

Anna Vitale

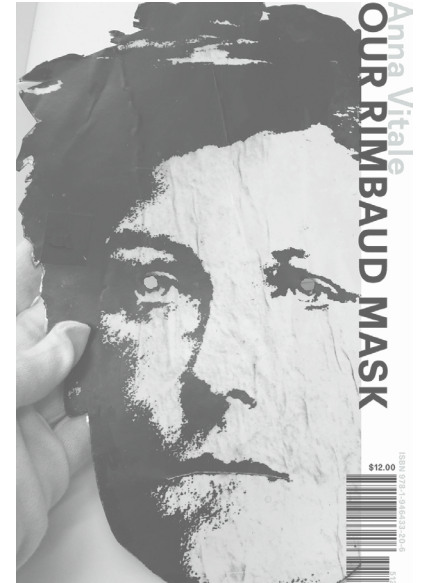
Our Rimbaud Mask

Our Rimbaud Mask follows the early publication history of David Wojnarowicz's "Arthur Rimbaud in New York" photographic series in order to show that our identification with Rimbaud, and with any artist, must remain a site of inquiry and curiosity rather than an obvious source of similitude. This essay draws together archival research, psychoanalytic theory, and impassioned close readings to lay claim to one of the most taboo fantasies staged in the series: suicide. The Rimbaud mask, different from the image of Rimbaud, invites us to become compassionate witnesses to those whose lives feel unsurvivable without assuming the experience can be shared.

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Under special conditions of ritual and imagination a mask can reveal as well as conceal. With his Arthur Rimbaud mask, David Wojnarowicz showed us the strange and terrifying power of that, and now a poet by the name of Vitale encourages us to take stock of that precious achievement.

— MICHAEL TAUSSIG



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Anna Vitale is the author of *Detroit Detroit* and *Different Worlds*, and the chapbooks *Unknown Pleasures*, *Anna Vitale's Pop Poems*, and *Breaststa*. Recent poems and prose have appeared in *Alienocene*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Full Stop*, and *Jacket2*. She earned an MFA from Bard and a PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She hosts the *Tenderness Junction* on WFMU in Jersey City and teaches writing in New York.

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