

The apocalypse is not when the world ends, it's when one single person is killed, when one person is tortured, in reality it's the entire universe that becomes deformed.

*Raul Zurita*

I think those things are present in there...a tortured Chilean or Argentine, or a child being killed by napalm in Vietnam, or someone trying to escape from the Twin Towers, or someone in a concentration camp, it's the same thing; it's the same terror; and it's reiterated and reiterated and reiterated as if it never stops happening. I think that poetry and art have to narrate those things, to speak them, and at the same time, to believe that they might be able to exorcise them...

*Raul Zurita*

My art began on a given day in the year 1966, in January, when I felt that the ocean was alive and had as much awareness as I do now.

*Cecilia Vicuña*

Language is migrant. Words move from language to language, from culture to culture, from mouth to mouth. Our bodies are migrants, cells and bacteria are migrants too. Even galaxies migrate. What is then this talk against migrants? It can only be talk against ourselves, against life itself.

*Cecilia Vicuña*

Open your mouth to receive the host of the wounded word.

*Vicente Huidobro*

....my specialty is not feeling, just  
looking, so I say:

(the word is a hard look.)

*Rosario Castellanos*

I don't see with my eyes: words  
are my eyes.

*Octavio Paz*

I wish I could squeeze myself into the cracks of everyone's "skins." Settling down there, I will boom boom boom beat "the skins" to stimulate their desires.

*Fi Jae Lee*



Every pain I've had my mother claims as hers first.  
Tuberculosis to assault, damaged spine to broken womb  
to phantom pain and shingles. Dry eyes and splintered  
throat, fatigue and aching joints. Not enough red in my  
blood. We have fractured the same bones, only each of  
her ailments she claims were worse, even without proof  
of them. See her eyes glow, her smile widen, words leak  
in through my skin. Now you know how it felt. And I do.

*Cosi Nayovitz*

Who could I turn to at such a terrible time? My address book was overflowing with friends, but I would have to struggle through this night alone.

*Spomenka Štimec*

Whose is this peace? Who was it lied to?  
Streets go blind from explosions, houses collapse;  
with them I go, I lie in piles  
by the kerbs. Defeated, we pretend to be  
dead, unrest is on the rise though.

*Mirka Szychowiak*

What is a fuckable text and is it only fuckable in English ?  
Is there such thing as a literary hard-on ? Who wants  
Nathanaël ? I do I do. Only he doesn't exist. He is not  
kissing you. He leaves no fold on your mattress. He  
doesn't break your heart. The tiled floor is cold and your  
feet are bare. Nathanaël is long gone he was never here  
not even once. He is a queer boy a loveable boy maybe  
even a fuckable boy and we are all wet or hard turning  
pages imagining his breath.

*Nathanaël*

It is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. [...] This is why the essential role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body

*Mikhail Bakhtin*

All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and world are overcome [...].

*Mikhail Bakhtin*

The absence of desire beside the surprising and sudden shock of desire. Hunger. Guts filled with air. The air that circulates round the empty guts producing an uprooted pain. A pain that starts in the gums and ends in the anus. A pain that is prolonged outside as you urinate three drops and expel droppings as hard as stone.

*Raquel Rivas Rojas*

My head and lungs have come to an agreement without  
my knowledge.

*Franz Kafka*



There is another you inside you. The you inside you pulls you tight into the inside, so your fingernails curl inward and your outer ears swirl into the inside of your body you would probably leave this life the moment the you inside you lets go of the hand that grabs you.

*Kim Hyesoon*

A body that repudiates me. A body sensitive to everything, easily poisoned. A body that holds onto everything, that keeps secrets from me, that turns from my ministrations like a melancholy child on the verge of puberty, like a wilful and dreamy animal, scorning all faith, trust.

*Roxane Gay*

The word "species" comes from the Latin speciēs: a seeing. Maybe we are losing them, and so many languages, because we don't wish to see what we are doing. I think of the contrast between the desire to observe language in the expression "que prosiga" and our desire not to see the numbing / dumbing consequences of doublespeak in our body and soul.

