

Emmy Beber (ed.)



THE BODIES THAT REMAIN

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Fig. 1. Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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The BABEL Working Group is a collective and desiring-assemblage of scholar-gypsies with no leaders or followers, no top and no bottom, and only a middle. BABEL roams and stalks the ruins of the post-historical university as a multiplicity, a pack, looking for other roaming packs with which to cohabit and build temporary shelters for intellectual vagabonds. We also take in strays.

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THE BODIES THAT REMAIN

Edited by Emmy Beber





~~Between the poles of Frick and Boogy
Sensible scribbles and Douth advocates
hugle over ^{the} ~~it's~~ writing gate~~

this was yer knee

For family

Contents

Introduction ☆ 17

Emmy Beber

The Life and Deaths of Jane Bowles (or, Reputation) ☆ 23

Lynne Tillman

Be Michael Jackson ☆ 33

David Rule

Judee Sill ☆ 37

Mairead Case

Lads of Aran 43

Claire Potter

Emily Dickinson ☆ 53

Jeremy Millar

Pause Between Pauses ☆ 63

Chloé Griffin

Brigid Brophy ☆ 77

Phoebe Blatton

A Body. Beat. ✨ 91
Susanna Davies-Crook

The Language of the Toilet ✨ 95
Travis Jeppesen

Mary Butts ✨ 111
Karen Di Franco

Mnemesoid ✨ 113
Tai Shani

He Dives Too Deep ✨ 125
Philip Hoare

more flinching ✨ 135
Heather Phillipson

The Remaining Body of a Gage Fanfic ✨ 215
Uma Breakdown

Kathy's Body ✨ 225
Linda Stupart

Envois ✨ 231
Sharon Kivland

Wilhelm Reich ✨ 243
Harman Bains

The Missing Body of JT Leroy ✨ 251
Pil and Galia Kollektiv

more or less matter ✨ 263
Kevin Breathnach

Sylvia Plath ✨ 269
Emily LaBarge

Acknowledgements ✨ 299

Introduction

Emmy Beber

“To love, bodily.”

Gillian Rose



The Bodies That Remain arrived on its own terms. I spent the next two years gathering examples. Throughout the process people would ask me periodically if I understood the book as a ‘body of work’. It was a collection, so this was a possibility. But somehow this felt too complete. The only physical body I had ever known truly was chaotic, anxious, constantly moving. At the beginning, the book felt like this too; it was unpredictable. The writing within shifted form, changed tone, pace, even subject; as though scattered parts, the texts arrived in my inbox from studios in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago; from hillsides in Yorkshire and the silent landscapes of the French countryside; from London back rooms, Belfast laboratories and even from aboard ship, in the middle of the ocean. It was a peculiar experience coming to care *viscerally* about the words of others as though it were their bodies I was working with; caring for the bodies being spoken about — the fictions, truths, pain, the sharing of bodies and their absences; learning how to allow a body to appear in writing without becoming the body.

The Bodies That Remain could never become a 'body of work' complete because those bodies being written about had written themselves into the future, had shaped the bodies of their readers, their writers and would move beyond. The boundary was too tight. These were bodies whose boundaries remained malleable and even in their absences had refused to expire.

Where 'body' as a verb makes material something abstract, *The Bodies That Remain*, as a collection, became bodily.



How do you reproduce the resistance between the body and its attempt to articulate? To allow the writing to remain uncomfortable performing the inarticulacy of the body — its falters, stutters, spillages — is to attend to the body through language, is to attend to movement; the page changes texture, the words unable to remain still. Or, broken, they lie flat on the page, unmoving.

