



from asphalt thrive ;

© Miatta Kawinzi, 2016



I have long been fascinated by the gesture of the reach.

To pull toward.

To sway away from.

To bypass layers, exploding the magnitude of a thing.

I left Kentucky wide-eyed and soft-hearted, one green backpack on my shoulders and two green boots on my feet. “Out West,” as always, reached my tender self towards its shores.

What did I believe?

1. That money was a fiction we could overturn if we loved each other hard enough.
2. That gentleness can still exist in the unknown.
3. That motion was the medicine.

I got picked up by a fellow seeker on the Oregon coast. He made his way into a wood-wrapped hostel and offered his car as sleeping bag. Grateful, I rested, and when my eyes opened it was to a blanket of mist glowing with silver stringing and lifting slightly to reveal the burst of bright green growing things in reaching to the sky. Damp air & earth & the coastline as a porous boundary. Everything alive.





The myth of California.

A well-founded smoothing of edges.

A person with well-sunned hands offered the bay
of his pick-up truck as viewing room for fields of clover.

Long stretch of growth
and swirl of sky.

Another, adamant on taking a detour to swing onto skinny
roads bordered by elegant trunks steadfast in standing.

*“The redwoods grow close together.
They have pancake roots.”*

I learned that
their latticework
is interlaced;
in joining,
they grow,
holding each other up,
reaching such vast heights
as time churns on around them.

Togetherness
as a means
to flourish,
as
staircase,

lift.



[sometimes it is comfortable to not know what is being said,
to simply coast the metronome of language]

I grew up lulled by the snytax of the unknown known.



My father and uncle would joyously speak Kamba and Swahili while sinking into the living room couch, the patterns of speech becoming familiar to me while remaining untranslated, long bursts of rapid speech accented with laughter.

As for me, I learned the Queen's English as filtered through this soil. Nothing was to prevent me from mastering sleek communication in this land where my being constantly had to be justified.

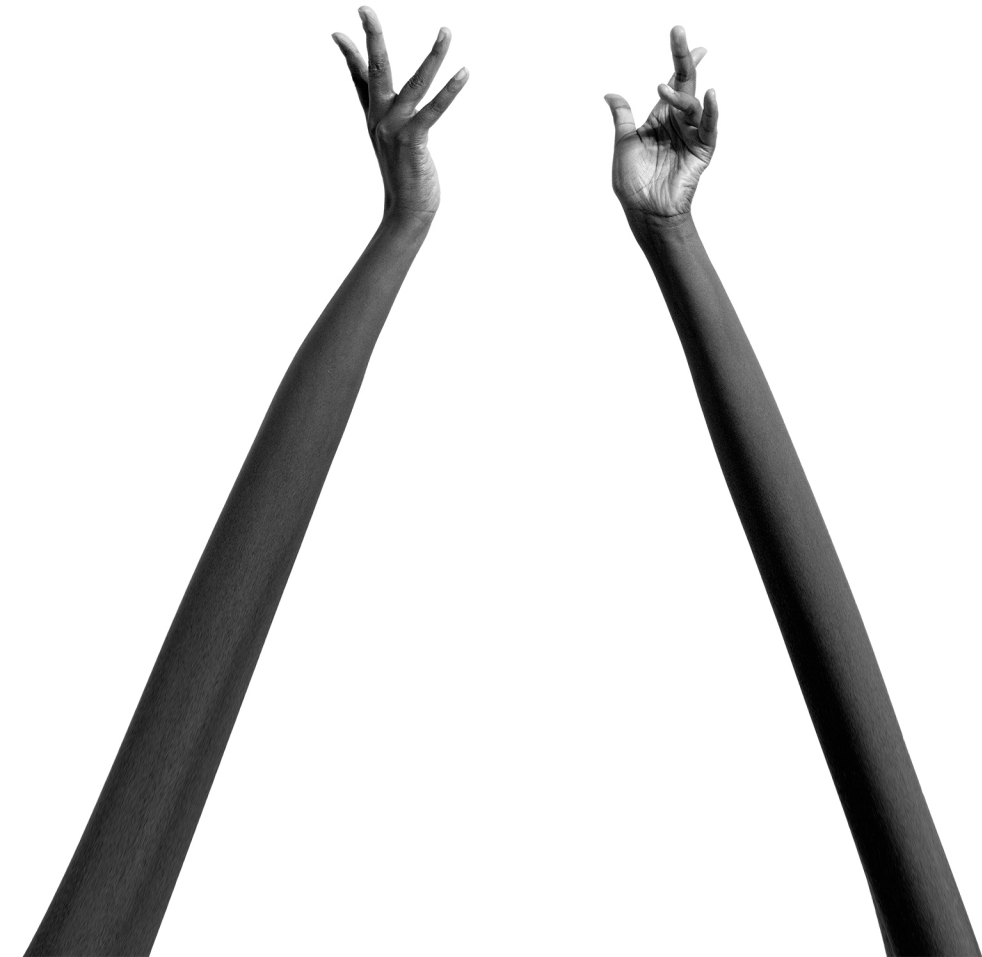
the qwaan's inglish

Sometimes the reach does not seek a grasping;
the gesture in and of itself is enough.

My mother speaks in many voices. Before I knew the academic terms for the bouncing of syllables and syntax between registers richly textured in difference, I would trace the morphing of easy sentences into buttoned-up ones, map the journeys of inflection across red dust clouds and wide city streets, on bus rides and plane rides, as held, as stretched, as invented.

Like many things, the labeling of this is reductive. They call it code-switching, but this term assumes the navigation of the already-given and ignores the imagination involved, the forging. I know it to be a form of shape-shifting, and this, too, I have inherited.

The one who is reaching decides how far to extend the self.
The one who is reaching decides how far to extend.





It is years later and I am unsure of where exactly “home” is, but the news that reaches me over overseas from the city in which I left my room to a subletter is shaky. Elsewhere I can step outside the pliable shell of metal I wear; the sides of this shell repel the endless din of discord that colors the base fabric of the nation into which I was born. They waited for an earth-colored president, then brought buried blades back to the surface to cloak the days in fear. I have re-traced the Atlantic, but the geographical distance does not disrupt the closeness of these stories nor unchoke the throat.

To breathe is another kind of

reaching

It reveals how the intangible

sets the mechanism

of living into motion

- or cuts it short.

I think perhaps
that the heart
has the potential
to shuffle on,
that a certain
amount of armor
is necessary to
maintain the
rhythm of foot
to floor in
moving forward,
that time moves
in waves mirroring
the ocean and
if nothing is
fixed, then it
can be changed.



But there is urgency
in this new kind of
reaching, these raised
hands everywhere
intoning a chorus
against the strict
burst of ammunition
marking the frenzy
of now.

[I dream of levitation.]

