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Post-truth: Phenomenon, Reflections, Ratifications

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Affective Witnessing: Testimony in the Age of Post-truth

Mukul Chaturvedi

Abstract

An interesting phenomenon of post truth moment is the rise of personal testimony and witnessing cultures. Informed by theories of affect, this paper examines how affective witnessing has emerged as a powerful tool in a highly mediatized and networked world by focusing on #MeToo movement and #NotInMyName protest as they unfolded on social media and moved from digital to the real world. Focusing on how affect constitutes witnessing as a collective and relational practice, with the effect of forming communities and provoking further testimonies, the paper argues that 'affective economies' (Ahmed 2004) of contemporary media landscape create feelings of communality and solidarity and reimagines new ways of being ethical and political. In foregrounding witnessing as a way of affecting and being affected, the paper draws attention to the challenges of contesting 'truth' claims, 'alternative facts', and competing witnesses, each claiming its own veracity with great vigour. The paper reflects on the paradox of the post truth moment which is marked by significant ethical quandaries that arise as we engage with mediatized witnessing in the digital age.

Keywords: testimony, truth, ethical, affect, post-truth.

Introduction

The significance of testimony and bearing witness is inextricably linked to the issues of epistemic injustice and violence in contemporary times. Whether it is witnessing from the site of historical trauma as in Holocaust and Partition, testifying before Truth and Reconciliation in conflict zones as part of transitional justice, denouncing human rights violations in testimonio, testimony finds a place in the context of denial, oppression, violence where the victim or the survivor in the act of giving testimony recounts personal and collective oppression. Bearing witness to trauma has been institutionalized as a way of moving forward after genocide and human rights violations and this has given impetus to 'speaking out' against injustice, oppression, and violence. The rise of testimony can be attributed

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Challenges, Transgressions and Articulations

Editors

Albeena Shakil • Amitendu Bhattacharya • Dhurijati Sarma

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Alexis Pauline Gumbs, *M Archive: After the End of the World* (Duke University Press, 2018, 232pp, £20.07 [Kindle only])
Reviewed by Shraddha Adityavir Singh (University of Delhi)

The second part of a triptych, *M Archive* is an experimental Black feminist work, in dialogue with M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2005), which refuses to adhere to any established literary genre. The first part of the triptych, *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity* (2016), was inspired by Hortense Spiller's work on Black feminist literary criticism and historiography. (The final part published in February 2020, *DUB: Finding Ceremony*, engages with the work of Sylvia Wynter and Caribbean dub poetry.) Alexander's book used 'crossing' as a metaphor for many things – the transatlantic movement of African people as slaves, for queer women, women of colour, memory and structure. For Gumbs, who offers an intergenerational dialogue between women of colour in her writing, *Pedagogies of Crossing* appears as a footnote on every page of *M Archive*.

Following in the footsteps of her short story, 'Evidence', published in the landmark anthology *Octavia's Brood* (2015), Gumbs presents her work in the form of a futuristic archive 'written from and with the perspective of a researcher, a post-scientist sorting artifact after the end of the world'. Gumbs's writing appears to be a mediation on what happens after the world, as we know it, ends – an annihilation of the elements of water, air, earth and even ourselves with evidence of late capitalism, anti-blackness and environmental crisis – with black feminist metaphysics materializing as the only possibility of being.

M Archive begins with 'A Note' which orients the reader towards not an affirmation of understanding Black people as human, but to question the definition of 'human' itself. In tandem with Alexander's metaphor of crossing, Gumbs moves into the realm of the posthuman – a speculative leap into nothingness, a 'blackness of what we cannot know'; yet, with the possibility of a blank canvas for reimagining existence. This emptiness after the end of the world also provides her with the opportunity to experiment with writing that resists capitalization, refuses to conform to literary forms or Western models of space-time and structure. The letter M, she explains, is for multitude, motherhood, magic, miracle, memory, muscle, music, must be, maybe, and more. She mentions *M Archive* as a work 'after and with' Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, Barbara Christian, Nellie McKay, June Jordan, Cheryl Y. Greene, Gloria Naylor, Jayne Cortez, Lucille Clifton, Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, and the Combahee River Collective.

