

Leslie Scalapino's body of work is a sponge-like organism that filters perceptions through numerous portals. These portals are tendril-like sense mechanisms that sift and process somatic experience, subtly apprehending minute shifts in relation. Contours of this body of work undulate and morph, and also break off, forming additional cellular manifestations in which impressive themes coalesce. Internal spatial considerations affect an outer contour which acts as an epidermal layer, stretching and relaxing as valences shift. I use the sponge analogy because the way in which a sponge is also the water and mineral content that inflates its body—all of the accumulative elements are that which support the body of the work. Like the sponge, sensation and ideation migrate between cell layers. Sponges are able to regenerate from broken off fragments—survival pods that lay dormant until conditions improve. Leslie's books are survival pods. Also, within each book are recurring themes and re-emerging personas, like survival pods renegotiating the terms of their existence. One such occurrence (recurrence)—of breaking off and re-engaging is the presence of Grace. I haven't charted her appearance thoroughly in all of Leslie's work but I became aware of her being in *Dahlia's Iris: Secret Autobiography + Fiction*, which was published in 2003.

In an opening sequence of *Dahlia's Iris*, Detective Grace Abe awakes. Her waking is so that she can go on and on—persevere. Waking is opening up to the conceptual frames that modify perception by casting their meanings on reality. The setting is a hybridized interplay of *Blade Runner*, *Terminator*, a reading of Kathy Acker's *Don Quixote* and *Great Expectations* (and other works of Acker's), Nāgārjuna's logic of the structural ("everything being impinged on in every moment in time." *DI* 183), and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, as well as other embedded frames sifted through the tradition of Tibetan secret autobiographical writings. Grace is a female embodiment of sustained vision meeting up with a corporeal reality where the animal-human body is subordinated and expropriated—her presence articulates alternatives to such abuses, survival mechanisms that counter the system. She is intersubjectivity—she signifies actions of empathetic consciousness in the face of social injustice. Grace dissolved and re-emerges.

In *Dahlia's Iris*, there are pods, also called pod flowers—a reference to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, where "a pod expressing like a flower, people transformed as work-flowers when they have to sleep, having to sleep as one person is (a worm-flower that's being-duplicated) lying sunk in tub of mud bath—is transformed as their same form" (56). Being pod-like is being in tandem. The pod is appearance and the duplication of appearance. The pod state is the transformative state before being something specific—before social context weighs in on the bio-physiological—it might already have transformed, but it is unclear how until the form develops and matures. How the social shapes the pod's transformation is a very important understanding which Leslie details in

*Dahlia's Iris*. The conceptualization of pods appears earlier in *The Public World/Syntactically Impermanence* (1999): “One is transformed by the pod, but appearing as oneself. The pod duplicates separately from one close by. It isn’t dreamed or dreaming. When the others at the moment pass running, the still living as that being oneself are fleeing” (“Deer Night” 93). (The significance of the *bud* in Leslie’s work relates to its connection to the organism from which it emerges: flower from stem, leaves from branch, etc., whereas the pod is a broken-off fragment that forms autonomously—but that is a subject for another analysis.) Pods signify repetition. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* instructs that “one should practice the ejection of consciousness, which liberates spontaneously as soon as it is thought of, in the bardo of the moment before death” (*The Tibetan Book of the Dead* [Shambhala, Boston, tr. Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa] 50). Images arise out of the crown of one’s head.

There’s a hallucinatory, hypnotic quality of exchange—mindreading takes place. Experiential data becomes memory and is relived as engagement to form a cycle, as if the sponge was feeding. Leslie hooks up flows between minds bridging autonomies. In one sense, this is to confront dogmatic historical overviews—to contest state-imposed versions, which in the case of US consciousness is marred by the ideological construct of imperialism—a bold, blocky monolith that obfuscates the personal, where empathy and love occur. Her work is the disruption of a bourgeois notion of normalcy, the relativity of seemingly unthreatening domestic life where all needs are met by subscribing to capitalism’s labor dynamic of surplus value. She peels back the dubiousness of such calm and chronicles how such calm comes at an exorbitant cost to bodies/eco-system. Capitalism allows for liberal theories of community and justice but vast distortions and fallacies occur in administering these ideals—the body becomes state apparatus, otherwise known as the bio-political. “Interiority is destroyed” by “duplication” which is social uniformity—the inverse of democracy. Leslie’s work is sensitive to “hierarchy-fakery” which she states “is no thought analysis in itself” (*Zither & Autobiography* 82). She documents the volatility of somatic experience by being acutely reactive to pressures and shaking off social prescription. This work exists in a living ecology that is disturbed increasingly by toxicity, war, poverty, inequity, and environmental devastation, etc. “The woman is radical. She must fight her way out—of the outside. And also change its conception, that is the pod-flower, not to be conceptually-structurally transformed (replaced) inside her” (*DI* 109).

In *Floats Horse-floats or Horse-Flows*, published in February of 2010, Grace appears again in a stream of surging syntax. This work, Leslie tells us, is “based on the notion of ‘alexia,’ word-blindness (but not arising as nervous disorder), unknown words create a future.” The hallucinatory aspect of the work is foregrounded. Subjects and predicates come as if from divergent worlds. In the midst of these blooming lingual profusions

Grace reemerges and “is sent by the police bureaucracy to an outlying region as an inspector with only the authority to arrest for selling skins, not for murder.” Grace again pursues justice in the calamitous, riotous mesh of sensuous wording. Her presence is hologrammatic, illuminated as if superimposed, but translucent, hovering over events, causing the mind to refocus spatial dimensions—a liberation through thinking, a liberation through hearing.

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Brenda Iijima’s book [\*If Not Metamorphic\*](#) was published by Ahsahta Press in 2010.