesting for those in academia to live “outside” of it, as the “outside” is often a fantasy of its own)—for those of us whose survival is not contested on a daily basis and partake in cultural formations—for us to repeat that art is excess, art is separate, poetry is useless and dead—this is an act of violent silencing and a denial of the emergent. I think

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<sup>8</sup> Full disclosure: I authored one segment in the “Literary Activism” post.

it's really weird to say literature is dead when narratives and politics we have yet to hear from are being articulated. There are narratives and dreams we are not apart of because we (those of us immersed in theory, and established culture already) are not the progenitors of the better and more radical things to come.<sup>9</sup>

We really aren't.

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I almost want to argue that Perloff and Goldsmith appropriated their “uncreative” argument from George Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” act. It is possible: the legislation was introduced on January 23rd of 2001 and *Unoriginal Genius* was published in 2010, so there was enough time for fermentation. I almost want to argue that Perloff and Goldsmith, rather than subverting hegemonic notions of literature, literacy and writing, attempted to aestheticize its standardization.

In his speech introducing “No Child Left Behind<sup>10</sup>” Bush stated, “First, children must be tested every year in reading and math—every single year. Not just in the third grade or the eighth grade, but in the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh and eighth grade.” It is important to note that he does not say that students from the third through eighth grades will *also* create, write, and perform their own education — he says they will be tested: again and again and again. Testing is the management, organization and regurgitation of pre-existing, standardized texts. Using Goldsmith’s language for choice and selection, we can call testing and its results “devalued-expression.”

Bush reasons that, “Without yearly testing, we don’t know who is falling behind and who needs help. Without yearly testing, too often we don’t find failure until it is too late to fix.” According to Bush, education is nothing more than the management, organization and distribution of text — to ensure that ‘we’ are all intimate with the ‘vast quantity’ of pre-existing text. And of course, all of this is done out of benevolence. Bush justifies that, “We must have the data to know how poor and minority children are doing, to see if we’re closing the achievement gap in America.”

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<sup>9</sup> These two paragraphs are revised from what I wrote for the forum:  
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2015/08/talking-about-what-we-dont-talk-about-roundtable-with-eunsong-kim-amy-king-lucas-de-lima-hoa-nguyen-hector-ramirez-metta-sama-nikki-wallschlaeger/>

<sup>10</sup> The good news is that most people today hate “No Child Left Behind.” This sentiment however, does little for the schools that were forcefully closed, for the students who were failed, and/or pressured to drop out due to the pressures of testing and “failing”.

So ultimately, the neoliberal management of information and its incessant testing demands are enacted because we are in solidarity with the poor?

Perhaps testing is not convincing as a parallel. If so I can turn to the “Common Core,” the current elective standards for literature across state lines. Their main statement reads,

The Common Core asks students to *read* stories and literature, as well as more complex texts that provide facts and background knowledge in areas such as science and social studies. Students will be challenged and asked questions that push them to refer back to what they’ve *read*. This stresses critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills that are required for success in college, career, and life. [Emphasis mine]

Notice how WRITE is not part of their main statement, neither is CREATE. Instead the emphasis remains on students’ engagement with chosen, pre-existing texts.

Looking closely at the standards the same narrative unfolds. The 5th grade reading standard states that it is a priority to, “Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text<sup>11</sup>.” And as for 12th grade writing that students: “Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information<sup>12</sup>.” Save your energies unoriginal poets and theorists: No standards to create future luddites here.

Looking through the standards, speeches, and arguments it is imperative to note that no one states: write to your hearts content. None of the standards state: go invent your literature, destroy the canon, tell us about your mother’s cancer operation and write us a poem about how in order to save humanity: all corporations, capitalism and choice based decisions must be dismantled. Though they (Goldsmith, Perloff, Bush, and the “Response” team) believe they're making a special point — they're faithfully repeating selections of "our" standards of standardization, which fundamentally devalues emergent narratives and writing. These standards and their theories continue to uphold testing our knowledge of previous canons. Their work is consolidated to ensure that emergent narratives have difficulty appearing.

