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**AN ACCOMPANYING  
TEXT**



**SHE**  
**WORKS**  
**FLEXIBLE**

She Works Flexible 2015

# **AN ACCOMPANYING TEXT**

Thank you for coming. Thank you for being here.

You are in a space. Are you sitting down? Are you walking? Or are you standing? Are you standing there looking? Are you sitting there looking? Are you deep down in a hole somewhere? You are in a space. Space is *a boundless, three-dimensional extent in which objects and events occur and have relative position and direction.* But normally space is both boundless in the sense that it can be imagined as such and also not quite boundless. This space has certain bounds. You are perhaps in a house. You are perhaps in an art gallery. You are perhaps in your apartment or in a prison. Or on a train. Perhaps you are sitting in your favorite hole. This piece is an exercise in imagination, since who knows where you might be. Or even who you might be. Where or who you might be is invisible to this text. Between this text and you is a large gap.

This text is the result of a request for accompaniment. By definition, it is therefore an occasional text. This is something that happens occasionally. That a request arrives to produce a form of art that might accompany another form of art or an event or a happening. This is a text meant to accompany. The text is left to navigate the vagueness and the vagaries of its coming into being as accompanier. How can text sidle up next to something? How can a text accompany anyone or anything? What exactly is accompanied by an accompanying text? How might this text accompany you? This text isn't trying to be meta, it's just trying to figure out how to exist.

Maybe it would be a good idea to sit down now, if you're not already sitting. It's that moment in the reading when sitting might be a good idea. Are you already sitting? You can sit. You can sit in a chair. You can sit on the floor. You can do what you will with your body. You can look at what is around you. You can move through this space. You have been invited to do so. This space is open. This text will accompany you as you move through this space or as you remain still in this space. Even when you stop reading or hearing it, the text will continue to resonate in your brain and your body. There are many levels of accompaniment this text is being asked to perform. This text has been asked to do so many things. It's a bit overwhelming for this text.

This text will take many forms over the course of its lifetime. It will have many drafts. It will have many versions. Right now, it is words on a screen, words cut and paste and added and subtracted. But also right now, you might be hearing this text being read. But also right now, you might be reading this text. What is "right now" shifts, an infinity of different "right nows" when this text might come to life under your eyes or in your ears. Right now happening over and over again. This text keeps happening again and again in different versions.

This space is not the space you are in now. It might not even be a space. This space is quite far from the space you are in now. Or is it? Does it even exist? Did you see the artists' performances here? Or there? Is it here or there? Were you there for the protest? It depends on your vantage point. For you, are you here or there? You are probably here. Bodies in space. Whether that is the space of a home or a gallery or a train or a prison. You might be reading this or you might be hearing it. In any case, you are here. But here is not here is not here is here. The problem of the deictic. The referent constantly shifting.

This is not a literary text that wants to fake you out. This text is not trying to fake anything. Though it is an exercise in imagination and thus you might say entirely fake. Between one time and another, between one space and another. Space implies a high degree of imagination. Some of this text's best friends believe in fakery. Some of them are having a party right now.

Here in this room with its windows looking out on the patio and a light breeze. Today it is raining. The clouds are thick. The trees are weighted with water. Thunder is occasionally heard. Today it is cloudy. Today it is not raining. Today the birds are chirping and the windows are open and a generator is roaring somewhere, or maybe a lawnmower. There are a lot of noises. Today is sunny and the birds are audible again. That generator is still there. The city's Public Works department has come again to pump sewage out of a broken line. Today the dogs are on the march in the backyard looking for cats. The sound of a train horn drones in the distance. It is chilly outside today and the windows are closed.

It's impossible to know what your right now is going to be like, since this text was written in advance of the moment you are living now. Is it raining? Is it cloudy? Is it sunny? Is it night? Is it day?

Originally, in its first draft, the text here featured a reflection on bodies, specifically the body of the author. This text has been through many drafts. This text will continue to change even after you read it. Will continue to morph and alter itself. Previously, for example, this text had been full of I's, full of first persons. It had a more casual tone. Maybe it was funnier. Maybe it would have made you laugh. Or entertained you. But the internet lead the text to an interview with a famous author who said, *Don't do that. Don't write about your little life.* This text thought, ah, one's little life. This little measly life which is not in fact something worthy of commentary. But what else is there except for this little, little life? It's unfortunate one's life is so very small, so specific, so narrow, this text thought to itself.

