

TEAM COLORS

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The Moment I Cannot Escape:

Care, Death, Mourning, and the Struggle Against It All

Kevin Van Meter | Team Colors

Riding the N train home to Brooklyn from a temp job in midtown Manhattan in early December, I find myself standing in a crowded car looking on at an elderly couple sitting before me. Exhausted from the day, I forego reading to people-watch and listen to a new album, deciding to give it another chance after seeing the band perform it live. I come across a lyric that intertwines with this scene: “Always reaching for her / Always breathing for her / Lifting his hand to the sky / Slow change might bring / Holy tears”.

Within a few moments it is clear to me that the gentleman is caring for the woman, who is quite ill. He holds her trembling hand, gives her sips of water as he touches her cheeks and brow to check for an elevated temperature. Towards the end of the ride, he coaxes her to take a few brightly colored pills, which she has trouble getting down.

Immediately, I can see the affect in his eyes and his movements, the pride joined with need in hers, and the relationship of care between them. I recognize this quite clearly because - from early May, when her condition worsened, until end of July, when she passed into the unknown - I was caring for my partner, best friend and constant companion in a similar way. As it was with this couple on the train, just a few months earlier, it was with her and I.

The Moment I Cannot Escape: Care, Death, Mourning and the Struggle Against It All explores three chronological periods in my life, and the life and passing of my partner, as it flows from caring for her into her passing, and then into the impossible grief and mourning that follows. While this is immensely personal[,] it intersects with a set of political realities - the imposition and discipline of capital and the state-apparatus, as well as forms of life and methods of struggle - that I will explore through my story, hers and the community that surrounds us both. But before all this there is a moment, one that I cannot escape, and it serves as the pivot in these periods I will describe.

The Moment I Cannot Escape

At the time of this writing, nearly six months from that terrible Saturday in July, when I held Jodi’s hand as she passed into the unknown.

Just two hours earlier I had left her bedside, hugged her, kissed her forehead, and told her: “I’ll see you later when you wake up from your nap.” I looked back on my way

out the door and noticed her outstretched arm, how it slowly dropped to her side. She reached for me as she said goodbye, unable to really speak more than a few words, but I knew every ‘look’ and understood what she was saying to me. I see this image every time I close my eyes, no matter how much I try to drink it away. But this is not the moment I am referring to.

Leaving the hospital, I spoke with her parents to let them know she wanted to try and get some sleep before a group of us returned later that evening. They mentioned that the doctors didn’t see a change in her condition, as the previous four witnessed the loss of her ability to speak, walk, and collect herself. While I was worried, I was yet to be distraught, as she was on a lot of medication and at twenty-three years of age I thought ‘brain placidity’ would allow for a full recovery. A few days before, when this new set of symptoms began to set in, she sat on her bedside while I stood, her arms around my waist, mine intertwined with hers and resting on her shoulders. She was concerned that the lesions developing in her brain - the ones causing this trouble, were permanent and that she would never be the same. To her “I’ll never be smart again”, I said in response “you’re gonna be ok”, and promised to be there throughout her recovery. I squeezed her to confirm this; it was always that way with us, words were secondary to what we would say with our eyes, arms, and ‘looks’.

Later that Saturday, I was called back to the hospital by Ben, a good friend of ours, who said Jodi wasn’t doing well. I made frantic calls to friends as I raced up to the hospital on my bike. But stepping out of the elevator, seeing the expression on Ben’s face and the seriousness of the doctors huddled just outside her door, caused me to break from all the moments before and after.

I entered her room, walked up to her bedside, and took her hand as she violently seized. I stood there alone with her, doctors just outside the door, nurses running in and out. I periodically covered her naked body as she pulled at her hospital gown. Her eyes closed, unable to speak other than to say “it’s me”, I held her hand and watched as she passed into the unknown. Every morning since this moment, as soon as I realize that I am awakening into the day, I experience the most uncontrollable terrors; as I shake and cry I am able to find other memories of her that allow me to escape from these.

Jodi Tilton was my constant companion, best friend, and my partner for the past three years. Calling someone your ‘partner’, beyond rejecting the hetero-normativity and gendered nature of the boyfriend / girlfriend label, connotes a relationship that is defined by the qualities of its content, substance and function rather than a set of obligations, regulations, expectations and externally imposed definitions. In this way, the ‘partnership’ Jodi and I shared was in a state of flux, changing considerably over these three years and the relation of care between us the last few months of her life was part of this. To pretend that our partnership was a constant would ignore the effect such a relation of care has on two people, as well as the often impulsive nature of our friendship and romance. This (as with “a life” itself) was an attempt at experiment with form and content rather than an absolute or objective example. “We turn(ed) in the night, consumed by fire” in all the ways that this implies.

Five days after that terrible Saturday in July, on the night that her body was finally at rest, I gave a panegyric at a gathering in Prospect Park of nearly seventy of her friends. I described her as “a character,” whose “raspy voice and personality carried on

far beyond her small body. Argumentative, sharp, punchy, and quick would all describe her conversational style and how she interacted with the world; yet within this she was unrelenting in her support and love for her friends. Her social conscience intersected with her love of craft and old typewriters, which in turn intersected with a unique sense of humor and her obsession with bulldogs (she just couldn't walk past one without grabbing it in her arms)." The lines that immediately followed were read by a Conor, a close mutual friend, as I was temporarily unable to continue.

I began the piece "Jodi Tilton: A Life", from which this paragraph is drawn quite late on Sunday evening, after that terrible Saturday: after watching her pass into the unknown, after walking from her bedside to consult with the doctors and to call her parents to let them know they needed to return to the hospital. After she seized for nearly five hours as I held her hand, after her move to the Intensive Care Unit, after a number of friends arrived. After emergency brain surgery, after hoping that the swelling would go down. After repeated scans reported "no brain activity", after we maintained a constant vigil in the waiting room and at her bedside for two days. After I returned home, to my room, alone; after I caught myself as I thought I was losing my mind – I realized that she was never coming back to me, to us, and this world we all inhabit.