The book is divided into seven sections, followed by 'Acknowledgements', 'Notes' that are footnotes to the various sections which reflect on Alexander's text, and a bibliography, 'Periodic Kitchen Table of Elements', not organized alphabetically but by atomic numbers. The first section, 'From the Lab Notebooks of the Last Experiments', is an affirmation of Gumbs's Afrofuturistic vision with a reflection on pain suffered by black communities. She talks about 'the mining of melanin' as a means to survival. The following sections, divided as 'Archive of Dirt: What We Did', 'Archive of Sky: What We Became', 'Archive of Fire: Rate of Change' and 'Archive of Ocean: Origin', incite the earth, wind, global warming and the importance of expressing emotions via tears. The poems, 'Baskets (Possible Futures Yet to be Woven)' and 'Memory Drive', meditate upon birthing, queerness, body image, love, science, social media, food, and fitness-wearable devices that can track activities like Pilates and Zumba. Futuristic images of 'the millions of transatlantic dead' also appear, alongside a diatribe on the process of archiving as a form of time travel that connects the archivist with their ancestors. Strewn across the beginning of four of the sections are the diagrams and sketches which correspond with the periodic element that section represents: the Archive of Fire, for example, contains a periodic table in which only Hydrogen, Nitrogen, Holium, Neon, and Iron are visible and the rest is blacked out.

This speculative documentary creatively interprets the present from a futuristic point-of-view via a lens focused on today. It may be predictive yet it is also collaborative with not just the Black feminist ancestors, but also future survivors of this moment. Queerness and gender fluidity are represented in every section, and human biology is subtly outwitted by references to self-reproductive amphibians. *M Archive* tells stories with no protagonists, but uses the collective 'we' as a reminder to the species that heeded no warnings and ultimately orchestrated a catastrophic end. For Gumbs, the only recovery can take place by using the body as a tool for remembrance.

M Archive, through its metaphors and images, announces the arrival of a future writing. It is a difficult work to read, without familiar ways of organizing a narrative, but it is a rewarding read nonetheless. The work challenges how scholarly writing, especially within academic institutions, needs to allow personal freedom to creatively engage with and recover indigenous knowledges. There are important questions raised about archive-making, and how a speculative reimagining of the archive could lead to newer ways of engagement with the past. Gumbs wants to bring to the fore ancestral speculative work as part of black feminist theory by situating *M Archive* 'after and with the defunding of the humanities'. She indicates how knowledge cannot be compartmentalised into the various departments and disciplines within the neo-liberal university. Instead, she positions her work as 'an experiment, an index, an oracle, an archive. Let this text be as alive as you are alive.' Not completely pragmatic or nihilistic, but a reaffirmation of the past, present and future as they collapse into a single moment to be salvaged.

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Reading Richards : Poetic Language in Selected Hindi Poetry

Aditi Sharma*

ABSTRACT

I A Richards has always been hailed as an important critic in the field of contemporary criticism. According to him, it is the duty of the critic to defend the individual existence of the poem. He tries to prove that the language that is deployed in poetry ceases to have any logical relations which is why he placed his trust more on communication. The 'poetic belief' or the truth of poetry and the 'scientific belief' or the truth of science are two different concepts and the facts of science can be proven. Various poems belonging to the realm of Hindi Literature aid in drawing such analogies between Statements and Pseudo Statements, as expressed in the works of Richards.

