

IN RESONANCE

DANIELLE VOGEL



IN RESONANCE: TRANSLATIONS OF LIGHT IN LANGUAGE

selections from
A LIBRARY OF LIGHT

DANIELLE VOGEL



#50

ESSAY PRESS GROUNDLOOP SERIES

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PREFACE

Imagine for a moment that you are looking through a wall of water. Now, let light enter to spangle and rhyme, ricochet and refract. When I think about light, I think about actions like: reflection, striation, illumination. And so I attempt to structure my book in kind: a prism of thought intersecting thought, breaking form only to reconvene later.

I begin writing with a simple, maybe impossible desire: I want to translate the logic of light as it moves. And not just visible light, but also the hidden light that occurs at the microscopic levels of our nervous systems.

I want to flood grammar with light. To see what knowledge might be illumined within our alphabets, and also, to observe what resists light, what in me—what in us as human beings—is unable to be

brought into sense through language, but remains an atmosphere at the edge of experience.

The following pages are excerpts from a book-length lyric essay about grief, lamentation, and the rapturous transcendence of both, written through the lens of light. I didn't begin writing about grief. I began writing about lineage and light in an attempt to learn how to see past grief, to get to the other side of it, to access the future of myself and to communicate with whatever it is that is before and after this body. I thought I had written myself out of sadness with my first two books, but then my mother died when I was a little over a year into writing this book, and, suddenly, the word 'refraction' took on new meaning. I moved from external light, to internal light, and then to the afterlife of light. Cells proliferating, communicating, flaring out, dying, releasing kinetic energy. I began to think about how light and energy cannot be destroyed, just re-scripted, reincorporated into new versions. And this book found its way.

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All living creatures emit a very weak light.

While not visible to us, the human body radiates at levels that fluctuate over the day. The source of this imperceptible glow are particles of light called biophotons: a light in the cells of many living organisms employed for cell-to-cell communication. I am not a scientist, I am a poet, but from what I understand, the DNA inside each cell vibrates at a frequency of several billion hertz. This vibration is created through the coil-like contraction of our DNA—which occurs several billion times per second—and every time our DNA contracts, it releases one single biophoton; a light particle. All of the biophotons that are produced communicate with each other in a highly structured light field that surrounds all bodies.

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I don't know how I began. From where or what matter. But when I imagine it, I see a light similar to electricity. A soft pink current. So pink that it is almost white. A single line, static, vibratory, rippling slowly. There is no sound here, no resonance, just intention. And as the line arches and turns, I know exactly what this light means to communicate without needing language. Its meaning opens a door in my face and I am no longer contained, edgeless but infinitely met outside of skin and angles. I am met somewhere else. Inside a color, or outside of all colors. I cannot tell.

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This light is the first inscription into the trajectory of me. A crackling pulse that set me going. I think words like: amniotic, birth, origin, and beginning. These words are what have been given to my mouth.

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Consider the human body. Mine and yours, composed of air, water, light, and minerals. Consider the information stored within the nucleus of one zygote cell.

Within my body and yours, a coherent light.

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But in its elasticity, the light gets threaded. When I was seven, I saw that the world through which I moved was always apparitioning. I wanted to find solidity. I believed it to be there, the solidity, slightly off-center, in that hologram. All those spectral architectures through which I moved. I haunted them. I became a comonomium of hauntings: my mouth, a barrel in conversation with the barrel of whatever housed me. With whatever was once there. With whatever slid up beside me taking my own solidity from me. A ghost is nothing but the noise we pass between. And noise travels equally in all directions. Spherically through time. I wonder about dissipation and absorption. The re-rippling of noise through other noises. Your body next to mine next to a limitless number of ghosts. We are all beside our own speaking. I am the center of my own sphere but we all halo out.

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Light lets the grid of a thing respire. Each intersection becomes an *or* in relation. Imagine the skin of you, all its points of convergence, either through sense or sound, being met at once. The grid begins to glow. We move in every direction even standing still. We let the light. It culls something against us. Oracles us. Reflexes relation. I become beside myself and something else even while stationary.

