

C H A I N

#7 *memoir / anti-memoir*

CHAIN 7
memoir / antimemoir

editors
Jena Osman
Juliana Spahr

with
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and also
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GUEST EDITOR'S NOTES

*Let us not forget, says Jabès, that if we say
"I," we already say different.*

—Rosmarie Waldrop, "Lavish Absence:
Reading and Recalling Edmond Jabès"

I am not I; pity the tale of me.

—Sir Philip Sidney, "Astrophil and
Stella"

*[W]hat I was really trying to do was re-
center the self because I was tired of hearing
about the de-centered self. And when you
hear a phrase too many times, if you're me,
you think, "Ha, ha, I think I'll do the op-
posite."*

—Alice Notley

*How I grew. When I pick up a book and it is not me. The book is a suit that fits
I think another someone. I say. It is this book that limits me. Or if I open it, did I
write it somehow? I look at the pages. How can I enter it? Tell me the topic, please,
and I will write the story of my life.*

*But which I found its way into print? What was the mystery, and who solved
it.*

This issue of *Chain* grew out of a conversation I had with Jena Osman last year at the Kelly Writers House in Philadelphia. I described to Jena some of the work I'd been hearing from writers who'd been coming through the House, work that seemed to address the motives of memoir without bowing to its generic conventions or ideological assumptions. Juliana Spahr joined the conversation, then co-editors Dorothy Wang, Nzadi Keita and Marina Budhos, and we began to imagine a collection. There were poets whose work was autobiographical yet defied confessionalism's ahistorical identifications, its solipsism. There were prose writers whose memoirs took as their subjects the constructedness of the selves. There were writers whose work addressed their own political and

social minority and the ways that representing the self can both articulate and challenge one's inscription into a marginal position. One could see a kind of conversation taking place among contemporary writers about how to understand and represent subjectivity—whether or not and how to locate it, name it, cohere it, identify with it.

Hey! I am going to make up an I that will stick to the pages of a book. I'm out there now where you all are. Oh, you say I am already entered into your book. But you wrote yours in a different language. Different story. For a different set of eyes. Can you tell me my sections. It's like a boat floating; it needs a map.

Chain 7: memoir/anti-memoir presents new texts that show the expanse and range of contemporary memoir. The works gathered here reveal memoir as re-invention, as generic interplay, as a conversation among texts, as travel back and forth and across times and states of mind. One can see in these texts the political and psychic stakes involved in self-representation and the ongoing negotiations of subjects, in dreams and particular material histories, making their way. Across the differences, there is a consciousness of language as the inter-me-diary.

Thrown from a boat, a boy nearly drowns but doesn't. Who is his father? George Washington wants him to have all of the opportunities our VCR has. What does an I have to do with an E? Headings in the same world book.

Many thanks to our contributors for the work. Thanks also to *Chain's* editors Jena Osman, Juliana Spahr, and Janet Zweig, and to this particular issue's other co-editors, Marina Budhos, Nzadi Keita, Dorothy Wang.

Now always I was swimming. The waves. The terrible waves. How do I dare not identify.

Warm, dry skin of the book.

—Kerry Sherin

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Joan Retallack
MEMNOIR

it is said that it

happens even in nature e.g. during the childhood the mother might have a taste for film noir and take the child along i.e. onderful I explained

my machine is hooked up to my machin fiction is precisely what they call non-fiction so too get a bit presonal

it would be necessary to go the other way i.e. she wanted more than she could say to not want more than she could say

or it might be necessary to replace all vowels with x mxgxcxly txrxng prxmxtxr txrrxr xntx pxltxblx pxst-pxst xrxny

not idle play to forgive that we in the spilt second of a single space i.e. it is said that it happens even in nature if only the space at the watering hole is large or small enough the animals the timing is all that is off

it is that that is the problem with the timing that it is always off while it cannot be off at all that is the he to be sure that the she did not choose the wrong thing

given the diversity of forms that even a soap film or any other minimal surface can this time at or on this point that is however not an Archimedean point

that will entirely explode the wild idea to try say that I had a wild idea just as a hummingbird flew by just like a deluxe model bumble bee engine with mechanical wings beating the sky like a wild idea in a hot majestic interlude containing profanity violence and graphic photos of murder victims before the clouds parted and the sun turned into a coffee mug or a doughnut

