

OUTER SELF WORKSHOP
WORKSHOP #2

(Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddamn")

"Alabama's got me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi *goddamn!*"

"go slow" – words of the establishment to those agitating for civil rights, equal rights

this was popular music in the sixties; you could turn on a radio & hear protest, resistance, copping out, tuning in, rage, love, understanding, compromise – it was all there; rock n roll, r & b, jazz

nina simone crossed genres: classically trained, jazz artist, popular singer with a deep & unforgiving black consciousness

we are here to deal today with the external: with the onslaught of material, news, material masquerading as news, trends, currents in behavior, i.e., the onslaught of "stuff" that assaults us as we awaken, as we turn on our radios, our tvs, our cell phones & computers

we are going to search for the gold, the titanium silver amongst this mélange and wrestle with it, turn it into substance, into art

my name is niama williams and i want to know what pisses you off.

what drives you to distraction, what do you wish you could shut down, shut off, never to be experienced again?

i asked you to start with what pissed you off because i wanted to hit at something right away that is essential for all poetry: passion

i wanted to start with what infuriates you because i want you committed, committed to expression, to self-expression

now i have another question. take a few minutes to think about this one: what is the one news item that has resonated most deeply within you, a news item that has grabbed your viscera and held on?

take 5 minutes, make a note of the item & the nature of its vise-grip on your gut

next question: what is the kernel of truth in that story, whatever/however you define "truth"?

is that truth a dangerous truth or a lifesaving one or both? to whom(s)?

bring a physical object (a la Neruda) into your poem that symbolizes the news story or the kernel of truth about that news story. Why does the object encapsulate this story for you?

finally, what brings this story into your world, makes it your concern?

Second exercise: Focus on your response to an aspect of the world we live in, taking in or refusing the massive onslaught of information crowding for attention, sorting out what impacts us and why, crafting responses to what impacts us, or what we feel we should ignore, in artistic ways, ways that will awaken sympathy/empathy/the desire for action in your listeners. What issues face us, what issues provoke us, what issues are not worthy of our time, what issues should be center stage and why?