This is 'the moment I cannot escape'; because in this moment, with this realization, a productive capacity began to emerge; a machine (really a set of tiny machines), began to turn inside of me. I followed a number of "lines of flight", one produced "A Life"; others are far more dangerous.

Care

*Does this hurt?
3 red pills 3x a day
How about when I push here?
2 white pills in the morning and at night
This hurt?
1 small round pill when you wake up
This?
4 of these at meals
2 more for nausea
1 for pain
1 for sleep
2 for anxiety
1 for depression
"How about you try some crackers + ginger ale. My mom used to always give me that when my stomach hurt."
I looked at her in disbelief.
"You know, I know exactly how you feel. I need to take a Tums after every meal."*

So writing this is going to be really difficult. Not difficult like riding yr bike 10 miles home after you flipped over yr handle bars + scrapped up your knuckles + knees but difficult like riding your bike 10 miles up a hill + knowing that taking a break from pedaling is not an option.

This humble poem (or possibly two poems, as represented by the break) written by Jodi during the spring of 2007 was found among her things after her passing, as the only entry in a small notebook. She had suffered with Crohn's / Colitis for years, but since February

when her flair up began, it had steadily gotten worse. The treatment she had previously used to control her flair ups was not working, so in late April, while I was traveling on the West Coast, she began taking steroids. These brought their own set of problems including anxiety and sleeplessness. As the poem suggests additional medication was prescribed to address the side effects of the steroids (with the exception of “1 for depression”, as she was not yet prescribed something for this particular symptom.)

As someone who immensely enjoyed cooking and sharing meals with friends it upset her terribly that she was unable to eat and join others in doing so. The depression that ensued was in essence a symptom of the autoimmune disorder she was saddled with, as being unable to eat and in constant pain for months would upset anyone. Additionally, autoimmune disorders are often isolating experiences with no outward symptoms for others to identify. Though this poem represents Jodi at this time, struggling with the pain and isolation of her illness, it certainly does not reflect her larger personality, her immeasurable presence and her bellowing laugh, which would cut through the crowd and wander along the edges of the room.

On May 4th I returned from an extended trip, and while we spoke a few times each day prior, I hadn’t realized the extent of the side effects the steroids were causing until I was back in Brooklyn. While she had never had any difficulty sleeping or anxiety, she now became rattled by insomnia and constant anxiety attacks. A routine began to develop between the two of us and a relationship of care ensued.

Jodi would call me throughout the day from work as I sat in a neighborhood café, writing and planning a month excursion to Europe for the coming summer. I would attempt to ‘talk her down’ through whatever situation was upsetting her at the moment. She knew that her reaction to daily stresses had changed with the steroids, and there were times that a simple conversation or joke would shift her mood. As the evening approached, I would quite often cook her dinner, as she would be exhausted from the day. Even more frequently, she would call me as bed-time approached, which was most difficult for her. There are numerous occasions when I would arrive at her apartment to find it in utter disarray - something she would never normally allow - and would have to clean up burnt pasta, count her pills to confirm that she didn’t take too many, and usher her to bed or into the shower. As I helped her into bed I would always join her, as often she would be unable to sleep without me lying beside her. I would lay on my side, my left hand placed on her stomach, both her hands holding my other arm. I could tell she was in pain from how swollen and hard her belly was, but squeezing my arm seemed to slowly ease her shaking. As the evening wore on, we would both turn away from each other and I’d find my right hand just above her left hip or her left hand squarely on my right hip bone, so that each knew the other was there. Only then would I hear her breath slow until she fell asleep.

There are few people as proud of their independence as Jodi, and because of this we both maintained a silence on this relationship of care, keeping it from all but a few of our closest friends, and from her family entirely. But one does not simply care for another; rather the relationship of care is intertwined and shared. When, for example, one of my close friends attempted suicide, it was Jodi who lay next to me as I held her arm.

Any relationship of care is not simply composed of tasks or forms of work, but rather affective and corporeal processes. It's not just that I would meet her for a bike ride and picnic in the park or that I accompanied her to doctor appointments, though this support defined our friendship and relationship of care. Rather, there was a set of physical and emotional components that flow through these activities, and define their content, substance and function. Above, I have defined a partnership in a similar way. Because of this existing partnership, the affection, affinity and close friendship that characterized it became intertwined with our relationship of care. The months immediately proceeding this development were quite difficult, especially for Jodi, since our partnership was, "without the boundaries that are normally used to define the time two people spend together", as I stated in "Jodi Tilton: A Life". With this came an element of uncertainty - as we were in a 'friends period'. But along with the relationship of care that developed, a new and different form of physicality, of eroticism, emerged between the two of us - not one of sexual intimacy, but yet still of the body.

This relationship of care extended beyond the two of us to incorporate a few close friends as well. On a number of occasions others stayed with Jodi, but predominantly they surrounded her with a sense of solidarity and support through constant communication, hangouts and other events. This groups activities never-the-less require some critique, as it did not internally organize itself sufficiently to provide clear support to Jodi, as we should have communicated with one another regarding the care we were providing. In this way we could have provided emotional support to one another and been more effective in our provision of care for Jodi.

However, as Jodi's illness progressed, the larger community of friends around her peeled away. In particular, two of her close friends stopped returning her calls and began ignoring her in public. While this is certainly due to a number of factors on their part – other perceived obligations, emotional immaturity, interpersonal differences and conflicts – the result was that it caused Jodi to feel increasingly isolated. The way this particular community interacted with her is quite problematic, with its inability to address, and in some cases, completely abandon, a sick friend. The affective and corporeal commitment to someone that is ill is too often seen as an individual activity, external to the daily activities of counter-cultural or d.i.y communities and without the social pressures that usually define those communities' activities, such commitment can falter.

