

spread (third)

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Remember the sibyl and her books.
Remember the emperor and his ignorance.
Nine books, then six, then three.
The emperor refused to pay the price.
The emperor knew he needed her, needed them.
The emperor would be no one without her.
The empire would be nothing without them.
She offered once, he refused, she burned a part.
She offered twice, he refused, she burned the second part.
She offered thrice, he agreed, the third part was spared, spread.

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There is you and there is me, and there is the work to be done and the work that cannot begin. There is the centre and the outside. There is the first part and the second. There is the third part which is neither the first nor the second. The present and past, as a pair, reveal the pervasive flimsiness of dualism.

When the empire fell, it was the third part that was no longer, a withdrawal. It's not so much that the books disappeared or were destroyed, they transformed into something else. It's not so much that the empire fell or ended, it transformed into something else. A trauma no one has acknowledged as trauma, one of the many great pains of this world. The sibyl knew.

Without her words, there is ignorance.

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This is a score for a (future imperfect) ritual.

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The spread is a feast, I am hosting a spread, you are invited to the spread, there are friends, there are strangers, making friends with strangers. Sweet grasses are laid out for everyone to sit on, a circular arrangement. A meal shall be served, the sacrificial offering, there shall be meat, milk, wine, fat, and sweets. A bundle of twigs is set aside, a seat for the gods, the presence of the unmanifest. Touch to draw its power of imagination, touch to charge its capacity to manifest, touch to caress this portal into another world.

* * *

I greet you as you greet me, in text and then voice. The exchange which sits at the centre of this spreading begins with its greeting: good morning, how are you, what does your day hold, how did you sleep? Where did you begin? And where did I end up?

I greet you as you greet me. In words and then with sound, a conversation which cycles back and forth, not endlessly but without bound. I come to this exchange with boundless enthusiasm and distraction. What is made of this world is made in its forgetting.

I am here, are you? Are you listening, I have heard. I am here, are you? Are you listening, I have heard. I am here, are you? Are you listening, I have heard that you are hearing me, can you? Logged in, logged off. I am reading, what are you becoming? Should we share? Log on, log off? Wanna phone? Give me a call. Let me try another connection, I can't hear you! I am here, are you?

We lay out the materials needed for the spread.

We arrange the materials for the spread. We place the objects onto the spread, moving them around. We prepare the spread to mark the occasion. We mark the lines that orient the arrangement.

I have collected a set of texts that I am interested in. You have collected a set of texts that you are interested in.

I offer you my texts and ask that you make from them a selection. You offer me your texts and ask that I make from them a selection.

I organise a selection and suggest a key text and point to chapters and passages that I feel will serve as supplementary texts. You organise a selection and suggest a key text and point to chapters and passages that you feel will serve as supplementary texts.

We meet together in a room with each selection printed out and we begin to read together.

We gather around the spread to read and recite, to offer and exchange, to share and to spend time together. The spread must have a certain number of objects, each carrying significance. At least two, seven, thirteen objects whose names begin with the letter s – sigma, sîn, samekh. At least, an amount. Must be named a certain way.

Ssssssssssss. Shhhhhhhhhhhh. Hissing, shushing. Stay quiet, don't tell.

* * *

Reading takes a physical form.

Our reading diverges, but our shapes in the space of the room begin to match. We pull tighter choices from the selections of selections we made for each other. We begin to arrange the many texts into a new pair of texts.

You arrange in fragments and I arrange in passages.

We build them on tables, spreading from the floor.

The texts are remade as a reader, to be shared and read and read again.

Disorientation from reading itself, and towards the practice of reading as it is and as it can be. I want to begin with greetings. Greeting the text and greeting the fellow readers. Greeting the spread, setting the space, and building in that space an intimate infrastructure.

What do you hold against or with me? I am sharing with you those things on which I thought we could build together a space of understanding, or at least a mode or means of enhanced clarity. I hoped that you would hear and see that this is that which we built together, and this is that which we held together. I build what might make the bounds of this hold shape.

There's always fire, there's always been fire.

Libya and Cumae, the faggot-friends journeyed to the sibyl,

At both temples, an offering.

The fireplace in the house,

On the day before we lost ourselves in the oasis.

We arrived from the backside, took the wrong way.

Pages of leftover books, kindling,

After the burning, one page remained:

"Here, this is your oracle," he told me.

Holding a bundle, a reed, a rod,

Lead the way, leave the fag for her,

Shaking the reed, scattering the seeds.

On the beach, flotsam and jetsam, horses and chariots.

Below her crag, the volcanic shoreline,

Fumaroles, fire underneath the sand,

Collect and gather, a broken piece of bamboo,

A sea lily wrapped together tight with pink plastic,

Left to never decompose.