Keywords : Critical Balance, Literary Criticism, Statements, Pseudo Statements, Hindi Poetry

I A Richards has a very important place in the canon of New Literature after the modernist poet- T S Eliot. Richards is counted amongst the literary critics whose mettle helped in the setting of the great tradition of literary criticism in English Literature. In contrary to Richards, T S Eliot is not mainly hailed as a critic but is a renowned modernist poet. He, along with heavily contributing to poetry, produced some remarkable critical essays that invited enough attention and discussions from readers, thus, marking his path in the field of criticism. Richards, on the other hand, is basically a prominent critic rather than a poet. Ivor Armstrong Richards is a Linguist, who has a deep study of Psychology, Philosophy, Science and Semantics which had influenced his vision in his critical tracts. He provided, through his work, a basis for the scientific study of the English language. According to W K Wimsatt, the main contribution of I A Richards is on "critical balance" (Wimsatt 14). Critical balance or Equilibrium of balance elaborates that the concept of reading and sense of meaning depends on the control and coordination of two opposite powers involved in work.

S T Coleridge, being a philosopher poet, chose to not differentiate between poetry and philosophy; he

believed the both of them to be one. He is a well known poet but his main contribution has been in the field of criticism. I A Richards belongs to this very tradition of Coleridge, that is, he is a poet and a philosopher- his famous poems being "Spaceship" and "Goodbye Earth".

In the history of English criticism, Coleridge is perhaps the first critic to have acknowledged the need of inner criticism of poetry. Being inclined towards philosophy, Coleridge gave more importance to the feelings, ideas and imagination depicted in poetry. However, the analysis of the language of poetry remained neglected. Eliot and Coleridge analysed poetry from the angle of the creative process or formation of poetry. I A Richards, on the other hand, analysed poetry from the point of view of the reader which is also called the reading process.

In the context of poetry, Richards involved himself as a reader and not as a poet or the creator of the poem. Hence, he differs from T S Eliot since; his analysis was from the point of view of the author or the content and form of the work. These are two extremes in context to the total criticism of a poem which is why Richards has certain limitations and a bridge between the two extremes, in order to strike a chord between the two

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schools of literary criticism, is ought to be created. In his book, *Culture and Society: Coleridge and Orwell*, Raymond Williams writes that I A Richards' work regarding criticism is raw material for the generation of the twentieth century (239 - 41). Richards' ideas on poetry and language are so industrious that one can write numerous books on each of these concepts and still not be able to completely cover the magnitude of ideas he proposes.

I A Richards was not an orthodox or religious person; he had an inclination of a scientific approach towards criticism. He established the value of poetry and its importance in equivalence to science. Richards thought that literary criticism was too abstract and impressionistic and wanted to make it have precision like science. He wished to examine the psychological process of writing and reading poetry. He attempted to discover a scientific linguistic theory, which was something that no critic, prior to him, had tried to establish. Through their work, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, C K Ogden and I A Richards have tried to establish Semantics as an important critical instrument (2).

Before Richards' contribution to criticism, there was an ambiguous trend of criticism of poetry. This can be proven by the statement of Coleridge regarding poetry- "Poetry gives most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood" (5). Richards, for the first time, clarified that although poetry may have many meanings but the conclusion of its meanings lies in one definite intention- this is the characteristic of Critical Balance. While writing *Principle of Literary Criticism*, Richards went through a similar pattern of critical ambiguity. As a result of this he tried to make a clear principle on the basis of psychological, semantic expression and value theory with regard to poetry. W K Wimsatt in his Essay, "I A Richards", writes that while writing *Principles of Literary Criticism and Practical Criticism- A Study of Literary Judgment*, there were two main trends in contemporary criticism. On one hand, feelings, aesthetics and inspiration were searched by critics and on the other, poetical tools were searched in craft like rhythm and meter along with emotion and

technique. One trend focussed on the communicative aspect of a work which dealt with what was explained and the other dealt with the experimental aspect which dealt with how it was explained. Due to these trends, the criticism of poetry was unable to explain poetry as a whole.

