



Hillman-esque Activist Poem

Reading Brenda Hillman's poetry we can sometimes forget what courage she has to protest drones, detention centers, or use of deadly pesticides. Of course that courage is also evident in the weirdness, non-linearity and self-effacing nature of her work. There's that.

In the "poem" "Activism & Poetry A Brief Report : : : : ." (pages 25 & 26 of *In A Few Minutes Before Later*) Brenda relates an action done at Kroger's supermarket chain store that she says "uses deadly pesticides in their brand." In the "poem" she encourages readers to learn more about bees at BeeAction.org and notes her white privilege. An excerpt:

Activism & Poetry—A Brief Report : : : : :

Sometimes i'm called an "activist-poet," maybe to make my aesthetically odd poetry seem more relevant or marketable to audiences other than poets. i've gotten to dislike the term "activist-poet" especially the hyphen. Mostly i'm not active & feel passive dread, bringing pagan practices outside, talking to insects & plants during the minutes etc. My practicisim occurs too rarely, but basically i can't stand 95% of what is going on about anything.

On Friday of National Pollinators Week, it is suggested that we take letters to our local Kroger Market for a campaign against pesticides. Kroger uses deadly pesticides in their brand. Had signed up to drop off a letter to the manager of Kroger. i've never heard of Kroger before this; i'm from Berkeley. i drive to the nearest Kroger; my friend Jane comes along for support: she is a great calm beautiful woman. The area around the store is being gentrified & is getting whiter. We're supposed to hand letters to the managers directly.

A large percent of insect species

Will go extinct by the end of the century. i'd like to become a bee when i'm nonhuman ("b

:: :: ACTION ITEM :: ::

Your task, should you accept it is to stage an action and write about it. It could be as simple as holding up a sign with a statement at a busy intersection, such as:

HONK IF YOU LOVE CLEAN AIR & DEMOCRACY

OR

ASK ME ABOUT “EVERY CHILD MATTERS”

(See: <https://uniteforchange.com/en/blog/indigenous/every-child-matters/>)

and note what happens. This is not for the feint of heart. It is not recommended to hold a sign that would provoke anger, such as:

HONK IF YOU HATE FASCISM

Nor should you in any way put yourself in danger doing this. It helps to go with a huge sense of compassion. (We do “swirl out what we are and watch what returns” as Michael McClure said.) As you engage in this exercise, make a note of who honks, the car model, color, description of the person, &c. Note people who come up to you and ask questions, what they are wearing, what they smell like, &c. You could tell folks you encounter that you’re a poet carrying out a science experiment. This could take as little as two hours or less, if you can get a poem about the experience more quickly The day, date, weather, any significant news events happening on that day and other facts are all grist for your poem. Can you include a pagan touch like Brenda does, or C.A. Conrad? (See: [THIS POST](#). Maybe this is more your speed if you fear potential confrontation.) Never put yourself in danger.

You could also simply lobby a legislator, city or county councilmember, on an issue. Be sure to be prepared with facts and figures to back up your cause or issue and note the critical things that happen during this, including qualities of the building that stand out. Is there limestone? Are there monuments? That sort of thing. You could stand next to the statue for Emily Carr in downtown Victoria with a sign that says:

SIGN THIS PETITION TO REMOVE THIS STATUE

and note the reactions and the luminous details. Write the poem as soon as you can after the action from your notes, photos and memory. Maybe you add photos for a haiga-esque touch like Brenda did in the “poem” “Report on Another Encounter in Nature.” See:

Report on Another Encounter in Nature



After the EPA began to unravel, some students & i went out to read what used to be called nature poetry at a shopping center wearing Russian gas masks we had purchased on the internet. The students were brave. We were surrounded by grassy hills with so-called invasive species. There was a little buzzing from the edge of the universe. We felt everything intensely. Phrases sliced through the minutes then moved away through space.

At the Safeway a man came up to us—older white guy—& asked what we were doing there.

Notice how Brenda levels the thickness of the activism with self-deprecation, self-scolding, lines about “buzzing from the edge of the universe” and by denigrating hyphens. In short, humor. Look at the

humor of luminous details like: “Apples, sardines, plastic purple beach balls.” (& they are expensive A.F!)

If this is too much for you, consider the [Kyger/Sanders documentary approach](#) of writing about [THIS](#) article, or one that has more meaning for you:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2023/01/02/devon-henry-confederate-statues-richmond/>

There are MANY hyperlinks in this document. Feel free to click on them.

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