DEEP CITY
Megan Kaminski

A NOEMI PRESS TEACHING GUIDE
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Poetry
ISBN 978-1-934819-53-1
75 Pages, October 2015
**OVERVIEW**

Megan Kaminski's *Deep City* considers the titular City, along with the Body, as architectures in crisis: how do space and identity contribute to the construction of the self in an urban landscape formed by catastrophe and conflict? In cities scarred by conflict, crisis, and capital, how does a body desire and connect with other bodies? In exploring these issues, the book flirts with and ultimately rejects the tradition of the flaneur/flaneuse: the poet as city-wanderer and -describer. The urban landscape is thus recognizable and alien at once.

According to CA Conrad, Kaminski “writes, ‘what if I split it open / melon ripe and red / let them all out’ but there is no “what if” about it as these beautiful poems dispatch us around the world where everyone awaits. The vivid re-imagined anatomy of the page in Megan Kaminski’s brilliant Deep City is host to the unexpected ‘slide from languid to louche’ listening with our enthusiastic ears. You will be wild about this book with me!”

Jennifer Moxley writes, “In Deep City Megan Kaminski continues her role as cartographer of desire, of longings both “feudal,” futile, and refined. Her delicate poems loiter at the intersection of bodies and letters (both alphabetic and epistolary), where objects and imagination collude. Kaminski’s poems beautifully illustrate how our sense perceptions insistently puncture through even the most rational arrangement. Deep City—not so much a place as a literary plea-

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**ABOUT MEGAN KAMINSKI**

Megan Kaminski is the author of two books of poetry, *Deep City* (Noemi Press, 2015) and *Desiring Map* (Coconut Books, 2012), and nine chapbooks. Her poems and essays have appeared in *The Atlantic, American Letters & Commentary, Denver Quarterly, Puerto del Sol, Third Coast*, and other journals. Before joining the faculty at the University of Kansas, she made her home in Los Angeles, Paris, and Portland, OR. She is an assistant professor in the University of Kansas’ Graduate Creative Writing Program and the 2015-2016 Hall Center for the Humanities Creative Fellow. She also curates the Taproom Poetry Series in downtown Lawrence.

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**FOR FURTHER READING**

Kate Greenstreet interviews Kaminski for *The Conversant; topics of discussion are Deep City and the writing process.*

“The poems explore the city and suburbs as container and contents of collective memory and how space shapes the body/how we create space.”

Megan Kaminski discusses Young Jeezy’s “Put On,” the source of one of *Deep City*’s epigraphs, at *Cold Front.*

“Jeezy (and Kayne) represent the proud and resilient individual body surrounded by a harsh and unblinking city”

An essay by Megan Kaminski about her poetic practice of mapping, influential to *Deep City*’s genesis and composition.

“I wanted to lay the world out, piecemeal and in flux, as I experienced it. I wanted to build worlds and create space for the reader to embody.”

Megan Kaminski appears on KJHK’s Sunflower Reading Series radio show, discussing and reading from *Deep City.*

“*Deep City* is a city that is not of our world...all these experiences I’ve had in cities go into it, but I think it’s distinctly a city outside of our world. It’s certainly not one city.”

Italo Calvino’s novel *Invisible Cities* is an interesting companion to *Deep City,* and it was an inspiration for Kaminski.

“You take delight not in a city’s seven or seventy wonders, but in the answer it gives to a question of yours.”
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Is *Deep City* about one city or many cities? Is the city in our world or a different world? Is it abstract or concrete? Find specific examples from section one, “The Cities,” to support your answers.

In an interview with Kate Greenstreet (linked above), Kaminski discusses Young Jeezy’s “Put On” as an inspiration, saying “there is something about Jeezy’s display of resilience and pride—the power of the individual voice and body—in the midst of a city crumbling around him. The cars, cash, guns, jewels, drugs, and beautiful women that he sings about are both armor and adornment against the harsh and unblinking city/economy/state.” Do you see this “pride... in the midst of a city crumbling” reflected in *Deep City*? If so, where and how? What other emotions/affects do the speakers in the poem ‘put on’? How the different registers of voices throughout the book resonate with the idea of ‘putting on’?

In the same interview with Greenstreet, Kaminski says *Deep City* “thinks about the city and the body as architectures in crisis” and that the poems “examine language and identity in the crisis of late capitalism.” Where in the book do you see reflections of this crisis? How would you describe the poetic speakers’ approach(es) in confronting these crises?

A Flaneur, according to Merriam-Webster, is “an idle man-about-town.” However, thanks in part to critic Walter Benjamin, the idea of the Flaneur has become “an emblematic archetype of urban, modern experience” and “an important symbol for scholars, artists and writers” (Wikipedia, “Flaneur”). In *Deep City*, does Kaminksi participate in the tradition of the flaneur? Does she subvert it? How so?

Kaminski has described the book’s second section, “Apocrypha,” as a “lost book.” What about the section gives an apocryphal impression, thus making it a lost book? How does it compare to the other two sections, “The Cities” and “Collection’?

How does poetic form function throughout the book? Do you notice any patterns, both within sections and between/across sections? And how does Kaminski’s use of poetic form resonate with the book’s themes and ideas?

WRITING EXERCISE BY MEGAN KAMINSKI

“Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.” - Italo Calvino (Invisible Cities)

Thinking of the city—real and imagined—and of our own secret desires and fears. Each night for the next five nights before going to sleep, you will seed your city. Imagining a structure, a place, a memory, or any tangible detail—a thing that you want to include in your imagined city, a thing that cannot be left out. Write it down in a notebook/on paper next to your bed. Sleep. Your dreams will reveal more. When you wake, first thing, before you get out of bed, before you talk with anyone, before you imbibe any substances, write down what you remember of the physical space in your dream—maybe it’s the city that you intended to seed. Maybe your dreams have taken you to another place. Maybe the seeds need to be nurtured some more—fed by reading or music or something else—maybe they are taking their time to sprout; no worry. You can write about their absence, too. Imagine them germinating. Over the next four nights/mornings, you will repeat this process. Slowly building a city/place/world through your dreams. On the fifth day, after waking and getting out of bed and doing whatever it is that you do in the morning (and maybe over a cup of hot tea), using your notes, you will write the city/town/field/world of your dreams. However it appeared to you then, however you inhabit it now in your waking thoughts. This is your city—perhaps it is of your choosing, perhaps it is something you inherited, perhaps it is something that haunts you.