"If you want to exist, you must accept flesh and the moment." Jeff Nuttall wrote through the body and his was the first work I grappled with its attention to all things physical. Our language of the body was different but translated it had a shared urgency. When you write the body, you remain within and perform it. Language becomes movement, becomes moment. The urgency I was looking for was interstitial. It was the space between the body physical and the body as it performed itself. How could I turn this into something familiar? Nuttall had devoured all of the body writers before him and I would do the same. I could list the names of some of the writers I worked my way through: Michel Leiris, Roland Bathes, Nathalie Sarraute; Eileen Myles, Hilton Als, Kathy Acker; Susan Sontag, Maggie Nelson, Wayne Koestenbaum; Lynne Tillman, Ben Marcus, Marguerite Duras, and on and on and on.

Each writer could be traced back, each had an entire lineage of other body writers worked through. Though not all directly con-

fronted or involved the body as object within their work, there were residues; language stuttered, remained surprising, moving.

In London I began working with children and realised very quickly that we are taught how to use our bodies. I had to retrain myself to write in a way far removed from my own syncopated scrawl. Their writing understands the body as a thing made by them, able to change its properties. Their surfaces are malleable and those tools that allow them to share their ideas have to be invited in. I thought about Robert Walser's ever shrinking pencil as I watched a child press pencil into page, how Walser's writing became smaller and smaller. The children notice everything about their body and yours and are happy to tell you. As a child, my writing was microscopic and remains so to this day. Theirs sits boldly on the line, biting back at the pencil that made them. As a child, before being taught, your body remains out of time.

In a moment of pause, I read Gillian Rose's *Love's Work*, Marguerite Duras's *La douer* and Emily LaBarge's PhD chapters *The Essay as Form* and thought about the sounds of the body in horror, in mourning, in truth. The body trying to escape itself; Rose describing her want to create an ethnography of shit in the face of seeing her body outside of body, the colostomy bag; the truths or weight of the body as form. The function of the sounds is to make us stop being a body altogether. Yet the body becomes this. Becomes language, becomes writing. As Gillian Rose said, "to love, bodily". Emotions remains mortal, must remain mortal *or else they are nothing*.



The most I have learnt about language and the body has been from the writers in this book. It was Philip Hoare telling me about his experience of discovering ambergris in a nook of the ocean and his transferring a small smudge of it from sea to his hand, from his hand to the notebook and the stench that remained. It was talking with Tai Shani about how delicious a

description of flesh might be, how we are shaped by the bodies of others, by the space around them and their movement. It was Lynne Tillman writing Jane Bowles' disappearance and reappearance, her restlessness in life and successful dispersal at burial, a line drawing of movement across language. It was Mike Harvey's endless fascination with the meshing and reforming of the body through scabbing and the fierce conversations with Claire Potter on body trauma, how language can show the impoverishment of itself as a performance of bodily experiences made inarticulate. It was reading Mairead Case writing, "When I read and write I know I'm moving somehow. I know my body's holding space." The back and forth emails of chlorine soaked lido skin with Heather Phillipson and the stories from Chloé Griffin on the impossibility of the body of water she was sailing over that week, of her new geographies, their sounds and scents and colour. Devouring Harman Bains' writings, I learnt much on the erotic body in its many guises and curiosities, and I learnt the body as something other — nourishing my own — from the books and essays and stories from Pil and Galia Kollektiv. The ongoing conversation with Kevin Breathnach taught me about the multitude of expressions and odours the body can erupt, the emails with Emily LaBarge about how language can eventually turn on the body, can expose it, and through the sharing of stories and our own experiences with Phoebe Blatton, I learnt what it is to understand how to be within a body. I have stories for every contributor. It has been a privilege to share mind spaces with all of them. Their words have shaped my understanding of writing the body and being a body.



On a car journey recently I had a conversation with my friend who works in palliative care about death. She told me how those that are restless in life, who can never sit still, are often restless at death, they refuse their end. The bodies within this book remain restless and even in their absence find new ways of be-

ing. Molded into the lives of their writer's are their bodies, in language. Echoes of the shape of their thinking.

