

LETTERS

TO

Considering how our Black bodies function and how you love yourself / we love ourselves, I feel you.

Our bodies: sites of our souls.

Our bodies: homes, not forever, but for now which is important, long-lasting.

Our bodies: evidence of our feelings and of our experiences on this plane.

My body, your body, our bodies are important to me. I want to know about your body and about mine. Here are some of my loving projections onto your body and onto my own body at the same time. Do you want to accept them? These wishes unto your skin, these whispers and encouragements rubbed like coconut oil into your scalp—or do you send these wishes back to me?

I hope you are receiving touch, feeling productive in ways that are meaningful to you—not simply for the sake of reflexive respectability politics.

And I wish for you, us: generation. I experience generation as having its own natural cycle:

1) ideation and the creative

practice of choosing to

enact

2) adding sweat to that

vision and bringing it to

fruition... spending or

offering some life-force

3) relaxing into the

effects of the new

etching (energy?)

in the world.

I do not wish upon you work of someone else's devising—work that does not excite you or is enacted only to survive capitalism. I call that kind of action, tasks done to fulfill an expectation which feels dull or dulling, “drudgery” or “grind.” I do not wish grinding upon you. As Tricia Hersey, performance artist and community healer at the helm of The Nap Ministry says, “You are not a machine. Stop grinding.” My friend, dance artist MK Abadoo, wrote under that Nap Ministry Instagram post, “That’s right! Grinding leads to dust. And ain’t nobody out here tryna be dusty.” The only kind of dusty you are, we are, is star dusty, celestial.

OUR -

Maria Bauman

S E L V E S*

I notice that these wishes are multi-directional.

*I wish all of this for you,
and am simultaneously braiding these desires into my hair,
hoping they will lock indefinitely around my own coils.*

Here's to loving ourselves.

Twice a week, I train in the African-Brazilian martial art of Capoeira in Prospect Park. Before we enter the *roda* (or circle) together, we practice kicks and dodges individually. My teacher consistently reminds us to "visualize your partner," to "imagine the situation." It seems that before we can communicate with one another we must imagine.

* "Letters To Ourselves" emerged from an invitation by mayfield brooks to Malcolm-x Betts and Maria Bauman to write love letters to Black artists. The invitation was a seed cultivated by Malcolm and Maria both together and separately. The resulting texts gesture to the desires and concerns of each artist and interconnect with calls for Black liberation, rest, and regeneration.

We must create an idea in our minds of how we might use the language with one another. This imagining doesn't altogether prevent our communication from being random and without context or meaning, but it does decrease the instances of physical non sequiturs in the *roda*.

I feel you doing that, and I feel it in myself too. May we

rest

and

imagine.

May we continue to practice our creativity individually with the hope and expectation that when we share with one another, the new language we've built will serve us. May we visualize the connections we want.

My favorite part of training Capoeira is on Saturdays when we create a *roda* and play together two-by-two, stringing together the building blocks of the physical language we've been learning. We converse with another person improvisationally but not randomly, using the language of Capoeira: *meia lua de compasso, esquiva, queixada*.

The people forming the circle clap and sing to offer energy to the two people playing inside the *roda*. We two Black dance artists are like the players inside the *roda*.

We endeavor to communicate with one another using some bits of language that are unfamiliar and clunky and some bits that are wholly familiar.

I am reaching toward you now, having first visualized our solidarity,
our interdependence,
our symbiosis,
and flow.

As we exit this *roda* of loving attention and letter writing with each other may we stay in the circle, clapping and singing for the next two and the next and the next...

Oi, sim, sim, sim

Oi, não, não, não



Photo courtesy of Capoeira Vida Brooklyn.