This text is very aware that there are billions of first persons jockeying to be heard. So instead of becoming a post, a personal essay, a memoir or an account of the individual, this text has decided to wager an experiment. This text has decided to accompany, just like that with no first person. This text has slowly been excised of references to the first person. If this text is to ever accompany, it cannot purport to establish one person as the first person. Why not, you ask? The author of this text is not the only first person. There are many. The curator. The protestor. The prisoner. The artist. The police officer. The person disappeared. The spectator. The driver. The person who didn't make it. All of you listening or reading are also "first people." Of course, the first person can be read as standing in for myriad other first people. But in general, this doesn't happen much. From one "I" to another, we, all of us first people, are much too different. We would do well not to erase our differences. So, this text doesn't ask you to step into the author's first person, rather it respects your first personhood, by leaving that first personhood to you. You are the only I in the room. In this text. Though we are all sometimes first and sometimes second or third. Though, this text will still attempt to exist in relation to you. Text, you might ask, is it even possible for you to accompany if you don't assert your own self?

A body is sitting at a foldable table. A back slightly hunched. A right elbow resting on a foldable table. A left elbow in the air. Hanging. A potentially injurious position. A movement, an alteration of posture comes. Now two elbows are firmly resting on the foldable table. Perhaps this is better. The process of writing made a body aware of its bodiliness. Writing is an embodied affair. There are bodies, even or especially when we write. These bodies accompany each other in all their multiple personhoods.



Do you remember when this building was something else? A bookstore. A market. Someone else's home. A prison. A desert. Should this text accompany the building as well? Before this structure was here, there was land. Are you already outside? This land has a history of conquest and colonization drenching it. Waves of history and blood. Is there blood in this land? Most likely. All lands are bloody. So then how to write a text that accompanies the blood in this land?

How could this text accompany you as you walk or sit or look or think to yourself?

What does it even mean to "accompany"?

Perhaps the most literal definition is the sense of one thing occurring alongside or in conjunction with another. It *goes with one thing as a companion, escort or attendant. It is a partner or a complement to.*

In music, accompaniment is *the art of playing along with an instrumental or vocal soloist or ensemble, often known as the lead, in a supporting manner.* This sense of musical accompaniment does seem to help. It suggests this text is secondary, not primary, and that it might exist as a form of support for something else. That something else is you and all around you: the art, the people, the home, the floor, the murmur of traffic, the other prisoners. Often, text is asked to do this. To support the real. The text is not asked to be real or to be an independent entity. It is, by nature, dependent. Something that only exists in reference to something real outside of it. *When you sing about what you don't know how to say, the saying turns.*

What is real is the laughter. As real as the flood. Between the shores of an island and a brick wall. Specific references to art on walls have presented a problem for this text. How closely should this text hew to the art in the space where the request for accompaniment was initially made? This text is accompanying a space between laughter and tears and a brick wall and gold lamé and a flood and a baby and a white lady and a dancing woman. This text is attempting to accompany that space. This text *runs from it but is still in it*. And yet, the text has a life outside of any one space. You are reading this text in a prison. You are reading this text in your dining room. You are listening to this text in the gallery. This is the issue. How best to accompany all of you? This text is trying to imagine all of you, but this text is having a very hard time of it. Surely, there is art around you, wherever you are. Or if there is literally no art around you in your little hole, surely there is something you could interpret as art despite the object perhaps not being initially designed as such. Or if there are no objects around you, surely there is something you can imagine in your head. This text owes much to the artists and the curator who have brought this text into being. They are special you's for this text, because this text depends on you, the artists and the curator, for its very existence. Were it not for you, this text would never have existed. And yet, this text hopes you will understand that you are not the only you's with access to this text. This text has to think about so many you's, so many occasions. You shifting and happening over and over again. You are not you are not you are you. You might even be no one.

