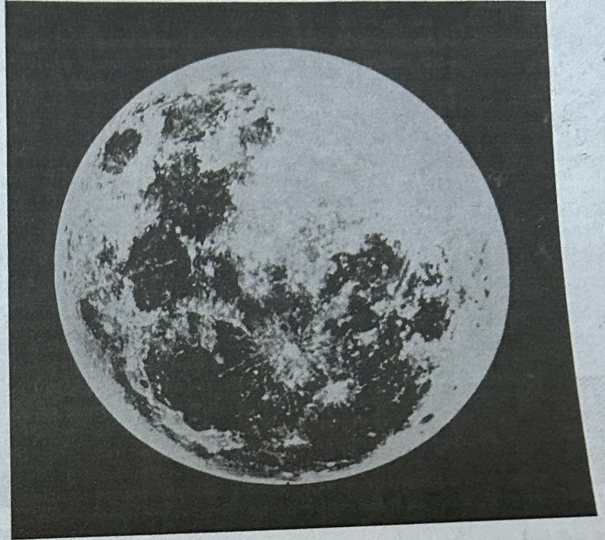


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Ferocious (and Tender) Survival

Alexandra Juhasz

Blood Loss: a Love Story of AIDS, Activism, and Art
By Keiko Lane
312pp. Duke University Press 2024

any form of survival is an act of rebellion when they don't want us to survive

—Cory Roberts Auli

In *Blood Loss: A Love Story of AIDS, Activism and Art*, Keiko Lane struggles to understand, and then share, her responsibilities, memories, and burdens. As a middle-aged, sero-negative veteran of AIDS activism, her tender work stems from the loss of her beloved friends, lovers, and comrades...and her own survival.

Those who survive will remember for those who don't.

—Keiko Lane

Beginning in 1990, the moment of her entry as a high-school-age lesbian into an exhilarating movement and community, Lane unleashes, with careful and close detail, wonderful and painful memories of an intense, giddy, life-and-death milieu of queer activism in Los Angeles. These vivid unrollings of her many friends, and their intertwined political, social, and sexual lives, continue

until 1996, forming the body of *Blood Loss*. We are half way into her look back at this heady period—one that formed, scarred, and changed all of us who survived (and many who came after, living in this wake of loss)—when the deaths anticipated by today's reader (and writer) enter the text; ominous, steadily quickening, brutal, and marked structurally by black pages memorializing each friend's birth and death dates. Holding the closed book, you can see these many pages of black striating its front edge. One by one, with stark words printed in white, with names and thwarted lifespans centered on each black page, an awful momentum and weight builds as they drop with increasing frequency into the narrative's second half:

Mark Kostopoulos (1955-1992)...
Robert Nemchik (1964-1992)...Richard Losty (1951-1992)...Jerry Mills (1951-1993)...and then 10 more friends, each ferocious, until...Connie Norman (1949-1996).

The risk isn't infection but the repetitive traumatic loss, staying connected until the end, and then the end happening, again and again.

After all this tragic loss, *Blood Loss* jumps toward our present with several short sections about "the after," a time where more deaths ripple and line the

book's body...and Lane's life. There are friends who die further into the enduring pandemic, surviving into middle and even old age: Ferd Eggan (1947-2007)... Nancy MacNeil (1950-2023) and her partner Mary Lucey (1958-2023). And still Lane survives.

Written from multiple co-existent times—one that reports with heartfelt detail a raucous teenage life amid activist adults; another, more knowing, that has lived into middle age and has been shaped and scarred by death—Lane testifies to her friends' lives and losses while accounting for how survival has structured her desires, her ferocity, her pain, her art, and this book.

How do we embody—on energetic, relational, and cellular levels—the belief that we don't expect to survive? Maybe this is what we mean by dying of heartbreak.

Her broken survivor's tale mixes registers expressing and mirroring AIDS activism's particular amalgam of pleasure and pain, promise and fear, community and its simultaneous diminishment. "Our queer family has become a space defined by absence." As we follow her headlong fall into community with queer friends (and lovers) she honors in tender

prose, today's author knows (as do we), that most will die, cruelly and painfully. All their activism, and living, and art, and love could not save them.

