

Indexing a Performance*—:

Let slip, hold sway

Natalie Diaz

future tense

The Future is usually someone else's.

We are in one right now—A Future, among many.

...astronomers discovered water in almost the entire solar system.

future tense

Every story happens in its Future.

The sequin was once a story of what is shiny.

post-future tense

Borges said the apple is not sweet—: It is our mouths.

The apple only becomes sweet when we give it
our tongue and teeth. In a Future, that We make.

Let slip, hold sway—: in tension

A troubling of knowledge: It's not what a thing *is* but what it knows it has *been*,
what it might *yet-become* that makes it a dangerous nautilus.

future tense

The armors of some warriors were plated with sequins.

future tense

Before *sway* meant *control*, it meant *bend* or *give way*.

Who slips knowledge? Who slips through knowledge?
Slip of the tongue.

Let slip, hold sway—: in tension

Indexing a Performance—: Let slip, hold sway

Sequin, a droplet of water in zenithal light holding Sea and Sky
in a relationship of horizon. Sequins scaling
up up the thigh.

future tense

Does all Beauty eventually end up as polyester film?

Let slip, hold sway—: in tension

In Death Valley, stones wander across the playa at night.
The desert's ice—: paned, thin as dust, latticing the surface, pushing.
Breaking itself against the stones, moving them.

The discordance of desire.

post-future tense

Please do not report the Future to the institution.

speculative

Muuhuyoyk—: The Moon and the Sun are looking at one another.
Holding one another up across the Sky.

speculative

*Water receives impetus from the stars and transmits it to living creatures.
Water, the longest border...*

In it are volcanoes, mountains and glaciers. In it are the voices...

Some say that water has memory....it also has a voice.

post-future tense

Never report the Sea to the institution.

speculative

Muuhuyoyk—: See me.
Muuhan—: My love.

post-future tense

Sequin like the surface of the Ocean—: Do not preempt the speculative Sea.

Let slip, hold sway—: our bodies

When you watch someone dance for three hours, then look away,
you continue feeling them—: Shimmering. In your eye and palms.
Shimmering as a theory across which water remembers us.

Let slip, hold sway—: an inheritance

“Mars Dust” blooms up like Rain you can cup in your hands.

post-future tense

Some of the first sequins were made of cowry and nautilus shells.

Let slip, hold sway—: our bodies

How many times have loving hands touched my body.
How to collapse time, a string of sequins—: feel a single unified hand.

post-future tense

When there was no English you could reach a hand through my back
and not pull out my lungs.

post-future tense

Future happens the way color happens—: Muuhan.

speculative

In my desert on a mountain top, we dance up red clouds of dust—:
touch the blue Rain, Rain of the Future, pull it down into our mud.

Let slip, hold sway—: our bodies

Every desert was once an Ocean—:
How long was the journey of the comet that brought us the first drops of water?
Each drop is a world apart. Each drop

is a breath—:

speculative

Indexing a Performance—: Let slip, hold sway

The action, not the hour.

Not the flying, but the painful growth of wings—: Tuu’aachk.

speculative—: to trans forms

The Seamonster wept as it left the Sea. Trembled in the pain of the unknown air.

The hurt of *becoming*—: a new being strong enough to turn mountain to dune,
and carve out a bend for the waters to pass through.

Let slip, hold sway—: a knowledge system

The sequins can be gathered to make a lace, a literacy—: our body as one body.

Look at it move. That’s energy and I’m the one who put it there.

I can put it there again.

* written as an index to the word “future,” and “Let Slip, Hold Sway,” a performance by Okwui Okpokwasili, seen at the Whitney Museum as part of “Edges of Ailey,” February 7, 2025.

Italicized passages are from Patricio Guzman’s film *The Pearl Button*, which tells of the Selknam people’s relationship to water. The final italicized passage is a quote from Black American painter and school teacher Alma Thomas.

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Natalie Diaz is Professor of English at Arizona State University. Her work has been featured in *Poetry*, *The New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, among other publications. She is the author of the poetry collections *Postcolonial Love Poem* (2021) and *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (2013).

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