*Another text says, Poetry's living connection with the real world and its occurrences in public and private affairs is revealed most amply in occasional poetry, what are called pièces d'occasion...If a lyric work of art is not to fall into dependence on the external stimulus and the purposes implicit in it, but is to stand out by itself as an independent whole, then the essential thing is that the poet shall use the stimulus purely as an opportunity for giving expression to himself, to his mood of joy or sorrow, or to his way of thinking and his general view of life. The principal condition for the lyric poet is therefore that he shall entirely assimilate and make his own the objective subject-matter.*

This is a startlingly clear statement of what this text does not want to do. This text is resolutely accompanying. This text is dependent on external stimulus and the purposes of that stimulus. This text is not lyric poetry. This text does not wish to stand out by itself as an independent whole. And this text has no use for the author who wrote it or for his moods of joy or sorrow, his way of thinking or his general view of life. This text has no use for the assumption that the author is a "he." This text pushes back against the masculinist third person. This text does not want to "assimilate" you or to make the "objective subject matter" "its own." This text does not believe in "objective subject-matter" since this text is entirely dependent and quite needy. This text does not want to take what is yours and to represent it as its own. This text wants to do something else. It wants to sit with you, to be sitting with you, to accompany.

This accompanying text will never stand on its own two feet. It will never be independent of its occasion. This occasion is the only fact of its existence. This accompanying text does not produce a distance between the occasion and the text itself. This text rejects the modernist delusion that, despite us being here now in a space, our ability to imaginatively leave this space is what might allow us to produce something great. This text does not need to leave this space in order to be great. This text does not believe in the terms of "greatness." This text is dependent and the product of an occasion. This text would argue that all art is the product of occasions, some small and some large, some traumatic and some less so.

But how can a text work in a "supporting manner"? How can a text support? Especially, when this text is written, as was mentioned before, on a bloody ground. This text is a bit obsessed with the blood and the bones buried in the ground. This text is not impartial or objective. This text has seen too much.

This text is thinking about another form of accompaniment on bloody ground. Accompaniment is *an often-used tactic of human rights observation. This accompaniment strategy was started (or at least named as such) in the 1980s by US solidarity activists in Central America. Since then, thousands of human rights workers, grassroots organizations and communities have been protected by accompaniers throughout the world.* Maybe you know someone who has done human rights accompaniment work. Maybe you have been one. Maybe you have been accompanied by one before. *This form of accompaniment is based on the idea that in conflict zones, in war time, some bodies are more likely to be attacked than others. Certain outsiders, for example, tend to be left alone by armed actors. Accompaniment is a grassroots strategy that uses privilege by putting people who are less at risk literally next to others who are under threat often because of their work for peace or justice.*

Is a war going on here? Or many wars going on? Or no war? Are you in a peaceful place? There are so many you's. This text imagines you in the midst of a war or multiple wars and warfare that is expressed in a million different ways on your streets and the streets of your neighbors. But this text is not trying to convince you of anything. This text likes to enjoy itself too. This text is not arguing a point. This text hopes you will need no convincing that there are wars going on right now, but recognizes war can seem very far away even when it is very, very close. Did you make the performance? Did you make the protest?

Does a text have a body to be able to provide this sort of human rights accompaniment? Does a text have privilege to put on the line? What protection can be provided by a text? Can any protection be provided by a text? Some bodies are more likely to be attacked. Is this a conflict zone? What kinds of conflict are happening here? Here which is multiple places, of course, wherever you are now reading or hearing this. Is this a conflict zone? Why or why not? That is an essay-type question. This text is asking you. Are you being attacked right now? In what way? Are you still able to read or listen despite the attacks? Are all of the you's around you receiving the same treatment right now? This text imagines each of you is being treated very differently depending on so much. For those of you suffering attack right now, how might this text stand in the way? This text wants to stand in the way. It wants to be there when the state arrives and knocks on your door and takes you away. Or when you are yelling at the police officers, telling them to get back. This text is ridiculous like that.

This text also wants to laugh at your joke. Your joke is perhaps the shining example of what language can do in the face of all the broken bodies and the blood. Your joke is small though. It can be drowned out by a wave of critique or sadness or conflict. This text is sorry it's not more funny. This text rehearses laughter in the rubble, and fails. This text would love to be funny. This text gets bogged down in the details, weighted down by microaggressions. This text also wants to be gracious. This text wants an invitation to the party. This text wants to get drunk and say funny things and feel popular. This text wants to laugh with you. This text wants to be a really good listener, which is something practically impossible to imagine a text doing: to listen. This text really wants to listen.

