

Renee Gladman
**Untitled
(Environments)**

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I began the day wanting to bring into convergence three activities of being – what I'd seen, what I'd read, and what I'd drawn – and to say about these acts how they made lines in the world that ran alongside other lines, and how all these lines together made environments of the earth, where I could put my body and you could put yours, and these would be lines always entwined because there was little if anything you could say or make without calling forth other lines, and this was how you knew you were where you were and the ground was worth cultivating and that there was life beneath the ground. I spent a long time looking into each of the acts of how I'd been in the world, how I'd conveyed that I'd been there and I found all these overlapping currents and found that each of the acts divided into further acts like the acts of writing and making narrative, which divided into acts of building and afforestation, which then led to sex and led to reading and wandering. I had found in drawing a way to think about narrative such that I could look into narrative without writing narrative and could see something about what it did and I didn't have to place periods anywhere and didn't have to give details or unfold events but could be in a narrative space, a space being built by narrative, and I could say this was happening because I was moving my hand across a page and I had a pen in my hand. I had a pen in my hand and for a long time or a short time I'd move it across a page and think or not think about narrative – what it meant to be in narrative, to feel narrative gather in my body and feel it work to move out of my body – but I'd be making a drawing, and yet, as I drew, I was often conscious of the resemblance of the lines of that drawing to those I made when I was writing: the resemblance was the sun at the bottom of the drawing page (I was trying to invert a city, to suggest a dense landscape) and the presence of this sun kept me cognizant that all the time I was drawing I was doing a kind of writing that in its duration was drawing, in its shape was writing, and narrative pulsed at the core of all of this. The ink was the core of narrative; my hand was the core; the shape my hand made was the core, and I knew when I was saying narrative that I wasn't limiting it to some event happening inside fiction, but rather was trying to get at an energy, a light that threaded all my acts of reading and writing and drawing and seeing into a day, then days. I had found in writing that all the women I'd read, that some of these women, had pulled a line out of some moment of doing and drew that line and kept drawing it while events and time settled above it and this line was its own kind of core and began something like, "This land will not always be foreign," Audre Lorde appearing to dream, and the line became the same as the land

when you looked at it from far off, from deep inside something that flooded and was peopled, often called a poem, sometimes a march of bodies in protest, sometimes the single body working at a desk standing in for every other body at risk, looking out of its face: perceiving, and Nasreen Mohamedi (her body failing but sustaining this practice of laying lines) writing into her own drawing, “The shadow came and stood in its place like yesterday”; and the early drawings of Julie Mehretu, where all at once the lines in the world head for the periphery, and each departure is violent and each exploding site is a center with a micro-architecture inside that pulses like all centers pulse, responding “to the megastructures of the previous layers,” each center being a book burning at the core of the earth; Janice Lee’s “single moment during the darkness” that opened the morning of my writing, where I could see the histories of the words I was combining, could see the ground they covered, could hear them resonating in the material of that writing – the sounds coming off the dark, the dark in their faces, the languages having to break in order for these words to appear, to flow like they’re searching for something, illuminated from within: Janice’s “figure kneeling in the alleyway, between worlds”; Danielle Vogel’s “harvesting of water, from mouth to ink”; Simryn Gill’s becoming “invisible like wind.” We were suspended in time, still talking to Virginia Woolf, still searching for Zora Neale Hurston, wanting to empty Woolf’s words of their racism, wanting to be loved by Stein. I had been up all night writing; I had been reading all my life and shaped in my writing these places where lines had been laid out and were woven in with the earth; I began drawing what I read, and saw Mira Schendel’s oily architectures and saw Gego’s knots and found in Agnes Martin a picture of our breathing and stood in awe of Toba Khedoori’s endless windows – each artist nesting a book in the floor, always a book inside some other. It was an interlocking thing, ley lines illuminated, seen only in the dark of writing, the line drawn out of the body, through time, wanting to have been loved by Stein, wishing for Zora to have been better loved: these were the pages that settled in you when you were drawing what you’d written for such a long time. I had found in drawing that I was writing something I’d been reading, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge’s awareness of the horizon, the breath in the mesa, “I’ll wait to see what I recognize,” staring into the light. I was looking into the moss growing between the bricks laid out in front of the door, looking into the moss as its own space, its doing beyond making a border, and the green coming back after such a long winter, bright but also mourning – the sun