The Life and Deaths of Jane Bowles (or, Reputation)

Lynne Tillman

Jane Bowles was born on February 22, 1917, a short, usually harsh month — it seems right for her. Bowles's unique writing and life were cut short, derailed by neuroses, alcoholism, physical illness. Her friends remember her sharp wit, agile mind, gaiety, humor, outrageousness. While she lived, stories about wild Jane Bowles circulated in Tangier where she resided from 1948. Back then she was a living legend, but the flux of reputation — here today, gone tomorrow — sends her body of work into and out of print (OP).

Among certain contemporary writers, including Lydia Davis, Deborah Eisenberg, Michael Cunningham, Jane Bowles is celebrated and revered for her work, notably her sole, singular novel *Two Serious Ladies* (1943).¹ It has also been praised exuberantly by Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, and John Ashbery. Bowles finished six stories, and a play, *In The Summer House*, which ran on Broadway in 1954, with incidental music by Paul Bowles.

Jane Bowles didn't subscribe to what life held in store for her, an upper-middle-class Jewish-American girl from Woodmere,

¹ Jane Bowles, 'Two Serious Ladies', in *The Collected Works of Jane Bowles* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, New York, 1966), 3–201.

Long Island, New York. Willfully, it seems, she undid her putative future; the unexpected — accidents of fate — also changed it: the death of her adored father, when she was 13, and, then, as an adolescent, she developed tuberculosis in her knee. The teenager recovered in a Swiss hospital, her leg in traction for months, when, it is said, she discovered her love of reading and literature. Ever after, she walked with a limp. Paul Bowles' hated, anti-Semitic father called her 'that crippled kike'.

Out of her mother's house, according to Millicent Dillon in her definitive biography, *A Little Original Sin*,² Bowles rebelled hard and fast. She led a super-fueled young adulthood, hanging out with writers and artists, bar-hopping in Greenwich Village, pursuing love and sex with other women. She was adamant in her desire for thrill, a Bohemian when the term meant something. Composer Paul Bowles and she met in 1937, and, surprising everyone, they married in 1938.

Bowles rejected comfort and complacency; she disdained middle-class values. Ease never befriended her: She questioned everything. 'I had met nervous girls before,' Tennessee Williams wrote in his preface to *Feminine Wiles*, 'but her quicksilver animation, her continual cries to me and herself: 'Shall we do this or that? What shall we do?' showed such an extreme kind of excited indecision...'³

Reading her work, I can feel that anxiety in slight shifts of tone, in her unusual juxtapositions, both jarring and productive. I read her phrases again and again, adjectives abutting nouns in unlikely relationships, an innovativeness with language that she shared with Jean Rhys. I might become melancholy, reading her, though her writing also makes me laugh out loud, the way Kafka's does. But Kafka's work is cooler. He's observing his writing and himself writing it. His work, in a sense, depends on distance — between psyche and society. He writes about and

2 Millicent Dillon, *A Little Original Sin: The Life and Work of Jane Bowles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

3 Tennessee Williams, 'Introduction' to Jane Bowles, *Feminine Wiles* (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1976), 7–8. This is a collection of Bowles' unfinished stories.

with detachment. Bowles is not detached, not in any way; her irony might even have boomeranged on her.

The way she lived differed starkly from her middle-class beginnings, but more the way she wrote veered from conventional literary modernisms. In writing, she didn't pursue a self; I can't imagine she believed one existed. She didn't write to discover an identity. She denied identifications and worked toward dis-identifications. While a sense of the fragmented underlay her order of things, she didn't strive for it. Her metier was seams and fissures.

A Jane Bowles character, like its author, will have trouble making up her or his mind. I take 'making up one's mind' literally: minds are made, not born. Bowles was exceedingly conscious of this and stymied by it. She was kept in doubt, undone by right and wrong, by what she didn't know, and what could be in her mind without her wanting it. Bowles' characters play in this absurdity, having choice and no choice simultaneously. Irrationality ineluctably figures into action and inaction, causing contradictions, and sometimes paralysis.

