

## OBU Manifesto # 398

What is it then?

OBU has been urging itself, don't get hyperventilated over every outrage, and don't crack up over every hilarity and absurdity, and don't for goodness sake believe that any one new thing will bring Trump down or any one new thing will bring create or recreate democracy.

If Robert Mueller is fired or is not fired...

If the Blue Wave in November happens as a tsunami or just a tidal increment

If 200,000 or 2 million join the March for Our Lives

What is it, then?

*Scott Pruitt?!*

OBU has been urging itself, don't watch TV, just don't bother, if it's one thing or if it's another, it's pretty much the same thing

and if it's McMasters or it's the lunatic Bolton or it if it's Tillerson or the lunatic Pompeo (with Gina Haspel the torture chief coming off the bench)

they're all of them committed to autocracy and they're all of them in it to win it, and when the going gets tough they're gonna party till the break of dawn

The fight is the same. Whoever is running whatever department of the circus, the fight is the same.

If the Democrats sweep over both houses of Congress, the fight is the same.

Do you doubt this? Do you think the fight will be over then?

When Trump is impeached or resigns, and if he is indicted, and if he is put in prison where he belongs, and for a long time, which he deserves,

the fight is still the same. Do you doubt this? Do you think the fight will be over then?

OBU Manifesto #159

Open

Darken

Observational equipment (we had not learned)

range of variables (we couldn't factor)

that operated according to prevailing

the only variables

available

mass and gravity

it turns out

places

dark (*matter*)

now developing (Mathematics)

To hold all the universes

sufficiently together

dark (knowledge)

can't open (matters)

**OBU Manifesto # Witnessed in the Convex Mirror** (by Eileen R. Tabios)

The forms retain a strong measure of ideal beauty  
as they forage in secret on our idea of distortion.  
Hermit your way to brewing up poetry and you go  
to unexpected places. For this, you murdered poetry  
books--the condition precedent to a certain resurrection.  
No community awaits at the end. But you know dark  
figures lurk in the background—they will peel themselves  
from shadows to approach the strange light of a resur-  
rected book. It first will appear as a bonfire, but they will  
shoot their hands forward to grasp the flames. When you  
lift your writing hand from this foretelling, you notice your  
fingers change to talons. You rip a hole in the paper and  
dive into it. On the other side: *Poetry*. It first appears as  
a bird of prey with eyes afire. It becomes you flying back  
through the hole to sit back at your desk. You continue  
proofing the manuscript. Every time you turn a page, ash  
rises from the buckling words. As they float away, they  
leave behind feathers the color of ink that were bathed  
(with drama, you discern) in the perfume of plumeria

## OBU Manifesto #616

OBU can no longer be ponderous.  
The fluid stasis requires unburdening.  
OBU is thinking, West Virginia, OBU is thinking, the kids in Florida,  
OBU is thinking, Downticket, Downticket!

Something resembling democracy is condensing on the cold leaves  
in the crevices of oligarchy's stone forest.

Something resembling millions refusing to die.

Jennifer Hudson is singing Bob Dylan as gospel, with a choir—"The Times  
They are a Changin.'"

*Bob Dylan?!?!*

Something resembling the solidarities of OBU is happening in spirit  
or hologram or has just popped out of the 3-D printer.

Something resembling a widely distributed courage and compassion  
is leaping across the synapses of the mirror-neurons  
of our shared organism.

Not everyone is a total idiot.

And so OBU can no longer be ponderous.  
OBU can be willowy.  
OBU is in the company of dancers.

**OBU Manifesto: Ten Commandments in a Time of Trump** (by Geri Lipschultz)

1. Your dick is the Lord your God. You shall have no other dicks before you.
2. You shall not make any graven images of a dick that is bigger than yours (unless you must).
3. You shall not use your dick in vain unless you must.
4. Remember the dick (to keep it holy) and to fuck anyone you must.
5. Honor your father because he gave you a dick.
6. You shall not kill unless you must.
7. You shall not commit adultery unless you must.
8. You shall not steal unless you must
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor unless you must.
10. You shall not covet because you can fuck anyone you must.

