

CRUCIAL SILENCE

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Preface

James Baldwin tells the story of being arrested in Paris for allegedly stealing a single hotel bedsheet. After spending several weeks and Christmas Day in a cold prison cell, Baldwin was brought to trial. As he was acquitted for the petty crime which he did not commit, he heard “great merriment in the courtroom.” Baldwin said, “I was chilled by their merriment even though it was meant to warm me. It could only remind me of the laughter I had often heard at home, laughter which I had sometimes deliberately elicited. This laughter is the laughter of those who consider themselves to be at a safe remove from all the wretched, for whom the pain of living is not real...it was borne in on me that this laughter is universal and never can be stilled” (Baldwin, 161).

These essays seek to hear and resolve what produces the fake laughter Baldwin describes. This laughter echoes in American society as well as through much of the American literary canon. Jess Row, in his book, *White Flights: Race, Fiction and the American Imagination* asks, “What would it mean to accept that America’s great and possibly catastrophic failure is its failure to imagine what it means to live together?”

Row, a key influence in this thesis, focuses on deconstructing and reckon with white identity in his essays and in his novel, *Your Face in Mine*. The novel follows the life of the main character, Martin, a white man, who undergoes racial reassignment surgery. The novel is satirical and critical of privilege and artistic blindness. Row doesn’t assume his race and his body do not matter in the art that he creates. In his 2019 collection of essays, *White Flights*, Row proposes a new way of writing called “reparative writing” (12). Row does so, “semiseriously, because it can’t exist until it exists in a community, as a process of dialogue and exchange; and it can’t

exist initiated by me alone (or, necessarily, me at all)” (13). That point should be emphasized, the reparative community is incredibly small or as Row notes, essentially non-existent.

Row assumes reparative writing would have tangible implications such as literary activism and resource redistribution. Row also argues that reparative writing means the white writers consider that racism is her “proximate cause of disorder and distress” (14).

Row acknowledges the “reparative work the white subject can undertake in response to racism is...poorly understood and understudied” and that “white American writers are almost never asked to bring their own sadness or their own bodies into play when writing about race or racism; their dreams, their sources of shame, their most nightmarish or unacceptable or crippling fantasies, or their feelings of sadness, paralysis, isolation, or alienation” (15).

Toni Morrison described the issue through a conversation on binaries. She wrote about colonial American’s insistence on defining personal freedom on the backdrop of slavery. To be a free and independent American required an alternate category of enslavement for the idea of freedom to become altogether real (34).

Morrison showed that this dichotomy persists in the white writer’s mind and art in her work, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the Literary Imagination*. In her review of American literature Morrison argues that there are endless tendencies for “Americans [to] choose to talk about themselves through and within a sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical, but always choked representation of an Africanist presence” (17). Morrison argues that the consciousness of the white writer uses the enslaved other to free oneself and give the mind license to move freely in the white writer’s “playground of the imagination” (38).

Morrison concludes that “images of blackness can be evil and protective, rebellious, and forgiving, fearful, and desirable- all the self-contradictory features of the self. Whiteness alone,

is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless, implacable” (59).

There seems to be two literatures in the United States. The racialized authored by people of color and the largely deracinated literature authored by white writers. It isn't that race isn't on the minds of white writers, but the topic is avoided. For starters, if a white writer digs into the issue with any depth or genuine curiosity she will soon be met with difficult feelings or to use Toni Morrison's phrase, one's own mute meaninglessness. It is a feeling of shame one would want to escape.

Or it is the question of, “What if anything could a white American possible add to the conversation on race in America?”

There is nothing to *add* per say other than sorrow, a reparative stance, and actual reparations. The conversation white people must have, in our lives and in our art, is a conversation with ourselves and one another about how to repair ourselves, reallocate resource, and learn to live together.

W.E.B. DuBois asked, “What on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it?” (228). Taken to the bone, there is little to the identity other than a posture. DuBois described this way of being when he wrote, “I am given to understand that whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever. Amen.” (228). In these essays I am trying to explore consider the cost and alternatives to white identity. In my essay, *Lunar Phases*, I write, “White writers have a history of escaping to nature as I have attempted to do in this essay. In the frontier we imagine ourselves to commune with nature or the stars or the moon. In this gaze we become raceless. But if we listen, even to nature, we hear the call to return to our natural rhythms. White women like

myself, in ongoing relegation to housework, forced birth, and lack of protection when become mothers, will recognize the ways that we are out of step” (31).