I A Richards has extensively written pieces of criticism on critics, poets and writers, like T S Eliot, Delmore Schwartz, W B Yeats, G M Hopkins, Thomas Hardy, William Shakespeare, P B Shelley, S T Coleridge, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, and D.H. Lawrence. Through the variety of these essays, the conclusion that comes to mind is that I A Richards, despite writing on 'Practical Criticism' is, in the end, a Theoretical Critic.

In *How to Read a Page: A Course in Efficient Reading*, with relation to poetry, I A Richards writes that a poem has inner linguistic existence, which is free from the aims and thoughts of the writer (72 - 78). It is the duty of the critic to defend the individual existence of the poem. Richards dismissed the aesthetical principles of critics and dismissed the value related theories of G. E. Moore. The assumption of Moore was that the process of evaluation of some object science is not capable of proving the evaluation nor can it help in denying the facts. Only the inner tendencies of humans can form the basis of such evaluation. Richards doubted this concept and established that evaluation must confirm the facts. Richards tried to invent a very important theory- that of Collective Criticism. Without naming the poet, he presented his students with several poems and requested them to provide independent criticism of the poems. His book, *Practical Criticism- A Study of Literary Judgment*, included such type of poems and comments therein. However, Richards' book, *Principles of Literary Criticism* deals with establishment of values and not aesthetical thinking. The mental structure of the reader and conversion of tendencies of sentiment of readers make Richards' criticism a psychological one. His ideas regarding language are not scientifically matured enough, because he pays more attention towards the impression of poetic language influencing the inner tendencies of readers, because of which, they have become psychoanalytical. In fact, Richards had seen the changes coming in the human mind and ideas through his

knowledge of psychology and science.

I A Richards believes that language has two different uses- factual and emotional, but language related study is neglected in comparison to studies of other subjects since it has not been analysed by people till now. Richards elaborates two categories, namely statements and pseudo statements. The 'statements' of Richards are Impression through "truth" and facts, which are related to Science. For the statements, the factual value is important and they are ought to reflect facts, be justified and hold value. They follow the pattern of first providing a true statement, the logical derivation of which will result in the proclaimed conclusion. For instance, to test whether a solution is acidic or basic in nature, one can do a simple test involving the dipping of litmus paper in the solutions to determine the nature of the solution. Litmus paper, which is light yellow in colour, when dipped in a solution that is acidic in nature, turns red and the paper, if dipped in a solution that is basic in nature, turns blue according to the presence of free hydrogen in the solution. Thus, a scientific experiment simply follows a given statement and a logical procedure that results in a set conclusion.

Poetry does not give statements like science does, it, rather, presents the emotional aspects that lack face value and thus, cannot be justified. It is necessary for Poetry, which is an emotional use of language to have an aesthetic value. Thus, as Pseudo Statements, the impression is made not through the "truth" but structural coherence of the work and its quality of being a whole.

Statements and Pseudo Statements cannot be differentiated entirely and are sometimes used interchangeably. The use of metaphor awakens one's emotions even if the words used are untrue which is why poetry conveys a false statement that reflects emotions and not facts. In science, however, it is important to always carry truth that intertwines with logic. So, the different facts that are combined to prove something should make a logical relation. The statements should be logically true derivations that lead to a conclusion. I A Richards tried to prove that the language used in poetry has no logical relations, so, he placed his trust more on communication. Richards differentiates between emotional intensity and emotional experience. His book

with C. K Ogden, *The Foundation of Aesthetics*, explains his early ideas regarding this, in which he explains sixteen types of aesthetics.

In the field of knowledge, religion and philosophy played an important role prior to Science. Scientific temper resulted in the conduction of experiments to prove facts to be true. Richards, therefore, discusses the doubt in the minds of readers regarding the truth in poetry.