Any sentence from *Two Serious Ladies* displays Jane Bowles' disorienting, elegant style — in fact, any sentence from all of her writing:

Arnold had just taken quite a large bite of his sandwich so that he was unable to answer her [Miss Gamelon]. But he did roll his eyes in her direction. It was impossible to tell with his cheeks so full whether or not he was angry. Miss Gamelon was terribly annoyed at this, but Miss Goering sat smiling at them because she was glad to have them both with her again.⁴

The movement from Arnold's cheeks, to Miss Gamelon's reaction to him, to Miss Goering's feelings about them, makes a sketch of each — I want to say, they're line drawings. Arnold's full cheeks can't be read as angry or not, which annoys Miss Gamelon, while

4 Bowles, 'Two Serious Ladies', 117.

Miss Goering smiles, happy to be with them. A reader can see the composition at the table, these three curious beings.

(I wonder: What troubled Jane Bowles when she wrote those sentences, which words worried her, what made her anxious.)

All choice — in life, writing — pained her. Making a choice, which writing allows and supposedly encourages — be as free as you can be! — created perpetual havoc. Working on the exceptional short story, 'Camp Cataract', Jane got stuck. She told Paul Bowles that she couldn't name a kind of bridge, cantilevered, unless she knew exactly how it was built. She made no assumptions even about her mother tongue, and said No to the first thing that came to mind. Her mind saw fit to unmake even plain words and phrases, to unveil home truths' hidden messages. Writing turned into a representation of her intensity and fierce integrity, she wanted honesty in language and syntax.

Like everyone else, Jane Bowles's volition was regularly compromised, and she moved to dictates she couldn't know. Psychoanalytically, home is always where you go, and, though Jane Bowles left hers to be herself, let's say, or to figure out her own way of life, or to write, she appears to have been unsatisfied, always restless. She and Paul Bowles, dedicated to difference, to being strangers in a strange land, chose their new home, but no place was home, I think, for her, and she didn't find it in her writing, either.

Paul Bowles found an odd comfort in estrangement; it suited his disposition, his dry humor. His story 'You Are Not I' is a tale of psychological horror, of a young girl's 'madness', and sent proverbial chills down this reader's spine. Jane Bowles' stories weren't horrifying or cold-blooded. Nothing she wrote is like Paul's 'Pages from Cold Point', a father/son incest story in which the son is the predator. The kind of horror she understood seeped into ordinary events and daily obligations that had to be faced, couldn't ever be avoided, and where deception lay in wait.

Jane Bowles portrayed all societies as unforgiving and alienating. Her writing oxymoronically sustains a condition of permanent disorientation.

The short story 'Everything Is Nice' begins:

The highest street in the Blue Moslem town skirted the edge of a cliff. She walked over to the thick protecting wall and looked down. The tide was out, and the flat dirty rocks below were swarming with skinny boys. A Moslem woman came up to the blue wall and stood next to her, grazing her hip with the basket she was carrying.⁵

In this 'blue Moslem town', everything is nice and strange, for Jeanie. The Muslim woman, Zodelia, calls her a Nazarene.

'Where is your mother?' Zodelia said at length.

'My mother is in the country in her own house,' she said automatically; she had answered the question a hundred times.

'Why don't you write her a letter and tell her to come here?'⁶

To Zodelia, Jeanie's mother living so far away is weird, maybe unthinkable, certainly not nice. Later, Zodelia pointedly inquires about Jeanie's aunt: 'Where *is* she?' (The italic 'is' is Bowles's.)

Her fictional characters often track homeward. Bowles's own sense of exclusion, of being on the outside, was powerful. She wanted to belong, somewhere, and 'home' is a problem and question in most of her work.

But home or away, life was very strange, and it was also frightening. That is ever-present in Bowles' writing. She seems to say, 'This is how it goes.' Life is incomprehensible, existence is bizarre, unaccountable, mean. There may be beauty or joy, momentary as a parting glance, so her characters will hope for even momentary happiness, as does Jeanie — genie — when she rushes out into the unknown to feel it before it goes.