*Cecilia Vicuña*

Every book is different but in the end it's always the same: a word, an image, the broken memory of a broken body waiting for the present to become the past again, for the future to become the past again, for the present to not be the present, for the heavy blows to cease, for someone to lie to us and tell us that we will go somewhere other than where we are, stuck, here, on this drowning floor, on these dirty concrete blocks, amid the stench, amid the broken bodies, the authoritative bodies, the inhuman bodies, the animal bodies, the abolishing bodies, the burdensome bodies, the quantifying bodies, the hollow bodies, the probing bodies, the doctoring bodies, the soldiering bodies, the howling bodies who do not know what world they have been taken to.

*Roberto Tejada*

More recently, in works that address material culture, the object of art, and the dreamtime of the seeable, I seek tactics and metaphors, stratagems and voices structured into displays that overturn the pyramids of high and low. In language at once popular, elite, disciplinary, and insubordinate, my desire is attuned to how habits and language can galvanize individuals into cultural citizens. The settings travel over time and geography: a lens onto the transatlantic colonial project that telescopes out from the perspective of contemporary art.

*Roberto Tejada*

What thing is the body when someone strips it of a name, a history, a family name? That there was a chance. When there is no face or trail or traces or signs. That they were going to bring them here. What thing is the body when it's lost?

*Dolores Dorantes*

I think that's one of the greatest responsibilities and one of the greatest virtues of literature and of art in general: to find different ways to talk about this, so we as citizens don't depend exclusively on language provided by and for power and mass media.

*Dolores Dorantes*

The quest is fun, the walking in the dark is fun. To create your own paths in a room without light. Of course, this sometimes is also frustrating, when you just keep bumping into things, most commonly into my own very clumsy self. Eventually you discover that you have not been walking completely in the dark but with some sort of intuitive sense of direction, some creative spine. But until you discover that, you alternate between the joy and the anxiety and puzzling with words.

*Yuri Herrera*



With each underworld that you cross, you are getting rid of some part of you, some part that makes you a living human being. And when you get to the last underworld, there is only silence; no others and no sounds and no life. That place is the place of re-creation. In this world, you didn't die and disappear, and you weren't reincarnated: you came to this place of silence to somehow be part of a re-creation.

*Yuri Herrera*

Forgive me for this letter so filled with pain. I miss you. I read you, there is a sharp pain in my chest, like the time last week when we spoke, and so I think that I must be a murderer of sorts, a murderer of people and of cities.

*Nathanaël*

Words are acts.

*Octavio Paz*

i tell my 'pop superstar friend' that i have no money, he tells me that, like ngoaps & mista gwala, the problem is that i 'romanticise' poverty. what-the-flying-crap!

(anyway, my little comrade here is more sympathetic. i tell him my pockets are flat & he says : yeah, i can see that your belly-button and your spinal column are making good friends, dancing cheek-to-cheek...

*Lesego Rampolokeng*

I keep looking, looking. Trying to understand. Trying to give what I have gone through to someone else, and I don't know who, but I don't want to be alone with that experience.

*Clarice Lispector*

I see the poet/translator as the person who goes into the darkness, seeking the "other" in ourselves, what we don't wish to see, as if this act could reveal what the larger world keeps hidden.

*Cecilia Vicuña*

I don't want anything explained to me that would require human validation again for its interpretation. Today is such a time, when the project of interpretation is largely reactionary, stifling.

*Kathy Acker*

Where in this narration lies the real? It lies in the connections between the three sections; in the connections between the 'real' events and the holes, the silences. In the slippages.

*Kathy Acker*



In life there comes a moment ... when everything is out into doubt ... And this doubt grows around one. ... I believe that most people couldn't stand what I'm saying here, that they'd run away from it. This might be the reason why not everyone is a writer, yes. That's the difference. That is the truth. No other. Doubt equals writing. So it also equals the writing.

*Marguerite Duras*

It is best if it touches something ugly or previously considered ugly.

*Stacy Levine*

Being a real poet involves enormous suffering, but one must be strong and be a born poet. I say that one must be a seer, make oneself a seer. The poet makes himself a seer by a long, prodigious, and rational disordering of all the senses. To be a seer he also must experience every form of love, of suffering, and of madness. The poet must search himself, consume all the poisons in him, and keep only their quintessence. This is an unspeakable torture during which he needs all his faith and superhuman strength, and during which he becomes the great patient, the great criminal, the great accursed, and the great learned one, among men.

