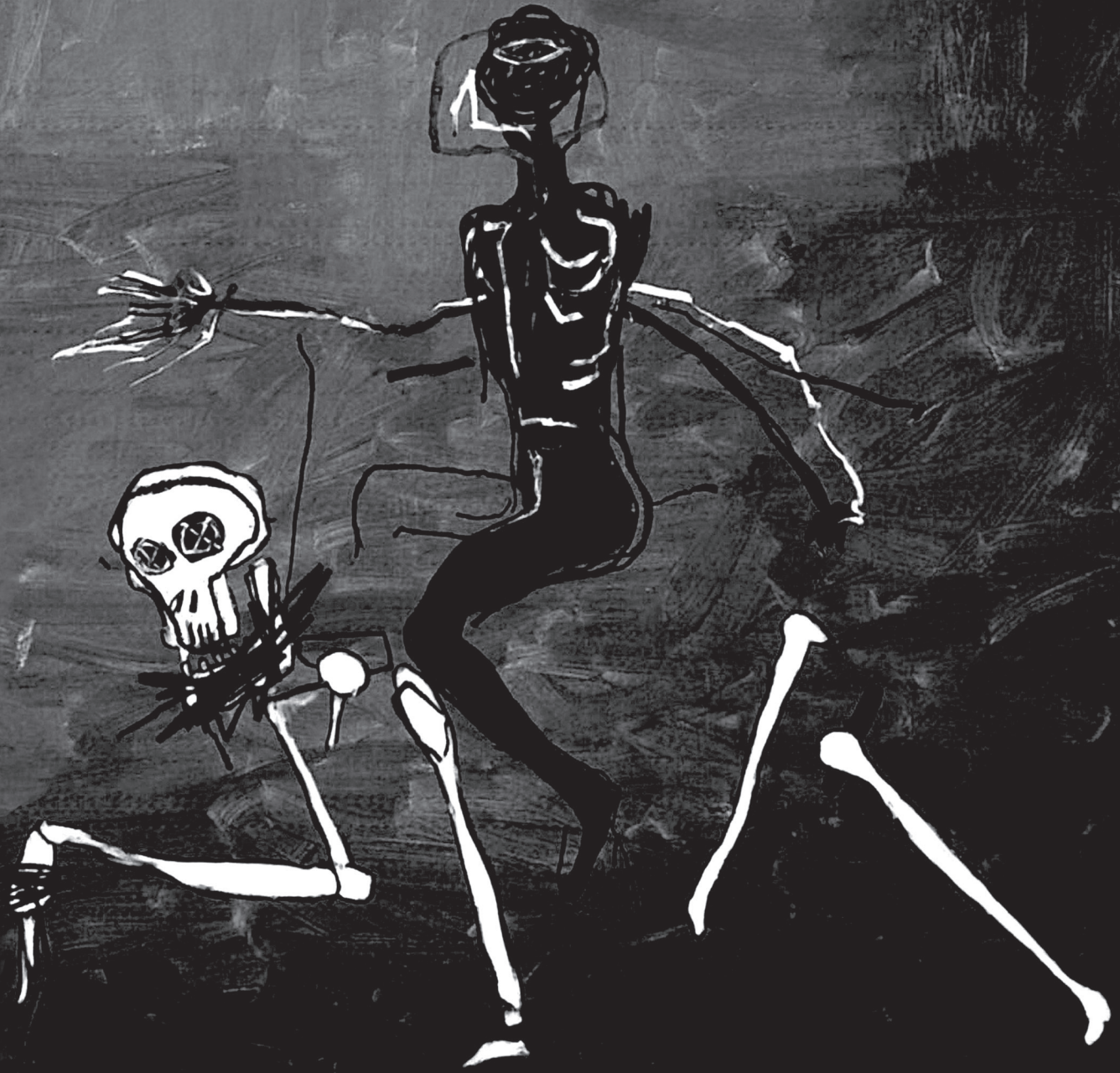


Prompts and Play: In theory and creative practice



In communion with the living and the dead
by Ellis-Neyra

Prompt Abstract: In communion with the living and the dead, revive a text on a small scale.

