

PUSHING UP DAISIES



**One side of a two-sided puppet named
Fore & From who performs in the four acts of
Pushing Up Daisies.**

“Pushing up daisies” is a euphemism for being dead. Theories about its origin point to correspondence documents from a British Lieutenant during the first World War, or to various British poets’ work published during the same time, including Wilfred Owen and John Keats. The phrase assigns an active force (pushing) to a presumed inactive state (being dead).

PUSHING UP DAISIES

(Annotated Treatment)

AMERICAN YOGA

During an early public rehearsal, this track was the instrumental version of the Imanbek remix of the song 'Roses' by SAINT JHN, which I heard for the first time during a CorePower Yoga™ class in Chicago in February 2025. In February 2026 I started attending Les Mills BODYPUMP™ group exercise classes. It is possible this track will change to Sonny Fodera's track 'Mind Still', featuring blythe, which is the lunge track for BODYPUMP™ edition 135.

Two puppets are in an American yoga class. We can tell because there is muffled pop rap playing and they are breathing heavily.

They are talking to each other in an activated warrior pose two, lunging downward & upward. One puppet is having a crisis.

I'm not sure I can be spending my time like this. I just... I can't stop thinking about my own — Please. Stop it. How else would you be spending your time? You need to indulge in some distractions. It's not that hard. Life is filled with distractions! Amazing work guys you're doing so good, now integrate the arms with the lunges. Lift your arms up with your lunge! What do you mean, distractions? You know, like, I don't know. What we're going have for lunch later. Or like this. This is a distraction. A good one. It's these kinds of things that make life meaningful. Now a quick transition into power crunches! Get on your back and find that fire, we're pulsing for five What I'm trying to say is, there is so much more happening. My eyes are so

This puppet is using self-care rhetoric as a tool to undermine the experience of another puppet. This rhetoric was rampant in white online and offline communities I was a part of during the first months of the genocide in Gaza that began in 2023.

open, they hurt. It's impossible not to think — if a meaningful life is — what happens to our lives when they — what happens when we — I know it hurts so good! And that's our four You need to stop. I know where you're going with this. It's not helpful, and I want to stop talking about it. Right now. You're going to have to start thinking more about yourself. Taking care of yourself, you know? You seem unwell. You got this three **Did you hear? Here comes our two Hear what? So strong, keep pushing! Entire families. Every single person. And now, a school... And here's our one, last push, you got this! Oh please. Those people, they aren't your family. They're not even even your neighbors! You've got to give it up. It's not your responsibility. It's just news. **And release, soo strong everyone, amazing work. We're transitioning to downward facing dog. Down dog everyone, meet me there and let's peddle it out It's just that — I just think, you know if it happened to them — and we saw it happen — if it happened to them — then it could happen to — they could —****

(The puppet in crisis breathes deeply. Their chest moves up and down. Their breath is labored.)

This refers to Al Jazeera reports in November and December 2023 from Gaza that entire families under one surname were murdered under Israeli bombing, and recent reports in February 2026 of an American missile striking a primary school in the town of Minab in southern Iran.

**We're peddling out the backs of
the feet, stretching our shoulders
long, twisting the arms outward I
see all of the mothers — that town
is so small —**

(The puppet begins to sob.)

A couple more counts, you got this

(The puppet is weeping)

**Yogi's choice; transition from
chaturanga through upward facing
dog, finding your final resting
position**

(The puppet continues to weep
while following instructions.)

**And release into shavasana, corpse
pose. So yummy**

(The puppet wails. The puppeteer's
head is down, sobbing with the
puppet.)

**Lay your arms wide, mat width
apart**

(The puppet continues to sob.
The puppeteer helps the puppet
make these adjustments.)

Our feet are falling to each side

(The puppet continues to sob.
The puppeteer helps the puppet
make these adjustments.)

**We are releasing our jaw, wiggling
our fingers**

(The puppet continues to sob.)

**Thank yourself for coming out
today**

(The puppet continues to sob.)

**Saturday afternoon, such a great
time to treat yourself to this
practice**

(The puppet continues to sob.)

**And know that after all that hard
work, the only thing you have left
to do is breathe**

(The puppet continues to sob.)

(The puppet breathes.)

END

TOWERING PEOPLE

A two-sided puppet recounts their dreams to each other: they dreamt of a strange event they did not recognize. The event is the funeral of a leader, either planned meticulously 40 years before their death, or delayed for security reasons, and attended en masse.

They interrupt each other infrequently, searching for a stable recollection.

On 9 January 2025, former US President Jimmy Carter was buried in a state funeral that was broadcast live with commentary on National Public Radio (NPR). I stream Chicago's NPR channel in the studio when I'm feeling homesick.