The 'poetic belief' or the truth of poetry and the 'scientific belief' or the truth of science are two different concepts. The facts of Science can be proven. For instance, one can differentiate between the colours blue and black in a laboratory. Parallel to this, the words of poetry are not unexplained but are rather unexplainable since the emotions cannot be measured. For instance, in Hindi Literature, Lord Krishna is variously described in accordance to his complexion as Krishna, "Shyama" or even "nila-megha-Shyama". "Nila" stands for blue, "Megh" stands for a cloud, which is dark in colour and "Shyama" stands for darkness. In other words, he is sometimes depicted as blue and he is sometimes depicted as black. This is so because, epistemologically, the Sanskrit word "nila" is used both for "dark" and for "blue" so the two colours used to describe him depict the same complexion. So, while they mean the same thing in poetry, in Science, the two colours are different.

The aim of poetry is, therefore, to arouse and satisfy the emotions of the reader, in such a situation, the truth or falsehood of facts seldom matters. The words used are merely used to assist such emotions. Due to this, Richards marks poetry as a Pseudo Statement. Richards, therefore, uses science as a means to defend poetry. Therefore, poetry has its importance in the age of science since it relieves people of tension and helps one satisfy one's own emotions.

Richards says that words are knitted in such a manner that when a reader reads, it creates rhythm and meter. He divided the reader into two categories- the emotional sensitive reader, whose immediate reaction to a tract displays his abundance of attention, and the less emotional and less involved reader. His theory of Language poetry is based on the mental status of the reader. For instance, Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar' who is considered as one of the most important modern Hindi

poets, in a poem- "Krishna ki Chetavani" states the lines:

Do nyay agar to adha do,

Par usmein bhi yadi baadha ho

Toh dedo kewal paanch gram

rakho apni dharti tamaam.

Though it would be fair to give half the kingdom to Pandavas,

But if you find that to be an impediment,

They would be content in ruling just five villages

You can keep your entire kingdom for yourselves.

The lines carry a lot of meaning when read with care; however, if the reader casually reads them, the idea of the poet will not be grasped properly by the reader. Ramdhari Singh Dinkar, through the poem, captures the angst of Lord Krishna towards Duryodhana's exploitations against the Pandava clan. The emotional reader will immediately quiver on reading the poem. Certain sequences of sounds create rhythm. A good formation of such a rhythm will result in proper flow of communication resulting in a better understanding of the reader. This sequence can be noted in the poems of Hindi poets like Gajanan Muktibodh, Raghuvir Sahai, Nagarjuna, Kedarnath Aggarwal, Ashok Vajpayi, Ashok Chakradhar, Agyeya and Harishvansh Rai Bacchan.

Richards compares poem with philosophy in "Poetry and Belief", he says that belief is not important in order to understand poetry i.e. impersonal facts and ideas need not be believed in (20 - 23).

The essence of the poetry therefore, lies in the understanding of the text by the reader; they negate the study of the self or the author as a prerequisite for the understanding of the poem. The theme and inner meaning of poems by Gajanan Muktibodh can be understood by the reader without the reader's understanding of the background of the poet. For instance, the poem, "Andhere Mein" ("In Darkness"), deals with the Post-Independence situation of India, the disillusionment of the common man after the implementation of the five-year plan and the darkness one feels within. The reader, without prior knowledge of the poem or the poet, can comprehend the pangs of disillusionment and desolation of the people and make their own meaning out of the poem.

Similarly, Sachchidananda Hirananda Vatsyayan

'Agyeya', in his poem "Kalgi Baajre ki" ("Crested Bajra") is in a discourse with his beloved over the similes and metaphors he uses for his beloved. He uses uncommon figures of speech to describe his beloved and requests her not to be offended of the comparison because it does not mean that he loves her any less when he says "ya ki mera pyaar maila hai" ("as if my love is blemished"). The poem is clearly not a traditional poem as it lacks traditional usage of figures of speech like comparing the beloved's face to that of the moon. The reader, however, without knowing the peculiar techniques of Agyeya can understand the poem without musing over the poet's background or without mentally comparing the author's poem to another poem of his. The poems by both poets, Muktibodh and Agyeya, can be comprehended without aligning them to the poems. They arouse the required feelings and provide satisfaction to the reader without the need of simultaneous analysis of the ideas of the authors.