On July 9th I accompanied Jodi to her second, and what would be her final, Remicade treatment - a particularly insidious, genetically modified, option for autoimmune disorders. This became her last resort, as the steroids were not controlling her flair ups, and while she could deal with being ill, she would not accept the steroids interfering with her ability to compose herself and participate in life activities she enjoyed. At this point Jodi viewed Remicade as a way off the steroids and presumed they would allow her to return to her everyday life; she thought the risk of such a treatment outweighed continuing with steroids. Within a few hours after completing the treatment she was exhausted so I ushered her home to rest. Over the course of the next day, she found herself wandering the city streets, confused. When I returned late the following night it was clear something was wrong, that she needed to go to the emergency room. From this moment until the evening of that terrible Saturday the 21st of July 2007, she became a resident of Room 510 at New York Methodist Hospital, not far from either of

our residences, as the doctors struggled to determine the cause of her exhaustion and confusion.

All these moments and memories that come before ‘the moment I cannot escape’ are filtered through its lens, as I find it impossible to understand the dynamics of the situation without it being tainted by what followed. Despite more than a decade of community organizing experience, I was unable to construct a collaborative effort of care, to collectivize the process and activities in which Jodi and I were engaged. I carry an incredible guilt for the nights I didn’t travel up to Jodi’s apartment, for not discussing the entirety of the situation with her, for the times I lacked the patience, and, as a separate matter, for the now irritable heartache I cannot acknowledge nor apologize for that I caused her during the course of our partnership. Any relationship of care, regardless of its affective and physical components, is composed of activities – its content, substance, and function – that are productive. Ignoring this productive aspect for the often conflicted emotional elements, as I described here with my personal narrative, prevented this productive activity from intersecting with care roles in struggle and self-reproduction – as well as the larger reality of the imposition of unpaid care work and social reproduction.

This problem is especially troubling since our Jodi and my own political activities often sought to address these questions through our contact with the Madrid-based collective *Precarias a la Deriva* (now *Todasacien*; Agency of Precarious Affairs) and through encountering the work and friendship of feminist Silvia Federici. In *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Federici explores the way early capitalism decomposed the relationships women had with each other as a means of imposing a new form of relationship upon them: that of the unpaid work of social reproduction – both in the general sense of reproducing the social realm and in the specific role assigned women to reproduce a particular commodity – that is labor power. Similarly, the activists of *Precarias* intervene in the growing care work industry, as well as in the nexus of unpaid care work performed by women throughout their daily lives. Here they pose the question: How do we strike against this work while not *striking against* those we are caring for?

According to *Precarias* and Federici, care work is usually hidden; it’s an isolated and isolating form of work. The task of caring is most often performed by women as part of the unpaid work of social reproduction. When care work is paid for outside of the home in hospitals, nursing homes, and the homes of others, it is predominantly women upon whom it is imposed, and when they return home they are faced with more care and housework, albeit unpaid. While the scene with which *The Moment I Cannot Escape* opened and the relationship of care I described between Jodi and I both demonstrate males (presumed in the case of the elderly man, self-identified in my own) performing such work, this is most often not the case. For intrinsic to the imposition of this work, both in its paid and unpaid form, is its gendered aspect. Hence it is not seen as work, but rather part of women’s inherent giving disposition, and thus human nature, that is myths utilized to justify this imposition.

There is another important clarification to make here: that there is a fundamental distinction between imposed paid and unpaid work, of relationships that are part of the discipline of capital and the state-apparatus; and social relations, methods of struggle, and

forms of life that are outside of this process. A relationship of care need not be imposed, as it was with Jodi and I. We developed an affective and corporeal relationship, that is, a social relationship, as with our partnership - which was defined by its content, substance and function, by the activities and moments that flowed through it. Our mistake was in not collectivizing and thereby amplifying this relationship, in turn politicizing it. For the potential that this relationship had for us personally, as well as serving as an example of a self-reproducing movement- a method of struggle, and a form of life, went unrealized. Politically, in our everyday lives and on the social field, I didn't follow the "lines of flight" through this relationship and toward new ones. I have viewed this period through the lens of 'the moment I cannot escape' and have allowed my desires to be over-coded by guilt and moralistic devices; an Oedipal gaze. That is the tint in the lens, the blinders that limit my vision solely to the activity that I should have done, rather than the important activity I did in fact produce.

Death

What I had realized on Sunday evening was apparent to all by Monday morning: Jodi was never coming back to me, to us, and this world we all inhabit. With EEG and MRI showing "no brain activity," and the discovery that the seizure was in fact total brain failure, the neurological team offered not even the slimmest of hopes that she would ever awaken.

For the next four days, as continuing tests showed the same results, as nurses and doctors filed through, as visitors came to pay their respects, we resigned ourselves to the inevitability of the situation. All these characters found themselves in a period where time stopped and beyond it lie the horrible finality of her body ceasing to function with the termination of her life support. The activity of keeping one's body alive when their mind has passed on is an act of violence; from the respirator forcing air into one's lungs, the constant maintenance of fluid and nutrient levels, the surveillance of the body's entire functioning, all of this requires constant imposition against the known or perceived will of the 'person'.

Unlike the productive capacity that defined *care*, and will define *mourning*, I fell into a near catatonic state where activity and desire were blocked and all that remained was the simple, repetitive task of being physically present. From the moment that Jodi seized on that terrible Saturday, my eyes did not lay upon her until the last few moments of her life on Thursday, when her family offered me a few minutes to be alone with her. I have the useful affliction of being quite near-sided so by removing my glasses, I would be able to enter her hospital room without seeing her; otherwise I just couldn't bare it.