## OBU Manifesto # 93

OBU is not content to swim in urgent disgust in the American river.

**OBU Manifesto #Is** (by Diane Stevenson)

Is  
the public an institution  
Is  
the public an individual?

(How sweet? How bitter?)

Whose moral compass is a country?

Whose desire gets to be a country?

Whose repression?  
Whose compulsion?  
Whose compassion?

(How sweet? How bitter?)

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Late capitalism  
Late, late capitalism  
Late late late capitalism  
is not too late to plot to blot  
the future, to bury us in private plots

to make private what is shared  
to bury us in obsolescence,  
to travel one direction  
to maul dialectics  
in a mall  
to sell brine online.  
Capitalism plots  
to make people obsolete.

[The sow not, neither do they reap... so, harvest them and market them].

Late, late capitalism  
is a weak joke but it will have to do.

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Love the symbolic, hate the concrete;  
talk on the cloud, hate the street.

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Late, late, late, late  
capitalism is a constriction.  
It constricts and constructs  
the social body  
out of bodies.  
It constricts and constructs the body politic  
into people  
into algorithms.

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once a future  
is added in  
once the whole  
is added up  
once the disparate  
explosive parts  
are put together  
when the future  
is put together  
again  
when we believe  
in futures  
constructed again  
from unconstructed parts

## OBU Manifesto # 1,988

### THE TROUBLE WITH OBU

is how are you supposed to read it? The name “manifesto,” in spite of its lineage in literature, is thought still to imply some political and semantic transparency.

The manifesto will tell you what it thinks. It will manifest.  
It will put it down and lay it out.

The principles of OBU

The tactics of OBU

The *longue duree* of OBU.

That’s how it’s done.

Breton’s “Surrealist Manifesto” is far from surrealist. It’s actually just an essay: “We are still living under the reign of logic: this, of course, is what I have been driving at. But in this day and age logical methods are applicable only to solving problems of secondary interest. The absolute rationalism that is still in vogue allows us to consider only facts relating directly to our experience. Logical ends, on the contrary, escape us.” And much more along those lines. It’s pretty clear, from start to finish, what the text is driving at.

There are more difficult instances. Take, for example, Ocalan’s *Manifesto for a Democratic Civilization* (vols. 1 & 2) or Fred Moten’s *Undercommons*. These are not easy to read. But their difficulty lies in their apparent need for a hyper-rigorous precision. The complexities they aim toward must be expressed with absolute exactitude. Thus, they resort to technical languages of their own invention. These are wonderful works, OBU avers; OBU is not knocking them. They are fun to read. If you like gnarly social theory and speculative history—and OBU loves ‘em—they are the cat’s meow. The point here is simply that their difficulty is not because their meanings or purposes are not clear. They aim for the transparency of social science. The difficulty, especially in Moten and Harney, is that they aspire to a complex, sometimes contradictory, precision. They believe sincerely that a succinct and correct account of the nature of oppression can be articulated, and that they are doing so. If the theory can be expressed with the requisite precision, the movement itself will leap into existence (as it already exists as potential). With its defining words as weapons, it will grasp its power.

OBU is written in ordinary language. It is not precise. It is obvious. It is banal. It is not difficult to understand sentence by sentence. It has no technical language. And yet, somehow, it is harder to *read*. With Ocalan and Moten and other manifestos, you know where you stand. They are there, in

a certain place, declaiming; and you are here, where you are, reading. That separation must be maintained. They are always and entirely serious. They are spelling out a theory, a correct theory. It is your job to decode the writing and get its meaning. The reader moves, or is expected to move, from his/her subjective place (the place of the act of reading) to the manifesto's objective place (the place of meaning). The manifesto is scientific. Its language is, really, an unfortunate necessity. It is a means, a medium. The goal is to see through it.