Michal Chabon called the dichotomous or categorical as an “apartheid of consciousness.” This split is within the white writer’s expression. It could be described as an artistic mental illness to continue to create art out of such an intense and pervasive dissociation.

In Toni Morrison’s review of the white literary cannon, she sites *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*, as one attempt that failed not because of Cather’s limited gifts but on account her limited vision in the narrative subject matter, namely the writer herself. Morrison writes that Cather was trying to address a buried subject which is “the interdependent working of power, race and sexuality in a white woman’s battle for coherence” (20). Morrison noted the flaws in Cather’s attempts and concludes that Cather deserves credit for “undertaking the journey” (28).

Coherence is a goal of these essays while I am aware that it is a process and not a destination that will be achieved here or in a lifetime. Reconciliation itself is a process that must be returned to again and again and not something that can be achieved. Coherence, even in the realm of the imagination, requires that the writer understands where she is from in terms of her gender, race, time, and place.

In my essay *Electric Feel* I give witness ongoing white flight, now from one suburb to the next. It is spoken of in veiled language under the guise of a need for safety. I write of the neighbor worried that “anyone could come over that fence” (132). Jess Row writes that. “a house is not just a house: it’s an act of psychic positioning, a feedback loop, in which visual surroundings condition the owner’s inner landscape, and vis versa” (114).

To gain coherence would be to bring awareness to this inner landscape of whiteness that desires to be deracinated or color blind and yet still seeks to be surrounded with reflections of

oneself, of whiteness. Last week, a *non-racist* woman told me, following her vacation, “It’s hard to say why Montana was so relaxing for me, but everyone there was white. I think that was it, there was a calmness to it.” Jess Row called this brand of white flight an “aestheticization of social reality” and “a posture of avoidance or evasion: the desire not to have one’s visual field constantly invaded by inconveniently different faces and relationships that are fraught, unfixed, capable of producing equal measures of helplessness and guilt” (117).

Perhaps in Montana the woman was unburdened of her subconscious guilt- the environment catered to her peace of mind. I am arguing in this thesis that a prerequisite to coherence as a white American requires one to become racialized.

I argue that we can find one example of reparative fiction in Barbara Kingsolver’s, *The Poisonwood Bible*. The Price family is a religious family headed by the evangelical Baptist father, Nathan Price. The family sets off to the Congo to redeem the ‘lost peoples’ of Africa and convert them to Christianity. The narrative follows each daughter’s perilous journey through the Congo and her evolving relationship to the land, the people of the Congo, and their father. The daughters evolve, the mother disintegrates emotionally, while Nathan Price remains rigid in his belief that he can save the Africans even as his youngest daughter dies from a snake bite, his crops and farming methods fail, and the people of Congo proceed on with their way of life, their farming own practices and spiritual traditions.

The cost of Nathan Price’s shortsightedness is everything. He loses his family, his youngest daughter dies, and he comes undone mentally and lives out the rest of his life meandering the Congo alone. In this way, the novel does what Morrison claims fiction written by white writers should do, “to advert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject;

from the described and imagined to the describers and the imaginers; from the serving to the served” (90).

Towards the novel’s end, the elder daughter who remained in Africa and married a local man from the Congo concludes: “If I could reach backward somehow to give Father just one gift, it would be the simple human relief of knowing you’ve done wrong and living through it. Poor Father, who was just one of a million men who never did catch on. He stamped me with a belief in justice, then drenched me in culpability, and I wouldn’t wish such torment even on a mosquito. But that exacting, tyrannical God of his has left me for good...The sins of my fathers are not insignificant. But we keep moving on. As Mother used to say, not a thing stands still but sticks in the mud...I look at my four boys, who are the colors of silt, loam, dust and clay, an infinite palette for children of their own, and I understand that time erases whiteness altogether” (526).

Part of reparative writing must come from a reckoning that whiteness itself belongs to a category of people who have given up attachments to their violent histories, and often to their lineage (Irish, Italian, Croatian) to assume an identity that is based upon conformist ideals and so often assumes false superiority. If this uniting principle were removed, whiteness itself would be erased, reparative writing might offer a new language for what could take its place.