Every blip on the monitor or drop in blood pressure would cause me to shake or a friend to call us to return to the hospital; numerous times over these days I would race back to the hospital to say my final goodbyes. It's this act of having to say goodbye over and over again - at the time seemingly endless - that causes the circular nature of this seemingly inescapable moment. Additionally, these moments have a psycho-physical component. Heading to the hospital every morning, getting off the elevator on the 7th floor and walking past her room to where our friends had collected themselves - I would find myself unable to move, as if my limbs ballooned with weight and I had entered a

state where time slowed. By that Monday morning I required taking a friend's arm as they led me into her room to sit by her bedside; the desire to be present with her was no longer able to propel my body forward. This period of slowed or stopped time generalized manifest itself over the entirety of my daily life, but there were a scarce number of moments when I would have to briefly become productive. In these her mother, who was serving as her medical proxy, required information that I had gathered from countless conversations between Jodi and I in regards to organ donation and end of life issues.

Between Monday and Thursday nearly two hundred friends and acquaintances cycled through Jodi's hospital room in an enormous show of solidarity, most standing in silent observance of her and her life. During this time the core group of Jodi's friends - those who had visited her daily during the course of her hospital stay, who provided her with constant communication throughout her illness, and with whom she had a history of collective action and political activities, as they did with each other - had self-organized so as to make sure someone was with her constantly, as well as to 'check-in' on each other. The solidarity and care between those participating in this process radiated from its common points. Daily meetings were held, constant updates given to those who had to run an errand, food procured for those unable to do it themselves, beds and couches provided for those few moments of sleep and two close friends were brought to New York from points west. As the week wore on and arrangements were prepared for a memorial event, this group "came together" to, in Conor's words, "to say goodbye to one of its own".

It is rare in everyday life to find a moment where this intensity of self-activity develops, with a corresponding level of composition, of affective and corporeal processes, of flows and breaks. Here normal life activities are broken in the immediacy of the moment and this defines its content, substance and function rather than socio-historical patterns and external impositions. I have only experienced this in large-scale direct action based mobilizations and during a particularly emotional period of court support for Conor, a close friend of Jodi's and a member of this core group, who was charged with politically motivated crimes. To support a member of the activist community in which I was engaged, we held regular sessions to discuss our emotions, prepared meals for Conor and his family, organized the comings and goings at the courthouse, and created a positive presence during the term of the trial. In these revolutionary moments, however temporary, those infected with its viral elements become focused on the tasks before them, here the singular lines reach their limit and become collective.

This level of activity is too often relegated to addressing a crisis, here to "say goodbye", and dissipates after the immediacy of the moment is no longer apparent. During this period provisions were not made to effectively continue this activity; this collected group, while it intersected with other communities and social networks composed of friends and other activists, didn't properly communicate its activities as to affect these neighboring communities. The political question that then arises is this: how can we construct moments of collectivity, not in crisis but in everyday life, whose mechanics I have begun to explore here. In answering this question organizationally we

confront the state-apparatus, its discipline and the imposition of certain relations of power; in this confrontation war develops.

Throughout *The Moment I Cannot Escape* I have used ‘passing’ rather than die, dying, death, dead. The choice is a conscious one, as passing refers to a general process rather than a final moment or specific physical process. As Italian Philosopher Giorgio Agamben has stated “life and death are not properly scientific concepts but rather political concepts, which acquire a political meaning precisely only through a decision.” I feel quite strongly that as I held Jodi’s hand, she passed into the unknown on that terrible Saturday in July; and on the following Thursday, I set my eyes on her, pushed on her nose with my right pointer finger - as I would often do when she was feeling ill - and left her side for the last time, her body ceasing to function with the removal of life support. While this conceptualization is personal, allowing me to understand these moments, it intersects with a larger imposition of power that surrounds the management of life and death.

Michel Foucault has described a fundamental shift in the technology of power: from a concept of pastoral power - the right of the sovereign to create life and impose death, to biopower - the subjugation of bodies and control over populations. Where the sovereign once had the right to impose death, under biopower, life is hastened to the point of death and continued insofar as one is productive; here power is exercised at the point of life itself.

The entirety of end of life decisions are facilitated through a set of medical, religious, and legal pathways, which exclude direct decision making by the ‘dying person’ as well as those collected around them. Under the regime of biopower life is managed and fostered by the state, and to challenge this is to go to war with the state-form. This recalls the earlier point that the act of forcing one’s body to ‘stay alive’ when the mind has passed on is an act of violence, in the form of an intrusion of the state into our lives. Even with EEG after MRI showing “no brain activity,” the community that surrounded Jodi, her family and friends could not allow her body to cease functioning. The regulations, limitations and time period for terminating her life support were imposed externally, maintained with the threat of continued violence by the state itself.

This is the limit of our solidarity and self-activity, for while we were able to create moments, levels of composition and intensity, and a temporary self-reproducing movement, the form of life which we are ultimately creating will confront and have to go to war with the state-apparatus in seeking to liquidate the state-form.

For me, the period between Jodi’s passing and when her body ceased functioning was marked not by my productive capacity, but its alternate pole; not by its “lines of flight” and its flows, but by its blockages and the catatonic state in which I found myself. While ‘the moment I cannot escape’ is the pivot between the active and productive periods of care and mourning, it is immediately encircled by its opposite – that is death, bordered by the trauma of watching her pass into the unknown and the inability to act on her behalf in terminating her life support. As someone who engaged with life as Jodi did, I believe as soon as she was unable to continue in it (I gather this from endless conversations with her on the subject), she would have wanted to simply and completely pass on into the unknown.