But OBU is its language. It has nothing else. There is nothing beyond it. Its meaning is its language. Its theory is its language. The experience of reading is the experience that OBU wishes its readers to have. Therefore, it must be *read*. What is then to be *understood*? What is to be understood is what happens during the experience of reading. The reader, if or as he or she is reading, is at all times inside. There is no objective other place to which the language will transport and deposit him or her. There is only here.

OBU obliterates every Archimedean point of leverage. Where are we? We're here. We're not there.

OBU fabricates and throws up its widest net and forces there to be, in the text, another place. And we are there. We are not here.

We're not. We're not. OBU is hurrying to the escape pod. It's punching in coordinates for a sector of extremely Dark Matter. The region is governed by gravities whose math has not been worked out. Why would we want to go there?

Because we can't stay here.

**OBU Manifesto #Trompe l'Oeil -- manifesto of the birds** (by Rachel Blau DuPlessis)

PREFACE with three-fold explanation of Trompe l'Oeil -- manifesto of the birds.

1. "Birds do not perceive glass as a solid object. They see a reflection of their habitat or nothing at all, causing the bird to collide with the window and either die from the impact or become injured."

This information from Temple's Tyler School of Art, from their project of designing plastic patterns to place on glass, particularly in zones of migration like the Atlantic Flyway. Any tall glass building or any glass architecture in the path of the fly zone is a potential death trap for birds.

2. ["In lieblicher Bläue . . ."], the text with which I originally began this work, is a multiple fiction. It is an imagined, transcribed or constructed ode by a character in a novel (*Phaeton* by W. Waiblinger, 1823) based on the writings of the poet Hölderlin in the later years of his life, when he was mentally non-normative, yet also still writing odes, fragments and praise songs. (This information comes from Richard Sieburth, translator of Hölderlin, *Hymns and Fragments* [Princeton U. P., 1984].) The speed of the associations in this unattested "Hölderlin" poem in *Phaeton* seems to symbolize both the poet's poignant situation and the utter epistemological and bibliographic uncertainty of this work. Who actually wrote this? Hölderlin? Waiblinger? Was it even written? Spoken? Chanted? It seems to come from almost nowhere. My work takes off from this whole situation and travels its own untoward direction.

3. The problem of the articulate and cunning manifestos of ONE BIG UNION is understanding what people wanted who do not think or feel in the terms this project sets forth. Who is us? who is them? What will happen to their (often outrageous) opinions? What will they do with their hopes? The problem of denazification was not fully solved. Perhaps detrumpification will fare better. The implicit them/ us shows how complicated and dangerous this has already become. I wanted this manifesto to disturb myself.

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*TROMPE L'OEIL—manifesto of the birds*

Darling blue cerulean blue refracted premonition

we were flying, saw our sky

saw light, WE WANTED TO SEE OUR SPACE

We needed large SOLACE, we saw it THERE

THOUGHT LOUD

BELIEVED we had beautiful space NEAR

flying high as high. TRIUMPH we have found.

BEST BIRD. BIRD BEST.

The news, one day already





shadow-dirt mirror-look leaves failed fledge flight dead thing of the  
universe in its tiniest place—SMAKC encompassing but bird is as bird does  
smashes at glass strikes rebounds strikes stricken strikes explained

WHAT WILL WE NOW BELIEVE?

HOW WILL WE NOW DO?

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WE HAVE

lost vision

we will still

we will hold to it

something invisible words happing birds hitting reflection

trompe l'oeil cannot be true can be true can can't can can't can can't

WE SEE CLEAR

WE SEE DEAR BLUE

## OBU Manifesto # Politics in the Twilight Zone (by anonymous)

A puzzle: the American left is besieged everywhere but the cities. But cities don't have power. They are creatures of the state and, by extension, creatures of the federal government; they can't redistribute; their lawmaking powers are weak.

