

Clearance Process

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SMALL CAPS

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Alison Dean's "Penitent Spy," a companion essay
written in response to *Clearance Process*, is
available to read [here](#).



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████████████████████
████████████████████
████████████████████
██████████ He is more of a lover than a hater.
██████████ are good friends, and he was
fighting for the betterment of our condition.

██████████ introduced him to me as a friend and someone to
help ██████████ my thirst for information about Christianity.
Although I enjoyed getting to know ██████████, he didn't
help me understand the Trinity. He confused me even more,
and my lot with him was no better: he, too, sent me to hell.
██████████ ended up arguing with ██████████ because
they had some difference in their beliefs, although both were
Protestant. I realized that they could not help me understand,
and so I dismissed the topic for good, and we started to talk
about other issues.

It's very funny how false the picture is that western people
have about Arabs: savage, violent, insensitive, and cold-hearted.
I can tell you with confidence is that Arabs are peaceful, sensi-
tive, civilized, and big lovers, among other qualities.

"██████████, you guys claim that we are violent, but if you
listen to the Arabic music or read Arabic poetry, it is all about
love. On the other hand, American music is about violence and
hatred, for the most part." [During my time with ██████████,
many poems went across the table. I haven't kept any copies;
██████████ has all the poems. ██████████ also gave me a small Divan. ██████████
is very surrealistic, and I am terrible when it comes to surreal-
ism. I hardly understood any of her poems.

One of my poems went
████████████████████
████████████████████
████████████████████

[REDACTED]

*Noises are the sounds
we have learned to ignore.*

—R. Murray Schafer

After a yearlong clearance process with the American military (specifically, the United States Southern Command: SOUTHCOM), I was granted access to visit the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center in April 2015. The process had been extremely thorough. I'd provided documents and references and agreed to several background checks. I'd applied as a "poet" and provided the required "brief outline on the scope of what your story will be." In this document I outlined my research into the stutter, dysfluency, and interrogation, and provided the required samples of my work. My final approval came as a signed "Country Clearance Form." I booked a round-trip ticket from Fort Lauderdale to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, on a flight operated by IBC Air: Your Gateway to the Caribbean.

I'm not exactly sure why I was allowed access to Gitmo. From conversations with members of the military stationed at Gitmo, access is given on a case-by-case basis and the criteria for acceptance changes with every command rotation. I got the sense that some units are simply more open than others to both non-journalists and to those whose applications propose more political and/or critical stories. Regardless, I can't help but think that I'd been permitted entry because my poetry is not overtly political and, no doubt, because of my whiteness.

I spent five days touring the facilities. I was taken through almost every aspect of the facility: the Medical Center (where force-feeding was explained and demonstrated); the Detainee Library (where I was allowed to browse all approximately-10,000 volumes of books and magazines available to detainees); Camp VI (where I was allowed to view detainees "going about their day");

Camp Justice (where the trials are held); Camp X-Ray (now completely taken over by the natural environment and where I was allowed to walk through the cells, the staging areas, and the interrogation shed in the afternoon and at night); and Camp Iguana (the juvenile detention facility where Omar Khadr was held).

The frontispiece of my press kit read:

JOINT TASK FORCE GUANTANAMO
SAFE * HUMANE * LEGAL * TRANSPARENT

I was never left alone at Gitmo, though I was permitted (barely, it turned out) to collect a variety of ambient sound recordings and to write poems and notes on my iPhone. For security reasons, I was not permitted to record what one Public Affairs representative (PA) referred to as “non-permissible human voice.” I attempted to record everything else and transcribed all the overheard small talk that I could.

When it came to photographs and video, members of the "Media Tour" (me along with three journalists and a camera operator from Belgium, Germany, and Catalonia) were prohibited from capturing "Frontal facial views, profiles, 3/4 views, or any view revealing a detainee's identity. No shadowy or blurred pictures may be taken as they could be adjusted at a later date," the Media Policy at Joint Task Force Guantanamo added. As one PA put it, "If their mother can't identify the detainee in the photo, then it's a good photo." Every day of the tour ended in the same way, with an Operational Security (OPSEC) meeting. At these meetings we were made to show PAs our photos, audio recordings, videos, or "other artistic renderings" in case any of it constituted Operational Protected Information:

3. During the OPSEC review, imagery that is determined to be in violation of these ground rules will be deleted or cropped to achieve compliance. For photographs, the NMR may request two (2) images per person per day be cropped to meet security requirements. Cropping is defined as cutting off the parts of a digital photograph deemed to be in violation. Blurring, smudging, fading, superimposing a black line or spot over certain parts of a photograph, or any other digital manipulation is not a substitution for cropping.

