MONOTYPES

We took an escalator to the lake
we acted like
wasn’t there
like we were embarrassed to wear
its dazzling white pants of sparkle
if the movie
of its discussion
with light couldn’t
tamp down the plot
points it crammed
into the squint
I made when the star
obliterated line
and freed us momentarily to hear
a scream of all color.
LINENESSES

I haven’t thought
that much
slash can report
the objects
wiped clean of glitter
in a spirit of
dyscommodification
that foregoes levels
for example imagine
wedges of a peach
circling through the air
around a purple square
inside an idea
eligible for benefits
on the heels of
khaki September.
LIKE WANTING TO HAVE KIDS

I’m not sure if I began
hallucinating as much as I
accepted that I always had been
available to architecture
meaning enveloping shapes
or feelings of shape
that pressed upon me in thoughts
which themselves I mistook
for waves of dense air
weighted with faceless significance.
ALONE WITH AN EMPTY BUCKET

It’s who anyone
is that’s so
comical to dumb
shelves plied with
metaphors
you wait for
kids to get too
bored to notice
in the hallway
to the inner
sense of your-
self as cartoon.
CANTED CIRCLES

I ate pleasantries
and wasted a whole house
on miniature catastrophes,
my one, two, three
apologies to sleep,
may we reunite
behind the flower
that greets the desperation
I sit with in the rain
legislating a personhood
more wanted than me,
the small font
of a dog’s voice
hnnn hnnn hnnn
by the ladder to a treehouse
darkened by clouds
digesting thunder
scrolling through streets
like a prosecutor
looking for someone to humiliate.
MY (AND EVERYONE’S) KIND OF ANIMAL

A face that goes “ding!”
delivers me from forgetfulness
along the deepest groove
lined by vinyl
greased up with brain cells on hold
who only know what they’re told
by the unspoken forms
that suit no one and everyone
deciduously, like until they don’t,
until it’s just another talking dog
answering the phone gruffly “WHAT”
as she pours coffee into a buttercup
checks the pH levels on the internet
and taps a setting on her sunglasses
that turns the sky a kind of pink
that buildings notice
when they pose for their mugshots
and try not to smile.
Gallery Place, a transfer station
for many, crowded, what they call
a crush of us getting off the first car
and following the flock to the escalator
down the platform to our right
to take us up to the gates and out
when I see a man striding—that is the word—
against and through the rush
like we hadn’t even noticed
the empty escalator we passed
like so much suffering.
Our eyes, as they say, met.
Then he realized, and I was
embarrassed. I should have
said something? The flush
as I thought this, embarrassed again.
His pennyloafers, his dark socks
underpainting beige chinos, light,
what they call a generous cut—
he was not a large man—
and his missable
bright blue fleece,
zipper down the front. Boring as corn.
But let me be precise
about the typography of the imperative:
I, too, was wearing fleece.
We came out of the station. A woman was spinning.
She looked at her phone
as her leashed dog walked around her.

God I love to dance.

It is December 2016, and I
work through what they call
the transition.

I walk past the FBI. I see a colleague on the opposite corner:
do I cross over, say hello, ask about the weekend?
I do. He’s leaving soon, what they call a political.

For around seven years I had a nosebleed.
Left side and daily. Then a few months ago
it stopped. It was how my eyes met
those of the man in blue fleece.

In the restorative justice tradition,
a crime is understood to create a relationship
between the perpetrator and victim
that asks for repair. There are ways to write this poem
that could get me fired. Is that censorship?
Is it censorship if I agree? Speaking hypothetically,
let’s say the man they’re bringing in
asked me, person to person, to live more fully
in the realization of his savior.