Cities are also where firms, finance capital, and real estate development expand, extract, and displace. Cities house the engines of the profoundest inequalities ever known. Life possibilities transform block by block. Civic goods and public services contract. The commons are under attack.

Raymond Williams, writing about nineteenth century literature, says that, "Out of an experience of the cities came an experience of the future." What experiences — what visions — of the future do contemporary American cities supply?

An example: New Haven, Connecticut. Settled 1638. Puritans and then patricians led the port city for its first two hundred years. Industrial, immigrant, growing, exuberant, working class for the next hundred.

New Haven in the 20th century embodied the problems of the American city in the 20th century: population growth and decline, blight, investment, divestment, unemployment, violence, environmental decay.

What future does New Haven prophecy?

The bargain — or fantasy — of the New Deal order depended on labor and capital sitting at the State's table. Fordist political economy rested on an uneasy bargain and a cursed political coalition.

New Haven prophecies Cleveland, Baltimore, Pittsburgh. Knowledge, service, care economies. New Haven prophecies the unraveling of the midcentury political economy: structural revenue crisis; real estate speculation; blight; wage stagnation; employer power.

Nonprofit university or hospital systems are the largest employers in every state in the country.

Reinhold Niebuhr came of age in Henry Ford's Detroit, the definitive company town of the American Century. Niebuhr called politics "a twilight zone where ethical and technical issues meet."

Politics requires routine, policy, implementation. Moral energies, conflicts, campaigns determine who gets what, where, when and how. Twilight zones, like estuaries, are murky, disorienting, transitions between phases, matters, and masses.

The normal science of city politics resembles a twilight zone. The imperative for action, results, response rubs against and overtakes aspirations for the best action, results, response.

Factions in city government develop along lines considered “political” pejoratively. Paraphrasing Mario Cuomo: campaigns are conducted in ideology, government happens in policy.

What can the organized left do to intervene into these twilight zones?

The extraordinary thing about democratic society is the extent to which it allows ordinary people to take over the government without violence. Left movements must become more comfortable with this idea. They must shed their melancholy attachments to being on the losing side of history.

But they must become more comfortable with the limitations and traps of pure political power as well. It bears repeating that power held internally depends on power exercised externally.

Taking over the government can never be enough. Institutions cannot be remade from within, *sui generis*.

They must be reimagined in church basements. That imagination must be harnessed and deployed in the twilight zone of council meetings, committee meetings, zoning meetings, commission meetings, neighborhood meetings — at stoops and doors and in living rooms and kitchen tables.

Cities are challenging places to make social change.

American municipalities have a simple prerogative — raise revenue to provide needed services supported by the voters.

That simple prerogative sets up a structural conflict between stakeholders and administrators about how exactly to govern the one area in which municipal authorities enjoy clear sovereignty, land use.

“The gentrification of the mind” that Sarah Schulman describes in San Francisco, New York and Washington, D.C. was not a conspiracy. It happened one municipal development plan at a time. One zoning hearing at a time. One planning commission meeting at a time.

In Los Angeles Chicano activists and allies troll hipster coffee shops and run art galleries out of the neighborhood (historically Jewish, currently Latino Boyle Heights).

Are these weapons of the weak sharp enough — or big enough — to work? And to what end?

Nietzsche warns against “no-saying” — defensive postures that emaciate our moral imagination. The left since before the end of the Cold War lamented the post-socialist condition: the lack of a unified, energizing program or vision.

The structural conditions for the Fordist city diminished decades ago. Can they be willed back into

existence? Do these conditions limit our political horizons? Do we want a left of preservation or transformation?

The city – for all its constraints – can be a laboratory for the OBU, a zone of experimentation and generation.

**OBU Manifesto # Overheard in New Haven** (by Dwayne Betts)

X: Got this idea. Like a dating app, but for friendship.