Two Serious Ladies's protagonists, Miss Goering and Mrs. Copperfield, leave home, bearing opposite psychologies: Ms.

5 Jane Bowles, 'Everything Is Nice', in *The Collected Works of Jane Bowles*, 313, 315, 319.

6 *Ibid.*, 318.

Goering strikes out, wanting bold adventures, while Mrs. Copperfield trails after her husband, an unwilling traveler/tourist, full of fear. At the end of this seminal, tragi-comic, picaresque novel, they both return home, something their author never did.

Jane Bowles died, in a Spanish hospital, Clinica de Reposa de Los Angeles, run by Catholic nuns, not knowing her name. She lived there—existed—for over five years. The year she died, 1973, the copyright for *Two Serious Ladies* should have been renewed: The law then was to renew copyright 28 years after the date of first copyright. But it wasn't. Jane Bowles died, and the same year her only novel, forgotten by its publisher, was sent into Public Domain.

Tennessee Williams proclaimed, 'I consider her the most important writer of prose fiction in modern American letters.'⁷ This most important writer's body of work summarily disappeared, and, ironically, sadly, absurdly, her corpse did, too. Upon her death, Paul Bowles had her body interred in a cemetery in San Miguel, Malaga, but leased the plot for only ten years, then let it lapse. The location of her grave became a mystery, and, without a renewed lease, '[b]ecause no one had claimed Jane's remains in response to official notification, her body would [have been] thrown into a common grave.'⁸ Let's say, the public domain for corpses.

Paul Bowles built his own shrine to Jane Bowles in his apartment in Tangier. He dedicated a wooden shelf to her books in all their editions and translations. (I visited his home in 1987.) Ultimately, though he had no truck with graves or an after-life, he permitted a young student, enamored of Jane Bowles, to move her body to another cemetery (the cemetery where JB had been buried might itself be buried under a highway).⁹ The young woman was rebuffed by Malaga officials, who suddenly decided Jane Bowles' grave was important to the city's cultural history.

⁷ Williams, 'Introduction', 7.

⁸ Millicent Dillon, 'Keeper of the Flame', *The New Yorker*, 27 January 1997, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1997/01/27/keeper-of-the-flame-2>.

⁹ Ibid.

Bowles' skull and bones have had a very peculiar trajectory, if I can call it that, and to say her corpse has been homeless is too cute. It's a long, complicated saga about which both Millicent Dillon and Jon Carlson have given full accounts.¹⁰ To cut to the quick, Bowles's final resting place has depended upon what Tennessee Williams called 'the kindness of strangers'.

Searching for her grave, Jon Carlson found a kindly priest, maybe saintly, called Padre Jose. He had become the keeper of Jane Bowles' flame.

Padre José said that Jane's new grave, established through the efforts of the municipality of Málaga and the Association of Friends of San Miguel Cemetery, had been unveiled mid-October, 1999. Afterwards, he added secretively, 'But in the evening she moves all over the cemetery, and I am here to watch over her.'¹¹

Mentioning her work in conversations; assigning her novel and stories to students, and writing about her, those who treasure Jane Bowles' body of work try to watch over it. Though I'm not completely pessimistic, I regularly observe the literary drift, the burials and un-earthings of writers' reputations. They come and go, 'talking of Michaelangelo', T.S. Eliot put it, and Eliot also, like Chaucer for 200 years after his death, will likely come and go. Here today, gone tomorrow.

Any writer who believes in her or his literary immortality is delusional. Writers, especially females — Clarice Lispector, for example, who is enjoying a rebirth of interest — writers whose work is mordant, elegant, even grim, their books will disappear. And maybe they'll return from the OP cemetery, rise from the dead, but only if a living person or two feels a great debt to that great writer. And, if that writer's books are reissued, smartly

¹⁰ Jon Carlson, 'The Gathering Spirit of Jane Bowles', *Rain Taxi*, 26 December 2013, <http://www.raintaxi.com/the-gathering-spirit-of-jane-bowles/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

repackaged, it will have resulted only from vigilance, devotion, and love.



