Epiphany as a moment, as a lifetime, as an individual, as a collective, as ache, as ecstasy, as clarity, as abstraction

This first print edition of Abstract features emerging and established contemporary black and brown writers and artists, each engaging with their own epiphanic experiences, exploring how we choose to communicate them, obscure them, consume them, and/or safeguard them for future generations.

Epiphany is a mutable occurrence; its meaning evolves with its audience. This publication functions similarly, asking its readers to engage with it: there’s plenty of room to annotate, edit, add to, redact, draw, rewrite, or amend its pages. Or dissolve it in your bathtub. Or set it on fire. We’re not sure if epiphanies are things that a person can possess, but if they are, they’re partly yours now.

Epiphany is a creature of the deep past and the far future. It doesn’t sit idle for long.

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THE APPEARANCE OF EPIPHANY

Karen Pope

If I am being asked to describe the what and how of “epiphany” as it appears through my lens, then I will first speak of it as being more of a transcendental experience as opposed to a singular intellectual jolt which connects past thoughts and actions with present thoughts and actions, as well as moving a person forward in their thinking. I posit that to have an epiphany has more to do with taking an opportunity to step outside of one’s self-view and then, at that moment, and in succeeding moments, move into (or possibility) of claiming all parts of self (conscious and subconscious). Epiphany then transforms into a process of transmuting negativity and/or trauma… disrupting repetitive cycles of old thought forms and facilitating re-connection to pathways that lead vibrationally inward and upward, paralleling that which is eluded to by Adepts. That shift in consciousness now elevates the experiencer from an entangled victim of circumstances… to a witness with profound clarity of circumstances. So, with that said, epiphany viewed through my lens is very dynamic and ever-evolving… and is the experience. The power yielded from the body-mind connection of saying, “Yes”… believing “Yes”, and then doing “Yes”. Those affirmations or meditations are the tools that help to usher in multileveled manifestations of healing and/or revelation that reverberates throughout the body… undoubtedly having one be present in the moment of higher consciousness or illumination.

So, is epiphany evidenced within my artistic practice as a poet? I will venture to say that epiphany is a prominent thread that not only weaves its way throughout my artistic practice as a poet and as an installation artist, but it also weaves its way throughout my lived experiences as a WOC living with a disability. The appearance of epiphany situates me as a witness with profound clarity as opposed to being an entangled victim of circumstances. And as I testify as witness, my focus is on using all of my senses (subtle and overt) to "tell it… to tell my truth"… all the while constantly searching for language that will best give inflection to my lived experiences that are often nuanced. I offer up that my intent…my focus is honed and polished by epiphany.

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Now as I give further thoughts pertaining to epiphany, I would like to pay homage to my twin brother and installation collaborator… Carl Pope. Carl is undoubtedly a formidable artist in his own right and were it not for his curiosity and presence of mind, after noticing a stack of my writings that had gathered dust underneath a dresser, I would have remained unaware of the power of my honesty reflected back to me… by those experiencing moments of their own epiphanies – as they hear and/or read my poetry. Nor would I have come to actualize the deeper “Yin and Yang” dynamic of us as expressed through installation collaborations… and as souls on the Path. I am forever indebted to him for shattering my perception of conventions surrounding who is and who ain’t… worthy to be called an artist.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge a cherished and respected friend who has dedicated her life to educating and guiding students from all walks of life with taking full advantage of the opportunities that will help them accomplish their personal and life dreams; Professor and Master Mentor Anisia B. Quiñones, M.A., Ed.D. To say the least, Anizia pulls me forward with her unabashed clarity that wholly honors and humbles me… ever illuminating the appearance of epiphany as impetus for self-awareness – Evolution.