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bearing down on it, the clouds blocking the sun, the human eyes glaring – and found, within, spaces that bordered some infinite writing about process and thought, some unending burrowing, some endless death and reach, some constant holding in place, Kristin Prevallet’s “the poem is a state both of mind and landscape,” and our books burrowing inside our drawings, the lines holding the brick unyielding. I had found in my looking at the land that I was also looking at water and behind me were living architectures in which I wrote and drew and where I read about other people’s writing and drawing, their mercurial habitations: Nathalie Sarraute’s “dark clusters between the dead house fronts ... motionless little knots, giving rise to occasional eddies, slight cloggings”; Eileen Myles’s standing “with several hundred people their identities changing slightly then utterly in the course of the night”; Mary Szybist’s “Days go by when I do nothing but underline the damp edge of myself,” and these were all moments of being that became houses or the stories of houses, and this was something pooling beneath the earth, altering its body, inverting surfaces: you did your farming in your sleep; you unwrote the clothes you wore. And I had found in reading a way to draw lines from the earth and make an outline around my sitting at this table or walking the streets of any place, any large or small city, any countryside, any emptied forgotten place, any place transitioning, taking on multiple identities, blaring them at once, and this was all architecture, all the reading I had done. Lyn Hejinian’s “the open mouths of people,” her “weather and air drawn to us,” to say, “landscape is a moment in time.” I’d found in my walking the expanse of several places through which I stopped repeatedly, I stopped in time and without time, I stood at the thresholds of doors, at the throats of caves; I pulled windows from collapsed walls, and grabbed a book to hold up the city, the barn, the balcony, and this was reading. I had already written toward Edie Fake’s architectures; I had counted the Ruth Asawa sculptures hanging above me and quoted Monika Grzymala three times. Eva Hesse’s catalogue raisonné of drawings – where was it? Lee Bontecou, Zarina; Zarina had said, “Once I lived in a house of many rooms,” and this was an etching. Reading aggregated layers, with luminous lines running between, and each line was a moment in someone, where the body stood up and walked into a book, a drawing, a squat structure of doors, a tower perched on a hill, into the water, and each line was the writing back of language, its response, its figurations, and all this queering at the corners, putting corners everywhere, even on top of one another. And I found in my narrative these other narratives that

opened under water, that glowed in deepest night, that you could read without alarm, that were blown-out geometries, maps, that were textiles hanging from the ceiling, calendula underground, always having something to do with bodies, moving through other bodies. Danielle's "The book spilled of something. Takes something."

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Suggested Encounters:

Ruth Asawa, *Ruth Asawa* (David Zwirner, 2018)
Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, *Hello, the Roses* (New Directions, 2013)
Lee Bontecou, *Lee Bontecou: Drawn Worlds* (The Menil Collection, 2014)
Edie Fake, *Cities of the Future, Their Color* (portfolio) (*The Paris Review*, Summer Issue, 2018)
Gego, *Gego: Autobiography of a Line* (Dominique Lévy, 2016)
Simryn Gill, *Here art grows on trees* (MER. Paper Kunsthalle, 2013)
Monika Grzymala, *Drawing Spatially* (Hatje Cantz, 2017)
Eva Hesse, *Eva Hesse Drawing* (Yale University Press, 2006)
Lyn Hejinian, *The Cold of Poetry* (Sun & Moon Classics, 2000)
Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography* (Harper Perennial, 2017)
Toba Khedoori, *Toba Khedoori* (Prestel, 2016)
Audre Lorde, *The Collected Poems of Audre Lorde* (W. W. Norton, 2000)
Janice Lee, *Damnation* (Penny-Ante Editions, 2013)
Agnes Martin, *Agnes Martin* (D.A.P. / Tate, 2015)
Julie Mehretu, *The Drawings* (Rizzoli, 2007)
Nasreen Mohamedi, *Waiting is a Part of Intense Living* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, 2015)
Eileen Myles, *The Importance of Being Iceland: Travel Essays in Art* (Semiotext(e), 2009)
Kristin Prevallet, *I, Afterlife: Essay in Mourning Time* (Essay Press, 2007)
Nathalie Sarraute, *Tropisms* (New Directions, 2015)
Mira Schendel, *Monotypes* (Snoeck, 2015)
Mary Szybist, *Incaradine: Poems* (Graywolf, 2013)
Gertrude Stein, *Ida: a Novel* (Yale University Press, 2012)
Danielle Vogel, *Between Grammars* (Noemi Press, 2015)
Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (Harcourt, 1989)
Zarina, *Paper Like Skin* (Prestel Publishing, 2012)

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Renee Gladman is a writer and artist preoccupied with lines, crossings, thresholds, and geographies as they emerge in the terrain between drawing and writing. She is the author of eleven published works, including a cycle of novels about the city-state Ravicka and its inhabitants, the Ravickians, as well as *Prose Architectures*, her first monograph of drawings (Wave Books, 2017). She lives and makes work in New England with poet-ceremonialist Danielle Vogel.

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