It is also true that if the divided consciousness that creates racist structures within the mind were abolished, most other seemingly unrelated neurosis might find their cure. One might learn to move through the world as Ta-Nehisi Coates implores, “to respect every human as being singular” (69). Coates writes in his letter to his son that, “There is no them without you, and without the right to break you they must necessarily fall from the mountain, lose their divinity, and tumble out of the Dream. And then they would have to determine how to build their suburbs

on something other than human bones, how to angle their jails toward something other than a human stockyard, how to erect a democracy independent of cannibalism” (105).

To live and write differently would mean living in a different world, it would mean falling out of that dream. This new world is constituted of different subjective realities that exist in different relationships to time. Human history and interaction might lose its linear structure and appear more as a kaleidoscope. Everyone would have to come home to their experiences, to the present moment, a moment in which we might reconcile our ideals of freedom to the actual conditions. There we might be reduced to what really matters, which is our own level of curiosity, empathy, and kindness in each of our interactions with one another and how that might be reflected in our art.

Reparative writing is created out this place albeit an idealized plane that doesn't exist. However, fiction at its best might be just that, hopeful, reparative, and truly creative of new realities. Of course, this doesn't mean harsher truths are to be sidestepped. Reparative writing would have to include difficult feelings of shame, guilt, and regret. These feelings have their place in this work. Row notes that reparative writing means the white writer does so “without a break down, or meltdown, confession of sins, and seeking of absolution- that is to make *my* feelings a catastrophe that has to be dealt with” (32).

This is a key limitation of my work thus far. While I am well acquainted with the feelings of shame and guilt, I have yet to provide an appropriate language for it and I believe this is a key opportunity for myself and white artists moving forward. I explore this lack in the essay, *There You Are*, in which I experience expression of shame and sorrow in Germany and fail to find any similar expressions in the United States. I write, “In Germany, a sense of shame was allowed, if not welcomed. The citizens there were ashamed of their history, ashamed of the genocide, and

ashamed of the hatred that lived in the hearts of the ancestors. They spoke about the shame, and they made it into public display in Nuremburg and at the concentration camps. In the United States, the shame isn't expressed. The confederate flag can blow widely and freely over citizens. Plantations, riddled with violent histories, can be toured freely while one is on vacation, one can even book a wedding that will provide the *charms of southern history*" (47).

All these essays draw on experience. Jeffrey Swartz wrote, "In quantum theory experience is the essential reality, and matter is viewed as a representation of the primary reality, which is experience" (278). In that way, experience is speaking, and experience cannot lie. The conclusions of these essays were drawn because of experience. Here I share a few experiences, how those experiences led to these essays.

In my years in Iowa City, I was drawn to a photo titled, *Invocation*, by Adam Fuss at the university museum. It depicts a baby's silhouette that is suspended in water. Perhaps in this invocation, or summoning of a deity, the baby is being baptized. The background is warm and bright like the sun, the baby appears a shadow, floating in the water. The baby's head and arm look as if they are trying to reach for something. I saw in that reach, my own reach, my own searching. The museum was canopied by expansive northern oak trees and after a visit, I would go outside the museum and sit on a bench and take Jimmy John's tomato sandwich out of my bag. I'd watch the university rowing squad cutting the water's surface on thin boats. I always wished I had become a rower. I loved the way they moved in unison, in full agreement on when and where to move. They went in a sleek line right down the middle, underneath the pedestrian bridges that were crisscrossed by students who lumbered like turtles with bulging backpacks.

This project is about my experiences, how I went out searching, and what I found. At the river's edge in Iowa City, I was at the start of my adult life. Everything I knew about the world and my place in it was based on my experiences with my brother, Joshua. And those experiences centered on the backdrop of my family's community which was the insular evangelical church in Iowa.

And by insular, I mean that it was all white. I write about worrying about my brother's soul. He couldn't pray or speak and therefore he couldn't make a public confession of sin and claim Jesus as his savior. I was, as a child, deeply worried about his soul.

By the insular logic of the church, Joshua was irredeemable. I remember once being in a service and a high schooler raised his hand and asked, "What happened to the native peoples that did not know who Jesus was?" The answer came quick, "They went to hell." It was that day I began to question conservative Christian ideology, politics, and spiritual tradition and it was that day I realized they might be wrong, which meant maybe Joshua's soul could be redeemed after all.

Joshua came to be a major thematic element in this collection. In these essays, I start with one of my first memories of him from 1996. From there, I provide flash memories of most of the years leading up to 2020. These memories alternate and weave through the other essays which explore experiences outside of that relationship.