*Arthur Rimbaud*

Now, I am not totally opposed to the therapeutic possibilities of writing (although to be honest I am quite opposed to it, or at least the trappings of tyrannical hygiene), but for this particular wound, I was very clear with myself. Refusal to write through it. Refusal to be cured by writing. This mud hole, writing will not drag me from. This wound, writing will not cauterize. Wikipedia says that cautery is useful for stopping severe blood loss, closing amputations and preventing infections. Reasons for rejecting cautery. Siding with blood loss, badly-executed amputations, rampant infection.

*Roxane Gay*

How to be a writer who says no to writing, or at least a certain kind of writing, but by virtue of that kind of writing, all writing. Knowing when writing has no time in me, knowing where writing has no place in me. Locating a silence that is not a writing too; a silence that is a silence that is a weeping wound. The writing I want will never heal me of anything.

*Roxane Gay*

I'm inaugurating the Barf as a literary form. The Barf is feminist, unruly, cheerfully monstrous. The Barf comes naturally to women because women like to throw up fingers down throat one two three bleh. The Barf is an upheaval, born of our hangover from imbibing too much Western Civ.

*Eileen Miles*

Like religion, language does violence to the immanent world by forcing the objects of that world to be understood in terms of generalities, by stripping them of their specificities and categorising them. And this sort of violence is in everything.

*Ben Marcus*

The words would...continue to spin about, continue to batter the insides of his head even after he had left the house. Better...to see the actual words, to read what was there on paper, to allow the words to set and solidify and thus sink lower in his head and be forgotten. The imaginative process can ruin a good head...and must be brought to a halt before it is too late.”

*Brian Evenson*



My irritable bowel. My raging periods. My howling headaches. Our maladies speak crassly and loudly for us when we are supposed to be calm.

*Kate Zambreno*

The more garbage we pack into that magical body the more we fear it, and the more chance there is that it will turn on us, begin to speak, accuse us. But that body-bag is also a treasure-trove, like any junkyard. It knows stories we've never told.

*Shelley Jackson*

The terrifying independence of the body. Its endless opposition. The appalling underground movements of the nerves, muscles, viscera, upon which, like a hated and sadistic gauleiter, one unremittingly imposed an implacable repressive regime, threatened eternally by the equally implacable threat of insubordination. The perpetual fear of being sabotaged into some sudden shameful exposure.

*Ana Kavan*

The body is a lever for salvation. But in what way? What is the right way to use it?

*Simone Weil*

Is the pursuit of pleasure something cowardly? Yes, it seeks satisfaction. Desire, on the other hand, is avid not to be satisfied.

*Kathy Acker*

Writing is still possible, but it is nothing like what most people think writing to be; it is like gasping for air. You vent your anguish in bursts of words. Were it not for this shortness of breath, you would howl; but howling does not become a writer, one does not become a writer by howling.

*S. D. Chrostowska*

Narrative provides context so that the rupturing of identity is recognizable. I think we are impossible beings. We ruthlessly evade scrutiny, yet recognition is the beginning of transformative emotion. It's a feeding process.

*S. D. Chrostowska*

You don't know if you're creating a monster.

*Camille Roy*



Realism: reductive and dehumanizing.

*Kathy Acker*

In the township where I come from myth is very important. In conversation people always talk about experiences they can't explain. Most of South African literature is not interested in that mythological world. A lot of people say it is unrealistic. But on a daily basis people talk about these things. People die mysteriously and always attach some mythological explanation to that. Township slang is inventive, you know what I mean? Xhosa language is very rich. It speaks about this thing – but it's speaking about something else at the same time.

*Unathi Slasha*

I'm still trying to theorise the “Unlanguage World”, it's an ongoing interrogation, not necessarily trying to find explanations but trying to write about it in a very descriptive way. Basically it's trying to find a language that matches the experience... that captures the possibility of it.