I remember towering people. Upright at the event of their lifetimes they stood still, proud to be there. Crowded, they swarmed. After every step a pause. What a tempo, like a heartbeat! ***Rushing people. It was outside, high ceilings with pious acoustics. Seated, powerful people whispered to each other.*** What were they whispering about? ***I'm not sure, but it seemed like it was unexpected. I could hear voices speculating about what they were saying. A strange public intimacy. The crowd moved chaotically forward, their arms up to touch a shrouded thing.*** A shrouded thing? ***Yes. Couldn't tell what***

On 23 February 2025, the public funeral of former Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah was held in Beirut, Lebanon. The funeral was postponed until five months after his death.

During the indoor service of the funeral of Jimmy Carter, cameras capture current president Donald Trump leans towards former president Barak Obama and whispers something to him. Both men smile and continue to speak, and media commentary guessed about what they might have to say to one another.

exactly. They threw dirt. At the thing? ***Yes. And it wore a black skirt, draped.*** Sounds nice. ***It was. Under a dome it sat still.*** A shame for such an outfit. ***On a truck, it moves with the people, slowly as to not hurt them. Horses, black horses pull it. A long stage, padded on the inside. It had a window with beige curtains parted in the middle, revealing a cloth dotted with stars. The walls of the stage were transparent. There was one person on stage.*** Where was the audience? ***The people stood back, gave space, alarms rang and flashed. The crowd rushed forward, cheering. Silent cleared streets. No oncoming traffic.*** Sounds like a rendering. ***Yes, like a city waiting to be filled. You couldn't see the ground there were so many people. A small group stood still and watched, nodding silently in sunglasses, some kind of approval. The people were walking, swarming, the people were standing still, heads down, with shoulder pads. The song was played on a piano, no one was singing.*** That might be from the show we saw last night. ***But the song was also sung into the streets from tin***

can speakers, hands to hearts beating, hands to hearts still. People covered their faces, people were unable to let go, they were holding on tightly. Were you holding on? **No. I was watching, worried I would have to grab on. Someone else always took hold the moment another released. The speakers sounded like they were wailing. The thing moved slowly through the crowd, with the crowd. It descended steps with a pause between each. Backward and forward it breathed through. And then it was dark, flashlights. No one was tired. Seven hours, an entire day. Four hours, enough time to get back to work. You know in dreams, time collapses?** Yeah. **I couldn't hear any crying, not over the crowd's loud voices. It was so quiet I could only hear the sound of the horses' hooves. I heard a voice calling the scene a historic moment. Something about respect.** Who was the voice? **Someone that wasn't there. Someone watching and transmitting. Then, a person in a straight line of people standing still fell backwards.** Yikes, why? **It's not clear why.**

They were dragged away by the shoulders. Who were they? **I'm not sure. Fighter jets fly low.** Was it combat? **No, not combat, a warning. A show of strength. Flags flapping, flags draped over a box.** Like our box? **No, a heavier box. A show of strength. Something had shifted, it was clear. There was a new narrative. Maybe it was a sports stadium. It looked cold. I heard the voices watching saying, this is a historic day, God will remember this day. People were saying, this is an event planned for history.** It sounds dark. **Yes, so very dark. The last moment possible to write history before this chapter closes. Chapters close? I don't think so, but they did.**

Israeli F-15 and F-35 jets flew over the funeral of Hassan Nasrallah.

A radio commentator shared to his co-host that the funeral of every US American president is planned decades beforehand, and that this moment is the last of these leaders' opportunities to inscribe their legacy into national history.

END

DEATH BED

A puppet describes their wishes for their final moments in their death bed to their puppeteer.

A bed in the middle of the forest. If this is not possible, a big window, natural light, trees inside and outside. The smell of burning wood. No, not incense but a wood fire burning nearby, or outside the open window. Wind. A thin net over me, so I can see it billowing. Everyone should be crying. Even you. Warm water, with those big loose cinnamon sticks in it. If I can no longer swallow, fed it to me with sponges on sticks. Warm sponge baths, or cold if I'm sweaty. Clean sheets dried crisp outside. Keep my skin moisturized, especially my elbows, and my lips unchapped. I hope I will still be able to cry. If no tears come, prepare eye drops. Music, slow and also fast. What is the color? Oranges and reds, a deep blue at dusk. Humor me this once, you lucky liver. Let me tell you how I would want it, if I could have it at all.

Something I remember at my grandmother June Huston's death bed is that she asked for Baileys Irish Cream, and we were able to give her small sips by soaking a sponge on a stick.

This act was written under the influence of many writings by death doulas and other care workers who aid people and their loved ones through their last transition, including Stacey Bu Shea's "Dying Livingly", Anne-Marie Keppel's "Death Nesting: The Heart-Centered Practices of a Death Doula", and Atul Gawande's "Being Mortal".

END

YOU ARE A STAIN

A two-sided puppet sings a song with one line: **YOU ARE A STAIN**. Their two mouths first take turns with words, and then with phrases. They sing to an audience. They look around and point to them, singing **YOU! YOU ARE A STAIN**. The puppeteer looks where they look, their eyes landing where the puppets' eyes land.

Suddenly, the puppets look upwards to the puppeteer and begin to sing at her. Shocked by their accusation, she physically recoils. She sings back to them, **YOU ARE A STAIN**. She leans downwards confrontationally. **YOU ARE A STAIN!** The three of them sing at one another. The puppeteer's voice takes the majority while the puppets' voices interject sparsely.

