

UNIT OR SPACE #: 3127

Date: 09/09/20

Claire Pentecost

Proposal for a New American Agriculture, 2006-2016

With a text by Juliana Spahr

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Materials: Composted cotton flag.
Dimensions: 36" x 60"

Juliana Spahr

My feed all day one half pandemics and
one half poets still publishing poems and winning prizes.
I spent most of my day on the Guardian
reading the virus updates.
Then watched the local news.
I teared up when I saw people
saying that the sick on the cruise ship should not
be allowed to disembark in Oakland.
And I wept again this time from relief
when I saw someone else then
say that it was terrible to say that.
These days, one thing after another closes.
One more time, as if for the folks in the back,
the market crashes.
The headlines worry it all day.
I made a joke about don't 7 percent me
because I lived through 22.3 percent in 1987.
I remember that day so clearly.
My boyfriend of that time brought me
the newspaper in bed with a cup of tea.
I must have slept late because the sun
was streaming in, the room outside
our bedroom full of light,
and he said things are different
and I still believed that things could be different.
I was so ready for it.
He wasn't. But I was.
But there was no revolution, no reconfiguration.
We went on. Some of us somewhat poorer.
The some of us that had some money.
I didn't then. So I got up that day and drank my tea
and appreciated the sun
and a version of that has happened
every day since that day, including today.
After the feed wore me down,
after the tv news too,
after I sat too long at my desk,
finally the sun set and I sat in the backyard.
It is spring and the sweet heavy smell of the Victorian box
went over the yard and deep
into my mucous membranes, as if it was a virus.
It feels perfect in so many ways.
I can hear the neighbors and
something about that always reminds me about
how I am not necessarily alone
and I take comfort in that.

A child cries a little. A dog is being trained.
No, someone says to it, no.
And I am with them, floating with them,
whether they like it or not.
As always more than 6 feet apart.
In the backyard, I read a poem on my phone
that Jasper had written about Sean.
It had a metaphor about fires
on the floor of the ocean.
That, I thought, must be a volcano.
But then the poem moved next to a poet's wound.
and I didn't know what a poet's wound was
except I knew Sean had been in pain.
This moment, I had texted to Andrew earlier,
it will not overturn things like the plague did.
Not enough death.
But it will break our hearts,
and the next month is going to be crazy.
Today I looked up how to make your own
ventilator on the web, I told him.
It looks possible but too next level.
In the dark, from the backyard,
I looked through the window into the house
and a child was being taught how to math
and then I thought I can't bear to lose even
a single one of you. And I meant not just
my family, for that was my son learning how to math.
And I meant not just my friends.
But all of you, all of you on that cruise ship,
and all of you who were not allowed off today
because you were not from the UK or the US.
I don't know what became of you.
The news didn't tell as it showed the ship
pulling out of port with no known destination
except the setting sun, beautiful and full of color.
Look, I want to say to all of you, there is no nation.
It's not a real thing. Don't let them tell you otherwise.
It's just a flag, a metaphor of tattered convenience
that travels for relatively short distances,
drops quickly from the air,
settling on surfaces in badly ventilated areas.