If we'd been born earlier, in the 1950's or prior, many of these memories wouldn't have existed. My brother, around the onset of adolescence or earlier would have become a family secret because he would have been locked away in an insane asylum. The short memories I share from 1999 and 2000 illustrate why his commitment most likely would have been inevitable.

There is an important history that led to the shift away from asylums, a movement known as deinstitutionalization. The idea was that those needing care would have their needs met in the context of the community. Hospitals and asylums were riddled with violence, pestilence, the suffering of human beings that were caged like animals. Community care was seen as a solution to the abuses brought on by institutionalization.

The full history of deinstitutionalization is far beyond the scope of this preface, however, here I provide a summary. A major note in the history being that the shift led to the rise of mass incarceration of the mentally ill, overcrowding in nursing homes, and homelessness (Parsons, 2018).

Roy Grinkler, in *Nobody's Normal*, wrote, "In the late 1770's, when British prison reformer, John Howard visited the vast network of asylums that had emerged throughout Europe he was disturbed to find that hardened criminals were kept in the same place as the bankrupt and the insane. He understood that the goal of confinement was to create a new space for people who diverged dramatically from what had become the ideal person in emerging capitalism" (27).

Grinkler argues that disabled and mentally ill people were categorized and shut away in asylums largely due to the rise of industrialization and capitalism which created an ethic of "individualism and personal responsibility" (17). The criminal, the bankrupt, and the mentally ill were "new and shameful category of being" which led to the American trend in the 1800's to divide people into two categories: idiots (congenital abnormalities) or imbeciles (developmental disorder of the mind that was lifelong) (Grinkler, 17).

E. Torrey, in *American Psychosis*, provides a compact account of the recent history and laments all too common incidents of abuse and neglect. He tells of Charles Furry who was diagnosed with schizophrenia and found with hundreds of maggots falling out of his socks, with

more maggots wedged in-between his toes and under his skin, as he sat alone at home in a drool-soaked shirt (Torrey, ix).

Community-based care is a failure in the United States. Care for disabled adults is pushed to the individual's nuclear family often with catastrophic financial results for those families and the individuals in need of help.

The history is further nuanced where it intersects with race and mass incarceration in the United States. Additionally, as Martin Summers shows in his work, *Madness in the City of Magnificent Intentions*, the American mental health system was founded on legacy of racist psychiatric treatment and research at a hospital located at the nation's capital where there was a "reduction of black madness to a state of mind... and the tendency to think about insane African Americans as flattened caricatures" requiring separate and most often impoverished care when compared to the white patients at that institution (7).

Joshua formed my way of being the world, the relationship made me aware of systems, matrices, and dichotomies. Joshua acts in many ways as what Buddhism calls bodhichitta, which is the "kinship with the suffering of others, this inability to continue to regard it from afar, it is the discovery of our soft spot...[a] tenderness for life, when we can no longer shield ourselves from the vulnerability of our condition, from the basic fragility of existence" (Chödrön, 88).

Joshua removed me from any denial of injustice in the United States.

In the United States, the category of being an individual is so rigid that the alternate category of being dependent or in need of help is equally extreme. I remember living in the tiny village of Bruckberg, Germany where there is one brewery. I was once sitting in that pub alone when two men entered. They had the physical characteristics indicating Down's Syndrome. The men had a beer. They talked with one another for a while and then left.

For about a year, I lived in a small apartment that was on a hill overlooking Bruckberg. At the center of the village was a yellow structure, the largest in town with a bell tower. It was a home for disabled people I would watch people of all abilities roaming the village and returning in the evenings to the home.

I had never, in the United States, seen such an image of care and freedom. To “allow” a man with Downs who was institutionalized to wander freely and “allow” him to drink a beer was foreign.

The German institution challenged the category of being dependent or independent. The residents of the home needed some structure, some help, but they were not solely dependent, they had freedom. Freedom to roam around, stop over and have a beer.

America’s relationship her most vulnerable is extremely rigid. In the case of the disabled the pendulum swung from institutionalization and subjugation to another extreme, absolute neglect in the form forced self-determination.

James Baldwin wrote, “It must be remembered the oppressed and the oppressor are bound together within the same society; they accept the same criteria, they share the same beliefs, they both alike depend on the same reality” (21). In speaking of someone as being disabled or able bodied, or in terms of one’s gender or one’s race, we are entering into the system of categorizations and a constructed reality. We run the risk of perpetuating the very systems we would like to escape. The writer must, as Baldwin explained, reject the category as the defining feature of the human being (25).