Mourning

On that Thursday evening in July, the day her body was finally at rest, a gathering was held in Prospect Park, attended by nearly seventy of Jodi's friends. Here memories of her were shared and the stories that made up her life echoed throughout the summer night. This event came together organically from the need of those collected together to speak of Jodi outside the context and space of the hospital room, and the impossible situation that marked the proceeding days.

Since I had prepared a panegyric some days earlier, I was prodded by one of the group to begin. In reading "Jodi Tilton: A Life" to those assembled, I stuttered many of my words, paused at points overcome with tears, and slowed as I concluded, speaking a word or two at a time. Never before in such a gathering was I able to see those sitting before me so clearly, to hear their cries, to hear the last moments of the day slipping away, and to hear all this intertwine with my own words (I presume my own memory of this is quite different from those listening). A torrent of stories, memories, reflections, and shared experiences followed as friends shared the immeasurable flow that made up Jodi's "life". Many, as they opened up to the gathering, shared numerous accounts while others seemed to find their voice for the first time. This activity defined the content, substance and function of the gathering and the composition and intensity of the moment; as I had said earlier that evening, in "A Life", "desires overflow one's body and connect with other desires in the world."

Two days later a wake and funeral were held in Jodi's hometown on Long Island, and while it included a eulogy given by three of her friends, as an event it couldn't be more different from the gathering. Before the scripted funeral service, mourners walked past Jodi's casket as part of the viewing and milled about the funeral home. As the viewing procession came to an end the service began, and while not delivered by a priest, it had the overtones and structure of a Christian ceremony. A thunderstorm swirled outside as the mourners listened to the poorly - worded mythical and transcendent musings of the religious figure conducting the service. During his comments on how Jodi is "looking down at us" and "in a better place", I struggled to detect a hint of her life in his words, and found none. At one point the lights flickered along with a thunderous bellow. If I believed in an afterlife, I would have taken it as a sign of Jodi's displeasure – some did, while others simply reflected on the irony of it all.

It is certainly not my place - nor is it the purpose of this piece - to critique the content of others' beliefs concerning death, an afterlife, god or how one chooses to mourn the loss of another. But comparing the differences between these two events provides valuable political lessons, for how these events function intersects with larger questions of power. Simply put, the wake and funeral service represent a break from the flows and content of Jodi's life, replaced instead with transcendent and vague platitudes. Even if the intent is to provide comfort when one says "she is looking down at us", it is an escape from her immeasurable personality, an evasion from actively engaging with the substance of her life, and serves as an excuse for not carrying on her productive capacities through our own. The content, substance and function of such an event is imposed externally, and operates within certain pathways provided by religious institutions and the state-

apparatus. At no point did Jodi's life entered the proceedings, except where it was completely stripped of its essence, while those in attendance are relegated to a non-participatory, spectator role. How can one mourn the loss of someone they love when they cannot participate in the process of mourning in affective and corporeal ways, with their raw emotions and bodies finding commonality with one another and with "a life"?

Against the striated space of the wake and funeral stands the smooth space of the gathering. The gathering was an extension of the self-activity and desires of those who participated; here there were no assigned roles or limitations placed on who may speak or the content created. The torrent of voices that night in the park created the interior of the event and connected to the construction of a partial, yet complex and substantive narrative of Jodi's life. These moments, memories and shared experiences found their collective expression among the participants; through their productive capacities and activities, a narrative is produced. This is the result as well as the intent of the gathering, and describes the machines at its center. This partial narrative deposits itself upon the surface of the event, flows outward and connects with both the experiences and productive capacities of those who participated in it. But this processed concluded the night of the gathering. Organizationally, the participants could have continued this activity, allowing it to deepen whereto Jodi's life would continuously flow into their own. This challenge is still unmet on a collective level.

Immediately following the wake and funeral, my travel companion Joel and I boarded a plane to Europe for a long-planned excursion through fourteen cities and eight countries, missing the burial in the process. This journey began with a week in Fes and Marrakech, Morocco, where we spent a good portion of the day sitting in a café drinking mint tea and writing – of her life, mine, and ours together. While exploring the medina I would often have detailed conversations with Jodi as if she was alongside me, and at the end of the day I would relive the experience in full solid-state hallucinations with her in Joel's place. By the time we arrived on the European continent this had subsided somewhat, but I found myself unable to eat more than a few bites, as a flood of images and memories of her would come to me in frightening and uncontrollable ways. Beginning that Monday before I headed to the hospital and continuing through the entire trip, every morning as I awoke into the day I would have the most vivid of terrors, similar to this flood of images, but triggered by the realization that she is no longer here rather than the assumption that she is. How these moments function are quite different: in believing that she was just across the square or at the next café, I would become almost catatonic - similar to my reaction that week in the hospital - as I stared off into the distance; but in the morning, with this counter-realization, I would shake and feel an uncontrollable surge beckoning to become physical, to become violent (there was nothing left besides the animal and primal). The latter is the desire to hold her, converse with her, to be part of the flow of her life and engage my productive capacity with hers and all these desires blocked by the fact the she has passed into the unknown.

While getting on a plane after Jodi's funeral was difficult, returning to New York knowing that she would not be there to share a meal and stories of our travels with, was impossible. These parallel conditions described above developed in Madrid, only to follow me through Barcelona, Terrassa, Paris, Rome, Bologna, Senegallia, Parma, Berlin, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, London and then across the Atlantic, arriving with me in New

York on August 25th. I had my first drink during all this on the airplane home and didn't have a sober night until the middle of December. Upon returning I was and as of this writing in January of 2008 still am awakening with those morning terrors, compounded by the catatonic state that has generalized over the entirety of my life - beginning with a trip to the cemetery the day after I arrived, where I collapsed at the foot of her gravesite. Leaving the apartment only on short trips for beer every few days, I would find myself sleeping throughout the middle of the day and passing out on the couch after drinking myself into a steeper by eleven in the evening. This continued for nearly three months, until I was finally able to get out of the apartment for an appointment with a psychiatrist, which I had struggled for weeks to obtain.