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Imagine adjacent squares or houses, arms of an alphabet or body. Infuse their walls with light and they become blown out, bendable, suddenly pluralized into both themselves and something else. I want to flood the sentence with light until it breathes without me. I suspend something between two points. I strain the body into parts. Let it warp through the word, exaggerated and left with the feeling of having been.

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I pick up light. I pick it up with both hands, shake the rope of it into a page. I put it in my mouth. I let it pull a sound through me. The desire to lean against a thing through language as light might lean across my house. Its dissipating gloss across the bedroom, spilling the kitchen. I want to learn how to do this through the sentence. I'm alone, so I lay my body in its way. I put it on like a wound. Watch my finger's translucence. I think about the membrane of the page, illumined in its reading. But this isn't right. So I make sounds into the room until the light is pulled from my house back into the city.

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I want to unwrap a word. A book and body, a residual architecture. Something left behind that is always both inhabited and inhabitable. Light like a skin like a sound, shed. Shattered. Shivered off. A page: a hallway of light between us. I want the body and book in all its tenses. Inhabited, inhabitable, inhabitation, inhabitability.

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Between a mother and her fetus, the placenta, an organ composed, relating bodies and connecting forms. A conduit for exchange, for migrating cells. And those cells may take up residence in the body of the other. Integrating the tissue. We are accustomed to thinking ourselves individual, but so many of us feel unstable: of fracture, disembodiment or conjoinment to something unnamable, some thing other than ourselves. A kind of microchimerism. A persistent presence of an other or elsewhere.

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I am guided by gaps and fragments, all the unsayable aspects. The dialectics of this internal light. A writing that accesses and organizes the body's unseen energy fields. I want to correct the imbalances within me. To start at the darkest imbalance, the most unseen.

The ledge of a pink line, the pigment glossed into a buff. A cloud. A line of color approaching shadow. To begin crouched inside the word: birth. A body. Before form, the sonority of her.

A perpetual state of looking. So much uncapturable light. This color feels like breathing, but without the effort.

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For a long time I have been trying to heal the landscape of me. I mean, that for about the first 23 years of my living, I felt as if I, the very essence of *I* (my self), was something akin to an atmosphere caught inside of a body that was not my own. My physical form was unfamiliar, slightly frightening. I had great guilt over inhabiting it. So when I say that I grew up disassociated from my body, I mean, that during that time, I was very much within it but separate from it. A kind of spectral dislocation that I came to love. I found gifts there. Ways of sensing what was invisible in people. I tried to meet those invisible places in people.

Later, I also tried to put words there. In all the invisible places I sensed. So I began with what I was given. A language, inherited. My language. My mother's. My father's. I began with words, placing them in the dark and watching as, through grammar, they contracted, shedding light: meaning, sound.

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In communion, fetal cells migrate into a mother's body, manipulating her immune system, often aiding in repair. And as this happens, a mother's cells pass learned information into her child's body. It is in this way that transgenerational traumas can be hemmed into a body of a child who hasn't yet experienced the world.

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As language contracted over the landscape of me, I experienced my form: its skin, sensors, and bones, its joints and synapses. Language was erotic, sensual, very much a part of not only my atmospheric form, but also my physical one. It was the living bridge between the two.

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Language, like light, is an immaterial medium through which all things energy and matter move. And like light, language can cause micro-distortions within us. I held language close and with much reverence. And what was most astonishing to me was that this was a body—a lingual-body—I might share with others. I could compose a sentence and put it on with another. Speak it into the space between us or place it directly into a mouth through having written it for reading. I could wear it with another. Walk down its center and in all directions, thinking alongside someone else, touching them, making corresponding shapes, and then we might move apart having exchanged something irrevocable.

For many years I tried to step into the body of me. I kept language close, but I didn't necessarily want to need it to locate myself inside of my form.

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Sometimes I have a feeling of amnesia, as if I should, but can't—although it is almost reachable—remember from where I originated. And this feels like a color, exploded, a certain resonance I recognize between myself and this world that houses us. When do we forget from where we came? For so many of us, there is a feeling of displacement. As if we are always longing to be reunited with some lost place: a place of amnesia and color.