You and I have yet to travel to her, Delphi shall

be for us.

These rituals are secret, improvised.
You just feel it out, you just know.
We burn what we leave behind.
We have nothing to show for our
transformation.

* * *

What is needed for the spread? What do the
different objects convey?

There is fire, there is always fire. Starting and
ending with fire, a circle. Fire always returns,
that is its mystery. Fire draws the one in and the
many come out. Burning is not a question of
exhaustion. The fire burns and it is the time that
attracts.

The text emerges, slowly, and keeps with it the
texture of reading.

There is water, there are flowers – carnations,
to be exact. There is honey. There is medicine –
long pepper, in this case. The Romans knew
this native pepper, shared between the
Mediterranean and Mesopotamia, sweet and
numbing. There is fat, sweet butter cooked
down and boiled off into golden ghee, shiny
nourishment. Rub it into the skin, pour it into
the body, fill your insides up with hot oil, this is
good for the mind, it provides a calm that is so
calm it arouses fear.

The text begins with texts, the readings, and
holds their shapes.

There are tools for the spread, instruments.
There are spoons, there are plates, there is a
candle holder, there is a sheet of metal. There
are charcoal sticks, densified life, burnt down
to its black essence. A wand, tap this, tap that.
Willow, do I weep with the wand? Is every tap a
teardrop?

The text was not meant to reproduce, or to
communicate clear or approachable citations,

rather it is meant to occlude.

There is paper, torn up and cut up scraps, bits
of texts, sayables. These are to be bundled
together, then offered to the fire. Devoured by
the flame, offered to earth and heaven, rising
up to the sky, scattered by the wind, seeding the
soil with sayables. Imaginations grow out of the
ground or rain down from the clouds, wet
word-drops.

Melt the metal, offer the token, pour it over
paper, let it cool. There is a tweezer, to pick
over and pick out, to dig around, finely, finally,
looking for pieces to save for later.

The writing documents not only the space of
reading, but the space which held the reading,
the space of our friendship and the space of our
lives.

Sift the ashes until the powder is of the finest
quality. Pour generous drops of warm fat, the
soot-black pool of ash-oil must be stirred to
suspend the carbon.

The writing begins as a greeting, something
that I plan to offer to you.

The elemental spread. Fire, water, plant, metal,
air, words. In other traditions, there are six
elements. At least. The elements are spread out,
they meet and move. They are arranged,
mobile, they are activated with the senses: see,
smell, hear, taste, touch.

I write and then plan to read, I read for you and
read again. The discomfort of performance and
the discomfort of rehearsal. The pleasure of
performance and the pleasure of rehearsal.

Touch one to the other, hold your hands
between them, connect your fingers, only then
can the energy move. The gestures are signs,
seals, and locks. The gestures are a
switchboard, they measure and dose the
elements, knowing when to touch and when not
to touch. It should flow, it should never get

stuck, there is a doing.

The spread is always recreated, never created. There is no first spread, there will be no last spread, there are only endlessly varying spreads.

* * *

There were great fires in the temples of the study-friends. Now, like our friendship, displaced, scattered, spread. We carry our fires with us, a process. Could it be that a fire may be transported, taken with you, kept alive, left attended to, even within displacement?

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We hope to share without the insecurity of authorship. Rather than extracting something from the exchange, we take no-thing as an offering. Ask: what comes out and off of the transfer? Instead of an author, an offer.

* * *

I should probably just watch it burn, instead of trying to capture it. It's hard to completely let go. But I notice how I only look into the camera, rush to snap at the right moment, and in my distracted attention, I miss the flashing speed of the page lit up, the liquid complexity of the fire as it moves unpredictably, growing, suddenly dimming, anti-climax: its movement is a no-thing. It burned better this time, it helped to stack a little pile of burning faggots underneath. The smell isn't comforting, not like a hearth or a grill, none of that smoky charcoal and fat-sizzling depth. I'm worried the neighbours will get weirded out. There are two next door in the courtyard, digging through the trash bins looking for bottles. They just stand there at the fence, gawking. I'm hunched over, like a roadside peddler selling watermelon and freshly pickled walnuts, squatting close to the ground. I watch my silly little fire, like a kid or a half-ass pagan. The white ash is soft and

velvety. I touch the words left behind and they disappear, imprinted invisibly onto my fingertips.

This text emerges out of *spread (medium)*, a study session offered in the form of a reader and two online performances on Thu 8 Apr and Thu 22 Apr 2021. The text is neither a documentation nor a reflection of these performances. The text spreads out the occasion, moving within and without, parallel and against. It is the third part.

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