Poetry can be enjoyed without being committed to the poet. Therefore, statement of poetry, the vision and analysis of the statement of poem is not the work of criticism. So, the analysis of ideas and concepts should not be the aim of criticism, rather, the aim of criticism should be the analysis of poetic language.

The art of understanding language depends on nature and practice. The learning and strengthening of language or making language richer depends on nature. In the early stages of man (childhood), language plays a very important role. But as man gradually transcends the early stages, the language learning skills begin to deplete. In childhood, a child may believe that he is unable to learn a language properly, but, as he ages, he no longer faces such a situation. When he grows older, it has been noted that one becomes casual towards the learning and usage of words. Thus, the person uses certain words for a particular situation because he has heard someone else use similar words in a similar situation because he is imitating him. He however may be unaware of the usage of that word, deploying it solely to converse. We can experience this problem in the context of learning language irrespective of our age. The great poets in their poems testify how the understanding of language is earned and controlled. Sometimes, we do not expect more from the language. Likewise, we note that Richards with

reference to poetic language discussed in detail the language and poetic language. By the contradictions of emotional and scientific language he tried to express the scientific truth and poetic truth in opposite forms.

The use of language interferes with the traditional use of language. Language has developed in a new form where it is influenced by science. Richards felt a need of explaining the two different uses of language.

The critical theories of I A Richards lead to the Formalist theory of criticism. I A Richards was the believer of the fact that the purpose of poetic criticism is not the evolution of facts, ideas and concepts depicted in poetry, because emotional facts cannot be proved. The purpose of criticism is to analyse and evaluate the poetic language. Acharya Ramchandra Shukla resonates Richards's idea of the purpose of poetry in his essay, "Kavita kya hai?" ("What is Poetry?") (Shukla 97 - 99). He writes:

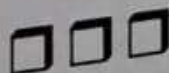
Kavita hi Manushya ke hriday ko swarth sambandho ke sankuchit mandal se upar uthakar lok samaanya bhaav bhoomi par le jaati hai. Jahaan jagat ki nana gatiyon ke maarmik svaroop ka sakshaatkaar aur shudh anubhootiyon ka sanchaar hota hai. Is bhoomi par pohunche hue manushya ko kuch kaal ke liye apna pata nahi rehta. Vah apni satta ko lok satta mein leen kiya rehta hai.

Poetry becomes the means to make man transcend the shallow thinking of self-centeredness and embrace the collective realm of humanity. This is the realm where man meets various emotional day to day activities and pure experiences. In this realm, man temporarily forgets himself his conscience, his being-ness and existence and involves himself with the collective being-ness of mankind.

Poetry has the power to create feelings in humans that make them more sensible. Thus, poetry makes humans humane. In short, it may be said that the use of poetic language is not only done to satisfy the emotional tendencies of the reader but it has an intellectual purpose too. The deep emotional approach towards reality is achieved with the use of poetry.

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The second part of a triptych, *M Archive* is an experimental Black feminist work, in dialogue with M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2005), which refuses to adhere to any established literary genre. The first part of the triptych, *Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity* (2016), was inspired by Hortense Spiller's work on Black feminist literary criticism and historiography. (The final part published in February 2020, *DUB: Finding Ceremony*, engages with the work of Sylvia Wynter and Caribbean dub poetry.) Alexander's book used 'crossing' as a metaphor for many things – the transatlantic movement of African people as slaves, for queer women, women of colour, memory and structure. For Gumbs, who offers an intergenerational dialogue between women of colour in her writing, *Pedagogies of Crossing* appears as a footnote on every page of *M Archive*.