Eventually, the puppets fall silent and limply to the floor. The puppeteer sings alone. She sings gently to the puppet body. She searches the audience, singing with despair **YOU, YOU ARE A STAIN**. Her gaze lands on the control booth. **YOU ARE A STAIN**, she tries to sing at the controller. **YOU ARE A STAIN**, she sings with more sureness. **YOU ARE A STAIN**.

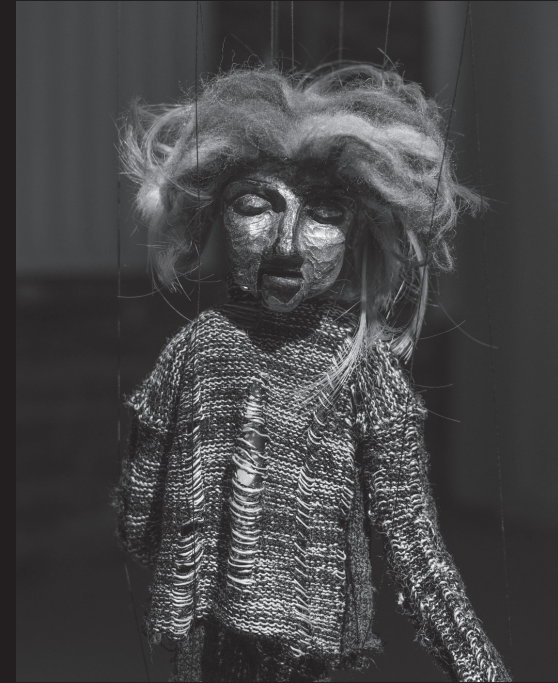
She continues to sing at the controller until they cannot take it any longer. They shut off all lights in the room.

END

YOU. YOU ARE A STAIN, IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE: AN INCONSISTENCY A SMUDGE
ON A PAIN A RUPTURE TO SOME OTHERWISE UNIFORM PATTERN, BEGGING
TO BE DARNED AWAY. YOU, YOU ARE A STAIN, TROUBLING SOME ILLUSIONS OF
HOMOGENEITY. YOU ARE A STAIN. WE STRAIN TO SUSPEND OUR DISBELIEF
FROM THE BRITTLE & TENUOUS THREADS OF YOUR IMAGE, OUR FANTASY
SWINGING FROM YOUR INARGUABLE REALITY. YOU, A STAIN: PROOF. A MARKER
OF AN ACTION OR PRESENCE PAST. A STAIN, A SHADOW, AN ECHO, A
REMINDER, CAN'T SEE PAST YOU IF WE TRIED. WE ARE NOT ALONE IN
THIS WORLD, DAMMIT. DAMMIT, WE ARE NOT ALONE IN THIS WORLD, YOU,
YOU ARE A STAIN. AND YOU ARE A STAIN, AND YOU ARE A STAIN, YOU ARE A
STAIN YOU ARE AND YOU, YOU ARE A STAIN, AND YOU ARE A STAIN, YOU ARE A
STAIN, YOU ARE A STAIN YOU ARE A STAIN YOU ARE AND YOU, YOU

A text written after performing [Pushing Up Daisies](#) for the first time, with an attempt to write out the emotional trail the three characters in the act [You Are A Stain](#) travel while performing.

This text is written in a typeface I designed based on a famous artists' handwriting. In 2026 It was printed on a heat-sensitive ceramic mug, so that when the mug is filled with hot liquid, the text appears. Only the underlines are visible when the mug is cold.



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Pushing Up Daisies.

Pushing Up Daisies is an exhibition of artworks and a four-act performance first shown at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten in Amsterdam, The Netherlands in June 2025.

This publication was made on the occasion of the group exhibition Les Fleurs du Mal curated by Karen Kraven at Oakville Galleries in Oakville, Canada. A selection of the works were exhibited, and the performance was presented on 28 March 2026.

DRAMATURG

ZAHRA MOHSENI

DRAMATURGICAL COUNCIL

TCHELET PEARL WEISSTUB

ALINE ALMEIDA OLMO

Who introduced me to

WRITING SUPPORT

EMILY PETHICK

Yael DAVID

ZAHRA MOHSENI

TEXT & DESIGN

LILI HUSTON-HERTERICH

That is me.

For sharing his print studio, the only one I know in Amsterdam that can print white on black.

THANK YOU

PIETER VERWIJ

KEES REEDIJK

VANESSA B. RIEGER

BRENDY LEHMAN

NATALIE STONE

KAREN KRAVEN

MARIANA ABOIM

For his guidance in building & programming a lighting system.

For her installation support while I was afar.

For their support modifying this system.

For her immense work in exhibition coordination.

For her attention, patience and trust.

Which was I was first referred to by Gabi Dao.

This performance was conceived while following a course from UNIMA INTL. PUPPET THERAPY TRAINING.

For her continued support & love.