Would I thank him?
I have sometimes endured the fantasy
that a form will reveal itself
in the course of writing.
I step carefully in the knowledge
of great suffering at the hands of Western traditions.
Will that get me fired?
There are ways to edit this poem
that could get me nothing.
It’s never a bag full of money.  
Sometimes you get an email that just says  
*Well?* I open a document and write the words  
*to work for [____________]*.  
A few months ago I add a sentence to my resume:  
*I identify as bisexual.* They have that resume,  
somewhere. To get fired for a poem.  
Bi people make up more than half  
of everyone who’s L, G, or B  
but are out at rates far lower than Ls or Gs  
and attempt suicide at rates far higher.  
And sure, I worry, so I  
put it on my resume? Apparently  
this is what you get. For awhile  
it seems like things will get smaller,  
but now it’s the opposite. How different  
is the next day. I have that panic,  
5:35 PM at 10th Street and G,  
38 years old on a Tuesday, dipping a stroll  
into the grand tradition of bureaucratic pain.  
I stay with it. I imagine a simple cracker  
within a symbolic system that is made visible  
only to those it harms. I imagine how government  
works, its care and carelessness, its fertility  
and numbness. It rains and then it doesn’t. Then it does,  
then it doesn’t. A train ahead and one behind.  
Articles of desperation, totems, oracles  
to be consulted, permanent but always new  
like trauma. What palliative isn’t reasonable  
in the face of it? A man says
he wouldn’t begrudge us keeping a job.
The bisexual purge in its host of forms.
Will they bother with the distinction?
They probably won’t bother with any of it.
Weeks go by, it’s late February,
they withdraw what they call
the *Dear Colleague Letter*
on legal protections for transgender children,
*first they came for trans kids.*
I shook the man’s hand.
Sometimes you’re just keeping things
from getting worse.
You look for ways to mitigate harm.
You deepen the channel of what they call *process*.
You consider that the imperative
has a stabilizing function.
You think about lines at your feet.
You think, *If I go, who will replace me?*
* Nobody? One of them?
I think about sending what I call
*letters of interest* to law schools. Retreat
or escape? But it doesn’t all collapse at once.
Some days you think, *Maybe?*
It’s been the warmest February on record.
*Nice,* my friend Jared says, *if you don’t think about why.*
The forsythia next door has already bloomed.
I consider whether raising something
would harden them into a position
that is the opposite of what I want.
I work through proxies.
I consider frames.
In the sci-fi novel I’d like to write,
a for-profit government agency
has developed a technology
to tweak your perceptions,
what was unpleasant to you
no longer seems so.
It leads to a kind of genocide.
I’m just a sentence to them, less than a sentence,
a sound that slips out when you speak.
But to myself, a spontaneous overflow of events
recollected in distress.
At the beginning of February
I go out of town for a conference
and see that Diana Flynn
is in the same place
to receive an award in recognition
of her remarkable career defending against
sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination.
She shows more optimism in her speech
than I’ve grown accustomed to,
a charismatic optimism underwritten
by long experience surveying
the landscape of law in time.
She reads from the epilogue of Invisible Man:

\[ I \text{ was never more hated} \]
\[ \text{than when I tried to be honest. . . .} \]
\[ \text{No one was satisfied—} \text{not even I.} \]
\[ \text{On the other hand,} \]
\[ \text{I’ve never been more loved and appreciated} \]
than when I tried to “justify”
and affirm someone’s mistaken beliefs . . .
But here was the rub:
Too often, in order to justify them,
I had to take myself by the throat
and choke myself until my eyes bulged
and my tongue hung out and wagged
like the door of an empty house in a high wind.
Oh, yes, it made them happy
and it made me sick.
She argues that once the law
recognizes the inefficacy of its
historical exceptions for LGBTQ+ people—
once the law applies, as it should, evenhandedly—
discrimination on the basis
of gender identity or sexual orientation
will have to be understood
as forms of sex discrimination,
something that’s still not entirely true today,
at least under federal law.
Years ago she writes an amicus brief
for Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins,
a 1989 Supreme Court case that establishes
that gender stereotyping at work
is a form of sex discrimination.
It’s a critical precedent in the struggle today
for the idea that we don’t need
a new federal law against
sexual orientation or gender identity discrimination
because they are already illegal—