In these essays I write about experiences sometimes in the context of my gender, my sexuality, my abilities, and my race. I do not understate the importance of gender. The

intersection of gender and race is explored more deeply in *Lunar Phases* and *Boss* and more generally in the stories about who was the caretakers for Joshua, and the essay *High Rise*.

Categories must be named, but I recognize that the categories themselves fortify a structure. Categories are the structure; the real people are operating within or outside of those boxes. My reach here is simple but honest, they are experiences. I hope that in my future work I can go farther and take more risks. In these essays there is a recognition of categories and structures and a few modest escapes.

These essays lay a critical emotional and intellectual foundation for me as a writer, to proceed into other forms of writing such as fictional short stories and novels with a base from which to begin to relate myself to the world in all my identities, connections and even limitations. I believe that it is a white writer's obligation to do as writers of color have been doing alone for far too long alone, and that is to bring white identity into our art and our conceptualization of what needs to progress in the United States and the world.

We need look no further than the work of William Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor to see that effort was made to reckon with whiteness. But the limitation was in their faith. I believe O'Connor and Faulkner saw racism as America's proximate cause of distress, however, I am not convinced that they wrote from a place of believing that progression out of and past that distress was possible.

White writers should be asking, what will those that come after me find disgraceful? One way to avoid the pitfalls is to listen, listen to the writers and thinkers such as Brittany Cooper, James Baldwin, DuBois, Toni Morrison, and others as I have tried to do in these essays. And the other way is creating our art and our fictions not from despair but from an almost inconceivable faith that the future will survive, and it will be so much better than the present.

And I hope that the conclusions of these essays are like the conclusions I express in my essay about white flight, *Electric Feel*. In that essay, I explore my reactions to the white women I meet that want to move away from Pflugerville to Georgetown, sometimes explicitly stating why and sometimes veiling their reasonings, leaving in their wake a lack of coherence and a crucial silence. In that essay, I'm not so sure that I can change anyone's minds in conversation or even in the writing itself, but I identify in the children a reality none of should miss:

"There is an electric feel in Pflugerville, Texas. The traffic buzzes in patterns of red and yellow lights, Tesla charging stations pop up on every corner zapping every sleek car engine into their electric lives of modern speed and acceleration devoid of petroleum.

The children here are numerous, they crowd the grocery stores with incredible enthusiasms, and they line their shelves with unheard-of books about new children that come from everywhere flagged in their country's lost glory.

The children overtake those playgrounds baking in the sun, their skin a kaleidoscope coming in multitudinous shades of melanation. They climb the slides backwards to the tops, claiming their thrones as sweaty kings and queens with holes ripped in the knees of their pants. I can hear them speaking multiple languages and they seem to laugh at my confinement to a singular language, English.

These children easily conquer English, and they also speak Spanish, Swahili, Yoruba, German, and Hindi. The words and sentences and paragraphs roll off their lips so easily.

I can hear their words gathering strength as lightening does. They swing next to one another pumping their legs furiously as they all shout, "Higher! Higher! Demanding once and for all to play together" (136).

CRUCIAL SILENCE

PREVIEW

I was watching the rolling hills and a tractor kicking up dust clouds on a side road. The other kids were rowdy. Joseph, who always sat in the very back, had taken a harmonica out of his backpack and was screeching as the AC vents were spewing short bursts, not cooling but providing little breaths of air that were fresher than the gas fumes that permeated from the bus's old tail pipe.

It was through the window that I saw him running. It was my younger brother, Josh, age two running down the sidewalk. He was naked. We had just pulled into the edge of town, and we were two stops from the house. He was a streak of peach baby flesh, headed for Second Avenue, the road he took for the town square. I was trying not to think of the worst, but it seemed inevitable, *what if he gets run over?*

My Great Uncle Junior, who was married to Great Aunt Nina and father to nine children, owned an auto repair shop at the city square. Sometimes Uncle, still wearing overalls covered in grease, would see Josh, and sling him over a shoulder and bring him home. Or Uncle's youngest daughter, Tammy, who kept books and answered the phone would see Josh and hold him in her lap and drive him home in their minivan.

The driver of the bus didn't notice him. I kept looking out, I watched him make a left off the main road disappearing out of site. When we got home that day, I skipped every other step to make it out of the bus quicker. Mom came out holding a basket of clothes.