“Things I never told you before, all your poems made me cry. You touch my heart and have helped me develop my emotional intelligence. Through you, I found who I am now.” – Anizia B. Quiñones, M.A., Ed.D.
A Bowden, For Thumper

KLEANIER

IT'S HIGH NOON FIGHT WAR ON ALL FRONTS

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Affirmations
For Displacement

It's fun

END Y R INSECT PROBLEMS

Accidental like
Sings were accidental like

A Bowden, For Gnat
Sometimes I feel like longing, the expanse between myself and a locus of belonging, has imprinted itself onto my cells, obscuring my sense of presence.
I had an epiphany today
I don't want to wake up tomorrow and that's okay
The sadness will never end
There is so much more to life than just sadness
Life is about reading a book of poems
Laughing at your favorite comedy
Dancing in public like no one is watching
Writing a list of all the things you want to read
Reading it out loud
Burning the page and making it happen
Life is about the butterfly that dances between dancers
Landing on hats and heads
Posing for the cameras and enjoying a life outside of a cocoon
A cocoon is meant to protect you as you grow
Never protect yourself to the point that you forget to grow
Get out
Stand out
Grow
Life is the music
The story
The dance
The rhythm
The beat
The smoke
The fire
The water
The void
Life is death
Birth
Sadness
Empinity
Life is not without meaning
I had an epiphany today
The sadness will never end
We are not defined by our sadness.
My client at the legal clinic in Tijuana set a photograph of her dead husband on the foldout table. She then balanced her five-month-old baby on her hip with one arm, and with the other leafed through dog-eared papers in her crumpled accordion folder.

I assured her of the photo’s importance. ‘Well go over how you can access scanned files in the cloud afterwards,’ then I paused to give Frida, my translator for the afternoon, a chance to enter the conversation. Some dry skin itched on my neck.

Frida didn’t make a sound. I looked at her. Her heavy, dark ringlets spiraled down her shoulders like veins in marble. She had thick-rimmed glasses and brimming tears.

I was accustomed to courtroom translators who spoke simultaneously with the client or with frequent pauses to repeat in English what was said verbatim. Frida was a volunteer. I asked her to translate all of what I had said.

Frida swiveled in her seat to face my direction. But she stared through me with no light in her eyes. I realized that I had to bring back Frida.

‘Lo siento,’ I said to the client and interrupted myself to rack my brain for any Spanish verb. This was how I had taught me to be polite with a diminutive, but this word, any word. "Necesito un momentito.” My father had taught me to be polite with a diminutive, but this word, any word. “Necesito un momentito.” My father had taught me to be polite with a diminutive, but this word, any word.

Clayton Hamilton, Ultimate Subversive Authority

GENTRIFICATION SHOULD NOT EQUAL DISPLACEMENT PROFITEERING

ULTIMATE SUBVERSIVE AUTHORITY

FEDERAL RESERVE/MULTINATIONAL MILITARY/INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

BACKWARDS TO THE FUTURE
When you live in small spaces, small space things happen to you. You see the same people, walk the same roads, cross paths too many times with too many of the same ex everything and all while you long for space. Often you cannot expand the outside for whatever reason you cannot make the outside bigger often the circle feels as if it’s closing the air is becoming tighter the people you wish to escape grow closer and you are stuck. To me that the point were you learn to breathe not gasp but breathe. You open up the inside and take a deep breath from the root of yourself. The place where all the feelings sit, the place where you just knew something was off about that person, the place where you trust when it’s no you trust around to confirm the truth that to breathe is to expand space and time to breathe is to have the power to slow or speed up time from the inside of the universe to breathe is to realize you have the ever expanding universe inside you and all you have to do is breathe from the root of all matter and life itself. You just breathing surrounds The outside, the small spaces, the small chaos, the small world you feel apart of and puts it back in its place. From the root you find breath you find depth you find an expanding universe you find you and small space don’t even feel the same.

Black the condition of being hidden away until closer examination
Black the condition of being hidden away until optional view is perceived and that which was hidden is hidden no longer
Was I there before you seen me
Was my beauty
Was my pain
Was my shine
Was I before you
Blackness the condition of being feared until you see which is black is Nothing to be feared at all
Blackness the condition of being feared until white fragmented light shines causing you to see that which you feared may lived in the dark
Was the light too bright for you to see the evil that brewed in front of you
Was the darkness too dark for you not to see the shadows that the light only highlight
Was I too dark is that why you feared my blackness
Blackness the condition of being so unlovable you’re convinced it’s only in your mind
Blackness the condition of being so beautiful you’re convinced you are something that should be hidden
Blackness the condition of being so feared you’re convinced you are the problem no matter your state of peace
Blackness the condition of being hated outside/inside all spaces on earth
Blackness the condition of being so metaphysically bound to glory you have to be ripped from the sky
THE DESTRUCTION OF INDIANA AVENUE: A REMINDER ABOUT THE PERILS OF LAND REDEVELOPMENT AND THE HISTORICAL AMNESIA THAT GOES WITH IT

I'm a third generation Indianapolis native, and I didn't know anything about Indiana Avenue — until about four years ago.