Be Michael Jackson

David Rule

Be Michael Jackson. Keep singing, but shrug your shoulders and smile and be lots of different faces and then be Tyra Banks. John Landis yells: 'Cut! That was perfect! How'd you do that???'

Be molten gold. Be the dream of molten gold, all sparkles. Turn into Michael Jackson and seduce the supermodel Iman. Be sand to escape her palace guards.

Be water. Rise up in front of waterfalls and dance. Dance with the shoulders. Turn into Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes and rap about the problems of the 1990s. Rap 'believe in yourself, the rest is up to me and you.'

Stay water but be a tentacle with a face on it for James Cameron. Learn about tongues. Be the T-1000, be liquid metal again, walk through fire, be disguised as a floor.

Be Odo on Star Trek. Learn to love yourself for who you are, when you could be anything.

Be Michael Jackson in space. Be your sister wearing a sweater in space. Dance together, share the sweater. The sweater is maybe cybergoth and the music video is maybe too expensive.



These faces
so good at singing Michael Jackson
(even Tyra Banks in her own way).
Faces made for mouthwash commercials,
each around for long enough to sing
'It's black! It's white!'
before morphing into other faces
made for shampoo commercials.
Nobody saw Michael Jackson morph
into any of these faces
but it seems possible.
Like when he became molten gold
for the supermodel Iman,
sand to escape her palace guards.
And if that dream of molten gold
(all sparkles) were to survive,
it's not hard to see it in the water
rising up in front of waterfalls
and becoming Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes
to rap about the problems of the 1990s.
Or in the liquid metal
of the T-1000 becoming a floor.
Or in Odo the changeling alien on Star Trek
who learned to love himself for who he is,
when he could be anything.

In a spaceship Michael Jackson
is turning into his sister.
They dance together, share a sweater,
smash things up.



Tyra Banks sticks out her tongue and turns into different people. And that person smiles and turns into a Calvin Klein-looking model singing 'It's black! It's white!'. Nobody saw Michael Jackson turn into any of these but it seems possible. When director John Landis yells 'Cut! That was perfect! How'd you do that???' Michael Jackson doesn't answer.

Michael Jackson turns into molten gold for the supermodel Iman. It is the dream of molten gold, all sparkles. Totally seduced but wary of comedian Eddie Murphy's jealousy, the supermodel Iman sends her palace guards after Michael Jackson. Michael Jackson turns into sand.

The sand disappears but maybe the water rising up under a waterfall knows something. It turns into Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes and raps about the problems of the 1990s. The water is not the most real of waters but then we've never seen water dance. With a kind of warning delivered, Lisa 'Left Eye' Lopes turns back into water.

When the water comes back it's science fiction, 'a mimetic polyalloy.' John Conner asks 'What the hell does that mean???' and Arnold Schwarzenegger explains 'Liquid metal.' This liquid metal walks through fire and turns into a floor to hide. In lava it turns inside out.

In space Odo, an alien on Star Trek, learns to love himself for who he is. He can be anything. Each week Odo might be molten gold, dancing water, often a floor.

In a spaceship, Michael Jackson turns into his sister. They dance together, share a sweater. They smash up the most expensive music video. Maybe too expensive. You might want to stop with the excess.



Be molten gold. Be sand. Be your sister wearing a sweater in space. Even water can rise up and dance. Here, shrug your shoulders and smile and be Tyra Banks.

Judee Sill

Mairead Case

'Nothing's happened but I think it will soon.'

Judee Sill, 'Crayon Angels'

Bodies are private, performative meatshells. They hold cancers and desire, and pain and joy, and sometimes other bodies too. I realized I had one when I felt sex pleasure, at three, one of my first memories, and also when my mom's shape changed before my little sister was born. I don't know anything about your body unless you tell me. Even if you don't use words, and even though I'll give you water, food, and aspirin anyway, if you have a headache. If some bodies remain, others must not. I feed myself. I believe in ghosts.