Redux, reanimation – an exercise in caring textual truncation

redux from Latin, “that returns,” “brought back,” “revived”

The stakes of this assignment are to learn how to *scale down* a text without evoking or performing an imaginary that “dissects” it. If we imagine a text as a system of meanings and play, as another shape for sounds to release and slip in and out of the impulse to narrate, and/or as a material and vital *thing*, why would we want to pin it down, cut it open, and pull out its parts? In this ruptured era of black uprising and refusal of the antiblack status quo of the dominant Western episteme, and of the Black Lives Matter movement in the face of U.S. law’s ostentatiously daily performed protection of the lawlessness of whiteness, we hear the repetition of the word *body* frequently used in relation to the word *black*. I want us to think about the contributions to thought by Black Nihilism and elegy (“American” poetics may be an arch-elegy). And I want us to question status quo, white-racialized *post mortem* attachments on the levels of grammar and form to the words black and body (revisit the story of Kenneth Goldsmith’s violence to Michael Brown). How do we, with the language we use to approach textual bodies, reiterate a poetics overdetermined by death, or a poetics that, to borrow from the Haitian-Puerto Rican painter Jean-Michel Basquiat, *rid[es] with death*, and finds breath on that ride. This assignment is about scaling down so as to breathe another life into a text; it encourages communion between the living and the dead.

1. Select one long work that we have studied thus far in our course, with your assignment companion.
2. With your assignment companion, begin to select passages that emerge *throughout – across, through-and-through* – the long work. Rewrite them. Relocate them from the text. Let them migrate and change in that process.
3. Visually scan those passages for how they sound in the page space to which you’ve relocated them.
4. Listen for syllabic repetitions, unexpected rhymes, sound patterns, etc.
5. Reanimate you all’s fragmented Idea of the long work in 2 single-spaced pages that remix selected passages from the text.
6. You can only use selected passages from the text to remake your collaborative sense of the text. Note: you are not dissecting the text. I find that perverse in a not eroticizable or salvageable way. The text does not need our *post mortem* attachments to violate it. *You are breathing something vital back into these fragments*. Breathe another kind of life, in short form.
7. I encourage you to stop now and read Borges’ (very) short story *Pierre Menard*, which rewrites the *Quixote*. I encourage you to think of this as a musical score. Or a dance score. Not only as a performance of literal citation. Although *citationality* as re-vitalization and remembering are part of the ethics of this project.

8. You can mark where you all have interjected *yourselves* – e.g, cut a sentence, sampled a dependent clause from one sentence and conjoined it with the subject and verb from another – by using [...] brackets. If [...] aesthetically perturbs you, then improvise another and consistent diacritical way of marking breaks in your re-location of the text. So, for example, if the words “the clinamen” were in the middle of a sentence and you all want to begin a sentence with those words, re-mark where you’ve excerpted by writing, “[The] clinamen,” thereby indicating that you’ve messed with ‘the original’ (wink emoji). You can italicize words or phrases for emphasis, and within your in-text citation, you can indicate that you’ve stuck your hand in the passage, so to speak. e.g., (Muñoz, “Gimme Gimme This...,” 107, *our emphasis*.)
9. If this seems like it contains an element of drawing or tattooing, as well as witnessing, then that seems right in its design. Show the traces of where you’ve been as a way of showing the other one way to go.
10. An argument will manifest from your passage selections. Let it come forth. Indeed, enchant it, seduce it in the drawing forth. Even if you’re playing in strategically evasive syntactic waters (like, such depends on the piece you’re re-scaling in the *Redux*). This is a good time to learn to learn how to make and sustain flexible argumentative positions. Which need not manifest in the style and tone of the imagined Father, Super-ego, Ur-authority, or capitalist state. In this exercise, do rehearse *authorizing yourselves to say*, and in relation to the text, your pleasures in re-reading the text, and your assignment companion’s pleasures.