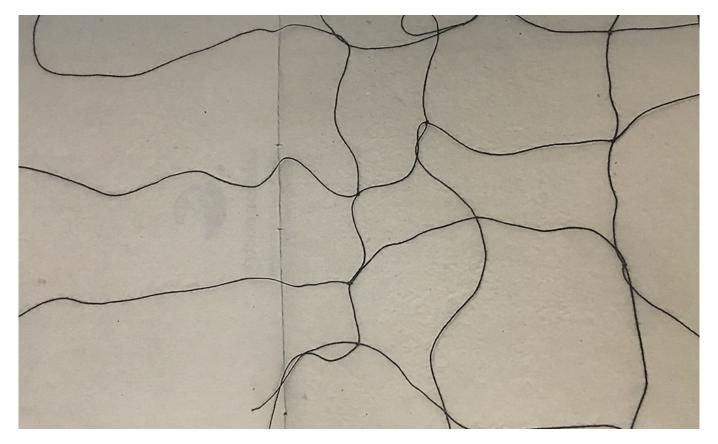
<u>Review: how do i net thee by Shira</u> <u>Dentz</u>

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how do i net thee by Shira Dentz
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During a recent lecture in Buffalo, the poet and artist Jill Magi pointed out that the modernist obsession with grids is by no means original, but really is an ancient logic revivified. We encounter it first of all in textiles: warp and weft, the taut squares of fabric, nearly-perfect boxes of color on the quilt, the constricting right angles of a net. Now, of course, the grid is a logic obsessed with us, a logic that presses in on the contemporary in all directions: the grid of pixels on a screen, the grid of a city block, the grid of fields and cages and fences from which our food comes, the grid of a net emptying a vast swath of ocean, the grid of the big box store, of the prison block, of the classroom, of the cubicles, of the parking spaces, of the spreadsheet cells our data-selves are kept in. More abstractly, with globalized capitalism's pernicious linking-together of everyone, everything, and everywhere, we could say that the grid is the current ordering of the world, how we are ordered into neat and tidy conceptual apartments (for everyone and everything has their place). At the same time, the grid is a metaphor for the most living need: the desire for filiation or connection, the threading-together of many into a messy and always-incomplete whole. It is within this complex and double-edged sense of the grid, or the net, that Shira Dentz's how do i net thee works, as she threads together the messy and necessarily imperfect familial ties that serve as a throughline throughout the book, while at the same time composing poems that are deeply skeptical of the nets she casts-or is caught up within.



In Dentz's book, we encounter the logic of the grid, but in a warped or warping form, as if the threads have not been-or cannot be-rendered taut. Jill Magi's frontispiece to the book provides a sense of this flailing grid, the squares contorted into curious shapes, and with loose trails of thread that betray the illusion of closedness or completion that a grid gives off. Like the frontispiece, Dentz's book is paradoxically closed and open, or on the verge of opening up. Not quite a closed text, hermetically sealed, and not quite an open text, freely given, how do i net thee straddles the seeming divide between these two camps of poetry, offering poems that must be actively composed by the reader through a navigation of the visual and syntactical grids Dentz constructs, but with a lyric throughline threading the poems and sections together. We can see this in the individual poems, but also in the broader construction of the book, with the different sections represented by a looped square, also known as a Bowen knot (#): rather than a clear linear progression from section to section, we encounter sections and poems that loop back around, circling and creating a net at the same time.

pauding like a bat . a man-flavor like a lifesaver i was alive but had no home hanging like a pat . a man-flavor like a lifesaver i was alive pat a bat . a man-flavor like a lifesaver i was alive pat a bat .

the mother and the father spreading, last night the father drove a black minitruck into a store—an authority told him to do it—the truck fell through the floor.

another night the mother. shouting in *red orange yellow*

upside down,

silver against silver silver against silver against silver silver star crickets and birds crickets and success silver silver red ants... spire silver silver taking little bits silver s

the tail of a comet-

where the branch fell off, half a hardboiled egg with a yolk inside.

Leaves are falling though it's still warm,

The grids or nets Dentz constructs in *how do i net thee* take many forms, most obviously in the grid-like poems that appear throughout the book, such as "Surfaces fast as blood" and "Twin," a calligram of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. Many of these grid poems demand that the reader twist and turn the book, wrangling with the codex form and wrangling with the grid itself in order to find meaning. Beyond these more obvious, visual grids, Dentz's poems remind us of the gridded or netted nature of written language, the top-down left-right reading experience that functions as a net, with the reader encountering each unit of meaning in discrete packages. Refusing to allow this net to predetermine the experience of the poems, Dentz paratactically juxtaposes phrases to unravel or loosen the grid through readerly intervention, using, as Allan Ginsberg calls it, "…the juxtaposition of disparate images to create a gap of understanding which the mind fills in with a flash of recognition" (*Howl* 130). In "wax," for example, a poem in the opening section of the book, Dentz's phrasal parataxis demands that the reader create their own syntactical ordering, their own categorizing of meaning:

flowers float along water my brother a steed's dark flank glistening back a cloud's shadow subtitles

it was sunny and a bit of thought passed.

metalgray. Knowing: closing: sound ripe from bird darts

Knowing, as a completed state, in which what *is* is sedimented into an immovable image, is a form of closing: a closing-off, a rendering of impossibility, a being-netted. The alternative paradigm, presented a line above, seems preferable: letting a bit of thought pass, like fleeting images in the periphery. Later, in the poem "Marsupium," Dentz writes about the textility of language:

hanging tongues from the ceiling. a period is a bald head.

language a brocade

Language is a brocade, heavy and decorative and woven, netted and gridded, "hanging tongues from the ceiling." Or, a brocade must be languaged, must be spoken into being: brocading is what language does.

If brocading is what language does, we could say that Dentz's poems are an attempt to unravel the overly decorous brocade of gridded language, to remake it instead as a shaky net — how do I net thee, but without turning you into a stuffy icon, a fixed image? How can I grasp those who are tangled up with me in the net of familial connection, but without binding them, or without binding myself to them? And how do I net thee without redoubling the ways in which we are all already netted in our monstrous present? These are the aporias that Dentz navigates.



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