I want to compose sentences so that I can access a kind of hypnagogic gloss and recall what I didn't know I could remember.

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Look at what you see and light will leave its trace.

Sight, at all levels of focus, never fails. It emits an invisible line that looms desire to disappearance to desire. Light, its originary source, never leaves you. I want to believe that language can preserve where I've been, but also that it can look at a thing and alter its reflection.

When all limits are illegible. What is a body?

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My mother spent many years living almost alone except for loneliness, paranoia, drink, and cocaine. The death of a mother never becomes lost. It never dulls and incorporates itself into the day, only drones on, humming its tenor. Numbing other timbers in its wake.

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When I was small and still living with her, I wanted to write to all the dead people I had never met. I wanted to talk to those concentrations of energy I felt in the hallways of my house, my school's stairwell, the damp corners of my yard. What I wanted to say couldn't be arranged so I'd stay very still and reach my silence outward like a tactile glow, a static reaching to communicate with passing frequencies. Tonight, I'd like to write to a dead woman at the bottom of this ocean in that same way. Sending out a kind of undercurrent that scripts itself into her, into me.

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Writing isn't the same as looking. It isn't the same as touch, yet it embeds itself like something felt. A voice away from its body isn't irrelevant.

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What is a ghost? A residual vibration, some desire left behind in the wake of a physical departure. Grief is a ghost. Light is a ghost. Language. I've not been haunted by my mother but sometimes I hear an urgent crackle in the corner of the room that holds me.

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What are ash and sedimentation, silted up, slick and gummy slowly becoming fossil and memory? I sent her ash three hundred feet below sea level. The house is left behind, her resonance in my DNA, my seeing. I measure absence past, absence future.

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Sometimes, when I drink, I experience my own edgelessness reaching out toward my mother's. Hers is a residence that brought me into light, into skin, dust, cells and desire. Now, she's been depleted into ash, dispersed. But what of that radiation? Can it be taken, intercepted, swallowed?

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A house and a body exchange walls, thresholds. To write to a dead woman. To cross the space in the house where she died—sitting in a desk chair rolled into the kitchen—cradling a folded bed pillow against her stomach. Laid out in her coffin, at the mouth of the funereal home. I hadn't seen her for over six years, but the night before, I washed for her: a pair of jeans, black underwear, socks, a black sleeveless silk shirt. I folded her favorite gray blazer, bleach-flecked black converse. I bought her a bra; I couldn't find any that weren't covered in mold. I gathered her earrings, and her favorite necklace that looked like and was as large as a man's dress tie composed of faux-crystals. I brought these things to another house that is a funeral home. Two days later, all of this would be burned, but her house would still stand, even though two weeks before she had set fire to its kitchen.

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I kept her ashes in my home for a year before I took them to the ocean. Ash is a symbol of grief or repentance. The powdery remains of fire. To burn. To glow. To dry up, to parch. Our boat, above three hundred feet of salt water, her urn sank quickly. What will the water give her? That new state of her body? *Penitence* comes from the Old French *paene* meaning *nearby, almost*. Meaning *is not enough*. To feel such regret for one's worth. One's living. I would have carried her ashes around with me everywhere had I been able to do it in secret. What I mean is that someone—quite a few someones—love me. So I keep my sanity close for them.

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I can't tell if writing incorporates what feels disassociated or furthers the distance between objects, but I come to language no matter. Language leaves its trace as does silence, as does light. An induction of the cells.

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A long time ago, I learned that when a mouse gives birth to a sick baby it might eat it, taking it back into its body. I want to know how close the womb is to the stomach. The heart to the moon. I wanted to eat the entire house, its filth and stones, its feces, its mold, its shards of everything. I tell the moon, I'd like to be like it. Reflective, gravitational, complete in all its phases, regardless of illumination. As I stand looking at the moon, I let my feet pulse. I can no longer tell where the road begins or where the edge of my face is in relation to the night.