Black people in Indianapolis had their own thriving business and cultural hub on Indiana Avenue. According to Emma Lou Thornbrough’s "Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century," Indiana Ave had everything a person could need. "In 1916, there were 33 restaurants, 33 saloons (including taverns and clubs), 25 grocery stores (including meat and poultry shops), 17 barbershops and hair stylists, 14 tailors and clothing retailers, 14 cobbler’s, 13 dry goods stores, plus drugstores, pawnbrokers, pool halls, funeral parlors, and offices for lawyers, physicians, dentists, and real estate agents.”

Today, the only remnants of this historic black area are the Madame Walker building, a historical house, and a single plaque. Between the Housing Act of 1949 and the controversial “Slum Clearing” of the 1950s that followed, plus the growth of IUPUI, and the building of Interstate 65, very little of the Avenue's rich history stands today. Most of it has been bulldozed, repaved, and shiny new office buildings and market rate apartments stand in its place.

What ever happened to all the people? I asked some Elders at my church, but no one really remembers. It’s like they've all blocked it out, or maybe the memories were lost with time. From what I could gather, most of the people moved out of the area during the ’70s and ’80s to the Northwest and Northeast sides of town. Others stayed in the area, but they’ve long since passed, and it seems their stories and memories lost for eternity.
At 2am
Laying in the bed
my lover digs up my past
With a fist full of dirt
Lover points and ask
"What are these marks?"
We both know what it is
But can’t name it
The slicing one brings
Upon oneself.
Breaking the sky
Of skin with the shine of knives
My skin has been many mornings
Old lovers would claim that
These marks are roads that lead nowhere.
They would say I’ll never talk.
My mouth is stitched.
"Is this what I think it is?"
We still can’t name it.
The slicing one brings upon oneself
My skin is the sky and has been broken by a shine.
I don’t say this.
Lover fidgets and waits for confirmation.
My skin and I have been many mornings.
It is silent.
"You know I love you right?"
Lover breaks the silence
And on Lover’s chest I lay.

At the bottom of a glass of Jose Cuervo is the burning bush
i am Moses
My tongue a fish
My mouth a bowl

It breaks open and out cries an aching laugh
By shot 2 watch my body branch into a church
Into a celebration
Sweat sits on my chest.
By shot 2, my feet know the middle of streets
Are holy ground so i dance on yellow lines
My knees bent / My feet step / my gap out
Like this is the first time i have ever arrived
Like
Like its 1992
Afro-beat bang in the street on Mass ave.
And i dance
My homegirl chants AYE with her phone on me:
Black body in the middle of the street that is warm and moving
My locs sway on my face
i can feel my laugh-- like a choir hum of bees swell from my chest
i sing and out comes the smoke
i swallowed the fire
Let it be known that on this day,
I remember I have been reborn at least three times by now

This was the third
As the car lights orbit this body of a planet--
Because is it not otherworldly to watch a black girl like this?
Watch her beam
Watch her bend into an eclipse
Drivers thought the moon sunk into itself
It did.
Along with everything else that was consumed
by the riot
in my dance
in my joy
in my hands
I ask
--Is this not a riot?
Justin Brown, Cubist Indianapolis