Y: Lonely?

X: It's just, you know, all my friends believe the same shit. And it would be nice to actually say I love someone I disagree with about something other than LeBron James.

Y: Man, fuck LeBron James. How he gonna go to the Lakers. This nigga got Akron tattoo'd on his back....

X: Bruh, we not gonna do this LeBron James as a slave shit no more. You don't fuck with him. You hate Magic Johnson. I got it. I'm saying, shit is like I can't disagree with niggas about shit no more.

Y: So you gonna build Tinder for opinion diversity?

X: Shit, yeah. Like how on Tinder, when you swipe to say what you like. On my shit, you'll swipe for the shit you hate and get matched with whoever loves that.

Y: Sounds like chaperones gotta be at those coffee hours.

X: That's the point. Why you even say that. Who you know that you disagree with?

Y: You nigga. Like all this crazy shit you be talking about. You know my cousin told me he voted for Trump. I asked this fool the reason and guess what he said?

X: If he said some MAGA shit I'm a fire on him when I see him.

Y: I thought you was peace with the disagreeable shit.

X: Whatever man. What he say.

Y: Nigga say, he saw Trump in a Jay Z video like a decade ago. So Jay Z said he was cool. Now Jay say he ain't. He say, shit been the same in the hood since Prohibition or the shit with the Freedom Schools got screwed - so fuck everything. He voted for the nigga black people wanted to be like when all he talked about was money.

X: Damn. Ay, yo, let's go see that *Sorry to Bother You* joint.

Y: Nigga, what is you gay? I'm not going to the movies with your ass.

X: See, that's that stupid as shit I'm talking about. I know you serious too. But I'm buying these tickets and you going.

Y: This ain't no date though nigga.

X: You do know you married, right? And, I been as gay as I am now since we was like 8.

Y: Whatever, get the tickets.

### OBU Manifesto #3,185

Elemental futzes descend quickly. They make their quick descent, in a small line, through rough terrain. It's like in a horror movie or a dream. But they are futzes, so no one need worry. They survive all calamities. Their progress is observed with fascination. It is intricate and winding. The futzes poke their snouts, or noses, into all the surrounding shrubs and outgrowths. They are searching for information. At some point, they will reach the bottom of the steep gully they are descending. They will find a narrow stream, shallow and passable. They will consider. Should they follow the stream, or should they ascend the hill on the other side? Should they go upstream or downstream, if that is a pertinent question? Are compass points of any relevance? But they are futzes, and they are elemental. Every decision and motion is important beyond its immediate context. Their immunity is no real safeguard.

**OBU Manifesto #Ranting on white** (by Terese Svoboda)

What color is  
God?

Universal color--  
Universal multiplied times infinite spectrums.

Colored.

In attempting such quasi-universal pronouncements,  
what gets said about racial complexities?

(Who's speaking?)

Or does the gesture toward “universal”  
invalidate the effort  
since there can be no speaking for all –

or just problematize it?  
(Hey, *Think this*, no matter who you are).

But something gets said  
about color  
about race  
whatever one's "position."  
Note: whites have a “position,”  
often forgotten.  
Forgetting is no option  
for POC.

Yet we (all) perform  
knowing that our performance won't resolve  
into knowledge.

We intervene. We interrogate.  
(Who's blue? Am I blue? Kind of blue? What did I do?)

In the progressive world (white?),  
critiques of white  
privilege are everywhere,  
but what gets elided (not me!)

and what ought to follow (applause?)  
need to be examined

starting with:

What is the status of *ought*?

What is the change that *might* might wreak?

If God gave Noah the rainbow sign  
who got saved?