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I am attempting to get through the door of me. Through the door of my mother's body and her mother's body before her and so on, straight into the mouth of the very first light emitted.

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I am not comfortable in all kinds of darkness, though I would like to be. Darkness allows nearness to the unknown. That place from which I first arrived on this planet. The door of me, my mother. What color was the inside of her body? What color was my consciousness there?

Both sound and light are wave phenomena, oscillating like the disturbed surface of water. What is the speed of light in language? This impossible question is what guides me. I want to articulate or find access to that amnesia, that primal light source that set my matter vibrating.

A poem: this inner geography of light, composed, breaking.

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A syntax invented itself inside of me. As volcanoes do. As algae and lichen do. As suns and planets and solar systems do. As babies do.

The light of our cells: a filmy incandescence, as color and light pulse in ambulation.

You look to focus on the page, but language—as it enters and exits you—balances at the edge of dissolution.

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I want to know if writing can raise the dead in me. The act of lifting: myself, a memory, a mother. To rear. To make higher. To restore to life. A voice. The physical sense of. Children, to bring up. But I won't have children. I think of the phrase: *I was raised in*. I was raised means *brought up there*. Brought into being. Bring me up. From sleep, from bed. From one's body. To get to one's feet. From one's grief. Get up from the table. Be fit. Be proper. To travel. To journey. To rise from the dead. To originate (from). Occur, happen, come to pass; take place. I write a piece of rising ground. To get a rise out of (someone). My mother has. Taken place. Has. Come to pass.

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Grief has a long passage. For months I referred to my mother's death in the present tense. My mother dies. Was what I said and wrote. What was this slippage? When I found out, I paced the floor until my knees left me. And then I crawled toward the bathroom, picked up an old toothbrush and proceeded to clean the room with it. I began under the claw foot tub. Stretched out, on my belly, my cheek pressed to the floor, I reached for the furthest corner.

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I've always wanted to speak to the dead, but, I think now, I understand that I want to levitate the dead in me. To speak to some body inside my body that I haven't yet met. What is levitation? Where is it? The place of lightness. An event of buoyancy. To raise (a person) into the air. See *gravity*. See *grave*.

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Language allows for connective resonance. I come to language because I want to heal something inside of me. Something hemmed into the cells, passed across generations, between mouths and mothers. To reattune myself through articulated frequencies. I yield to the hidden voice. Of bone and light at once. Having access to the unlit through what is illuminated.

I make myself fragile for you.
Because we hold vigil for one another in language.
Because we need to ingest light and release it.

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AFTERWORD: LINEAGES OF LIGHT

1

We come to life now. When we. When we are. We pick up language like a lit garment, wet and shaken out. A shinbone lifts. An elbow. A paragraph. All shot through until our edges dissolve in pleats. We are held together through our separatenesses. We are an ambiance of remains, wreckage, re-configured. We are an illuminated architecture. We are a moving letter. Topologies of sound. We are never static, but echoic. As we make shape, we take it. The mouth, unmarooned. We trespass punctuation. A curvature. An arc, unarchived in the sharing. We almost make a circle, but what we mean is silence into sound. Or an inconstant coming into focus. We are always in the present tense. The food of the gap, washed out. We, a word. We, a window. Bring your body.

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When we are six, we are also seventeen. When we are six, we are reading. But we cannot read. Our language drapes over some thing and we make shape associatively. When we are seventeen, we are reading by resonance. A certain rhyme in the curve of a thing. The slight of it slips through the tongue. A leaning of throats. When we are three, we are also fourteen. When we are fourteen, we do not know the difference between a book and a body. We are unbound, gutterless. A book is a woman's skin near the eye. A page, the plum-colored aureole. A cobbled finger-bone, a vague novel.

