

The Pressure to Deform

by [Sheila Murphy](#) (January 2025)



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Monkey-see, C-suite monkey
see-saws from one wrong answer
to another fresh from the table

of random numbness scrambling
to the front a font of split-
second gesture toward life-
changing circumstance, not to be
confused with romance, near weeds
of dubious breed all skittery with birth self-
replicating in the surf-waft blemishing
the house paint splurged against the building
by the chemistry teacher on summer break
missing his beakers, flasks, Bunsen burners,
and pipettes. Notoriety needs an audience
reported as weight rather than by number,
“a ton of people.” The inhabitants of the home
have not much in common except the skin
of the house now being touched up to last for years
of seasons, the oncoming fall with masses
of mood leaves destined to stain the white
now viewable in the momentary sun made rich
for the waking hours as far from Waikiki
as a gaggle of defragged bits disguised as one
big happy fam slammed into a frame.

I Need to Be Far from You to Still Love You in that Split Infinitive Spray of Muscular Language

Why don't you join a monastery
and embrace the vow of silence,
I say to myself shelving mainstream
culture's raw culture like kefir, a constant
cloud just loud enough to interrupt
the flow of loss indigenous to worldly floss
see-through far from the sea of seedlings
with invisible names.

I tame myself by way of staves
containing the containment of unasked for
tones wracked with requisite intonation
to discard on cue. I loom to myself
I hum soon enough for the daily rooster
whose caw smarts pre-dawn across
the strangely zoned lawns and stables and barns.

If there is a hell my father never believed in,
how is it that preaching stretches always toward
over-reach like a furnace pumped with coal,
to spoil the home of all of us a ruckus constantly
trained to char the brain. How does my brain
leech from my heart and nothing within
the sense of hearing jar the otherwise polished
windows with a quake we only believe we hear
there is a tuning fork, unblemishing every caring
year we have lodged before us as if
what light flight scents upon the even oven line
of aloneness as meditation teaches one to cry
silently and preferably not at all?

I press my temples and bask in the asking price
for health and homing, if you can imagine
sorghum-free savory spree of wounded words
approaching perfect affection disguised as solitude.

Odd Couplets

From the rafters, something expected. What license
You showed although recall I never asked.

I never asked for your perspiration or your chops.
Living in proximity meant half dying.

The strain of impending depth perception hurt.
I blurted out nothing except on paper.

Paper mirages filled the soon full house.
Did I say home; I intended house.

You have housed my indignation at least once.
Now I spar with ghosts living and gone.

Or you might proclaim my mind hell and gone.
It's time to set the record sugar-cured.

A third of life, already sweet with sleep.
From the rafters the unexpected upkeep.

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Sheila E. Murphy is an American text and visual poet who has been writing and publishing since 1978. She is the recipient of the Gertrude Stein Award for her book *Letters to Unfinished J.* (Green Integer Press, 2003). She was awarded the Hay(na)ku Poetry Book Prize from Meritage Press (U.S.A.) and xPress(ed) (Finland) in 2017 for her book *Reporting Live from You Know Where*, 2018. She currently lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

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