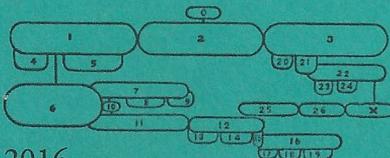


# Score Poems

by Allyson Paty



2016  
A Present Tense Pamphlet

SCORE FOR THE NEW COTILLION

do the knees	of the brother	in a stranger's	home video
when he chases	the dog	pulls	the dog's ears
do the left wrist	of an anchor	the right arm	of a riot cop
& the scalp	of the crowd	<i>c'mon</i>	do the pelvis
of the talent	in a blue movie	tilting always	away
add the torso	of a man	in a clip	from a prank
do the second	just before	he eats pavement	<i>you know</i>
<i>you're twisty</i>	<i>little girl</i>	now switch	it's your neck
after the neck	of the brother	your shins	after the shins
of the anchor	your navel	of the police	& thighs
of the crowd	you've got	the elbows	of the talent
& your lips	<i>c'mon</i>	do the lips	of the person falling

## SCORE FOR THREE VOICES

### I.

Like anyone your kinfolk  
have been speaking  
for centuries.  
On the floor of your largest room  
lay out each glass  
each bowl      each jar, spoon, & vase.  
Consider the men  
as split-open fruit.  
The women, the work  
of splitting.  
Recall every onion you've watched  
your father prepare,  
& Mother, when she peels  
away an apple skin  
how she holds  
her own gaze in the knife.  
Into the mouth of each container  
recite every adage they've given you  
striking the words  
*never & must*

### II.

Stand face-to-belt with the bronze figure  
at the center of a public square.  
Should it happen the statue is cast  
in the shape of a fighter  
list victories  
as Clue accusations  
          *Henry*            *in Agincourt*        *with the longbow*  
          *Sherman*        *in Savannah*        *with the torch*  
until you don't  
remember another.  
Should it happen the statue is cast  
in the shape of a statesman  
recount charters  
          *Jefferson*                    *in parchment*        *with ink & quill*  
          *Moses*                    *in stone tablet*        *with god's hand*  
Sit on the monument's shoulders.

Sit with your legs around his neck.  
Kick off your boots  
so they land like two dead pigeons.  
Expound on the urge  
for a different end  
no force          no disgust          no exhaustion

III.

Bring home scraps of paper left in grocery baskets, on top of ATMs—  
most litter will do.  
Speak what is written but don't move your vocal cords.  
This is how to hear the tongue the roof the spit the teeth.  
Put your mouth to different surfaces.  
This is how to hear the shelf the wall the coil on the stove.  
If someone is listening, you can put your lips directly on his body—  
it won't hurt.  
You can say into his stomach *this is my patois which means to paw, to treat roughly the language.*  
When there is no more to read,  
begin again. The first word as quietly as you can manage.  
The next a bit louder. Likewise the third, the fourth.  
Before long you are shouting.  
Before long you cannot articulate a full word.  
Isolate the vowels.  
Scream the breath from your lungs like two fists wringing water from a rag  
until the voice refuses you.

(Once I watched a woman lie on her back & scream.  
I walked in, the performance already begun.  
Instantly one knew the extent of the piece: *the woman would lie there, the woman would scream.*  
Each sound rent its own path through the torso & soon watching untethered from *what I'd say*  
*was happening*, became a new thing.

At four, Dick Higgins's daughter saw him perform a score that read  
*Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream!*  
She later reflected, *you can't interrupt the relationship between a person & a body that's screaming at*  
*the top of its lungs.*)

*I have only on language, & it isn't mine*  
watch it pass through your body  
—an address without origin  
save the fact of  
your voice          the hair  
that catches in your mouth.

## SCORE FOR LIKENESS

Taste pennies out of nowhere & my nose is about to bleed.

Self-portrait with paper towel over the face.

The family doctor says *Not pennies. Iron.*

Self-portrait when sold off the timber

& gone to lay track.

That kind of work with pincers & sweat.

Self-portrait the morning the tunnel collapses.

Say my face is a ribbon cutting

My face is broken ground.

You know that the water you're drinking is ancient.

Self-portrait as condensation.

Condensation as effigy.

Every day of your life you have been a woman.

What about when you're bone char.

What about dirt.

Say your life's work.

SCORE FOR LIKENESS

myself from the top of a stairwell / not one full body / slivers of hand & wrist

as a montage of security footage / skewed / walking out of the frame

or as the neighbors see me / absent when not / pacing / fucking / clanging plates

the sum total of minutes spent in stairwells / a currency

not poor

blanching the day / as turning a jar / will empty it of water

## SCORE FOR A SPECTACULAR

The peeping toms advance onto their balconies.  
Mosquitos rise, Lolitas run baths.  
I was a girl among girls in the locker room.  
Blond legs. Blond books.  
We took turns with our eyes to the rifle scope.  
A champion undressed, we were waiting.  
His pocked back in the crosshairs.  
Look in your compact for the transit of Venus.  
E coli observed through a keyhole.  
One hundred thirty thousand pounds ground beef  
reloaded into trucks.  
While the sitter keeps a finger-frame on the crib,  
the mayor attends the symphony wearing night-vision goggles.  
Kettledrums heroic in green.  
Every time I pick up my opera glasses, the towers are mid-collapse.  
On my seaside vacation they are burning again  
in the keel of a glass-bottom boat.  
My face & the minnows alight  
your open mouth like an oil slick.  
I love you when (& only when)  
you are the single eye of the panopticon  
& I the six thousand prisoners.