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<sup>11</sup> CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1

<sup>12</sup> CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.6

None of the standards and the expert theorists discussed thus far have stated: poetry is survival — have you written today?

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It is imperative to remain reading and remembering Audre Lorde. In “Poetry is Not a Luxury” Audre Lorde argues that, “[T]he white fathers distorted the word poetry to mean — in order to cover their desperate wish for imagination without insight.” Goldsmith’s call to be “uncreative” aka don’t “write” cancer stories but understand how to “value” your appropriative “choices” — is a distortion. “Uncreativity” is in line with the values of neoliberal subject-hood and standardization. And most importantly, it is the call to teach and affirm “imagination without insight.”

And the “Response” which argues there is an order to revolution and transformation? Who sets such an order? Lorde writes:

We can train ourselves to respect our feelings, and to discipline (transpose) them into a language that matches those feelings so they can be shared. And where that language does not yet exist, it is our poetry which helps to fashion it. Poetry is not only dream or vision, it is the skeleton architecture of our lives.

Poetry makes the rebuilding of our lives possible. Theorist Sara Ahmed<sup>13</sup> echoed the importance of this work recently on twitter, stating. “To write from experience does not make experience into a foundation. To write from experience is to shatter the foundation.” Poetry is not a luxury and to write from experience is not a passé, secondary act — but absolute rupture.

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<sup>13</sup> Sara Ahmed, tweet 9/11/2015, <https://twitter.com/SaraNAhmed/status/642254329370550272>

To return to education—

Perhaps you will think I am painfully naive for centering the importance of poetry in education and life. Perhaps you will believe this is self-serving. I will not shy from either criticism: remaining painfully in awe and to care for my loves — I will not shy from this criticism.

In secondary education and in our current context, poetry is treated as an irreproducible luxury. Public schools must pay for an “artist”, a “poet” to temporarily exist in one or two classrooms: in the whole school. If you do not happen to be a student in one of those classrooms — well tant pis for you! I told this to a colleague of mine last year and they replied, “I’ll send my children to private school.” Shattering.

Irreproducible structures are as violent as their reproducibles. To not be continued, to be seen as a luxury, when it is part of your survival<sup>14</sup>. Irreproducibility is an undiscussed structural element of the not-for profit industrial complex: to be temporary, singular, exceptional when poetry is not temporary and never singular.

The student poets I worked with wrote a lot of poems. And under Bush’s mandate they were tested. Our poetry lessons revolved around their testing schedule. Each week a student rendered the process of poetry open. I want to call these classroom experiments: poetry without poets<sup>15</sup>. Not because the students were not distinctly important or self-declared poets, but because the end goal of any and all of the writing was not testing, publishing, adoration, reviews, but rather asking for the labor and space of poetry to be more *valuable*. Poetry without poets is not calling for poets to be erased; it is an experiment that temporarily inverts the center. An education system and poetic theories devoted to emergent narratives is not naivety, but solidarity with radical imaginations.

I am repeating Audre Lorde’s libation that “Poetry is Not a Luxury” and I am saying that poetry in the hands of a group of poets who do nothing but write new poems and read their works is a sphere for “Poetry without Poets.” I am also stating that poetry is a form outside of standardization and any attack of her is an attack on the emergent.

This quest is a permanent sidetrack. Poetry without poets is a permanent sidetrack. It is a way to deny the gaze that tears into the layers of meaning gauged from the surface of the object: endless drawings on how to tear the managers down:

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<sup>14</sup> I am borrowing here from Audre Lorde who has written that poetry is survival.

<sup>15</sup> I co-wrote “Art without Artists” with Maya Mackrandilal for the online platform *Sixty Inches from the Center*. This phrasing is coming out of the idea “Art without Artists.”

they want us to believe that writing is no longer necessary because their memories are *filled*

they want us to believe writing is secondary because they are legible subjects & managers and management is currently valued above all else.

but Lorde has already stated: poetry is not a luxury because it is the development of a form for our memories—

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