4. Photos selected for cropping will be moved from NMR's photo storage media (e.g., SD card) and saved onto a government computer. The original photo will be deleted from the NMR storage media and stored on the government computer until the final disposition of the photograph has been decided. The photos will then be cropped by a JTF-GTMO PA representative on the government computer, renamed and saved back to the government computer. The newly created file will then be transferred back to the NMR storage device. There is no appeal of JTF-GTMO's proposed cropping; if the NMR disagrees with the proposed cropping, the cropped image will be deleted and the original photo may be appealed to the JTF-GTMO CDR (or his or her designated military representative other than the JTF-GTMO PAO).

I happened to visit Gitmo during the Baltimore riots, which were constantly being played on all the screens and radio stations at the facility. Much of the talk uttered by members of the military addressed the possibly imminent closure of Gitmo, the allegations of torture and enhanced interrogations, and the (non)legality of detaining the one hundred and eleven men that remained at the time I was there. The soundscape of this talk was one of feedback loops and evasion, repetition with variations on an echo-forming language strategy:

That's not in my lane.

I don't know what they've done or what they haven't done. I'm not privy to that information.

I'm not authorized to tell you that, sir.

I can't speak to that. But I'll see if I can find someone who can.

Sir, you're not allowed to ask that.

That happened before my time.

The neighborhood is burning itself out.

Even if they're good, they can't talk.

The ambient recordings collected here capture the room tone of a once-held violence or a never-heard pastoral. The sounds belong to the disappeared and the indefinitely detained, their calls for rights and home flung out only to evaporate in the impossible sea air that surrounds. Ambient recordings as a kind of empty form that resonates with the visually-redacted photo or the lexically-redacted poem. Redaction looks like ambience sounds.

How can we listen to redaction? How can we listen to entire systems of it?















































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LED ZEPPELIN:
IT'S BEEN
A LONG TIME

STEREO
RM 11-2

Hour 1
Side 2















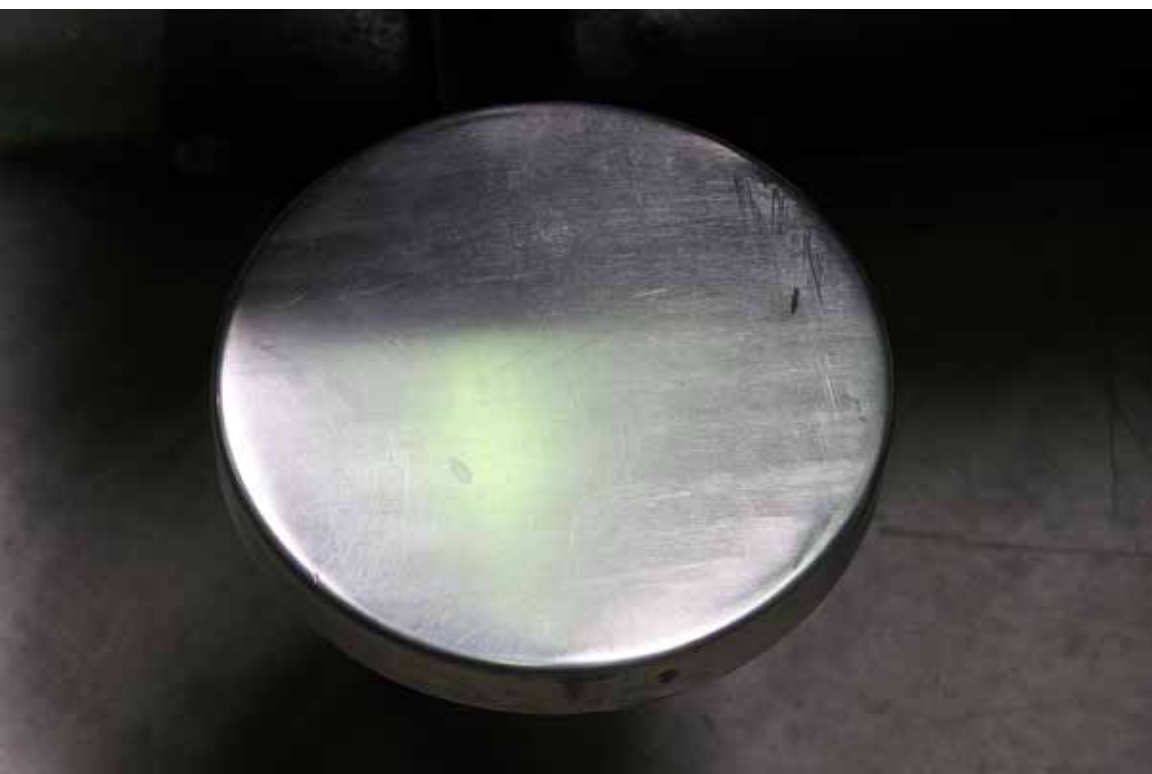














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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The cover image of this chapbook is a visual rendering of the ambient sound recorded inside a vacant cell in Camp Six.

Pages 3–4 are borrowed from Mohamedou Ould Slahi's *Guantánamo Diary* (ed. Larry Siems, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2015), 359–60.

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This book is dedicated to Mohamedou Ould Slahi.