The condition I have described here and the symptoms I was exhibiting were diagnosed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, with the caveat that I would require - of my own volition, of course - weekly therapy sessions and a prescription for a low dose antidepressant. This came with the warning that if I was not able to cease drinking on my own, the psychiatrist would suggest counseling for alcoholism as well. Even with a long-standing position against psychiatric medication, especially for myself, I considered it and was eventually prescribed Zoloft with the prodding of a few close friends and family. While I found myself talking in weekly therapy sessions about Jodi's illness, passing and the aftermath, I began to and have continued to, limit my discussions on these issues and my emotional state to very few friends.

Accepting that I required outside intervention from friends, family and professionals to address my condition was a difficult conclusion to come to, but one that is bound up in a particular desire for my suffering and pain from her loss to manifest itself in physical form. It is not just that I drink every night, I am an alcoholic; it's not that I am grieving, I have PTSD; that at times I believed I was exhibiting the symptoms that she had the last few days of her life. I found myself at points unable to speak, to walk without stumbling or to compose myself. This hypochondrium became physical and I welcomed the possibility that it was actually taking place. For the desire to pass on, to have PTSD, to be an alcoholic, is part of the production of these elements in my life.

While in Italy I planned a dinner party as a way to see friends upon my return, and to host an event that I would normally put together with Jodi. What I was not clear about at the time is that the purpose of holding this event was to provide an opportunity to see those I cared about for the last time before committing suicide.

During a particularly bad meal of Chinese food -- nothing was open due to the summer holidays -- in Bologna, I fell into an obsessive state where all I could think of was Jodi's last few moments of consciousness; was I there with her in those moments? It was here that I made the decision to terminate my life. Since I didn't have access to or money for a firearm I would have to use a poor man's way out, that is - sleeping pills, plastic bags, and duck tape. In the note that was to go to Conor, a mentor and another friend, titled "Catastrophe and the Cure: Instructions," I provided no further explanation than that I had died of a broken heart, rather than what would surely appear on my death certificate. I had watched an elderly friend deteriorate after his partner of nearly seventy years passed away. Without her by his side, he lost his mind and then simply died; I felt that as it was with him, it would be with me. Referring to this story in my note to them, I remarked on Jodi's age and how I fully expected to have her in my life for the rest of it:

she was only twenty-three. This letter found itself into email form, addressed and all, as late as December 9th 2007; until recently, I returned to this reflection often.

This act was averted the morning of, as I awoke with my first dream since Jodi's passing, a particularly clear dream where I was able to return to that moment when we last spoke and communicate what I was unable to at the time. That evening I held the second event titled "Breakfast for Dinner," where vegan breakfast dishes were consumed in mass quantities and countless White Russians and Mimosas went into full bellies. The undertone of the event was Jodi's presence as it flowed from the components we all carry of her within ourselves. This is my refusal to let her go, to continue to "turn in night" with her, "consumed by fire"; out of this refusal reemerged my productive capacity.

This is 'the moment I cannot escape' in its full expression. The morning terrors oscillating with the catatonic state I described, the hallucinations, voices, the PTSD, my drinking, my suicidal impulses - are all part of the nexus of my desires and are produced in my everyday life as their expressions; the particular "lines of flight" that construct these desires return in on themselves, rather than connecting with other desires in the world. They are part of my productive capacity as much as a dinner party or the other activities are part of this refusal to let her go (as examples of lines that do connect). In realizing that she is not here by my side I enter into a feverish violence; and at the opposite pole in believing that she is, I fall into a catatonic state. Having suicidal impulses rather than just depression, PTSD rather than just grief, alcoholism rather than just a daily drink; - these patterns find their opposite expression in holding a dinner party in her name, or producing a memorial cookbook of the recipes we shared, or getting a group tattoo of an old Singer Sewing Machine to mark her memory on our bodies, or in writing this article, or "in doing things" to which, as a friend said, "Jodi related". 'The moment I cannot escape' is this productive capacity; it is contradictory and immensely painful, but its positive expression is the process of mourning through and against grief. In this way it can become a refusal, an act of fleeing.

But grief and mourning function differently and in important ways. Grief is a set of symptoms, of emotional and corporeal reactions, while mourning describes a set of productive activities, both affective and corporeal. As with my comparative examples of the gathering and the wake / funeral, grief and mourning are further complicated by the relationships of power with which they intersect. Some forms of mourning are qualitatively and quantitatively more substantive than others. Some forms of mourning function by over-coding, repressing and simplifying "a life", while others utilize it as a process to further expand the complexity and flow through "a life" into the lives of others; some are rich in the content of "a life", others are devoid of even a hint of it. This is simply a way of measuring the composition, social relationships and value contained in these activities. These never take place in isolation, as these are part of larger struggles taking place on the social field.

Grief, when described as an abstraction, serves to eliminate difference among individual experiences. Rather than using content, substance and function as we have with the process of mourning, I propose understanding grief through measuring its contours, magnitude and structure. Additionally, our grief is a set of emotional and corporeal experiences which interact with a set of relations of power (and the level of compositional power) as it intersects with sexual and racial identities, in addition to class power -- a subject worthy of far more attention that its mere mention here receives.

The contours, structure, and magnitude of my grief have been explored indirectly throughout *The Moment I Cannot Escape* but to describe this and best illustrate the significance of losing Jodi, there is the story of a conversation I had upon my return from Europe. Within a few days of arriving in New York, Jodi's mother telephoned me to discuss the nature and extent of our relationship. At the wake she had asked to meet with me upon my return, and I seconded this suggestion in an email to her from Rome. The question at the core of our near four-hour conversation that evening was the one before me, "did Jodi know of my feelings (of love) for her". This question has obsessed me continuously since that week in the hospital, and I find it so immensely complicated that it is nearly impossible to answer.