In 1784 I was 18; in 1830 I was 51.
MOTHERSHIP

Ari Attack

It's interesting to realize how not okay I am with claiming my own space. With my body literally expanding, I can do this when it comes to art, or community building. But just me? A friend said, in response to a comment about not being able to tell that my body is showing this alien gift, 'we can only tell you're pregnant because we know you. You're definitely showing.' My breasts are protruding more than ever before, and are sore as hell. I've sucked my stomach in since puberty to give the illusion of a smaller midsection. My great-grandmother said women are supposed to do such a thing. I can't touch this belly in, or it protrudes more and more. I can hardly tell if it's food or the baby, so I usually say it's a bit of both. Sometimes, I wish I would've lost more weight before getting pregnant — even though nothing was going to fit after some time. Hearing sayings like, 'your body was made for this,' sends my mind into a spiral of perplexing thoughts. So far, my body has been meant for enduring trauma (personal and generational), and surviving. Not only surviving, but succeeding. Working nonstop, and achieving. Proving the world wrong about these brown limbs and bright spirit that shines brighter than any lighthouse, and pushing my family's story further. Creating history. Growing a baby seems so different. I'm almost halfway finished with growing the seed, but then I wonder what the next thirty-plus years of being a mother will be like? Time is everything, but how was anyone supposed to time this. Sexually careless (or maybe carefree), but that bright spirit light is now shining through my uterus and forming arms and legs. This week, the baby is as big as a mango — or a toy in a claw machine.

The way people interact with my growing body is hilarious at times. Incredible in many ways, uncomfortable in so many others. It's dawned on me that I'm not my body — but in the same breath, I am. Many friends and other folk that bear children make this process seem effortless. I'm honored to have them as references, auntsies and people whose shoulders I can weep on whenever I need it. I also think about the men in my life. From the supportive familial ones, to the estranged former lovers. Many who I've continued friendships with seem different, or have estranged themselves from me since learning that I'm bearing a child. What makes me so different? My body wasn't mine when I was with them, and it still doesn't seem like it is now. Why does the disregarding male gaze confuse me so much at this point? These aren't relationships I'm looking to water, but it's interesting to watch the unwinding my finally wilts. Disregarding me like conquered land, which was once an island for them to vacation on.

My body isn't mine anymore, it feels as if I'm a guest on this land at times. I just regained the hang of this growing a baby thing — for it to change again — week to week. Feeding this little sapling from the nutrients that come from my body. It's hard for me to even keep up with. I'm scared. Scared of breastfeeding, scared of raw nipples, being raw and gnawed till beyond sensitive. Will I be able to do it? This is the scariest journey I've ever been on. Choices. I've been rethinking everything when it comes to sitting in this pregnant body. Everything is playing itself out and I'm not sure I have a say in the matter. I chose to grow a baby. A new path. The seed chose me, and I couldn't deny the soil or the chance to nurture this new journey. My body is taking up space in many different ways. It's a space I have to protect and be accountable to — more so than I ever have in life. I am not my body and at the same time — I am. Responsibility I never considered realistically. Prenatal appointments, epidurals, baby shower dates, giving and giving when I barely have any energy to give myself anything but a nap (when I can.) Was I ready for this? Belly expansion, barely have any energy to give myself anything but an epidural, baby shower dates, giving and giving when I never considered realistically. Prenatal appointments, not my body, and at the same time — I am. Responsibility accountable to — more so than I ever have in life. I am different ways. It's a space I have to protect and be responsible for enduring trauma (personal and generational), and perplexing thoughts. So far, my body has been meant for this, sends my mind into a spiral of spiraling.

The universe works in mysterious ways. Re-thinking everything, and forgetting it all at the same time. Forgetting meditations, mantras like ‘my body is a sanctuary,’ but more feeling like I’m running crazy, spiraling. But just me? A friend said, in response to a comment about not being able to tell that my body is showing this alien gift, ‘we can only tell you’re pregnant because we know you. You’re definitely showing.’ My breasts are protruding more than ever before, and are sore as hell. I’ve sucked my stomach in since puberty to give the illusion of a smaller midsection. My great-grandmother said women are supposed to do such a thing. I can’t touch this belly in, or it protrudes more and more. I can hardly tell if it’s food or the baby, so I usually say it’s a bit of both. Sometimes, I wish I would’ve lost more weight before getting pregnant — even though nothing was going to fit after some time. Hearing sayings like, ‘your body was made for this,’ sends my mind into a spiral of perplexing thoughts. So far, my body has been meant for enduring trauma (personal and generational), and surviving. Not only surviving, but succeeding. Working nonstop, and achieving. Proving the world wrong about these brown limbs and bright spirit that shines brighter than any lighthouse, and pushing my family’s story further. Creating history. Growing a baby seems so different. I’m almost halfway finished with growing the seed, but then I wonder what the next thirty-plus years of being a mother will be like? Time is everything, but how was anyone supposed to time this. Sexually careless (or maybe carefree), but that bright spirit light is now shining through my uterus and forming arms and legs. This week, the baby is as big as a mango — or a toy in a claw machine.