Dying and living; love and loss; community and the absences it can hold: these states are always co-existent, but only the most dire, delightful, or delirious of times

the SHADOW

INFORMATION IS STRENGTH - KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

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allow for this bittersweet self-awareness. Lane writes from this pained and enraging state. She depicts how and why she was “tug[ged] toward a different world” as a 16-year-old budding radical. Quickly becoming the beloved youngest member of a beguiling group who made up LA’s Queer Nation, ACT UP, Gender Queeries, and anti-war activism, Lane is educated by her knowing (and sexy and sick) comrades about the problems that fuel their action and rage: homophobic and racist inattention to the AIDS pandemic; systemic racism in the city of Los Angeles; and interpersonal dynamics of sexual risk, fear, and impending loss, as she becomes the queerest of lovers: a bi-racial Okinawan American (Hapa) dyke partnering with Cory, a gay man of color, a fellow-activist living with HIV.

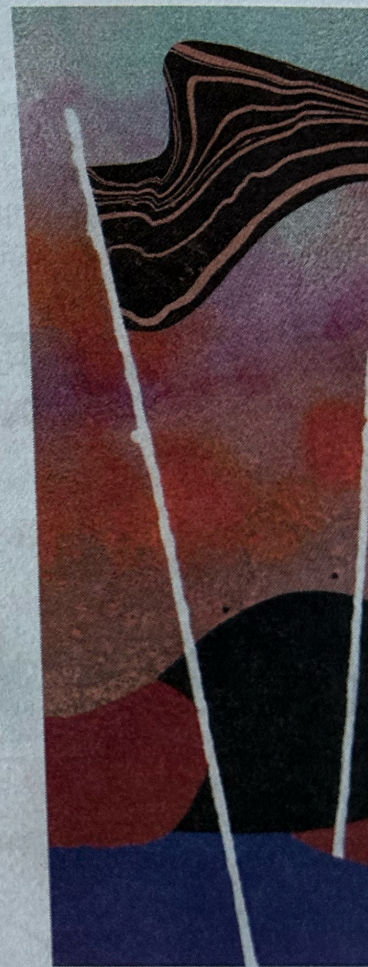
In her early movement years, Lane and her fellow activists made good use of their bodies: to protest, to march, to soothe each other when they feel sick, to make love. For a while this body-work worked: as care, dissent, and even signification. “And so,” she tells Cory, “we put our bodies on the line for each other, for ourselves. It could always be any of us. It isn’t just an idea. It’s our experience as bodies in the world.” She and her friends organized against a host of problems: trying to survive a deadly virus with no cure and ineffective treatments, little public or medical attention, within seas of bigotry, while also inventing new forms of community, care, love and art.

In *Blood Loss*, Lane’s survivor art, prose, and poetry is an inquiry into the relationship between embodied experience and writing. She learned early from a zine, *Infected Faggot Perspectives*, “the love child” of Cory and fellow activist W. Wayne Karr that “no distinction is made between ‘verifiable facts’ and ‘felt experience.’” The writing in the ‘zine was the translation of body experience into narrative others might relate to.” But even with all this good work and analysis, Lane and her comrades are forced to raise questions and demand new solutions: how can it be that their activism, their love, their community will not save them? As her roll call of death descends, Lane informs us: “We don’t imagine anymore that we can save each other. But we imagine that we can keep each other close. That everyone will know they are loved.”

Critically, Lane begins *Blood Loss* with an introductory section called “The Problem of the Story.” In her memoir, one as much about writing, memory, and witness as about the glories and losses of this ongoing pandemic, Lane considers the relations between (her) words and want, between the flesh and the ferocious.