As I have described earlier, Jodi Tilton was my partner, best friend and constant companion since we met at a workshop I was facilitating on December 8th, 2004. Immediately we found something that we loved deep within each other, a commonality in politics and a set of activities that we were enthralled with, such as cooking, biking, bad movies (worse television), and wandering the streets in search of a ruckus or vegan sweets. Throughout the entirety of the three years of partnership, our lives overflowed in an intense, almost endless way into each others. This certainly doesn't mean our partnership was a constant, as there was a point it reached where I could go no further, due to past experience in relationships. But Jodi was the one I expected to spend my life with once I, and we both were ready – "I should have been her Sasha, her my Em'."

As I explained this to her mother, I thought of the point where I would simply have to state "yes" to her question; "yes" Jodi knew of my love for her. This point never arrived, as I was unable to provide such a simple answer. Rather, unresolved questions linger: when during these three years did she know of the particular intensities and contours of my feelings for her, when was I expressing my feelings toward her as a friend or as a lover, can these distinctions be clearly delineated, how precise was I in my communication of this, at what moments was she certain of this or not? The moment I am most concerned with is that final moment -- as I left her bedside, hugged her, kissed her forehead, and told her, "I'll see you later when you wake up from your nap" as I looked back on my way out the door, noticing her outstretched arm and how it slowly dropped to her side.

To answer this is beyond my ability, as I constantly obsess over this question throughout the day. For the contours of my grief are defined by my inability to answer this apparently simple question, its magnitude by the intensity and level to which it has been generalized over the entirety of my daily life and finally, its structure - as formed from the "lines of flight" that define the negative pole of 'the moment I cannot escape'. How one addresses their grief is a matter of engaging with mourning as a social process. Which as its own process, and as a process that intersects with the emotional and corporeal experiences of particular expressions of grief, it seeks to address the devastating aftermath of someone you love passing into the unknown. It is to this point that I return.

Some months later the core group that had been present that week in the hospital and beside Jodi throughout her illness came together for a gathering at Ben's apartment to discuss these three periods that frame *The Moment I Cannot Escape*. The purpose of this

gathering was to discuss our thoughts, feelings, reflections, and critiques about caring for her that week in the hospital, and how each of us has been coping since her passing. Those in attendance expressed how deeply they missed her, echoed some of the critiques I have provided here (and only when they reflected my own), and related how social events with mutual friends are personally important. Social events allow them to feel Jodi's presence, whereas they don't necessarily feel this during their everyday lives. Here I am certainly not attempting to represent the event or the opinions and thoughts of those in attendance, but rather providing a line of thought that I want to counter with my own experience. Since Jodi's passing, her death has generalized itself over the entirety of my daily life; as I told Conor, Ben, Joel and other mutual friends, "her death has become my life". I find social events impossible to attend because it is in those situations that I notice not her presence, but rather her absence; this is too much for me to bear. This particular gathering was important for me because it provided a collective and social space to mourn Jodi's passing and participate fully in the social process of mourning *against* grief.

The social process of mourning has since continued beyond this small gathering, becoming more of a collective project, intersecting and affecting those who attended. I have found the response to Jodi's passing, and as a separate concern, the response to the magnitude of my grief and substance of my mourning, problematic. Those outside this core group, in neighboring communities and social networks -- activist and d.i.y. -- have not responded in productive ways to Jodi's passing, and I have found this infuriating. A certain subset of this population who I consider dear friends and acquaintances - having found their way into my life through both personal and political channels -- have overwhelmingly responded to me with silence. This runs counter to my experiences while traveling in Europe, where the activists I visited with from autonomous movements (addressing the condition of precarity, and working specifically on the *Precarity Web* project and *Euro May Day* actions) addressed my condition and Jodi's passing directly. Unlike the U.S. response, comrades in Europe began our conversations with this point rather than relegating it to private conversation or ignoring it entirely. Those in the U.S. seemed to hope that through participating fully in politics or social life again I would somehow find a replacement for what I have lost through Jodi's passing. Additionally, this participation would be an expression of my health and a sign that I am beginning to emerge from my mourning. While particular personalities within this dichotomy I have set up certainly differ; and one could challenge this description in regards to the kind of relationships I have with these two groups; the importance of these remarks can be found in the underlying point: mourning as a social process is also a political one.

Seeing mourning as a collective endeavor, as a social and political process, allows for the production of collective memories and refusals and the intensification of corresponding personal memories and refusals in the act of their multiplication. As we approach the ever-moving westward horizon, it becomes 'a common': as an active depository of memories, as a desiring-machine, as our collective productive and reproductive capacities, as an act of refusal, as the mountains where guerillas have always kept their arms. I suggested this political project nearly six months ago, on a Thursday evening, five days following that terrible Saturday in July, as I spoke of Jodi's life, mine, and ours together to a gathering of her friends in the park. I outlined this project in "A Life" and stated that we all should wield "a weapon against forgetting".

Some years ago I wrote to Jodi after a particularly intense and romantic few days, saying “I didn’t want to give you up to the day”. This, as with the process of mourning described here, is an act of refusal: a refusal to forget the illustrious Jodi Tilton, a refusal to block the flow of her life into my own, a refusal to have my mourning over-coded or imposed upon, a refusal to cease my productive capacity as it intersects with others, and in this refusal I am fleeing through ‘the moment I cannot escape’, “and in fleeing we pick up a weapon”.

The Struggle Against It All

‘The struggle against it all’ is a war against the imposition of a particular form of life that has defied the incursion of capital and the state-apparatus in our own production of care, death and mourning. These are all sites of struggle – which in turn intersect with other sites of struggle - and our weapons can be as simple as a memory or as complex as an organizational response to care for an ill friend. As sites of struggle they are not exclusive unto themselves: what relationship of care is not haunted by the specter of death, what death is not linked with grief and mourning, and what process of mourning is not taking place with in a larger relationship of care?

