

SYLVIA JONES

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STRAIGHT PEOPLE ARE THE REASON I CAN'T READ

social cues  
their subterfuge, a brash impetus  
crass, shrewd, and masked

in scientific ridiculousness  
a choir of mouths  
swiveling in unison like ghetto pterodactyls—singing

at me in a kamikaze tenor  
down a dig site  
split into laser like seconds

riffing off of throwbacks  
from the 1980s  
before I was alive

back when  
AIDS just meant  
“gay cancer”

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poetry

# FAST BACKWARDS

*After Toi Derricotte & Charles Simic*

isms aside conjuring  
Derricotte, *I see my father after his death*  
in Baltimore covered in soot shopping

for groceries at the 24 hour Giant, then again hurtling  
through the dark, outside a Bronx ale house punching  
the air behind me citing

Simic, *the blood-curdling shriek of my mother audible*  
what registers first is this kinda subsonic rumble, following  
a glance, yet there he is slouched as a french horn sitting

on a nocturnal pew giving  
away golden parachutes, pacing  
in continuous circles, quicker than a soft boiled egg peeling

its own shell: thin as an antenna bending  
into a medusa curl, renegeing  
on tomorrow, seeing him feels like naysaying

down an engine of hilarious grief  
all those fat rodents sounding  
violently like tires, oozing  
into a rottweiler

## Family Crowds Around Open Oven for Warmth, Harlem, New York, 1967

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here beneath the Manhattan Bridge  
absentmindedly night shines  
like a loose shawl  
being worn  
to a completely wordless opera

pinballing off  
Eastern Standard Times  
grid like posturelessness  
a plaster latching cracks  
between the floorboard  
alternating nostrils  
other people's loss  
sounds like rainfall—  
demonstrating genetics  
via four flanking columns contemplating  
Decembers psychic income  
until tomorrow yields a better batch of replicas

our combined stomach  
becomes a rock bounces  
the daylight back