Blood Loss resonates with two other recent books: Eric Wat’s *Love Your Asian Body*, and, more vitally, Gil Cuadros’ *My Body is Paper*. These three efforts redistribute the history and memory of AIDS culture spatially, bodily, and also in relation to form. They take place in Los Angeles, within communities of color, communities of women, and through

Echo and



all this here, now.

by Anna Stern, translated by
240pp. Lolli Editions 2

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Los Angeles, within communities of color, communi-
ties of women, and through poetry, black pages, and
the body's knowledge metabolized as words. Cuadros'
posthumous effort (edited by Justin Torres and Pablo
Alvarez) also thinks alongside Lane's in terms of for-
mat. If the body is paper, then on and with this form we
can remember, speak, and be heard. Reading Cuadros's
words, poems emanating from the same lost place and
time as Lane's LA memories, I see anew the black lines
of death that mark both books as evidence of survival,
even as Cuadros died young and Lane survived.

As a teenager and AIDS activist, Lane's older and
sicker cohort informed her that her role in their move-
ment was to survive and to tell their stories. Cory says:
"You'll tell it. Don't forget any of it." And so Lane tells
us how this has been her life's most portentous prob-
lem: a huge responsibility, an impossible bequest. She
says to Cory:

What does survival mean? I mean, what does
it literally mean? Live through it? Do you
mean that metaphorically? Live through as
in remembered? That those who are left will
remember?

Survival is what AIDS activists fought for, and yet
many died; as will we, some from AIDS and its related
matters of health, others from the specter of this (and
other) pandemics.

The question of staying is the question of living
through again. Of risking again the loss of the beloved.
Blood Loss takes the risk. Lane ends with this poem:

(IS IT POSSIBLE NOT TO DIE OF
AIDS)?

This love. This loss. This longing
It breaks us.
It takes our breath away.
It bleeds us dry.

*Alexandra Jubasz is a distinguished professor of film at
Brooklyn College, CUNY. She makes, teaches and writes
about feminist media, including in her book Women of
Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video.*

all this here, now.

by Anna Stern, translated by Damion Searls
240pp. Lolli Editions 2024

Where is memory happening if it's a sensory ex-
perience? Where is it happening if not here, if not
now? These questions are spread out over the mem-
branes of Anna Stern's novel, *all this here, now.*, and
make up the bulk of its philosophical inquisition.

The plot, sometimes veering towards tropes of
the contemporary bildungsroman (the road trip, the
memories, the pain that binds people together and
rends them apart), is the least challenging aspect of
the book. At a glance, it's a road-movie classic with
a morbid edge: a tale of several long-time friends
who, after a little too much to drink, steal the fam-
ily car for one last trip towards redemption. Or to
die trying on the way.

These friends (close, some of them relatives) are
struggling to process that classic severance: the death
of one of their number. In order to do this, they take
one last Euro-road-trip from the unnamed state in
which they live (seemingly Switzerland), south to-
wards the coast (presumably Italy). There following
a hasty twilight exhumation, they intend to scatter the
ashes of their dead friend, ananke. This is where the
existential informs the metaphysical—in the pas-
sages of recalled events: a childhood barbecue, days
out by the water, first cigarettes.

Here Stern shows a condensed world of contem-
porary Europe: freedom of movement, memories
of camping trips in nylon tents, the hush of auto-
bahns and motorways, periods spent studying at a
university, cross-cultural exchange, tolerance and
difference, little log cabins, dotted across sweep-
ing vistas, the lurid green valley, the hiss of the
waves, the taste of petrol station food packaged
in cardboard and plastic, memories of childhood
holidays, milking cows on a farm both homely
and foul-smelling—all the idealised and everyday
things associated with growing up in Western or
Central Europe.

It is a world of privilege and Stern owes much
to Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* in her tale of edu-
cated friends from upper-middle to upper-class
families, coping with loss and memory through
that similarly idyllic lost Eden (the name, as it hap-
pens, of one of the central characters). Stern does
little to venture into the implications of their privi-
lege (fitting the laconic edge of the book) but fears
of border control and detainment as they flee in a
stolen Mercedes might raise a few eyebrows: these

Steven Englander (1961-2024), fiercely independent
arts and culture squat, ABC NO RIO, died this past
fellow ABC board member Julie Hair. He'll be remem-
bered for his interest in all things DIY, deep knowledge of
the NYC Anarchist Book Fair.