

# These Survivals

AUTOBIOGRAPHY  
*of an* EXTINCTION

Lynne Huffer



WRITING MATTERS!

*A series edited by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Monica Huerta, Erica Rand, and Jerry Zee*

# *These Survivals*

AUTOBIOGRAPHY *of an* EXTINCTION

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Lynne Huffer

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*For Alexa*

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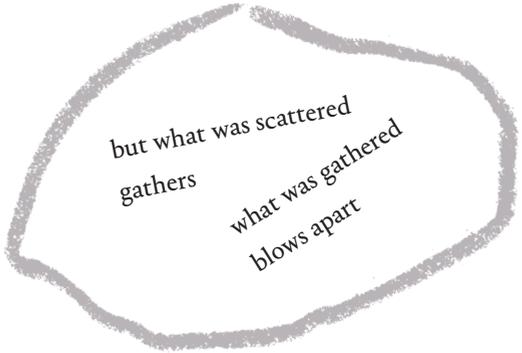
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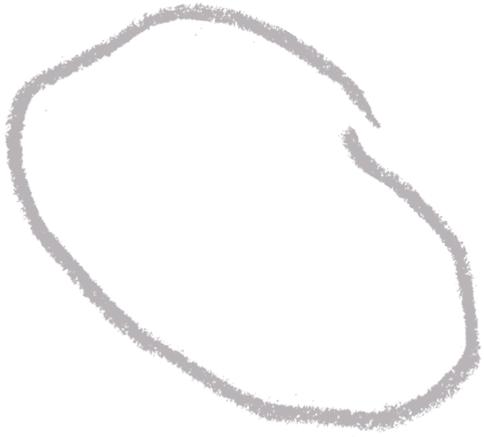
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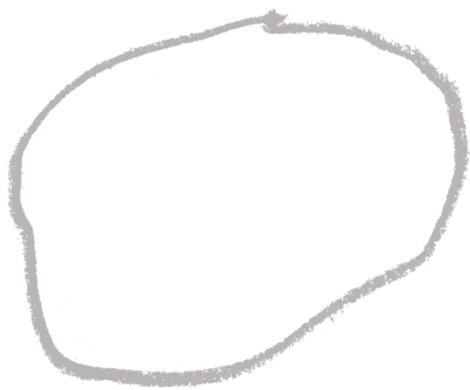
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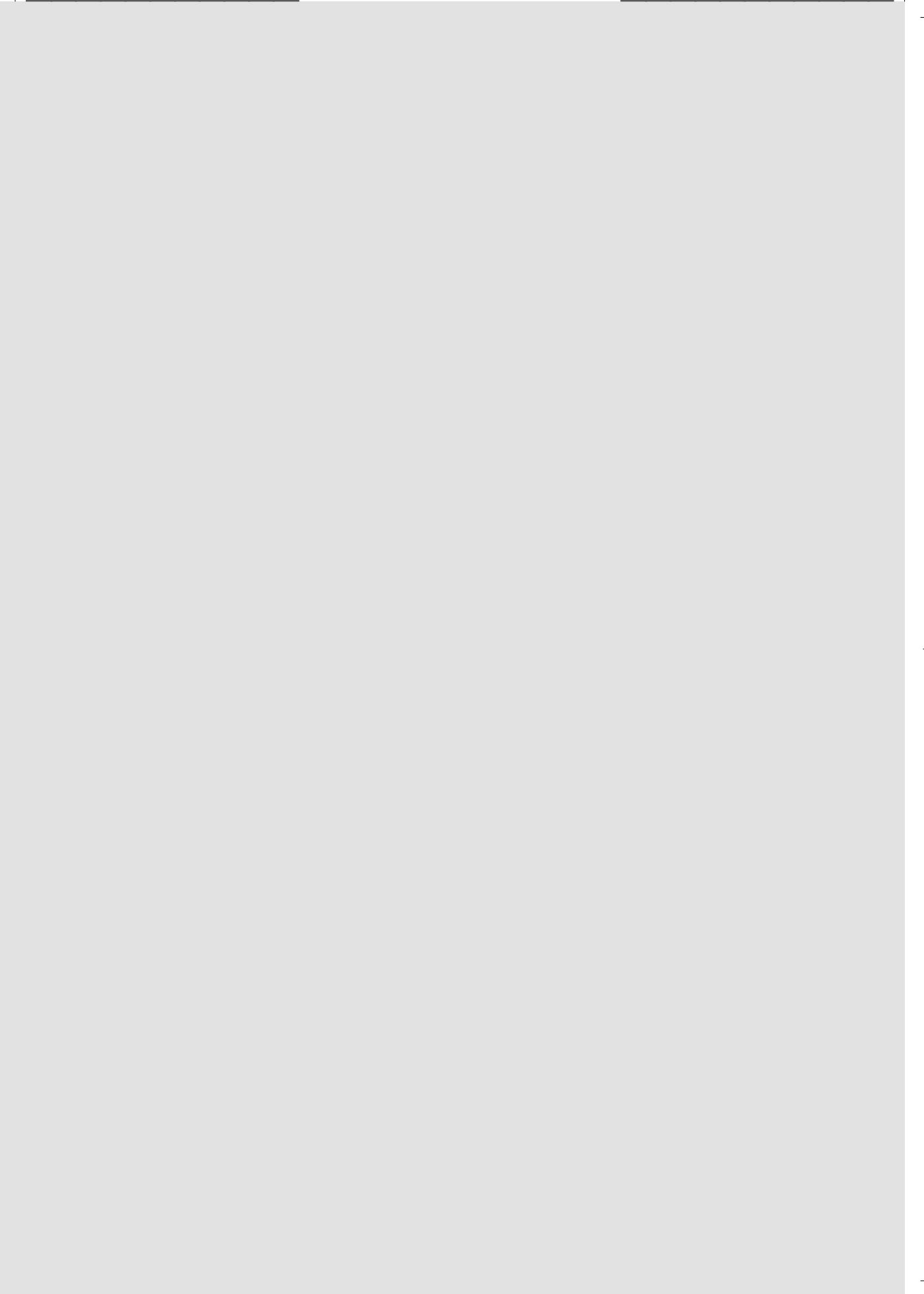