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Stories a corner. A slope of wall. Or water. A soft warping through the gloss. A belly. We refuse to come into convergence. We are already converged. We are the yellow hour that laminates the horizon. We are a strigosing of selves. We love. When we are. When we are there. When we are one, we

are sometimes also twelve. When we are three, the ground is mostly ether. We walk through the specter of things. When we are seven, the world is drained. When we are only four, we live in empty houses. When we are six, we fall in love with the slats between fences. We fall in love. We love through the throat. We reverberate. When we are nine, we are also twenty. We are a shifting geometry and the halo moves from the window. We are wedded in occurrence. We manipulate the grid. We are led by our hands, but we have no hands.

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When we are. When we are there, we lay together and cover ourselves with our voices. When we are ten, we are also twenty-one. We speak of breathing, but this is a thing we cannot do. When we are seven, we are also eighteen. When we are eighteen, we cartography our bodies. But we are unmappable, unhinged. A sound the voice cannot make, but makes.

2

When we are not yet born, we are also ten. We feel our birth a thousand miles away. We see a body suspended across the sky. We come cleaved at birth. We are both one and eleven. We are an irregularity draped across a country. We are here, we say. We are here. We are uncusped at the threshold. Tangential at the curve. A compendium of skins. A skinning sound. We are flooded. We are emanated. We are a mesh of strings, striated, invisible. We are a single canopy. A permeable membrane, wet at the lips.

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When we are thirty-four, we are cartographers of empty space. We map an unreliable grid. We map the shifting grid between. Between thought and body. Between bodies. We reverberate. We scatter, but keep relation. We spectre we. We are a dream-

culture of intimacies. We write ourselves to return to ourselves. When we are forty-one, we split our house in two and then stitch it together. When we arrive at the other, we create a burst of reference. A globe of hatch-marks knit skin to skin.

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Our arms are creatures across an open room.

3

We are cosseted, a living alphabet along the ground. We let ourselves be turned. When we are, we are always writing. Even before the sentence begins, it has begun. It is a soft un-fossilization through the tongue. A membranous correspondence.

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When we are. When we are one, we are also twelve. When we are twelve, we are as lonely as if we were one. When we are lonely, we let our tongues reach out until they touch another's.

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We want you to reach for us. We are the alphabet realigned, unarchived against the body. We say, this is a book. A body. We say, this is a sentence. A thing nesting and nested. We say, my mouth is a living record. We say, a bright lattice-work, a netting. We say, watch. We watch this net breathe as it reconfigures itself between us. We say, this is a thing that makes shape and takes it. We say, this is not a border, or bed. We say, inlets. Sound.

A NOTE OF THANKS

In the summer of 2011, I told my friends and family that I was writing a translation of light. As a gift for my birthday, I asked that they send me a question, phrase, word, or image they associated with light that I could place beside my manuscript as I wrote.

I hold their gifts close and I'd like to thank those people here. Their company means the world to me.

Allison Jeanes, Barbara Merriss, Bess Wallace, Bruce Hegnauer, Cassandra Smith, Deborah Poe, Elizabeth Frankie Rollins, Eric Baus, HR Hegnauer, J'Lyn Chapman, Jen Hofer, Jessica Hughes, Joan Dickinson, Julia and David Nicholson-Paine, Julieta Maciel Luevano, Kristy Hegnauer, Kristen Nelson, Mathias Svalina, Kathy Conde, Lisa Donovan, Lisa O'Neill, Michelle Naka Pierce, Sara Renee Marshall, Sara Veglahn, Sarah Stone, Selah Saterstrom, Sueyeun Juliette Lee, Todd Furey, and Travis Cebula.

I am ever grateful for the friendships of angela rawlings, Samantha Shay, and Souvankham Thammavongsa. All dear comrades of light.

And, as always, Renee Gladman, who holds space for me as I refract and glow.

AUTHOR BIO



Danielle Vogel is an artist and cross-genre writer who grew up on the south shore of Long Island. She is the author of *Between Grammars* and the artist book *Narrative & Nest*. Her installations and “public ceremonies for language,” which investigate the archives of memory stored within language, have been exhibited most recently at RISD Museum, The Nordic House in Reykjavík, Iceland, Temple University, Pace University, and The University of Washington at Bothell. She is currently a visiting writer, teaching across genres, at Wesleyan University.



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