*Unathi Slasha*

This is the unexplored, the unlanguage world I'm talking about, but it is not an insular and distant world that exists out there in the sky. If we are to take this as the truth, then it's only right to create a kind of imaginative fiction that explores and engages this world in its entirety through a language that fits this kind of reality. To deny an existence or an experience is to be against it.

*Unathi Slasha*

It is this desperation to make meaning and sense out of everything that occurs in the world that exhausts and kills realist storytelling. To make it more unbearable, it demands its adherents toe the line of formalism and “proper” ways of engaging the world through fiction. That is, it sets rules about certain topics and a certain language suitable for literature. Once one goes against this convention, one is kicked to the curb. It’s all these rules and limitations that make realism dead.

*Unathi Slasha*

In capitalism bodies are merchandised, transported, positioned, displaced, worn out, replaced. They are known as mechanisms, systems to be geared into other systems, funds of energy, manpower, massed stocks of surplus value, of profit.

*Alphonso Lingis*

As our bodies become orgasmic, the posture, held oriented for tasks, collapses... Our lips loosen, soften, glisten with saliva, lose the train of sentences, our throats issue babble, giggling, moans, sighs...Our impulses, our passions, are returned to animal irresponsibility.

*Elizabeth Grosz*

Art is not the activation of the perceptions and sensations of the lived body—the merging and undecidability of subject and object, seer and seen in a common flesh [...] but about transforming the lived body into an unlivable power, an unleashed force that transforms the body along with the world.

*Elizabeth Grosz*



Infection is necessary to complexity. We are all lichens now, we have never been individuals. From anatomical, physiological, evolutionary, developmental, philosophic, economic, I don't care what perspective, we are all lichens now.

*Donna Haraway*

I locate myself within the tradition of Johnny Dyani for example, you know, the Blue Notes. Bheki Peterson said something some years ago about the voice becoming an instrument within that, improvising, like a saxophonist.

*Lesego Rampolokeng*

On the other hand, over time and subterraneously, writing has the ability to change not only the way people think but the structure of how they think, and that can have a subtle but powerful effect... it's like a contagion.

*Brian Evenson*

To access memory, reverie, and the unconscious—its powers, beauties, terrors, and perhaps above all, its rule-breaking intuitions, and to celebrate ... the mind's longing to become lighter, free of the weight of received ideas and gravity-bound redundancies.

*Rikki Ducornet*

I don't know. I do know I have always had to, and will always have to, live consciously within the meat of the body, and this meat life influences every fiber of my politics/poetics.

*Danielle Pafunda*

Everything revolves around the “I,” it’s a culture of the ego. Therefore, I think that the call that needs to go out to artists is for a participatory democracy. It’s no longer merely a political question, it’s a question of the survival of humanity, of the survival of the planet.

*Cecilia Vicuña*

Having said that, I think the other crucial thing that we need to do is stop thinking about it as U.S. innovative literature. Dambudzo Marechera suggests, rightly I think, that writers not only occupy their own nation, but also occupy a country entirely their own, a country of writers both living and dead.

*Brian Evenson*

I am against everything, against war and those against war, against whatever diminishes the individual's blind impulse.

*Dambudzo Marechera*



When all else fails, don't take it in silence: scream like hell, scream like Jericho was tumbling down, serenaded by a brace of trombones, scream”

*Dambudzo Marechera*

Every book is different but in the end it's always the same: a word, an image, the broken memory of a broken body waiting for the present to become the past again, for the future to become the past again, for the present to not be the present, for the heavy blows to cease, for someone to lie to us and tell us that we will go somewhere other than where we are, stuck, here, on this drowning floor, on these dirty concrete blocks, amid the stench, amid the broken bodies, the authoritative bodies, the inhuman bodies, the animal bodies, the abolishing bodies, the burdensome bodies, the quantifying bodies, the hollow bodies, the probing bodies, the doctoring bodies, the soldiering bodies, the howling bodies who do not know what world they have been taken to.

*Roberto Tejada*

Before 'the switch' I felt like I was some guy with an AK just shooting a lot of random people because they were all enemies. After it I started viewing myself more as a sniper. That's the best way I can put it. One piece at a time, instead of just rattling out staccato.