Another thing I know is how to hear Judee Sill's voice. Ed gave me two of her albums and right now I listen to them on my way to work. Outside the windows I see mountains, sky, metal-and-wood stands selling fruit and plants. Usually I am drinking lots of coffee very quickly. Crumbling toast in my lap. Judee's voice needed her body to be. Her body isn't here anymore, but its sounds are, somehow, because I can press a button and my ears fill with them. In Judee's absence — in the absence of someone I never met — I feel more myself. I am trying to be as clear as possible here. I don't think any of this is obvious.

I listened to Judee Sill when I lived in Indiana too. I moved there for college, almost fifteen years ago, and I loved her voice because it made me understand my body differently. When I moved to Indiana I was weighted by my body, which I wasn't allowing to menstruate. I thought it must be someone else's because it felt so wrong on me. But when I listened to Judee, I didn't want to put on a binder and makebruises at a show, I wanted to sit in a church and gobble light. I felt released. She sang about crayon angels and enchanted sky machines, lambs, crowns, and cosmos — not white boys like Bikini Kill did. Judee wasn't binary at all.

The very first time I heard her though, was on a mixtape Rob made for a girl he liked. He sent me those tapes too, because they were good and it took him a long time to make them, but also in case of heartbreak. He didn't want to lose the songs. We cared for each other in this awful, tender, childish way. I write about Judee's body by writing about mine. I need my body to hear hers: my ears, the ringing they have sometimes. Some people listen to Judee and never hear ringing. Anyway the song Rob picked was 'Jesus Was a Crossmaker', which is kind of a terrible song to put on a tape for your crush. It's about a stranger, a bandit, and a heartbreaker who sings to his lover then freezes up and smokes off. Judee wrote it for J.D. Souther, a Texan who put her heart through a paper shredder. Rob's logic I guess was that he knew how Judee felt. He'd never be that guy. I want to ask Judee: do we have to fall in love with everyone? And if we do, how do we grow old? Sometimes I would like to be old with lots of lovers. I would like to have this wisdom. That body.

Judee Sill, a beautiful name for a first album by Judee Sill, came out in October 1971 and features Christian mystic lyrics, baroque pop, multiple overdubs, and piano. 'Fuck, man — she's school for all of us', Souther, who wrote songs for the Eagles, told *Rolling Stone*. I found her. I saw her. I tell the magazines.

As a writer I listened first to Judee's lyrics, though later and for the first time I loved how the multiple overdubs of her own voice — mirroring, braiding, climbing — show her growing confidence, or at least her desire to take space. To make it. If Judee could then I could too. I could listen, and stay.

Her lyrics are shimmered, spacy, image-heavy. For example, 'Crayon Angels' features God and a train, the astral plane, magic rings turning fingers green, dead mystic roses, and phony prophets. What hit me here was the idea that images — which need space to be, like bodies do — can communicate, can connect with something — the church, punk shows — even if they don't agree with all of it. If Judee could cop language from church and put it in a non-church space, then both these spaces must exist. Time must be happening. Duality. Bodies can change. Listening to Bikini Kill taught me to carry knuckle rings, taught me to believe that if I let my body be a woman then at some point I'd be attacked, like being caught in the rain. Listening to Judee Sill taught me that flux and love are real too. I still listen to all these songs.

In Indiana, on the early internet, I found a video of Judee singing her song 'The Kiss'. She sits a piano, her hair heavy and straight. Her face looks like a rodent's and her eyes look beyond. I wanted to sit on a hood in a parking lot and read our horoscopes together. Since she was dead, I researched her life.