but what was scattered  
gathers  
what was gathered  
blows apart







I

FRAGMENTS COMINGBACK

]

]



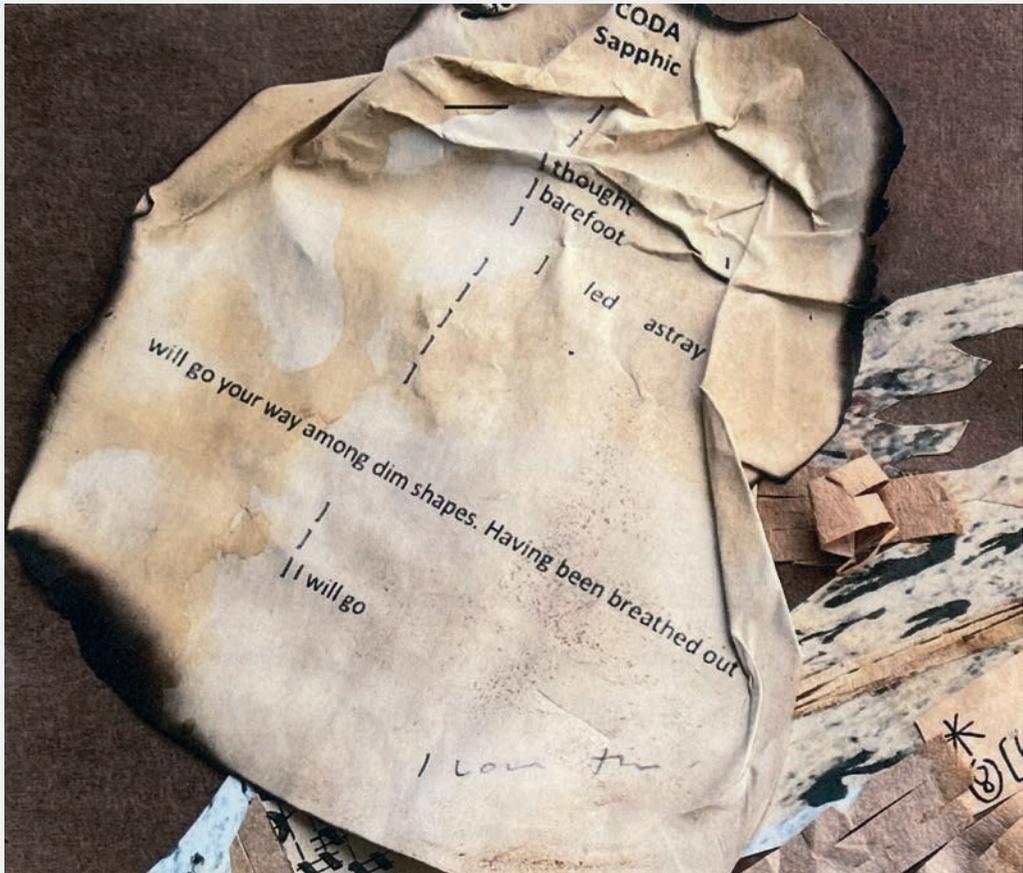


FIGURE 1.1

,

What you wrote, quoting Sappho, at the end of a book, the last in a trilogy you made,  
(feverish)  
was the promise of an ending

] ]  
] I will go

(eros growing cold  
after Sappho)

Yet here you are again,  
] led astray

] ]  
by words and the silences they shape. One day, perhaps, you will no longer know what  
this was. This heat. This cutting and pasting, collaging yourself into negative space: both  
steadfast and strewn. You will have gone your way  
among dim shapes

#### ΚΛΕΠΟΤΑΜΕΝΑ

[“having been breathed out”]

Anne Carson notes: “Cognate with words for wings, flying, fluttering and breath, the  
participle *εκπεποταμένα*, with its spatter of plosives and final open vowel, sounds like  
the escape of a soul into nothingness”

these pages

saying



you, me  
petrified bits of tooth,

rockglint in gullies

(Père Cuvier's archive: paleofossil record  
& [you&me]  
stonecold human anatomy)

*what is black in the museums of Paris?*

if you're Sarah Baartman you bear the cost of the stonecold archive:  
kidnapped from Africa for London parade this *unbearable* display for  
postmortem parts preserved in Parisian ManMuseum jars

these stonecold fragments dug up from gypsum mines in the Paris basin  
(*Anoplotherium commune* drawn but never published)  
in museums, unbearable, fragments endure:  
poem life overburden (dread, surprise, suspicion, longing) and



wish my pussy could live  
in a different shape and get  
some goddamn respect

one day

jars will shatter  
in the Musée de l'homme

,

: & whiffs of freedom  
(whiffs of respite)  
pause at stations of reflection  
saying sapphic breaks [ ] in worldending (Anthropocene) violence

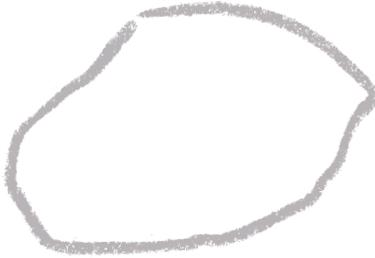
,

A rule for writing:  
Don't say Anthropocene.  
The word sags from overuse.  
Unsay Anthropocene with a (Holocene) fragment.



FIGURE 1.2

Spring 2023, Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton. At the end of her public lecture for our climate crisis seminar, the anthropologist Anna Tsing showed us a picture of a skull. A classic still life: *vanitas*



miniaturized collapse of civilization

A *vanitas* image is the pictorial equivalent of an open landfill where heaps of meaningless yet valuable things are laid to rest along with the worldly values attached to them for everyone to see

Carefully arranged. Bleached bone radiating an arrangement of objects: grasses, leaf bed, lavender nodules of *Laccaria amethystina* bubbling up from the earth. Tsing interpreted the deer skull sprouting amethyst deceivers as the return of Holocene life in an Anthropocene patch. Psychedelic fungi figuring purple respiration. A skull breathing in the overburden of an abandoned coal mine in Denmark.