Our challenge becomes a question of organization as it expands upon care, death and mourning in our everyday lives and seeks to address affective and material tasks. Especially in material terms, as this is part of the larger class struggle against the imposition of work, in productive and reproductive, waged and unwaged, material and affective (some would say immaterial) forms. This organizational response is not an intervention into the consciousness of those around us, our communities, or the working class, but rather an intervention into the political composition of these communities as it experiences care, death and mourning - with the specific purpose of launching organizational initiatives, hoarding weapons and engaging in battle. Here I am not speaking metaphorically, but rather abstracting from concreteness: concepts, matter, social relationships, and forms of life. As Foucault said in *Society Must Be Defended*, “We are at war with one another; a battlefield runs through the whole of society, continuously and permanently, and it is this battlefield that puts us all on one side or the other. There is no such thing as a neutral subject. We are all inevitably someone's adversary.”

In intervening in care, both relationships of care as struggle and imposed care work as part of capitalist relations, we enter into everyday life and the site where power -- as biopower -- is exercised. Care carries us into and through death and mourning, as a set of relationships around the person ‘passing away’ and the social process of mourning that follows their passing. As a social and political relationship, care requires collaborative efforts and collective practices (of our social reproductive activities) both in the creation of movements that are self-reproducing outside of the imposition and discipline of capital and the state-apparatus, and movements that directly confront the imposition of care work in both paid and unpaid forms, in our homes and the homes of others, along with the gendered nature of social reproduction and the reproduction of labor power. Here care is

a site of struggle and it plays a vital role in neighboring struggles. As we politicize and amplify these relationships we confront capital and the state-apparatus on the terrain of everyday life, rather than as grossly over-totalized institutions and ideologies.

There are not two separate areas of struggle -- for and against -- as this is a false dichotomy and a vast oversimplification of the political relationships and flows circulating here. In seeing life and death as political concepts, and hence sites of struggle themselves, we locate the limits of our solidarity and self-activity and the numerous points where we must go to war with the state-apparatus and seek to liquidate the state-form. But in those moments, with those relationships, “lines of flight”, forms of life, acts of solidarity and the intensity of these activities, we must break through the walls of ‘the moment of crisis’ for them to affect everyday life, the social field and the power relations and machines that populate them.

As political and social processes, of mourning *against* grief, of the gathering *against* the wake / funeral, of conflicting desires and modes of production; mourning develops as a political project *against* the imposition of a particular form of life as coordinated by, imposed by, and under the discipline of capital and the state-apparatus. It is not that one form of mourning is “correct” or “true” but rather that they function in completely different ways, with different compositions, levels of productive activity and different results. In describing and exploring these different forms of mourning as social processes, of blocked flows, of over-coded mourning, of “a life” cut off from the productive capacities of those around it; sites of struggle emerge and collide with the production of collective memories and refusals, of collective productive capacities, of ‘a common’.

This is not an oppositional politic, as the *against* is already a site of struggle; an actual one not an ideological one. Rather this struggle is a process of becoming, as with Deleuze and Guattari’s example of the Orchid and the Wasp. The Wasp is part of the Orchid’s reproductive system and requires its presence for pollination, while the Wasp requires the pollen for its own reproduction – we are speaking of the becoming-Wasp of the Orchid and the becoming-Orchid of the Wasp. These becomings require contact, affective and corporeal relationships - as one can not become *other* without such contact - and the creation of new ones from the embers and elements of the old.

An organizational response to these struggles requires that one begin with an inquiry into the political composition of the working class and the technical composition of capital. The purpose is to pinpoint these ‘becomings’, these sites of struggle and new subjectivities arising out of them so as to intervene by creating spaces of encounter, methods of self-reproduction, and forms of life through our collective productive capacities. We find our organizational expressions and forms, and their corresponding content, substance, and function in the flows, “lines of flight” and machines already populating the social field, as well as the weapons we pick up in fleeing.

The question we have before us - for our movements as the barbarians and nomads collide with capital and the state-apparatus on the terrain of everyday life, as the war-machines collide with the state-form - is how an autonomous politics (more accurately a post-political politics) can self-organize everyday life in nonrepresentational, participatory, and productive ways. “A revolutionary machine is nothing if it does not acquire at least as much force as ... coercive machines have for producing breaks and mobilizing flows.” The test of these concepts, inquiries, interventions and initiatives will

not be found in print or on the debating floor but in the flows of everyday life, on the social field, in our struggles – and in the results of these guerillas wars.

There is of course a danger here that I have not yet mentioned, especially as near six months have gone by since Jodi Tilton passed into the unknown. It is quite possible that I have simply over-intellectualized and complicated something that is quite simple, yet there seems to be no clear and substantive words for. That is, I miss Jodi tremendously and don't know how to live through my days without her.

* * *

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Author Biography

Kevin Van Meter is a community organizer and researcher (focusing on everyday resistance) originally from Long Island, New York and a member of the militant research collective Team Colors. Van Meter appears, along with Benjamin Holtzman and Craig Hughes, in the AK Press collection *Constituent Imagination: Militant Investigation // Collective Theorization* (Oakland: 2007), with an article titled “DIY and the Movement Beyond Capitalism”; and along with Hughes and Conor Cash, he co-coordinated and edited the one-off online journal *In the Middle of a Whirlwind: 2008 Convention Protests, Movement and Movements* - www.inthemiddleofawhirlwind.info - recently released from The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest Press (Los Angeles: 2008). “Jodi Tilton: A Life” and additional writings can be found at www.warmachines.info; where he can also be contacted.