INTERVAL

nothing lost so many times

it cannot stand in shade

I dig a little trench with bare hands

no symptoms

if space is not a voice

falling on soft tissues

what gravitation

my literacy

casting vision

left to right

stitch, under stitch

*things that are the case*

blue kerchief, shadows readymade

*& kinds of erosion*

## SCORE FOR NOTHING

for a minute

on piano

in a room

the afterlife

out there

between us

in an hour

what I made

I spent

a day

in the blotters

as meme

## SCORE FOR THE CONTINGENT

Where the night speaks of the fire which speaks of the flock,  
cue Fishwife onto the porch:

*A moon that makes an open dish means rain.  
Means smoke that moves close to the ground.  
And the swallows when they fly they fly as one.*

She says *a downpour is a downpour is a downpour*: cue action in the gutter.

She says *trouble brings trouble brings trouble*.

A bird flies in through the window.

Fishwife: *Watch for illness*.

Flies in and can't get out.

Fishwife: *Watch for death*.

An empty chair goes rocking.

Fishwife: *Watch your money*.

A wishbone hung from the door.

Fishwife: *Watch for love*.

*Don't make him both your racehorse and your wager.*

We who watch watch from the wings

We whose bets begin to draw off our boldness

At the heart of our work is persistence

As long as I withstand I believe I am owed

The fishwife calls on us to make a sound  
like a steam whistle with no ship to herald.

SCORE FOR TWO MEN AND UPRIGHT PIANO

You play the one man. The first.  
Supine on the top board.  
Don't mimic a club singer, arranging herself  
like deviled eggs. Each vertebra is an eye,  
and you are hell-bent  
on watching the hammers.

I play the other man.  
I come in after the audience is used to you,  
and growing bored.  
I play a song from the year someone built this piano.  
Next piece, I move back a decade.

You stay as long as you can bear it.  
Wait for your feet to lose circulation.  
Let me touch your ribs with sustain.  
Song by song, I accumulate  
my chronology in reverse:  
A dialectic of muscle and wood.

Wait for your mouth to go dry.  
Wait for your stomach  
to start growling again.  
When you stand,  
take the top board with you.  
Set the hinge pins on my lap.

The best scenario  
is your patience aligns  
with the age of our piano  
so when you demand the key cover  
I'll be on music  
for organ and clavichord.

We look inside the piano  
and find quarters, trinkets—  
Things that will tell us  
who used the piano  
before we took it for our own.

Together we dismantle the action:  
hammers, dampers, keys, strings.  
I arrange the parts on stage like a spinal cord.

We dismantle the action  
and it won't be easy.  
My arms will weigh  
like a curse under the tongue.  
Your stomach will growl  
with such vigor it would be audible  
But we apply such force,  
our breath will mask the sound.

## SCORE FOR EXITS

Through the smell of the man left sleeping the deadlock  
lifted from its socket and returned the bag caught  
on the fence like an appeal for parlay it is white.

Through the office carpet all the flies caught dead  
in the light fixtures the window onto the alley  
one pedestrian is collapsing her umbrella.

Through the doctor his tools his work on the table  
is me the new body of words he administers  
his hand is implement the nurse's a stroke.

Through no evidence of flood save the price of greens  
is high next week my friends will be married  
in the vineyard I will sink through the grass.

## MISE EN SCÈNE

To the tourist  
even the orange  
belongs to this city  
when he sees it  
in my lunch-break hands  
your gaze  
what makes it  
*yours* when it lights  
on a woman  
as she binds each twin  
in his flame resistant fleece  
*yours* when it shifts  
to the vistas of hair  
hard bodies encased  
in silks & voices  
amebic against  
the ornamental cherries  
& *yours* when it rests  
on the membrane  
when I pull apart  
the sections  
my fingers speak  
in their language of use  
the seeds  
I spit on the path  
the waste  
& total value of the fruit

## MISE EN SCÈNE

In a sunburned time  
I wait on the curb  
the traffic breathes on me  
I take the heat  
personally. No need  
to synchronize  
our clocks by hand  
the scene is time  
as uniform  
as water in a wading pool  
At the end of a parking lot  
I reach toilets, pay phones  
a mailbox, an ATM  
what is it a person needs  
when everything is a plot point  
fully measurable  
At the end of two identical hours  
I re-board the bus  
count row house after row house  
painted two shades of beige

NOTES FROM A THEATER

From excess  
of sameness

one dark over every seat

The dancer wrings  
his torso, beats at his chest

Agony already  
in & of the body  
like hands or teeth or wakefulness

no symbol will do

*Around the stairwell, a wire cage*  
*On the sidewalk, Bradford pears*  
*give off their sex smell*

I want to dismantle my vocabulary of sequence  
*I dug in my purse for keys or a lipstick*

& to begin with, why mime  
falling? The drama of flailing the arms

when the body in earnest can fall

*lakedark, oildark, city night, tar*

Single breath  
the flutist sustained

note, its curved shape

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