"He's out again," I yelled.

Mom dropped the basket and went out of the door to find him, my sister followed. I stayed inside to watch the other two. There were five of us total and mom was home with three kids under the age of five.

Child Protective Services started showing up at our front door. It was probably a concerned neighbor that called in sightings of a naked two-year-old running alone. They would always show up with clipboard and look around the house, taking notes of what was in the refrigerator or on the stove cooking. Mom would sometimes explain things with an apology.

“Sorry for the cheerios all over the floor” and she’d start sweeping.

Or “Oh those clothes on the couch, they are clean, just need to put them away.”

The inspectors would nod and keep taking notes and then pull us to the side and ask questions like, “Who gets angry in the family?” or “Why do you think your brother wants to run away?”

The day I saw Josh from the bus, mom found him and brought him home. I went outside to get my bike. It had a pink banana seat with wicker basket. I pulled it to the driveways edge and hopped on, taking the downhill for my initial push.

I rode out to the edge of town, past the sign that said, Lewistown Pop. 348. I went out onto a side road amongst the farm fields. I decided to peddle until the landscape changed, until I saw something other than corn and soybeans alternating in a pattern, but it started getting dark and nothing changed, other than an occasional sign that pointed to another town like, Hannibal or Quincy or LaGrange. As the sun set, my eyes adjusted slowly to each new shade of darkness and my legs grew heavy so I turned back around and went home.

Lunar Phases

I. New Moon

The leading theory on how the moon arrived is that a misguided meteor whacked into earth about 4.5 million years ago. As the meteor came zooming in for the whack it took some earth dust with it and formed itself into the moon in orbit around earth. During “The Big Whack,” as it is called, the earth tilted, and the tilt is why we have season. This set into place day and night and months lasting 29.5 days.

The Big Whack changed everything about life on earth, setting into motion the rhythms of seasons, night and day, and years. Most of us, whether we realize it or not, are longing to sync our bodies and brains to natural rhythms.

If we slice a coral, we can see bands that are formed daily. In the summer months, when the days are longer mineral growth is longer, so the bands are larger. In the winter, growth slows creating shorter bands. In each cycle there are 365 bands, coral as a cyclical attachment to the season and calendar year. In his book on the topic, *The Universe Within*, Neil Shubin drew this conclusion about our lives, “The different clocks in bodies and in rocks don’t tick independently; they are part of the same planetary and solar metronome” (61).

Our cells and bodies beat to this solar metronome. We grow and live by a 24-hour day and a 12-month-year with seasons. Rhythms and not time chunks and strict schedules. A rhythm comes naturally, and we feel compelled internally to follow the rhythm rather than the external pressure exerted upon us by schedules. Rhythms are adaptable, they can flux with the seasons as they do when we have a few more hours of daylight in July. Rhythms can shift in one’s personal energy reserve due to hormones or milestones such as the anniversary date of a loved one’s death.

I know I could be more productive in the summer and less so in the winter, however, the schedule that I adhere to survive the modern world does not change with daylight hours. We could think of the natural universe as rhythmic and the economic one was a machine.

I had never paid much attention to my own deficient in rhythm until I had become so exhausted I had nowhere to look but up. Shubin wrote, “we live in an age of disconnect between the ancient rhythms inside of us and our modern life” (77). That disconnect was never so apparent to me until the birth of my second daughter.

At the time, I was working as a director of a large corporate childcare center with a daily responsibility of 170 infants and young children under the age of five as well as 40 staff members, not to mention the hypervigilant parents of the kids. This responsibility spanned our opening time at 6:00 AM until our close at 6:30 PM each weekday. There were also text messages from the team that would start pelting my psyche with the day’s problems every morning by 4:30 AM. The nature of the job was made more difficult by the year-round nature of childcare, we didn’t take any seasonal breaks. The center catered to working parents, so we only closed for ten national holidays, two of which were used for teacher training days.

Infants naturally demand more. Capitalism demands that less be given. Capitalism demanded that I put as many children into the space and as few adults as possible. The less food and supplies I purchased with our tuition, the better.

This conflict between a newborn’s care and corporate profit was felt in my body manifesting in all sorts of physical symptoms including headaches, nervous tension, digestive upheaval, trouble sleeping, and weight gain.

But I stuck with the job because I was being paid well enough and I needed to provide for my family. I knew it wasn’t sustainable which was why I had gotten a counseling degree by taking