Judith Lynn Sill was born in October in Oakland, 1944. Her dad, Milford 'Bun' Sill, owned a farm and imported exotic animals to act in movies. Both he and Judee's brother died in dramatic accidents before she was ten. Her mother, Oneta, remarried, a man who helped animate *Tom and Jerry*. Judee learned to play piano when she was still a kid, and when she was seventeen she married for just a year, to Larry who died taking the Kern River in a rubber raft while he was stoned. Around this time, Judee started robbing banks. The first time she was so nervous she said 'This is a fuckup, mothersticker!' She never hurt anyone with a

gun or fists but was caught pretty quickly, and hired a lawyer using her inheritance from her father's death. The lawyer won her extenuating circumstances, so Judee went to reform school instead of jail, where she learned to play religious music and the organ. 'I began to suspect that certain songs evoked certain emotions', she told *Disc and Music Echo*. I felt her. Certain songs I never danced to, ever.

Once free, Judee found work in a saloon, playing the piano. When they found out her age they fired her, and then she took up bass. She married again and her husband, Bob, took heroin so Judee took heroin too. She stopped playing bass, almost died, was caught and arrested again and once she was freed, Judee decided to use 'all the hungry monsters' and become a great songwriter. This to me is the mark of a new life. A new light on an old body. She told *NME* her three main influences were Pythagoras, Bach, and Ray Charles. She always wanted to harmonize with someone but couldn't find anyone, so she decided to do it with the piano instead. With her own voice. From her own body. 'If I could talk about religion', said Judee, 'I wouldn't need to write songs about it'. This was new too: aiming for harmony. I knew *Rip It Up and Start Again*, I knew Chicks on Speed singing about girl monsters, Hedwig Schmidt's surgery, and Wynne Greenwood inventing Nikki and Cola. I hadn't thought about refusing to cut. (Later I read Susan Stryker on Frankenstein and saw Hans Scheirl's *Dandy Dust* and thought again about cutting, but anyway).

Another important part of this story, as I read more and more about Judee, was realizing my life wasn't hers. Our bodies were different. I was trying, am still trying, to figure out mine and mine is not hers. She figured hers out as best she could. Judee wanted to be famous and she talked about being famous in a way that would have been fine if she was a man. But she wasn't, so the newspapers said she was selfish.

Judee Sill was the first album on David Geffen's Asylum label, just before debuts from Jackson Browne and the Eagles. Their successes soon dwarfed hers, financially speaking, but even so she had the cover of *Rolling Stone*, though by then she was talking shit about Geffen. She was falling out of love with Souther. Or maybe she never fell out of love with him. I don't know. 'When I first met Geffen I thought he was some kind of knight in shining armor, you know', Judee said. 'But I didn't understand the other things, the things that made him such a ruthless businessman'. Love and money and bodies. When Asylum released *Heart Food* in 1973, it flopped too.

After that Judee went back and forth from Los Angeles to Mill Valley, she had a car accident and started using heroin again, for the pain, and selling sex to pay for it. A man she picked up at a restaurant on Melrose said they went back to Judee's place and there was a mural-sized portrait of Bela Lugosi, a gigantic ebony cross, and candles everywhere. He says he didn't realize how high she was, right away, but of course they still fucked. Of course he still listened to her read him Aleister Crowley and mystic manuscripts. Here too are bodies, and bright pain at the center. I don't know what happened because I wasn't there. I listen to Bikini Kill and think I know.

Soon this guy said Judee turned into a 'serpentine cadaver', a 'huge gray reptile' curling up on the comforter, and he left her. Which was weak, as Judee wasn't, isn't Medusa. They were just really high. This makes the body shimmer like a song can. When I first heard this story I didn't know to wonder if Judee got off too.

Judee Sill died in a trailer park when she was thirty-five. The night I read that I was alone in my apartment, which had ghosts and a pink-tile bathroom. Maybe it still does. I like trailer parks because people I love live in them. I took *Judee Sill* and hooked it up to my cheap drugstore speakers, which glitter, and I lay on the floor, one speaker face down on my chest. It was half a ritual, but I listened until I fell asleep. Then I woke up and made coffee,

and I drank it and I laced up my shoes and left the apartment for work. My life felt a different bright. Like I was living, walking through space after something happened.