*Lesego Rampolokeng*

People need to just march through all the filth they complain about and scrape away at it. In the same way the writing is an attempt at embracing beauty and the positive of life.

*Lesego Rampolokeng*

Satiated with the great purposelessness of it, we gently  
belched nerve gases into the next generation.

*Dambudzo Marechera*

I kept having dreams all night. I thought they were touching me with their fingers. But dreams don't have fingers, they have fists, so it must have been scorpions.”

*Roberto Bolaño*

The pain, or the memory of pain, that here was literally sucked away by something nameless until only a void was left. The knowledge that this question was possible: pain that turns finally into emptiness. The knowledge that the same equation applied to everything, more or less.”

*Roberto Bolaño*

The diseased, anyway, are more interesting than the healthy. The words of the diseased, even those who can manage only a murmur, carry more weight than those of the healthy. Then, too, all healthy people will in the future know disease. That sense of time, ah, the diseased man's sense of time, what treasure hidden in a desert cave. Then, too the diseased truly bite, whereas the healthy pretend to bite but really only snap at the air. Then, too, then, too, then, too."

*Roberto Bolaño*



If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race,  
then fuck you.

*Dambudzo Marechera*

I'm working towards a writing that subverts sexual bragging, a writing that champions the vulnerable, the fractured, the disenfranchised, the sexually fucked-up. A female body who has sex writing about sex - no way can I stand in front of an audience reading this stuff and maintain the abstraction the "author" A BODY some writers glory in this but I feel miserable and invaded - as if the audience has x-ray vision and can see down to the frayed elastic on my panties. But, really, it is I who have invaded my own privacy. To regain some of that privacy I have desexualized myself in public, have stiffened, as if to say, "This is not a body."

*Dodie Bellamy*

What it seriously attempts to do is challenge just about every dichotomy on which our culture is based. And the distinction between dirty and clean - as a grounding for both civilization and pleasure - is one of society's most fundamental.

*Samuel Delany*

I packed my bags and left!

*Dambudzo Marechera*

I try to piece it together and that has to be reflected within the writing. Uneasy writing, because my world is uneasy, my world is chaotic. I am attempting to find a language to address it... I have not found it yet...I am seeking.

*Lesego Rampolokeng*

Yet the memory would not set into the setting sun, that green and frozen glance to the wide blue sea where broken hearts are wrecked out of their wounds. A blind sky bleached white the intellect of human bone, skinning the emotions from the fracture to reveal the grief underneath. And the mirror reveals me, a naked and vulnerable fact.

*Dambudzo Marechera*

I'm trying to listen to the voices of those who were not able to accede, who went through life without leaving traces, especially in the written language, of who they were, what they tried to be, what their dreams were.

*Ariel Dorfman*

My truth is this, which the astronomers also knew: The world is blurry around the edges. When I'm looking intently at the page, there is always something in my peripheral vision, some dark shape I cannot shake.

*Jennifer Chan*



Men have disappeared, these human forms remain,  
these human graves, but inside they're no longer human  
at all.

*Sony Labou Tansi*

In that poem, the mass grave is the site where bodies, voices, experiences, and historical eras all commingle. It's a place of absolute grief and yet it's presented lyrically and tenderly. What do you think of the idea of the book as a black site?

*Daniel Borzutzky*

So, there's a lot of writing and speaking and singing in this book, but also this uncontrollable mouth that seems to exist apart from mundane human activities—a devouring mouth that's going to be a site of consumption. To me that's actually a hopeful thing!

*Daniel Borzutzky*

The intensity comes from a sense of desperation inseparable from the one I have felt while living through and observing the last ten years of life in the globalized US. But it's also a desperation to articulate this mess so as to not fall into an even deeper despair.

*Daniel Borzutzky*

It seemed to be a makeshift replacement for love, absenting oneself from stifling atmospheres, because love basically was a torrential storm of feeling; it thrived only in partnership with laughing generosity and truthfulness.

*Bessie Head*

I am building a stairway to the stars. I have the authority to take the whole of mankind up there with me. That is why I write.

*Bessie Head*