

Unnaming Statement

On the occasion of the cancellation of *The Mouth is Still a Wild Door*

“Now they preceded the country of their future which contained as yet only the arrow of their mouth whose song had just been born.” —René Char

I write this from inside time. My sovereign body is as big as my house, where I shelter. Time is a metronome all through this house.

In spring 2020, inside the cocoons of our individual homes, connected only by lines of internet cable running underneath the sea, a new world—enclosed inside imagination and frustration—would seek to manifest. The whole season we sheltered in place, Guta carried a child.

Once upon a time, upon a specific time—there was an apple. When it was named *Adriatic, Galia, Algerian, Atago/Bella Heart, Betty Anne, Bergamont Black*, its presence outside of these names evaporated into history.

We Zoomed performance notes between our houses. Our piece was to be called *The Mouth Is Still a Wild Door*. It was postponed from May to June then canceled altogether. As Guta canceled plans to birth at the hospital, I contacted my midwife, and the real working together started. The collective tradition of birth, according to Silvia Federici’s *Caliban and the Witch*, was ruined at the outset of colonization. The common grazing lands of Europe were enclosed, and the peasants, now without their means of subsistence, were forced to work for land owners. This new economy called capitalism depended on enslaving people from Africa for labor. Midwives were designated witches then, and women were assigned to unpaid reproductive work.

Guta’s 2017 video performance series, *The Minotaur and Us*, consists of more than thirty-five videos in which pairs of old, young, black, brown, white, trans, and cis

women pull, wrap, struggle, and dance with a mass of red yarn between them. The piece “enacts an encounter between self and other, a meeting of profound romance and deep violence.” Each time it is performed, a pound of yarn is added: “The yarn became a collective ‘entity’ carrying woman’s DNA, memories, traumas, desire and insoluble knots, ambiguities and contradictions.” Inside our caesura, Guta began a series of videos based on our evaporating performance. She eventually performed a Minotaur with her unborn child, wrapping them both in red string.

The Mouth is Still a Wild Door was to pay homage to Lygia Clark’s 1973 performance *Baba Antropofágica*, in which several people extrude string from their mouths and wrap one person in it. In March, our first change: we simply could not perform with saliva during COVID-19. In April, we got news of postponement. In May, Silvia Federici—the driver of my poem’s fantastical utopian melancholy—would be called out for being a trans-exclusionary essentialist. In June, city after US city would explode with the demand to abolish the police. Guta got ready to birth somehow, now supported by midwives at home. Our open and activated performance ritual migrated onto a rectangular screen.

A human gestating another is a small community. Once upon a time, before the name “mother,” this community was much larger. I will recite all the names of the apples in a chain, enchain them, enchant them, bind them, bound them, chant them.

We call it a start. “The word *art* as it emerged in the mid- to late eighteenth century was linked to the imperial conquest and mastery of time, as if time was not something shared in common, but a divisible thing to be allocated,” says Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. The world that comes next precedes any name we have for it. It is inside the world we now share, attached at each point.

The “feral house” of my poem is not a metaphor, it is the term for an abandoned house overtaken by foliage, a domicile lurking, covered, protected, masked, hidden, returned, and wild in a world that was not working.

We will not be going back. The unmaking of the future has accelerated. Our entanglement is clearer than ever. Urgent memories of a world before our time, before our time keepers, appear with astonishing presence. They overtake what we thought was the future. It has no name yet, and is growing. Let's recite the names.

Oakland, June 7–July 7, 2020