Following in the footsteps of her short story, 'Evidence', published in the landmark anthology *Octavia's Brood* (2015), Gumbs presents her work in the form of a futuristic archive 'written from and with the perspective of a researcher, a post-scientist sorting artifact after the end of the world'. Gumbs's writing appears to be a mediation on what happens after the world, as we know it, ends – an annihilation of the elements of water, air, earth and even ourselves with evidence of late capitalism, anti-blackness and environmental crisis – with black feminist metaphysics materializing as the only possibility of being.

M Archive begins with 'A Note' which orients the reader towards not an affirmation of understanding Black people as human, but to question the definition of 'human' itself. In tandem with Alexander's metaphor of crossing, Gumbs moves into the realm of the posthuman – a speculative leap into nothingness, a 'blackness of what we cannot know'; yet, with the possibility of a blank canvas for reimagining existence. This emptiness after the end of the world also provides her with the opportunity to experiment with writing that resists capitalization, refuses to conform to literary forms or Western models of space-time and structure. The letter M, she explains, is for multitude, motherhood, magic, miracle, memory, muscle, music, must be, maybe, and more. She mentions *M Archive* as a work 'after and with' Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, Barbara Christian, Nellie McKay, June Jordan, Cheryl Y. Greene, Gloria Naylor, Jayne Cortez, Lucille Clifton, Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, and the Combahee River Collective.

The book is divided into seven sections, followed by 'Acknowledgements', 'Notes' that are footnotes to the various sections which reflect on Alexander's text, and a bibliography, 'Periodic Kitchen Table of Elements', not organized alphabetically but by atomic numbers. The first section, 'From the Lab Notebooks of the Last Experiments', is an affirmation of Gumbs's Afrofuturistic vision with a reflection on pain suffered by black communities. She talks about 'the mining of melanin' as a means to survival. The following sections, divided as 'Archive of Dirt: What We Did', 'Archive of Sky: What We Became', 'Archive of Fire: Rate of Change' and 'Archive of Ocean: Origin', incite the earth, wind, global warming and the importance of expressing emotions via tears. The poems, 'Baskets (Possible Futures Yet to be Woven)' and 'Memory Drive', meditate upon birthing, queerness, body image, love, science, social media, food, and fitness-wearable devices that can track activities like Pilates and Zumba. Futuristic images of 'the millions of transatlantic dead' also appear, alongside a diatribe on the process of archiving as a form of time travel that connects the archivist with their ancestors. Strewn across the beginning of four of the sections are the diagrams and sketches which correspond with the periodic element that section represents: the Archive of Fire, for example, contains a periodic table in which only Hydrogen, Nitrogen, Holium, Neon, and Iron are visible and the rest is blacked out.

This speculative documentary creatively interprets the present from a futuristic point-of-view via a lens focused on today. It may be predictive yet it is also collaborative with not just the Black feminist ancestors, but also future survivors of this moment. Queerness and gender fluidity are represented in every section, and human biology is subtly outwitted by references to self-reproductive amphibians. *M Archive* tells stories with no protagonists, but uses the collective 'we' as a reminder to the species that heeded no warnings and ultimately orchestrated a catastrophic end. For Gumbs, the only recovery can take place by using the body as a tool for remembrance.

M Archive, through its metaphors and images, announces the arrival of a future writing. It is a difficult work to read, without familiar ways of organizing a narrative, but it is a rewarding read nonetheless. The work challenges how scholarly writing, especially within academic institutions, needs to allow personal freedom to creatively engage with and recover indigenous knowledges. There are important questions raised about archive-making, and how a speculative reimagining of the archive could lead to newer ways of engagement with the past. Gumbs wants to bring to the fore ancestral speculative work as part of black feminist theory by situating *M Archive* 'after and with the defunding of the humanities'. She indicates how knowledge cannot be compartmentalised into the various departments and disciplines within the neo-liberal university. Instead, she positions her work as 'an experiment, an index, an oracle, an archive. Let this text be as alive as you are alive.' Not completely pragmatic or nihilistic, but a reaffirmation of the past, present and future as they collapse into a single moment to be salvaged.