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Shape those stories/poems/novels without using the easy label of “black.” What does “black” mean anyway, other than the ability of the skin to reflect light? Try to think about how a character reveals himself/herself as identifying as an African American, and whether that has any relevance to this particular piece of writing. Calling attention to color without a rationale makes white the default. Using “black” asks the reader to pull up his prejudices and scan the situation for markers. Okay, sometimes you might want to play on “preconceived” notions, but do it consciously – like at the opening of “Get Out” where the black man is (justly) terrified of being arrested for walking through white suburbia. Using more precise characteristics produces more accurate portrayals. Unless the character's in a coal bin and naked and being black explains why he can't be seen. But how many nudists hang around coal bins anymore?

## OBU Manifesto # 2212

Be in it, be in it, just be in it, be in it, don't lose heart, stay in, show up, let despair flow through you don't try to stop it, just stay in, stay in, show up.

When you go out, you'll see. You'll find the people you need to find. They'll say, yes, the wealthiest people should pay more taxes; and yes, schools should be adequately funded and people should have health care they can afford; and yes, a person who works should not live in poverty and the minimum wage should make sure of that; and yes, people should have rights and power in their places of work; and yes, children should not be kidnapped at our borders. When you go out, you'll see.

If democracy is to be saved—that is to say, created—we must go out from door to door and find the people who will create it.

The job of the “activist” is to locate the *demos* and to locate the *cratos*. Going to rallies won't be enough. The thousands of people attending rallies must engage in tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of conversations in order that the *demos* and the *cratos* will be found. When the *demos* is found, the *cratos* will come into being.

Only if the people are real can there be decency. Until the people are found, they cannot be real.

They will be found behind their doors. Ring the bells and knock on the doors.

When you ring the bell, put your ear to the door; make sure the bell is working. If you don't hear it ring, then you must knock.

If you hear dogs barking, that's ok. Many people have dogs.

If some crazy woman or man is holding a large German Shepard on a chain and threatens to set the dog on you, then you should walk away quickly. That person will probably not support the democracy.

**OBU Manifesto # The Next Dream** (by Michael Davidson)

In this dream I killed two friends  
by stuffing them into a cereal box  
covering the top with Saran Wrap  
and waiting until the shaking stopped,

later that day I hugged another friend good bye  
even though she wasn't going anywhere,  
the sky was full of smoke  
the lake a sheet of mercury,

it's the forests' fault  
the trees grow close together  
to exchange signs  
and express solidarity,

they must be exterminated,  
on the way home  
I fed quarters into a machine  
but it was the wrong machine

the attendant said, that's  
the slot for bills, trees  
speak a slow language  
that no one remembers,

fire begins here  
in a sentence no one is permitted  
to complete, the next dream  
is the black sun.

## OBU Manifesto 4, 998

The cold is overpowering. It's crushing. It's like seven oligarchs drilling holes in seven places in OBU's bodies. Through the holes comes just an emptiness—a really cold one, of course. It's the cold of a winter that's both misleading—it's *not* some sign that the whole world's climate is not getting damagingly and irreversibly warmer—and it's right there on your face swearing it will never leave you. You can believe in it. You are exchanging your calories for the ridiculous, pointless, shrouded crouch and jog toward the next station of warmth. OBU is drilled seven places releasing its warmth.

We're one, says OBU, on small pieces of paper. We're one like flames from a gas jet all from one stove. The stove is the earth. We're ladled from one genetic soup pot and gestate in numerous cultural bowls. But with what real difference? Unless we're merely ideologically driven puppets fighting to the death in a murderous *commedia del arte*, some comedy of cannibals, some prequel to tragedy in which the gods eat their children. Mmm, that was good, now what shall we do?

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Don't lose the ambiguous  
Stop equivocating  
The multiple

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One can only reject everything for so long, OBU confesses,  
and then you have to accept something.

You think, finally (though it may seem premature) that, yes, you'll go with *this*.  
It has its flaws, but its vision is congruent—you might say—

with the current situation, at least as you envision it.  
It has the appropriate horrifying lack of a floor;

when its protagonists speak, it's not certain what language they're speaking,  
and you can celebrate this.