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WHAT'S BROKE

Too Black

What's Broke?
Broke is when I can't afford the either/or
Broke is when I elect myself to take a hard vote
"Soooo am I going to pay the energy bill or the car note?"
Broke is when the idea of paying both bills never enters the barricades of my mind
Because ummm... clearly both is not an option
It's simple, I either keep my heat on or I drive
Broke is when I unanimously vote to drive
Because in my city the public transportation stays on delay longer than freedom and procrastination
We're overly dependent on car-go
So being late to my third job one more time is a hard no
Plus, my boss is a flaccid dick and I'm completely out of ass to kiss
If it wasn't for the weight of parole I'd probably quit
With this bankrupt management
All the hours I sweat don't appear on my paychecks
My pay stub got stuck up by bereft of wage theft
My only success is I haven't given my boss a fade yet
Broke is when I alarm my people that I'm getting robbed
Yet, all they have to say is "I mean at least you gotta' job."
Well, praise white Jesus the God of my ungainful employment
What's Broke?
Broke is when people hate your broke ass for experiencing enjoyment
Ronald Reagan was basically quoted saying 'welfare queens' don't deserve nice things
So sister, please don't post or boast about a joyful moment
Because it's only proper
You grind every second that your heart pumps and your breath offers
Well, that's until your mountain high blood pressure wrecks ya'
And you collapse from a heart attack
Broke is when it's not so simple when people say "why don't you just go to the hospital?"
Well, because I can't afford to heal from an emergency bill
So what do y'all suggest?
Broke is when being broke is the cause of death
What's Broke?
Broke is torture
Broke is when you can't afford to keep the child or abort them
Broke is a desperate mother selling orphans to pimps, rich white benefactors, and human traffickers
Broke is the black child mortality rate per capita
Broke is when your mother don't have enough food for the both of you
What's love?
Love is when there's no debate who's she gonna' choose

What's Broke?
Broke is when rules for the hunger games change
When the city used to say my hood is too poor for a grocery store
Now I can't afford a hot sip
down the block
at the new coffee shop
Broke is when I watch my childhood get bulldozed into a new parking lot
Broke is shivering knees bending to ethnic cleansing
Broke is when I can't afford to buy a politician to fix it but I'm still resisting
Because I know what's at stake
What's Broke?
Broke is an international earthquake with massive magnitudes
Broke is when I'm forced to sneak across the fault line of the border
Because US foreign policy destroyed the shit hole y'all told me to go back to
What's Broke?
Broke is when white folks were like, "Hey we don't have a budget."
"So let's just enslave these muthafuckers."
See broke is as American as apple pie
The apple pie y'all used to send my kind to the backside of the store to buy
Broke is when Latin and African American are the supply and the demand
But broke isn't the roots it's the weeds
Broke is a symptom of capitalist greed
Broke is when your government is founded and financed by thieves
A reality that hits like an eviction notice
Now ask yourself, do you know really know what broke is?
Maybe when we talk @ the end of this divided date, we won’t mention the shooting @ the synagogue in CA, six months to the day after the shooting @ the synagogue in PA. We’ll just chat about our children, & movies, & our life of love ahead. This one you’ve spent threading prayer beads, this one you’ve wrapped in the blessing of emerald, cat’s eye—heart chakra—& shouldn’t that be enough? One dusk when our voice never turns to blood?

Push it away—at least for the night. Won’t death still be death in the morning? Let the sun bleat its hot brass second line, let the black birds be jealous. Let the grass weep for joy.

A bead, a bead, a bead. Bless your hands, the orb of every soul.