]]

[haiku fragments for Anna Tsing]

unexpected things  
happened when they left the mines,  
left them leaving piles

of unstable sand  
mixed with coal. With the mine red  
deer died together

where they had gathered  
(in Denmark almost extinct)—  
herd becoming sign.

But skull doesn't speak  
forevering void: unspeaks  
last of a species.

Vanitas instead:  
generations fragmenting,  
returning to us  
  
as the Holocene,  
she said, skull (un)saying these  
newcaught animals,  
  
comingback bits in  
the midst of our sad planet's  
pits of disturbance.

，

Such excitement collaging these Holocene fragments in carefully counted comingback time!  
(sick to death of necrotic Anthropocene prose)  
Break the rules (old jars) & reassemble the shards!

Anne Carson again (comingback) in her *Oresteia*:  
“Words are coined by pressing old words together  
into new compounds—”

comingback  
comingback  
manminded  
haredevouring crimsoncovered!  
comingback  
dayvisible  
lightbringing  
dreamvisible  
comingback  
dewdrenched  
purplepaved! redsaturated!  
griefremembering pain  
comingback

comingback

The comingback fragment endures. Its endurance not steady or persistent,

not a line across a page but \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ lines that  
*break*

returning across a page or a \_\_\_\_\_ space for living

in comingback time like speech that unsays by saying  
[not the time of madness but the time of unreason]

the fragment endures while the whole crumbles

IMAGINE YOURSELF AS  
A BIT OF BONE. A  
FRAGMENT OF A FRAGMENT  
OF TOOTH. WILL SOME  
IMAGINE YOURSELF  
FIND YOU WHEN YOU  
CATCH THE SUNLIGHT

a piece of meteor  
from an unknown  
sky

It is the fragment and the fragmentary sta  
that are the enduring and normative cond  
conversely, it is the whole that is ephemera  
and the state of wholeness that is transitor

Any walk through a museum  
will support that thesis.

*what is black in the museums of paris?*

far from paris a desert museum:

Purifoyed dada junkyard after 66 neon signs

this creation of beauty from ugliness

,

The Holocene fragment (red deer skull still life) speaks more truthfully (Adorno thinks, thinking fragment with totality) than any Anthropocene whole. This

renewed possibility for a Holocene ecology (Tsing says)

something to  
look for

[  
in the remains  
in the remains  
in the remains of Anthropocene mining

in the remains of  
Anthropocene  
me my mine-  
ing

,

Give yourself rules for writing. How you create form:

Exercises for sapphic erasures or haiku condensations or verbswept weather reports or abecedaries or acrostics or wordcollage.

But forms will be broken (d collage)

Try as you might,

(or perhaps not trying)

you will trip and fall,  
[[

you will break a rule, then another, even the experimental ones you've set  
for yourselfandnooneelse

(newformslikeoldgreekcompoundwords)

Like all broken things, newforms will scatter (let her scatter)

you  
rself  
andno  
one  
for  
else  
no  
on  
e  
e  
els

remembering

*66 Signs of Neon*  
police killing in Watts so hot neon signs melted  
more signs in these times allthetime

,

---

---

---

---

---



breath mark  
luftpause  
if you're singing or talking  
(wind instrument)  
take a breath

,

this is not a comma

(respite)

the fragment endures while the whole crumbles

It is the whole  
that is fragile,  
transitory,  
poignant



FIGURE 1.3 Noah Purifoy, *No Contest (Bicycles)*, 1991.

Courtesy of Noah Purifoy Foundation © 2025.

,

Another rule for writing:  
It's ok to say "I," but let her scatter.  
[she was already scattered]