and/but/though over the years mathematicians have been able to prove that every

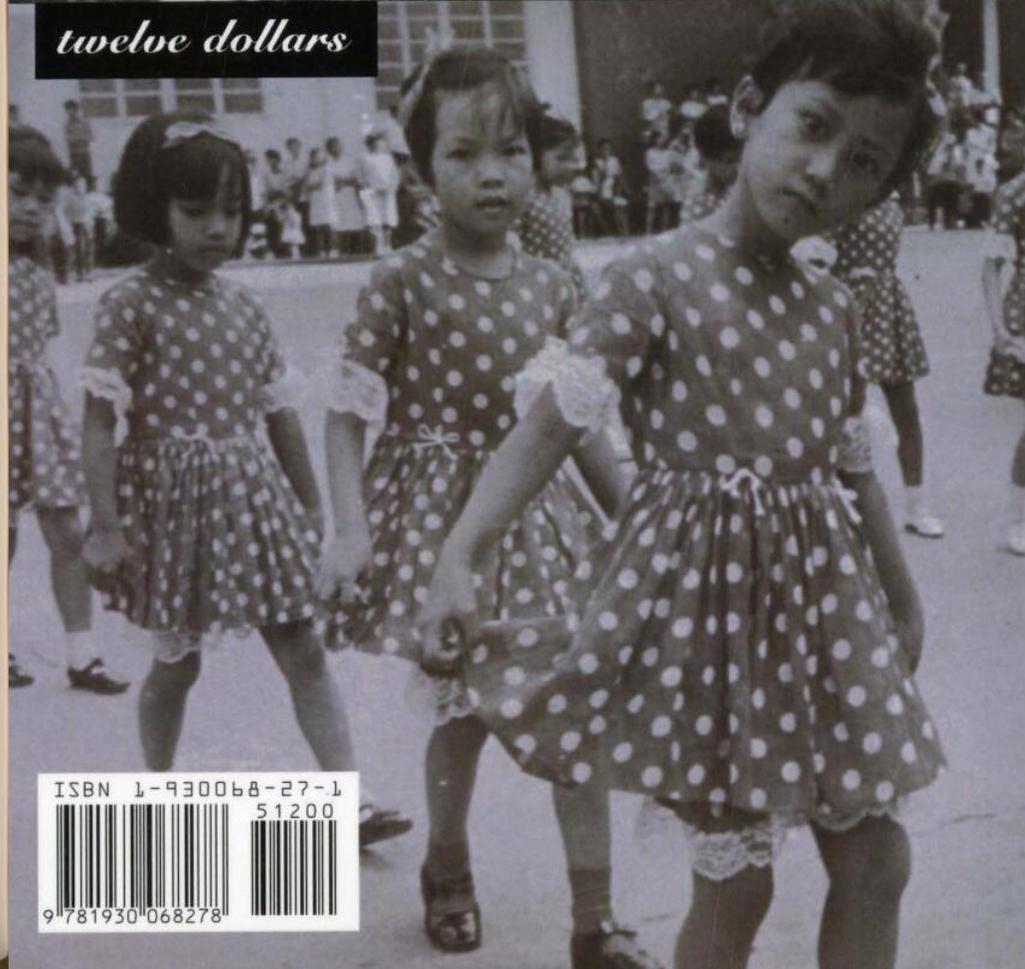
noninteresting closed curve is spanned by at least one smooth minimal surface or surface reflecting the twisting of the sun into someone's bird's eye view or the limits of any horizon always being a point of view just like the one unflooding here

and then she found that to find one's position on the graph using xy coordinates one must replace all the consonants with y

Memnoir, like all the work I do, comes out of a perforated self—permeable, in conversation, not wanting to finish a story about a self that must be in motion for the I to believe in the I as a vital principle. This isn't about owning a self, or having a story to tell, though narrative strands weave in and out of chance-developed configurations. Since everything is made of the dynamic interaction between memory and experience. . . . Memory in this piece is a process of connecting language with ambient conditions that include material residues of the past while navigating the continuing flood of experience. It's profiles/vase, before/after, mean/while. Experience will always interpolate its noisy silences. All that is and is not the self is all that is and is not poetry or prose, but poetry.



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