This text recognizes the waters which one day might wash over this little patch of land. This text will accompany the waters of the future upon the land. This text should accompany the flood. This text doesn't want to stand in the way of progress. This text doesn't believe in progress. This text wants to be a flotation device when the water rises. When the water comes, this text will drown alongside you, but only to accompany you if you drown. This text wants to stand with you on the prow of the ship as you arrive home. This text wants to dance with you in a non-creepy way as you arrive home. This text wants to accompany you as you get off the plane or the boat and walk into unknown circumstances. This text wants to be there with no weapons to stand in the way of the gunfire. This text wants to be a bodyguard or at least to stand next to you. This text also wants to recognize its privilege and use it in some way to stop the attack. This text *embraces its naivete, its foolishness, its underconsidered belief in human possibility.*

Accompaniment is large and deep.

This text accompanies this site, this space, this land, this war, this art, these artists, this curator, this you. This text doesn't have to go to some far off country where war is raging in order to accompany. Though it would love to travel to a far off country. It hopes it might be able to provide something, anything at all, once there. This text would like to learn. This text commits to re-write itself as circumstances change.

This text thinks war is shaped by the space in which it is made, as war itself shapes the space. War is not only made in faraway countries, war is made here, at this foldable table where this body is writing, but it is also made there, your here, in the space of this gallery or this prison or your hole or in the space of you reading this text in a pamphlet. This text must be in the streets where the state murders its citizens or destroys their houses. This text must accompany the explosions. This text must be a ceremony. This text should make those explosions audible.

This text is made of language. This text promises not to translate your secrets into language. You can tell this text your secrets. This text will crouch down low to the asphalt and listen. It is simply accompanying you. This text won't take what is yours and make it its own. This text will leave what is foreign foreign, what is elsewhere elsewhere. This text will make what belongs to it foreign.

A friend of this text wrote that

to accompany one another

(what that friend calls *loving one another*)

*requires that we look at the invisible together,*

*requires that we give up a centered gaze,*

*a fixed sight,*

*a renunciation to leave space and air around*

This text can't see you. Probably some of you have come in to the space while this text was already in progress. While this recording has been playing. Maybe you picked up the pamphlet and your eye began to read here on this line. That's fine. Thank you for coming. Because you arrived late or because you are jumping around in the pamphlet or even if you have been in the text the whole time, you might not know or it might be good to remind you that previously this text declared it would not use the first person. This text was trying to listen to that famous author telling the first person not to talk about their little life. But that author was telling privileged students not to talk about their little life, probably not to talk about it in one little way.

This text does have a little, little life.

This text contradicts itself. This text doesn't so much contradict itself as it forgets things. This text is very forgetful. This text remembers something later and adds it. The truth is this text is going to fail at every goal it sets out. This text is not safe.



This text is a first person.

This text has a body and a presence.

This text is alive and breathing. Or is it dead.

This text realizes it doesn't matter

because alive or dead,

it accompanies somehow

or fails to accompany

which might be the same thing.

This text doesn't take place

as a given.

This text is listening to the stories between the letters.

This text wants to listen across the gap, but it's fucked up.

*A gap remains between me and you,*

between you and me. This text is late making a payment.

Between this text and "I" is a large gap.

It appears and exists.

*In perceiving the other,  
if I annul the gap  
and the difference between us,  
I become the other  
and make him mine.  
I would cease to accompany you  
if I made you mine.*

*We would cease to be two.*

You have been  
*becoming the other.*

I have been too.

*Becoming the other  
without returning within myself  
corresponds to a becoming that loses the way back*

Did you lose your way?

Did you become someone else?

When the pace slowed down,

when the white space appeared,

did you start to think of something else?

Did you go somewhere else?

Now you are back,

first person.

Yet I is not I is not I is I.

This text is an I

*is a way back*

*to the self,*

*to one's own perceptions,*

*to presence in the world,*

*to the other.*

This text says

*I perceive the other and lose myself*

This text ends as lost as it began.

But I don't exit,

or I don't exist.

Maybe we can still run away together.

# NOTES

[...*a boundless, three-dimensional extent...*] – Wikipedia

[*Don't do that. Don't write about your little life.*] – Toni Morrison

[...*goes with one thing as a companion...a partner or a complement to...*] – OED

[...*the art of playing along...*] – Wikipedia

[*When you sing about what you don't know how to say... & ...runs from it but is still in it.*] – Fred Moten

[*Poetry's living connection with the real world*] – Georg Hegel

[*This strategy was started...*] – Sara Koopman

[*embraces its naivete, its foolishness...*] – Claudia Rankine

[...*loving one another...etc...*] – Luce Irigaray

# APPRECIATIONS

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